

**REPRESENTING WALES:
EXPERIENCE ON SCREEN 1985 – 2010**

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Abstract

This doctoral submission arises from the experience of working in broadcasting in Wales over a period spanning five decades. It focuses on one of my abiding concerns throughout: the under-represented experience of the community (the post-industrial working class of the South Wales coalfield) in which I grew up – and, more broadly, of those not especially powerful or privileged, elsewhere in Wales and the world; and how, in the broadcasting mainstream, in the UK and beyond, the quantum of the representation of such experience could be increased and its quality improved.

The submission consists of a portfolio of four of my documentaries - *The Waste Game* (1987); *Everyman: A Place Like Hungerford* (1988); *Do Not Go Gentle* (2001); and *Tonypandy Riots* (2011) – and an overview which examines the characteristic features of my programme-making in the context of the development of the documentary and of television in Britain; explores the nature of representation in broadcasting, and its importance in validating the complex experiences and identities of ‘peripheral’ communities in the UK; explains how my understanding of community, forged in Wales, became problematic in the eyes of the London-based press when it informed in turn my representation of a particular and traumatic English social experience; and delineates strategies I have helped to form and articulate, both within the BBC and as an independent producer, which are intended to ensure that the under-represented experience of the periphery becomes more visible on the screen.

After an Introduction which examines the interrelated group of meanings bound up in the idea of ‘representation’, and explains why they were of significance to a tyro

producer/director from the Rhondda, each Chapter of the overview details the genesis, production and impact of one of the four documentaries in the portfolio, in chronological order, with an intermediate Chapter covering a period I spent away from hands-on production, engaged at a senior corporate level with issues of Welsh representation on the BBC networks. A Postscript expresses my conviction that the progress in the representation of marginal experience which I have witnessed and been party to can only be truly fruitful if the imaginative human relationship between programme-makers and those they represent is one of mutual trust and respect.

This submission represents a significant contribution to knowledge in several ways.

First, the portfolio of documentaries and the wider corpus of my work analysed and assessed here form a high-profile cluster of broadcast output made in the English-language in Wales. Such programmes were comparative rarities when my career began, and remain under-represented on the British screen. This intimate account of the detail and context of their production adds to the limited body of academic scrutiny such work has received.

Second, at a time when the relationship between ‘the devolved nations’ of the UK and England is of particular political significance, this study constitutes a detailed consideration of a dimension of ‘British’ identity beyond those of age, ethnicity, class and gender which is just as complex in terms of the implications of its representation on the screen, and deserves as much attention.

Third, this portfolio of work was produced within a broadcasting system and an institutional structure which, I argue, was signally failing to offer proportionate representation to the kind of experiences I was concerned with. This study offers a unique ‘insider’s view’ of power-struggles over the issue at the BBC and the development of a key intervention in which I was centrally involved.

Finally, the portfolio itself and the broader career which it has been my privilege to enjoy are testimony to the (at least partial) efficacy of some of the strategies examined here for surmounting and moving beyond the economic barriers and cultural constraints which have historically prevented Welsh experience being fully visible, and which continue to disadvantage the Welsh producer. This account of the rationale for these strategies – and of the use made of them by the individual programme-maker and the incorporated production entity in the marketplace for factual television in the UK and beyond – may fill in some useful detail in the roadmap taking us towards a more complete representation of human experience.

Acknowledgements

Professors Steve Blandford and Hamish Fyfe have given me this opportunity to consider my career in this new, (and to me, at least) valuable and educative way, and have guided and supported me in the work with enormous patience and sensitivity, as well as proper academic rigour.

Production is a collaborative exercise: I am indebted to many, many others – far too many to list – for their part in shaping ‘my’ programmes. As well as those named in the body of the text, I should like to record particular thanks to each and every one who has made Green Bay shine bright; and, from my twenty-two years at the BBC, to Teleri Bevan and the late Martin Webster who helped me start out, to Tessa Hughes who was with me all along, and to Professor Dai Smith, who, for a final few seasons, commissioned programmes that represented Wales as it should be represented.

For reminding me that there are more important things in life than television, thanks are due to Dr. Clive Selwood, who knows how many times we’ve stood together (with tens of thousands of others) to cheer those who represent Wales on the rugby field.

Margaret and the late David Roberts, my parents, gave me the wonderful gift of a Rhondda upbringing and endless, unconditional love. My children, Seán, Anwen and Róisín Roberts, have taught me so much – I can only apologise to them for being such a slow learner and for all the bad jokes. Angela Graham, my wife, helped me begin to see Wales from a different angle. For that, and for everything else on the journey of a lifetime, the final credit goes to her.

**REPRESENTING WALES:
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JOHN GERAINT

Introduction: Very Welsh	2
Chapter One: Playing The Game, Changing The Rules	11
Chapter Two: Poison Worms	27
Chapter Three: Way Out In The Centre	46
Chapter Four: Deeds in Green Bay	68
Chapter Five: Making History Again	87
Postscript: Towards A Level Playing Field	117
Appendices	
1. <i>Everyman: A Place Like Hungerford</i> : Press Comment	122
2. BBC Broadcasting Research: Television Audience Research Report	128
3. Internal BBC Memo to the Editor of the <i>Everyman</i> Series	131
4. Internal BBC Memo to the Factual Editorial Board	132
5. Green Bay Press Release	134
References	135
Notes	139

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EXPERIENCE ON SCREEN 1985 – 2010**

JOHN GERAINT

“We didn’t just think of ourselves as a group of people in a depressed area, we saw ourselves as part of the world – and the things we wanted to fight for were not just fighting for the Rhondda, but fighting for people as a whole.”

Annie Powell in *A View Of The Rhondda: All Things In Common*
produced and directed by John Geraint (1985)

“This is living history. This is history in the making.”

Julie Atkins in *Tonypandy Riots*
produced and directed by John Geraint (2010)

Introduction: Very Welsh

In 1966, when I was a young boy growing up in the Rhondda, something truly astounding happened to a neighbour of ours. She appeared on television.

She spoke about a local campaign, and the whole community agreed that what she'd said had been very good. But equally, by common consent, the way she'd said it had been a problem: 'She did sound *very Welsh*, didn't she?'

That comment has remained very much alive in my consciousness ever since. As I grew up and thought about it, I realised that the only reason she sounded '*very Welsh*' was that, in those days, no-one else on the airwaves did. And I do mean – almost literally – no-one.

British broadcasting up until the 1960s, and even beyond, was an immensely powerful and far-reaching force in shaping culture and society, but it was one in which unscripted, working-class accents from the mining valleys of Wales were unheard. If 'ordinary' Welsh people (from whatever part of Wales) featured, their experiences were reported on or dramatised; scarcely ever presented directly by themselves first-hand.

From early days, I had an instinctive sense that this was not only unfair in its own right, but that it further entrenched inequality, injustice and lack of true respect and self-respect. My instincts chimed with the understandings of those who were studying the issue more broadly:

‘How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of a group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not) these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens. Equally re-presentation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation.’ (Dyer, 1993, 1)

Representation refers to the construction in any medium – and especially in the mass media – of aspects of ‘reality’, such as people, places, objects, events and cultural identities. In respect of key markers of identity – class, age, gender, ethnicity – representation involves not only how those identities appear within the text, but also how they are constructed in the processes of production and reception by those whose identities may differ. These complexities and social differentiations are important factors in any assessment of the broad impact that television has. As Stuart Hall, who has done so much to further our understanding of representation in the media and its relationship to identity and power, is careful to point out: ‘[w]e are not “viewers” with a single identity, a monolithic set of preferences and repetitive habits of viewing, all exposed to a single channel and type of “influence” and therefore behaving in predictably uniform ways’ (Hall: 1986, viii). Nevertheless, Hall would scarcely dispute (quite the opposite) that television – particularly in Britain during the period I

have worked in the industry – *is* a powerful, unifying force; and so Dyer’s analysis of the social effects of representation has particular weight when we consider how they play out on and through the screen.

A key concern in the study of representation is the way in which representations are made to seem ‘natural’. This, too, is a particular issue in television, where the dominant mode is naturalistic, not just in presentation of ‘live’ events, but also in other genres, including news, drama and the documentary. A good deal of television’s authority and power derives from its presentation of itself as ‘direct’ experience, and in the persuasiveness of its encouragement of its audience to set aside its consciousness that this is a medium where representation is constructed. This has particular force in the case of the broadcast documentary:

‘Much televised documentary depends on the presentation of visual images that are easily understood as ‘copies’ of source material in the real world... Narration and interviews combine to assure viewers that the images mean what they are and are what they mean – in other words, that they provide a window on the world.’ (Kilborn and Izod: 1997, 45)

If the television documentary is received as ‘a window on the world’, representing the world as it really is, then it seems particularly important that that representation is as accurate and as inclusive – as representative – as possible. That, I hope to demonstrate, has certainly not been the case with regard to Wales; on the contrary, as one academic who has studied the issue over much of the span of my career has put it:

‘the representation of what it is to be Welsh on the English-dominated national [i.e. UK-wide] television [networks] has often been seen as narrowly drawn and derogatory.’ (Williams: 2003, 39)

Though I could not at the time have articulated it precisely as such, it was the impulse to try to do something about ‘representation’ in the mainstream – to champion the right of the people I grew up with to see themselves and their own lives portrayed in a rounded fashion with sympathy, insight and understanding on the screen; and, more broadly, to give a platform to those whose voice isn’t heard and whose potential is circumscribed – that led me to work in broadcasting. And I certainly felt that my native valley had a story that the world needed to hear; and that telling it, on its own terms and in a context where it enjoyed parity of esteem with the stories of the powerful and privileged, would help to validate the complex experiences and identities of those I grew up with.

In a career that now spans five decades, I have sought to remain close to that initial impulse. My work might be characterised as more social than overtly political. It has typically appeared as ‘documentary’ rather than as ‘current affairs’. Since it has almost always been made for broadcasters, it has had to comply with regulatory codes which – though they have varied over the years, and in the different territories and markets in which my programmes have been seen, both in their fine detail, and in the rigour of the demands they place on the producer – have always demanded a degree of ‘fairness’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’ over and above compliance with the law of libel. My documentaries have sometimes been playful in relation to ‘classic’ television forms and expectations, but they have almost always had to carry the intent

of attracting a large, mainstream viewership. I have unashamedly sought to make them not as ‘community video’, but so as to sit alongside television of the highest professional creative and craft standards, which might make them appear to mimic content which has little or no radical political intent. Nevertheless, my whole career has been informed by a conviction that representing to a broad popular audience, in programmes made with people and not just about them, the resilience and grandeur of the human spirit, both individual and collective, as it engages with the larger social and economic forces which bear down on us, *is* a political act.

This study examines critically my intentions and how they have played out in practice. As will become evident, I have pursued my goals not only as an individual programme-maker, but also as a media executive, policy-maker, campaigner, BBC functionary and owner-manager of an independent production company. In all these roles, it has been a central concern of mine to seek to increase both the quantity and the quality of the representation of Welsh experience in broadcast television both here in Wales and beyond our borders. So this is also, to some extent, an examination of some of the economic barriers and cultural constraints which have prevented the Welsh voice being fully heard, and which continue to disadvantage the Welsh producer; and an account of some of the strategies for surmounting and moving beyond these difficulties as experienced in the marketplace for factual television by the individual programme-maker and the incorporated production entity. But at the heart of this study is the question of representation in the broadcasting mainstream of certain types of human experience, to many of which it is convenient, for reasons which I hope will become clear, to apply the adjective ‘Welsh’ – though that term would be misleading unless it is understood that, like Annie Powell¹ in the quotation

which heads this study, I should like see my attempts to represent the particular to be understood as earnest not of an essentialist parochialism but of an egalitarian universalism. Indeed, to illustrate what happens when representation foregrounds communal dimensions of experience (rather than stressing the purely private and individual aspects which – as I argue – are dominant in least some metropolitan perspectives), this study focuses on the example of my film about events in an *English* town, Hungerford.

The story of our Rhondda neighbour in 1966 with which I began this introduction illustrates the particular and deep sensitivities that surround the portrayal of under-represented communities, classes and countries. It is a special case of a central issue for all producers and directors working in factual programming:

‘If there is one overriding ethical/political/ideological question to documentary film-making it may be, What to do with people? How can people be represented appropriately?’ (Nichols, 1991: 34)

The idea of ‘representation’ will lead me to consider the complex and interrelated group of meanings bound up in this single word. To ‘represent’ can mean: to stand for something, to symbolise something; to act the role of a person or thing; to put forward a person or thing as an embodiment of a particular quality; to depict something in art or photography, to portray something, to stage or produce (a play for example); to describe something or present something in words; to present something clearly to the mind; to draw attention to something by way of argument or protest; to serve as the official and authorised delegate or to act as a spokesperson; to play or act as champion for one’s club or community or class or country.

All of these dimensions of representation are to some extent relevant to and present in my work – in the processes involved, as well as in the end-products, the finished programmes, four individual examples of which form the portfolio which accompany this study. They are: *The Waste Game* (1987); *Everyman: A Place Like Hungerford* (1988); *Do Not Go Gentle* (2001); and *Tonypandy Riots* (2011). Each of these documentaries, in chronological order, forms the background to one of the following chapters of this study, with an intermediate chapter (Chapter Three) covering a period I spent away from hands-on production, in BBC management.

Chapter One, *Playing The Game, Changing The Rules*, examines the genesis of my programme-making and delineates some of the distinctive stylistic features of my work and the way I sought and chose to represent Welsh experience against the context and development of broadcast documentary-making in Britain at the time.

Chapter Two, *Poison Worms*, is a case-study of how I brought a ‘Welsh’ perspective – one informed by my experience of the importance of the social in human experience – to a high-profile representation of a traumatised English town, Hungerford. It shows how the way I saw and portrayed the place was received there, and by the television audience – and how it was challenged by the metropolitan press partly because I chose to represent Hungerford as a community.

Chapter Three, *Way Out In The Centre*, offers an insider’s view of the debates and power-struggles over the question of more proportional representation of the UK’s constituent nations on BBC network television – something of critical importance to

the production of all the programmes in the portfolio, as well as to much of my other work – and examines a key intervention in the issue in which I was centrally involved.

In Chapter Four, *Deeds in Green Bay*, I return to programme-making as an independent producer, seeking to represent Wales on the world stage with a counterblast to a prevailing trend which, though masquerading as truly representative, I saw as narrowing the scope and impact of the documentary.

Chapter Five, *Making History Again*, charts the progress of my infant company as a representative of Wales in UK network and international markets, before I return as a programme-maker to mid-Rhondda, as my hometown focuses on an anniversary which represents a significant chapter in its own past.

In a brief Postscript, *Towards A Level Playing Field*, I consider one aspect of representation which, despite all the technical advances and increased opportunities for the democratisation of documentary-making which I have witnessed during the course of my career, remains at the heart of the matter: the delicate relationship between programme-makers and those they represent in their programmes.

Throughout, this study will reference existing literature, especially analyses of the documentary form itself, its relationship to representations of place, community and culture, and the (more limited) literature about documentary representations of Wales; and it will place professional practice in the overarching context of relevant cultural theory. But, above all, it will try to present an analysis of what I have learned from my

attempts to represent Wales, in the hope that Wales may be better represented in the future.

Chapter One: Playing The Game, Changing The Rules

Just past closing time one Friday night in the mid-1980s, I was involved in something of a fracas at the doorway of an 'Indian' restaurant in Neath. I was researching a documentary about a jobless generation. The young Welshmen in whose company I found myself – friends and associates of an out-of-work footballing photographer I'd just met locally – were fairly drunk, hungry, unreconstructed in many of their attitudes and behaviours, and angry at being denied entry by the Bangladeshi waiters inside. An imagined headline flashed briefly before my eyes: 'BBC producer sparks race riot'. But with a few quick words of Bengali – picked up from a friend at university - I managed to diffuse the situation, get us a table and secure the chance to continue my conversation with the representatives of the unemployed. Which of the two ethnic groups – the Welsh or the Bengalis – was most shocked at my unlooked-for linguistic capability was very, very hard to say.

I was still young, an Oxford graduate but with a recognisable Valleys accent. I could pass muster as someone not so far removed from the life of non-working working class youths in South Wales that they would deny me an opportunity to show them that my interest in representing their experience on screen was not merely exploitative. But, of course, I was not one of them. Between us was a gulf of experience, status and – in the context of the documentary I was hoping to make – power. If my intention to represent them fairly was to become a reality, it would require an act of creative empathy on my part, and a willingness to trust my motives on theirs. An evening like the one in Neath was part of building the trust that could close those gaps. If I had facility with the skills which were necessary, it came less

from my academic education or my BBC training, and more from the place in which I grew up.

Raymond Williams would have recognised ‘my’ Rhondda, at the heart of the South Wales coalfield, as one of those communities with a history of solidarity, and of political and industrial action, where collectively the working class had created and produced a culture of its own:

“[‘Working-class culture’]... is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language; it is rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought which proceed from this....The culture which [the working class] has produced, and which it is important to recognise, is the collective democratic institution, whether in trade unions, the cooperative movement or a political party. Working-class culture, in the stage through which it has been passing, is primarily social (in that it has created institutions) rather than individual (in particular intellectual or imaginative work). When it is considered in context, it can be seen as a very remarkable creative achievement.” (Williams, 1958: 327)

Specifically in the case of the Welsh working-class, I would add to Williams’ list of ‘collective democratic institutions’ – and, certainly, all of his were strongly active in the community which nurtured me – the miners’ welfare halls and libraries, and the non-conformist chapel.

All Rhondda's chapels were to some degree self-governing democracies, and many of them were engines of education and social action. The nearest chapel to my front door, the Methodist Central Hall, Tonypany, was, in so very many ways, in the vanguard of the community's struggle for social justice. In the 1920s and 1930s, it not only alleviated the consequences of inequality with its soup kitchens and workshops for the unemployed, it actively promoted a political response to that inequality in its discussion classes and 'mock parliaments', amongst whose leading lights were not only such mainstream political figures as George Thomas (later Speaker of the House of Commons and Viscount Tonypany) but also a friend of my family's and Rhondda's first Communist Mayor, Annie Powell.

Both Thomas and Powell featured in *All Things In Common*, a history of Central Hall, Tonypany and the centrepiece of a three-part series, *A View of The Rhondda*, which I produced and directed for the BBC in 1985 as my first attempt at long-form documentary on television.

I had joined BBC Wales, fresh from graduating from Oxford in 1978, as its youngest-ever radio producer. My timing – given my mission to secure better representation for 'ordinary' Welsh voices – was felicitous. In November of that year, BBC Radio Wales was launched as a stand-alone service. Its tone – popular, indeed populist for much the schedule – was a radical departure from that of its fore-runner, which had been a partial Welsh 'opt-out' of the old Home Service, aimed primarily at opinion-formers of a certain age, and produced with a kind of 'official' (Williams would have said 'bourgeois') view of what Welsh culture meant.

With personal responsibility for up to six hours of new, bright-and-breezy, speech-based output a week, I was part of team of tyro producers who wanted to reach out to a younger, working-class, Valleys-based audience. We shared a strong conviction that their experience needed to be represented in as unmediated a way as possible. As a signal of our intent, we put their voices on air ‘live’, in interviews, quizzes, phone-ins and – in a format which I pioneered – directly and unedited from the heart of their own communities in *Radio Wales On The Road*. My presenter, Alun Williams, was a veteran broadcaster, and was actually strongly associated with that older ‘official’ version of Welsh culture in both English and Welsh; but he had a genuine popular touch and a showman’s gift for communicating the excitement of the here-and-now. I would set him free to wander down local high-streets with a ‘live’ radio microphone, accosting as he went Friday-morning shoppers, workers and loafers, willing and eager to give anyone and everyone an immediate chance to address the nation.

The results were often chaotic, but, in the serendipity, there was a real sense of working in a revolutionary tradition. After all, this was just twenty years after BBC producer Charles Parker had, with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, created the ‘radio-ballad’ (see Cox: 2008), a sophisticated, edited weave of songs, instrumental music, sound effects, and, most importantly, the recorded voices of those who were the subjects of these documentaries. The latter element was truly ground-breaking; previous radio documentaries had used either professional voice actors or prepared scripts. Now – two decades later – we were on the streets of Maesteg, Merthyr, Aberdare and Pontypool, allowing Valleys voices to claim the airwaves unfettered by editing. We also visited other parts of Wales, returning regularly to Deeside, where a

massive wave of redundancies in steel was mirroring the rapid contraction of heavy industries in the South.

It was fun, and pioneering in its own way. But, despite many gems in the interviews we hit upon, the ‘buzz’ of live broadcasting covered up what was, on reflection, often trivial and repetitive. Access to the airwaves for working-class Welsh voices was an important step forward, but I’d started to realise that, for me, it didn’t go far enough. I began to seek a more structured, crafted approach where consideration, depth and dignity could be afforded people and issues, rather than the excitable stream-of-consciousness which tended to dominate even the best of speech radio (aside, perhaps, from the uniquely well-funded and London-based BBC Radio 4). By 1982, with Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government now in power, I felt that ordinary people were owed an analysis and not just a reflection of their everyday experiences. No doubt, I was also tempted by a seemingly more powerful medium.

Television in those days was a much scarcer commodity than it is in today’s 24/7 multi-channel universe. That was especially true in Wales. Beyond news and sport, there was precious little English-language television made in Wales, for Wales. But in response to the creation of S4C, a whole channel for Welsh-speakers, BBC Wales had found some resources and cash to increase marginally its output in English. Having served a short apprenticeship in studios and ‘outside broadcasts’, I managed to convince the management – by a combination of youthful passion for my subject, dogged persistence in the face of bureaucracy, having something genuinely new to say, and the backing of an influential departmental head, John Stuart Roberts² who saw in me, I suppose, a raw talent worth backing - to fund a three-part television

essay I had sketched out portraying the experiences of Rhondda people across a century. *A View Of The Rhondda* was a rarity – a free-standing documentary series in English without a ‘topical’ hook. The series was actually shot in late 1983, and was in the editing room at the start of the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike. But because there were no regular ‘slots’ to transmit it – BBC Wales broke into the ‘network’ schedule to show its own programmes under sufferance – it wasn’t broadcast until 1985.

The stylistic features and editorial standpoint of these programmes set a pattern for much of my subsequent work. For one thing, they are informed by a deep creative sympathy for their subjects. They explore and celebrate a specific culture, history and location as experienced from the inside. To that extent, they can be seen as following in a documentary tradition initiated by the American ethnographic film-maker Robert Flaherty and further developed in the industrial world by the father of British and Canadian documentary, John Grierson:

“With Flaherty, it became an absolute principle that the story must be taken from the location, and that it should be (what he considers) the essential story of the location. His drama, therefore is a drama of days and nights, of the round of the year’s seasons, of the fundamental fights which give his people sustenance, or make their community life possible, or build up the dignity of the tribe.” (Hardy, 1979: 38)

As much as he recognised and admired the painstaking commitment which characterised Flaherty’s anthropological approach - “[h]e lives with his people till the story is told ‘out of himself’” (Hardy, 1979: 38) - Grierson’s engagement with the inequalities of industrial society compelled him to move beyond it:

“This sense of social responsibility makes our realist documentary a troubled and difficult art, and particularly in a time like ours. The job of romantic documentary is easy in comparison; easy in the sense that the noble savage is already a figure of romance and the seasons of the year have already been articulated in poetry. Their essential virtues have been declared and can more easily be declared again, and no one will deny them. But the realist documentary, with its streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories, has given itself the job of making poetry where no poet has gone before, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed. It requires not only taste but also inspiration, which is to say a very laborious, deep-seeing, deep-sympathizing creative effort indeed.” (Hardy: 1979, 41)

The school of documentary-makers associated with Grierson was quite capable of looking down on its subject from on high – as Brian Winston points out in criticising the “alienating and alienated images of the working class” (Winston: 1995, 53) in Humphrey Jennings’s 1939 film *Spare Time*, part of which was shot in Pontypridd; but I shared their instinct to try to make poetry out of the unglamorous post-industrial landscape I’d grown up in.

