

Diana Pearce, 28/01/11

Diana Pearce (née Hall) was assistant to Chris Griffin-Beale in the Channel 4 Press Office, 1982-1989.

Interviewers: Justin Smith, Linda Kaye, Rachael Keene

[DP & JS talk about Press Packs]

JS: ...Yes that's interesting the sort of...you were there from the start and there seems to be a sort of...one mustn't overdo this but there seems to have been a phase of about ten years and there was a certain sort of turn-over wasn't there?

DP: A change of emphasis would you say?

JS: A change of staff and emphasis perhaps...

DP: In the very early days Channel 4 was incredibly optimistic about running a really lean organization, and um I first of all worked for Justin Dukes, the Managing Director as his PA secretary. Justin dealt with anything that wasn't the creative side – admin reported to him, distribution reported to him, engineering...The legal side reported to him, finance reported to him. Programming, commissioning editors, Paul Bonner obviously (Head of Programmes) reported to Jeremy...anybody creative that was Jeremy. Anything organizational that was Justin. That was the set-up. And then when Justin brought in Sue...the Head of Marketing Sue Stoessl, when she joined she reported to Justin, but obviously had quite a creative link with Jeremy Isaacs as well. And uh Chris Griffin-Beale, he was taken on because he was ex-Broadcast of course, I don't know how much research background you've done on Chris Griffin-Beale...

JS: A bit, but don't worry about telling us things we already know...

DP: ...Do stop me! Chris Griffin-Beale joined Channel 4 from Broadcast. He was TV Editor I think, on Broadcast, or was it Education [Editor]? Chris came from a sort of educational background, educational press. I think he was on the Times Education Supplement at some point. But anyway...Chris had a phenomenal, elephantine memory. And a very good sense of corporate matters. A very good sense of where broadcasting was going. So he...in a way he was um poacher turned gamekeeper, in a way. He was employed by Jeremy Isaacs directly, and as far as I remember Chris joined in...what, early 1982. And the Channel in its huge wisdom thought that all Chris needed was himself and an assistant to run the whole press operation. And I was his first assistant...I moved from being Justin's PA. I had showed an interest in the marketing side, and there were all these corporate launches that we did in the Barbican centre, oh it must have been early 1982. And I got quite involved in doing that...just talking to the press. But it was the corporate great and good really we started off with. And sort of on administrative side I got quite involved. And Justin could see that I was interested in that side of things. So he was very generous spirited when I went on to join Chris. And I joined Chris...I don't know, it must have been around May, June 1982, something like that. Maybe a bit earlier I can't quite remember...

JS: And you were still at the IBA, then, on Old Brompton Road?

DP: No...we had moved into Charlotte Street by then. We rattled around 'cos there weren't very many of us. I should say we moved into Charlotte Street...yeah...early...We moved gradually from the end of 1981 onwards into 1982. Yeah, 'cos when we uh when we were appointing the advertising agency, the last meetings were held in the Charlotte Street Headquarters, as opposed to the IBA Headquarters....Staff numbers then were still very low. At one point a financial consultant who Justin had employed, David Scott, who became uh Financial Director actually, but David Scott had to produce a report for the great and good when they were financing Channel 4, and the first thought was that they would have a staff total of 151 people. [All laugh]. As you know, it grew! That was early background. So Chris joined and basically had lots of meetings with Jeremy discussing creative ideas, but he had...a very definite view about what journalists needed in press information. Obviously before we were on air, Chris and I were fielding phone calls from the public, any kind of phone calls to do with information came to us.

JS: Goodness, you must have been busy!

DP: Yes I think. We would get there at 8.30 in the morning, and on a good night, we would leave at 9.30 at night. Uh and that went on for months. Months and months. Uh by the summer we had a secretary join us. And then another secretary. So we were four. And that was by the summer or early autumn – still not on air.

JS: What kind of questions were you fielding? What kind of answers were you giving as well because you must have been in a position where you were not actually broadcasting yet...what do we tell people about what we do?

DP: Well a lot of people were asking a lot of terribly basic questions about when Channel 4 was supposed to be going on air. People were asking questions, Channel 4 are supposed to be doing a lot on education, what's going on, whose commissioning, what sort of programmes...Various people wanting general information about what the Channel was going to be about...And was it going to be showing this sort of programme, that sort of programme. And then of course there were all the very sort of public bodies, institutions, wanting to know who to contact at Channel 4 for their particular interest. Potential programme makers wanting to know who would be the commissioner for XYZ subject area. Because we were fielding general public as well, 'what's this new channel, is there going to be lots of sex?' Every question from the most mundane to the most egg-headed really...Um and it was just...and very often we actually didn't have the answer, we had to find out what the answer was. People wanted information about ooh I don't know whether David Rose was going to...how many films was he going to be commissioning in the first year and so on and so forth. So we had to trot off and go to talk to people and find out and come and ring back. We ran this huge notebook where every phone call was noted. The job every day was to get as many queries answered as possible basically. Chris was on the phone most of the time, also dealing with queries, more with the direct press queries. But there was of course all the national papers, and the regional papers, and magazines – they wanted to know what the set-up would be, how they would get their information and so forth. We were bombarded with questions...

JS: How conscious or clear was Chris that he wanted Channel 4 press office to do something different from, let's say, the BBC or you know, a commercial channel?

DP: He was very clear; I think he took the attitude. I think he'd been at the BBC at some point; he had loads of contacts there, had enormous respect for the BBC, but at the same time wanted us to be more accessible and less bureaucratic. Because the BBC press office could be rather bureaucratic and you never knew quite who you were talking to and so on, there was quite a pecking order. Chris made himself accessible to everyone; there was no sense of 'I'm too great to talk to this person'. Very very approachable and immensely knowledgeable. So people would ask a simple question, and a long answer, very detailed, would come tumbling out. Which was great, absolutely wonderful. But no he had a very strong sense of what journalists needed. And he had a very strong sense of how Channel 4, entering the TV market, was um going to have a struggle to get space in the newspapers. There was going to be the initial curiosity factor obviously, but day to day we had far less resources than say the BBC. The BBC had a whole team of press officers. And we were going to have to be getting press office freelancers in to help with certain programme strands, but would not be directly employed by Channel 4. So he had a great sense that press information had to be something that made in so easy for journalists that they would use the copy i.e. so he would write a lot of information, and if journalists wanted to lift stuff wholesale for their preview pieces they were absolutely welcome. Um so it was written in such a way that people could do that.

