

# KLASSIC HAUS RESTORATIONS



## **History of the 1964 Sir Adrian Boult/London Symphony Orchestra Associated-Rediffusion film**

As related by George Douglass (printed here by permission):

I'm a 69 year-old ex-broadcast television engineer (that's what they called me, I prefer technician!) I worked for Thames Television at Teddington Lock in South-West London between 1977-97.

Thames were an ITV contractor responsible for broadcasting to the London and local region. ITV were the commercial television service for the UK.

I'm afraid the ITV structure was made complex and got worse before it got better.

Going back to 1955, that's when ITV was formed. It was designed around 5 large companies and 8 smaller ones. The "Big 5" would provide the bulk of programs, the rest would provide local news and sports and regional programs.

It mostly worked because of the small size of the UK, and its strong regional identities.

In 1968 the ITA (Independent Television Authority) became unhappy with the output of two companies. ABC Television and Associated-Rediffusion, they had a very complicated arrangement of swapping scheduling and overlapping regional output.

The ITA didn't like this and brought an end to it. It forced the two parent companies of both contractors to setup a new company, Thames Television.

ABC were given 51% of the shares in Thames, A-R the rest. ABC came out of this quite well, they just changed the signage at Teddington and staff were fired and re-hired on the same terms and conditions.

A-R not so good, they were forced to give their Wembley London studios to a new company London Weekend Television. They retained the Midlands region but lost the part London region. It was pretty ugly, and the ITA threatened to close A-R down if they didn't comply

Messy isn't it! This was before my time and the dust had settled when I joined. Important thing is both ABC and A-R kept their identities, its often reported that they merged to form Thames. They didn't, Thames was a new company, though its history is that of ABC Television

It's confusing and caused more confusion later!

All went well at Teddington till 1992 when it lost the five-day week franchise to Carlton Television. Thames bid too low in the auction. Carlton would start broadcasting New-Year's Day 1993. Thames decided to become an independent program maker, that meant Teddington site was needed.

Teddington had three studios of varying sizes where the majority of programs were made. The outside-broadcast garage bought themselves out and carried on doing mostly horse-racing. The transmission centre on Euston Road central London was wound down and eventually went back to the landlord.

Over 500 staff were made redundant over the next 18 months, a small staff were to keep the place working till independent productions came in.

That's the background, glad that's over!  
The main player now comes in.

TTI (Thames Television International) was a wholly owned subsidiary of Thames. They were responsible for all sales of Thames programs outside the UK. With Thames losing its franchise and not making programs anymore, TTI had lost its access to new content.

They went back through the Thames library and found that many 2" tapes had not been dubbed onto a more modern format. This was 1993 and we had gone through the open-reel 1" format and were now onto cassette.

TTI set up a Format Transfer area, not an archive just straight dubbing and keep it simple. They decided on the Panasonic D3 format, mostly because the BBC had selected it after they did some research on the various digital types then available.

Format Transfer had two Ampex AVR2 2" machines, each driving two D3 and two S-VHS. I was put into this and was on my own for a few weeks till an ex-Thames colleague joined and we got it working full speed.

Eventually another ex-Thames joined and I went back to the main VTR area. It worked happily for many months and by agreement if there were any "difficult" tapes they would be left for me to sort out when I was on week-end shifts.

These were tapes that had severe drop-out that could sometimes be fixed by making multiple passes and dropping the best recording into the D3 dubs. Time consuming and wasn't worth slowing down the main transfers, so they were put to one side.

I said above Thames Euston site went back to the landlord, well, Sir Adrian enters. All video tapes were either on a machine, in the local library, in Security Archive or travelling between. Not this 2", it had been sitting in the "bits and pieces" cupboard/shelf that all vtr areas acquire. Not for transmission, but nobody wants to throw them away. Could have been camera tests, auditions, off-air recordings as back-up, lots of reasons.

This tape arrived direct to Format Transfer and left for me. It had no paperwork at all, no bar-code from the library, just "The LSO with Sir Adrian Boult 1964" in magic-marker on the box label.

I made a normal dub with two D3 and two S-VHS and put those to one side till I had talked with TTI Technical Manager. I knew then it wasn't a Thames Production, they didn't exist in 1964. Obviously, it had to be an ABC recording...