Whilst my *Rhondda* films allow their subjects to speak for themselves, with no mediating voice-over, I certainly did not shy away from rehearsing, directing and interviewing the people I filmed. Like most social documentary makers in the 1980s, my impulse to capture the drama of real, ordinary lives on screen owed a debt to the approaches of both Direct Cinema and *cinéma vérité*, made possible by advances in portable film equipment, and developed and codified by practitioners like Robert

Drew, Richard Leacock and D. A. Pennebaker in America and Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in France (see Barnouw: 1993). But again, like most social documentary makers by the 1980s, I instinctively bridled against ‘rules’ and conventions which even then had come to appear mannered and open to critique. As historian of the documentary Bill Nichols argues, the potency of a new style tends to evaporate once “the conventional nature of this mode of representation becomes increasingly apparent” (Nichols: 1991, 32). In other words, new film-making styles can initially appear to be unvarnished ‘reality’ on the screen, but as time goes by, their conventions become more and more evident.

In any case, no one who takes a BBC film crew to the Rhondda can be under any illusion that the presence of a camera does not affect what happens in front of it, that one can record and represent reality without influencing it. My choice to avoid a voice-of-God commentary – which in itself required careful and repeated interview ‘takes’ and ‘coaching’ of subjects unused to speaking in public so as to ensure they clarified personal and local assumptions and context for the wider audience – was born not so much of devotion to a particular theory of documentary-making (though I did feel an instinctive egalitarian impulse that people should be allowed to tell their own story) but more of a practical calculation: that any imaginable ‘professional’ voice, speaking in the BBC voice-over idiom of the time, would contrast so markedly with the genuine, strong Rhondda demotic of my subjects as to make them appear uneducated and undignified (“*very Welsh*” indeed), the exact antitheses of my intentions.

I felt no need to be constrained by a ‘pure documentary’ manifesto and I wanted to take advantage of the power I felt in other genres of television, especially drama and performance. As a teenager and young man, I was a particular fan of another Oxford graduate from a working-class coal-mining community, Dennis Potter, whose dramas *Follow The Yellow Brick Road* (1972), *Pennies From Heaven* (1978) and *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) often played ‘outside the box’, subverting the prevalent ‘realism’ of television to blur the line between fantasy and reality (see Potter: 1993).

Potter’s work clearly has many influences, but significant amongst them is that of Brecht, who had used techniques – like the direct address to the audience, noticeably artificial lighting, songs and explanatory placards interrupting the action on stage – designed to shake off the complacency he discerned in traditional theatrical ‘realism’, and to motivate the audience to respond by taking action in the world outside (see Brecht: 1964, 138). Brecht sought deliberately to remind the audience that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself – what he called the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the ‘de-familiarisation effect’, ‘distancing effect’, or ‘estrangement effect’, often mistranslated as ‘alienation effect’ (see Brooker: 1994, 193). Potter’s work regularly manifests “the influence of Brecht which he had thoroughly absorbed in the 1960s” (Mulvey and Sexton: 2007, 10) and commentators note specifically the link between the active spectatorship of the Brechtian epic theatre and the “deciphering viewer constructed by *The Singing Detective*” (10), Potter’s masterpiece.

I was intrigued by the power and impact of Potter’s non-naturalistic trademarks - the evidently false ‘lip-sync’ technique he developed for his serials with songs, the

extensive use of flashback and nonlinear plot structure, the use of adult actors to play children, the direct to camera address by characters ('breaking the fourth wall' as students of dramaturgy would have it), and their intermittent apparent awareness that they are only characters in television drama. And the notion of the 'deciphering viewer' – that the audience would be actively engaged in constructing the meaning of the work even as they watched, with the inference that this was a collaboration not just between programme-maker and subject, but also between programme-maker and audience – plays a part in a number of documentaries in the portfolio which accompanies this study and was to become important to me as my career developed.

Still learning my craft at this stage, I lacked both the confidence and the mastery to be as bold as Potter, but I'd begun to think about how non-fiction programmes might represent experience in ways that I hoped would be as powerful. Even in this first essay in documentary-making, I used actors, readings, and 'staged' imagery. I asked participants to repeat for the camera words and actions I'd observed during my research, in sequences which I felt to be "sincere and justified reconstruction" (see Winston: 2000, 132-7). I lit interviews carefully, and framed the interviewees in big close-ups. I imagined that the grainy 16mm film I used gave them the look and status of stars of a feature film (or at least a well-funded and glossy BBC drama) rather than the prosaic 'reality' of videotape which in those days in particular tended to reduce everything to the 'flat' look of a sports outside broadcast.

With music, repeats of key passages of the spoken word, and lovingly-composed Rhondda landscapes, there was indeed an element of urban poetry about my intent, which Grierson might have recognised. But I had already moved beyond Griersonian

attachment to ‘objectivity’. Taken as a whole, it would be an exaggeration to say that what I presented in my debut was a televisual correlative of the radio ballad – there was still much that was conventional social-documentary story-telling, driven by ‘witnesses’ as I credited my interviewees (in a nod more to non-conformism than to the who-dunnit); but on the screen I was headed in a direction which, like Charles Parker’s audio classics, combined performative and documentary elements in the celebration of working people’s lives.

By the late 1980s, I had gone much further into that territory. Together with another native of the Rhondda turned BBC producer, Phil George³, I had become increasingly concerned about the plight of young people in the Valleys. This was a time when the Thatcherite doctrine of monetarism seemed to be using unemployment as a tool to control inflation and ‘liberalise’ the labour market, with massive consequences for what was now – in the wake of pit-closures which rapidly followed the end of the Miners’ Strike – effectively a former coalfield. The job prospects of the area’s school-leavers were blighted, with social consequences which many believe we are still experiencing.

Our research – weeks spent in youth clubs, drop-in centres, in the homes and haunts of young people, and on sometimes scary nights out with them, like the one which ended at the Bengali restaurant in Neath – led us to the conclusion that Government ‘schemes’ to alleviate the problem (sometimes well-intentioned, sometimes fairly openly cynical means of massaging the figures) ended up doing more harm than good.

Our advocacy of that analysis – emboldened by watching Dennis Potter tease and enthrall a mainstream primetime audience with television which was determinedly playful, surreal and radical in *The Singing Detective*, the transmission of which on BBC 1 coincided with the period of our research – reclaimed a tradition which Grierson’s moral seriousness, norms and rules seemed to have killed off: “a documentary form that could be, on occasion, satiric, irreverent and comic” (see Winston: 1995, 255). Our attempt was *The Waste Game* (BBC: 1987), an hour-long documentary based on the conceit of an imaginary board game where young people became trapped in unemployment, with the consequent waste of their talent.

We filmed a large number of interviews with a cross-section of young people from across the South Wales Valleys. Taken together, we felt, they represented something: a pretty clear-cut case of structural neglect of a whole generation. To realise the conceit that framed these interviews, we asked four of our interviewees to act as ‘players’ of our imaginary game. Their scripted words were devised collaboratively with them. We filmed these sequences as drama, in a kind of *film noir* style. To show how much talent was being wasted, we included exuberant performances of rock music and dance, alongside the thoughtful spoken contributions. The performers were genuine local groups, with material which was also devised collaboratively with ourselves as producers and tailored to the programme’s themes and structure. We drew on the black humour common amongst the young people we met, and, from the very beginning – a *noir*-ish montage in which our protagonists meet like spies or drug-dealers in an abandoned building to record the playing of their game on video – we let the action ‘overflow’ the frame of conventional television, pointing up (if it

were at all necessary) the artificiality of the construct in ways which echo Brecht and Potter.

If sometimes rather juvenile, it was all very watch-able; but it had an unapologetic social message and, as well as presenting the experience, it also offered an analysis of it and even suggested ways of moving beyond it, difficult as that might be:

“The trouble is that over the years changes in the rules have been brought about by the players of the game joining together to meet the makers – a way of playing called politics. And for most players today, politicians are one big switch off...” (BBC: 1987)

And, of course, in another moment of *Verfremdungseffekt*, the screen immediately went blank.

Having established the structural ‘blocks’ which prevented young people from expressing their talent in socially-useful and personally-rewarding ways, *The Waste Game* tested BBC ‘impartiality’ to the limit by setting out explicitly that one of the factors preventing them from ‘fighting back’ in the game was the decline – even, or perhaps especially, here in the Labour heartland – of those very democratic institutions which Raymond Williams celebrated as a major creative achievement of working-class culture. Now, his ‘basic collective idea’ was under attack: a triumphant Thatcher was about to proclaim that “there is no such thing as society”⁴. No surprise, then, that for our young gamers, traditional politics seemed irrelevant:

“It’s a pity really. Years ago, it had a Golden Era in Wales and there were some great players here in these Valleys who made it a really exciting game to play.

Actually, they got a lot of rules changed and they involved a lot of people in doing it. In fact, they were only able to do it through team work – working together. Now the whole point about our players today is that they haven't got any work. No work, no team work. So how can they hope to change the rules? Where are their politics going to come from?" (BBC: 1987)

Our answer was to see some prospect of hope in a new set of grassroots institutions – or at least social phenomena – which Williams would surely have applauded. They, at least, seemed to be offering young people the chance to express themselves, and to be giving them tools with which they could begin to exercise some control over their own lives. There were community arts groups, commended on screen by Judith Thomas and members of Rhondda Youth Dance in phrases reminiscent of Annie Powell, sixty years their senior:

“In this community-based project... we're trying to show the rest of the world and the rest of the people in the Rhondda that there is vitality, there is life in us. The Valley's not dead yet. We're fighting back – against the system.”
(BBC: 1987)

There was video-making by young people themselves, like the work being done in Blaengarw by Allan Walsh:

“I found when I first started making videos, it was just a matter of grabbing a camera, going out, filming a couple of shots, filming a couple of interviews....But since I've been doing it for a year now, you tend to realise that the material that you're shooting is *emotional* material to most people in the Valley.” (BBC: 1987)

And there was the informal 'institution' of local gigs staged by rock bands whose music had a social edge, like Treorchy's Peruvian Hipsters, fronted by Nigel Buckland:

"There's got to be some kind of change, some kind of movement. The only way that's going to happen is by events that aren't really regarded as political events coming off... where people get together and see that they've got something there, there's something between them all... People often hark back to the 1920s Strike, when there was a real community. But that thing can happen again." (BBC: 1987)

These glimmers of hope were set against a bigger picture which was bleak:

"It would be nice to think that these are the first few small steps towards bringing the game to an end. Because I think the Waste Game has had its day, and it's time to replace it with a new game, the Talent Game. But when I look at the board, I don't see much sign of that happening, do you? It's going to take a lot more tactical thinking, with a lot more players involved. In the meantime, a whole generation of talent goes on playing the Waste Game." (BBC: 1987)

I was proud of *The Waste Game*. I felt that, however naively, it had succeeded in giving a voice and a platform to 'my' people – it had represented them as themselves in the way that I felt that television had failed to do in my formative years, and in ways in which they might broadly recognise as accurate and truthful. But it also made clear the limits of the medium in effecting direct social change. It ended with a Brechtian, Potter-like breaking of the fourth wall – the young players stepping

‘outside the frame’ of the programme to hand the completed tape to the audience, asking for a response. That response was a long time coming. Meanwhile, the society they lived in seemed headed in a direction which was more fractured, and – even in Thatcher’s Middle England – more dysfunctional and alienating than ever, as one young contemporary of theirs was about to demonstrate, with devastatingly lethal consequences.

Chapter Two: Poison Worms

The hitch-hiker we'd picked up on the way to Hungerford wanted to know what we were going to do in his home town. He was not pleased to discover that we were from 'the media'.

"Have you been beaten up yet?" he asked, cheerily. "We caught a couple of *'them'* the weekend after it happened and gave them a good hiding".

One of the recurring themes that emerged during a whole year of filming in the Berkshire market-town was the feeling of anger and resentment in the community at the way that the media – both press and television – covered the Hungerford massacre. Ironically, the issues of representation, raised so forcefully in interviews and off-camera by everyone we met there, from priest to publican, were precisely the same questions with which we had to grapple in the making of the film. We were, are, after all, 'them'.

As a television producer, I had been drawn to tell this story for a number of reasons. The awful scale and significance of what had happened – the sense of violation that such violence could happen *here* – had, no doubt, been primary factors. Then there were the existential questions which had been raised: in a post-religious society, who were people to turn to for comfort, who were they to blame for an act of 'evil'? But, for me, it also seemed an important opportunity to represent these extraordinary experiences of ordinary people in their particular social context: as I had represented the Rhondda, it now seemed important to explore and understand Hungerford *as a*

place. It was my upbringing in Wales – and my understanding of community – which was to guide the way I portrayed this English town. And, as I shall hope to establish, the way I came to see Hungerford and its way of coping – as more than simply individuals coming to terms with personal loss – provoked a firestorm of reaction from sections of the London-based press to which ideas of communal solidarity were anathema. This, for me, was the most revealing aspect of the reception afforded the programme I made there, and one which led me to contemplate further what it meant to ‘represent Wales’, as well as other non-metropolitan experiences in the UK and beyond; and that contemplation, in turn, was to change the direction of my career. But I am getting ahead of myself.

I was in Hungerford because, on 19 August 1987, in and around his hometown, a man called Michael Ryan had perpetrated the first act of mass murder by shooting in modern Britain. Hungerford was shaken by the outrage that had left seventeen people dead and many wounded. Yet in the weeks that followed, it took another sort of battering. Its sense of identity had been shattered by an alien act of violence carried out by one of its own sons on its hitherto so-peaceful, so-English streets. This shocking incongruity horrified the nation and attracted droves of reporters and crews. The story ran and ran for weeks, through funerals, a civic memorial service and inquest.

It’s difficult to quantify inappropriate media behaviour, or to judge it solely by infringement of voluntary codes of self-regulation. Only one paper, the *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, received the chastisement of the Press Council. The Broadcasting Complaints Commission had no complaints. And yet, wherever

we went in Hungerford, we found a communal sense of violation, and individual tales of abuse and intrusion.

The widow of Ryan's sixth victim, Abdul Rahman Khan, a woman in her eighties, was woken up at three and five in the morning for quotes. Jenny Barnard, left widowed and with a five-week-old baby, was pestered, for the whole of the morning after the shooting, by reporters offering her up to £4,000 for pictures and an exclusive interview. She took refuge in her mother's secluded back garden. Not to be thwarted, a television crew hired a helicopter to hover over the garden. Stills photographers offered cash to the next-door neighbour for the use of her upstairs window as a vantage point. After the funeral of her partner, Barnard fled to Jersey for some peace and quiet. It took Fleet Street just thirty-six hours to trace her and come knocking on her hotel chalet door.

In a town the size of Hungerford, such stories of the excesses of a (significant) minority of journalists were quickly passed around and blown up into full-scale disgust at the news media in general. It was unfortunate that with Ryan dead and an absence of any other angle – apart from the sideshow of the gun-laws – the full focus of attention was placed on the bereaved and injured. Unlike other 1980s tragedies – the Zeebrugge ferry disaster, the King's Cross Underground fire, the Piper Alpha oil-rig explosion – those affected lived within a small radius and were easy to get at.

It's easy to take the moral high ground on such matters. But where does the documentary-maker seeking to represent this experience stand? I and my assistant producer David Willcock arrived in Hungerford just as everyone else was leaving. In

many ways, we had less justification than most to be there. The news outlets at least had a duty to cover the shocking carnage of 19 August, 1987. They did so efficiently and with great ingenuity and courage: most of the town's residents relied on radio and television for information about the shootings even as they were going on around them. One newspaper journalist who was there later recalled the utter frenzy of the moment:

“Hungerford was the first massacre by a lone gunman in this country... For the British media, it was thus an entirely new experience.

The coverage that resulted led to anger among many in the town, with accusations of gratuitous infringement of privacy.... Most journalists' memories of the event are of confusion, incredulity and excitement. As news of the shooting began to break, dozens of reporters, photographers and cameramen began to rush towards Hungerford. The numbers were to rise to hundreds with national and international reinforcements. Press helicopters flew alongside police vans; convoys of television vans with rows of satellite dishes queued to get into the town.

The emergency services were caught completely unprepared by Ryan's rampage. As a result, very few police lines were set up before the media descended, allowing journalists to drive in relatively unhindered. For a while, the media and the police were in streets next to the ones Ryan was prowling, as terrified members of the public fled past. This proximity to the grim unfolding action led to the powerful pictures and evocative writing that emerged from the massacre.” (Sengupta, 2007)

Aware of the extent of public outrage in the town about the graphic and intrusive nature of the immediate coverage of the shootings, we were at pains, in our approaches to local people, to dissociate ourselves from a news approach. Yet our brief was for a programme potentially more intrusive than anything the tabloids could dream up – to follow the progress of the town, the injured and the bereaved throughout a whole year.

The first and most urgent question we had to address was the one at the centre of most complaints about the press: is the subject in the public interest, or is it something that will merely be interesting to the public? Apart from BBC News, which had just had its knuckles rapped over its coverage of Zeebrugge, most of the media assumed, rightly or wrongly, that the personal grief of the relatives of Ryan's victims was in the public domain.

We also wanted to talk about grief, about bereavement, but we wanted to achieve something beyond the scope of a news team. We wanted to show the grieving process, to observe the road to recovery over a year and, in doing so, create a film that would be a testament to the resilience of ordinary people in coming to terms with meaninglessness and loss.

Because the project was planned over a year we had the luxury of time to ensure that we had sufficient trust and co-operation before committing ourselves to film. Unlike a news crew with a deadline to meet, we weren't faced with the dilemma of whether to doorstep our potential contributors. We made contact, usually through introductions by friends or relatives, over a period of weeks before bringing in the

camera. People responded to the idea of taking part in a film which might help others who had been suddenly bereaved. One couple decided to take part because they themselves had been helped by a series on premature babies. This collaborative element – the style of programme-making I'd hit upon and developed in the South Wales Valleys – did much to balance feelings of intrusion.

However, we could not alter the fact that television, by its very nature, is intrusive. It is, after all, a medium of entertainment. Interestingly, it was some of our closest colleagues who were most dubious about the wisdom of attempting such a project, even with the best of intentions. Chris Lawrence, the doyen of BBC Wales' film editors, who had cut all three of my *Rhondda* trilogy films with me, and whom I numbered amongst my biggest supporters and closest colleagues, needed hours of careful persuasion before committing to the project.

By Christmas 1987, David Willcock and I were on good terms with a cross-section of Hungerford people. We could call in for coffee and a chat and expect to be privy to both the mundane and the intimate. We were greeted like old friends at the Mayor's Carol Service. We were television professionals, but – as with the research process for *The Waste Game* – we 'joined in', showing ourselves to be human and vulnerable and were treated like human beings in return. Again, it helped that we didn't look or sound like suave media metropolitans. We weren't London people: Willcock lived not far away, and I brought the film crew with me from BBC Wales in Cardiff.

Crucially, I believe, we understood Hungerford *as a community*, and wanted to represent it as such. Although sitting in the heart of England, so *very English* (as my

Rhondda neighbours might have said) in its history, traditions and social structure, and located less than seventy miles by road from London, Hungerford seemed, on so many counts – power, influence, confidence, cultural taste, attitudes to the new and the trendy – far removed from the centre of national life. I felt instinctively that it belonged to the periphery rather than the core. It was striking not just that, in this town of several thousand residents, many of the victims knew each other and each other's extended families; but also that, close as it was to London, even the younger generation spoke with a strong and recognisable local accent. Some people – like the young man at a disco who couldn't settle in London despite a good job there and so moved back 'home' to the dole – opened up to us precisely because we could empathise with non-metropolitan (indeed anti-metropolitan) feelings. Only at the very end of the year's filming, with the anniversary approaching, did we again feel like strangers in the town. The Bear, Hungerford's only 'swanky' hotel, was fully booked with reporters for the anniversary week, and an ugly mood began to get up.

Coming from mid-Rhondda, I had another reason to read the after-effects of what had happened in Hungerford as I did – and I'm sure it coloured the way I spoke to everyone there, as well as the entirety of the film I ended up making. In 1965, as a small child, I'd stood in the rain on the corner outside Central Hall, Tonypany with thousands of others and watched as a long procession of hearses carried the thirty-one victims of the terrible underground explosion at the Cambrian Colliery, not two miles across mid-Rhondda at Blaenclydach, to their last resting places at Llethyrddu cemetery in Trealaw. I knew what it was like to live in place where a violent and deadly irruption had devastated so many – how deep and long-lasting the scars could be, how close the fellow-feeling in the community of survivors was. Clearly,

Hungerford was not a Welsh mining disaster. But equally clearly, it was a place where a collective outpouring of grief was tangible, and where a coming together in the face of tragedy was based on bonds that already existed.

The trust that David Willcock and I had won in Hungerford, flowing from the empathetic approach I've described, was real enough. But trust can be a two-edged sword. It can be used to manipulate, to coax and coerce thoughts and feelings that might not ordinarily occur. There is an inherent conflict between friendship and objectivity. Both we and the relatives had our own needs and interests. The dilemmas which arose sprang from representing and balancing the divergent interests of the participants, the programme-makers, and, not least, the viewers.

With one couple, halfway through the year, the experience of loss and the inability to talk about it openly to each other had put a considerable strain on their marriage. There had been a temporary separation. This additional emotional stress was colouring all parts of their lives.

It seemed right to us – if the programme was going to be an honest representation of their experience – that they should speak about it. They were understandably reticent about doing so. Eventually, we were able to agree a way of talking about what had happened that they were happy with. But were we right to ask them to go ahead? In a previous interview, they'd said things to each other on camera that they'd found impossible to talk about in private. Could it have been that it was our presence that brought their problem to a head in the first place? It was sometimes hard to tell whether we were helping or hindering the process of recovery.

When we first arrived in Berkshire we'd gone to see the local doctor. He said that he understood what we were trying to do, but as far as his patients, our potential participants, were concerned, it would be better to leave them alone. On our last day in the town we were relaxing after a day on location when the mother of one of our contributors came up to us. She gave each of us a bear-hug and thanked us for all we had done for her daughter during the year. In dealing with individuals rather than making generalisations, such contradictions abound.

There are many claims which people in the media put forward in order to justify to themselves the nature of the work they do. I heard colleagues say that it's natural for people after a disaster to be angry with the press, as though the press were serving a valuable cathartic function in provoking anger in the first place (see the *Daily Telegraph* review of my programme – Appendix 1F). One of the justifications of the television coverage of Zeebrugge was that asking relatives to talk is in some way therapeutic. In the years since then, on-the-spot interviews with those immediately traumatised, bereaved or even seriously injured themselves by acts of violence or of God have become commonplace in news coverage. There may be good public interest reasons for showing them; but, for those in the throes of pain and loss, they form no part of the healing process and arguments used to justify them as such are spurious. The process of talking through grief is essential, but it is a long-drawn-out healing. Help is most often needed and only likely to be effective when the funerals are over and the incident has long since ceased to be news.

Of course, in the frenetic confusion at the scene of a tragedy, and with a deadline to meet, ethics often takes a backseat in journalists' minds. Readers and viewers need to be told what has happened – and they relish the accompanying detail. Even the most fastidious of us can be suckers for certain types of 'human interest' stories. One Hungerford conversation moved from disgust at the treatment of one widow by a Sunday tabloid which had discovered she'd found a new boyfriend, to amusement at newspaper revelations about the private life of the then England cricket captain, Mike Gatting. Everyone is curious about other people's lives. Yet I believe the documentary we made, *Everyman: A Place Like Hungerford* (BBC: 1988), shows that it is possible to meet that curiosity in ways that do no harm to those lives but positively do them honour. Or, at any rate, that the attempt is worth making.

One crucial factor was the production time-scale. None of our interviews were made public until the television transmission a year after the shootings. Over that year, in our repeated visits to the interviewees, we were able to observe and record on camera, the (slow and yet unevenly-paced) process of recovery. Our approach was commended by senior professionals who deal medically and socially with disaster management, and indeed used by them in authoritative educative materials which support the development of clinicians and counsellors who deal with the long-term effects of mass public trauma:

“The BBC... made a documentary about the Hungerford shootings, reflecting...individuals' changing feelings and attitudes over time. These are powerfully important because they reflect the long term issues rather than the excitement of the post impact phase. They both validate the fact that many victims continue to suffer long after trauma, in a personal and public way, and

eloquently voice the need for long-term support by the helping agencies.”

(Hodgkinson and Stewart: 1991, 103)

Recognition in this meticulously-researched ‘Handbook of Disaster Management’ (which has remained in print as a practical tool for professionals ever since, and in which Hodgkinson and Stewart quote verbatim (60-61) extensive passages of the eloquent voice of Hungerford’s bereaved and traumatised precisely as edited in the broadcast programme) is, for me, an important endorsement of the documentary’s value.

