



Introduction

In the early days of the web site I found myself corresponding with increasing numbers of folk, either offering me material and encouragement or asking me for information. The "Newsletter" was the result of one of those flashes of inspiration you get just before you drop off to sleep (and usually forget when you wake the following morning). This one stayed, and saved a lot of me repeating myself over and over to different people and forgetting who had been told what.

In those early days I sent the news out as a simple e-mail to an ever growing

list of e-mail addresses of folk who had e-mailed me about Michael Bird or the web site in general. However the explosion of spam e-mail in the last few years, and the introduction of spam protection by web providers, meant that mass circulation e-mails were frequently rejected.

I have therefore elected to use a mailing list service. It requires "double opt-in" on the part of the recipient before adding their e-mail address to the list. Register to receive future editions using the registration box on either the welcome page or the News page.

Dave Rice

NEWSLETTER #001

[23 August 2002]

I have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of interest generated by my Michael J Bird tribute web site and overwhelmed by all the good wishes. I planned to "plug" the web site in Radio Tellyscope - the magazine of the [Programme Preservation Society](#) - but that is yet to happen. People are finding the site via the search engines and the friendly, helpful feedback is very encouraging.

We all have busy lives, and although the internet and e-mail are wonderfully useful they represent yet another drain on our time. The fact that you were sufficiently interested in Michael Bird to take the time to e-mail me suggests that you may be interested in hearing more about the man and his work. You could waste a lot of time visiting the web site looking for fresh material. I could waste a lot of time repeating myself in e-mails as new people get in touch, losing track of who I've told about which particular development. A newsletter seemed like a good time saver.

There will be no publication schedule - this is an "as and when" production, "as" there is something worth saying and "when" I have the time to say it! I will jot things down as they crop up and when there is sufficient material to make it worthwhile I will shoot it off and start working on the next one.

"AUTHORISED SITE"

I have told many of you already but I am still "buzzing" from the fact that Olive Bird, Michael's widow, has agreed to help fill in some of the gaps surrounding Michael's life and work and has sanctioned the web site so it is now "authorised". As I said to Olive, it means little to anyone else but a great deal to me.

She also supplied photographs of Michael, which I have uploaded to the web site, and lent me a great deal of other material - all of which should make for an interesting and fitting tribute site. (All I need now is a nine day week to pull it all together.)

MAELSTROM

Satu told me there is a great deal of interest in Maelstrom in Finland - with people "in Finnish chat rooms" looking for videos of the series so they can watch it again. It is one of the few Michael Bird creations I have not seen and no-one in the PPS seems to have it on video.

Olive leant me a copy of the BBC Press Book for the series and Jeff from Canada sent me a copy of a map of the locations featured in the show that he got from Bente Saxon the official "Norwegian Liaison Officer" for the series. I have scanned both items and uploaded them to the site.

The really big news, though, is that Olive Bird does have Maelstrom on video and very kindly had a copy made for me. The copy quality is fine so I should be able share it (once I have had a chance to watch it myself!)

WHO PAYS THE FERRYMAN?

Only recently discovered that there was a commercial BBC video (presumably in the 80's) of Who Pays The Ferryman? It was edited down (effectively losing three episodes worth of story) but it would still be a nice item to have. Since the BBC seem to be digging through their archives currently and re-releasing stuff on DVD now might be a good time to write and suggest they give Ferryman the DVD treatment.

If you can spare the time drop a line to the

"Commissioning Editor" at
Woodlands
80 Wood Lane
London
W12 0TT

Bird's novelisation was published again last year by a Greek publisher (there must presumably be a market amongst British tourists in Greece) and Fred in Holland tells me that the soundtrack CD has been re-released by EMI Greece. Anyone going to Greece for their hols? (My wife and I are planning to go to Elounda next year to celebrate our 25th Wedding anniversary.)

SPECIAL BRANCH

Michael Bird wrote three episodes of Special Branch which were all chosen out of heaven knows how many episodes for release on the two commercial videos they did of that show. For more on the SB series (and Michael's contribution) - take a look at the [SB Web site](http://www.mjbird.org.uk) run by Werner from Germany. (Aren't we a cosmopolitan bunch?)

PHOTOGRAPHS ANYONE?

I have finally (4th time of asking) had a response from the BBC concerning accessing photographs from their stills library.

They have a selection of pix from all Bird's series. The bad news is they charge £40 as a "research fee" plus a charge per still. I am getting more details from them but as it stands it is a no go. The web site is not a commercial venture and no way could I justify spending £40.

BUT, depending on how it works, it did occur to me that some of you might want to put in a combined order and split the cost between us - someone (Brenda?) might want a couple of shots from Ferryman, Jeff or Satu may want a still from Maelstrom, I would want The Lotus Eaters etc. Just a thought. (And of course you would all - out of the kindness of your hearts - let me scan the pix for the web site before passing them on to you!!!)

