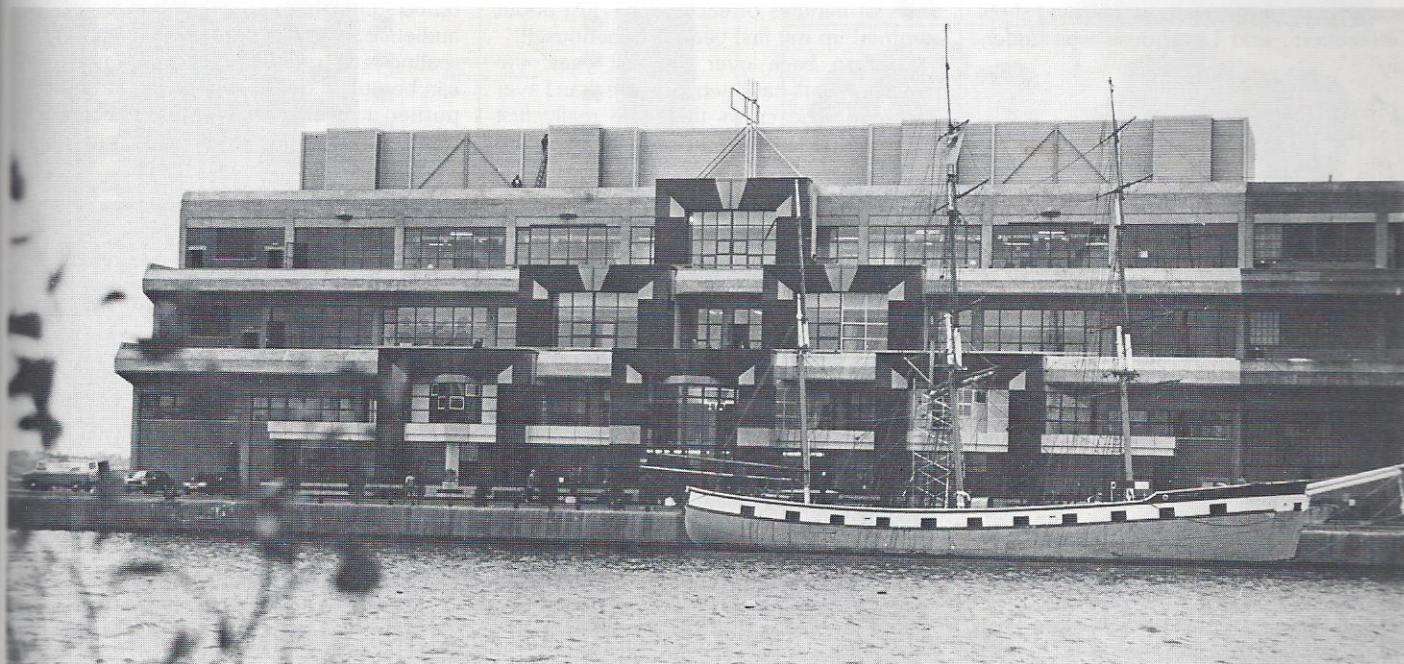


Limehouse Studios

Martin Hawkins, Deputy Head of Cameras at Limehouse Studios, compares his working life in a facility company with the broadcast company he left behind.



Limehouse Studios – Studio One on the left. 'The sloop John D' – restaurant and bar to the right.

In 1981, when Southern Television were preparing to hand over operations after the loss of their franchise to TVS, there were some doubts whether the new company would take over the old Southern studios at Southampton. With the possibility of an empty complex, some of the Southern management considered operating the studios as an independent production centre. Although the studios were taken over by TVS, the idea of an independent production centre had taken root . . .

It was February 1983, and I was at London Weekend Television sitting on my pedestal in studio 5, and reading. It's a very common position to be in, LWT crews will know what I mean, and for those of you who don't I was operating camera 2, a caption camera on ITV's World of Sport, but that day was unlike any of the previous Saturdays. This time I was reading a brochure about the new Limehouse Studios and trying to decide whether to leave the safety of the ITV network and all my friends at LWT and move out into the big and competitive world of the facilities companies to join Limehouse. It

was, I think, the hardest decision I have ever had to make, for believe me, it is a very different world to ITV.