Unsurprisingly, not all the press agreed. When the programme was shown, *Today* led the tabloid counter-attack:

“There is an irritating tendency among TV news teams to imagine they are somehow superior to newspaper journalists.... Everyman.... marked the anniversary of the Hungerford massacre and was presented by a team assigned there for an entire year to chart the long-term effects of the tragedy.

I was stunned by the criticism meted out to the press. “We felt it was a terrible invasion of our privacy”, said a woman whose husband died in the shooting.

Implicit in this was the idea that the Everyman team had somehow NOT intruded. In fact the programme was a testament to the way the team had pried and probed with the ruthlessness of any gutter hack.” (*Today* newspaper, 18 August 1988: see Appendix 1A for article in full)

The *Daily Express*, more measured overall in its review (“a remarkable tribute to the ability of people to cope with suffering.”) also scented hypocrisy:

“...the Press was spoken of as intruding into the privacy of people bereaved by the murderous rampage of Michael Ryan...Yet the same people were willing to talk about their suffering to a television camera.” (*Daily Express*, 15 August 1988: see Appendix 1B for article in full)

The *Daily Mail* struck out even more trenchantly on behalf of Fleet Street:

“How the activities of the Everyman film crew...differed from the Press and TV ‘intrusion’ criticised by some of the relations of the dead last night is difficult to fathom. Any bereavement is hard to bear, whether a loved one died in a road accident, from a fatal illness, or was killed by a maniac’s bullet. Would the BBC normally make a programme on the process of recovery from grief of relatives or friends in the first two of these categories?

No, they did so because of the sensational nature of the Ryan killings, and were thus exploiting, in however muted and gentle a fashion, the dark events of last year.” (*Daily Mail*, 15 August 1988: see Appendix 1C for article in full)

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the strongest criticism came from the most populist and right-wing tabloid of them all. In an attack which I have come to regard as something of a badge of honour, my documentary was held up as another example of why the Corporation which broadcast it deserved the attacks on its independence which were raining down upon it from senior figures in the Tory Government of the day⁵. Under the bold and underlined headline ‘Ryan shocker by poison worms at the BBC’, *The Sun* proclaimed:

“Norman Tebbit was right. The BBC is a poisonous bag of worms.

This week it showed a programme on how the Hungerford survivors had coped in the last year.

And somehow – and only the BBC could achieve this – by the end of that programme we had less sympathy for those survivors....

So sensational was its coverage that it even managed to get a married man, who had lost both his parents to Michael Ryan, to admit that in the intervening year he had been seeing another woman.

And a woman who lost her husband of nine years, admitted that within that year she had started seeing another man. The BBC did all of this with a lingering, quite sickening and unsympathetic voyeurism.

The rest of the programme was taken up with attacking the Press crews who originally covered Hungerford. Because those crews dared to try to talk to the people involved.

The BBC lot obviously believed that only *they* had the right to talk to those victims.

Even though all their programme managed to do was exploit those innocent victims for the sake of television.” (*The Sun*, 19 August 1988: see Appendix 1D for article in full)

Thankfully, other newspapers – whilst recognising the ambiguities that I’d discussed with Lawrence and other colleagues all year long – were more even-handed in their analyses:

“John Geraint’s sensitive programme, made over many months, was about time’s healing and about coming to terms with unnatural disaster. No one outside the film can be sure how far talking to camera was a release and a

relief for those of the Hungerford people who had shunned the media before. Or how far it was one more media intrusion. For the moment I would give Geraint and his crew the benefit of the doubt.” (*Guardian*, 15 August 1988: see Appendix 1E for article in full)

And even some right-leaning papers were forced to question their assumptions, even if they conflated short-deadline journalism and documentary-making in doing so:

“It has often been suggested that journalistic intrusion into private grief can be justified because the bereaved find solace in talking to a disinterested stranger. This sensitively-handled programme, made over many months by a crew from BBC Wales, seemed to provide some evidence in support of a questionable theory. Possibly, the process of confronting the cameras over an extended period was part of a catharsis. Or was it merely that time, the healer, made these interviewees increasingly at ease?” (*Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1988: see Appendix 1F for article in full)

There was also – and most welcome it was – plenty of straightforward praise:

“John Geraint’s sensitive film...made over the past 12 months... had this old cynic wiping away the tears.” (*Time Out*, August 1988: see Appendix 1G for article in full)

And some critics seemed really to understand what we were trying to achieve:

“...we should be glad that the marking of the anniversary devolves on the Everyman team, whose humane and intelligent documentaries consistently challenge the dismissive “God slot” label.... John Geraint’s deeply moving

film, made without commentary, follows the progress of key social and civic events in Hungerford, throughout the changing seasons which reflect changing emotions. It allows the bereaved and injured to talk freely, many for the first time in public, about the pain, anger and bewilderment, about the adjusting.” (*Guardian*, 13 August 1988: see Appendix 1H for article in full)

It was particularly pleasing that a number of reviewers – including the one above – picked up on some key aspects of the way in which I’d sought to work with the interviewees:

“There was no commentary, no formal identification of a contributor” (*Daily Telegraph*: see Appendix 1F)

“There is no commentary – the injured and the bereaved speak for themselves.” (*Time Out*: see Appendix 1G)

There was approval too for the qualities of the camera-work, even if “pastoral images of mist-shrouded ducks” (*Daily Telegraph*: see Appendix 1F) were seen (rightly!) as quite secondary to the human subjects of the documentary.

I was still working on 16mm film and to my conviction that ordinary people deserved to be filmed beautifully. The Hungerford photography is mainly the work of the young Ashley Rowe who went on to make a brilliant career shooting drama for television and film⁶. I remember particularly one sequence we shot with Betty Tolladay – “everyone’s idea of a gentle granny” (*Time Out*: see Appendix 1G) – who had been shot and seriously injured. She was receiving communion at home from the local vicar during her recuperation. Rather than film the foreground action

conventionally, I asked Rowe to set his exposure for the sunlit daffodils springing up outside the window behind them, leaving the two communicant figures silhouetted in the living room. The sequence – dark interior and vibrant new life – became a powerful symbol of re-emerging hope and strength.

Whilst they sometimes appreciated – indeed applauded – aspects of my style, the London-based reviewers were at odds with my instinctive understanding of Hungerford as a place:

“Another oddity was the impression the film gave that Hungerford was a small village where everyone knows everyone else, rather than the market town that it is with a population of 7,000.” (*Daily Express*: see Appendix 1B)

This response reminded me of Raymond Williams’ story of having to object to the Cambridge lecturer who asserted that no-one could now understand the term “neighbour” as Shakespeare used it. Like Williams, I could claim that I understood “perfectly well” from my upbringing in Wales “what neighbour meant” (Williams, 1979: 67). But my sense of the inter-connectedness of lives even here in settled southern England was anathema to that section of the press which had already bought in to Thatcher’s nostrum that there was no such thing as society:

“Everyman created the erroneous impression that Hungerford is a tiny village constantly engaged in quaint ceremonies involving men in top hats climbing ladders to kiss women, rather than the sizeable, bustling centre of high-tech computer industries that it actually is. What one saw was not a community gradually recovering from a traumatic event, but the courage and dignity of a

handful of directly-affected individuals trying to come to terms with their personal loss.” (*Daily Mail*: see Appendix 1C)

In the context of such wilful misinterpretation, it was a comfort that my programme could reach its audience directly. And reach an audience it did. At 10.20pm on a Sunday night in August, 3.8 million people watched.

This comfortably outperformed all the competing channels, other than Channel 4 which ironically ran a classic Hollywood Western entitled *The Hour of the Gun*⁷. A *Place Like Hungerford* attracted more than twice the number of viewers averaged by the other eight programmes in the *Everyman* series that summer/autumn.

The programme was high-profile enough for the BBC to commission a special in-depth study of its impact on the viewing audience (BBC Broadcasting Research: Television Audience Research Report from the BARB Television Opinion Panel: see Appendix 2). Generally, comments of ordinary viewers were favourable, and in marked contrast to the naked self-interest of some of the press notices. Viewers expressed understanding and sympathy with the victims and considered the programme a sensitive portrayal. Crucially, more than half of the respondents (53%) thought that it was right for the BBC to make and show the programme, with only 13% disagreeing – although there was a sizeable minority of ‘don’t knows’.

The professional reaction from television people was also very supportive. In an internal memo to Jane Drabble, the Editor of the *Everyman* series, David Winter, the BBC’s Head of Religious Broadcasting – a London-based executive not necessarily

instinctively inclined to be generous to network programmes made in Wales – pronounced it “stunningly good....truthful, exploratory, pastoral and thought-provoking, all at the same time. And the pictures were magnificent!” (See Appendix 3).

The programme was nominated by the Royal Television Society as one of the three best documentaries of 1988⁸. Another nominee – and eventual winner of the award – was Peter Kosminsky for his Yorkshire Television programme *Afghantsi*⁹. At the award-ceremony (held in the glamorous Grosvenor House on London’s Park Lane), I spent some time in conversation with Kosminsky, comparing notes on documentary technique. Like me, it emerged, he was finding himself drawn increasingly to the use of the conventions of fiction to tell real-life stories. It was, we agreed, natural for documentary-makers to seek more and more control over the realisation of their work, and this led inevitably to a desire to use professional performers and more sophisticated – and cumbersome – technical kit, more subtle and spectacular lighting effects; in other words, to drama.

Kosminsky was, of course, to go on to make a glittering career in drama and drama-documentary¹⁰. I certainly felt pulled in the same direction. And the ‘success’ of *A Place Like Hungerford* positioned me strongly to continue to make well-funded programmes – in documentary and even perhaps drama – which, like *Hungerford* and the work I’d done in the Welsh valleys, validated the experiences of those on the periphery. But another impulse was to lead me elsewhere. That impulse was implicit in a question I specifically asked to be included in the audience research conducted into the *Hungerford* programme: *were you aware that the programme was made for*

Everyman by BBC Wales? Only 9% of the respondents said they were, 87% were not (see Appendix 2). Actually, I had expected that few, if any, of the viewers would notice (why should they?). My question was rhetorical as far as the audience panel was concerned. It was aimed internally - at both BBC Wales and the BBC power-brokers in London. I'd decided to use whatever kudos the programme had given me within the Corporation not to increase my own personal creative scope, but to try to wake the decision-makers up to the broader issue of Welsh representation on the networks. And, in a hierarchical organisation like the BBC, that implied not a shift of genre, but a move away from hands-on programme-making altogether.

Chapter Three: Way Out In The Centre¹¹

“It’s worse than we thought, Mark”, I said to the man in charge of the BBC’s factual programmes at Television Centre in London. “It’s less than one per cent.”

I can’t remember his precise response. It probably wasn’t printable in any case.

Quickly, though, before the word got around the corridors of power (the well-worn BBC joke was that ‘the Centre’ had been built in the round so the rumours could circulate more easily), we agreed the makings of a policy response to the issue I’d been asked to investigate: how much of the BBC’s network factual output – the programmes shown right across the UK – was made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland?

The policy implications were urgent, of the moment, and specific to one institution. But the debates which surrounded them, and the ‘settlement’ which had given rise to the imbalance I’d identified, as well as the one which flowed from the intervention we were now making, were much more durable features of the broadcasting landscape in which I’ve laboured across the whole course of my career. They have been and are central determinants in shaping the nature and scale of the opportunities which have been presented to me to make programmes, including all of the programmes in the portfolio which accompanies this study. The pursuit – by myself and others – of the argument about due proportionality is what ultimately has carved out the space for whatever representation has been secured for Welsh producers and Welsh stories on the UK’s main public service television channels. And there’s a more fundamental consideration: the substantive, underlying, perennial and universal reality is that

representation happens in an economic as well as a cultural context. The scope that documentary makers have to make choices; the choices they actually make; and the ways in which they are able to bring their work to audiences: all of these things are crucially affected by the quantum of funding available, the conditions under which it may be accessed and the systems of distribution which operate.

These simple, obvious considerations are, it seems to me, sometimes underplayed in academic considerations of the documentary as a cultural form. Whilst studies of the development of the documentary have greatly and usefully deepened our understanding of the ways in which changing technology has influenced representation and the human relationships between maker and subject which are central to the documentary, comparatively less attention has been paid to the economic structures which make it possible for documentaries to be made and to find audiences, as well as setting limits as to how they can be made. It is, nevertheless, true that, for the documentary-maker, these practical economic considerations are of primary, everyday importance. Whilst appreciating that political discourse based on notions of what constitutes the public good is what creates the framework in which the broadcasting system operates, as creative producers in television, we normally *begin* not with an overarching cultural theory, but with ‘the budget’, ‘the channel’ and ‘the slot’.

I have pursued my career as a documentary-maker almost exclusively through the medium of broadcast television. Working in the UK, I have been fortunate to have been able to operate within a relatively benign economic regime for television documentary-makers. Public service broadcasting, in particular, values and supports

quality documentary-making and has funded it well. It has also allowed it a prominent place in network television schedules and has thus brokered a relationship with a large, mainstream audience. The BBC, the cornerstone of public service broadcasting in the UK¹², has an unrivalled reputation as a producer and supporter of the documentary. All the same, in the 1990s, one of the most important and unique contributions I feel I was able to make as a programme-maker and executive within the BBC was to point to and develop arguments about an issue where I believed the BBC's practice was deeply flawed. That practice, I argued, was undemocratic, unrepresentative, unjust in economic terms and injurious to the BBC itself and to its 'cornerstone' role. The issue – the one I was discussing with Mark Thompson at Television Centre – was the place of Wales (and by extension, Scotland and Northern Ireland, though not so acutely, as we shall see, the 'regions' of England) in factual programmes on network television.

The representation of Wales on the networks – on the channels that broadcast across the UK – has received more attention following the 'devolution' of UK politics than it did at the time I began to grapple with it. It is bound up with – though not necessarily the same thing as – the locus of production of network programmes. To put it simply, back in the early 1990s, Wales was appearing rarely in factual programmes on network television and very few network programmes were made by producers in Wales; so that even when Wales was shown to UK audiences, the perspective was usually that of an outsider looking in.

Representation is an issue across a wide range of television genres. The totemic power of drama means that audiences seem particularly sensitive to depictions of national

and local stereotypes in fiction¹³. And in entertainment – to quote a celebrated example – one of the BBC’s very first National Lottery shows in 1994, produced from London but ‘visiting’ the Rhondda Heritage Park, caused a spate of letters and phone-calls to BBC Wales and local outrage when its portrayal of Wales depended solely on outdated images of miners and male voice choirs. It was not so much that these images were offensive or inappropriate in themselves (I have on occasion used them myself!); but that to see anything ‘from Wales’ in such a high-profile slot was so unusual that it placed a very high premium on the way in which Wales was represented.

Subjects of, and contributors to, factual programmes are especially concerned about the ways they are treated by the programme-makers and portrayed on the screen. After all, this is the genre in which what is presented to the viewer is – ostensibly at least – not a construct devised purely for entertainment, but a representation of ‘real life’ purporting to conform to broadcasters’ codes of ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’. It often involves ordinary people opening up their lives, thoughts and intimate experiences to the all-seeing eye of the lens; and then surrendering editorial control over the use of material that has been gathered by professionals whose interests and agendas may be quite different from those of their subjects. It is no surprise therefore that, in documentaries, perceptions of metropolitan arrogance and the persistence of unfavourable ‘regional’ stereotypes are widely attributed to the lack of sensitivity shown by visiting production teams. This is arguably even more apparent when those production teams cross boundaries which are not just regional, but national.

In 1995, for example, during my time in programme management at BBC Wales, I managed to persuade senior colleagues to back me in taking the bold step, quite counter to the Corporation's usual practice, of offering the people of Penrhys in the Rhondda a 'right of reply' to one of the BBC's own programmes, after an England-based production team made a network documentary, *Mad Passionate Dreams*, which portrayed their admittedly socially-deprived community as both hopeless and feckless. Part of the problem, one of the residents remarked, was a failure to cotton on to their particular sort of black humour, something he felt sure a Welsh production team would have instinctively understood. That the programme was no representative insider's view, but rather took an anthropological approach was confirmed when the director – Penny Woolcock, highly-respected as a documentary-maker but anthropologically-inspired and Anglo-Argentinian by upbringing – confessed that her *modus operandi* was to befriend “the don/ the big man/ the godfather” (as she termed it) of the marginal communities she filmed in and get him to protect her or at least to tolerate her presence¹⁴. As a Rhondda man, I had no illusions about how tough, deprived and difficult life could be on Penrhys, and I knew, of course, that drugs and law-breaking were part of its story; but my own understanding and experience of the place, based on the close relationships I had with church and community groups there, would never have led me to approach the community as though it was a ghetto living in fear of organised crime.

My interest in the fall-out from Woolcock's programme was direct: I had followed my instincts and was in the middle of a series of fairly rapid promotions up the BBC management chain¹⁵ in pursuit of my determination to redress the balance of proportionality and Welsh representation on the networks. At about this time, John

Birt, the Director General, and the BBC's London hierarchy seemed suddenly to realise that the Corporation's record in this regard was open to criticism. Could it have been a coincidence that devolution was on the political horizon again? For whatever reason, I found myself knocking at an opening door. Mark Thompson, one of senior management's rising stars in London, and at that point Head of Factual Programmes for BBC Network Television, was particularly exercised by the issue and tasked me with investigating the balance of production of network factual programmes across the UK.

With booming factual production centres in Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester, the corporation was easily delivering on its 'Hatch targets'. These were so called after David Hatch, the BBC executive who had been appointed 'Special Assistant' to John Birt in 1993. As an adviser with influence but no power, Hatch described himself as 'a sort of minister without portfolio' whose main function was to act as peacemaker among the 'warring BBC barons'¹⁶. One of the jobs Birt gave him was to draw up plans for the corporation to devolve more programme-making to the 'regions', in the context of earlier concerns that the BBC was being funded by a regressive tax collected from every corner of the UK, but spent disproportionately in the rich south-east of England. Hatch's analysis was, I was somewhat surprised to realise on examination, actually fairly sketchy; but it had led to a public promise that the corporation would make broadly a third of its network programmes outside London. Since 'Hatch' was being delivered – indeed, in factual programmes, it was actually being exceeded by the good work of producers at Pebble Mill, Whiteladies Road and Oxford Road – there was a reasonable if somewhat complacent assumption that all was well. Unfortunately – and paradoxically – the success of these 'Regional' centres

in England in the early 1990s was making it even more difficult for documentary-makers in 'the Nations' to make an impact on network television. The *Everyman* strand, for example, had moved with the rest of BBC Religion from Television Centre in London to Manchester. As a 'regional production unit' in its own right, it no longer felt obliged to commission programmes from BBC Wales producers, as it had done for the previous decade, when it had consistently given documentary-makers like me the opportunity to contribute to network output. BBC Wales was now shut out of *Everyman*. Had the Hungerford massacre happened five years later, no Welsh producer would have had the chance to make a programme about it, and *A Place Like Hungerford* would not have formed part of my portfolio. The issue that delivering the 'Hatch targets' was masking, then, was that virtually all of network factual output was still being produced in England. This, apparently, hadn't been seen as a problem before devolution re-appeared on the agenda. But now there was a political wind favouring the enterprise which Mark Thompson had asked me to undertake.

I set up camp in Television Centre, and began the task of extracting and gathering together commissioning data held by BBC bureaucrats in a number of the London fiefdoms where the 'warring barons' held sway. These internal sources were numerous and sometimes contradictory, and their guardians often reluctant to divulge their detail (though Mr. Thompson's imprimatur eventually unlocked most filing cabinets!). Once collated, though, the conclusion was pretty clear cut. What I discovered and was now reporting to the boss was that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales added together contributed *less than 1 per cent* of all of the BBC's network factual output.

But my report wasn't simply a collection of statistics. The point was to change the world, not simply to describe it. In order to do that, to effect a change in BBC policy, I realised I had to establish *why* this un-representativeness mattered – and why it mattered not in the theoretical world of principles and ethics, but why it mattered to the BBC and its decision makers. Consequently, I set out to prove that a spend of less than 1 per cent outside England was damaging *both* the BBC's corporate standing *and* the competitive position of its network services: a two-pronged argument, each prong secured by an appeal to economics.

The BBC was deeply worried about the renewal of its Royal Charter in 1996. According to one senior BBC colleague of mine at that time, who has studied how management behaved in the period, it was in order to make a very deliberate appeal to the pro-market ethos of the Tories that the Corporation subjected itself to a massive and traumatic structural re-organisation, which involved the introduction of an internal market, Producer Choice, “orchestrated to persuade the government that the BBC was capable of operational change delivering efficiency savings, and therefore worthy of Charter Renewal” (Wegg-Prosser, 1998: 211). But the Corporation was also highly sensitive to the way it was perceived as an institution and service-provider by the British public – its corporate standing or ‘approval rating’ – and tracked this assiduously through specially-commissioned private polling. The BBC's position in this regard, my report reasoned in the first ‘prong’ of its argument, would be strengthened by a change in policy with regard to factual production. In economic terms, my proposition was based on arguments about the provision of *social goods* or *community wants* – that is, things over and above what an unregulated market will provide. Analysed from this perspective, a market in broadcast television, we may

suppose, will undoubtedly produce some excellent programmes; but it will, overall and taken over the long term, provide lower quality products than consumers either individually or collectively would desire.

The market is by definition nothing more than the aggregation of individual decisions; it takes no account of the community and of the complex relationships between citizenship, culture and community – the very things I had been most keen to ensure were represented in *A Place Like Hungerford* and the rest of my documentary output. The *externalities* of consumer choice – the ways in which individual choices impact on other consumers – would be ignored in a purely commercial broadcasting system. This, at the very least, constitutes a kind of market failure. As I argued, broadcasting can be defined as a public good because one person's consumption does not compete with another person's consumption. The marginal cost of an additional consumer is zero, which negates the usual rationale for a price mechanism. Yet if, in a pure market system, consumers as a whole do not choose a sufficient range of good programmes, broadcasters will lack the incentive to provide them, and those consumers who would wish to view them are denied the choice. The BBC's public service obligations – placed centre stage in its 1992 strategy document *Extending Choice: The BBC's Role in the New Broadcasting Age* (BBC:1992) – to provide a range of challenging factual, current affairs and religious programmes in its peak-time television schedules are examples of the extension of market choice for groups of consumers who might otherwise be left unsatisfied.

We view television, however, not simply as consumers, but also as citizens – as members of a community. There is an intrinsic value to individuals in this sense of

community, a value the market finds it difficult to price. Viewing television is itself part of what creates this commonality. Some commentators have argued that in a pluralist society, the risks of social fragmentation are high, and so as a consequence is the value of any medium which binds us together:

“An entirely appropriate role for a public service broadcaster in ... Britain would therefore be to contribute towards the (re)construction and maintenance of a common national culture that is accommodating enough to accept *on equal terms* as many as possible of the minority group cultures that go to make up such a pluralist society, and thereby minimize its tendency towards fragmentation.” (Graham et al, 1992: 183; my italics)

These arguments obviously have a bearing on the individual national cultures of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom. Public service broadcasting is a social good which helps to bind together each of these plural societies. But – if as Michael Bilig argues “[t]o have a national identity is to possess ways of talking about nationhood” (Bilig: 1995, 8) – it is also of crucial relevance to the relationship between the countries of the UK. In terms of networked factual programmes – which portray the present and historical social realities of the UK in the most direct and straightforward way to audiences right across the UK – the acceptance ‘on equal terms’ of the cultures of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is arguably one of the more important imperatives for the cornerstone of British public service broadcasting.

If part of the BBC’s public purpose, then, was to help ensure that the relationship between the nations of the UK was one of mutual respect and deeper understanding, it

was crucial that programme-makers in all of the nations had proportionate opportunities to make documentaries which reflected their own national cultures and represented the diverse experiences of people in their own nations to the rest of the UK; and, I argued, since it was inevitable that England-based producers would continue to make programmes right across the UK, it was also important for documentarians in the ‘peripheral’ nations to have the opportunity – as I had done in making *A Place Like Hungerford* – to investigate the experiences of the English.

