

◀ Ron operating an early Marconi 3 three-inch image orthicon colour television camera in BBC Studio G Lime Grove, 1965

RONALD CHARLES GREEN

1930–2009

A personal appreciation by GTC Vice Chairman John Henshall



▲ BBC Crew 7 photographed through a Teleflex Fisheye 1 lens in 1965. Front row l to r: Ron Green (Senior Cameraman), Keith Salmon (Camera 2) (both with thumbs up), John Henshall (Camera 3) (making the sign of the Crew 7 film moonlighter), Peter Leverick (Camera 4) is between Keith and John

Ron Green, the legendary BBC studio cameraman, died on 22 August 2009. His funeral service at St Mary's Church in Byfleet, Surrey on 1 September 2009 was attended by hundreds of his former colleagues – not only from BBC Television Centre, but also from the ITV companies where he worked after retirement. A superb eulogy was delivered by Jim Moir, former Head of Light Entertainment, BBC Television.

As Ron drove home from work in

down the road from the site in White City where the world's first purpose-built Television Centre was at the planning stage.

Naturally gifted

Joining the Engineering Division meant that you might work in any area of engineering or technical operations but, luckily for BBC Television, Ron found that his hands, eyes and brain worked together in

“There was a side to Ron which the camera managers did not know about: a fun – and somewhat alternative – side”

1955 he could be certain that the blue light flickering on the curtains of the houses he passed meant that the people inside were watching the output of his new employer: the BBC Television Service.

This certainty didn't last long, though. From 22 September 1955, Ron could no longer be sure of the source of that flickering light for, on that day, Independent Television started broadcasting in the London area. For the first time in the history of UK television, there was a choice of what to watch. And it was this event that had been the catalyst for Ron to move from testing television sets at Cossor Electronics to working at the BBC.

Many BBC staff had been persuaded to move to ITV by the higher salaries on offer, and so the Corporation was in urgent need of replacement personnel. Ron spotted a BBC advertisement for technicians and made his successful application for a job at its 'temporary' television studios at Lime Grove – just

perfectly coordinated harmony to make him a superb natural television cameraman.

The 'Golden Age' of British television began in the late fifties, continuing through the sixties and seventies, and on into the eighties. Ron Green was a major part of that Golden Age, working on many of the major programmes of the era.

Changes came fast at that time. It became possible to record television on tape; the line standard was increased by over 50 percent from 405 to 625 – the bandwidth doubled; a second BBC channel was added and colour came along. Multi-camera studio-based light entertainment, drama and opera were raised to new art forms and Ron Green's immense skills were a major contribution in all of these specialist areas.

In those days, a television crew was a very special amalgam of individual personalities and skills moulded into a highly cohesive and motivated

team, working as one. Leadership of such a team required skills that few people possessed in the necessary quantity and quality. Ron Green had the required qualities in abundance. Without doubt he was one of the very finest senior cameramen in the history of television. And he was also one of the nicest people you could wish to meet, always with a smile and twinkle in his eye.

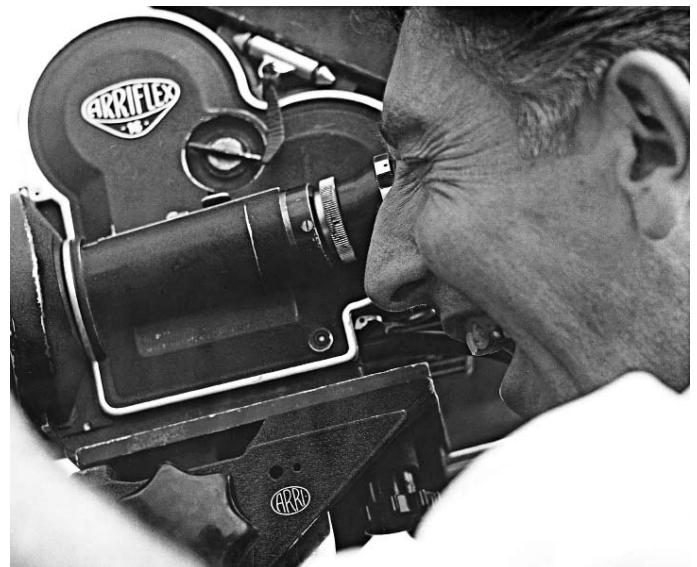
Ron's opportunity to demonstrate his leadership skills came when he was promoted due to the coincident arrival on the scene of two national treasures: the BBC's second channel, BBC2, and – rather bizarrely – a lovable little bear. Senior Cameraman Michael Bond published 'A Bear Called Paddington' in 1958, and then went on to write a whole series of Paddington books. By 1965, these were so successful that Disney bought the rights and he gave up his job with Crew Seven to become a full-time writer.