NEWSLETTER #002

[22 September 2002]

Correction and apology first. I gave an old URL for Werner's Special Branch web page last time - it should be:

http://www.mediagems.mynetcologne.de/01filmtv/sb_engl.html

WRITING CREDITS

I have had a great deal of fun in recent weeks spending my lunch hours at the central library in Liverpool digging through back copies of TV and Radio Times rooting out details of the episodes Michael Bird wrote for the various series with which he was connected. Research is very seductive - you could easily spend all your time researching and never get around to writing. I found myself going off at a tangent to learn more about Mr Rose (of which I have fond memories) and Brett (which I had no recollection of seeing but which sounds really good).

I have still got some "digging" to do for The Onedin Line and The Brothers. Both series ran for years, and it's a needle in a haystack job. Likewise General Hospital, which bounced around all over the ITV schedules. It has been distressing to see how others before me have mutilated the reference copies of the magazines - whole pages ripped out, bits hacked out with razor blades, even whole issues gone in some cases. It means I can't be sure I've got everything.

See the "Screenwriting" page of the web site.

If anyone can add anything from their wider range of interests please do (any Brothers fans out there!)

I have also been adding to my store of knowledge about the other series Michael wrote for YTC. Does anyone have "The Outsider" or "West of Paradise" on video?

WANDA VENTHAM

After the last newsletter Martin Hearn of the [Programme Preservation Society](#) told me that Wanda Ventham had declined a request for an interview for "Radio Tellyscope" because of bad experiences with misquotes etc. Since Wanda had played Ann Shepherd in The Lotus Eaters, Martin suggested I approach her from the "authorised" Michael J Bird web site.

It seemed like a good idea - and it was! I wrote asking a number of questions about her involvement in the series and scrounging

<http://www.mjbird.org.uk>

photographs. I am pleased to report that Ms Ventham also regarded Michael J Bird's work very highly and she agreed to co-operate. She wrote back answering many of my questions finished her letter ...

"Forgive my rushed scrawl but I'm off to Greece in two days and I wanted to answer just some of your questions before I left ... I just haven't time to research any pictures of LE now - maybe when I get back in a month"

which sounds rather hopeful.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Heard nothing more from the BBC about photographs but Brenda Merrigan has offered to do the chasing ,so if anyone else is interested in a "bulk" purchase (see last newsletter for details) then e-mail Brenda:

brendadzuka@hotmail.com

VIDEO COPIES

I recently added details of my video collection to the FAQ's section of the web site.

As ever - if anyone can add anything to what I have said then please let me know.

I followed my own advice last month and wrote to the BBC Commissioning Editor of DVD and videos suggesting they release some of Bird's stuff on DVD To date I have had no reply but if any of you get an answer then please let me know what they say.

I know a number of you are awaiting copies of videos from me. Be patient - at the last count I have 37 hours of shows to copy! Unlike a friend of mine who has two videos permanently hooked up in his home, I have to borrow my son's video - which means unscrambling a mass of cabling involving play stations, mega drives etc and then re-routing his Sky connection - then set up in the lounge. Invariably that incurs my wife's displeasure.

I tend to wait until my wife is at work. She works Saturdays every so often and when she does I have a Taping day. (Two Saturdays coming up in October.)

NEWSLETTER #003

[5 October 2002]

VIDEOS

I have made considerable progress on the video front:

Since the last newsletter, I have copied 26 of the 37 episodes

4 - Last Lotus Eaters tape for Olive

6 - Maelstrom for Jeff

6 - Maelstrom for Satu

6 - Maelstrom for Werner

4 - First Ferryman tape for Joke

Which leaves

4 - Second Ferryman tape for Joke

4 - Lotus Eaters for Chris

3 - Last Lotus Eaters for Werner

The end is in sight

(Of course since then Andy Jago has asked me for a copy of Maelstrom!)

WEB SITE GUEST BOOK

The web site seems to be averaging about 40 hits a week, but I get very little feedback in the way of e-mail messages. (Of course the 40 hits may just be one sad person visiting it six times a day!)

Anna suggested adding a guest book, which would be another way of encouraging feedback, so I have signed up to one of the "free guest book" hosts and will give it a try. Feel free to leave your mark - for good or bad!

After only two days it has already added a couple to our little circle. (And whether she intended to or not, Joke added a handful when she copied me in to her e-mail about the Ferryman video.)

PHOTOGRAPHS

Great news on the photograph front. Olive Bird sent me a package last week with the message ...

"I have come across a number of photographs taken on set for some of the series which may be of interest to you together with

three of Michael. I don't want them back so do whatever you want with them."

... and enclosed were ...

6 @ 10x8 b & w from Lotus Eaters

8 @ 7x5 b & w from Aphrodite

1 @ 10x8 b & w of Bird on set with Vere Lorrimer - producer of Dark Side of the Sun

26 @ 10x8 b & w from Dark Side of the Sun (yes that is 26!)