These considerations were strongly to the fore as the BBC attempted – in seeking a renewal of its Charter in 1996 – to position its brand as central to the cohesion of society, ‘the DNA of Britain’ (see BBC: 1995a), recognising Britishness as an amalgam of the core values of the constituent nations of the UK. At the time, the BBC’s regular private quantitative surveys of the esteem in which it was held by the British public (its ‘approval rating’) indicated that the BBC’s corporate reputation declined the further one travelled from London. It seemed reasonable to assume that this was no coincidence. So, as my report argued forcefully, the fact that less than one per cent of programmes in a key BBC genre were being produced outside England would not only be publicly and politically indefensible once revealed, it was also already being instinctively perceived by licence-payers as a failure to deliver a social good which the BBC’s public funding entitled them to expect.

The BBC could not begin to change its approval rating across the UK without addressing the profile of its key domestic services. So the second ‘prong’ of my argument related not to the BBC’s corporate standing, but directly to the competitive position of its network services. My thesis was that the almost complete absence of

factual programmes made in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was adversely affecting the audience ratings of BBC Network Television. Outside of England, BBC 1 and BBC 2 were performing markedly less well, albeit slightly better in Wales (where S4C, with its language-specific mission, took a lower market share than Channel 4 in the rest of the UK) than in Scotland (in much of which ITV broadcast as ‘Scottish Television’, a powerful national brand as the impulse towards devolution strengthened) and Northern Ireland (where the nationalist population – if it could – tended instinctively to turn away from the *British* Broadcasting Corporation to point its aerials towards overspill pictures from the Republic). The BBC’s poor performance outside of England was particularly noteworthy when one adjusted the ratings in the light of the demographic make-up of the other countries. Their comparatively old populations should have boosted the BBC’s performance to levels above those of England, since its rather traditional, public service and ‘establishment’ image tended to appeal disproportionately to older viewers.

This was important because it points to second kind of failure – a failure properly to mimic the market. As we have seen, broadcasting is a commodity for which individual ownership rights do not readily arise in a natural way, but for which there *is* rivalry between users and the use by one person or group *does* influence availability to others. It is the government which assumes the role of trustee of this common property resource, establishing guidelines and placing statutory responsibilities on broadcasters (in the BBC Charter, for instance) to balance the competing wishes of all potential viewers rather than purely, for example, satisfying a largest possible majority at all times.

The BBC's Charter devolves some of the responsibilities of trusteeship to the BBC. This has now been more transparently recognised than it was at the time by the creation of the BBC Trust to govern the corporation; but even now – as then – the trusteeship is effectively further devolved on a day-to-day basis within BBC television to the channel controllers and the commissioning executives who advise them. In their commissioning decisions, they mimic the market as custodians of the scarce common property, making choices on behalf of the viewing public. They are of course guided by their own professional insights and instincts, but they are informed by ever-more sophisticated and detailed analyses of the audience. The notion of 'audience *need*' – more complex and wide-ranging than 'audience *wants*' (which might imply simply maximising the audience at all time) and for those very reasons more capable of inflection for political reasons – came to be the driving force behind a major review of programme strategy within the corporation, which arose during the period I was writing my report and which was summarised publicly by the BBC in a document called *People and Programmes: BBC Radio and Television for an Age of Choice* in 1995:

“Television and radio audiences are on the move. They already enjoy more choice than they used to and will soon enjoy far more. They are more discerning, more aware of their power and their rights as consumers of broadcasting, less willing to be patronised or talked down to, less ready to accept someone else's definition of what they should enjoy.” (BBC: 1995b)

People and Programmes was notable for its emphasis on audience need. Although it claimed to spring from the same principles as *Extending Choice*, the BBC's opening

salvo in its campaign for charter renewal in the 1990s, it contrasts with that 1992 document in moving away from the idea of ‘distinctiveness’ as the acid test for the BBC. In *Extending Choice* the BBC came close to suggesting that its proposition should be seen as a pure ‘social good’, and that it should position its programming accordingly. *People and Programmes* was much more reluctant to withdraw to the high-ground, suggesting instead a role of mimicking of the market, where the BBC plays across all programme types, and audience reach and even share are the indicators to abide by. The provision of a whole range of ‘lighter’ consumer, lifestyle and leisure programmes in mid-evening weeknights on BBC 2, as well as BBC 1’s increased willingness to compete head-to-head with ITV for the Saturday night mass market were examples of the fruits of this changed approach.

The way in which the question of proportionality of production across the UK plays into this ‘mimicking of the market’ is complex, but it was crucially affected by the shift in emphasis. On first sight, it might seem that an approach which is intended to be more like that of the market itself would deliver less to the ‘peripheries’ and more to the ‘centre’. But this is to read the provision of programmes for audiences across the UK from outside the south-east of England as though it was merely a public service obligation which had to be imposed on an otherwise unwilling audience.

The fact is that the majority of the UK’s population live outside the M25 corridor. The corporate standing of the BBC declined in direct relationship with distance from London, and its own private polling showed that one of the key reasons was that the public beyond the M25 wished to see their attitudes, tastes and distinctive cultures reflected more fully in the programmes they were watching. That is, the public

perceived a failure on the part of the BBC to provide an adequate representation of the cultural diversity of the UK.

The provision of more documentaries which represented Welsh experience (as well, of course, as those of other non-metropolitans) was not, the signals showed, simply an issue that exercised socially-committed programme-makers like myself. The 'market' itself, the viewing public, was calling for more programmes which reflected the mixture of experience which could be found across the UK – programmes like those in my portfolio (and those of many others!).

The market's desire, then, for such programming could be seen as something which was being frustrated by a commissioning system overly dependent on the judgement of metropolitan-based professionals. The renewed emphasis, in *People and Programmes*, on 'mimicking the market' – through prioritising audience need – could be read as a pressure for releasing that frustration. In economic terms, the commissioners at BBC 1 and BBC 2 were tasked to deliver a greater consumer surplus, measured by a willingness to pay the licence as set at various levels. Rather than projecting a single metropolitan vision, their most effective strategy would be to mimic the market by reflecting the diversity of the society they were serving.

It was clear then that the commissioners were failing to respond to the messages of their own viewing figures, and to the strong evidence that viewers outside of England – 17 per cent of the total available audience – wanted to see their tastes and interests reflected more fully. Of course, it was possible to argue that such representation could be effected successfully from England. And – even if it had been in any way

practically possible – it would be a poorer Wales that excluded the perspective of English programme-makers entirely (as it was healthier for England, I argued, to have some programmes, like *Hungerford*, where its experience was seen from outside). But the qualitative evidence of the responses to episodes like those at the Rhondda Heritage Park and at Penrhys, not to mention the common sense logic, suggested that, for the ‘peripheral’ nations, programme-makers based there would be more sensitive and more accurate – and we knew from the exhaustive assembling and rigorous analysis of internal financial statistics, which John Birt insisted on¹⁷, that they would be more cost-efficient too. And there was more: in a BBC Wales audience survey viewers in Wales specifically called for more networked documentaries and factual programmes reflecting their lives and experience as a means of correcting what they saw as outmoded national stereotypes (see BBC Wales: 1994). The often unselfconscious cultural assumptions of the English – both referred to *and* made in a series of interviews with senior BBC executives in London which I conducted for my management report to Mark Thompson – were real issues.

Then, even more than now, the English often seemed to equate England with Britain, seeing little distinction between ‘Englishness’ and ‘Britishness’. Even the British Prime Minister seemed unable to stretch his imagination much beyond the Home Counties:

“Fifty years on from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county [cricket] grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and – as George Orwell said – “Old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist” . . . ”¹⁸

England's position as the dominant culture within the United Kingdom – the unquestioned and unquestioning 'norm' from which others diverge – is clear from the underlying and almost completely unrecognised assumptions encapsulated in this and in other quotations from the period 1993-5 collected in a report on Britishness and the BBC which was circulating within the corporation at the time¹⁹ – such as John Redwood (the Secretary of State for Wales!) talking about '... a crowded island like England ...' and Richard Ottaway (the Conservative MP for Croydon South) asserting that 'the most prosperous region of England is Scotland'.

The commissioning of that report shows that *some* parts of the BBC were at least considering the question of how England related to the other UK nations. But such awareness was rare in the metropolis. Significantly, one quite senior London programme-maker I interviewed, whom I knew quite well and who assured me he had great respect for my portfolio of work, said that he had no idea how England was seen in the rest of the UK – he just didn't think about it. Equally noteworthy was the case of the London scheduler who couldn't comprehend why the special Hogmanay programme for viewers in Scotland didn't include what seemed to him a sacrosanct fixed point – the 'traditional' televised New Year message from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who "after all *is* the senior prelate of the Church of England" (Geraint: 1996, 19-20)²⁰.

There was, of course, a tension between the two 'prongs' of my argument; between the consumer-oriented, 'market mimicking' objectives clarified in *People and Programmes* and the 'social goods' objectives of *Extending Choice*. But there was also an overlap. Today's social good can become tomorrow's market need, for there

is a strong educational or ‘preference-altering’ aspect to successful social goods. For the BBC’s corporate integrity to survive, I argued, it needed a judicious mix of the two so that all its stakeholders should remain supportive. In the maxim of Huw Wheldon, it must ‘make the good *popular* and the popular *good*’²¹. It should reflect the diversity of the UK as well as provide a unifying national forum. Economic and political judgements about the nature of this mix will have a direct bearing upon the framing of the corporation’s objectives and the urgency with which they are implemented from time to time. The points at issue are always those of the day, but the debate itself was nothing new. Tensions between populism and quality, as well as those between centralism and devolution had always existed in the BBC. What was new and urgent was the need for the BBC to consider the emergent political reality – for the first time in eighteen years, a government of a different colour on the horizon, with a manifesto commitment to constitutional change including devolution, in a feverish political atmosphere with energetic, cross-party bodies like the Scottish Constitutional Convention busily putting the finishing touches to their final, persuasive report which was to speak of the ‘powerful and clear’ will of the Scottish people²².

Consequently, I made a number of specific recommendations to address the BBC’s market failure, the most significant of which was the adoption of an immediate target for factual production of network programmes outside of England. This was set – hugely ambitiously in terms of a base of less than 1 per cent – at between 5 and 10 per cent within two years, with the eventual aim being broad proportionality on a *per capita* basis (see Appendix 4 for the two-page summary of my report, which, with

Mark Thompson's support, I presented to BBC Network Television's Factual Editorial Board in November 1996).

It was the start of very long journey towards a much healthier and more proportionate balance. By the middle of the following decade (2005-6), annual production of factual programmes from Wales (including some of my own work discussed in the next chapter of this study) on the flagship network channels BBC 1 and BBC 2 had risen to 37 hours. This was still only some two-and-a-quarter per cent of the total factual output on these channels – less than halfway to true *per capita* proportionality – but the projects were largely well-funded primetime documentaries, and had a high impact accordingly (BBC: 2006)²³.

Building on from this, the BBC has now publicly committed itself to full proportionality by 2016 by increasing the number of television programmes made outside England to 17%, matching the proportion of the UK's population which lives there (see BBC: 2010, 43).

It would be wholly wrong of me to claim the credit for a significant shift in BBC policy and practice, or even to say that I set the ball rolling. I am sure that Mark Thompson, a wily political strategist, was thoroughly convinced of the need to act before he ever read a draft of my report. But the fact of the matter is that he took the facts, the analysis and the argument with him as devolution bedded in and he rose rapidly to positions where his say-so had real clout: from Head of BBC Factual Programmes to Controller of BBC 2 to Director of Nations and Regions to Director of

Network Television and eventually – after a brief sojourn at Channel 4 – to BBC Director-General.

Even so, it was never going to be an easy journey for those who were charged with attracting more network programming to Wales. The underlying disdain of senior London-based BBC figures for out-of-London production was rarely expressed aloud beyond the corridors of Television Centre, but it was real enough. The mask slipped in one interview I conducted for my report, when a quite influential executive explained patiently to me some of the reasons why, in 1996, the ‘nations’ weren’t more prominent on the network:

“ ‘commissioning bad ideas themselves, poor market research, lack of awareness of the audience profile, quality of management, delivery problems, failures, talent gaps, no hunger for work...’. After this litany of condemnation, I ventured to ask whether he’d actually seen any factual programmes made in the nations. ‘Yes’, he replied, ‘the local evening news. It’s very good.’ ”

(Geraint: 1996, 46)

Deep-seated prejudice of this kind – confused as it undoubtedly is shown to be by the answer to my supplementary question – could only be shifted by negotiated but specific targets. Change was effected, in the end, by an act of political will from the top of the BBC which gave talent in the nations its opportunity to flourish within the framework of internal output deals and public promises on spend in the nations.

Those in broadcasting who wield power and who are most anxious to defend the *status quo* will often tell you – as they told me back when I was writing my 1996

report – that targets and quotas don't work. Commissioners must be free.

Commissioning is a creative process undertaken bravely under extreme market pressure, they'll say; you can't send commissioners naked onto the airwaves and force them to place work where they've no faith in the talent to deliver.

But the notion that commissioning is a kind of creative *acte gratuit* is, of course, nonsense. All broadcasters, whether they recognise them or not, have plans, quotas and targets for production and routinely slice their budgets by genre, tariff range and supplying department, company or production centre. Commissioners are highly skilled at maximising their freedom within these established constraints. And all commissioners have tropes and prejudices, and established suppliers and patterns of commissioning which make it more – or less – likely that they will place orders in particular places, for good and bad reasons.

Nevertheless, as a producer who valued his audience, and knew that, very often, the commissioner knows them best, my report was careful to stress that programme-makers in the 'nations' should market programme ideas *not* proportionality policies. Though the two theses I had proposed were not to my mind irreconcilable, clear tactical separation needed to be made in the way they were to be pursued: the *social goods/community wants* argument should – I believed then and still believe now – be prosecuted politically by those who are guardians of the airwaves on the public's behalf; *mimicking the market* should be the domain of programme-makers as they aim to develop irresistible proposals which satisfy the needs of the network audience and the requirements of the schedule.

I began to practice what I was preaching – to address the internal market for network television production as the head of the in-house production arm at BBC Wales. Even after the devolution vote in 1997, we found little real warmth for our ideas at ‘the Centre’. In so many senses, we were still peripheral to the commissioners’ true concerns. Nevertheless, backed up by the nascent network supply strategy for the nations, we had some modest successes. We doubled BBC Wales’ overall network income to a record £17 million per annum, and produced a range of well-received documentary series like *Prohibition* (1997), *Visions of Snowdonia* (1997) and *The Union Game* (1999). But I had scarcely time to begin to implement my own strategy for increasing Welsh representation on network television, before a series of sweeping management changes in the wake of Greg Dyke’s appointment as Director General and the retirement of my boss, Geraint Talfan Davies²⁴, as Controller BBC Wales, saw my own departure from BBC staff in the first year of the new millennium. I was about to experience the realities of the market for documentaries from a completely different perspective. I was setting up as an independent producer.

Chapter Four: Deeds In Green Bay²⁵

On the evening of Monday, June 10, 2002, the Eric Harvie Theatre at the Banff Centre, in Alberta, Canada, was packed for the 23rd Annual Rockie Awards show. In their black ties or ball gowns, the great and the good of the television industry had gathered at one of the world's foremost media events for the finals of the 'Olympics of television' and the announcement of the \$50,000 Global Television Grand Prize for 'the world's best television programme' – a claim which might have seemed grandiose had it not been for the quality of the nominees.

Selected from nearly a thousand entries, the finalists included internationally-recognised series like *The West Wing*, *Frasier*, *The Office*, *Band of Brothers* and *Blue Planet*. So it was a thrill to find my new company's very first production amongst them; and somewhat of a comfort, as I took my place in the nominees' section, to realise I was acquainted with the young woman who'd been allocated the seat right next to mine. She was now a drama producer working at ITV but, like me, she had been brought up in the South Wales Valleys, and I had met her when she was working for BBC Wales some six years earlier. When the Grand Prize was finally announced, there was a surprise. The winner was none of the blue-chip series listed above. Nor was it my programme. It was a modern-day adaptation of *Othello* starring Christopher Ecclestone and produced by the woman sitting alongside me, Julie Gardner²⁶.

For me, missing out on the top prize (especially to another Welsh producer!) was no more than a momentary disappointment. The nomination itself had attracted a great deal of positive industry attention in the UK and internationally, and was a huge boost

for my new company. It became a ‘calling card’ as we sought to grow and win new commissions, a marketing tool for Green Bay Media Limited (see Appendix 5). And, for me personally, it felt like a vindication of my decision to return to hands-on programme-making for the first time in a decade.

The experience of leaving the BBC had been salutary. One frosty morning in February 2001, Phil George – who had also left a staff post at Llandaff that month – drove me to a friend’s garage, where we lifted a couple of cob-webbed desks (no House and Office Services²⁷ now!) into Phil’s car, took them around to an unheated building at the bottom of another friend’s garden, and set up shop.

We’d had long discussions about the kind of company we were hoping to establish.

I’d even drafted a high-minded ‘mission statement’:

“Green Bay

founded in 2001

to make world-class film and television in drama, documentary and the arts

- to produce substantial, challenging programmes which we believe in and we really want to make – and to enjoy ourselves creatively in doing so
- to work with the best talent who excite and educate us – learning from them, learning with them
- to be a cultural magnet – offering a platform, an analysis and a celebration of what matters to people whose voice isn’t heard and whose potential is circumscribed”

(Green Bay Media: 2001a)

This set of guiding principles – based on concerns and commitments developed over the course of my BBC career and which have been discussed in earlier chapters – certainly gave us a direction. The tone of hubris was no doubt bred of a career conducted solely in-house at the BBC. Indeed, it is hard for me now to credit the narrowness of my perspective at the time. The Corporation has such a good name in the world, such a persuasive view of itself, such a strong sense of the quality of its standards, the worth of its output and the centrality of its place in the audience’s affections, such an unshakeable conviction that what’s good for the BBC is good for Britain, that its alumni – however broad the personal hinterland they bring to it – can fall all too easily into the trap of thinking that (as a fellow BBC ‘escapee’ from this period put it in private conversation recently) ‘the world revolves around the BBC, rather than the BBC around the world.’

This myopia extends even to documentary-making close to home. Whilst I was on staff at Llandaff, I certainly knew that factual programmes were also made elsewhere in Wales. Indeed, my wife, Angela Graham²⁸, had been for many years a programme-maker at HTV Wales (as it still then was) and then in the independent sector. I much admired the work of her colleague at Teliesyn, Colin Thomas, and others; and I had commissioned programmes from them as a BBC executive producer working with the ‘indies’. I understood that they could be light on their feet, and weren’t burdened with the onerous corporate overheads (like House and Office Services) nor the tiresome bureaucratic reporting responsibilities that so frustrated in-house programme-makers at the BBC. But, if I am to be perfectly honest, I probably didn’t think that we had very much to learn as broadcasters from others. It wasn’t until I began to function as

an independent that my eyes were opened to my own arrogance.

Producing programmes commissioned by Elis Owen²⁹ at HTV Wales was to be a revelation. The budgets were tighter, and there was a focus on commercial profit, even before this part of the old public service broadcasting duopoly was swallowed up in the convulsions of merger and acquisition which have, by now, created a monolithic ITV plc. But just a decade ago, Culverhouse Cross enjoyed a good deal of autonomy within the ‘regional’ ITV system. And perhaps because it didn’t regard itself (in Elis Owen’s eyes at least) as a treasured institution but as the viewer’s friend, there was an absence of stuffiness and a directness of appeal to the English-language audience in Wales, a simplicity – an elegance! – in the editorial line required, that’s difficult to express precisely in words (at least without sounding pretentious), but for an experienced programme-maker it was not so much like finding another gear – more like approaching a familiar place on a new road. Stupid me! There was a different angle.

The popular factual series we made in Green Bay’s early years for HTV/ITV Wales – *Fun In The Sun* (2001), *Summer On Gower* (2002), *Start-Up* (2003), *The Welsh Weekend* (2004) and *Fit For A Change* (2005) – were also significant factors in building a sustainable production business. Our first commission from Owen, *Fun In The Sun*, documenting the summer season in the resort town of Tenby, enabled us to hire the first of many exciting production talents we’ve worked with, Nia Dryhurst³⁰, who was therefore also available to help research our very first commission, which had come from my *alma mater* in documentary, the BBC. Its genesis sprang directly

from the guiding principles Phil and I had used to frame Green Bay's mission statement.

Whilst I had been 'away' in management, something of a revolution had occurred in television documentary-making. It became known as factual entertainment – and, depending on one's stand-point, it was a new flowering or a dumbing down of the genre. Driven by a generation of (mainly) British factual-programme-makers, the docu-soap, 'reality tv' and constructed documentary formats had begun to deliver really big popular audiences to broadcasters around the world. Drama might still get bigger audiences in absolute numbers, but the new-style popular factual output wasn't far behind, and since it was far cheaper to produce, it came out an easy winner when broadcasters measured cost-per-viewer-hour. In 1998, for example, ITV successfully replaced a long-running primetime drama at the heart of its schedule with an untried docu-soap commissioned by an executive poached from the BBC for his expertise in the newly fashionable genre³¹. In fact, throughout these last two decades, in an increasingly competitive global market, factual formats have transformed the ratings of whole channels – from *Airport* (1996-2005) and *Hotel* (1997) for the BBC in the 1990s to *Faking It* (2000-2006) and *Wife Swap* (2003-2009) for Channel 4 and *Ice Road Truckers* (2007-) for The History Channel in new millennium. The formal innovations and narrative techniques have been snapped up and copied, across British television and internationally.

The docu-soap, in particular, pioneered the deliberate use of formal devices – fast editing, short sequences, intercutting between multiple narrative strands to heighten the sense of action unfolding rapidly, and to build in 'cliff-hangers' within the

programme structure, keeping the audience hooked – many of which were copied directly from the soap opera genre (the slightly pejorative epithet ‘docu-soap’ is no misnomer). In the eyes of some critics, they served to divert attention away from the essential triviality of the subject matter, or at least the triviality of the way it was treated. Indeed, the over-riding factor that differentiated the docu-soaps from other forms of contemporary documentary was entertainment:

“The exemplary docusoap is structured and edited to maximise entertainment value. Unlike direct cinema ‘crisis structure’ films, docusoap crises are primarily concerned with the mundane and the non-monumental, and so the creation of a structure performs the very different function of making everyday events coherent and entertaining.” (Bruzzi, 2000: 85)

Bruzzi’s characterisation of the docu-soap is accurate – the programmes are concerned, in the main, not with traumas like the Hungerford massacre which raise deep existential questions, but with the ‘tragedy’ of a double-booked hotel room, a histrionic passenger missing a flight, or a tiff between husband and wife over poor driving, or between parent and child about help with the washing up. Of course, a focus on what Bruzzi calls ‘everyday events’ was not necessarily a bad thing and – in the period leading up to the establishment of Green Bay – it was certainly popular. On the BBC, in the second half of the 1990s, Chris Terrill’s *The Cruise* (1998) attracted 11 million viewers, whilst Francesca Joseph’s *Driving School* (1997) peaked at 12.45 million – unheard of numbers outside of drama and major events. Even long-running series such as *Vet School/Vets In Practice* (eleven series between 1996 and 2002) were delivering audiences of 8 million on a regular basis (BBC: 1996ff).

Driving School may have been an amusing piece of social commentary, but it had no real political intent; it was, as Bruzzi suggests, much more focused on entertainment and ratings. The docu-soaps certainly encouraged the audience to engage with the real people they depicted – *Driving School*'s Maureen, for instance, is a very memorable 'character'. But, to my mind, the tone they adopted bordered on the sneer. The watching public, it seemed to me, was being invited to laugh at the characters, rather than with them. The crises laid out for the viewers' entertainment were often constructed so as to appear that they resulted from the incompetence or naivety of those discomforted on screen. They belittled their stars, even as they made them famous.

In the documentary as I had understood it, and wanted to produce – the kind of programmes Green Bay 'believed in' – people can be represented *as themselves* without being manipulated so as to appear as problems, victims, winners, losers, heroes or villains. For me, as I have explained in discussing my work throughout this study, the form has the potential to be expansive and empowering – for its subjects and for its viewers. Documentaries can be made collaboratively with their subjects – with people, not just about them. Aspects of human experience – culture, spirituality, history, science, personal relationships, attachments to place – which may be more fundamental and significant than the trivial and the everyday, can be explored at a moment of crisis or across months or years of patient engagement. The medium itself can become an expressive form, and the format can be constructed and varied not to reduce matters to entertainment, but to reveal the truth in a given reality.