JS: And you and Chris were really conscious then, of sort of...developing the kind of brand identity of the channel really before it had even started broadcasting...that must have been a creative leap of faith in some way...

DP: Yes it was, we had a wonderful um we had two very wonderful people in the presentation department, Pam...I've forgotten her name! – ex-BBC, and Tim Simmonds. And Pam and Tim were responsible, together with the advertising agency, for creating the brand image, in discussion with Jeremy Isaacs, Paul Bonner and Justin Dukes. And so the Channel 4 ident, the coloured '4', Chris incorporated that on the front of the press information pack, but basically the way it looked, it was Chris talking to Jeremy, and talking to the Head of Presentation, Pam...and I still can't think of her name, it's ridiculous...it's just gone, I'm having a senior moment! So there were a lot of discussions about that that I wasn't party to. Because it was between Chris and them, but his concept was always to make Channel 4 accessible, um friendly, um and informative. And um he set out in press information because a lot of the press information that was coming out from ITV um and BBC at the time there was whole great lists and there was 3 lines on each programme. As you've seen from the press information, he wrote reams on the stuff. And um it was to try and give, from every point-of-view, the programmes...to tempt journalists into thinking 'this looks interesting', or 'this is great, I've got all the information, I would like to see this programme, write about this programme'. Press information went out, God knows, this was before computers and everything, it was all typed out. In the early days Chris wrote it all, I typed it out, and it was sent out to the printers. To start with he wrote the lot. When I say that, he would get the information in from the commissioning editors. And then he would sub it down and write it up. And then gradually he then brought in um a freelance lady called Sue Cormack. And she did a lot of the writing for him, and I started doing some writing. But to start with I was more involved with liaising with the printers, getting it printed and so forth. Um...

JS: So one thing that we're interested in from the point of view of our project is the interest in film. The film notes sections...Chris' idea? Was he writing those?

DP: You mean the film notes about Film 4, or the film notes about these movies. [All talk] Movie notes. Chris got a guy called Alan Frank in to write the movie notes for us. Alan Frank is still around, he's on a website called [picturesthattalkdotcom](http://picturesthattalkdotcom). Which he writes together with David Quinlan, who was um film editor at TV Times. I've worked with David very closely as well, that's when I moved onto TV Times. Alan Frank – lovely guy...Alan's brief, right from the beginning, was to produce Movie Notes on all the old black and white films. C4 very much wanted to bring good old films to people's attention.

JS: Yes, of course you had Leslie Halliwell buying from American, and Derek Hill buying...

DP: All the arty-farty stuff, European cinema. Yes, very earnest person, Derek Hill. Very pleasant. Leslie Halliwell...had a most wonderful assistant called Ruth Jacobs, who had the filing system to cap them all. She had publicity notes on all these movies, in a room. And the filing cabinets probably were one and a half times the length of this table. All alphabetically filed. Absolutely amazing. [JS: What an incredible archive]. Halliwell was employed by Granada, as far as I can remember, and she worked for him. And I know Ruth...I'm not directly in contact with her, but I know how to get hold of her. Ruth is going to be in her 70s now I would say. Alan Frank will be around 70. Um. So Alan had the job of writing the Movie Notes in such a fashion uh even if some of the black and white films, the old films, were perhaps less than amazing, you know to talk them up a bit. And he actually he would if he couldn't think of anything else to say he would go on about the superb monochrome cinematography [laughs]. So Jeremy Isaacs' vision in the early days was very much that we wanted to be a channel that loved film, and respected film, and wanted people to enjoy film. And you know, in the early days, Channel 4 got hold of some splendid old things, and of course there were Channel 4 silents, which were fantastic. They got...that was Kevin Brownlow and the other chap...[JS: Andrew Mollo] no...David Gill. It was Thames Silents but it was brought in under the Channel 4 banner. And uh no we would have a showing complete with music and everything at the Dominion very often, of whichever, we certainly showed The Wind and um oh a lot of them. But that was a sort of Channel 4 film event, these wonderful old silent movies. And Carl Davis was brought in to write the music for them. Or update the music if it existed. So they were quite something special, and C4 was very keen on those.

JS: The other film material you got presumably from commissioning editors, so you were getting things on the Film Four seasons from David Rose, from Alan Fountain...

DP: About the Eleventh Hour, independent film. So in terms of getting the information out, once a week, you know Alan Fountain or Paul Madden or Walter Donohue or David Rose, had to produce some information. Uh Chris in the early days would watch the Films on Four himself and write them up. And eventually that was passed to me to do. So once a week I'd go away and closet myself and view a film and write it up.

JS: What was your first one, do you remember?

DP: I know I had to do 'My Beautiful Laundrette', I think it was about that time that I was helping, the mid 80s. And um then of course there was the films coming in from

the continent. We showed Heimat, the whole lot. And muggins, because I spoke German, was given the job of doing the press information from that each week. And we showed Berlin Alexanderplatz, and we had a lot of continental film seasons. I think Derek Hill organized those. And Film Four, of course was something really important right from the start, and it was absolutely with intention that Walter was shown on our opening night. This was quite extraordinary if you compare Countdown at 4.30 or whatever it was, that was the first programme on air, and yet later on in the evening you had Walter, which is not a very cheerful film! In my view, very good, and a wonderful performance by Ian McKellen, but it kind of set a stamp that we weren't about being jolly entertainment, we were *challenging*. Jeremy Isaacs was absolutely keen on that, that the opening night was not to be a night of jolly frippery. In a way he wanted to slide on there [?] in a way. So it was that balance between lots of publicity, because it was quite an event, a new channel starting but at the same time not giving away to a big colourful extravaganza but to actually say this is what we're about.

