

## **An Open Meeting Held on Wednesday 18 April in Wokingham Town Hall**

### **Putting Local Landmarks on TV: A Talk by TV Producer, Director, Presenter and Reporter Paddy Haycocks**

As his 35-year career in television developed, local resident and Society Member Paddy Haycocks became increasingly involved in making programmes about landmarks and buildings of architectural and historical significance, and in his presentation to the Wokingham Society he shared his experiences by featuring clips from five programmes in which he had been involved, first as a reporter and then as a producer and director.

#### **Wokingham Town Centre in 1991**

While working as a reporter for TVS in 1991, Paddy, as a resident of Wokingham, was pleased to report on the state of the town centre. Looking in detail at the buildings and the streetscape, he felt that the obvious lack of control over the size and appearance of facias and shop fronts had an adverse effect on the quality of the town's heritage. He pointed out how buildings designed in the 1960s and 70's had had a deleterious impact on the overall image of the town. Memorably he said that images presented in the High Street as a whole are in fact the 'shop window of a town'. In Wokingham, he believed little thought had been given to symmetry and sympathetic design in modern times and he described certain buildings as hideous and soulless.

The images created by his cameraman portrayed superbly the contrast between Wokingham's beautifully crafted heritage buildings and, for example, the concrete parade of shops at the east end of Peach Street. He left us in no doubt that he felt strongly about what he called the desecration of the town centre as seen from street level. The audience clearly empathised with him and, as Chairman Peter Must pointed out later, little had changed in the intervening years. The Society had in fact asked the Borough Council if it intended to be more rigorous and consistent in its policy about shop signage, not only within the regeneration sites, but in the town as a whole.

Before moving on to his next clip, Paddy firmly expressed his view that 'we must fight to preserve our heritage'. To emphasise his point, he briefly showed images of contemporary Sevenoaks, a town with a large conservation area, proving that it is possible to take into account a town's history and heritage while planning its future.

#### **The Thomas Holloway Sanatorium at Virginia Water**

During his time at London Weekend Television, Paddy produced a number of programmes about buildings of historical interest, and in the series entitled *Concrete and Clay* he told the story of the foundation and ultimate demise of the Flemish Gothic Sanatorium in Virginia Water. He suggested that many in the audience might not know that the striking building resembling Royal Holloway College had been endowed by the same Victorian philanthropist, Thomas Holloway. Designed by William Henry Crossland and approved by the Lunacy Commission, the Sanatorium was a luxury care home for

the middle classes and no cost was spared. Only the best materials were used in its construction. The interior was lavishly designed and the walls and ceilings were splendidly ornate. The furnishings and fittings were created by skilful craftsmen in the most luxurious late Victorian style. The building was more like a palace or country mansion than a Sanatorium. Opening in 1885, it was greatly admired and it became an instant success.

IT thrived until WW2, after which it had passed its heyday. Subsequent to a disastrous fire in 1979, it was closed in 1980 and by 1991 it was derelict. In 1994 renovation and restoration of the art work was started and after six years the building was restored almost in its entirety to its original condition, after what was the biggest art conservation project in Europe. It is now a luxury gated community called Virginia Park with 2 and 3-storey houses in the Sanatorium itself. In his clip Paddy was able to find sufficient evidence to confirm the wonders of the design and he was helped to bring the building's history to life by two men who had worked at the Sanatorium, one a male nurse and the other the last security guard, Bill Dobbs. Both men had very positive memories of their time working there, and they hoped it would be restored to its former glory.

Interestingly Paddy told us the building had been used as a location for a number of films and television programmes. He also mentioned that the author Bill Bryson had worked there in 1973, and he had referred affectionately to the building in his book *Notes on a Small Island*. It was there that met his future wife, a nurse in Windsor Ward.

### **The Savill Gardens Visitor Centre**

Moving further east, Paddy then focussed on the new Visitors' Centre in Savill Gardens, Windsor Great Park. Here the emphasis was on a modern, even futuristic building, which he described as being sympathetic to its environment while being at the same time practical and eco- friendly. He told us that for six years he produced the live Stirling Prize Programme *Building of the Year*, and in 2007 the Visitors' Centre was a leading candidate for the award, which he felt it should have won. The designer and writer Kevin McCloud, in a demonstration using Pringle crisps, explained the methodology behind the undulating 'saddle-style' wooden roof built from natural oak from the estate. The building could be seen to meld into the surrounding environment and its use of sustainable material throughout marks it out as a model for buildings set in a natural environment.

### **Battersea Power Station**

We now moved to the Embankment in London to the site of Battersea Power Station. To many this huge building has been and perhaps still is a blot on the landscape; to others it is a true 'cathedral of power' as Paddy reminded us. The clip he showed us was from a series produced in the 1980s called *South of Watford*. In a programme made in 1985 fronted by Hugh Laurie the audience was shown why the building was considered a masterpiece of industrial design. The architect Giles Gilbert Scott had earlier designed the huge Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool and the power station reflected his love of vast spaces. We were shown the building in a state of near collapse, but the art deco interior is a splendid example of how seemingly functional buildings can be created with artistic

flair. The enormous Station A Control Room, which has been described as being more like a ballroom, was portrayed by the Art critic Brian Sewell as a masterpiece of symmetry, with every object and piece of machinery, lever, timer or switch perfectly in harmony with the overall concept of style. The carved metal doors are splendid examples of art deco design in their own right. A former tour guide, Margaret Jamieson, showed great affection for the building when she explained how she and a co-worker had a dance routine which they performed in front of the tourists, and, after dancing with Hugh Laurie, she told him a tunnel was rumoured to lead beneath the power station to the embankment. Allegedly it was used to access a pub close to the tunnel exit.

The clip certainly made me look at Battersea Power Station in a new light, and I hope the long-delayed restoration will show future visitors that technology and art can fuse to create a building which truly reflects our architectural heritage.

### **Nelson's Column**

Our final trip was to the heart of the West End. Here Paddy treated us to a fascinating view of Nelson's Column as shown in 1989 on a popular London Weekend Television magazine programme, 'The Six O'clock Show'. In the film the entertainer Gary Wilmot climbed a series of ladders attached to the column in order to take tea on a platform at the top. The aim was to recreate the topping out ceremony in 1843, and the bravery of the crew was clear for all to see. As the protagonists ascended the column and finally sat at the table perched on the specially extended platform, some of the audience appeared decidedly uneasy as the camera looked down from the height of 163 feet creating a 360-degree panorama. Paddy explained how difficult it had been to make the shoot, and he said that the process used was at the cutting edge of technology at the time. He also emphasised the skill and bravery shown by the cameraman and sound recordist. The latter, on hearing Gary Wilmot say proudly that he was probably the first black man to climb Nelson's Column, was heard to say, 'Oh no you're not!' He himself was, of course, black!

Paddy Haycocks captured the attention and imagination of the audience not only by the images in his film clips, but by sharing his commitment to his subject matter as well as his appreciation of the expertise of his colleagues. He told his story, laced with fascinating anecdotes, with wit and enthusiasm, and the warmth of the applause at the end of his memorable presentation showed how much it was appreciated by those present. This was reflected in Peter Must's vote of thanks when he presented him with books about Berkshire and a further token of the Society's appreciation.