1 @ 10x8 b & w from Maelstrom

1 @ 6x4 colour of Bird with Ann Todd from Maelstrom (clearly contemporary with the picture of Bird on the web site index page).

3 @ 10x8 colour from Maelstrom

1 @ 6x4 b & w of Bird taken "on Hydra" (?)

I will be scanning them all and uploading them to the site over the next week or two. Some of you may have noticed that I have already begun adding "Picture Galleries" to the relevant pages.



NEWSLETTER #004

[9 November 2002]

PRODUCTION CREDITS

You know what a "sad" individual you have become when you find yourself, as I have recently, sitting in front of the video with the remote control freezing each frame and copying down the end credits of a TV series!

The end result is that I have uploaded production credits for most of Bird's series. It made me smile when my son Michael asked - "why don't you just get it off the Internet?" These days kids assume everything is on the net (and it often is) but I pointed out to him that this particular information wouldn't be on the Internet if I didn't put it there! I think he took the point but he gave me one of his "pitying" looks.

THE OUTSIDER

Olive kindly sent me (out of the blue) videos of The Outsider - the first of Michael's series with YTV, starring John Duttine. I had never seen it (though I had read the book) and it has been great fun watching it. Another great series now accessible to a wider audience.

MICHAEL SHEARD

Actor Michael Sheard appears in The Outsider. He also played Von Reitz in Dark Side of the Sun. Thanks once again to the good offices of Martin Hearn of PPS I have been in touch with Mr Sheard and he has agreed to share with us his experiences of working with Michael Bird.

He already told me one (hopefully first of many) interesting titbit. If you've seen (and remember) Dark Side of the Sun - in the final reel Sheard's "Von Reitz" (until then a creeping, toady sidekick) suddenly reveals a steely side to his character and takes control of the cult, while everyone else runs round like headless chickens. It is a defining moment for the character - you realise there is a lot more to him than you thought - and it was all a fluke!

"Although I knew Vere (Lorrimer - the producer) very well, I know that Michael was very instrumental in my casting. The last episode was running short and he wrote that extra scene where I took over,

especially for me. Very nice man - we exchanged Christmas cards every year. "

DARK SIDE OF THE SUN

More pix scanned and uploaded to the picture gallery.

VIDEOS

I recently copied Ferryman for Judith who floored me when she said a search company in the US had quoted her \$150 for the first tape plus \$100 for each subsequent tape - if they could manage to find it! The PPS (and Olive and her neighbour) have saved us all a fortune!

FERRYMAN

Speaking of Ferryman - any musicians among you might be interested in the sheet music for the theme (it was in a neat little promotion pack issue by the Beeb in early 1978 when they got all excited that it was in the charts). See the Ferryman page on the site under "Music" (where else?)

I have also scanned and uploaded a couple of colour pix from a 1977 Radio Times.

MAELSTROM

I was delighted earlier today when a tentative approach I had made to the Tourist Office at Alesund brought back a really friendly, supportive and informative response from Bente Saxon (Norwegian liaison officer for Maelstrom). Bente gave me lots of useful quotes about the effect the series had on tourism in the town and says "Michael was a very good friend of mine. .. we kept in touch regularly up until his death last year."

NEWSLETTER #005

[7 December 2002]

DARK SIDE OF THE SUN

Another handful of pix scanned and uploaded to the picture gallery (only a few more to go!)

THE APHRODITE INHERITANCE

Anyone with a copy of the novelisation of "The Aphrodite Inheritance" might be interested to know that one went up for sale on E-bay recently and fetched a staggering £17+. (My copy cost me £1 from a charity shop in Poole.)

VIDEOS

A couple of you are waiting for copies of videos. I will gladly do them for you - it may just take a few weeks!

THE OUTSIDER

After an amazing piece of detective work Martin Underwood has cracked the mystery of where they filmed The Outsider - the location of the fictional Micklethorpe was Knaresborough and we have the photos to prove it, when I get around to uploading them to the site.

MAELSTROM

Bente Saxon has proved to be a wonderful source of information on "Maelstrom". She has lots of photos she took during the filming - I have uploaded some to the web site and there are more to follow. Bente also sent me a copy of Bird's original story outline and a production script for Episode Three. When I finally get around to writing it it should make for a much more interesting review of that series.

SCRIPTS

On the subject of scripts, Olive Bird found a box of papers in her attic with some of Michael's original scripts. She has loaned me three so far - "The Madison Equation" from Journey to the Unknown, "Double Exposure" from Special Branch and "Bridgehead" from Secret Army.

CAMBRIDGE RESIDENTS

I know a number of you live in and around the Cambridge area. The Cambridgeshire Journal has scheduled my feature about the life and work of Michael Bird for the February issue. You'll recognise the illustrations (and a lot of the text!) from the web site. The editor was so pleased with it she has asked me for other suggestions for features - any suggestions, please, from you Cambridge residents!

Finally I would just like to wish you all a good Christmas and a fun filled New Year.

