

STV – at 60

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Introduction

Scottish Television (STV) has been on air as the independent television channel serving central Scotland since 1957. With all the other ITV companies now amalgamated into a single company, STV is the sole surviving regional company from the original franchise-holders first established in the mid-1950s as a federal ITV network competing with the BBC in a UK broadcasting duopoly. For over sixty years STV has transmitted the ITV schedule for the Scottish audience and made programmes both for the UK network and for opt-out transmission within Scotland. This article will argue that the achievement of STV is simply that it has survived, retaining its identity as Scotland's commercial television station despite the radical transformation of the broadcasting landscape across the UK. The survival of the company has been the result of periodic management initiatives to re-structure the business to adapt to the changing media environment. Yet even though STV has had a lifespan of over six decades, it still remains of minor importance for the UK and global media industry. This article will survey the key achievements of the company and examine why, although there have been notable programmes across a range of genres, the company has not been able to evolve in a consistent way as a producer or broadcaster. The news and current affairs output, the sports coverage, and some of their best-known programmes have made a contribution to Scottish cultural life, however, there have been periods during which the company has been forced into retrenchment, finding it difficult to build on the potential of previous successes, unable to sustain growth and forced to reduce the scale of production. The limited impact of sixty years of programming for the audience was evident in the low-key way in which STV's main channel marked its sixtieth anniversary in August 2017 with a repeat of a documentary produced in 2007 produced to celebrate the fiftieth. Now the focus for the company is to look forward, with a new CEO, Simon Pitts, leading the company from the start of 2018 and initiatives for the delivery of programmes across several digital platforms, the company makes the case that, having survived for six decades, it is well-placed to play an increased role in competition with BBC Scotland and others to provide public service broadcasting content relevant to Scotland and to serve the

Scottish audience in ways which reflect changing media consumption and viewing behavior (White 2017b).

The history of STV can be analysed in four distinct phases when the company pursued different management strategies. Firstly the pioneer maverick days of ITV expansion and profitability under the founding chairman, Roy Thomson. This was followed by years when the company appeared to accept a very restricted position within the ITV federal structure and, after accusations of poor quality programming, faced several bitter franchise battles. Then, from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, there was a period of growing confidence leading to ambitious growth with a slate of mergers and acquisitions, immediately followed by a dramatic fall in the share price between 2000-2003. Finally, over the past ten years, after the hubris of a financial crisis caused by over-expansion, the company has been re-built as a digital media business concentrating exclusively on the audience and advertisers across Scotland (Bulkley 2013). The article will investigate whether the history of the past 60 years can provide insights into how the company can develop in a future fifth phase to play a significant role for the Scottish audience providing relevant programme content which reflects 21st century life in Scotland, and whether the company can meet the challenge of survival within a rapidly changing competitive global media business.

STV began transmission on Saturday 31 August 1957, two years after ITV was launched in London, with a lavish light entertainment extravaganza presented by James Robertson Justice entitled, *This is Scotland*. From the fanfare opening with a company logo combining the lion rampant with the thistle, the programme was a celebration reinforcing established clichés of Scottishness. There was (black and white) tartan-trimming throughout with singer Kenneth McKellar supported by a troupe of country dancers presenting a programme of popular traditional songs. There were filmed inserts with a commentary poetically declaiming the beauty of the misty mountains, glens and lochs of the highlands, and the industrious character of the lowland towns and cities. Guests on the show included Scots who had made their names in Hollywood such as David Niven, Deborah Kerr, and Jack Buchanan. Comedy was provided by Jimmy Logan and Stanley Baxter, stars of the local variety circuit, who performed routines from their Alhambra Theatre *Five Past Eight Show*. The show ended with Glasgow Police Pipe Band playing a rousing version of *Scotland the Brave*. It was ‘a spectacle sumptuously mounted and manned by one of the most brilliant collection of Scottish artists ever to amalgamate their talents in a single production’ (*The Scotsman* 2 Sept 1957 cited in Sendall 1982: 209).