Of course, I understood that it is given to few of us – and then only for a small proportion of our time on earth – to be caught up in great tragedy, to be moved by great poetry, to be active in great social struggles, to be cast aside by great shifts in economic policy. The everyday *is* important: to paraphrase Raymond Williams ‘culture is ordinary’. And representing it can be an egalitarian impulse which I would instinctively support. But I felt strongly that the predominance of the docu-soap was in danger of narrowing the range of what the television documentary might do, even as it extended the number of hours of factual output transmitted.

I was not totally alone in my concern. Critics and historians of the documentary as an art form were also tracking its most recent manifestations and recognising that more could be less:

“The proliferation of documentary forms...is both an indication of ... productivity ... and a symptom of underlying failure. The very form which developed to enable us to think about history and social change has almost turned into its opposite – we are now in a mode of iteration, an accumulation of information that can render us informed but paradoxically unable to act.”

(Nash: 2006, 49)

I was in broad agreement with Nash, but I was not so arrogant as to believe that I could single-handedly redress the matters that concern him; nor – as will be evident from the list of titles Green Bay produced for HTV/ITV Wales – did I eschew opportunities to build our business by tackling lighter themes and subjects. At the time, it would have been an extremely risky strategy to try to build from scratch a new business based solely on the high-minded and Parnassian. Certainly, few other

companies were doing that. Nevertheless, I did set out – pretty deliberately – to make Green Bay’s first documentary one that would connect with the concerns of the broad popular audience, but which wasn’t at all ‘mundane’ or simply an ‘accumulation of information’ – which, in fact, sought to deal head on, in affecting yet challenging ways, with the most profound issues of human existence.

The precise starting point was the realisation that a significant anniversary in poetry was approaching. Exactly fifty years earlier, in the spring of 1951, Dylan Thomas had been told that his father was dying of cancer. His celebrated artistic response was to submit himself to writing in the strict discipline of the French song-form, the *villanelle*³². The result was *Do not go gentle into that good night*³³.

Half a century on, Dylan Thomas’s global stature as a poet was a very significant factor in my being drawn to focus on this anniversary. Thomas is one of the few Welsh literary figures who would be recognised by and appeal to a world-wide television audience. His devotees were known to include the rich and famous, and the resonance of this particular poem was still enormous. Two living Presidents of the United States were thought to have particular attachments to it³⁴. Its most famous lines had entered popular consciousness around the globe and were picked up and used in all kinds of ‘non-poetic’ contexts. It seemed to speak to ‘ordinary’ people who would not think of themselves as literary types. A former colleague, no great lover of poetry for its own sake, had recently read it at his father’s funeral. But quite how widespread and how deep its significance was I did not realise, until the notion took me to conduct a simple internet search. I was astounded to discover – even at that comparatively rudimentary stage of the World Wide Web’s development – that there

were references to it on as many as 600,000 pages³⁵. These ranged from complex academic and ‘fan’ sites to simple requests for interpretation from teenagers who were studying the poem at schools in India, Australia, North America, Japan. Most moving was its use in so many individual obituary and memorial sites. It was evident that this was a poem which meant so much in bereavement to people of all creeds and kinds. For hundreds of thousands, it was a poem which, despite its strident refusal to accept the inevitability of loss, was acting as a balm on the rawest of emotions. In a secular age, its hymn-like qualities offered solace, and supported the resilience of the human spirit.

But hitting upon a topic – however powerful and resonant – is by no means the same as developing a persuasive programme proposal which a broadcaster will commission. The real boldness of *Do Not Go Gentle*, its distinctiveness, and the justification for any claim it might have to sit (literally) alongside the world’s best television programme, was its willingness to devote a whole hour of lavishly-produced screen time to the contemplation of a short piece of verse. No doubt there were antecedents in television, such as Alan Yentob’s famous documentary about the impact of the song *My Way*³⁶; and yet again I was drawing on the admiration I’ve described (in Chapter One above) for Charles Parker’s Radio Ballads, in the weave of performance and real-life testimony I was proposing; but I was not aware, at that point, of any full-length screen documentary celebrating a single short poem.

In that sense, what I’d conceived and now began to flesh out was original: an hour-long documentary special, featuring Thomas’s voice reading his own lines in the famous sound recording³⁷, which would take its cue from the formal repetitions of the

poem itself to interweave and return to a number of key themes. These included Thomas's own story; his complex and problematic relationship with his father; why he wrote the poem as well as how; and that fact that the poem was a strange and poignant presage of Thomas's own death in New York less than two years later.

It struck me that I could delve into the tone of the poem itself, its musicality, its masterly manipulation of the form. This could be explained and celebrated by critics and poets. Then there was the artistic response to the poem in other art forms. Rock legend John Cale³⁸ – another Welshman in New York – had set the poem to music in a sequence called *Words for the Dying*. Would he take part, performing and talking about the technicalities of putting Thomas's words to music? I also needed a contemporary reading of the poems, and felt drawn to a voice that would contrast with Thomas's and would avoid any temptation to fall into mawkishness – that of well-known screen actor Keith Allen, who shared Thomas's reputation as a hell-raiser, and with whom I was in contact following my days overseeing drama at BBC Wales³⁹.

Then there could be interviews with Thomas's major biographers, Paul Ferris and George Tremlett. Thomas's daughter, Aeronwy Thomas Ellis, could be approached. Would she be willing to revisit the house she grew up in, the Boathouse in Laugharne, even to be filmed laying flowers on her father's grave, high above the town?

Above all (and here, perhaps, I was connecting with the spirit of the 'docu-soap age'), I wanted to feature readers' stories – the personal impact of the poem – why it had come to mean so much to 'ordinary' people, even if 'Poetry' wasn't really 'their

thing'. I wanted to understand, from people recently bereaved, and those pulling through medical crises, why they saw the poem as a practical tool.

With all of these (potential) elements, I was able to make a compelling case in 'selling' the idea to the BBC. By early spring 2001, with the commission confirmed, we were into pre-production.

It was almost too soon. I remember having not the faintest idea of how to budget and manage an independent production without the safety net of the BBC's in-house support units. Negotiating day-rates or holiday pay on the freelance market was not something I'd ever had to do. What was Green Bay's health and safety policy? What mileage rate did we pay? What accountancy package should we use?

Somewhat in desperation, I sought the advice of an old friend, the highly experienced Production Manager, Mary Simmonds. Thankfully, she was patient with my naïve questions, and generous and wise in her guidance.

I recruited another former colleague, Rory Taylor⁴⁰, on camera. The quality of Taylor's photography was crucial to the success of the project. Since I'd been away from hands-on directing, there'd been major advances in the technical specifications of electronic cameras (as well as a whole new aspect ratio – widescreen – to take into account!), and I now felt able to abandon 16mm film. Though, obviously, film is capable of many moods, it was its ennobling depths and textures which, for me, had always seemed to match so well the way I was seeking to represent ordinary experience. Now I had to recognise that, in the right hands, and with the requisite care

in lighting, video cameras were capable of equal if not superior sensitivity (and at a considerably lower cost).

If I had a residual reluctance to change the medium of picture acquisition, Rory Taylor's training as a film cameraman, and the quality of his subsequent work in video, gave me all the reassurance I needed. The results throughout the finished programme – specifically commended by the Banff jury – seem to vindicate the choice. Taylor's night-time aerials of the canyons of light formed by Manhattan's skyscrapers are particularly striking. Within a few short months of us shooting them, their appropriateness as a metaphor in a film about mortality was given added poignancy: after September 11, 2001, no-one would be able to view footage of the New York skyline in quite the same way.

Whilst we were in Manhattan, we filmed with students at New York University's prestigious Tisch School of Art, and at locations associated with Thomas like the White Horse Tavern and the Chelsea Hotel. We also had the good fortune to track down Dave Slivka, the New York sculptor who had made Thomas's death mask. He was a close friend of Thomas and strangely had been born on exactly the same day as him. He explained the rather macabre mechanics of making a death mask and his account of the immediate aftermath of Thomas' death included details not previously made public. Slivka also told us about life in town with a famous *bon viveur*:

“I introduced Dylan to the White Horse Tavern in Greenwich Village, and we would meet there for a liquid lunch. Everyone knows that he could drink vast quantities of alcohol right up to the time he went on stage to do a reading. I

said to him once, ‘How do you do that?’ And he just said, ‘It’s the ham in me’.” (Green Bay Media: 2001b)

John Cale gave us his own tour of the Big Apple and spoke of it as a catalyst for artistic expression as well as artistic demons:

“New York gives you so much as an artist. If you want to make money, you can do that here. If you want to die, you can do that in all kinds of spectacular ways. And where there are casualties it’s usually the result of a long drive towards that by the person involved.” (Green Bay Media: 2001b)

New York was the right choice to film many of the sequences – Thomas was clearly in his element there, for all that it contributed to the self-destructive urges Cale was referring to – but all of the on-screen interviewees there recognised that this was a very Welsh story. And, of course, we also filmed key contributors (as well as landscape and townscape sequences) back in Wales. In Thomas’s hometown, Swansea, Keith Allen gave us another perspective on how public expectations can expose and isolate an artist:

“I have a reputation ... as a “wild man”. I hear stories about myself which are patently untrue – events that simply didn’t happen. And I don’t worry about that, because I can see it for what it is. But I do know people who feel a pressure to live up to that sort of image. And I think for Dylan Thomas and artists of that stature, there’s another sort of pressure – which is to go on producing work at a certain standard. And if you feel you can’t cut it anymore, then the pressure must be enormous. Just enormous.” (Green Bay Media: 2001b)

And Thomas's daughter, Aeronwy, gave us her own views on the source of those pressures on the poet:

“I think *his* father's death took away one of the motivations for him. Because he became a poet to please his father. And he knew that in going back to America on these tours where the living was easy, he was putting himself in the way of all these things that took him away from writing poetry, and putting his life in danger. He had to know that.” (Green Bay Media: 2001b)

In separate interviews, George Tremlett and Paul Ferris trenchantly expressed very different views about Dylan's 'decline'. In editing the final film, we cut rapidly back and forth between them, compressing their arguments in a sequence in which the juxtaposed sound-bites of diametrically-opposed 'evidence' illustrated that the poet and his work remain beyond simple critical encapsulation, and that the judgements of even the best-informed biographers can be widely at variance. It's another example of my deliberately pointing up the artificial, constructed nature of representation on television.

The editor who constructed this sequence with me was my former BBC colleague, collaborator and good friend, Chris Lawrence, who was by now working at what was at the time, and was to remain for the rest of the decade, the leading Cardiff facilities house, Barcud Derwen (sadly, it ceased to trade in 2010). My confidence in Lawrence was not misplaced, but after eight years away from hands-on programme-making I misjudged how I myself might cope with the demands of the editing process. I had anticipated that I might struggle with the pace of directing on location,

but that six weeks in edit would be something of a doddle. As things turned out, the adrenaline of the shoot kept me going through some hectic days and nights in Laugharne, Swansea and New York without too much difficulty. Conversely, I found the long stretch in the cutting room a real trial. No doubt my desk-bound years in the BBC hierarchy had got me used to the “constant, constant multi-tasking craziness” (González and Mark: 2004) which studies of management attention point to. Instead of switching tasks every two to three minutes, I was now staring at the same pictures for a month and a half!

Driven by John Cale’s powerful specially-recorded piano setting of the poem, the final form of the documentary which Chris Lawrence and I eventually arrived at follows the poem through its six stanzas, each spoken in turn by Thomas’s voice and the other contributors. The careful selection of these was intended to present a cross section of readers who had found the poem ‘useful’ in a variety of professional and/or personal ways: doctors fighting critical illness in Cardiff’s Heath Hospital; the NASA scientist who used the poem on a website to point up images of the splendour of a dying comet; the mother for whom these words meant everything after the tragic death of her child; and hospice pioneer Ilora Finlay who talks of the “phenomenal... ability of the gravely ill to see what’s really going on” (Green Bay Media: 2001b) – all of these bear witness in the film to the poem’s searing universal power, even as they weave together the specifically Welsh-based elements in Thomas’s story with locations associated with his time as a Welshman abroad.

The documentary’s key images – such as the helicopter shots of the New York night sky and the raging, dying lights of Broadway; the sunlight dancing on the waves of

the green bay below the Boathouse at Laugharne – recur throughout, in a deliberate echoing of the repetitions of Dylan’s masterpiece itself. The technicalities of how the poet uses those repetitions are brilliantly expounded in an on-screen interview by Wales’ first national poet, Gwyneth Lewis⁴¹:

“[T]he wonderful thing about the *villanelle* – what a *villanelle* will do for you which other poetic forms won’t – ...because you’re repeating the same lines – ‘*Do not go gentle into that good night*’, ‘*Rage, rage against the dying of the light*’ – it’s like a hawk coming down in a spiral, approaching the same sentiments from a different point of view... spiralling down and around this very difficult subject. So the repetition is crucial... The point is that with the distance between the... spirals, the poet has learned more and the reader has learned more. The closer he gets to his prey, the more those repeated lines mean, the more weight they carry, because we’ve seen the circle of thought that’s brought us to that point.” (Green Bay Media: 2001b)

To underline her point, I intercut Gwyneth’s words with repeated takes of the performance of the poem’s two key lines by the young American drama students. And – in another example of my seeking, like Dennis Potter, to construct deciphering viewers – I used her explanation creatively in structuring my own work: I deliberately introduced images without fully explaining them, returning to them later in the film when I hoped they would carry more weight as a result, “because we’ve seen the circle of thought that’s brought us to that point” (Green Bay Media: 2001b). This is most obvious in the opening sequence, when, after we hear Thomas’s own voice begin to read the complete poem set against lush strings and the spectacular Manhattan night, a group of people gather outside the Chelsea Hotel during a

lightning storm to watch two medics load a figure on a stretcher into an ambulance. Amongst the concerned group and the passers-by are several of our interviewees, but this wouldn't be evident on first viewing until the scene is repeated much later, when we deal with Dylan's death in the main body of the documentary. The opening sequence concludes and the reading of the poem ends with the ambulance driving off into the rainy New York streets and the lights of Broadway flickering, before a segue into the main title and John Cale's piano and voice signal a change of mood.

Thanks to the craft skills of Rory Taylor and Chris Lawrence, many of the programme's viewers have told me that it is a memorably dramatic opening; it was one of the key factors, according to the pre-selection panel, which made the film stand out amongst the hundreds submitted to Banff. I'd like to think it does justice to the genius of the poet and the poem, the circumstances of its writing and its enduring power for so many readers around the globe. It signals that this is a Welsh story of world stature.

As a single hour, *Do Not Go Gentle* may not have turned back the tide of 'factual entertainment' on channels internationally. But it was an uncompromising attempt to harness the power and ambition of the documentary form to represent the depths of human experience and the heights of our achievements – and, incidentally, according to more than a few kind industry colleagues, a brave way to launch a new company.

Its success made me even more determined that Green Bay would bring many other Welsh stories to the world screen. That ambition would necessitate engagement with markets which in some respects were structurally quite alien to programme-makers

schooled in the values of British public service broadcasting. We would be forced constantly to question and re-evaluate how the representation of Welsh experience would be affected – and might be compromised – by broader exposure. Nevertheless, that was the task that I was convinced we must now face, even as I remained determined that we should not turn our backs on our roots. Like Dylan Thomas, our world would be Welsh, our Wales world-wide.

Chapter Five: Making History Again

The online journalist who'd called my mobile phone was excited but insistent: "*I understand you're using hundreds of local schoolchildren to march through the shops in Tonypany tomorrow morning and re-enact the Riots. It's a great story. I just need a quote for the BBC News website....*"

Any independent producer rejoices in the offer of publicity for a programme. But the journalism here seemed to be in danger of crossing a crucial line between 'reality television' and reality itself. It was a distinction which I had grappled with myself in developing and 'selling' the idea of a programme commemorating the centenary of the Tonypany Riots, and after a decade as an 'indie' I knew that many of my colleagues in the independent sector were grappling with it too; so in this chapter I will explore at greater length the pressure that 'reality tv' has exerted on documentary-makers, as well as examining the context in which I was able to develop my business as an independent producer making documentaries representing Wales and Welsh experience in markets inside and outside Wales in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

But first – an urgent request required an urgent response. And most of what the online journalist was saying was true. Hundreds of pupils from Tonypany Community College and its feeder schools *were* involved in my project. The programme we were making *was* intended to mark the anniversary of one of the most significant industrial disputes in labour history, the Cambrian Combine dispute of 1910, which had resulted in mass disturbance and looting in mid-Rhondda, the calling in of troops and the

controversial involvement of then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill. We *were* closing the main shopping street for a big public event. And it certainly *was* newsworthy – it was eventually covered ‘live’ during lunchtime television bulletins on ITV and the BBC; in more reflective reports on Wales’ main national news programmes on ITV, BBC and S4C; in news reportage and opinion columns in Wales’ ‘national newspaper’ – as well as appearing on-line, as my journalist caller the night before had wished. Fortunately, in conversation, I was able to steer her away from the sensationalist turns of phrase which would have struck the head teacher and governors of the school involved as infelicitous to say the least, and from her overall conception of the project as a kind of extreme reality history programme⁴².

The whole occasion had come about because in making the programme I was dealing with a classic documentary-maker’s dilemma. Gerda Jansen Hendriks, a producer/director for NPS (Dutch Public Television) describes facing the very same issues in shooting a documentary about riots by Tamil refugees in the Netherlands in the 1980s, in a revealing and the appositely-titled essay, *How to present riots that have not been filmed*:

“...to show written statements, even if you have them read aloud, does not make very exciting television.

To convey the tension of that night of rioting...I opted for rather traditional solutions, mixing the interviews and passages from police reports with symbolic images, like the blue flashing light of a police car with accompanying sound, night shots of the street...that went with the sound of glass breaking and sounds of ‘angry mob’, as it is called in the index of sound effect CDs.” (Hendriks: 2001, 56)

My programme, *Tonypandy Riots* (Green Bay 2010a), would also have to depend on many of these well-established devices. And British broadcasting, just as insistently as Dutch, obliges documentarians to shape the events of the past into a coherent and palatable form:

“[i]n television, it all has to add up to a good story. This implies that there is a dramatic narrative. That is a concept that comes from fiction, but I think it can be applied to non-fiction without distorting the facts. Usually, reality contains enough drama, if you want to see it.” (Hendriks: 2001, 61)

There was certainly no shortage of drama in what happened in mid-Rhondda in 1910. Well before the public disturbances on the streets of English cities in the summer of 2011 refocused public scrutiny on the questions of why people riot, and what – if anything – might justify such behaviour, I knew that there was a rich vein of history to explore here. But I was determined in representing the past not simply to offer a narrative frozen in time. Hendriks’ “traditional solutions” might be necessary for me; but they weren’t sufficient. I was seeking to create an event that would not only bring excitement and drama to the screen, but would also live in the memory locally and help to reconnect Tonypandy to a key episode in its past. More than thirty years after I’d started in broadcasting, and ten years after setting up Green Bay, I was home again.

The road back to Tonypandy was a long one, and, of course, I didn’t arrive as I had left. Politically and psychologically there were continuities, but there were also new developments and perspectives which had come from the lived professional

experience of representing Wales in different ways and disparate contexts. And, now, after a decade of growth at Green Bay, I'd worked through three distinct phases of the development of a commercial enterprise. At each stage, I had had to learn lessons and come to understandings about the craft of documentary in a rapidly-moving media environment, *and* about the business of sustaining a documentary-focused production company in a changing world.

The first stage saw us establish the company's reputation in the wake of the success of *Do Not Go Gentle*. Crucial to this were a whole cluster of commissions we secured from the BBC network for profiles of world leaders in architecture, business, ecology, science, religion and the arts. These included Norman Borlaug, "the father of the "Green Revolution" " (Mathre: 2010), the Nobel Prize winner credited with saving one billion lives through his work in developing dwarf wheat; Ricardo Semler, the maverick Brazilian business guru who runs "the world's most unusual workplace" (Semler: 1994, 64); Jan Morris, the "Flaubert of the jet age" (Wroe: 2001), the celebrated writer and traveller, who began life as James Morris; Tim Smit, the creator of the Eden Project, the environmental centre based in a Cornish quarry which had become the UK's most successful millennium project; and Zaha Hadid, the feisty, visionary Iraqi architect, as she opened what *The New York Times* called "the most important American building to be completed since the end of the cold war" (Muschamp: 2003).

This pattern of network commissions was no accident. We were making a deliberate statement that the Welsh perspective didn't end at Offa's Dyke; and that the work of public intellectuals of global standing could be represented just as competently and

viewed just as interestingly from a non-metropolitan, small-country base. And this roster of international profiles helped to persuade London network controllers that when producers like us focused on subjects closer to home, we could be just as compelling. *The Story of Welsh* – a six-part history of one of Europe’s oldest languages told for the first time on television in English, and commissioned and initially transmitted in a primetime slot in Wales (where it attracted unprecedentedly high audience shares for a documentary series of more than 30%) – was snapped up eagerly as a repeat and transmitted unchanged by the BBC network.

Of course, as I had seen whilst on staff at the BBC, winning network business, even from an in-house base, was no easy matter. But there was a sense that independent producers in Wales had given up on the struggle, dispirited by a long history of failure. The Producers’ Alliance for Cinema and Television (“PACT”) – the UK trade association that represents and promotes the commercial interests of independent production companies – regularly reported zero annual returns when tallying programmes commissioned by the UK terrestrial networks from independents in Wales⁴³. One well-established independent producer – whose experience and talent I much admired, and who had left a staff position at the BBC a decade before me with a distinguished network track record – counselled me privately to ‘forget London’ and pitch for business directly to the continent. This chimed, perhaps, with a contemporary nationalist pre-occupation that the way forward for Wales lay in bypassing England and heading straight for a “Europe of the Regions” (Wigley: 1997, 4).

The reluctance to engage with the UK networks had begun, one might argue, as long ago as the early 1980s, with the genesis of the independent sector in Wales in response to the need to fill the schedules of the new Welsh language channel, S4C, with material of a quality and range which would attract an audience. S4C's more recent difficulties⁴⁴ have served to remind us how fragile an infant the new-born channel was – conceived amidst massive public controversy, and almost aborted by one of Thatcher's U-turns, before being given life by another, it was made subject to an early years political review which many at the time scarcely believed it could survive.

No-one would wish to denigrate the political and cultural commitment of producers who concentrated their attention on making a success of this vulnerable new Welsh-language institution because they saw it as crucial to the survival of the language itself. But there's a persuasive reading of what happened in the years that followed which sees it as the gradual seepage of complacency into a market fuelled by guaranteed public funding and limited by linguistic competence on its supply side. In simple terms, there was small incentive for Welsh-language producers to chase speculative London business when they enjoyed a captive market at home in which they could feel at ease politically and culturally, as well as commercially and editorially.

But it was our contention in Green Bay that any strategy which effectively gives up on growing business with the UK-wide broadcasters would be fundamentally flawed. As Geraint Talfan Davies, my boss as Controller, BBC Wales in the 1990s, used to say, a commitment to entering the network market is necessary, not optional. Talfan

Davies's analysis was that there were three compelling reasons to pursue network commissions – the business demands it; the talent demands it; and the audience demands it. In my judgement, all three reasons applied to the independent sector, and they were just as compelling. We would never build world-class production businesses in Wales unless we exposed ourselves to the rigours of network requirements; our best programme-makers would always seek the larger audiences they would find when their work is broadcast across the UK; and – rightly or wrongly, but I think entirely naturally – the audience here in Wales feels that its experience is validated in a more complete way when it is broadcast beyond Offa's Dyke. As a recent report – echoing and further exploring many of the concerns and arguments I helped to raise in the BBC in the 1990s (and discussed above in Chapter Three of this study) – has it:

“If strong, active citizenship and a robust civil society are obvious priorities for any democratic government then the need for all communities to feel that they play a full part in the national conversation becomes pressing. Equally, the BBC's historical role in education and its mission to represent the UK abroad in ways that can be completely trusted are fundamentally dependent on being able to embrace the concerns of the whole nation, and not just those parts that are closest to the traditional centres of power.” (Blandford, Lacey, McElroy and Williams: 2009, 3)

The validation of the Welsh audience's experience has an important public function in strengthening citizenship and democracy. But it also has significance at a more intimate level. Thanks largely to the sea-change effected by Julie Gardner in the fortunes of the BBC Wales department, we now have the relatively novel experience

of being able to see Welsh locations as regular backdrops to prestigious network drama – and this can have a positive socio-psychological effect for those of us who identify with them, as Brett Mills posits in an amusing yet penetrative piece of autobiographical analysis, *My House was on Torchwood!*, which explores the intersections between personal history, ideas of home and the emotive nature of responses to representations:

“Telling everyone that my house was on Torchwood certainly says something about the programme; but more fundamentally I’m engaging in a process intended to say something about me.” (Mills: 2008, 400)

So – for all of the reasons Talfan Davies enumerated – Green Bay’s determination to win network business, starting with the BBC, was born of a deliberate strategic calculation. And the commissions that resulted – Borlaug, Semler, Morris, Smit, Hadid and so on – were a gratifyingly serious body of work. These were programmes of substance and stature: we were being trusted by the BBC to deliver definitive documentaries about important international figures with established reputations. But we also managed to do something more than that.