NEWSLETTER #006

[14 January 2003]

TREVOR BAXTER

Actor Trevor Baxter, who played the "doctor" role in both Dark Side of the Sun and Maelstrom, is the latest to help me with memories of Michael Bird and his work. I'll be using Trevor's information in upcoming reviews of those two series. I have already added his comments about Michael to the "Tributes" page of the web site.

THE APHRODITE INHERITANCE

With the publication of the latest edition of Radio Tellyscope (the PPS magazine) I have uploaded my review of The Aphrodite Inheritance to the web site. (I may be revising it in the near future since Alexandra Bastedo has agreed to speak to me about her memories of Michael Bird and of filming the series!)

CONTACTS

Wanda Ventham, Michael Sheard, Bente Saxon, Trevor Baxter, and now Alexandra Bastedo all seem genuinely pleased to help. The hard part has been knowing where to contact them. Spurred on by my success I have written to Patrick Mower (c/o Emmerdale) to Brian Blessed and Art Malik, (c/o their respective agents), and to Betty Arvaniti (thanks to Anna Pereboom). I would love to get in touch with others - Peter Egan, Jack Hedley or Stefan Gryff, for instance. If anyone has any contact details (or can suggest possible leads) please let me know.

MAELSTROM

Torsten Thierbach must be the world's No 1 Maelstrom fan. I have added Torsten's memories of the show to the "Tributes" page. Bearing out what Judith said recently about the cost of buying tapes of these shows Torsten tells me he tried to buy Maelstrom from the archives of GDR television and they wanted US\$100 per episode!

Incidentally Torsten tells me that in Germany the show was called "Eine Unheimliche Erbschaft" which he says translates as "An Uncanny Inheritance". Anyone know of alternative titles to any of the other shows?

SCRIPTS

Olive Bird has loaned me four more scripts – "Somewhere in A Crowd" from Journey to the Unknown, "Safe Conduct" from Quiller, "A Family Affair" from The Expert and Michael's episode of The Fourth Arm (no title – just Episode 9).

JOURNEY TO THE UNKNOWN

Another PPS member has just copied for me three "Journey to the Unknown" episodes written by Michael Bird. It is good to know they still exist. The video tape is in NTSC format – which I can play but unfortunately cannot copy.

QUILLER

Reading the script prompted me to add a "Quiller" page to the web site. (Ultimately I intend to have a page about each of the series Michael wrote for, with links to other resources about the particular show.) There is a link to the "Quiller" web site and I have sent them a copy of the script.

PAUL TEMPLE

I have also added a "Paul Temple" page.

THE WINNING STREAK

And I have added some details to the "Winning Streak" page.

NEWSLETTER #007

[10 March 2003]

BIOGRAPHY

Following publication of The Cambridgeshire Journal piece I uploaded the feature as a new Biography section on the web site.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Uploaded some more about the 1988 film, Out Of The Shadows, starring Charles Dance, which was Michael Bird's last produced work. It had a fascinating genesis. I managed to track down a commercial video of the film on E-bay. It is in NTSC format, which seems to play fine on my VCR (fortunately) but I can't copy it (before anyone asks!).

ACTOR CONTACTS

A lot of developments in the last month or so in my quest to contact the actors who worked with Michael Bird. I wrote to Peter Egan's agent and Egan rang me. Anna tracked down a current address for Greek actress Betty Arvaniti (of Ferryman and Darkside) and an approach resulted in an e-mailed tribute to Michael. Olive gave me an address for Godfrey James. He and Michael were great friends. He is going to do me a tape of his memories. And Stefan Gryff is so keen to help he is talking about visiting me in Liverpool to talk about his work with Michael.

It was also good to receive an unsolicited approach from an actor in Darkside of the Sun who stopped by to sign the guest book!

LOTUS EATERS

Darren Giddings sent me scans of the four page Radio Times feature for the first screening of Lotus Eaters and I have added it to the LE page.

MAELSTROM

Maelstrom remains the most often remembered of Bird's series. Judith Kay tells me that she and her family were so taken with the show they holidayed in Alesund the year after it was screened.

"When we went in the footsteps of Maelstrom, in 1986, we sailed on the Coastal Steamer from Bergen to Alesund, and we have a home cine film taken as we sailed into Alesund,

with our children (then 11, 8, & 6) singing the Maelstrom theme tune!"

WHO PAYS THE FERRYMAN?

Recently uploaded a couple of features in Dutch about Jack Hedley and Ferryman, courtesy of Brenda Merrigan. (Anna Pereboom has translated them for those of us who can't speak Dutch!)

NEWSLETTER #008

[19 April 2003]

CONTACTS

Received an interesting letter from Joanna Dunham, giving some glimpses behind the scenes on "The Outsider". It was all the more welcome because I had very little info about that series, Bird's first for YTV.

I also got an encouraging response to an approach I made to Andrew Morgan, who worked as Production Assistant on Ferryman. He may be able to put me in touch with Bill Slater – the Producer – and also Michael Bird's agent Richard Wakeley.