In the end I decided to go (I think it was in the middle of wrestling – or was it in the results sequence?!) Anyway, a gut feeling told me to leave LWT and move on. After a successful interview, some four months later I was writing out my resignation in the camera office at LWT late one Sunday evening still wondering about many things: just what will Limehouse be like? (after all it was still only a building site): what would be the differences between ITV and a facilities house?: would there be any location work?: who else would I work with and what would they be like?: what would the standard of shows be?: will they even *get* any work? There were of course many other questions, and time alone would answer them. I knew only too well that ITV would be around next year, but will Limehouse? As its income doesn't come from commercials, they would have to make programmes to survive. The new studio would have to attract independent producers and production companies, make programmes for them, and equally important, get them to come back!

So I left the camera section of 42 cameramen at LWT and joined a section of only seven cameramen at Limehouse. My first big shock! I was going to have to get used to seeing fewer people around. Not only in the camera department but in *all* areas. LWT employs some 1,500 people, whereas Limehouse employs about 75, and uses freelance personnel when required.

Long Hot Summer

So life started for us at Limehouse on July 4th 1983. We all met amongst a collection of portable workmen's huts and temporary offices on a sun drenched building site at the end of Canary Wharf in the heart of London docklands. For about the next six weeks this was to be our home – and a boat. We have a boat called 'The sloop John D' which has now been converted into our restaurant and bar, and is moored outside the studio entrance. I must just mention here 'the boat people' (the catering staff) whose smiling faces are always the first to arrive, last to leave and who look after us all so very well. During the building of the studios the camera department seemed to become 'head of guided tours' and would show people around. We had to walk round during those

early weeks with those crash helmets on, the kind you have to wear if you're on the front of the crane at BBC TV Centre – I can't imagine how you get headphones on as well!!! I think we must have been the only camera department *without* any cameras! But by August our eight cameras had arrived, and with studio two finished we were into our first production, 'Harry's Christmas'.

I shall always look back with very fond memories of that long hot Summer, as it was a time of getting to know new people, barbecue evenings on the side of the quay watching the sun go down over the city: Big Mac and film nights out in town: unpacking all the new equipment as it arrived, plus it was also the last opportunity to spend any length of time at home with the wife!!!

The darker evenings were drawing in and it was during November that Studio One became operational with our opening show 'Celebration', and Limehouse was under-way.

Camera Section

The camera department at Limehouse consists of only seven people as I mentioned earlier. There are five operators and two camera assistants. Michael Lingard is head of visual services (Cameras and Lighting Departments), there's myself who's deputy head of Cameras and Tony Keene (all three of us ex LWT). Simon Morris (ex BBC TV Centre and 'the bar') – he's still known as 'wrecker' BBC chaps, and finally Chris Saunders (ex Zoom TV) who is our fifth operator. We five are looked after by two hard working camera assistants Derek Penell and Philip Piotrowsky.

The first year at Limehouse has seen many productions for Channel 4, single programmes and series: The Business Programme, Chips Comic, Years Ahead, Black and White and Read All Over, and Treasure Hunt. Dramas included: Winter Sunlight, West, Home Video, C. Q. and Tropical Moon Over Dorking. The situation comedies were Dream Stuffing and Relative Strangers starring Matthew Kelly. A D.I.Y. programme called Low Tech, about how to turn everyday rubbish into useful household furnishings. We shot two productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Moliere and Cyrano de Bergerac, starring Derek Jacobi. An opera, Julius Caesar, and a This is Your Life which we recorded for Thames just after their strike last year. With the Royalty Theatre where they normally record the programme committed to another show, and as all Thames studios were full, Limehouse was able to help out. There's been a number of industrial videos and programmes shot for some of the larger car manufacturers like Ford, Austin Rover and Saab. Theatre productions brought into the studio include a dance programme – Run Like Thunder, Kipling, and the National Theatre's production of Hiawatha, shown on C4 last Christmas. Rock and Pop music came in all different styles: Rebellious Jukebox, produced by Godley and Creme, combined sketches and music from a band on stage in a club playing to a live audience, concert style – Supersonic for Mike Mansfield. Zero One, a Breakdance programme,

Streetlife, mixing fashion and live rock music. Six one hour live music programmes in a concert style setting, built in the studio, called Rock 'n the Dock. Finally in a class of their own a Max Bygraves Singalong Special for video cassette, and an Emma Thompson comedy special.

We've also transmitted 'live' to Channel 4 with Who Dares Wins . . . and C4's New Year's Eve show called 'Julia Live' directed by Brian Izzard, using six cameras in the studio, four studio cameras, one portable on a lock off w/s and the other in the gallery for 12.00 midnight when the whole of the production team linked arms and did 'Auld Lang Syne'. Finally, three cameras outside at the end of Canary Wharf for a firework display! I've never worked before on New Year's Eve, it was probably one of the most sober ones I've ever had! Working right up till 12 midnight and then into 1985, the last and first minutes of each year – just about summed up my first year at Limehouse!!!