Prophetically as it turned out, and drawing upon the long-term interests of both myself and Phil George in religious documentaries, Green Bay produced biographies of both Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) and Rowan Williams (now Archbishop of Canterbury) *before* their election to their current roles. Filmed with exclusive, intimate access in the months surrounding his appointment, Green Bay’s portrait of Dr. Williams broke stories about his views on disestablishment, homosexuality and Church hierarchy which made headlines across the world⁴⁵.

The production of network documentaries which were not just worthy but newsworthy raised Green Bay's profile - according to a key UK industry journal we were "the kind of company that could be a standard-bearer for a Welsh revival" (Broadcast: 2003). We'd reached a level where we were able to move on to a new stage of growth.

That second stage began in February 2004, when Wales's First Minister, Rt. Hon. Rhodri Morgan, officially opened Green Bay's new production centre, the Talbot Studios. Now, we had attractive, characterful headquarters of our own, close to Cardiff city centre where we could base our production teams and build up in-house edit facilities. The move coincided with a significant shift in the business prospects of independent producers. This came with the implementation of the 2003 Communications Act which gave independents control of the rights in the programmes we were making. Our intellectual property was now to remain ours – and not be ceded to the commissioning broadcasters – and we were free to exploit it in secondary markets. The effect was to turn us into real businesses, with reliable and predictable revenue streams – and it excited the interest of the City. This, in turn, was the catalyst for a number of key mergers and acquisitions, consolidating the grip of the so-called super-indies (such as Endemol and RDF) on large sectors of commissioning.

In this climate, we realised that Green Bay would need to put on some corporate muscle if it was to continue to compete successfully for commissions for the kind of programmes that we believed in and had been making. In the intense and intensifying

competition for network factual commissions, the winners would be those who could lavish large cash spends on ‘development’ – on finding compelling stories and tailoring them *precisely* so as to appeal to the marketing niche and audience demographics of each commissioning channel. Unless we found some serious backing, the larger London companies – already advantaged by their metropolitan location – would clean up.

Consequently, we entered into negotiations with Finance Wales, the venture capital arm of the Welsh Assembly Government, which was charged with making strong commercial returns whilst investing in companies which have the potential to make significant contributions to the Welsh economy. In November 2004, we completed a deal involving a £300,000 cash investment intended to boost Green Bay’s network, international and commercial development work. The clarity of our network strategy was key to securing the deal, as the Finance Wales investment executive who negotiated the investment confirmed at the time:

“Our research revealed that, in an industry where competition for commissions is fierce and standards are extremely high, Green Bay has distinguished itself as a provider of exceptional broadcast programming, and they’ve established that market presence in a remarkably short space of time. The pedigree of the founders is plain to see, and they’ve allied that expertise with a clear vision of where they want to steer the business.” (Cousins: 2004)

That vision was focused on serious organic growth in network and international markets. The new arrangements necessitated a full professionalisation of our financial and corporate functions. We recruited Gareth Fisher, a former colleague who’d

managed multi-million pound departmental budgets for us at the BBC. Phil George and I were joined on the Board of Green Bay by Elizabeth Coffey, one of the UK's leading corporate development experts, whose clients included CitiGroup, Deutsche Bank, Ford of Europe, BT, British Airways, Goldman Sachs, Unilever and the British Cabinet Office. The Board oversaw the establishment of a dedicated, full-time development team whose role was to research the market exhaustively and to devise detailed programme proposals to capitalise on the opportunities identified. We recruited some experienced producers, whose names and track records would in themselves be earnest of quality and successful delivery of high-profile projects; and we promoted and made permanent staff members of younger, energetic and emerging talents, whose potential we rated and whose sensibilities extended the range and demographic profile of the company itself.

As a result, in the next two years we tripled turnover and posted record profits, becoming one of the UK's fastest growing television production companies (Broadcast: 2007), and the fastest growing business in the creative industries in Wales (National Entrepreneurship Observatory: 2007). Our success attracted a further investment of £500,000 from Finance Wales in 2007 which has been a motor driving us forward in international and network markets ever since:

“Green Bay has evolved into one of Wales’ leading independent production companies since [Finance Wales’] initial investment in 2004. This, combined with future growth potential, has led to our second round investment which should help propel the company further into the UK media arena.” (Pugh: 2007)

And so the third phase of Green Bay's history began. In addition to Welsh and UK network business, we were now aggressively targeting the international markets for quality specialist factual programmes. We brought on board consultants and executive producers with experience of working for blue-chip channels in the UK, Europe and North America, and we explored a number of informal alliances with well-established independents on both sides of the Atlantic. We took advice from these new colleagues and partners, and undertook a programme of immersion in the international marketplace organised by the leading training and development organisation for independents, the Glasgow-based agency, The Research Centre (now TRC).

Our work now involved making contacts and chasing deals at programme markets in glamorous locations like Cannes, where meticulous forward planning for meetings was as important as eye-catching proposals; and signing off, in copious and tedious detail, complex and voluminous cross-border mutual funding agreements and co-production contracts. *Rivers and Life*, a six-hour high-definition international documentary series, was co-funded by S4C, the Wales Creative IP Fund, Barcud Derwen and the French national broadcaster, France Télévisions. It was designed to show how the Amazon, Nile, Rhine, Mississippi, Ganges and Yangtze have shaped the cultures of the people who live along their banks. Filming locations included China's monumental Three Gorges Dam. The series was sold to terrestrial broadcasters all around the world and acquired for its global satellite and cable channels by National Geographic. This latter sale opened a dialogue for Green Bay with the broadcaster's senior editorial staff, resulting in three further commissions directly for National Geographic. We also began to co-produce series with The History Channel. And we've recently completed a follow-up series to *Rivers and Life*,

involving broadly the same group of co-production partners and focusing this time on six iconic *Islands* – Cyprus, Iceland, the Galapagos, Cuba, Zanzibar and Fiji – with a third run of the franchise, *Deserts*, already in pre-production.

Our international strategy necessitated familiarising ourselves with the tastes and predilections of television audiences across the world. Channels in North America, in particular, know to a tenth of a percentage point the gender balance of their audience and to a month their viewers' average age. It became our business to be as fully conversant as they are with their demographic base, and with the precise programme strategy they deploy from time to time to defend and grow their share of a highly-competitive and fragmenting multi-channel television market in an era of multi-platform media proliferation.

Whilst it has sometimes been a little uncomfortable to be developing programmes for channels designed to attract as many American viewers as possible, we have typically found niches within those channels where the values of commissioning executives are sympathetic to the educative (as well as, hopefully, entertaining) nature of the programmes we seek to make. The opportunity to represent 'ordinary' experience in a rounded and respectful way is just as – indeed, perhaps more – valuable in the context of channels which are driven by commercial imperatives as it is in a 'pure' public service context. And we have not shied away from controversy – for instance, in showing the human cost of unfettered free-market economics in the commercial exploitation of the Amazon basin, the widespread evidence of disastrous climate change in Fiji, and the injustices of riding roughshod over residents' rights in the flooding of communities behind the Three Gorges Dam.

Meanwhile, closer to home, we've continued to make documentaries for the BBC networks, and we've had a modest break-through into the UK's Channel 4. Here again, we've had to appeal to audiences who are overwhelmingly not living in Wales. But we've continued, through all of the work that we've done, to remember that we view the world from a particular perspective. And, whilst studiously avoiding the parochial, we are delighted when we can represent Welsh achievements to a global audience – as, for example, with an on-going National Geographic documentary following a Gwent business's efforts to restore and protect the fabric of Egypt's oldest pyramid; or in our feature-length network documentary for the BBC about the statesman who was so hugely influential in determining the shape of the welfare state, the delineation of British party politics and even the map of Europe, *Lloyd George: The People's Champion* (2009).

We also, of course, continue to address the Welsh audience itself, through a large body of programmes commissioned and intended primarily to be shown only in Wales, by BBC Wales, S4C and (until it recently effectively ceased to commission 'regional' programmes from independents) ITV Wales. So, in tracking stories which would appeal to commissioners in Wales, I was mindful – as the tenth anniversary of Green Bay's incorporation approached – of a much more significant milestone in Welsh history, the centenary of the Cambrian Combine dispute.

The documentary, commissioned by BBC Wales, which I produced and directed to commemorate that centenary, would involve filming once more in my hometown. I had a real sense of my career coming full circle. Yet a cursory reading of the

programme ‘billing’ might suggest that I had abandoned many of the stylistic features and even the precepts which guided my early work:

“TONYPANDY RIOTS

Eddie Butler⁴⁶ challenges four local people – including *Over The Rainbow* runner-up Sophie Evans – to discover the truth about the events in mid-Rhondda that rocked the world one hundred years ago during the Cambrian Coalminers’ dispute.” (Radio Times: 2010)

This sounds very like the kind of ‘factual entertainment’ which – as I discussed above in Chapter Four – I had been so wary of when Green Bay was set up, and against which *Do Not Go Gentle* had been a kind of counter-blast. Certainly, *Tonypandy Riots* rides the wave of a number of current popular trends in British television. The most obvious of these is the inclusion of a young singer who’d become a ‘star’ in one of the many elimination-driven talent and performance shows which had come to dominate Saturday evening entertainment on the main channels. Her appearance was rather gushingly welcomed by local dignitaries:

“*Over the Rainbow* finalist Sophie Evans has travelled back in time to the Tonypandy riots of 1910 for her latest television appearance...Councillor Robert Bevan, Rhondda Cynon Taf council’s cabinet member for culture, recreation and tourism welcomed Sophie to Treorchy’s Park [sic] and Dare Theatre for the filming. He said she had done the area proud as runner-up in the BBC TV talent series to find a young singer to play Dorothy in a West End production of *The Wizard of Oz*. “She is an outstanding performer and has certainly made her mark throughout the country with her stunning performances on the *Over the Rainbow* programme,” he said. “We are very

proud of her achievements and once again her talent reinforces the image we have of Rhondda Cynon Taf being the valleys of music and song.” ” (BBC News: 2010)

The notion that my programme might be buttressing an outdated ‘official’ stereotype of the Rhondda as being at the heart of a ‘musical nation’ was not the only aspect of the production which my younger self might have found problematic. There was also the ‘challenge’ element of *Tonypany Riots* – tasking ordinary people with stepping back in time, seemingly mimicking the vogue for historical reality television or living history programmes:

“Historical reality television... combines elements of historical documentary with reality television’s generic tropes. These include the use of ‘ordinary participants’, the construction of tasks or experiences to be undertaken, a directorial concern with the exposition of feeling and a camera style focused on capturing intimacy in private realms. Such formal innovations respond to the televisual ecology and wider cultural trends, including the growth of genealogy as a leisure pursuit, the changing nature of museums and other historical venues as interactive sites of heritage ‘experience’ and performance, and a focus on specifically social history that informs many such developments.” (McElroy and Williams: 2011, 80)

McElroy and Williams make interesting, persuasive connections between these programmes and the broader cultural development of hands-on history and the heritage industry, and they are right to note how popular and pervasive such programmes have become. The phenomenon – which encompasses programmes like

The 1900 House (1999), *The 1940s House* (2001), *The Edwardian Country House* (2002) and *Regency House Party* (2004) as well as Wales's own *Coal House* (2007), *Coal House At War* (2008) and *Snowdonia 1890* (2010) – is acknowledged and referenced in my programme's opening sequence when one of the key characters, Julie Atkins, declares: "*This is living history. This is history in the making.*"

The young John Geraint might have doubted the sincerity of a documentary-maker who flirted with a genre which some historians have criticised as spurious and patronising to the past, and as privileging 'identity' over thorough historical analysis:

"well-made historical reality programmes can occasionally provide elements of insight into the lived experiences of the past... But what none of the programmes begins to offer is any greater depth of analysis or inquiry... While superficially issues of class, social structure and inequality might be approached this more often than not is pursued through the prism of identity – 'how would our forefathers and mothers have lived', not why, or how did it change over time" (Hunt: 2006, 856)

Then there is the use in *Tonyandy Riots* of a professional on-screen presenter, Eddie Butler, who comes from outside the immediate local community – a device I had deliberately eschewed in *A View of the Rhondda* back in the 1980s. Nowadays, in an era when the layers of the BBC's hierarchy were preoccupied with issues of compliance and impartiality, the introduction of an 'authoritative' outsider, presenting the 'truth' of a highly-contentious piece of working-class history in a balanced and un-contentious manner, could be read as a sign of the self-censorship which critics of the documentaries broadcast by major networks have often pointed to:

“Most network employees had grown up under the eye of television and had, from the cradle on, assimilated its standards and guidelines – what should be said and what had better not be said. The guidelines were their bones and neurons....Throughout the industry countless decisions – by executives, producers, directors, performers, writers – follow guidelines so deeply embedded that they have become unconscious and automatic.” (Barnouw: 1993, 339)

Barnouw points to a kernel of truth which I have to recognise in my work: that years of schooling in the BBC prints ‘balance’, ‘fairness’ and ‘impartiality’ into a documentary-maker’s DNA just as deeply as any original campaigning or radical intent they may have had. And, as for adapting my style to encompass the on-screen host or mimicking reality television, it would, in many ways, be sad, as well as strange, if the style of my programme-making and the resources I regarded as permissible had not changed across the course of a thirty-year career. It would scarcely be credible or even in my interests to deny that *Tonypandy Riots* feels like a thoroughly modern piece of television, aware of the idioms of its time and designed to sit happily in the middle of the BBC ONE schedule. But over and against these observations about television as talent show, reality history or presenter-led balancing act, there are arguments to be made that I am still attempting to represent the experiences of the community where I grew up in ways that are significantly different from the examples of the sub-genres being referenced.

Sophie Evans’ involvement drew attention to the documentary because of *Over The Rainbow*, but her song in *Tonypandy Riots – Every nice girl loves a striker*, the

Tonypandy miners' cheeky parody of the 1909 Music Hall hit *Every nice girl loves a sailor* – was not there to be judged by the audience as a performance, but as integral to her exploration of the events of 1910, as she herself testified: “Preparing to perform it, I’ve been talking to some real experts in the history and I’ve learnt so much about the history of my own hometown.” (BBC News: 2010)

This might still be seen as no more than a fig-leaf of historiographical credibility, were it not – I would argue – for other elements in Evans' contribution to the programme, such as her encounter with the local historian, David Maddox, who unearthed the parody and – above all – her on-screen conversation with her own grandparents, something which went well beyond performance for the camera, redolent as it was of genuine empathy for the miners' predicament as well as of life-long political commitment to their side of the argument.

I used Evans' performance of the song as a developing and recurring motif throughout the documentary, its meaning and context intended to become progressively clearer and deeper to the deciphering viewer, as I had previously done with other images and sequences throughout my body of work (such as *Do Not Go Gentle*, for example, discussed in Chapter Four).

Evans was participating as one of the 'new historians' – intended as a cross-section of ordinary local people – which I'd promised in the proposal to BBC Wales which won the commission against a number of competing bids seeking to mark the centenary:

“In this ground-breaking approach to history on television, a group of ordinary local people will encounter the drama, tension and violence of the Riots – and

examine the ideals, ideas and tactics involved in the Cambrian Combine strike which sparked the conflict – by approaching the story through the eyes of their counterparts from a century ago...Our ‘new historians’ will have a range of resources to help them carry out their investigations. Their own family histories – and the knowledge and contacts of neighbours – will be a unique and rich source of primary material. Tonypandy Community College is leading a concerted effort to gather new evidence and to collate the large body of academic research on the Tonypandy Riots as part of the Centenary events. And professional historians will be available for consultation. But essentially, this is a community history. So our ‘new historians’ will re-discover their own past against the backdrop of final preparations for this year’s community-wide commemorations.” (Green Bay: 2010b)

The point is that the ‘new historians’ are not passive subjects paraded before our eyes as they struggle to come to terms with being forcibly deprived of modern conveniences and comforts as the result of an editorial calculation as to what will produce the most entertaining difficulties; rather, they are active agents, supported by the production in their own historical investigations.

Sophie Evans’ emergence as a publicly-recognised figure complicated the presentation of the ‘new historians’ as ordinary citizens of Tonypandy, but she and her grandparents were also representatives of their class and locality, as were all of the other participants in a more straightforward way. The choice of who to include as ‘new historians’ in an expository documentary was obviously central to my intent as producer, and to the success and authenticity of the programme:

“The expository mode...raises ethical issues of voice: of how the text speaks objectively or persuasively (or as an instrument of propaganda). What does speaking for or on behalf of someone or something entail in terms of a dual responsibility to the subject of the film and to the audience whose agreement is sought?” (Nichols: 1991, 34)

Part of my claim of representativeness for this documentary was the depth of knowledge I was fortunate to possess about the contributors. Sophie Evans had been introduced to me by one of the staff at her school, Julie Atkins, whom I'd worked with for some years in the media charity Zoom Cymru, which gives screen opportunities to young people, particularly in less advantaged communities. David Jones, the Penygraig man who manages crowd control at major events for the Welsh Ambulance Service, was a school-friend of mine. Together, we were glad during a break in filming one day to bump into the mother of another mutual school-friend, the sprightly 94-year-old Millie Jones, and to persuade her on the spot to share with the camera family memories which went back a hundred years. Derwyn Nicholas, our rugby player, was suggested as a contributor by the Penygraig RFC team manager, Arfon Henderson, who was a close neighbour of ours for many years in Tylacelyn Road. Nicholas' parents turned out to have been teenage acquaintances of mine.

But it would be misleading if all of these connections make Tonypandy sound like the kind of small town I was anxious to establish that it wasn't at the beginning of the documentary - “The Year is 1910. The place is Tonypandy. And this isn't a small town story....” (Green Bay: 2010b). Even a century later, long after the pits had closed, this was still a very well-populated urban space. Not everybody here knows

everybody else. Eddie Butler's role as presenter, I suppose, was to emphasise – if it needed emphasis – the scale and significance of both the community and the events that were to unfold within it:

“Monday the 7th of November – today and tomorrow, something important is going to be decided – something that will change the way the world works – here in the Rhondda, in all of Wales, in the rest of Britain and beyond – and for the whole of the next century. It's a clash of massive forces. On the one side, the Chief Constable of Glamorgan, the Metropolitan Police, the Lancashire Fusiliers, the 18th Hussars and Winston Churchill himself; on the other, twelve thousand Mid-Rhondda miners and their families. It's going to be a Riot.” (Green Bay Media: 2010c)

As mouthpiece of the director's editorial intent, Butler was to some extent playing a classic and well-recognised role, and one that was particularly useful in presenting history to broad popular audience on a mainstream channel:

“The expository mode emphasizes the impression of objectivity and of well-substantiated judgement...it affords an economy of analysis, allowing points to be made succinctly and emphatically, partly by eliminating reference to the process by which knowledge is produced, organized, and regulated...”

(Nichols: 1991, 35)

It certainly suited my purpose to be succinct and emphatic at times, but I would like to think that I was as wary as Nichols is of the illusion which the use of a presenter can facilitate: that of reducing history to a parade of facts on screen, effectively concealing the contested and multifaceted experience which gives rise to them.

Consequently, I was careful to make Butler share the story-telling with others and to reveal – indeed to foreground – some of the mechanics of the production process:

“So – to get to the emotional truth of the Tonypandy Riots, we’ve recruited four local people who’ve agreed to explore their hometown’s history in ways they’ve never had the chance to before……” (Green Bay Media: 2010c)

Constructed in this way, my documentary seeks to engage with the broader philosophical question, *What Is History?*, as well as with the political one, *Whose History Is It?*. These are huge questions and the debate about them has been long. A single documentary is unlikely to settle the academic argument, but it can open the discussion out to the real world. Some aspects of the discourse can be characterised as ‘facts versus interpretation’ – though in considering which has primacy, the acclaimed historian and historiographer, E.H. Carr, sought to engineer a synthesis:

“The historian starts with a provisional selection of facts, and a provisional interpretation in the light of which that selection has been made – by others as well as himself. As he works, both the interpretation and the selection and ordering of facts undergo subtle and partly unconscious changes, through the reciprocal action of one on the other. And this reciprocal action also involves reciprocity between present and past, since the historian is part of the present and the facts belong to the past. The historian and the facts of history are necessary to one another. The historian without his facts is rootless and futile; the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless.” (Carr: 1961, 29-30)

Early in my documentary, I decided to put this issue directly before the audience. Having described what's at stake, Eddie Butler sets out the key questions that the Tonypandy Riots pose for the historian:

“But why? How has it come to this? Why does it mean so much to all those involved? Why has what happens next echoed down the long years in the century since? And what does it mean for us now?”

EB PTC 1.4

at Glamorgan Archives reading document GC/SJ 4/1 Standing Joint Committee Minutes, Chief Constable's Report Dec 1910 p9

There are two ways to answer those questions. The first is to come to a place like this – the Glamorgan Archives. It's full of photographs and documents and records – the ‘undeniable facts’ of the past. You can know for a certainty by coming here that the Riots were a violent affair – look, here's the Chief Constable reporting to the County Council that “A Bill will be laid before the Committee for 300 truncheons which I had to obtain to replace those damaged at the... Riots, the cost of which is £25 7s 3d...”

EB PTC 1.5 TONYPANDY STREETS

And then there's another set of answers that comes from out here, in the places where it happened. It's the history that's remembered... and forgotten... and remembered again by the people whose lives it changed... and by their

children and their children's children. This is history made anew, in every generation, and even if the collective memory lacks some detail and even some accuracy, it packs a punch that bald facts and figures can't deliver."

(Green Bay Media: 2010c)

Here – though their media differ – the documentary-maker and the historian stand on the same ground, face the same questions and are in need of the same transmuting quality: Imagination. As Hendriks, the Dutch documentarian of the Riot, puts it:

"Good research is a necessity, but in itself does not make a good programme. What is also needed is imagination. This should be based on the facts that research has come up with, but will often surpass them in order to make attractive television. Surpassing the facts is what any historian will do in establishing a thesis. The form may be very different, but both the serious producer or director and the historian ultimately share the same goal: to give a better understanding of the past." (Hendriks: 2001, 61)

But the imaginative elements in *Tonypany Riots* were not there solely to facilitate "a better understanding of the past"; they were also there to give the people of mid-Rhondda (and the wider audience if it could be persuaded to make the imaginative leap to join them) a better grasp on their lives *in the present*, as inheritors of that history.

The most important sequence in the programme, the one on which we lavished most production time and effort – was not Sophie Evans as Music Hall star in period costume. It was the hundreds of schoolchildren marching boldly down to Dunraven

Street, caught on camera in wave after wave of expressive faces just as their great-grandfathers had been in 1910, by the local professional photographer, Levi Ladd, in a famous black-and-white still which also features in the programme.

The 2010 March was imagined as a commemoration. It in itself has now become a public memory in mid-Rhondda. It was constantly referred to, for example, in feedback sessions I took part in at the Tonypany Community College some months after transmission of the programme, as central to local young people's experience of the Centenary – 'the community is represented by everyone taking part in a historical event' said one; 'the March represents the way people can come together', said another. And as a newsworthy event, it generated television news coverage which we incorporated into the body of the documentary, in effect creating our own archive (and partially resolving, in a somewhat novel way, the problem of *How to present riots that have not been filmed!*)

To achieve any of this, we had to go through endless logistical and health-and-safety meetings, with the schools, the police, the traffic planners, the ambulance services, the local authorities. We chose the route of the March – and the form and the words of the ceremony of commemoration which we held in Dunraven Street – jointly with the schools and the pupils involved. We did it to enable the young people to embody something and to experience something. They were not there to 're-enact the Riots' – as the online journalist who'd phoned me had assumed, and as an extreme historical reality show might have had it. In fact, they were there to do something potentially even more explosive, perhaps even less in compliance with broadcaster and local education authority guidelines. Certainly, they were there to demonstrate an

imaginative continuity, to march not in place of their forefathers but alongside them as it were; but they were also there as themselves, without historical pretence, to experience what it's like in 2010 to walk together through the public spaces of their hometown in solidarity for a cause.