At the time when Ron became Senior Cameraman, the crew would work on series as diverse as *Top of the Pops* (which had moved to London from the BBC's Dickenson Road studio in Manchester), *The Likely Lads*, and Peter Cook and Dudley Moore's groundbreaking *Not Only But Also*. In the BBC Club bar after these shows, the conversation would not be about camerawork but about the much more important question of how many pints of beer could be safely consumed before exceeding the new drink driving laws. This was not as irresponsible as it might seem – some of the keg beers then on sale were said to be so low in alcohol that they could legally have been sold in the US during prohibition.

The camera department at BBC Television Centre was a junior section of Technical Operations, supervised by a Head of Cameras and four Camera Managers whose function it was to run the crews in a quasi-Civil Service manner. Their main raison d'être seemed to be processing the obligatory secret reports that managers and supervisors had to write about those under them. Ron never really enjoyed writing these reports, though he seemed to manage to do so while also paying lip service to their other rather quirky middle management requirements.

Ron never needed to crawl to the camera management because he was respected by all the really important people in television – the producers, directors, designers, floor managers, production assistants and stars. You never ever heard anyone criticise Ron. His interpersonal skills were exemplary. He was a born leader. He exuded calm, even in the most stressful situations. His dedication to the output of BBC Television was total and his camera skills were breathtaking. There have been many excellent Senior Cameramen but none has ever been better or a more skilful all-rounder than Ron Green.

Ron was like an elder brother to those of us who had the privilege of working with him. Being on his crew was like being part of his extended family. He was always patient and tolerant with trainees. He had a wonderful way of being helpful and supportive without ever being patronising. He led by outstanding personal example. It was, quite simply, a joy to work with him.



▲ Ron operating an Arriflex 16ST film camera, 1965



▲ Ron operating an Arriflex 16ST to film tennis star Ken Rosewall being interviewed by Martijn Lindenberg at Wembley in 1965. Fishing pole operator Neil Dormand, sound recordist Roger Twyman, clapper-loader/producer John Henshall

A sense of fun

There was a side to Ron which the camera managers did not know about though: a fun – and somewhat alternative – side.

I was at the time married to one of the George Mitchell singers – of *Black and White Minstrel* fame – and became the choir's unofficial photographer when it travelled to Holland to make a Dutch television programme. There I met Martijn Lindenberg, who was tracking the Heron crane on a programme called *Midavond Serenade*. Martijn had ambitions to become a sports producer and did later become Head of Sport for the NOS (Nederlandse Omroep Stichting). One day he contacted me for a crew in London to shoot part of an Arsenal football match and interviews with the manager at Highbury, followed by interviews with tennis stars Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver, plus their match at the Empire Pool, Wembley.

Of course I asked my Senior Cameraman, Ron Green, how I should go about arranging this shoot. In those days – the 1960s – it had to be on film. Neither Ron nor I had ever shot film but we did have an opinion about it. We would watch the location inserts to the programmes we shot in the studio and wince at some of the appalling camerawork from our colleagues at the BBC Film Unit in Ealing. Ron was convinced we could do better – and this was our opportunity to prove it.

Film adventure

Neither of us had ever operated a film camera before and had no idea what

was involved. But this did not deter Ron. He had an idea. We went down to the BBC Publications shop by the front gate of Television Centre and purchased the Technical Instruction on operating an Arriflex 16ST camera. The BBC produced excellent 'TIs' of this kind, although they were not really intended to assist staff to 'moonlight'.

We arranged to rent all the equipment from Samuelson Film Service and drove up to Cricklewood in Ron's smart Hillman saloon car. Ron was an avid car enthusiast and had an enviable collection of classics.

"Where's your truck?" asked the storeman, pointing to the huge pile of flight cases. So we had to take everything out of the cases to cram it into Ron's car. I sat in the passenger seat with the camera body on my lap.

Back at my flat in Kew, Ron knelt on the floor in front of me, holding the press-stud bound TI (which instinctively sprang shut all the time) open at the page showing how to load the 400ft magazine, while I fumbled in the changing bag. It was a bizarre sight. But it worked.

