

BIRTH PLACE OF TV BROADCASTING

A Presentation to the Alexandra Palace and Park Consultative Committee

By Clive Carter, Save Ally Pally campaign | 24.10.07

I'd just like to say a few words about the television studios which are somewhere over there in the East wing. My name is Clive Carter and I'm not from this country. But I've known about the television studios all my life.

My uncle was the engineer in charge of TV transmissions for the NZBC (that was the New Zealand equivalent of the BBC). The point I'm making is, that this site and what happened here in November 1936, is world famous.

During the war, that same precocious uncle of mine, aged about 20, helped maintain a certain ultra-high technology on board flying-boats on anti-submarine patrol in the South Pacific. This is not a coincidence.

Now, you're probably wondering what my old Uncle Jack in NZ has got to do with this building. The state-of-the-art technology he maintained was known as radar and radar has everything to do with the reason behind the television studios. The studios were built at huge cost in the aftermath of the great depression and Television was imposed on an unwilling BBC and an actively hostile Lord Reith. Why?

Because a far-sighted cabinet minister (possibly Churchill) could see war coming and he wanted to establish the infrastructure for an electronics industry. The same technology used to make vacuum tubes in television sets could be used for the oscilloscopes in the radar sets that would become so vital.

Without the studios, no one would have bought televisions and radar might not have been so advanced and able to be deployed as quickly as it was surely needed. So these studios are the confluence of two highly significant technologies.

TV broadcasts stopped at the outbreak of war, but during the war this place became even more important. The transmission mast was used deviously to mislead incoming bombers so as to drop their bombs early and this may have saved hundreds of lives of Londoners. It is not just the most important building in Haringey, it is the Bletchley Park of London.

This place is rich in history, like few other places.

Unfortunately, I've never been to the studios, although I'd very much like to. Sometimes I bring overseas visitors here and tell them that this was the birthplace of television. All they can see is a blue plaque on the wall. Overseas tourists show a polite interest, but somehow I don't think they really believe me, because there even though there is this huge building, there is so little to show for the birthplace of television. At the moment, with public access barred, it's hardly worth coming here for this reason.

This site and the studios should be a prime tourist destination, not just for Haringey but for all of London. My personal view is that, because of the immense importance of the studios, we should put their preservation and restoration at the start and heart of any regeneration plans and build outwards from there.

Some describe the BBC studios as the 'old' studios and as the 'disused' studios. We should not forget they were the first in the world. One of the difficulties with the studios is that we are too close to them historically: the world's first television broadcasts are in the memory of many people alive today and seemingly less important. But in 100 year's time, it will be seen as hugely important. In other countries, especially young countries, a site with this kind of history would have had money lavished upon it, with sponsors queuing up.

I think we need new responsible Trustees who fully understand the significance of the history of this place. Let's not dwell on how we arrived at this point but consider how we can make the most of this immensely important site for the education and enjoyment of future generations.

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Our Aims

:: Stop any grant of a long lease of the Palace that's not for charitable purposes. The 1900 Alexandra Park and Palace Act provided that both Palace and park be held on trust "for the free use and recreation of the public for ever"

:: Safeguard the original site of the world's first high-definition broadcasting and to preserve the outline of the original studios A and B

:: Reconstitute AP's Trustees back to representatives of the **whole** of London and of the nation, capable of and interested in maintaining the Palace and Park for public use under its trusts (e.g. various councils in North London, The GLA, English Heritage, BBC, The Arts Council; individuals who have experience in community, heritage and educational areas.

The Palace is a unique national public asset and should be cherished as such.