In that sense, in the march we organised together, the young people were simultaneously reclaiming and (in all probability, for most) experiencing for the first time, another of the 'collective democratic institutions' which Raymond Williams celebrated as the essence of working-class culture (as I discussed in Chapter One): the protest march. In the television programme, the 2010 March represented not just the miners' 1910 procession through Dunraven Street to Tonypandy Square and beyond to the 'Scotch Collieries' which was to end in mayhem and riot; but also the subsequent and resulting mass march to Pontypridd in solidarity with the leaders and men put on trial for their involvement with those events (as we make clear in the film by mixing between the 2010 March and black-and-white stills of the Pontypridd March). For older observers on the street and viewers at home, it might also have brought to mind those who walked the streets of mid-Rhondda in the Hunger Marches and Jazz Band parades of the 1920s; in the Means Test protests of the 1930s in which Annie Powell had taken part; and, more recently, in support of the 1984-5 Miners' Strike. But for the young people themselves, removed by at least two generations from Rhondda as a single-industry mining community, this was an event in the here-and-now. They were there to serve a polemic purpose, to represent a history, but also for and as themselves; and in that they stood squarely in the documentary mainstream, and against the overwhelming pressure – from commissioners, schedulers, reviewers

and – yes – even those who wield the remote-control at home – to make all television into narrative-driven entertainment:

“Documentaries... do not differ from fictions in their constructedness as texts, but in the representations they make. At the heart of the documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical world.... Documentary represents the world, and it may be useful to recall some of the multiple meanings of the word “represent” since they are all simultaneously applicable here. The most prevalent use in film criticism has been that of likeness, model or depiction.... Representation also means... politically representing a group or class by standing for or in place of them with the right or authority to act on their account.....In addition, representation means “The action of placing a fact, etc., before another or others by means of discourse: a statement or account, esp. one intended to convey a particular view or impression of a matter to influence opinion of a matter in order to influence opinion or action” (OED)... Here...representation is allied with rhetoric, persuasion, and argument rather than with likeness or reproduction.” (Nichols: 1991, 111)

Nichols delineates precisely the kind of representation I am seeking to make in *Tonypandy Riots*, in the other examples of work in my portfolio and – I venture to suggest – throughout my career. If my work has often been rather poetic in its construction and imagery – privately, ‘song-like’ is a close colleague’s short-hand; ‘lush’ said an old Oxford tutor of mine to me once, and not entirely positively – I trust that it has also had a hard core of analysis and protest. I would see *Tonypandy Riots* as an argument, a representation in that particular sense described by Nichols, on behalf

of the people of mid-Rhondda, in 1910 and now. The marching schoolchildren are part of that representation; the ‘new historians’ likewise. Even Eddie Butler is scarcely here as disinterested purveyor of facts. Despite all the pressure to comply with the BBC’s editorial guidelines on impartiality, there’s little doubt whose side he’s on:

“Rhondda’s miners are building a New Wales. And in this modern world, something shifts... some change happens in the minds of the people, in the way they interact with the world that they’ve made.” (Green Bay Media: 2010c)

The *Western Mail* – much more sympathetic to the people of Tonypany in 2010 than it ever was a century before – got the message. Its two-page spread previewing the documentary was entitled ‘When revolution was in the air’. Journalist Carolyn Hitt wrote that *Tonypany Riots* was “a vivid picture of what it was like to live, work and strike in a society that was on the brink of massive social change.” (Hitt: 2010, 13)

Other reaction was just as positive, and – of real importance to me, as a programme-maker – the participants themselves felt that *Tonypany Riots* had done their history justice and that taking part had been more than worthwhile. Helen O’Sullivan, head teacher at Tonypany Community College, posted a message on the school’s website affirming that “[t]he opportunity to involve students in this event was wonderful - it enhanced their understanding of their heritage and community. Everyone, students, staff and volunteers valued the experience and it will remain with us all for a very long time.” (O’Sullivan: 2010)

Personal messages and correspondents to Green Bay and to the BBC spoke of how pleasing it was to see bright and articulate Rhondda people investigating and celebrating their own history (“really did the Rhondda proud”, said one). Though long-established stereotypes remain hard to counteract, and there was clearly some expectation that it might have been otherwise, the era of ‘She did sound *very Welsh*, didn’t she?’ seemed finally to have come to an end.

Representing them to a broader audience, the whole experience also gave me new perspectives on my hometown and its people. I found them funny and fascinating, moving on avidly to new experiences and challenges, but taking with them a culture and a set of aspirations which flow directly from their – our – charged history. After a broadcasting career which now spans five decades, returning to Tonypandy had put me in mind of T.S. Eliot’s dictum that ‘the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time.’ (Eliot: 1944)

However, in no small measure as a result of our approach to making history in and successful delivery of *Tonypandy Riots*, the BBC has now commissioned Green Bay to make a major six-part television history of Wales, the first time this has been done in a quarter of a century⁴⁷. It seems that my days of documentary exploration, of representing Wales, are not quite ended yet....

Postscript: Towards A Level Playing Field

‘How long will this be, when it’s on telly?’; ‘How long does it take to make a programme?’ – two questions I was asked on location just the other day, two questions I’ve been asked consistently across a quarter-of-a-century of television production. The honest answers are (respectively) ‘a lot shorter than you think’, and ‘a lot longer than you think’. So is the effort worth it? The older one gets, the more one appreciates that the mediated experience is not the lived experience, that representation is not reality. All the same, for me, for the reasons which I trust by now are clear, representing people properly really matters.

In the introduction to this study, I recognised that all acts of representation in the television documentary are multi-faceted, complicated by the overlapping levels of meaning and understanding of that term which we as documentary-makers, on-screen contributors or audience members give and take as a result of our involvement. In that introduction, and in interrogating my own work in subsequent chapters, I have attempted to show that the question of representing the under-represented can be especially problematic and challenging.

I have also acknowledged, I hope, that across the decades in which I’ve been working (and despite the problems and challenges, and some unhelpful stylistic trends and innovations) technological advances, political shifts, and opportunities for democratisation in media production and distribution *have* enabled a more rounded representation of ‘ordinary Welsh experience’ to find its way onto the screen.

When I began my professional life, there was no Radio Wales or Radio Cymru as stand-alone national stations; no Welsh-language television channel; no regular documentary output in English from or for Wales; little feature film or video workshop activity; and, of course, no internet sites or social networks distributing content. I welcome the subsequent development in all of these media, which has certainly made Wales more visible and understandable to the Welsh and to those beyond our borders. The progress has been substantial, though – in television terms, at least – we may have passed a high-water mark around the early years of the new millennium, when we enjoyed increasing network and national output on a well-funded BBC; some years of plenty on S4C; a still-substantial body of output for Wales on ITV; and even a nascent English-language channel, BBC 2W. All of this is now under threat or already gone, and much thought and action is needed if Welsh experience is to be adequately and properly represented in the media of our future. As we are continually reminded, it's a rapidly-changing world.

Nevertheless, in this short postscript, I should like to focus on one aspect of representation which, in essence, has remained essentially unaltered since I began to make programmes and which for me has been a primary concern of my work as a hands-on producer/director – the discourse between documentary-makers and their subjects. It is perhaps to state the obvious to say that that if it is to be satisfactory, truthful and just, this discourse requires the establishment of a robust human relationship in which there is mutual respect; but further, and more specifically, it seems to me that if it is to be truly revelatory it requires a compact, a commitment of trust and generosity by both parties – the 'representor' and the represented – an

imaginative leap of good faith in which a safe channel of disclosure, insight and clarity in both directions is opened by a kind of act of mutually-assured vulnerability.

For the subject of such a documentary broadcast on mainstream television, it requires a willingness to expose one's experience (which may be especially painful or difficult, and is often still in the process of healing or resolution) to public scrutiny in a context where such experiences are often sensationalised or belittled and where, in any case, as we have seen, they are not necessarily valued or validated equally with those of the powerful or privileged; and to commit to that exposure by surrendering control of the representation of this under-represented experience to a figure – the documentary-maker, the producer/director – who may seem in the context of the programme's production, at least, to be the representative of power and privilege.

For the documentary-maker, the producer/director, a certain sort of useful distance from the subject of the programme as well as from its commissioner is, of course, desirable as well as inevitable; but successfully negotiating access, not just formally, but also in the fuller and most intimate sense, to the experiences of the under-represented requires an equally-demanding level of self-exposure if it is not to be exploitative or inequitable. By this, I do not simply mean that one is putting one's professional reputation and career ambitions, to some degree at least, in the hands of subjects who are not trained or used to 'performing' (that is the price and the privilege of working in documentary rather than drama); nor simply that one has to open up one's imaginative processes and intentions, the beating heart of one's creativity, as well as one's craft and organisational skills, to people who may not be equipped to appreciate the pressures and sensitivities involved, and may be justifiably indifferent

to those pressures and sensitivities to the extent that they can appreciate them; but, most importantly, that – on a purely human level, the only level that ultimately counts, both on the screen and after the programme is done-and-dusted – establishing a real relationship with the subject will require a willingness to expose one's own pain and difficulties, one's own suffering and inadequacy.

It is my contention – indeed I believe it has been my experience – that such relationships, such compacts (whether spoken or unspoken), as challenging as they are for both parties, are not only possible but necessary in representing 'the matter of Wales' and indeed in all cases where 'ordinary' experience (that is, the experience of those not especially powerful or privileged) is wilfully or otherwise neglected, and consequently left or cast outside the dominant, hegemonic account of 'what really matters' for reasons which, consciously or not, must ultimately be to do with the protection of power or privilege.

For those reasons – the difficulty for newcomers in understanding and committing to paying the real emotional cost, and the essential social and political importance of producing documentaries based on such relationships, such compacts – I have sought in the latter phases of my career to seek to mentor and motivate others whose perspectives will be different from mine and whose talent may be greater than mine, but who are also seeking by their own lights to affirm in their work under-represented experience. Whilst I certainly do not believe that Wales and the Welsh have any monopoly on under-representation, I have done this with new and emerging talent in a professional context with my company here in Wales; and by working with an organisation which seeks to develop media awareness and skills amongst children and

young people in the kind of communities which I grew up in. So Green Bay's *First Cut* documentary for Channel 4, *The Boy Who Was Born A Girl* (2009), the network debut of Julia Moon⁴⁸, whose talent we have nurtured and developed in-house, which charts the progress of a 17-year-old with gender dysmorphia, and his relationship with his wonderfully supportive mother; and the Zoom Young Film-maker Awards, recognising grassroots video story-telling in the former coalfield communities and now all over Wales, and presented annually in a glittering ceremony in Pontypridd – both of these, in their own ways, represent for me the continuing struggle for more representative representation.

To be clear, though the experiences we seek to represent may have been marginalised, they are certainly not marginal in the experience of those who have experienced them; and those who experience them may not be thought of as on the margins of society; rather, they may be mainstream, majoritarian experiences of substantial categories of people at certain times, of social classes and communities, and indeed of whole nations. Nevertheless, despite all the progress which has been and continues to be made in the 'democratisation' of the media during the course of my working life, paying attention to those under-represented experiences, creating a platform for and an analysis of them, lavishing on 'ordinary experience' the kind of imagination and creativity which can crown it with the grandeur and dignity it deserves but is so often denied – this remains a revolutionary act.

APPENDIX 1

EVERYMAN: A PLACE LIKE HUNGERFORD PRESS COMMENT

A. TODAY: 18 AUGUST 1988 MASS INVASION OF THE GUTTER

There is an irritating tendency among TV news teams to imagine they are somehow superior to newspaper journalists.

They always pretend they never resort to gutter tactics, and when covering the Royal birth, for instance, TV cameras panned across the photographers as though they themselves were not part of the ridiculous spectacle. Everyman provided another example of the syndrome.

The programme marked the anniversary of the Hungerford massacre and was presented by a team assigned there for an entire year to chart the long-term effects of the tragedy.

I was stunned by the criticism meted out to the press. “We felt it was a terrible invasion of our privacy”, said a woman whose husband died in the shooting.

Implicit in this was the idea that the Everyman team had somehow NOT intruded. In fact the programme was a testament to the way the team had pried and probed with the ruthlessness of any gutter hack.

B. DAILY EXPRESS – 15 AUGUST 1988 HOW A TRAGIC TOWN LIVED AGAIN

One curious aspect of **A Place Like Hungerford** – the first in a new series of **Everyman** programmes – is that the Press was spoken of as intruding into the privacy of people bereaved by the murderous rampage of Michael Ryan.

Yet the same people were willing to talk about their suffering to a television camera.

Another oddity was the impression the film gave that Hungerford was a small village where everyone knows everyone else, rather than the market town that it is with a population of 7,000.

We were given an insight into the way the residents had coped with their losses since that terrible day, a year ago.

Ryan – for no apparent reason – went berserk with a gun, killed 16 people, wounded many others and took his own life.

After the massacre, according to a vicar, the community came closer together and there was a kind of wartime spirit in the town.

In the Christmas play at school there were stars instead of the usual angels because, as one child said, angels are people who have died – and no one wants to die in Hungerford.

A remarkable tribute to the ability of people to cope with suffering.

C. DAILY MAIL – AUGUST 15 1988 WOUNDS TIME HASN'T HEALED

It was hard to divine any real purpose behind **Everyman: A Place Like Hungerford** (BBC 1), filmed over the course of the year since the appalling massacre in that town on August 19, 1987.

The bereaved, allowed to speak for themselves, threw no fresh light on the motives of Michael Ryan, who shot dead 16 people before killing himself. Nor were there any recriminations over police failures on the day, except for the reservation – by a policeman – that no-one would wish to see armed police regularly on the streets of our towns.

Everyman created the erroneous impression that Hungerford is a tiny village constantly engaged in quaint ceremonies involving men in top hats climbing ladders to kiss women, rather than the sizeable, bustling centre of high-tech computer industries that it actually is. What one saw was not a community gradually recovering from a traumatic event, but the courage and dignity of a handful of directly-affected individuals trying to come to terms with their personal loss.

How the activities of the Everyman film crew thereby differed from the Press and TV 'intrusion' criticised by some of the relations of the dead last night is difficult to fathom. Any bereavement is hard to bear, whether a loved one died in a road accident, from a fatal illness, or was killed by a maniac's bullet.

Would the BBC normally make a programme on the process of recovery from grief of relatives or friends in the first two of these categories?

No, they did so because of the sensational nature of the Ryan killings, and were thus exploiting, in however muted and gentle a fashion, the dark events of last year.

D. THE SUN: 19 AUGUST 1988 RYAN SHOCKER BY POISON WORMS AT THE BBC

Norman Tebbit was right. The BBC is a poisonous bag of worms.

This week it showed a programme on how the Hungerford survivors had coped in the last year.

And somehow – and only the BBC could achieve this – by the end of that programme we had less sympathy for those survivors than we did when it began.

So sensational was its coverage that it even managed to get a married man, who had lost both his parents to Michael Ryan, to admit that in the intervening year he had been seeing another woman.

And a woman who lost her husband of nine years, admitted that within that year she had started seeing another man. The BBC did all of this with a lingering, quite sickening and unsympathetic voyeurism.

The rest of the programme was taken up with attacking the Press crews who originally covered Hungerford. Because those crews dared to try to talk to the people involved.

The BBC lot obviously believed that only *they* had the right to talk to those victims.

Even though all their programme managed to do was exploit those innocent victims for the sake of television.

It came up with no answers. But it did expose those poor people like a raw and open nerve. For us to touch.

Only two came out with any dignity. A little old lady, forever disabled by Michael Ryan who still won't let him beat her and treated the camera with the contempt it deserved. And a policeman, still policing Hungerford, who lost his father that day.

As for the rest, even in grief, the BBC managed to strip their dignity away. They are such hypocrites, those Corporation men and women.

E. THE GUARDIAN – 15 AUGUST 1988 THE HEALING OF HUNGERFORD

We are in a hall of distorting mirrors in **A Place Like Hungerford** (Everyman, BBC-1). Is that gross and terrifying image waving a Kalashnikov really one of us? And what about that figure of wheedling menace, with blood on his boots and fivers in his fist, and a hard Nikon where the soft jelly of an eye should be?

One of the key witnesses in this programme was the wife of the taxi driver who was among the sixteen shot dead by Michael Ryan on August 19 last year. Her most bitter words were reserved for the press men who had come hammering on her door repeatedly, seeking interviews and, no doubt, the opportunity to cross her palm with very large cheques.

What they wrote made her even angrier: “The press gave Ryan this Rambo image... they made him a film star, but in my opinion that was so wrong. He was nothing but a madman... They made him a cult figure, and God forbid someone sometime will try and outdo him.”

There's a deadly foreboding about that, and it haunted the film. We saw a young schoolgirl who had faced Ryan and seen him lift his gun towards her, and had thrown herself to the ground and lay there petrified. She said she still could not believe Ryan was dead, and feared one day he would jump out from cover and shoot her. Later she thought that had been a silly thing to say; maybe Michael Ryan is simply the easy label for the extreme so far of irrational violence, for state of the art mayhem.

Was it simply time and the grieving process itself that persuaded them to recall the day of wrath? The schoolgirl withdrew her fears, the taxi driver's wife found some comfort in a new friend and in the child who was only a few weeks old when his father was killed. John Geraint's sensitive programme, made over many months, was about time's healing and about coming to terms with unnatural disaster. No one outside the film can be sure how far talking to camera was a release and a relief for those of the Hungerford people who had shunned the media before. Or how far it was one more media intrusion. For the moment I would give Geraint and his crew the benefit of the doubt.

F. DAILY TELEGRAPH 15 AUGUST 1988 HUNGERFORD REMEMBERED

This week an entire community would like to be left alone. It is, alas, a forlorn hope. Other outside forces will ensure that the anniversary of the Hungerford massacre does not pass without comment – some of it, inevitably, in very large type indeed. No wonder several of those most affected by the events of August 19, 1987, when Michael Ryan killed 16 people and wounded many others, will be away from home on Friday.

The few who contributed to **A Place Like Hungerford**, which opened the new series of 'Everyman' (BBC-1) last night, left the viewer in no doubt that they wished it could be the final word on a subject which will never cease to cause pain. "It's finished; we just need to rebuild", said one; another "Hopefully, now it's all over for this first year, we can get to our own lives."

It has often been suggested that journalistic intrusion into private grief can be justified because the bereaved find solace in talking to a disinterested stranger. This sensitively-handled programme, made over many months by a crew from BBC Wales, seemed to provide some evidence in support of a questionable theory. Possibly, the process of confronting the cameras over an extended period was part of a catharsis. Or was it merely that time, the healer, made these interviewees increasingly at ease?

John Geraint, the producer, and his assistant, David Willcock, made no attempt to analyse how or why the massacre had happened, nor to explore the implications of the firearms laws. And while their success may not have been complete – one wondered, for example, about those who declined to co-operate – it certainly made for an absorbing, moving hour.

There was no commentary, no formal identification of a contributor. Shots of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" being performed in church, the town crier bellowing and the carnival in full swing were enough to identify the changing

seasons. Some of the participants were familiar from the initial press coverage; others – like the couple who returned from holiday to find their house a smouldering ruin – were not.

Jennifer Barnard, the cab-driver's widow and mother of a five-week-old baby, proved the freest with her emotions, conveying the terrible, haunting image from the moment when she saw her husband's hand protruding from a black bag beside his car. The only one to talk on camera of the way Ryan was made a 'star' by the press – "He was nothing but a madman." Mrs. Barnard came to terms with her anger and bitterness by saying, "It really was a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time".

The policeman who lost his father and whose mother was shot said: "There seems to be a deeper understanding between the people of the town and the police". More indelible than any pastoral images of mist-shrouded ducks was the testimony of 71-year-old Betty Tolladay, who told Ryan to "Stop that racket", was shot and badly injured, and is slowly but cheerfully recovering. "I've never felt bitter," she said, "but I do find it very difficult to talk about it". Hungerford's indomitability incarnate.

G. TIME OUT – AUGUST 1988

It's almost a year since Michael Ryan ran amok in the country town of Hungerford. He killed 16 people. John Geraint's sensitive film was made over the past 12 months. There is no commentary – the injured and the bereaved speak for themselves. Those interviewed include the family whose house was burned down while they were away on holiday, the policeman whose parents were gunned down within 100 yards of his home and Betty Tolladay, everyone's idea of a gentle granny, who went out into her garden to tell the kids to stop making that racket and got shot for her pains. It was five hours before someone came to her assistance. She only came out of hospital at Easter. It was a good decision not to screen any news footage – the words of those involved are graphic enough. Jenny Barnard, whose taxi-driver hubby was murdered in his cab, leaving her alone with a five-week old baby, tells how the police stopped her behind the cab as she was being driven to relatives; her husband was still at the scene in a body bag – 'all I saw was his hand'. Her bravery is the most impressive feature in a catalogue of quiet heroism. A girl who was shot at but remained unscathed reveals that she had to endure such schoolboy jokes as "Hungerford's dead on Wednesdays". She still daren't go to the school's 'Book Club', held in the room where Ryan blew his brains out. As a result of the massacre the community pulled together and found it easier to talk to each other. In this respect the programme is encouraging; despite all the repercussions – disbelief, grief, guilt, anger and adultery – 'time does heal'. Still, it had this old cynic wiping away the tears.

H. THE GUARDIAN - 13 AUGUST 1988

PREVIEW Everyman: A Place Like Hungerford (BBC-1, 10.20).

It's a year since the tragedy, and we should be glad that the marking of the anniversary devolves on the Everyman team, whose humane and intelligent documentaries consistently challenge the dismissive "God slot" label. In the 12 months since that appalling August day when Michael Ryan shot and killed 16 people, they have been regularly visiting the little Berkshire town, sensitively

recording the process of grief and recovery in the shattered community. John Geraint's deeply moving film, made without commentary, follows the progress of key social and civic events in Hungerford, throughout the changing seasons which reflect changing emotions. It allows the bereaved and injured to talk freely, many for the first time in public, about the pain, anger and bewilderment, about the adjusting.

APPENDIX 2

BBC BROADCASTING RESEARCH TELEVISION AUDIENCE RESEARCH REPORT From the BARB Television Opinion Panel

EVERYMAN: A PLACE LIKE HUNGERFORD

Producer: John Geraint

Average audience: 3.8m
AI : 79
Genre AI : 78
Source : BARB

- In Summary - The average AI for all 'Documentaries and Features' broadcast on BBC, ITV and C4 during this period was 78, one point lower than that achieved for Everyman: A Place like Hungerford.
- This particular programme also achieved a higher audience figure than the rest of the programmes in the series, the average viewing figure being 2.1m, although its AI of 79 was lower than the average of 81 for the whole series.
 - Over 8 in 10 of the sample audience (86%) agreed that the subject was interesting, and, separately, sympathetically made (82%).
 - Women showed a greater appreciation of the programme, demonstrated by an AI of 82 as opposed to 74 for men.
 - Generally, the programme received favourable comments. People expressed sympathy with the victims and considered the programme a sensitive portrayal.
 - Over 8 in 10 (87%) of respondents were unaware what this programme was made for Everyman by BBC Wales.

On Other Channels:

BBC2	9.15-10.30pm	Edinburgh International	Av. Audience - 0.8m
		Festival	Av.AI - 76
	10.30-12.15am	Film: One from the Heart	Av. Audience - 1.8m
			Av. AI - 60
ITV	9.30-11.00am	ITV Play: Chekov in Yalta	Av. Audience - 2.1m
			Av. AI - 58
	11.00-11.30pm	Men On Violence	Av. Audience - 1.5m
			Av. AI - 69
C4	10.15-12.00am	Film: Hour of the Gun	Av. Audience - 5.2m
			Av. AI - 69

1. 'A Place Like Hungerford', the first of nine programmes in this 'Everyman' series, was thought by over 8 in 10 (86%) of respondents as an interesting subject, and by over 7 in 10 (75%) as the sort of subject 'Everyman' is expected to deal with. Over three quarters (76%) also found the programme to be informative, with only just over one fifth (22%) thinking that more background information was needed. Over half of the respondents (59%) agreed that the programme added to their understanding of bereavement, with a further 29% being unsure about this.
2. The format of the programme (returning to the same people to update their stories) was seen as effective by almost three quarters (73%) of respondents. The statement that the programme was intrusive received a more mixed response with nearly half (44%) of all respondents disagreeing, 27% agreeing and 29% being undecided, although over 8 in 10 (82%) agreed that it was sympathetically made.
3. The statements that it was depressing or uplifting also received a mixed response, although the respondents were more inclined to disagree (45%) that it was depressing and nearly half of the respondents (49%) were unsure as to whether it was uplifting. Twice as many people were inclined to disagree that it was uplifting as agree with it (34% as opposed to 17%). People seemed, on the whole, inclined towards agreeing that they intended to watch 'Everyman' again next week.
4. Women were more inclined to agree that the programme tallied with their own experience of bereavement (54% against 28% of men) and the overall figure was just over 4 in 10 (43%).
5. Over half of the respondents (53%) thought that it was right for the BBC to make and show this programme, and this figure was backed up by comments such as:

'This happened and is not fiction – why bury your head in the sand.'
 'It is important to share the heartache.'
 'I thought it was a tribute to those who coped.'
 'To say to the people, "Hey, you're not forgotten."'

