



**Voice of the
Listener & Viewer**

Bulletin

Working for Quality and Diversity in Broadcasting

Winter 2010

Issue 99

VLV's Spring Conference STRICTLY PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING — CREATIVE FREEDOM AND AMBITION?

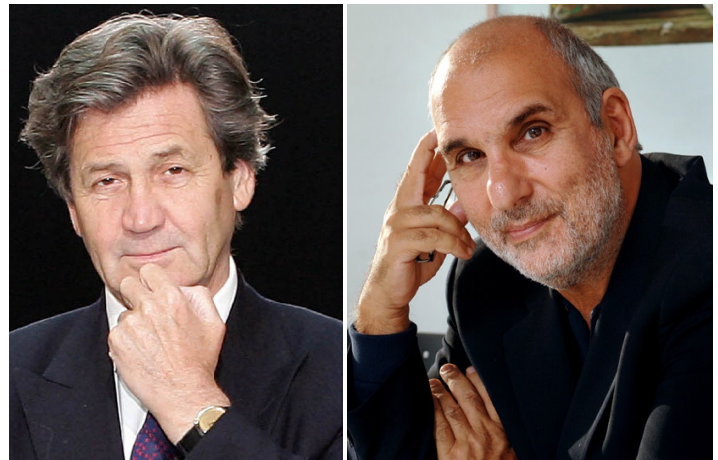
**Our 27th Spring Conference, in London
Wednesday, 28 April 2010**

The BBC is fighting its corner to maintain its licence fee funding and its character following attacks from various political and commercial interests. At VLV's Autumn Conference in 2009, **Mark Thompson**, BBC Director-General, told us of the duty the Corporation had to stand up for creative freedom and ambition.

After a virtual tsunami of reality and celebrity-dominated programming, VLV feels it is important to learn more about these BBC ambitions, so we are pleased that in the main morning session, **Alan Yentob**, the BBC's Creative Director with responsibility for developing talent across all the BBC's services, will explain how the BBC is responding to this aspiration. He is likely to face some tough questions.

Creative issues continue to be the concern of **Melvyn Bragg**, outstanding radio and television broadcaster and until very recently presenter of the South Bank Show on ITV. He is one of our most articulate communicators and VLV is delighted that he will widen the debate to include the problems of the commercially-funded public service channels in the session immediately after presentation of our 2009 Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting.

In the first session of the day, VLV Board members will give an update on the many issues they are pursuing on behalf of members, viewers, listeners and new media users at this critical



Keynote speakers: Alan Yentob (right) 'the creative spirit of the BBC' — and Lord Melvyn Bragg, who sees VLV as 'an invaluable independent watchdog'.

time for all public service broadcasters. There will be another opportunity for members to have their say during the **Members' Forum** in the last session of the afternoon.

The conference will be held at the Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1 10.30am—5pm. Coffee and registration from 10.15am. For more information and tickets visit www.vlv.org.uk or contact the VLV Office on 01474 352835.

James Naughtie will present VLV's Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting

The VLV Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting, to be presented at 1.45pm by **James Naughtie** (right) of Today, the Book Programme, the Proms and many other broadcasts, will reward some of the

outstanding programmes and presenters of 2009. Hundreds of programmes have been nominated. We can never reveal in advance who will be there as winners on the day, but the ceremony is always highly enjoyable

and the short list to vote on is impressive. Again we thank **Roberts Radio** for their special prize.

Ballot Papers for voting in each category are enclosed with this Bulletin. Please could you complete and return these straight away, the deadline being Friday 12 March.



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Voice of the Listener & Viewer

Working for Quality and Diversity in British Broadcasting

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Editor & desktop publisher
Carol Cattley



VLV's Annual General Meeting held on 26 November 2009 at the Geological Society

The Chairman Richard Lindley spoke of a very successful year for VLV celebrating its 25th anniversary in a way which has brought attention and recognition from the broadcasting industry, as well as new members keen to support our cause. The Silver Jubilee appeal has brought in some very useful contributions and VLV is grateful to a host of generous donors. Richard referred to the April 2009 Conference on media literacy, attended by many interested organisations and funded by Ofcom, which was a resounding success.