DARK SIDE OF THE SUN

Finally uploaded the last of the photographs from Dark Side of the Sun sent me by Olive, and following publication of "Radio Tellyscope" Issue 19 from the [Programme Preservation Society](#) I have added my overview of that series to the web site.

MURDER

Olive recalled that back in the 60's Michael had contributed to a Granada TV series called "Murder" (a predecessor of the UK's current "Murder In Mind" series). I have tracked it down and added details to the site.

YTV

I have been fleshing out the YTV section (for which I still have very little info.) Does anybody remember seeing "West of Paradise"?

NEWSLETTER #009

[29 May 2003]

CONTACTS

Michael Bird's agent, Richard Wakeley, has been very helpful and given me a lot of useful background information which will filter into various sections of the website. After speaking to Richard, and to Andrew Morgan who handled a lot of the direction on Ferryman, I have revised the answer to the FAQ about that series. I made Andrew a set of Ferryman videos and in return he has kindly agreed to share his recollections of working on the show. Watch this space!

Stefan Gryff has also been very helpful. His character, Michael Krasakis, has always been my favourite Michael Bird creation and I was fascinated to find that after Lotus Eaters the next series was planned to be "Krasakis" – a series of stories about the Greek policeman. I have started adding Stefan's information to the web site. He is also going to share with us his collection of photographs taken during filming of the various series in which he appeared.

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN

With an assist from Colin Cutler I have added an "Out of the Unknown" page, showcasing Michael's contributions to that classic BBC series. Olive Bird lent me the script for "The Uninvited" which confirms the story about the Hammer House of Mystery and Suspense episode "In Possession" using the same script!

SCRIPTS

Speaking of scripts – in addition to "The Uninvited" Olive recently lent me Michael's scripts from "Hadleigh", "Mr Rose" and "The Blood Relation" from the Granada TV series "Murder"

THE EXPERT

I have also added a page for "The Expert". I have only found the one episode contributed by Michael so far. (Apparently it still exists in the BBC archives.)

GENERAL HOSPITAL

Added a page for "General Hospital". (All of these additional show pages are accessed via the "Work" page. By the time I have finished there should be one for each of the series Michael wrote for.)

MAELSTROM

Added a portion of sheet music from Maelstrom and an appeal for help tracking down the theme.

THE LOTUS EATERS

Added a "music" section to the Lotus Eaters page, with an assist from Steve Rawdon. Can anyone who speaks Greek please translate "Ta Trena Pou Fyghan"?

WEST OF PARADISE

A copy of TV Times covering the transmission week for "West of Paradise" came up for sale on E-Bay for £5 and I couldn't resist it. Added scans of the accompanying feature(s) to the web site – it got quite a spread.

VIDEOS

I have more or less finished copying all the videos I promised to do for people. If I have forgotten anyone do let me know!

IN GENERAL

In response to a number of requests I have added a recent likeness of me to the welcome page. I have also added a 16 year-old photograph of my daughter and I to the Lotus Eaters page – the reason will be self evident!

I tracked down a member of the PPS who has the series "The Fourth Arm" and "Secret Army" on video and he has made me copies of the episodes Michael wrote. I have also acquired a copy of Michael's Dangerman episode "Judgement Day".

Newsletter 9A

[8 June 2003]

LOTUS EATERS

Anyone who hasn't looked at the Guest Book recently will have missed Steve Rawdon's message (and offer) concerning the theme from Lotus Eaters. The theme for the series was not an original composition: it was a track from Hellepontus, an LP of music by Stavros Xarhakos. Steve writes;

"My LP of the original music was pressed in NZ in 1974 purely because the series was such a hit here In 1975 a follow up LP

was released here by EMI.... It contained an alternative version of the main LE there by Stavros Xarhakos ... I am having both LP's converted to CD. If there is interest I will have multiple copies made ... certainly of the original LP with the theme." If you are interested please e-mail Steve at rawdon@paradise.net.nz

VIDEO AND DVD

It is some time since I last floated the idea of us collectively trying to persuade the BBC to release Michael Bird's work on DVD/Video, or even repeating it on TV. Since then the level of interest via the web site has grown considerably. The website has had 1,400 hits to date and I send these newsletters to over 70 people. It might be worthwhile giving it another go. I am not suggesting a petition, but a stream of letters coming in from around the world might make someone sit up.

I don't propose suggesting a sample letter (that would be counter productive) but several "angles" spring to mind, over and above the basic approach suggesting "a series I would love to see again ... "

- surprise that the BBC did nothing by way of a tribute after Bird's death in May 2001 given the extent of his contribution to BBC drama in particular and television in general over so many years. (He had major drama serials running on BBC and ITV during the same six week period in the Autumn of 1983 – not many writers manage that!);
- the novelisation of "Who Pays the Ferryman?" is still in print and therefore clearly still catering to a market (republished by a Greek publisher a couple of years back) and the theme from Ferryman was in the top ten – twice!
- the existence of, and growth of interest in, the web site itself;
- whenever novelisations or soundtracks for Bird's series come up on E-bay they are usually snapped up;
- the (only) two videos of the ITV series Special Branch to be released feature the three episodes written by Bird;
- the enduring popularity (and bankability) of stars such as Patrick Mower and Peter Egan (for Dark Side of the Sun) or Brian Blessed (Aphrodite).