JS: That was a tricky balance to strike...from my memory...between fanfare and celebration and saying we're a serious operation. It's a bit like starting a soap opera, because a Channel has to start a new identity and brand image. What was the sort of print run of the press packs to start with? Who did you send them to?

DP: We sent them to all the nationals, all the regional press...the print run was pretty big. Obviously it was sent to um all the trade press, I've no idea how many provincial newspapers, they all got a copy. Deepest Scotland or furthest West of England, they all got a copy. All the media press obviously. It would get sent to several journalists on each newspaper because it was sent to previewers and the reviewers and to the features people um arts editors um film writers. So probably the big newspapers got about 5 or 6 copies each. The nationals. It was...I suppose it must have been um I can probably find out...it is one of those numbers I can't remember. We actually had to physically load that stuff into envelopes....

JS: You were watching films and writing about them and you were personally putting these into...

DP: Well there were more of us by that time, we were press office...when we went on air, so November, there was Chris Griffin-Beale, myself, Mary Bremner, Francis McPadden um who else. Was Ken Thompson on board then? No he wasn't. No Ken on the opening night I don't think Ken was there. We were 4 or 5 people. Coming into 1983 there were half a dozen of us. I think Ken Thompson joined sometime in 1983. Yvonne Taylor joined in about 1983. So Ken came in as Deputy Head of Press. Um Yvonne Taylor came in as senior press officer. I was still a lowly press assistant at that point! And...quite a lot of freelance publicists had been employed. And certainly in press information, you know we would list the press contacts there, so people knew who to contact. But certainly under...Kate Perry that's right..Certainly in 1983 in terms of the admin in the office, there was myself and Kate and Francis and Mary, there were 4 of us. And then there was Chris and Ken and Yvonne. So about 7 of us that was in 1983. Going on into 1984. So I think oh gosh I mean however many regional newspapers there were at that time, they got one. [JS: That's extraordinary, quite a circulation list]. Yes. All the big city press, and things like the Shropshire News or something, these quite small newspapers. And we, I think it was done in Brad Street [?] who used to do a cuttings service for us. All these

tiny little cuttings would come pouring in, references to Channel 4, these had to be checked through. [JS: Ooh I wonder if the cuttings are still there, the cuttings files!]. You've been in touch with Pam Dear, yes? [JS: No. No yet] She worked with us in the press office, she's the Channel 4 archivist. [JS: Ah, now we know Rosie Gleeson]. Well she knows Rosie yes...Pam works now part time for Channel 4, but basically Pam set up the Channel 4 archives. She was there from the beginning. Doing well yes it was her job to go through the press cuttings as far as I can remember. She joined us on a freelance basis, she joined because we were also having to produce press cuttings for the Directors every day. So we had to produce a press cuttings pack with recalcitrant photocopiers. So Jeremy Isaacs, Paul Bonner, all the senior staff of Channel 4 would receive every day a press cuttings [pack] from the nationals. So that was our job as well, Pam was brought in to deal with that, you know to put it all together. Well to help put it all together. So we could see what sort of press coverage we were getting, and monitor it. They came in with little green stickers attached, the Coventry Evening Telegraph with a date on, mentioning a Channel 4 programme or issue. We must have sent hundreds of these things out each week. And it was quite a major printing operation. The printers were West1 [W1?] printers. They came in because Sue Stoessl was Head of Research, she became Head of Marketing. When she was Head of Research at LWT she used W1 printers, they were based in Hanway Street or Rathbone Place, one or the other. And that was Bert and his wife Anne, ran that. Bert died unfortunately; I'm still in touch with Anne. Uh so if you wanting to know about the print operation I could give you a contact. She probably would remember actually, how many copies we used to run off. They gave use a wonderful, very personal service. Bert actually would come over to the office every week and pick up the hard copy to take it back for printing. Um was it a thousand? I can't remember how many regional newspapers there were. All these labels were run off. Literally we were loading stuff into packs and sticking on labels.

JS: Apart from the press cuttings can you remember what sort of...impressionistic sense you got I suppose...of what effects the press information packs were having. And did you respond to that as it were in nuancing and developing the press packs.

DP: Yes I think we did. This is why we had the cuttings service. Because we wanted to see how our information was being used. Obviously we got a lot of feedback from the journalists themselves. The journalists who were in regular contact with us, the Sean Day-Lewis of this world, Peter thingy of the Guardian, Peter... [Fiddick?] anyway him. I think he's retired. The major TV critics. It was much more difficult to get hold of the movie writers. We would hold previews for Film Four, for example. It was very difficult to get people along. We used to...there was a central diary, which all the BBC and ITV and Channel 4 used to use for previews. So that you'd get in touch with the diary to see, if you wanted to launch a programme, or series, or season of Film on Four, you got on to the central diary, to check you weren't going to be clashing with anything major on the other channels...Unfortunately um this didn't quite extend to the film critics. And there was reason for that, because as you probably know, the film critics spend their lives in darkened rooms. And there is such a full programme of films to see, and they can only go to the viewing that is offered to them by the film PRs. And I don't know how much you've been involved with those people, but that's a whole saga in itself. I could you know...Because my colleague at TV Times, Derek Winnert, who's a film writer for TV Times now, I mean the sagas of trying to get into previews sometimes, quite amazing. But that's another side to the

whole issue. I'm going away from your question...we did make modifications according to what people needed, or the sort of things that people felt were missing. But on the whole I think they had this great big thick pack every week. They had all the information they knew, and one of the problems was people not being able to turn up to things because they were committed to going to something else at the same time, it was us who suggested why don't you come in and watch a video cassette. So we would make available to anybody at any time, any journalist, 5 days a week, who wanted to watch a Film on Four or a programme, they could come in and we'd leave them in the viewing room with a video cassette, and turn it on, and bring them a cup of coffee and away they'd go. Nobody else was doing that at that time. Uh BBC and ITV were saying you shall come at such and such a time and then you shall be shown the programme. We thought we've got to find another way [JS: in the preview theatre or wherever]. Yes...people caught onto that very quickly and realized they'd have to do the same. Because, again, you've got an extra channel, and as everything moved toward the obvious multichannel future, everyone had to do that. But I think I'm right in saying that we were the first of ITV and BBC1 and 2, we were the first to offer these individual viewings at whatever time.