Almost sixty years later on Monday 24 April 2017 for the second time the company started broadcasting a new channel, STV2. This time the opening show was *Live at Five*. Rather than launching with kilts and bagpipes this show followed the ubiquitous format of 21st century light entertainment programming. This time the clichés of contemporary life were cheerful presenters on sofas chatting to the camera, with inserts covering light-hearted topical stories and celebrity gossip. Despite the familiar, everyday (and low-budget) approach of the programme, STV management claimed this second launch as ‘a significant milestone’ in the history of the company (Farber 2017). Building on the foundation of their local digital television network (LDTVN) franchises STV had launched the first English language channel dedicated to broadcasting exclusively to Scotland. This was a channel that did not just broadcast UK network content interspersed with local Scottish opt-outs for a limited duration of the daily schedule. STV 2 brought together the two local TV city stations that were already running, STV Glasgow (established June 2014) and STV Edinburgh (launched January 2015), and combined them with newly franchised channels for Aberdeen, Dundee and Ayr. Although only broadcast terrestrially on transmitters to these five main centres of population the new channel was made more widely available across Scotland through cable and satellite, and streamed on-line and available on-demand via the STV Player. Embracing new platforms and technologies, STV 2 was launched to provide an innovative type of service providing hyper-local news bulletins alongside a programme schedule serving the whole of Scotland (Campelli 2014).

STV’s launch of a dedicated channel for Scottish viewers came nine years after the Scottish Broadcasting Commission published *Platform for Success* (2008) outlining the need for a dedicated Scottish digital channel. A few weeks earlier on 22 February 2017 Tony Hall, Director-General of the BBC had announced that BBC Scotland would launch its own Scottish channel in the autumn of 2018 broadcasting around seven hours a day, ‘ambitious well-funded programming...not just tartan TV’ (White 2017a). With the need for a new channel for Scotland identified by both the Scottish Government and by the BBC, nevertheless it had been the commercial station that was first to make this a reality. Since 1957 the rivalry between STV and BBC Scotland has been important for the on-screen presentation, documentation and recording of Scotland and Scottish life. In the autumn 2018 the new BBC Scotland channel will go head to head with STV2 thus there continues to be a form of *duopoly* competition in the representation of Scottish culture and identity.

Previous academic studies

There is little previous academic research on the significance of the role of STV. The limited reference to the company in the official histories of Independent Television, Briggs (1979), Sendall (1982, 1983), Potter (1989) and Bonner and Ashton (1998), define its role as a minor player in the federal ITV network. McDowell (1992) does reflect on the impact of STV on BBC television in Scotland from the mid-1950s up to 1983, however, as yet there has been no historical account of the past twenty-five years. Leading players in the media in Scotland such as Thomson (1975), Milne (1988) and Isaacs (2006) provide insight into key moments for STV, however, these autobiographies reflect on the company history as a strand of their personal careers. The most significant critical writing about television in Scotland dates back to McArthur (1982: 4) who asserted then that 'television (is) a key site of debate and struggle in Scottish culture'. Although *Scotch Reels* looked in greater detail at cinema, nevertheless Caughie (1982) did speculate about a possible alternative television service that was not saturated with either tartanry or the kailyard and which would properly serve and represent Scotland. He argued for a new approach

for a consistent engagement on the part of Scottish television in all its programmes with the idea and with contradictions of Scotland as a nation with the debates about identity and the development of a national culture.
(Caughie 1982: 120)

Blain (2009: 770) recalls how this debate identified the ways television output focused on 'local cultural idiosyncrasy, sometimes enhanced or manufactured'. In *From Limelight to Satellite* (1990: 193) STV Managing Director, Gus Macdonald gave a personal analysis of 'the success story' of drama series and television films made in Scotland by STV, Channel 4 and BBC Scotland in the 1980s, asserting his view that television was truly representing contemporary Scottish society. Petrie (2000: 131) outlined some landmark achievements for STV with a particular focus on the key drama productions from the 1970s onwards. However, the most detailed written accounts of the history of past six decades of STV have been published as show-biz anecdotes and memoirs reflecting the populist content and impact of programmes and personalities (see for example Tibballs 1998; Holmes 2009; and Paul 2009).