Please try to find a few minutes in the next week or two and drop a line to The Commissioning Editor DVD and Video Releases BBC Worldwide Limited Woodlands 80 Wood Lane London W12 0TT

NEWSLETTER #010

[27 June 2003]

MAELSTROM

With the imminent publication of Radio Tellyscope No. 20 I have uploaded my overview of Maelstrom, including much of the information supplied by Bente Saxon and Trevor Baxter. Also added a scan of the Norwegian version of the novelisation (courtesy of Judith Kay).

WHO PAYS THE FERRYMAN?

Ferryfan Anna Pereboom regularly holidays in Elounda, and this year she and husband Harry have had cobs of fun haring about all over the place tracking down the locations used in the series. Anna's pictures of Elounda, 25 years on, have been added to the Ferryman pages of the web site - shortly to be supplemented by a map.

I have made a number of other changes/additions to the Ferryman section. The Greek's have published another edition of the novelisation of the series (so it is clearly still selling well). Added scans of the cover of the new edition and of the booklet accompanying the Greek Ferryman soundtrack CD (courtesy of Anna) and of the sleeve from the original BBC Ferryman video (courtesy of Fred).

HOTEL ARMAGEDDON

"Hotel Armageddon" was another Michael Bird creation that never made it into production. I have added as much as I have been able to find about it to the general BBC page.

... AND SPEAKING OF THE BBC

Those of you who took up my suggestion last month and wrote to the BBC please let me know as and when you get a reply. Allan Greagsby wrote asking about "The Lotus Eaters" and got the usual reply saying that "BBC Video has no current plans to release this title on DVD and VHS" but saying his suggestion would be passed on. to the Commissioning Editors. A flock of letters from around the globe may just attract someone's attention.

NEWSLETTER #011

[October 2003]

MAELSTROM

Added scans of the Radio Times feature which accompanied the start of Maelstrom in 1985.

WHO PAYS THE FERRYMAN?

Added another Radio Times scan of a picture of Jack Hedley (courtesy of Alan Cornforth.)

Speaking of Alan, my recent message about his Ferryman video for sale on E-bay drew some serious interest - I had no idea that some of you were that fanatical about Michael Bird's stuff - you put me to shame! (If anyone doesn't know, the video sold in the end for £77! - while a subsequent video containing 2 episodes of The Aphrodite Inheritance went for £36!)

If it proves nothing else it confirms how short-sighted the BBC are not to make these shows available commercially. Other video tapes of old TV shows are coming up for sale all the time - check them out at:

http://cgi6.ebay.co.uk/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewSellersOtherItems&use_rid=archive_videos&include=0&since=-1&sort=3&rows=50

GENERAL BODY OF WORK

I have revamped the section of the web site which listed all Bird's output and split it into two separate pages - Books/Journalism and Screenwriting. The Screenwriting page has been redesigned to include little thumbnails depicting each show - click the thumbnail to jump to details of Bird's contribution to the show.

Having recently discovered a fifth edition of "The Town That Died" I have added a little routine to the "Books" page that displays all five editions, front and back covers.

HADLEIGH

Added a "Hadleigh" page, accessible from the Scripts page. I am indebted to Richard Spurr at the excellent "Square Eyed TV" for the information about Bird having scripted the Hadleigh episode "Some You Win, Some You Lose". The Granada Region TV Times omitted any writer credit for that episode. I was doubly pleased to discover

that Richard actually has the episode on video and he has kindly agreed to do me a copy.

DARK SIDE OF THE SUN

My PC has failed on me twice in the past 3 months and I have lost, part recovered, and lost again a lot of my files. Forgive me, therefore, if I have already mentioned this but I have uploaded location details and pictures for "Dark Side of the Sun", following my recent holiday on Rhodes.

I have also added scans of an interview with Bird, contemporary with Dark Side, (courtesy of Sandra Brake) and the cover of the BBC soundtrack cassette (courtesy of Jennifer Menten).

WARSHIP

I recently acquired videos of all four of Bird's episodes of "Warship". With the "Hadleigh" episode mentioned earlier, that means I now have 19 of Bird's "one off" contributions to other drama series on video.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Picked up a commercially released video of this YTV production on E-bay. Previously I had only seen an NTSC version. This one is a PAL version and was produced for the middle-east (it says on the cover.) Incidentally, today (31 October) would have been Michael Bird's 75th birthday.