Through the year a popular programme of members' private visits to broadcasters round the country continued. Three times VLV members went to Westminster to question successive Secretaries of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Conference in Scotland and annual Conference on Children's broadcasting were both highly successful; and at BAFTA in October VLV celebrated 25 years not just of VLV but of great British broadcasting.

VLV Board members have worked diligently on our responses to Consultations, held frequent meetings with Ofcom, the BBC Trust, the DCMS, and the broadcasting industry, and given evidence to Parliamentary Committees.

VLV is also leading a coalition of like-minded organisations to campaign for plurality, so that public service broadcasting is not left entirely to the BBC. 2009 ended with VLV campaigning against the proposal by the Secretary of State to overturn the ban on Product Placement in UK-made TV programmes, which seems to us a most serious threat to the integrity and reputation of British broadcasting.

Not since its foundation has VLV been so needed and so important in the battle to maintain programme quality as the UK goes digital. Richard expressed deep gratitude to the VLV Board, Trustees and staff and to all our VLV members for their enthusiasm and commitment.

There were changes in the VLV Board of Directors. Professor Maire Messenger Davies, Mr Robert Clark

and Mr Norman Green stood down but were eligible and willing to stand for re-election. Mr. Clark was later appointed Hon. Secretary. Four members were proposed and elected: Professors Jeanette Steemers and Bob Usherwood, Ms Sophie Chalk and Mr David Eggington. A vote of thanks was proposed and endorsed for departing VLV members Professors Sonia Livingstone and Ivor Gaber and Mr Laurence Pawley. A vote of thanks was also proposed for Mr Richard Lindley for his wholehearted commitment throughout the year as Chairman.

MEMBERS' FORUM

After the VLV AGM there was a very useful Members' Forum which enabled members to raise questions of policy on key issues and VLV activities. These included suggestions to hold some regional conferences; greater use of e-mail to canvas membership views; the use of radio in small communities; and some issues relating to the provision of equipment for deaf and blind people.

Hugh Peltor

Two new directors

David Eggington is a seasoned VLV member actively engaged in consultations, particularly on the future of local and regional media. He is currently helping to organise a VLV event in the North.



Sophie Chalk is a broadcasting producer director with her own company, Director of Campaigns at the Independent Broadcasting Trust and a lecturer for One World Media.



Voice of the Listener & Viewer (VLV) represents the interests of viewers and listeners as citizens and consumers and works for quality and diversity in British broadcasting. VLV is free from political, sectarian and commercial affiliations. VLV is concerned with the issues, structures, institutions and regulation that underpin the British broadcasting system and in particular to maintain the principles of public service broadcasting.

CHANGES AT THE TOP OF VOICE OF LISTENER & VIEWER

Richard Lindley comments

Over the last year and a half as Voice of Listener & Viewer's Chairman I've had the job of telling the broadcasters and regulators, the programme makers and politicians, what VLV stands for and why our members care so much about British broadcasting. It's been a great privilege, and I like to think that we have got the message across that just because broadcasting is going digital does not mean that we are going to abandon our determination to support high quality television and radio programmes.

But there's no denying the many different pressures that threaten that quality, and the time it takes to see that VLV is fighting them all effectively is very considerable. A voluntary post as Chairman that we all thought would keep me busy for at most two days a week has turned out to be a virtually full-time job: I'm in danger of neglecting prior commitments as chairman of a housing charity and governor of a hospital trust. As a result I am stepping down as VLV's Chairman a little sooner than I had expected.

The process of appointing a new Chairman is already under way, and I am very pleased indeed that John Clark, a former Board member and now a VOLT Trustee, has agreed to hold the fort meanwhile as Deputy Chairman. Few people know VLV's business better than John does, and he has always been a doughty champion for VLV.