Looking back over the last year, the variety of work has been far more than I ever imagined. The crews there are really first class, the productions have been of a very

high standard and there's been a fair amount of location work, with single camera shoots for dramas and the L.E. shows plus ENG units shooting around the UK, America and Belgium. With all my earlier questions now answered, I really haven't looked back – I don't get the chance!!! Although I left behind a lot of friends at LWT, Limehouse has given me a new lease of life.

Tech. Spec.

Talking technically for the moment, at Limehouse there are two studios, each having their own identical production, sound and lighting galleries as well as a large client room overlooking the production control room. The vision mixing desks are the Grass Valley 300 with Quantel 5000P and Aston 3 character generators available in each studio. Studio one is our largest at 6,500 sq.ft. It has a cyc height of 26ft and an audience seating rostra for 300 people. The seating is all moveable on hover pads and can be pulled out for any audience show or pushed away to leave the studio floor totally clear. Studio two is 3,000 sq.ft. and its cyc



Martin Hawkins with a NEC camera on a location shoot for 'Winter Sunlight'.

height is 18ft. The lighting set-up is again identical in each studio. It's based on a Rank Telestage system of self climbing hoists with 34 in Studio two and 69 in Studio one. Each hoist has two lamps, and each lamp is a pole-operated double-ended light called a 'Giano'. It is a hard lamp one end using a dual wattage 1¼, 2½, 3¾kW lamp and a 1-5kW soft lamp at the other end. These lamps are supplemented by 2kW pups, 5 and 10kW lights, 5kW soft lights and a few par cans.

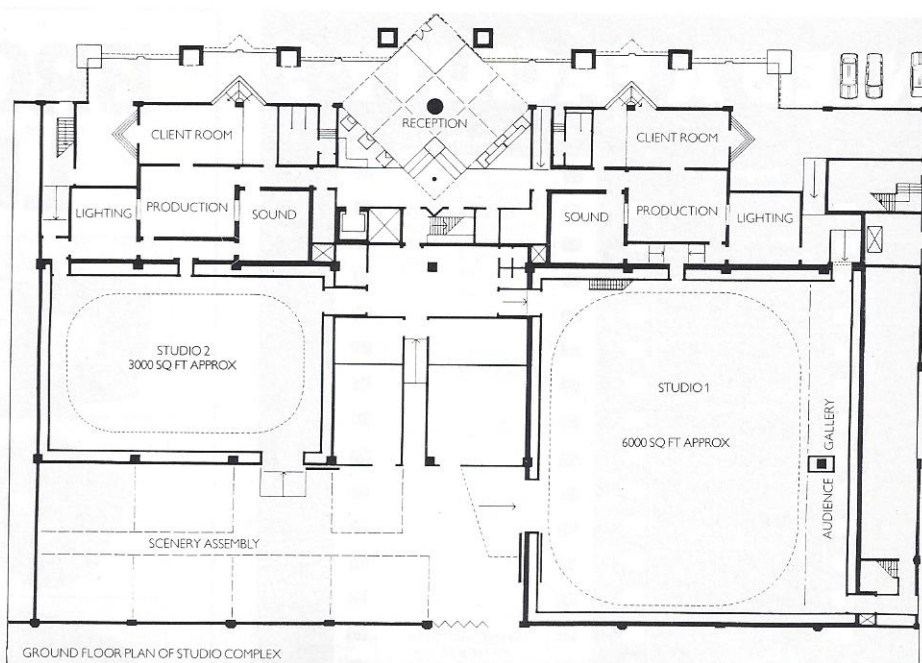
The cameras we have are 6 Link 125 studio cameras – we're taking delivery of a seventh – and two NEC82A portables. The eight cameras are divided up between the two studios, therefore each studio can have a minimum of one camera or a maximum of eight! Normally though it's been three or four in studio two and four or five in studio one, but it really depends on each production, there's no set amount. We've had a number of one or two camera drama shoots, shot 'film style', while on other occasions we've used seven cameras on a show. One particular day I remember last summer we were using four cameras in Studio two on *Treasure Hunt*, we needed five cameras in Studio one for a rock music show – *Streetlife*, and we had a portable out on location with *Low Tech*. The total meant 10 cameras, so we hired a couple of Sony 330's from Viewplan Broadcast, and Dolphin arms from Vinten and cabled them into the system.