But why was an ABC recording at Euston Road, that wasn't built till 1969.

I didn't think there would be a problem with this, we had ABC material come through before.

Unfortunately, TTI could find no record of either the LSO or Sir Adrian making any recordings at ABC Television Teddington Lock.

These were sales folk and without definite proof of copyright they didn't want it. I asked if I could contact the LSO. Definitely not, came back. What shall I do with the tapes? Send them back to Security Archives.

They had never been in SA. If they were given a new entry and logged in, they would be forgotten. Thames were typical ITV output, sit-coms, light-entertainment, drama. You would never go through their library looking for classical recordings.

I waited a few weeks and put the 2" and D3 into the Format Transfer system then sent all into Security Archive. At least they would be logged with that project. I also made another D3 copy and kept that in Format Transfer.

The Format Transfer area had been running about 18 months and we had dubbed all 2" format onto Panasonic D3. Very few problems and the only anomaly was the Boult tape.

I could see TTI's point of view, it wasn't a Thames tape or production and the only thing to do with it was put it in the archive and forget about it.

Everyone thought it was an ABC recording that had not gone into their library. Very unlikely, but we couldn't come up with anything else.

ABC Television existed as a business entity for holding shares and the company still held copyright for their own productions.

I was starting to realise that this tape would probably never come out of the archive once it went in. TTI couldn't sell it, they wouldn't wipe it, but it wouldn't be used.

So it was left till I had to move base. By now I was working in transmission and the latest owner wanted all transmissions on one site and my new base was central London. Realising I probably wouldn't be back at Teddington, I copied the D3 to Sony DigitalBeta format. I'd recently been on a training course for the machine and Sony give you an hour-tape to use. This I kept at home.

Was in a dilemma now, I couldn't send the tape to the LSO, they'd want to know where it came from (I thought). My new employer probably wouldn't be interested, except that I stole from my last one. Eventually a solution would appear that didn't involve me losing my job, so I waited. After twenty years my responsibilities had declined, and I contacted the LSO in 2017. Philip became my contact and I like to think we are friends. He had never heard of the recording, which was a disappointment. I'd thought the reaction would be "we thought that was lost". When he went through the LSO performance diary, he found the entry for 11<sup>th</sup> February 1964. It was for Associated-Rediffusion at Wembley, Studio five.

It was an A-R tape, not ABC.

In a way this was even more mysterious, what was an A-R tape doing in VTR dept. at Euston Thames? I've joined a few Facebook groups to find an answer but no luck. Tapes did travel between ITV regions for time-shifted transmission, but they always wanted them back! The timeline is odd too. The recording is in 1964, it is at Euston no earlier than 1969. Where was it in between?

I should mention my good friend and colleague Leslie Cates (Les). I've known Les since I started at Thames and he is a better engineer than I never was, and still calls himself a technician. Although I kept a Sony DigiBeta copy of the tape, it was useless without a machine to play it on.

It became obvious that tape was being replaced with video-servers in broadcast tv a lot faster than anyone had expected. Operating costs of course. I wanted to get it onto a DVD before tape machines disappeared completely. I couldn't do it, tape machines were busy with transmissions, it would attract attention if I connected a DVD recorder to one and started playing the LSO...

Luckily Les was in Electronic Maintenance, and nobody bothered them! He was working on a DigiBeta, brought in his own DVD recorder and successfully copied it across. That DVD is the master I made copies from and sent one to Philip. He tells me he has retrieved the DigiBeta, and is waiting for Kaleidoscope organisation to reply regarding collection.

Rationalisation happened to all the ITV studios after the 1993 franchise changes. It was politically motivated, but the politicians rapidly lost interest. Teddington Studios became the victim of its own success. You can see in the panoramic it's a residential area. No room to expand or space for scenery storage.

It wasn't close enough to London theatreland to get easy access to performers, but not far enough out to take advantage of lower costs. Amazing it lasted so long really. The Pinewood-Shepperton Group bought it out in the 2000's, but even they couldn't make it pay. The riverside offices were rented out and that was the beginning of the end. The site was sold to property developers and that was that.

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