Alongside the debates about representation and cultural identity on television scholars have reflected on how the rationale for a UK media and communications policy and regulation has been challenged, most significantly by the devolved Scottish Government since 1999 as control of broadcasting was 'reserved' to the UK parliament (Blain and Hutchison 2008: vi; and Schlesinger 2008: 36). Most of this attention has been directed at the BBC in Scotland, focused on the implications of changing models of governance, and economic questions raised concerning the total licence fee raised in Scotland compared with the actual expenditure on local and network commissions. Nevertheless, there has been recognition of the on-going competitive relationship between BBC Scotland and STV in a way that continues to be very different to ITV and the BBC elsewhere in the UK (Johnson and Turnock 2005; Sweeney 2008). This was further strained during the 2014 independence referendum with accusations of bias made against some BBC reporting (Law 2015). There has been constant competition between the two broadcasters for local early evening news between the BBC's *Reporting Scotland* (BBC 1968–current) and STV's *Scotland Today* (STV 1972-2009) and *STV News at 6* (2009-current). There has also been rivalry to attract audiences for late evening current affairs with *Newsnight Scotland* (BBC, 1999-2014), *Scotland 2014* (BBC) going head to head with *Scotland Tonight* (STV, 2011-current). From April 2017 the news and current affairs output of both BBC and STV has been regulated by Ofcom to ensure their public service broadcasting charter and licence obligations to comply with rules for impartiality in all matters including the level of support for Scottish independence.

The origins of STV

When BBC television transmissions began in Scotland in 1952 the Conservative Government was already drafting the Television Act 1954 and planning the establishment of the ITV network. In October 1954 Canadian businessman Roy Thomson acquired *The Scotsman* newspaper group around the same time as the creation of the Independent Television Authority (ITA), which set up a federal system of franchises based upon regional transmission areas (Thomson 1975: 40). Thomson had experience of commercial radio in Canada and when he approached the authority with plans for a station to serve central Scotland he was strongly encouraged. ITV was launched in London on 22 September 1955 but it would take a further seven years until the network reached the whole of the UK with Grampian TV and Border Television both not beginning transmissions until 1961 (McDowell 1992: 121-130).

From the outset STV was set up in a way that reflected the particular situation for a Scottish company on the fringe of the main ITV network. On 28 November 1955 the ITA invited interest from applicants for the central Scotland transmission area and three months later interviews were held in Edinburgh. For every region announced up to that date the authority had awarded split week contracts with one company operating Monday to Friday and another delivering the service at the weekend, however, the central Scotland area was deemed to have too small a population for the potential advertising revenue to be divided in this way. On 30 May 1956 the appointment of Thomson's STV was announced as the first seven day ITV franchisee. Thomson remembers, 'We had no studio, no artists, no announcers, no producers, no technicians, no musicians and no programmes, but we had a contract' (1975: 49).

Over the following year Thomson tried to persuade investors to provide support for his company. Thomson claimed that he knew from experience in Canada that commercial TV was a potential money-spinner. In a crucial deal he secured backing from Charles McQueen, a director of the Howard and Wyndham theatre group, who saw the potential of the Theatre Royal in Glasgow as a possible television centre, invested his own money and persuaded Howard & Wyndham to invest £40,000. Thomson still required additional support, but this was enough to convince the National Commercial Bank of Scotland to offer facilities of £500,000 enabling the company to buy the Theatre Royal from Howard & Wyndham for £105,000 in October 1956 and convert it into studios and offices. STV had secured the financial means to plan to start transmissions with Thomson himself holding 85% of the shares (Braddon 1965: 232-257; Sendall 1982: 201-210; Thomson 1975: 50-57).