I'd like to take this opportunity of thanking our distinguished President and founder Jocelyn Hay, our Treasurer Hugh Peltor, our office staff Sue Washbrook and Linda Forbes and my colleagues on the VLV Board and The Voice of the Listener Trust for their



Richard Lindley (left) with Culture Secretary the Rt. Hon. Ben Bradshaw at a VLV Westminster Evening Seminar in the House of Commons on 3 November. Richard welcomed Mr. Bradshaw to his first VLV event and a capacity audience in the Grand Committee Room. During a lively question and answer session the Minister responded on a wide range of issues, including the Digital Economy Bill, BBC funding and digital switchover.

support; also Sandy Chalmers, Susie Gilbert, Vincent Porter and Bryher Scudamore. They have all worked with tremendous energy and goodwill with me to see that VLV continues to flourish, and I am very grateful to them all. Thanks too to all our members who have urged me on at our Conferences and other events to fight for the best of British broadcasting. I have so much enjoyed my time as Chairman of VLV and I intend to remain an active member of this great organisation.

John Clark responds

I am flattered to be asked by the VLV Board and VoLT Trustees to fill the role of Deputy Chairman of VLV Ltd whilst we face the difficult task of replacing Richard Lindley as Chairman. I have had a long and rewarding association with VLV including many years on the Board and am delighted to be able to help further at this time.



As Jocelyn Hay has said in a statement released to the press we are immensely grateful to Richard for leading VLV through one of its busiest periods ever, a time of intense activity and change in the media industries. It was a period which also included celebrations to mark the first 25 years of VLV's campaigning — on behalf of listeners, viewers and new media users — to maintain the principles of public service in broadcasting.

Richard threw himself into VLV's affairs from the start, generously sharing his energy, enthusiasm and experience as a broadcaster. He was unstinting in the time and care he gave to

leading and representing VLV, and promoting the cause. We are all grateful to Richard for agreeing to continue offering *pro bono* advice to the VLV Board on news, current affairs and communication matters. I am also delighted that he will continue his long-term membership of VLV.

This year looks like being an even more demanding and busier year for VLV. The Digital Economy Bill is progressing through Parliament, the transition to an all-Digital TV UK is well under way, Channel 4 and ITV face further financial problems and the BBC continues to confront attacks on its management and funding.

VLV will be active on all these issues through its Board and loyal membership. The Spring programme includes VLV's 27th annual spring conference, voting for VLV's 2009 Awards for Excellence in Broadcasting, and the 2010 Student Essay Competition.

Our high level of activity will require the full attention of the Board and the generous support of members if we are to continue the momentum. As the only organisation continuously pursuing listener and viewer interests at many levels, I believe this momentum is essential. So I look forward, with the Board's support, to continuing VLV's tradition of campaigning for quality, diversity and impartiality through editorial independence in British broadcasting.



l-r Leanne Rinne, Jean Mackenzie, Alex Thomson, Channel 4's Chief Correspondent, Priya Kharbanda, Jonathan Crane

THE CAMPAIGNING VOICES of younger listeners and viewers were celebrated when four student-writers received awards at VLV's Autumn Conference for their incisive and considered thoughts on the future of Public Service Broadcasting. As prizewinners in VLV's 2009 Student Essay Competition, the four contributors were congratulated for progressing the debate.

The outright winners — **Jean Mackenzie** in the Postgraduate section and **Priya Kharbanda** in the Undergraduate section each received cheques for £250 from **Alex Thomson**, Channel 4's Chief Correspondent. Supported by The Voice of the Listener Trust, the cash prizes are provided by Channel 4. Both winners and runners-up — **Jonathan Crane** and **Leanne Rinn** — enjoy work placements.

The essay subject was: *'What is important about Public Service Broadcasting and how should it be funded in the 21st Century?'* Jean Mackenzie of Teddington, Middlesex, who studied for a post graduate Diploma in Broadcast Journalism at the London College of Communications is working as a freelance journalist. She will spend two weeks with Tiger Aspect in London. Priya Kharbanda, from Glasgow, is studying law in London and will spend two weeks with Scottish Television.