JS: I was going to ask you about your sense of [whether] your competitors took notice of your tactics and competitive strategy. There must have been some influence with the press packs...on the BBC. They didn't do anything like that at the time. But with the launch of BBC Films they began to do their own work around that. Were you consciously aware of other press offices...?]

DP: The feedback we got from journalists was that we were more helpful, more accessible, more open to deal with. And that the press pack was much more detailed. To be frank we were so busy that it was quite hard to have the time to reflect too much on what the competition were doing. [JS: Sure...] But um I think we did have an influence on...things. Um and of course we made a great...as things developed we had to make a great use of freelance publicists for programmes. Education programmes... were um farmed out to can't remember the name – it's in the press packs somewhere – and there were some regular publicists who would take over a strand and would be responsible for getting the journalists interested, getting the stories around the place. So there was a sort of small, central...And then the press office absolutely mushroomed in the 1990s. I mean I'd left by then, but I mean we were already press and marketing, we were together on the same floor, press, marketing and publishing, on the same floor, adjacent to the main Channel 4 HQ. By that time, we were about 18...and then there was Theo Cowan and Laurie Bellew. Theo Cowan died but Laurie Bellew's still around. They were our corporate PR agents. They were very involved in the image of the channel, very much knowing who was who. And Ken Thompson was taken on, because of his incredible contact list. Ken was one of the biggest schmoozers of all time. And um and was a real man about London. And knew lots and lots of people, had loads of contacts. Um and he was very much on the um he did an awful lot of you know lunching and greeting and whatever, on that side of things.

JS: Was there a sense that that corporate PR agenda, if I can call it that, became more significant and more prominent during your time there? [DP: Yes, it developed certainly...] The kind of the, in a sense, the ethos of what you were about was changing and the way that you were articulating your sort of message obviously you didn't have the same job to do once people knew what Channel 4 was, had a sense

of it, that initial impact was generated and the identity began to form. But in a sense the agenda went on and in a sense the ethos changed did it?

DP: Yes I think the agenda did move on, and certainly Channel 4, in character, changed. As the staff numbers mushroomed. And as Channel 4 became more of a recognized or corporate body. And the channel had to respond to that. And there were all sorts of meetings and lunches and you name it, with the great and good. And of course there was the whole business every time the sort of some form of government review came up, and obviously C4 was publicly funded, in a very sort of unusual way...um there was a guaranteed funding. ITV sold our advertising. Um so there was an awful...it was a very complex relationship. [JS: You had several masters to please...] Yes. And very much, certainly Chris and Ken were very involved in the sort of what would be generally termed the corporate side. It was making sure that Jeremy Isaacs was saying the right thing to the right people at the right time. Ditto Justin Dukes. You know, the Head of Marketing Sue Stoessl and her assistant – her responsibility was the annual report. And there was all the corporate stuff to do with the annual report, had to be handled. So yes, as the channel matured, um there was a greater corporate emphasis. The Channel was negotiating with HBO for this that or the other, or as the distribution network became wider we were distributing...Larry Coyne was the Head of Distribution, and we were distributing in the States. All these deals were being set up. We were buying in from Germany, and we were buying in from the States. All that activity has its corporate spin-off. Quite a lot was going on.

JS: There's a couple of um...new stories or issues that I'd like to ask you about in a little while. Shall we have a little look at some press packs? DP: Yeah.

LK: It's interesting...one of the things I was thinking about is the use of the stills as well... [for] the journalists...

DP: Oh yes, we would choose those. What would happen...our pictures department, that was run by a guy called Steve Jelly, and um Chris and I in the early days, once a week would go over to Steve, and all the production people would obviously have to produce stills, and we would go through all the stills, together with the stills department, and choose what we thought would be technically useable and appealing. It was up to us to choose from what the stills department had in. So...yes the first four days on Four – I was convinced I had a copy of that, but could I find it?

LK: This one is pretty dog-eared actually...

DP: So yes, that was the other thing; we did a summary because at the end not everybody wanted to have all this long stuff. So we did long and short so people could just take out of it what they needed. Yes, so the stills, we would....

LK: Done on different paper as well...

DP: It was done on different paper so the regional press could reproduce it straight from there. At that time, that was the plan. So as we said, making them suitable for dot-to-dot reproduction for newspapers and magazines....So yes you've got um you never really saw the announcers but um that was uh but obviously we pictured them in the early days. That's dear old Jeremy bless him. And of course The Body Show. What we tried to do in those first four days is to um get a feel for the breadth of

interest that the channel was bringing together. Um. Oh God, A People's Court. Yes and Paul Hogan, he went on to quite a career in one way or another. Nobody had heard of him at the time. And there's a rather young looking Ian McKellen. We were trying to say women, serious drama, kids, yeah, and we were saying edgy comedy...P'Tang Yang Kipperbang. There was stuff for kids but...it was a weird selection, but that was the plan. It went from the deeply conventional, like Richard Whiteley, to The Body Show, which was very sort of ethnic looking, edgy Aussie humour, serious drama, a women's revue...I mean it now looks quaint. But at the time [JS: it was cutting edge, new, fresh, it was the mix as much as anything that was fresh]. It was the mix. When we were um...choosing...appointing an advertising agency...um it was the final two who were competing for the business were...Boase Masimi Pollett and Gold Greenlees Trott. I think we landed up with the slogan – 'Channel 4: For all of the people, some of the time'. And BMP came up with that. GGT came up with something quite snappy – 'Television that turns people on'. BMP won because their research capacity was better. It was so close, they had to re-pitch. They had the edge. GGT were very good but their business-head background wasn't so good.