NEWSLETTER #012

[December 2003]

The web site had its 2000th visitor last week. (Theoretically, of course, that could just mean one sad individual visited it 2000 times, but from the volume of e-mail I receive that seems unlikely.) Two or three new people each week seem to stumble across it and find that it stirs up fond memories of Michael's work.

Recent updates on the site include:

THE APHRODITE INHERITANCE

Added a scan of an interview with actor Stefan Gryff published in "Mix", a Dutch magazine in 1979, with a translation by Anna Pereboom. One often suspects magazines make up a lot of these supposed "interviews" but I have spoken to Stefan who vouches for the accuracy of the piece.

I have also added bios of Stefan and Director Terence Williams to the Aphrodite page.

And I (finally) have a good quality video of the entire Aphrodite series - pulled together from three different sources - a combination of UK Gold broadcasts and some episodes from the original BBC screening, courtesy of Olive Bird.

DARK SIDE OF THE SUN

I found yet another version of the BBC theme music cassette and scanned and uploaded the cover.

QUILLER

I was recently sent a (remarkably good quality) video copy of "Price of Violence" one of Bird's contributions to Quiller - the 70s BBC spy series starring Michael Jayston.

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN

And I have also been sent a good quality audio recording of Bird's story "The Uninvited" from the BBC anthology series "Out of the Unknown". This is remarkable since the BBC officially list this particular episode among the "missing".

NEWSLETTER #013

[February 2004]

FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ACTORS

Made contact with a few more of the actors who starred in Bird's series.

Peter McEnery from The Aphrodite Inheritance, Emily Richard from Dark Side of The Sun and Elizabeth Bennett from The Outsider all responded to recent approaches. Added tributes from Emily and Elizabeth to the web site.

Anthony Stamboulieh (Nikos from The Lotus Eaters) e-mailed from Canada to say he will share his memories with us when he gets a minute.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Added scans of the TV Times pages covering Out of the Shadows.

DARK SIDE OF THE SUN

Some revisions to incorporate Emily Richard's contribution and added character profiles for the major characters taken from Michael Bird's script. (The level of detail is remarkable.)

MAELSTROM

Added details of the incidental music used in the show culled from BBC production notes.

THE APHRODITE INHERITANCE

Some minor revisions to incorporate Peter McEnery's contribution

NEWSLETTER 014

July 26, 2004

INTRODUCING THE NEW STYLE NEWSLETTER

Since my last abortive attempt to circulate a newsletter as the usual (bulk) e-mail - at least half of which bounced as the spam filters around the net decided I must be a dodgy geezer - there has not been a lot of change on the website.

Olive Bird was having a clear out and her son, Michael, wrote and kindly offered me a collection of foreign language versions of the TV adaptations. I have scanned the covers and added them to the relevant pages.

Other developments are covered elsewhere in this newsletter. The big news, however, is that a chance encounter with a fellow writer has put me in contact with Viktors Ritelis. Ritelis directed half of the second Lotus Eaters series and half of The Aphrodite Inheritance and he and Bird were good friends. He has sent me several pages of fascinating reminiscences of their time working together and dozens of behind the scenes photographs.

The additional information and sheer quantity of photographs will probably take me a couple of weeks reworking the Lotus Eaters and Aphrodite pages, but it will be well worth it.

WHO PAYS THE FERRYMAN?

Anna Pereboom, my "Dutch connection", holidayed in Elounda again earlier in the year and returned with a fine collection of Who Pays The Ferryman? location shots which I used to replace some of the earlier pix. I took the opportunity to append to one of them an amusing anecdote from Andrew Morgan, who acted as Assistant Director on Ferryman.

THE LOTUS EATERS

One of Vik Ritelis'S first revelations - which was only incidental: arising from a photograph he sent me - made me realise just how unobservant I can be. The second Lotus Eaters series contains a lengthy dream sequence in which Ann Shepherd (Wanda Ventham) is repeatedly menaced by a mysterious bearded man in a white suit and sunglasses. The same man reappears later in the series as a tourist and unnerves Ann, recalling her dream. I did find the character puzzling but, even knowing as I do Michael Bird's

penchant for cameo appearances, I completely failed to recognise the writer! Vik has also given me some background to filming the dream sequence which, together with a couple of new photographs, should make for an interesting addition to the Lotus Eaters page.

The photograph now graces the entrance page to the web site (I reckoned it was due for a change.)

CONTACTING THE ACTORS

Got a short reply from Patrick Mower who apologised for not getting back to me sooner and said he was currently very busy with Emmerdale and writing his own memoirs. The implication was he will let me have something when he gets the time.

VIDEO TAPE COPIES

I seem to have been inundated with requests for copies of tapes recently. If anyone is still waiting for tapes and thinks they may have been forgotten then please drop me an e-mail

NEWSLETTER 015

August 29, 2004

THE LOTUS EATERS

I have heavily rewritten the Lotus Eaters page to incorporate information from Viktors Ritelis, a director on the second series. Ritelis's insight into the way Bird worked makes fascinating reading and he recounts a number of interesting "behind the scenes" anecdotes. I have added several new photographs to the Lotus Eaters Gallery, also courtesy of Ritelis.