Jonathan Crane of East Molesey, Surrey, a student on the same course, is freelancing and about to start a contract in Paris. In the spring he will spend two weeks with Roger Graef's Films of Record. Leanne Rinne, from Cheltenham, is studying journalism at Sheffield. She will have her placement with Ragdoll Productions.

ALEX THOMSON'S COMMENTS

After the prize-giving, Alex offered the Bulletin some personal thoughts

Alex found the VLV conference a fascinating event but felt that too much time had been given to the BBC and issues such as the number of Promenade Concerts being screened, and too little to the current crisis in public service broadcasting: how to fund the provision of news across the English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and in the longer term, national and international news and current affairs on Channel 4.

He pointed out that neither issue had been addressed at the conference either by **Jeremy Hunt** or delegates, even though Mr Hunt claimed it was a broadcasting sector he cherished. In Alex's opinion, the immediate need was for a public debate about the future of C4 and ITV News.

Richard Lindley's reply

Alex made a plea for finding a way to fund public service broadcasting (specifically news) outside the BBC. VLV could not agree more — and we are leading the campaign for 'plurality' in the Citizen's Coalition for Public Service Broadcasting.

This Conference focused on the BBC because the Government wants to 'top-slice' BBC licence fee money to help pay for this rival commercial service. We want to find new money.

Channel 4 Chairman, Lord Burns, was not able to speak at this conference however, he has agreed to address VLV members in 2010.

STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION 2010

We're setting a real challenge for this year's VLV Student Essay Competition by asking young people learning at university level, to consider how the flowering of independent online journalism from blogs to special interest sites will impact on the work of trained journalists. Does the success of independents undermine or increase the need for traditional news providers like the BBC and Channel 4?

Happily, Channel 4 is again providing the cash prizes — £400 for the winner in each category. The two winners and two runners-up will also benefit from two weeks work experience.

We are delighted that news presenter **Jon Snow** will present the prizes at our Autumn conference.

VLV invites entries from students studying for a UK registered undergraduate or postgraduate degree, or similar professional qualifications, on the following subject:

In the world of internet blogging, anyone can produce a news story? Assess this view in relationship to the standards demanded from professional journalists and explore the prospects for traditional news providers.

Entries to be submitted as a written essay of a maximum 2000 words by June 1, 2010. Details and an entry form, which must be completed, are available from vlv.org.uk or in writing enclosing an SAE.

Shyama Perera

IN 2009 VLV RESPONDED TO NO LESS THAN TWELVE CONSULTATIONS — by Ofcom, the DCMS and the BBC Trust

VLV's response to the BBC Trust Reviews of BBC 1, BBC 2, BBC4 and the Red Button Service

In our last mailing we asked members to respond to the above reviews. Thanks to all who wrote and to the small teams who collated our response, summarised below.

Voice of Listener & Viewer believes the BBC remains a unique cultural institution, greatly admired in the UK and around the world. Through its programmes and services it provides a range of fascinating material to inform, educate and entertain. VLV also believes that the Licence Fee is still the best way to sustain the BBC's independence, important not just to broadcasting but to democracy itself.

This response has given VLV an opportunity to think hard about the quality of these channels and services, and ask how good they now are.

BBC 1 is seen to be meeting a very wide and demanding remit: 'The full remit for BBC1 seems to us to be beyond the scope even of Renaissance Europe. As viewers, it seems that BBC 1, with variations over time, meets these challenging targets reasonably effectively'.

BBC 2 provokes a more critical response. Although 'VLV believes that, compared with the alternatives, BBC 2 still provides value for money...' There is a feeling 'that the channel has gone downmarket, and perhaps moved away from its original high ideals'.

BBC 4 receives more enthusiastic support: 'BBC 4 is a distillation of the BBC mission. It can be compared to a vast library which is life-enriching'... 'It is my regular channel'... 'It is as close as any other service to meeting the ideals and values of public service broadcasting' were comments.