JS: That slogan...there was some controversy about that...there were people who thought, well actually...we should be saying 'all the people, all the time'! That in a sense that was courageous, for a television channel to say that – you won't want to watch us all of the time, but everybody will find something of interest. That was a different ethos in terms of the marketing position of a major television channel at that time. Now with the situation we live in now, that's what most television channels are, in reality.

DP: Because we're in a fragmented media world. The word fragmentation was starting to be banded about in the early days of C4. Justin Duke was part of...what was it called, the IT commission or some such thing, where the media great and good would get together and talk about what was going on. There was the sense that things were going to change...people were trying to feel their way, and get a sense of where it's going. JI said one day, certainly to us...at some launch or meeting or other... he said well, you can look at it like this – C4 is probably the last beautiful steam train. And actually I think he was right. OK, Channel 5 came on air, but Channel 5 was...suffered enormously because they never had the budget...or the distinctness. They had the three F's wasn't it [JS laughs]. They were always this kind of...trying to catch up type situation. They didn't have a... [unique selling point]. They were a different kettle of fish, although a lot of people from C4 went to Channel 5 actually, but that was much much later on.

JS: Arguably in a sense the change...the Rubicon had been crossed by then, the mindset about broadcasting...I think Channel 4's sort of pivotal position there was the sense of it being a public service broadcaster who was willing to say we are one alternative amongst many...we are offering a range of alternatives, which sort of broke the mould.

DP: C4 the way it was set up, was quite a dichotomy when you think about it. It had this edgy, dare one say, sort of leather-sandaled image, and at the same time, we were Thatcher's child. Because, what we were doing was setting up as a commissioner, we commissioned stuff. We didn't make the news. We did our own presentations stuff in-house, and that was about it. Everything was commissioned.

Channel 4 news came from ITN. The films, the programmes were commissioned. We commissioned a lot from LWT and Thames and Granada, and also from Tyne Tees, and Scottish, but more important thing in a way, the whole independent producer thing started up with us. And it was because of C4 that BBC ended up with this rule that 25% had to be commissioned from out-of-house. So we were very much Thatcher's child, but most Channel 4 people were leather-sandaled, Guardian-reading people, but operating a very Thatcherite operation.

JS: The let-the-market-choose model...the market chose a lot of things which conflicted...certainly that conservative those...

DP: The commissioning thing, that was very new. Jeremy Isaacs gave the commissioning editors a lot of free rein, but also there were situations where a producer uh programme-maker rather would have a meeting with Jeremy, and Jeremy was in many ways quite a seat-of-the-pants guy, and he would say, 'yes I like that idea, we'll do that, you need to be in touch...David Rose will take it over, or Alan Fountain will take it over, or one of the commissioning editors...' So commissioning editors would sometimes find themselves...I mean they all respected Jeremy enormously, but they would find they would have to find...to slice off a bit of their budget for this programme that Jeremy had decided we had to have! A 2-line memo would go out to the programme-maker, 'I like the project, we're going with it. Kind regards Jeremy Isaacs' boom! And so I think sometimes some of the commissioning editors would say arrgh! Caroline Haslam, she was doing education, and then Naomi Sargeant of course, Naomi and Carol worked together, doing slightly different strands, and they would be saying arrgh! [Laughs] That was how it was! But on the whole Jeremy left them get on with it, with certain guidelines.

JS: ...A couple of other things....the red triangle. Tell us about the red triangle from the point-of-view from the press office. You mentioned Jeremy Isaacs' brain waves. A lot of people thought it backfired.

DP: That was one of Jeremy's brainwaves. Yes, it did. What happened um we used to um I think it all started when the duty office, who receive telephone calls from the public, received a *huge* volume of complaints from outraged viewers about something that they really didn't like to see on TV. And they felt they should be warned that this programme might contain such offensive material. I can't actually remember the *incident*. Now duty office records...again we would get a pack round from the duty office every day...with notifications of telephone calls from viewers [complaining or praising]. Or people would write in. There was a whole office that dealt with that, but we would see the log. ...And then it was decided that what the channel didn't want to do was get itself a reputation for showing offensive material [JS: 'cos the tabloids latched onto that immediately didn't they...] The tabloids were so unhelpful, they were often a complete nightmare. I remember one particular instance...I digress...Going back to the red triangle, meetings were held...and the idea came up of putting a red triangle in the corner of the screen to signify that this film contains sex or swearing...Viewers get most upset about swearing apparently. But then of course you got all the people in the raincoats, didn't you, saying there's a red triangle film. Then you got people watching those things for particularly the wrong reasons. It wasn't one of our greatest successes, the red triangle...One of the things we were up against with the tabloid press...actually we weren't in the business of the stuff...that the tabloids were interested in. But at the same time we

needed the tabloids because we wanted Sun readers and Star readers to... [JS: And Brookside audience...] Exactly...so one of the uh an example of how it was...we, Ken Thompson and I took a group of journalists over to Germany. To meet to see a preview and meet the cast of a German medical soap opera called Black Forest, we named it Black Forest Gateau...it was called Black Forest Clinic I think, and it was a German medical soap, made I think by um we went to Hamburg so it was Deutsche Rundfunk probably. But set in the Black Forest., a pretty rural location, all the comings and goings of the doctors...And um the guy who played the senior doctor was a much respected uh classical actor, who was nearing retirement. He was the senior figure. It was a bit of fun for him, a serious Vienna-berg theatre. Then there was a young actor who played the glamorous young doctor, and a young woman, I can't remember any of their names. Anyway so there was a preview, we went round the studios, met the actors and so on, and we had the broadsheets and the tabloids there. And all the tabloids wanted, they wanted some *scandal*. And I think it was a journalist from the Daily Express who was sitting next to me at lunch, and because I speak German, and a very well-respected senior German actor didn't speak English, so I was translating. And the guy from the Daily Express said 'well what is your acting dream, what have you still not achieved which you'd like to play?' And so this very serious German actor said 'Well, I would have liked the chance to play King Lear'. Tabloid journalist – what am I going to do with that. I earwigged them at the end of the day saying 'what the hell are we going to write about?' They were on a jolly, and determined to get to the Reeperbahn that evening....but they had to justify themselves going. The only scandal they could find was the glamorous young actor who played the male lead, there was something minor thing that he'd been involved in something to do with...and it was so minor and they blew it up out of all proportions because they had to sell some copy. And that for Channel 4 was quite difficult because C4 wasn't into all that. Certainly in the early days. Brookside um Theo Cowan and Laurie Bellew dealt a lot with Brookside certainly in the early days. But Phil Redmond was such a good self-publicist that he was...very hot because he had this amazing reputation from Grange Hill, and it kind of went on from there. I can't remember now who used to deal with Brookside...it must say in here somewhere.