6. The minority who thought it was not right for the BBC to make and show this programme (13%) gave reasons such as:

'People's grief is a private thing.'
 'It was too sensitive.'
 'It must have brought back some horrible memories.'
 One lady, although feeling that 'those people need time to forget, not a reminder', agreed that it was 'good to see they were aware that life must go on.'

7. A larger proportion, however, (31%) were unsure as to whether the programme should have been shown, demonstrating their uncertainty with comments such as:
- ‘It’s sometimes not a good idea to stir up sad events.’
 ‘I feel human curiosity but I appreciate the intrusion.’
 ‘Although we need a reminder of these happenings, it must rekindle a lot of sorrow and depression’.
8. Respondents were asked what they thought about this edition of Everyman. Over 7 in 10 (72%) gave an overall favourable response, although many of the comments cannot be seen as positive in the usual sense of the word. This is obviously to be expected given the nature of the programme. The comments displayed the sadness that such event evokes in the public and also their faith in human nature:
- ‘Although it was very sad, it showed how people can survive this awful crime with their faith in God still intact.’
 ‘My initial reaction was disapproval but the programme surprised me. Tastefully done.’
 ‘Genuinely well made.’
 ‘It was very moving but very good.’
 ‘Well made programme on a different subject.’
 ‘Very good. We should all remember this tragedy.’
9. The minority disapproving of the programme generally felt that it was...
- ‘Too intrusive.’
 ‘I do think they should now let the people of Hungerford get over their tragedy quietly.’
 ‘Not what I expected. Wallowing too much in grief. Didn’t do viewer or participant any good.’
10. Only 9% of the respondents said they were aware that the programme was made for Everyman by BBC Wales (87% were not, 4% did not answer)

The Sample

Reactions to ‘Everyman: A Place like Hungerford’ were based on questionnaires completed by 178 members of the Television Opinion Panel.

APPENDIX 3

INTERNAL BBC MEMO TO THE EDITOR OF THE *EVERYMAN* SERIES

FROM: Head of Religious Broadcasting
Room No. 315 Yalding Hse. Date: 15th August 1988
SUBJECT: EVERYMAN : HUNGERFORD
TO: Jane Drabble

Jane,

Let me join the many who will be telling you how stunningly good this programme was. It managed to be truthful, exploratory, pastoral and thought-provoking, all at the same time. And the pictures were magnificent!

Your only problem is to keep that up all through the series...

(DAVID WINTER)

APPENDIX 4

INTERNAL BBC MEMO TO THE FACTUAL EDITORIAL BOARD

“Proportionality” Across the UK In Factual Programmes On Network Television

In 1995-6, Network Television spend on Factual Programmes was divided:

London	54.93%	Belfast	0.43%
Birmingham	7.83%	Cardiff	0.01%
Bristol	19.52%	Glasgow	0.55%
Manchester	16.73%		
<hr/>			
England	99.01%	The Other Nations	0.99%

1994-5 and 1996-7 show only minor variations

A spend of **only 1%** outside England **damages both the BBC’s corporate standing and network television’s competitive position**. Semi-structured interviews with key figures in commissioning and production in London and the nations confirm the high regard in which network factual production in England is held, but suggest that there is scope for consensual progress towards increasing the proportion produced in other nations. Economic and marketing analyses suggest ways in which the nations could *add value* to network television. Mark Thompson, who as head of Factual Group was the project’s mentor, has already made an initiative in earmarking development funds intended to increase the number of strand commissions placed outside England.

The BBC’s corporate standing would be strengthened by a further increase. In economic terms, this relates to arguments about the provision of social goods or community wants - *we view television not simply as consumers but also as citizens* - which are strongly to the fore in *Extending Choice*. The BBC is positioning its brand as central to cohesion of society, “the DNA of Britain”, recognising that Britishness is an amalgam of the core values of the constituent nations of the UK. But the BBC’s corporate reputation declines the further one travels from London. It cannot change that without addressing the profile of its key domestic services. 1% as a proportion of a key genre made outside England is publicly and politically indefensible.

Network Television’s competitive position is also adversely affected. In economic terms, this relates to analyses which see the BBC commissioners as trustees of a common property resource, obliged on behalf of the public to mimic the market. *People and programmes* with its concept of audience need emphasised this. **17%** of the network television audience live outside England. There is plenty of evidence that they wish to see their tastes and interests reflected more fully. Representation can sometimes be effected successfully from England, but the often unselfconscious cultural assumptions made by the English – *referred to and made in the interviews conducted for the project* – are a barrier. Programme-makers working within their own nations would be more sensitive and accurate – and more cost-efficient too.

Quality can be safeguarded. In-house factual production in England is a precious asset which the BBC should protect, but the market has an inherent dynamic. Flexibility exists in England, as evidenced by the relatively recent, rapid growth of Bristol, and the numbers of freelance directors. Production *could* be shifted without damaging quality. Concerns about the nations’ ability to deliver seem founded largely on ignorance of their present output. Drama – with Ballykissangel, Hamish Macbeth and Streetlife made under a specific “Hatch” target of 20% for production from the nations – offers a model of success.

Consequently, the Factual Editorial Board is asked to consider the following specific recommendations:

BBC Broadcast should set a proportionality target for factual production for network television from outside England.

- 1996-7 thanks to the strand initiative the figure will be close to 2%.
- 1997-8 although largely commissioned could get to 3% with more strand commissions.
- 1998-9 the target should be in the 5%- 10% range, and it should then be reviewed.

It is hard to see why a figure lower than the Drama target of 20% should be the ultimate target. This represents a broad proportionality on a per capita basis.

BBC Broadcast should set a specific target for network factual strands to commission from the nations.

Building on Mark Thompson's initiative, this should be six hours in 1997-8, some 6% of the single documentary strand total. Specific strands should be named.

For 1998-9 a complete strand should be placed outside England.

BBC Broadcast and BBC Production should guarantee parity for the nations in the new structures and forums.

The Nations must be fully involved in the Broadcast/Production dialogue at all levels.

The nations should enter the market.

Market analyses suggest that organisations with low business strengths (the nations have no track record) seeking to enter mature, attractive markets should seek:

- *Niches* - like daytime, where Wales and Northern Ireland are now trusted suppliers.
- *Specialisms* - like walking and climbing (Scotland) or cultural/social perspectives.
- *Acquisitions* - blocks of output - could all Daytime Documentaries come from Wales?

The nations should utilise their own factual spend to leverage network business.

£12M p.a. in total is spent on factual programmes for showing within the nations. There is sensitivity in the nations about using this to "subsidise network". But on the margins – say 10% or £1.2 M – with matching network money, a production fund could be created that would *add value* for the nations, the networks and the audience.

The nations should work together.

The logic of the market will continue to drive the nations merely to compete, unless a specific commitment is made and a single executive is designated to implement it.

Programme-makers in the nations should market ideas not policies.

Clear separation needs to be made between the *social goods /community wants* argument – which should be prosecuted by those responsible for corporate affairs within the nations – and *mimicking the market*, which programme-makers should address with irresistible proposals which satisfy the needs of the network audience and the requirements of the schedule.

***John Geraint
Head of Production, Wales
November 1996***

APPENDIX 5

GREEN BAY PRESS RELEASE



GREEN BAY REACHES THE 'OLYMPICS OF TELEVISION'

Cardiff-based **Green Bay Media** is celebrating reaching the 2002 finals of the 'Television Olympics' with its very first production.

Do Not Go Gentle, a documentary about Dylan Thomas's great poem, has been nominated for the prestigious **Banff Rockie Awards**. The Awards are the centrepiece of one of the world's foremost media events, the **Banff Television Festival**, held every year in Canada's Rocky Mountains.

The **Green Bay** film, commissioned by BBC Wales, was produced and directed by **John Geraint** and executive produced by **Phil George**.

The Banff competition drew nearly 1,000 entries – the best of the world's television. **Green Bay's** success in winning a nomination puts it in the company of blue-chip series like **Frasier**, **Band of Brothers** and **Blue Planet**, and makes it eligible for the \$50,000 Global Television Grand Prize.

John Geraint and **Phil George** set up **Green Bay** last year after distinguished BBC careers. The company has gone on to win a dozen more major broadcast commissions, but **John Geraint** describes **Do Not Go Gentle** as 'the perfect start': "It's a Welsh story of world stature," he says "We set out to capture the passion of Dylan's words, and to tell the story of how he came to write what's been called 'the perfect poem' for his own father."

Driven by a powerful piano setting of the poem by rock legend **John Cale**, and featuring actor **Keith Allen** and Dylan's daughter **Aeronwy**, as well as schoolchildren and many 'ordinary' readers, **Do Not Go Gentle** was shot on location in Wales and New York.

"The poem has retained a really special place in people's hearts," said executive producer **Phil George**. "Fifty years after it was written, it appears today on an astonishing 600,000 web pages. So this film is a testament to its enduring appeal, and the Banff nomination shows how that appeal reaches all over the world."

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Notes

¹ Annie Powell (1906 -1986) was a Rhondda-born schoolteacher, campaigner and politician. In 1960, she was a delegate at a major international conference of Communist parties in Moscow, where she claimed to have impressed Khrushchev with her rendition of *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*. Mrs. Powell regularly topped the poll in council elections for the Penygraig ward where I grew up and cast my first democratic ballot and, in 1979, she became Rhondda's first Communist mayor.

² John Stuart Roberts, then Head of Religion at BBC Wales, is an ordained minister and Christian socialist who went on to be Head of Television at BBC Wales in the late 1980s. His influence on me was profound and inspirational. An autodidact and something of a maverick at work, his management style and determination could be divisive, but he had a real commitment to making programmes 'in Wales, for Wales', as he put it, as well as making a mark for Wales on the BBC networks. In addition to sharing an approach to broadcasting, we have first given names and proper family surname (Roberts) in common; and so to avoid confusion, at his insistence, I have been known professionally since joining his department simply as 'John Geraint', my two given names.

³ Phil George, brought up in Treorchy in the Rhondda, has remained my closest colleague and collaborator ever since. His subsequent, distinguished record as a BBC producer included *Blood and Belonging*, the highly acclaimed international series on the resurgence of global nationalism presented by Michael Ignatieff. He founded Green Bay Media with me in 2001 and we continue to work together. He is the founding chair of National Theatre Wales and, in 2010, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in recognition of his career achievements by the University of Glamorgan.

⁴ "I think we've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it's the government's job to cope with it. 'I have a problem, I'll get a grant.' 'I'm homeless, the government must house me.' They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society." Margaret Thatcher, interviewed by *Women's Own* magazine, 31 October, 1987

⁵ Conservative antagonism towards the 'liberal' BBC throughout the 1980s is well-documented. For example, Norman Tebbit had compiled a whole dossier of complaints about BBC coverage of the 1986 American bombing raid on Libya.

⁶ Ashley Rowe continues to work prolifically in films and television. His Director of Photography credits include *Hot Fuzz* (2007), *Alfie* (2004), *Calendar Girls* (2003), *Karaoke* and *Cold Lazarus* (the last works of Dennis Potter, 1996), *Widows' Peak* (1994) and the *Young Indiana Jones* franchise (1992-2007).

⁷ *Hour of the Gun* (1967) starring James Garner and Jason Robards is a Western about Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday's 1881 battles against the Clanton gang, in the 'Gunfight at the O.K. Corral', and its aftermath in and around Tombstone, Arizona.

⁸ The third programme nominated was the Channel 4 *Equinox* documentary *Chaos*, a co-production between InCA and World's Edge Films

⁹ Kosminsky filmed with conscripts and officers in Kabul at the end of the unwinnable Soviet war in Afghanistan, and was praised by the jury for his diligence in securing such access and his bravery in taking advantage of it.

¹⁰ Peter Kosminsky's credits as director, producer and writer in film and television include *Shoot to Kill* (1990), *Wuthering Heights* (1992), *The Dying of the Light* (1992), *No Child of Mine* (1997), *Walking on the Moon* (1999), *Warriors* (1999), *The Project* (2002), *White Oleander* (2002), *The Government Inspector* (2005) and *Britz* (2007)

¹¹ The title of this chapter is taken from a collection by the Welsh poet Dannie Abse, who was the subject of my first arts documentary, *Return To Cardiff*, in 1985. *Way Out In The Centre* was published by Hutchinson in London in 1981.

¹² This description of the BBC's role crops up time and again in public discourse – to give just one example, it can be found no less than nine times in *Second Public Service Broadcasting Review: Putting Viewers First* Ofcom, London, 21 January 2009 (pp 17, 18, 23, 44, 46, 63)

¹³ See *Britishness and the BBC*: a BBC-commissioned survey by Scottish consultants Red Spider Inc., July 1995

¹⁴ Penny Woolcock is one of the leading UK documentary-makers of her generation and winner of numerous awards throughout her career. She was honoured most recently (in November 2010) with the Grierson Trust's prestigious Trustees Award and at The British Documentary Awards and the Media Guardian Sheffield Doc/Fest. I am a great admirer of her work, but the Penrhys programme, *Mad Passionate Dreams*, part of the *Nice Work* series, was not, in my opinion, her finest hour. For her perspective, though, see her Forman Lecture : *Stories from the Margins: Filmmaking and the Drama of Everyday Life* p12 (University of Manchester, 2004) http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/disciplines/socialanthropology/visualanthropology/events/forman_lecture/documents/Woolcock_Forman_2004.pdf

¹⁵ Having become a senior producer in the late 1980s, I undertook the role of Chief Assistant to Controller, BBC Wales from 1993-5, and then became Head of Factual Programmes, Wales until 1996, when I was further promoted to take charge, managerially and editorially, of the output of BBC Wales's 430 programme-making staff in all genres as Head of Production. This involved responsibility for 1,700 hours of TV and 12,000 hours of radio per annum, with budgets totalling £70 million per annum. I also held prime responsibility for BBC Wales' 'network' output and one of my main objectives was to effect a 'step-change' in the quantity of network commissions won by Wales.

¹⁶ See David Hatch's Obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 2007

¹⁷ Under Birt's leadership the BBC's annual internal performance review involved the preparation of confidential statistically-driven reports hundreds of pages long by all of BBC departments including the 'National Regions'; as Chief Assistant to Controller, Wales between 1993 and 1995, it was my particular privilege to prepare the Welsh documentation.

¹⁸ John Major, Speech to the Conservative Group for Europe, 22 April 1993, quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of 20th Century Quotations* (1998), 204:16.

¹⁹ *Britishness and the BBC*: Red Spider Inc., July 1995 as above

²⁰ My report was also submitted as a management project to the University of Bradford in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

²¹ Sir (as he became) Huw Wheldon (1916-1986) was the Welshman who was at the heart of the BBC's success in television's 'golden age'. An eloquent advocate of public service broadcasting, he held the key post of Managing Director, BBC TV from 1968 to 1975, during which time he would often sum up the BBC's programme mission with this phrase.

²² *Scotland's Parliament, Scotland's Right* was published on St Andrew's Day, 30 November 1995.

²³ Figures are from the *BBC Annual Report and Accounts for 2005/6* and directly from BBC Wales.

²⁴ Geraint Talfan Davies's career began in print journalism, before he moved into television with HTV Wales and Tyne Tees. He was appointed Controller BBC Wales in 1990, and left in 2000. He is founder of the Institute of Welsh Affairs and has chaired both the Arts Council of Wales and Welsh National Opera.

²⁵ Phil George and I named our new company after a phrase in the third stanza of Dylan Thomas's poem *Do not go gentle into that good night*, the subject of our first commissioned programme:

*Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

'Green Bay', we hoped, sounded like a pleasant place to be; but the poetic context was redolent with the fragility we felt in setting up our fledgling company, as well as the transience of the bright, dancing lines that make up a television picture. Contrary to assumptions some people have made, there is no intended reference to an American football team or to Psalm 37 verse 35, which talks of 'the wicked in great power' flourishing 'like a green bay tree'!

²⁶ Julie Gardner had been an assistant script editor when I assumed overall responsibility for drama as Head of Production at BBC Wales in 1996, but had just accepted promotion to a full script editor's post in another BBC department. Bizarrely, when I took over, 'BBC Wales Drama' was largely based in London, and I

used her departure to close the London post and ‘repatriate’ it back to Wales (ever since, Julie and I have shared a private joke that I sacked her to facilitate this). In 2003, of course, Julie returned to the BBC as Head of Drama for BBC Wales, to head up the revival of *Doctor Who* which debuted in March 2005, with Ecclestone on the title role, to critical and popular acclaim. Her partnership with Russell T. Davies is credited with reinventing Saturday evening ‘family drama’ on British television as well as transforming the reputation of BBC Wales drama.

²⁷ House and Office Services, which furnishes and maintains BBC premises, is one of the unsung support departments which institutional programme-makers often dismiss as ‘overheads’; they don’t know how lucky they are!

²⁸ Angela Graham was born and raised in Belfast and read English at Oxford University where we met. Her career in broadcasting, like mine, now spans five decades. She was for many years a producer at HTV Wales and then producer/director at the independent production co-operative Teliesyn. She and I have worked together only very rarely indeed, but we collaborated in 2010 in making *Merthyr Meirionnydd* – a documentary for S4C marking the 400th Anniversary of the martyrdom of the Welsh Catholic saint (and namesake of mine!), John Roberts – and in developing Green Bay’s comprehensive television history, *The Story of Wales* (see note 47 below).

²⁹ Elis Owen, originally from Llanelli, began his career in print journalism, before moving into broadcasting as a current affairs producer at HTV Wales. He rose to be Managing Director and Director of Programmes of HTV Wales, and then National Director of ITV Wales, responsible for commissioning in-house and independent producers across all genres. His public service broadcasting credentials were underlined when he moved effortlessly into the role of Head of Commissioning at BBC Wales in 2009.

³⁰ Nia Dryhurst – as well as shooting and directing *Fun In The Sun* in the summer of 2001 – is credited as researcher on *Do Not Go Gentle*. A graduate of the European Film College in Ebeltoft, she eventually left Green Bay to work with one of the fathers of the modern television documentary, Roger Graef, and his Films of Record. Happily, she returned to Green Bay in 2007, to make a big contribution to *Rivers and Life*, an ambitious high-definition international series shot on the Amazon, Nile, Rhine, Mississippi, Ganges and Yangtze; and to win the BAFTA Cymru award for Best Factual Director for *Fel Arall*, a feature-length documentary she made for us about the experience of gay people in Wales.

³¹ On 23 February 1998, under the headline *Docu-soaps take over as TV’s hot property*, *The Independent* newspaper reported: “The takeover of television by documentary soaps passed a key marker this weekend when ITV announced that it was moving its long-running soap *The Bill* to make way for a new fly-on-the wall series. *Airline*, a documentary which follows the passengers and crew of Britannia Airways flights at the height of the holiday season, will start on March 6 at 8pm on ITV. It has been put in the peak time slot which inherits *Coronation Street*’s audience. The commercial network rarely puts an unknown new programme in such a slot and has never previously moved *The Bill*. ITV has already poached Grant Mansfield,

former managing editor of network features at the BBC who commissioned the BBC's *Airport* and a host of other documentaries and ITV's controller of programmes has said popular factual programmes will be used to lift the channel's ratings."

³² A *villanelle* must be nineteen lines long, with five tercets, one concluding quatrain and only two rhyme sounds. The first and third lines of the opening stanza must alternate as the third line in each successive stanza and form a final couplet.

³³ Originally published in the journal *Botteghe Oscure* in 1951, it also appeared as part of the collection *In Country Sleep* (1952).

³⁴ The poem's significance for Jimmy Carter and for Bill Clinton was shortly to be confirmed in two public settings of global importance. The opening two lines were used in the presentation speech when Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo on December 10, 2002 - see http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2002/presentation-speech.html. Clinton quoted its final couplet in delivering the First Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture in Johannesburg, South Africa on July 19, 2003 - see http://www.nelsonmandela.org/index.php/news/article/the_world_is_looking_to_you/

³⁵ Obviously, the World Wide Web has continued to expand in the decade since the programme was researched. As of the time of writing (summer 2011) a 'Google' search for 'Do Not Go Gentle' returns 'about 15,600,000 results in 0.25 seconds'.

³⁶ The *Arena* documentary, first broadcast in the 1980s, was an investigation of the appeal and power of the popular song written by Paul Anka and recorded by many artists, including Frank Sinatra, Shirley Bassey, Elvis Presley and Sid Vicious. Contributors included Paul Anka, George Brown, Barry John and Dorothy Squires.

³⁷ The recording - used in my documentary by permission of Harper Collins - is from the *Caedmon Treasury of Modern Poets Reading Their Own Poetry*.

³⁸ John Cale, born in Garnant in 1942, is the classically-trained viola-player who settled in New York in the 1960s and co-founded the hugely influential experimental rock band The Velvet Underground with Lou Reed.

³⁹ Keith Allen was born in Gorseinon in 1953 and has appeared regularly in leading roles on television since the early 1980s. In 1999, he'd starred in the BBC Wales network drama series *Jack of Hearts*. Subsequently, of course, his talent for portraying abrasive and dangerous tough guys with no hint of sentimentalism has been recognised in his casting as the Sherriff of Nottingham in the most recent BBC adaptation of *Robin Hood*.

⁴⁰ Rory Taylor continues to work prolifically as Director of Photography in television drama as well as documentary. He was, for instance, one of the two DoPs during the David Tennant era of *Doctor Who*.

⁴¹ Gwyneth Lewis, born in Cardiff in 1959, was formerly a close colleague of mine at BBC Wales and left at about the same time. Her words *Creu Gwir Fel Gwydr O*

Ffwrnais Awen / In These Stones Horizons Sing are inscribed in the façade of the Wales Millennium Centre. She became Wales' first National Poet in 2005.

⁴² As it eventually appeared on the BBC News online site, the story was headed *March commemorates centenary of Tonypandy riots*, and began strongly but less sensationally: "More than 400 Rhondda schoolchildren are to fall silent to commemorate the centenary of one of Wales' most significant industrial disputes..." See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-11384915>

⁴³ See, for example, *Nations and Regions*, a PACT report commissioned from the Somerset-based consultants Attentional in November 2007.

⁴⁴ In 2010, a breakdown in trust and communication between the S4C Authority and its Executive Board led to the sudden departure of the Chief Executive, Iona Jones (and eventually the premature retirement of the Chair, John Walter Jones); leaked audience figures revealed that the audience for scores of its programmes was too small to measure; and the UK Government unilaterally announced that S4C's budget would be cut by 25% by 2015 under new arrangements to fund it through the BBC licence fee, potentially compromising (in the eyes of many observers) its status as an independent broadcaster.

⁴⁵ Green Bay's documentary and its revelations were covered as a news story in Australia and the USA, and by the main BBC Television News, Radio 4, *The Times*, *Independent*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sun*, *Sunday Times*, *Independent on Sunday* and in a *Guardian* leader and front-page story.

⁴⁶ Eddie Butler is, of course, the journalist and former Welsh Rugby Union player who is the BBC's voice of international rugby and has begun to appear regularly as a presenter of BBC Wales history programmes.

⁴⁷ *The Story of Wales*, a six-hour television history, is scheduled to be shown on BBC ONE Wales in the first quarter of 2012, and on BBC network television later in the year.

⁴⁸ Julia Moon joined Green Bay in 2004 as a zoology graduate in a developmental role working in reception at the Talbot Studios. Her career – first as researcher, then as assistant producer – has blossomed, and she promises to be one of the outstanding Welsh-based documentary makers of her generation.