

# Waving The Saltire

## Local man Peter Barber-Fleming reflects on the state of Scottish film and television production

BY IAN McLAREN

With nine per cent of the UK population, is it fair that only three per cent of TV programmes are made here in Scotland? Alex Salmond expressed his concern over these figures at Holyrood, while BBC Director General Mark Thompson had to respond to questions on the issue when he attended the opening of the new BBC headquarters by PM Gordon Brown in September.

A key figure, well-qualified to comment on this matter, is Bridge of Allan resident Peter Barber-Fleming, founder and head of Saltire Film and TV Productions. When the question was put, however, he smiled enigmatically, commenting "it's part of my daily business" to promote film and TV projects with the BBC and other media outlets.

For Peter, his move to Bridge of Allan to live is a return to his roots. His grandfather was a member of the Walker family who formerly owned Coney Park on Henderson Street, and it was in Coney Park that Peter was born, "behind the top left-hand window".

He has spent a lifetime in the theatre and media business after his RADA days with Alan Rickman and other future stars. Preferring to work behind the scenes - and then the camera - he was part of the production team behind *The Sweeney*, and was later involved in setting up the successful *Taggart* series at STV.

His own production company, Saltire, was established in 2000 to produce quality drama and documentaries, mainly on "human interest" stories, both historical and educational. The list of Saltire credits is too long to record here, but many viewers will recall series such as *Blue Heaven*, which followed the progress of teenagers in Rangers Football Club youth development programme. Well, tomorrow has become today, and it is interesting to note that Charlie Allan and Chris Burke of the present Rangers team were key figures in those programmes.

Many of the independently produced Scottish programmes of the last decade on topics from boxing to ballet, from Wallace and Bruce to Sir

Harry Lauder and Richard Demarco, have borne the Peter Barber-Fleming/Saltire badge of quality.

Watch out on St Andrew's Day next month for his documentary about, appropriately, St Andrews itself. The programme will focus on the daily lives of a few of the 300 greenkeepers and 260 caddies who help to make "the auld grey town" the capital of world golf. When *The Times* interviewed him, Peter was delighted to note the lovely sunny autumn day outside - not just for the usual reasons, but because he had chartered for that same day a (very expensive) helicopter to film some panoramic scenes of the glorious Perthshire countryside as a key background for another venture.

By way of a contrast with his company's compelling look at disadvantaged youngsters at a residential reform school in *The Boys of Ballikinrain*, he is producing a documentary about his old school, Glenalmond, a very different kind of residential institution!

It is not just documentaries he makes, however, as Saltire has also nurtured an extensive slate of feature film projects and television dramas. The company's first feature, *Man Dancin'*, written by Sergio Casci and directed by Norman Stone, was shown at Cannes 2003 and had a world-wide distribution deal.

Peter talked animatedly about the financial maze through which he had to travel to set up the £7 million funding for his current project, a feature film of Robin Jenkins' *The Cone-Gatherers*.

For Peter, visits to Cannes did not mean a gentle stroll along the Croisette, but a challenging series of meetings to put into place the infrastructure which lies behind the complex business that is film-making in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Interestingly, he felt it was the quality of people involved rather than the subject matter which "sold" the project to the American financiers who fund most films.

At present most of his time is taken up with the production of Jenkins' complex and moving novel. Peter, who knew Jenkins personally, had bought



Peter Barber-Fleming

the film rights to the novel some 18 years ago, believing then as now that the quality of Robin Jenkins' work had never been fully recognised.

He had just completed a "crazy" meeting with well-known film director Michael Caton-Jones (who has previously made films such as *Scandal* and *Rob Roy*). With a script by that excellent writer Bernard MacLaverty in place, Peter has been in contact with actors such as Liam Neeson and Cate Blanchett to star in the film - a busy, challenging yet stimulating time ahead then for this Scottish-based film and TV producer.

Some Scots argue the case for a quota of Scottish programmes on our screens. Surely, if we had more media companies like Saltire, under the creative leadership of people such as Peter Barber-Fleming, producing high quality film and TV programmes in Scotland, then there would be no need for such a contrived scheme.

From the *Stirling and Bridge of Allan Reporter* August-November 1907

### AN EXCELLENT WALK

Last week a local gentleman, named David Wright, left Bridge of Allan at nine o'clock in the morning, and walked to the top of Ben Ledi, returning home to Bridge of Allan at eleven o'clock p.m. The performance is a remarkably good one, and is all the more creditable owing to the fact that Mr Wright never broke his fast during his journey, which was a fourteen hours one. (September 21)

## Bridge of Allan Parish Church

All are welcome to the church services on Sunday mornings at 11am and to Coffee Fellowship after the service. In addition all are welcome during the week to the Guild, Thursday Night Group, badminton and Women's House Group. Details of these are found in the magazine, Order of Service and on the church web site. [www.bridgeofallanparishchurch.org.uk](http://www.bridgeofallanparishchurch.org.uk).

Dates for the diary.  
Friday 16<sup>th</sup> November Church Ceilidh  
Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December Communion

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