LK: Probably in later ones...

JS: Linda's the expert because she spends every day reading them!

DP: The press information in 1990 it was still going on in the same sort of way.

LK: The changes...

DP: This was still Chris Griffin-Beale's time.

LK: It's kind of mid-1990s on that it really starts to change.

DP: That's right. So here we are, 2<sup>nd</sup> November Brookside....Beverley Watts, now she worked for the um she was based up in uh Liverpool with Phil Redmond, and was in London some of the time. That's right. She dealt with it. That is um. That's how it was dealt with. 'Cos Phil Redmond has quite an operation, and so he had a press officer as well, so in that situation she had a London base as well. With the big production companies who had their own people, they would do their own publicity in conjunction with us. In discussion with Chris or Ken Thompson or whoever was the

internal person who was responsible....Yes so you see David Rose was commissioning editor for Brookside as well, it was not purely film. You associate him with Film on Four.

JS: He's very proud of Brookside and rightly so.

DP: Oh yeah, we took some. We went up to Brookside before it went on air, we took some journalists up there. And what was very innovative of course was the fact that they'd actually used a real housing estate and bought these houses. And they took us round, they took us round the houses and you know, cut holes in walls to poke cameras through, and the whole thing was...and the plan was uh however long Brookside lasted, there was a saleable house at the end of it. It was bizarre! Again, that had not been done before. A real live close of new houses.

JS: Those...corporate activities with journalists those publicity events...apart from the screenings, and you mentioned the silent screenings. Were there any other publicity events you did around Film on Four specifically? Or to do with film people?

DP: We would...in the early days we would have a launch at Channel 4, for a Film on Four. But it was quite difficult to get a big crowd along, for reasons already stated. Because film critics had millions of things to go to, and these things clashed. And um it wasn't easy in those days. And we did...but we people if people couldn't come to the launch, we would offer them a cassette they could watch. I don't think we did many big events around Film on Four, not that I remember.

JS: The reason I ask is that, and this didn't happen initially, but certainly when some of the commissioned Films on Four began to get circuit or theatrical releases, and I know from talking to Jeremy that Channel 4 was very involved with the Lumiere and Screen on the Hill...um...the sort of independent film circuits...

DP: They tended to handle a lot of their own publicity.

JS: 'Cos I know the films were sold to independent distributors. So in a sense it wasn't in-house.

DP: I'm just wondering...cos that gradually took a form...in the early days we would have launches for a specific Film on Four at the Channel 4 cinema...but I tend to think that the filmmakers did a lot of their own stuff. As far as that was concerned...

JS: The Neil Jordan film 'Angel', that was an early one.

DP: C4's very first commission ever was Nicholas Nickleby. In terms of which the first film commission was...Angel was a very early one.

JS: Did you handle any of the publicity for...you know there were sort of Film on Four season notes...

DP: As far as I remember we did in the early days put out 'there's a new Film on Four season coming, and this is what's going to be in it'. Film on Four used to be on a Wednesday or a Thursday....It was the Irish RM by then. I think it was a Thursday night.

LK: So with something like...I've seen something for Night Waves [New Waves], which was produced completely separate, with um detailed synopsis of some of the films there, would that go through you or would it go through someone else?

DP: Remind me when Night Waves was.

LK: Night Waves was...early 80s.

DP: Yes...um...

LK: And it was a collection, some of the stuff was from the workshops, some was BFI...

DP: Yes, now again, um...I don't remember us sending all that much stuff out about that.

LK: So that would have been something that was....

JS: Someone like Alan Fountain or Paul Madden would have done.

DP: I think they would have dealt with it themselves, as far as I remember. But Film on Four was uh I don't think we had many events surrounding Film on Four, not as I remember. The launches at Channel 4 were very hit and miss affairs. You could have, for example, Michael Jackson, who eventually became Chief Executive at Channel 4. He in the early days produced a 2 part series called 'The Sixties' and at the Channel 4 cinema we had a full house for that. People were really interested in the subject matter. And it was a nice pair of programmes. But he's a great publicist anyway so all sorts of people that he knew came along. On the serious arts side we had a music programme, and the pianist Peter Donohue came, and we publicised the fact that he was coming amongst the music press, the classical music people...and we had a very low turnout. It was so unpredictable. It made the catering very difficult [laughs]! I think it was a programme about Tchaikovsky I think, can't remember exactly...we had about 10 people. Other things were on...people just didn't turn up, despite the fact his great pianist were there. You could never tell...Going back...certainly we would send something out at the beginning of a Film Four season... Going back to the memory, I'm still in touch with Chris Griffin-Beales' wife, and he kept a diary, and she's got all those diaries. I actually asked her in my Xmas card, I said if...I mentioned I was helping you guys with this, and if I need to have access to his diaries at that time, would that be possible? And she said yes no problem. [JS: That's fabulous...how interesting] I've never seen the diaries. But Lucy has hung on to everything like that that Chris wrote. [JS: There should be a *memorial* archive...]

LK: Once all of these press packs are digitized, once they go up, we'd like to call it 'The Chris Griffin-Beale...'

DP: That would be superb.

JS: Wouldn't it be lovely to...it's fascinating material...because it was incredible work that he did.

DP: He did amazing work, and he had a capacity for work that was unbelievable...unbelievable capacity for work. His brain was as sharp as a razor. He

was a very quick writer. And so unassuming...um and he would dash...he was only about that high, have you ever met him? He was about that high, and quite thick-set, and would rush around with sweat on his brow, saying 'what a day!', on the phone, on the typewriter. He was amazing. He was much respected among all the journalists and the film people for what he knew.