On the Red Button service some say it is 'usually good', others find it 'distracting', and more don't use it at all.

BBC Questionnaire

Concern that quality may have been slipping is reflected in responses from VLV members moved to write in response to the BBC Trust questionnaire. Dissatisfaction with a BBC perceived to be too often abandoning the highest programme standards in pursuit of ratings should not be ignored. Nor should

these critics be written off as old-fashioned and out of date. The number of older people is growing: it would be foolish for the Trust to think their views can safely be discounted.

These criticisms made, VLV members are among the BBC's most loyal supporters. 'The BBC is a fantastic national institution — please look after it'. VLV urges the BBC Trust to redouble its efforts to do so.

Robert Clark

NO TO PRODUCT PLACEMENT

In its response to the Government's new consultation, VLV strongly opposes lifting the ban on product placement in television programmes made by or for UK broadcasters. In our view it is vital to the health of British broadcasting to maintain the clear separation between advertising and content — the hallmark of British-made programmes since the advent of ITV in 1955. (*Product placement means payment to a broadcaster or producer to feature a product or service in a programme. The existing ban is on product placement on all BBC output, all programmes for children and news and current affairs coverage, even if allowed in all other TV programmes.*)

As former Culture Secretary **Andy Burnham** said last year: 'there are some lines we should not cross — one of which is that you can buy the space between programmes on commercial channels, but not the space within them.'

Far from adding to 'authenticity', as some in the television industry have argued, product placement destroys trust; and the more 'subtle' the more likely the viewer is to be deceived. Product placement is surreptitious advertising, and ought not to be permitted in UK-made programmes.

Already damaged standards

VLV is deeply concerned at the present poor financial state of our commercial public service broadcasters, which has already damaged programme standards. We fully understand why these companies are looking for new sources of revenue. But product placement is not the way forward. As well as being wrong in principle it is highly unlikely to make up the shortfall in advertising revenue. Ofcom estimates that revenues from product placement are unlikely to top £25-30 million after five years. Even these low figures ignore the likely result — a corresponding reduction in income from programme sponsorship and spot advertising.

VLV recognises that product placement already exists, most obviously in American feature films and television series, but we see no reason why Britain

should lift its present ban. To do so would be to destroy our reputation for honest programme making which gives British programmes their high reputation, and erode the trust viewers place in the programmes they watch. It would undermine Ofcom's primary regulatory responsibility to protect the interests of the viewer as citizen and consumer. To sacrifice an important principle on which British commercial television was founded for uncertain financial gain is wrong. VLV urges the Government to abandon this ill-advised proposal. **Robert Clark**

MORE FREE-TO-VIEW EVENTS SHOULD BE LISTED

Under EC law member states can, if they choose, draw up a list of sporting or other events considered of major importance to society, which should be made available on free-to-air television. (*Free-to-air means no payment for reception beyond the licence fee and cost of receiving equipment, and broadcasts capable of reaching at least 95% of the UK. It covers the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 and the Government has maintained a list since 1956.*)

Other things to enjoy

The DCMS is consulting on the current list, following an independent report published in November 2009. VLV supports the principle and considers the list should include other key events as well as sport. There are many things in the life of a nation that people want to enjoy as they happen.

At present some sports are only available on subscription channels. Since the 1960s live broadcasting of sporting and other national occasions on television has been the place where the UK comes together — high points so significant that their coverage on free-to-air television must be guaranteed. Not at the whim of a television station scheduler or only available on a pay-to-view service.

We consider all sporting events where national teams or players are involved should be on the list. We would also include all royal and state occasions, national and European elections, key cultural events and national happenings that command a reasonable audience.

It is particularly important for those members of society isolated by age, infirmity, income or geography to be able to join in these events on TV. For many this is only possible if broadcast free-to-air.

