



A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Multi-award-winning documentary filmmaker and investigative journalist **David Hart** (OE1953-60) started his career in feature film production. Here, he recounts some of his early experiences on his way to BAFTA recognition.



I was keen on sport at Emanuel and represented the school in athletics, particularly sprinting. I was a member of Lyons house and also got involved in house cricket and rugby. I really didn't enjoy boxing, however, and managed to get out of it by becoming the official timekeeper for all bouts. The ability to avoid pursuits that I didn't enjoy was a mainstay of my time at Emanuel. I didn't like the Combined Cadet Force, but I joined the Air Squadron (RAF section) which involved less marching and parading. Later, when the school opted to do the Duke of Edinburgh Award, I was quick to sign up as it was held at the same time as the CCF. I successfully played both sides against each other and told them both that I was at the other. To avoid being caught, I would sometimes just pop home.

I was an enthusiastic mathematician, geographer and historian at Emanuel. I made some wonderful friendships and was influenced by some inspiring teachers including English master, Jack Cuddon. The Head of French, Tom Graham, helped to set up some work for me as a language assistant after Emanuel and I got the opportunity to work on a film in Les Mans. As soon as I saw the film being made, I was hooked.

I was one of the less celebrated students of the London School of Film Technique. I saw myself as a filmmaker of great dramatic works. Hence, whenever there was a school break (of which there seemed to be many), having managed to wheedle a union ticket, I would try to get a job as a very junior assistant director on whatever production would have me.

Even I realised how green I was on the opening day of my first production, *The Saint*. I was given the job of helping to organise the communication for a scene where a helicopter flew down towards a quarry and picked somebody up. When I asked the First Assistant Director how I should do this, he told me there were a set of walkie talkies in the boot of his car. I collected them and took them to the sound department. "Yes, we certainly know how they work but the electricians claim it is their job so you'd better take the walkie talkies to them." So off I went to seek out the electricians, who said it was indeed their job "but we have no idea how these things work." So I put the walkie talkies back in the boot of the car and we used flags.

During the second production I worked on in my holidays, *The Great St Trinian's Train Robbery*, I learnt that the relationship between the assistant directors and actors could be either very good - or very bad. My first day was dramatic, if only because I was roundly turned on by one of the cast, Dora Bryan, who let out a string of obscenities at me even though I had never met her before. When, in a state of shock, I asked the Second Assistant Director what her problem was, he let out a series of obscenities that matched hers. They obviously hated each other. She spent the whole production complaining about all and sundry and him in particular. But the Second Assistant Director had the upper hand. He would often call her in first for makeup at maybe four or five in the morning and then leave her waiting for her first scene until well into the afternoon. I certainly learnt the nature of power in the film industry but I'm not sure she ever did.

My next two productions were of altogether different quality and demands. *A Man for All Seasons*, directed by Fred Zinneman, and *2001 - A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick, were wonderful to work on and are considered film masterpieces today. We had our production party for *A Man for All Seasons* on the day England played Portugal in the 1966 World Cup on 26th July. We had a TV playing so that we could follow the match during our festivities. When England scored, Susannah York grabbed me and gave me a great big hug and kiss on the cheek. She was very beautiful - a couple of years older than me - and I didn't wash my cheek for a week!

Zinneman and Kubrick were very different types of people and nowhere could this be seen more clearly than in their relationship with their male lead actors. Zinneman loved watching Paul Scofield act. He would often let the scene continue two or three minutes past the point he wanted to end at, just because he gloried at what a wonderful actor Paul Scofield was. He would stand in rapture after he called "cut", just soaking in Scofield's genius.

Kubrick, on the other hand, only seemed to be interested in himself. He directed Keir Dullea as if he were a puppet, telling him exactly how to move his head or where to look at a particular moment. He was given no scope to develop the part himself. Kubrick had the reputation of being a control freak and nothing I saw in the two months or so of filming convinced me of anything different.

I was fortunate to work on several outstanding parts of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. My favourite was the section towards the end when Keir Dullea's character looks over his shoulders a number of times and each time sees himself 20 years older. The make-up for him at 80 and 100 took nearly 12 hours to complete. We would call him in to start doing make up at about 2am and he would not be ready to shoot until the afternoon. As the filming would go on to quite late into the evening and Keir Dullea had to be back for 2am again the next day for make-up, I'm sure he was exhausted by the end of filming the sequence. But it was not a consideration in Kubrick's mind.

After all this wonderful exposure to feature filmmaking, I was at the end of my college career and ready to embark on feature film production myself. But things in life often choose their own path. I was also interested in politics and a series of events hooked me like a giant magnet. I was fortunate to make a film with John Schlesinger, Harry Saltzman and Wolf Mankowitz about the Arab Israeli War in 1967. This was followed in April 1968 by being asked to cover the death and funeral of Martin Luther King in Atlanta for the BBC's Panorama. I also went to Nigeria and Biafra in 1968 and, despite the horrors, I was firmly smitten by investigative journalism and documentary filmmaking.



I spent ten years on *World in Action* and then took on projects like the *Spanish Civil War*, *Mersey Blues*, a series about Liverpool detectives; *The Traitor King* about Edward VIII and *The Trust*, a series about the National Health Service in a hospital in Nottingham for which we won a BAFTA for Best Documentary Series, to name but a few.

I made two or three dramas and even feature films including *Gas Attack*, which won several prizes including the top award at the Edinburgh Film Festival, but they were the exceptions. I spent most of my 40-year career in current affairs and documentary filmmaking.

Am I sad that I didn't spend much more of my time in creating stories? I think not - if for no other reason that by and large documentary filmmakers and investigative journalists, in searching for truth, are rarely involved in the petty infighting that seemed to consume parts of the feature industry.

My advice to anyone wanting to get involved in filmmaking is to keep your options open. The world continues to change at a rapid pace and new jobs are being created all the time. You must never give up; there will be setbacks but these can create new opportunities.