JS: Certainly in terms of our specific project here, what I would like to say is a) we'd be very pleased if you would be interested in being involved with, later in the production phase we're going to have a beta-testing phase and certainly Rosie's going to be involved in that, and you as someone who made these and knows these documents intimately, would be prepared to be involved with that, in terms of the...the database itself, and looking at it and how it works, we'd be delighted but equally if Chris' widow would be amenable what would be delightful is for any material that she might have that might shed light on the sort of context of the press office and the press packs, such as you've generously provided this afternoon, if we could add any of that, around the database as it were, to give contextual information, that would be super wouldn't it.

LK: Because then people would understand how revolutionary they were in the context of what was happening at the time.

JS: And recognize what an incredible creative input he had...

DP: It was absolutely incredible...he was the creative force behind this. But as...Chris wrote all this first one, he wrote the lot. Based on basic information he was given. Some of the programme makers were like one man and his dog! And I can quote one of my own experiences, I had to write up, and this was a series about caving – speleology. And the production company were doing I think it was 1 or 2 programmes, and uh we had a one line thing about what it was about. It was Di - can you ring these people and find out what their programme was about? So I interviewed him over the phone and wrote the whole thing up, that's how you had to operate sometimes. Other times people were incredibly organized, um and had it all more or less pre-prepared and all you had to do was sub it down into how much page it was getting. But the concept was Chris. Chris, in conjunction with Jeremy, obviously with the presentation people, how it was, how it was to look. He kept it simple from the point of view that people needed to know who'd done it, who'd commissioned it, they needed to know who to get hold of. In the early days it was um...as he said here, you know 'contact the specific press contact, or relevant press office at ITV, independent producers contact C4, or Cowan/Bellew. Laurie Bellew's got a memory like an elephant, I'm sure I could get his number. I can think of various people who you could get in touch with. I'll drop you an e-mail. I think it would be interesting for you to talk to David Quinlan, 'cos David Quinlan was film editor of the TV Times, remember in the pre-1990 Broadcasting Act, ITV and Channel 4 had the copyright for all their information. So billings would be supplied to the TV Times and the ITV companies and Channel 4 would have the final...

[Tape Change]

...Things that were going on at that time about distribution of films on 4. So she's another person who might be able to help on that [JS: That's very helpful, thank you].

DP: I'm just trying to think...those are the key people I think, in terms of your project.

JS: That's tremendously helpful. Have you got any idea...I mean I've still got this image in my mind of the filing cabinets the length of this table...Ruth Jacobs...I mean Heaven forbid that stuff should have been dumped. I mean that sounds like an incredible archive...

DP: Now let me think - who would know? Ruth might know. Funnily enough she's still in contact with somebody to whom I introduced her. I could get hold of her and she might know. It was all part of Leslie Halliwell's set-up at Granada, and it was the Granada offices at London where [it was kept]. She might know. She left and went on to other things. She was amazing – she could lay her hands on all sorts of press information. I wonder. Alan Frank, who was a friend of Ruth's – he might know what happened to it. He might, although he might not... [JS: But that's where you would have got the information from, as far as scheduling broadcast films]. Yes, it would be supplied to Alan Frank, to write up the movie notes. So that's why I think it's quite important that you speak to Alan Frank about that. Alan will talk the hind legs off a donkey. He's a fountain of information. He is a complete movie nut. And he has an amazing memory. And he's a great friend of David Quinlan's – they do this website together. And he um he would remember those early days you know and how he was commissioned, I think it was Chris Griffin-Beale who knew him or knew of him and contacted him. Anyway all these movie notes at the back...Yeah, all that stuff, that would come in from Alan in the early days. In the early days we had to re-type it all.

JS: I mean that's the other thing, about your operation, I mean we forget how labour intensive the process was, compared with these days.

DP: We had our first computer, which was a Datalogic word processor, and we got that, oh, back end of 1983. And it was the state-of-the-art. Yeah. So Alan Frank would produce all these notes. And uh you know [laughs] and it was Alan who dug out all the reviews. And so he'd always dig out the reviews. It was a fantastic bit of work he did for them. But you know he says here of *Enchantment* "this tender romantic drama of two love stories that span three generations, benefits from Goldwyn's impeccable production values"...Actually I think I still possess, Alan did for me one day a wonderful list of his subtexts. 'Cos he was having to make the films sound fantastic, and in some cases they weren't! So he sent me something saying this equal this. And I expect tender love story would have equalled very sentimental! But he's an incredible character, very knowledgeable about movies. And he writes for the *Daily Star*, he's been doing the *Daily Star* film column for donkey's years.

JS: But you know that was all unique, and that level of attention, that a broadcaster would give to old films that they were putting out on you know a Monday afternoon or whatever, was itself unprecedented, and was a contribution to a greater awareness of cinema and film culture, that Channel 4 fostered, and that's very much what we're about, investigating and and and celebrating really.

DP: I think Jeremy Isaacs just felt that movies were totally neglected by TV and he wanted to redress the balance somewhat by showing quality, and by showing that these old movies were still fantastic. Um on the business side of course we have to remember the budget. Uh old movies filled time and were..in those days they weren't inexpensive, but they were at a useful price.

JS: That's right. That's one of the great bugbears of course, for the distributors, that television got all the old films for a song. But that was a process that only really started in the 70s, and that came together with the arrival of Channel 4.

DP: And it's sad now, in my personal view that Channel 4, yes it still shows the old black and whites in the afternoons, but it's changed. Film4 is...but it's been quite a change of emphasis. [JS: Very much so...]

JS: I spoke to Jeremy about that, and I think the sad truth is...from campaigning for newly commissioned work to be you know shown as soon as possible on television. Now, bless them, and they're a great foundation of the film industry in some senses but Film 4 Productions are all about commercial, theatrical release. It'll be a while before those films get to be shown on Channel 4, and it won't be as part of a Film 4 season. It won't be part of that culture of bringing film to television. They've gone their separate ways in some respects. Although Film 4 still has a very serious commitment to British film.