The next day Ron experienced the creative freedom of using a small, lightweight, handheld and untethered camera for the first time – through the turnstiles at Highbury and walking along the touch line. He was out of his comfort zone, breaking new ground, and he loved it.

The tennis at the Empire Pool presented a different challenge. The noise of the unblimped camera in the empty arena was almost deafening. We really needed the blimp but, try as we might, we could not work out how to fit it. The noise would certainly

interrupt the tennis and this would all be covered by the OB unit shooting the event for BBC Sport. We would be rumbled.

Ron had an idea. If OBs were covering the match it would be recorded. Ron 'knew someone' in the Eurovision office at the BBC and would ring her on Monday.

On the Monday, a 16mm film telerecording of the tennis was made, processed and sent to Holland as part of the reciprocal arrangement between European broadcasters.

All the film we shot came out fine. Edited in Holland, all that remained was to see the results of our work. Should we fly to Holland? No, Ron 'knew someone' at a BBC Listening Station...

Unfortunately, there was no television signal coming in from Holland that night, so Ron never saw the results of his first single camera shoot. But oh, the fun we had – and

the camera managers never got to hear about one of their top Senior Cameraman's first moonlighting job.

This was the Ron Green I will always remember fondly. Daring, never afraid to take risks or to break new ground, yet always highly professional.

And there was the other side to the highly professional Ron Green. Fun – and lots of it.

Stealing a Picasso

In the sixties, before colour came to broadcast television, the BBC had an experimental colour studio – Studio H in Lime Grove. This studio came to life after three minutes of blank screen at the end of the day's transmission. In 1965, Ron's crew wheeled the huge Marconi three-tube image orthicon colour cameras through from Studio H into Studio G, to cover the UK end of a Sotheby's transatlantic auction of a Picasso painting. That night I



▲ Ron 'stealing' a Picasso under the nose of Sotheby's auctioneer Tim Clarke in 1965



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▲ The cast and complete crew of *The Val Doonican Show* on stage at the BBC Television Theatre, Christmas 1967. Senior Cameraman Ron Green is just left of centre, beside John Henshall's wife, singer Margaret Eaves (white dress). John Henshall (Camera 3) is behind Ron and Alan Kerridge (Camera 2) is to the left of John, leaning on the monitor cradle. Val Doonican is seated on the Mole crane with Camera Assistant Bernard Newnham (who now runs the BBC Technical Operations website www.tech-ops.co.uk) peeping over his shoulder. Producer/Director John Ammonds (moustache and glasses) is next to Val

Just some of Ron Green's credits

Light Entertainment

Top of the Pops
Rolf Harris Show
Shirley Bassey
The Two Ronnies
Carrot's Lib
The Likely Lads
Three up Two Down
Blackadder
Not Only But Also
The Paul Daniels' Magic Show
Opportunity Knocks
The Hot Shoe Show
The Des O'Connor Show

Drama

Z Cars
Softly Softly
The House of Bernarda Alba
Thunder Rock
Strife
Season's Greetings
Relatively Speaking
By George
Dracula
Jekyll and Hyde
The Importance of being Earnest
When we are Married
King Lear
Pericles
Arms and the Man
The Devil's Disciple
Theresa Raquin
War and Peace

Arts

Mass For Man
Points in Space
The Love of Three Oranges
The Beggar's Opera
Così fan Tutti
The Ginger Tree



▲ Ron Green (left) with John Henshall (right) in 1965

Fact File

John Henshall:
www.epi-centre.com

For an idea of Ron Green's outstanding skill on the Mole crane – complete with 'how it's done', see www.tech-ops.co.uk/page163.html

photographed Ron operating the early colour camera and also managed to grab my favourite photograph ever of Ron – creeping away with the 'stolen' Picasso right under the nose of the auctioneer. This is the way I want to remember Ron Green – enjoying life, enjoying work and having immense fun.

Ron Green, I will miss you greeting me with the secret sign of the film moonlighters for Dutch television – grinning through a film viewfinder frame formed by your thumbs and forefingers. Maybe your single-camera moonlighting for Dutch television helped when you pioneered the BBC's first venture into high definition many years later – *The Ginger Tree* – for which you were awarded a well-deserved BAFTA in 1989.

I will always remember with gratitude the profound influence you had on my career, and the sheer joy of working with you and being part of your televisual family. This I share with the many other cameramen who had the honour of working with you and being inspired by you. Thank you Ron. You really were the very best.



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