This consultation ends on 5 March. *If you wish to comment write to Listed Events Consultation, DCMS, 2-4 Cockspur St, London SW1 5DH, and send a copy to VLV.* **Robert Clark/JohnClark**

VLV's Autumn Conference

Both keynote speakers at VLV's Autumn Conference in November offered fresh thoughts on the topic of the moment: *The End of the BBC's Licence Fee Monopoly?*

Mark Thompson (right),

Director General of the BBC, talked optimistically about *Beyond 2012 — The Future of the BBC*. Taking a look at commercial broadcasting both here and around the world, he asked himself: 'Is it possible to believe that if you took the BBC away you would end up with anything other than a big black cultural hole?'

That was why the BBC 'has an absolute duty to impartiality', he said. This was 'now regularly disputed with well-intentioned and serious minded people'. There was also a vigorous attempt to suggest that 'strong comedy and satire were somehow unacceptable in the public space'.

Hunt — 'Choice can drive up quality'

After lunch **Jeremy Hunt** (right), Shadow Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport — introduced by **Tom Bradby** of ITV

— said that the Conservatives had not only founded the BBC but introduced competition for it. Today it faces serious competition and 'choice can drive up quality'. He is

'a big supporter of Channel 4 — Dispatches v. Panorama.' He said that with Reality programming quality and competition had been broken. But advertising income was down drastically, which was 'catastrophic' for viewers. Local media was also being lost and that impact was starting to bite: 'We need to act fast — it's a responsibility for decades to come — and take serious action' he said. He is convinced that 'identity' is important: why did 'Birmingham Alabama

Another BBC duty is to stand up for creative freedom and ambition: 'It's what the public want from us. What we believe in'

He noted that the digital assault on PSB was happening across the developed world and attracting 'plenty of political activity'...but 'in Britain we are different — there's a tradition of UK politicians accepting and honouring the independence of the BBC, and other PSBs.' However 'none of this should be taken as an argument for the *status quo*. BBC independence is not there to stand still, but so it is better able to serve the public, and where necessary adapt and change.'

The Strategy Review will set out a template for a more focused BBC and 'first and foremost a quality strategy. Emphasis on the best journalism in the world, high quality programmes, children's services...' It may point to a smaller BBC in some respects, but no less confident, he said.



local rather than regional levels: 'There is no TV structure in county or city.' And he saw a role for community TV, but it would need local

networks. 'New technology has massively reduced the cost of news, but we must find a model that works'. He would like: 1. To remove regulation on local media ownership allowing more convergence: 'No monopolies are as stable as they used to be'. 2. To develop a new local TV sector. The government wants to subsidise this through the licence fee — 'a disaster because it undermines competition'.

Carol Cattley

appearance and gave some assurances on the funding of his department.

Among the mix of speakers **Ben Williamson** of Futurelab drew attention to young people as participants and creators, able to remix 'mashups'. **Alex Evans** of Media Molecule explained that participants in PlayStation's *Little Big Planet* were 'making' rather than 'playing', and **Marc Goodchild**, BBC Head of Interactive

SCOTLAND

Success for Gaelic Television

VLV places particular emphasis on promoting quality and diversity in British broadcasting so we warmly welcomed the decision to proceed with the new Gaelic digital channel from August 2008. BBC ALBA is the Gaelic language television channel available on Sky and Freesat and via BBC iPlayer. It aims to serve both those who are Gaelic speakers, interested in Gaelic culture, identity and heritage, and to promote Gaelic issues across English-speaking Scotland. We believe the stimulus given to cultural and educational programming has already helped to improve English services and the BBC to more fully meet public purposes.

The go ahead for BBC ALBA was conditional on a review taking place before digital switchover in Central Scotland and the Highlands in 2010. This was undertaken between October 2009 and January 2010 and examined the service's progress to reach beyond existing Gaelic speakers and provide quality educational programming. It also examined future strategy for BBC ALBA considering the merits or otherwise of making space available on Freeview so that BBC Alba could be viewed by more Scots.

In its evidence to the review, VLV supported the aims of BBC ALBA and argued for its inclusion on DTT Freeview, noting that BBC evidence showed the channel scored highly on approval rates and that non-Gaelic speaking viewers outnumbered its target audience by three to one.