DP: But of course we have to bear in mind how Murdoch's got everything tied up. You look sometimes and it's the same movies that appear on TV, whether it's Channel 4, 5 or BBC. And there are so many movies that you never see. Why? Because Murdoch's done the deal with all the studios. He's got them all tied up. At TV Times for example, when you go through on the PA system and you've got Sky Movies Premiere, Sky Movies Class, Sky Movies Drama and Romance, Sky Movies Thrillers, Sky Sci-Fi, Sky Movies Horror. And they've got tie-ups with all the major studios. All the other TV companies are very much scrabbling around. [JS: It's a changed world...] It's a changed world. Things do move on.

JS: It's been wonderful talking to you...you've an incredible memory for names, and for the period and so on. It's a long time ago, dare I say it...

DP: I joined Channel 4 30 years ago more or less, and that is a long time ago! I can help you with phone numbers of some of these guys. I'm happy to do that. I'll have to tread a little bit careful with Lucy, Chris' widow. I've got a problem because I'm off to France for 2 weeks on Tuesday. I'm not really sure what sort of time...

JS: I should have said. This project is...at the end of March we'll have completed the first of its four years. So this is a long-term project, the press packs themselves and that phase of things will be very much in development over the next 12 months. Um uh of course my PhDs have got 3 years full-time to go. So we're having a major conference, we hope, to coincide with the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday of Channel 4 in November 2012. Um which you'll be cordially invited to in due course. So that's our sort of time frame. So nothing has to happen in a hurry in a sense, we've got lots of work to do, so we feel a sense of getting on with it. So when I say there's no hurry...But by all means lets be in touch when you come back from France. I understand entirely about Lucy, but I just think – we had no idea whether or not he had any papers.

DP: Ooh he was a real squirrel! His shelves groaned...What I'll do if I may, I'll contact Lucy, I'll pop over there and talk to her, and I'll ask if I can have a look at some of the ideas, and get an idea of what they contain. Because God knows when he wrote them, he must have really burned the midnight oil, because he never left early. On the phone to his 2 and a half years old [daughter] Sophie, 'You're going to bed now...aren't you? Daddy's not going to be home until 10 o'clock'. So he must have

written those diaries by candlelight in the middle of the night. I will contact Lucy, I am actually pleased to have the opportunity to do so...I'll get a feel for how she feels about them. [JS: And do tell them about this part of our project and its intentions]. She will be tickled pink to know that it will be called...

LK: His name will be in it. Because we will digitize from the 1<sup>st</sup> copy to June 2002 which is when the last of the hard copies was published. It's going to be within...not everyone will be able to see it, it will just be the UK Higher Education because of all the copyright implications. But we thought it would be nice to name it after him. The reason we have all of these is that our CEO Murray was invited to the launch of Channel 4, so went down the road (we were in Greek Street then), he picked up the first one and went 'this is amazing – we need to keep these because they're going to have value in the future'. So we got on the list, and we collected them.

DP: Of course Channel 4 have them – Pam Dear at Channel 4. I don't know how they're stored, but I know they've got them all. But there won't be many complete sets around. So it's great that you have them.

LK: One thing that we can't do is the stills – there's copyright and it would be so complex.

DP: Now independent producers, I suppose someone who would have a long memory of those early days of negotiations with Channel 4...Denise O'Donoghue of Hat Trick. She was a leading light in the independent producers association (IPA), which was a precursor to PACT. But she was very involved...and formed Hat Trick with...can't remember [Jimmy Mulville & Rory McGrath]...she will have a good memory for those early negotiations with Justin Dukes. She's a very good businesswoman. And uh she will remember those early meetings I would think. They were quite heated at times I seem to remember. As I went in and out with the coffee [laughs]. Yeah but she would have a long memory for that aspect...The objective is to completely digitize this as an archive for the BUFVC, to have a complete picture of how film and TV interacted...

JS: And the impact that Channel 4 had on British film culture. I mean culturally, economically...

DP: And what I'll do, if I may, I will forward your website to Lucy so she can have a read. And get a feel for.

JS: There's nothing secret about our website at all, that's entirely open but this, the database will be open to the UK Higher Education community only, for academic researchers of film and television. Increasingly we see Chris and Chris' work as extremely important...I think that colleagues in the field who work in film and television history would acknowledge that his work is worth celebrating and acknowledging, and where possible having research access to, in some shape or form. As you probably know, many people who work in film and television over the years made donations over the years, to, for example, the British Film Institute, to their Special Collections, all catalogued and archived. Those types of material are extremely valuable to the Higher Education community, expanding out knowledge of film and television history. Anything that you can do as regards Lucy would be very valuable. I'm going to make a list of all the people I've mentioned who I will get the contacts for.

JS: What we'll do of course is transcribe this, and I will send you a copy, and then you've got the text with all the names you've mentioned on here, to save you writing lots down....This [recording] will go into my machine, leuan who's our wonderful research assistant back at Portsmouth will transcribe this into a Word document, and I will send you a copy of it, the text, via e-mail.

DP: Wonderful, super. What I will do, what I like to do is just make sure that I can sort of get on with it. Won't take me a sec to jot something down. So it's Jane Small, Ruth Jacobs, Alan Frank, David Quinlan, Pam Dear, Frank McGettigan...

JS: Do you...interestingly, Colin Leventhal and David Aukin were involved in a sort of British subsidiary of Miramax for a while and went off and kind of did independent...I've had trouble tracking him down.

DP: Colin Leventhal will be another interesting person to talk to...he will of been involved in all those union negotiations about distribution and so on.

JS: Walter we think's at Faber, we haven't tracked him down. Paul Bonner we do know, I've got his number. Larry Coyne.

DP: I wonder where he is now. Jane Small might know, you see. It's all to do with...I'm in touch with a former colleague who might know Frank McGettigan's number, so it's all gettable...

JS: That's marvellous, Di. This is the standard form...

DP: Yep, no problem.