Link 125

About the Link 125 camera, I must say that I think it is a really comfortable camera to operate. The nearest one yet to the old EMI 2001. Our six 125s all have Canon 14-1 zoom lenses and are mounted on Vinten Fulmar peds, with a mixture of fluid 7 and mk 3A heads. A push button on the panning handle for external viewfinder is the only mod. we've done to them ourselves. I now wonder how we ever coped on a John Kaye Cooper sit. com. without them, matching T.M.S. TVs beware!!! At long last my right hand can start concentrating on the focus handle! (No jokes please crew). The choice of the Link 125 camera was made before the Limehouse camera crew were taken on. I believe that Limehouse asked several other cameramen to test various models and decide which of the new cameras they preferred. They all chose the Link 125. It is in my opinion a real cameraman's camera. By the way, the pictures from it are also quite nice!!! The two lightweights are NEC 82A's, imported by Link as a good match for the 125. Each one having a set of Hi and Low legs, large V/F and a Ronford Baker fluid 7 head. The lenses on the portables are Fuji 14-1 zooms with a 31/2-1 as an alternative.

Location

Away from the studios for a moment, as I mentioned earlier for a studio that wasn't going to do any, we have completed a fair amount of location work. It wasn't too long before we realised that studio based shows occasionally need location shot material. So we built a frame on a small trolley which housed the 1" portable VTR, colour monitor, CCU and scope. We would take out our NEC portables when they were required and a Ford Transit van would then transport crew and equipment to the location. Being able to



follow a production through from the studio shoot to the location, apart from being very satisfying for all members of the crew, must surely be a real added continuity bonus. Being able to carry on that bit of style that you started in the studio, I believe can only add to the quality of the final production. We're now about halfway through our first long running series, *C4's The Business Programme*. Thirty, 45 minute shows transmitted on Sundays at 5.15pm. It's a studio based show with about 35% location ENG material. Shot on our new Betacam unit, we crew it with a lighting cameraman, sound recordist who now uses a small SQN 4 way mixer and then feeds the output into the Betacam, and a spark on a 4 weekly rosta. I think Betacam is a wonderful system and must surely be here to stay. We completed a mod. on the back of the recorder part of the camera to allow it to take a Sony BP90 battery instead of those NP1s which don't really last any time at all. It's this sort of variety, a month on ENG with the *Business Programme*, then a couple of months back in the studio or location shooting inserts for some of the other programmes that is so very important to me, and should be to any other cameraman as it does not allow you to get stale at any one particular type of television camerawork. I do appreciate that it isn't that easy to do all this work in some of the ITV companies, and certainly not at the Beeb, but that's where a smaller section and studio set-up like Limehouse will make and is making camerawork far more satisfying and enjoyable – for me anyway.

Back indoors, each show will have a pre-production planning meeting to sort out all the technical requirements for that particular show. I may have to organise Dolphin arms, cranes or filters if needed. It's a job usually done at LWT by the production or location managers. Having felt very removed from that part of camerawork and now having to undertake the job myself, I don't consider it any extra work but just part of my new job and I feel far more involved and satisfied for it.

Where the Difference Begins

But the biggest difference I've found in

moving from a traditional ITV company to a facilities house is in working for 'clients'. No longer are you going into 'the factory' to do your day's work, you are now working for clients who expect the best, producers and directors who have come to Limehouse with their own show, and naturally you don't want to let them down. You need them to come back. They are, if you like, our commercials and licence fee. Without them we'd be out of a job. Work has now become much more of a commitment, and I don't mean that lightly, the hours each day are much longer. Having two studios and location units to look after, but in effect only one camera crew, we've been jumping from Studio Two one day to Studio One the next while at the same time cleaning, boxing and returning hired equipment, possibly loading a location unit, completing order forms and timesheets, rigging the studio, and most important of all, eating breakfast, and all before 0900 line-up! Something else I've noticed since my move is that there isn't the clockwatching that goes on in so many Broadcast companies. At Limehouse, like so many other facilities houses, if a show has to overrun it does. You have a commitment to that client and their show, it has to be finished. No longer, therefore, can you bank on going out to dinner or to see a film. Nowadays there always seem to be so many more jobs to do before the end of the day and we all go over to the boat to the bar...

At Limehouse, the studios and equipment are our livelihood. They have to work and work well. I'm sure most cameramen in other facilities houses, maybe those in the network companies and freelancers as well, cannot see anything wrong or different in working like this, but these are just some of the differences that I and the rest of us in the camera department at Limehouse have experienced since our move out of the ITV network and BBC, and into the world of the independents over our first year.

If any Guild members find themselves in London and would like to come over and see us and have a look round, please just give us a call. We'll be pleased to see you and give you a tour... including the bar! ●