Matthew Hibberd

and Online, also stressed the positives of encouraging creativity with the internet.

Hamish McPharlin equipped 15 families with the newest technology and his research had indicated that while shared and 'live' viewing decreased, total viewing increased. **Matt Deegan** showed how Fun Kids Radio has geared to appeal to children of the digital age.

Alex Nagle of the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre provided sobering information on problems involving children using adult social sites.

Peter Johnson, British Board of Film Classifications, saw a potential regulatory gap. **Rebecca Newton** of Crisp Thinking and **Tamara Littleton** of eModeration explained methods of moderating the internet. **Kate Bulkley**, journalist and chair, gave an encouraging summing up.

Lewis Rudd

VLV's CHILDREN'S CONFERENCE

'Children are digital natives, adults are the immigrants' — is how Professor **Tanya Byron**, the keynote speaker, characterised the situation at VLV's November conference on Children's Media, which examined the growth of new media for children and how it is being used. **Joe Godwin**, the BBC's new Director Childrens, made his first public

Letter to the Editor

DAB Radio

In the Autumn Bulletin, Robert Clark expresses some reservations about the proposed switch from FM to DAB radio. Here is another one:

I understand that a digital radio uses significantly more power than an analogue one. Now that we are becoming aware that we all need to reduce our energy consumption as much as possible, this is surely a step in the wrong direction — quite apart from the energy used in manufacturing all the new sets (and the environmental impact of dumping all the old ones).

Fiona Vincent

St. Andrews, Fife

Letters do not necessarily represent the views of VLV and may be shortened for publication.

Deadline for next issue:
12 March 2010

Write, fax or e-mail your letters to the Editor at: info@vlv.org.uk

Book Review

EUROPEAN MEDIA IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by Richard Rooke

London Pearson Longman £24.99

At first this may seem like a student textbook. It is well worth a purchase by both Bulletin readers or your local library, if the latter still has funds to buy books!

Richard makes accessible some of the daunting issues and processes involved in EU politics in the context of regulation and media legislation.

It quickly becomes apparent that the tensions between those who view the media as a business and profit market oriented approaches are privileged, as opposed to the arguments advanced in favour of public service values and funding models, which see the media as being about culture, quality, range and diversity.

The EU structures seem to reflect UK ones, with their culture media and sport department being mirrored in one directorate general and the business department being reflected in another.

Curiously it is the EU and its concern for national and regional identities which may — in the end — be a useful way of helping to ensure the survival of the British broadcasting industry and preventing it going the way of the British film industry — but we will see. So readable and useful. What more can you ask of a book?

Robert Beveridge

VLV's visit to the BBC Research Department at Kingswood Warren

Matthew Postgate, Director of Research, and **Judy Parnall**, Head of Knowledge Management & Development, welcomed 15 VLV members to a fascinating visit to Kingswood Warren, Surrey last autumn. Matthew outlined the past, present and future of engineering research at the BBC. Kingswood Warren was closing in 2010, its staff being split between Shepherds Bush and Salford Quays. It emerged that with the demise of TV's research facilities, the BBC was the only organisation undertaking broadcast research for UK plc. The need for open technical standards was stressed by VLV members, to provide genuine choice for consumers and free access.

In the laboratories, **Andrew Parland** explained work to enhance Audience Experience and how the Internet could be used to carry additional programme information to the viewer, including simultaneous subtitles in foreign languages. New techniques will instruct

mobile phones how to select the most important part of the picture for their small screens. **Graham Thomas** demonstrated Production Magic and how moving images can be inserted into television scenes, for example in weather forecasts. The BBC is now able to use pictures and graphics to analyse live sport video such as football action, and move back to the live match without the viewer noticing. This will be used extensively at the Olympics to cover athletics. New techniques also enable 3D pictures to be generated from 2D images.