Other changes include a couple of minor revisions to the Ferryman page and the addition of a Viktors Ritelis tribute to the Tributes page.

Next update should see a similar rewrite of the Aphrodite Inheritance page, since I have a lot of new information about the making of that series from Vik and a large number of location photographs. I am so grateful to people like Vik who take time out from a very busy schedule to help me make the web site such a valuable resource.

NAVIGATION

I have also made some changes to the welcome page, including a new set of navigation buttons. Before I roll them out across the rest of the web site I would welcome any feedback - especially if anyone experiences problems with them.

BROKEN LINKS

Occasionally I discover the odd broken link. Given the size of the web site these days (and to think it started as about 3 pages!) there is no way I can keep checking it so please let me know if you spot any problems. Anna Pereboom has been invaluable in this respect but even Anna can't keep an eye on everything.

CONTACTING THE ACTORS

I spend a lot of time chasing actors and crew who worked on Bird's series so it makes a pleasant change when people approach me. I recently received an e-mail from Richard Watts who had a minor role in West of Paradise, asking if I could help him locate a video of the film.

Richard, who still lives in the Seychelles, said "As you probably noticed my part in the film was rather minor. I was on the set for

probably not more than an hour. However I can say that that was one merry crew. I'm 73 years old. I would really appreciate a copy of the video which I want to leave for my grandson who is 5 now. He'll have a good souvenir of what I looked like then, in my prime, at 55."

I was only too happy to help.

NEWSLETTER 016

November 15, 2004

A NEW WEB HOST

After my free web host managed to lose the site twice in as many weeks I decided it was time I switched to paid hosting. I had purchased the domain name, which enabled me to switch seamlessly between hosts, but now I am paying for the actual web space that should no longer be necessary.

It also means we have lost those annoying adverts across the top of every page.

A few people suggested ways of raising funds – including charging for the newsletter. I have no intention of going that far, but I have added a “donations” button to the welcome page so if anyone is feeling flush this month ...

THE APHRODITE INHERITANCE

Since the last newsletter I have rewritten the Aphrodite page completely to incorporate new material from director Viktors Ritelis, and some quotes from an interview with Alexandra Bastedo, which appeared in a 1994 TV Zone (thanks to Keith Plummer for the tip-off).

Also uploaded the first batch of "behind the scenes" photographs supplied by Viktors Ritelis. (There are plenty more still to add!)

NEWS PAGE

Removed the reams and reams of text reprinting all the old newsletters on the site and replaced it with a single PDF file which folk can access if they are interested.

You will need Adobe® Acrobat® Reader™ to view it so I have included a link to Adobe downloads.

LINKS PAGE

Spent some time updating the “Links” section on the site, replacing outdated ones and adding a few new ones. Also updated the link to the “Real Lotus Eaters” (sorry it took so long Dennis!)

FAQ's PAGE

Added another Frequently Asked Question - Why are you doing all this, what got you started?

CONTACTING THE ACTORS

Last issue I mentioned Richard Watts who had a minor role in West of Paradise, who had asked if I could help him locate a video of the film.

I was contacted recently from New York by a friend of Barry Halliday (who played the luckless Barry Collier in "The Aphrodite Inheritance"). As a birthday surprise for Halliday his friend was trying to track down a copy of the series. Needless to say he now has a copy and in return he promises that he will get Halliday to share with us any memories he has of the filming.

NEWSLETTER 017

November 23, 2004

CATCHING UP

The most recent newsletter went out under the naff title my newsletter which was added by Bravenet – although my stipulated title was News from the Michael J. Bird web site. I couldn't blame anyone who simply deleting it without reading!

If you did miss it the main news was the recent transfer of the entire site to a paid web host. A big thank you to those of you who responded to the "donations" button on the welcome page. I had also done a heavy re-write, accompanied by some new pictures, of the Aphrodite Inheritance page. I have now finished uploading the rest of the behind the scenes pictures kindly donated by director Viktors Ritelis.



The Four Gods

Ritelis supplied all the captions. You have to love that last picture!

MAELSTROM

One of the advantages of paying for web space is there is no longer any restriction on the size of file which can be downloaded from the site. I have added PDF files of a couple of documents about the making of Maelstrom which may be of interest.

THEMES

The relaxation on file size also means that I can add sound files of the main theme for each series. I had tried this before but the file containing the theme exceeded the permitted download size and I had to store it on a separate site. It was more trouble than it was worth.

I have now added "play the theme" buttons for Lotus Eaters, Ferryman and Aphrodite. Next up will be Dark Side of the Sun and The Outsider, and finally Maelstrom.

NEWS OF THE ACTORS

Did anyone else spot Stefan Gryff a couple of weeks back on Holby City? He played the distraught father of a lad who had died in surgery.