Chris Noakes and **Phil Layton**

explained problems of maintaining picture quality in Freeview HDTV transmissions. The BBC and other PSBs might not be able to transmit high specification HDTV signals due to lack of Freeview bandwidth. The problem could be solved apparently if they were allowed to use one of 14 RF channels released when Digital Switch Over is complete. The intention is for all 14 to be auctioned by Ofcom, so UK HDTV could be of a lower quality than that transmitted in the rest of the world.

Norman Green

A fascinating visit to the BBC's Natural History Unit



A highlight for VLV members who visited the **BBC Natural History Unit** in Bristol in October was the chance to see the studio where **Kate Humble** and **Chris Packham** present *Autumn Watch* (see photo), and meet production staff.

Tim Martin, Executive Producer, explained how the NHU worked and that sometimes up to four years research and planning went into making blockbuster series. **Andrew Jackson**, new Head of the Unit, anticipated an even more exciting future with HD, time lapse photography and constantly new techniques.

Members learnt about the philosophies and ambitions behind programmes. **Michael Gunton**, Executive Producer of

the *Life* series narrated by **David Attenborough** explained the enormous care, research and sometimes danger that went into making these big-budget international productions. **Tim Schoons**, on the other hand, explained that *Spring Watch* and *Autumn Watch* were designed to be accessible and to involve audiences, especially children.

Their websites are enormously popular and an essential extension to the programmes. Their use has led to an explosion of interest in conservation and wildlife, with all sorts of valuable spin-offs involving young people and old. One of the most successful and enthralling VLV visits ever.

Jocelyn Hay

Advertisements

Please refer to VLV when responding to advertisements. VLV Ltd cannot accept any liability or complaint in regard to the following offers. The charge for classified ads is 30p per word, 20p for members. Please send typed copy with a cheque payable to VLV Ltd. For display space please contact Linda Forbes on 01474 352835.

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Diary Dates

Wednesday, 28 April

Strictly Public Service Broadcasting — Creative Freedom and Ambition?

The VLV Spring Conference will be held at the Geological Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1 (opposite Fortnum's). 10.30-5pm (registration and coffee 10am). Keynote speakers Alan Yentob, BBC Creative Director, and Lord Melvyn Bragg.

For tickets and enquiries please contact: Linda Forbes
tel: 01474 352835 email: linda.forbes@vlv.org.uk or visit www.vlv.org.uk

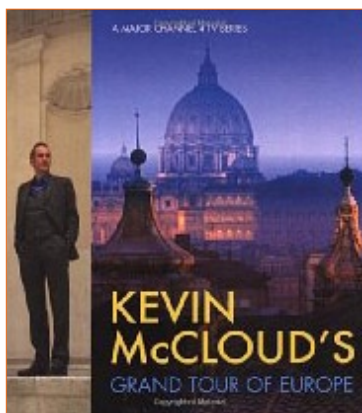
Visits to Broadcasting Centres

VLV organized four visits for members and guests round the UK in the last quarter of 2009. We shall again be arranging a programme; meantime we would be glad to hear from members with suggestions as to venues they might like to visit, especially outside London. Please write to Sue Washbrook at VLV PO Box 401, Gravesend, DA12 8FY or e-mail Sue.Washbrook@vlv.org.

RARE BBC HANDBOOKS FOR SALE

BBC Handbooks—1928 to 1988—complete collection for sale. best offer over £500 sent by end of February 2010 to thkendall@phonecoop.coop or telephone 0207 485 4870. Purchaser must collect from London or pay for delivery.

WINTER COMPETITION



WIN A COPY OF KEVIN McLOUD'S GRAND TOUR OF EUROPE

Published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson for Channel 4, price £25.00

Following the TV presenter in the imaginary footsteps of Inigo Jones, Christopher Wren, Robert Adam and the origins of the Classical Revival.

Q: Did Andrea Palladio come from Venice, Florence, Padua or Vicenza or Piacenza?

Replies on a postcard to WINTER Competition, VLV, PO Box 401, Gravesend DA12 9FY or by e-mail to info@vlv.org.uk by 15 March. The winner of the Autumn Competition for *BREAD* was **Mrs E. Thornton of Bury St. Edmunds,**



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