From his radio experience Thomson knew the importance of having affiliate status with larger more established partners and he was able to make a deal with Lew Grade at ATV. Thomson talked Grade into letting him have programmes cheap, £900,000 for the first year, with a fixed deal of £1 million a year for the next seven years (Thomson 1975: 51). This guarantee of access to the programmes of the main ITV schedule was vital for the STV business plan but it did mean that from the outset the company would only take a minor role as a production centre. This led to a condescending reaction from the BBC's Broadcasting Council for Scotland.

The obvious conclusion is that Commercial Television in Scotland will aim at attracting a mass lower-middle-class audience because of its potential purchasing power and readiness to view material of little cultural value. It

cannot be regarded as true competition, but this challenge has to be met and will be with vigour (BCS Paper 30 Nov 1956, cited in McDowell 1992: 127).

The direct competition with BBC Scotland began in August 1957 and has continued over six decades with both stations transmitting a UK national schedule with a limited number of opt-outs for Scottish news and other programme genres.

Getting established - 1957- 67

From the autumn of 1957 the programme schedule with which STV appealed to a rapidly growing audience came by relaying the main ITV network schedule supplied by ATV, ABC, Associated-Rediffusion and Granada. These programmes included US westerns and comedy imports alongside new British programmes such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955-60), *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* (1955-65), and *Armchair Theatre* (1956-74). The franchise agreement committed STV to produce just 15% of programme output themselves. Thomson had appointed Rai Purdy, a fellow Canadian, as Director of Programmes to oversee local productions and he assembled a team who became 'pioneers in developing innovative original formats' (Sweeney 2008: 95). These included the full range of genres. *Scotsport* (1957-2007) went on air in September 1957 and was presented by sports writer Arthur Montfort, recruited from the Glasgow *Evening Times*. It was evident that the coverage of Scottish football would be a major draw for the STV audience and they needed to make this a priority. The company was the first to broadcast a British team in Europe when Hearts played Royal Standard Liege in September 1958 (Holmes 2009: 18).

Factual programmes included *This Wonderful World* (1957-68), produced and presented by veteran film producer, John Grierson, who curated a selection of material re-versioning and compiling clips from international documentaries from across the globe (McLane 2012: 187). This started as an STV opt-out programme but quickly moved to the ITV network. Other examples of factual output included the daily magazine programme *Here and Now* (1957-63) making Esmond Wright, then Professor of History at Glasgow University, one of the earliest media academics (Holmes 2009: 20). Early religious programming included *Late Call* (1960-89) later famously parodied on BBC Scotland by Rikki Fulton. The tradition of live Scottish coverage of Hogmanay for the ITV network began on 31 December 1957 with *A Guid New Year from Glasgow* (Perry 2013: 263).

Alongside the networked entertainment offered by the ITV schedule STV had success during the early years came with home-grown entertainment programmes. These included *Jigtime* (1958), a celebration of Scottish music and dance similar to the content of the opening night programme. The most celebrated of these programmes, built on the tradition of Scottish variety, was the *The One O'Clock Gang* (1957-64), with Larry Marshall, Jimmy Nairn, and Dorothy Paul. During this period daily lunchtime entertainment shows were a staple of the ITV schedule. In July 1958 Rai Purdy was succeeded as Programme Controller by Gerry Le Grove, hired from the BBC in London. Le Grove continued the policy of hiring talent who came from the variety entertainment circuit, for example with the comedy, *Francie and Josie* (1962-65), starring Rikki Fulton and Jack Milroy. In January 1963 *Roundabout* (1962-65), a magazine programme aimed at teenagers presented by Paul Young, featured an early appearance of The Beatles during their tour of Scotland. In children's programming *Cartoon Cavalcade* (1966-91) presented by Glen Michael was a regular feature of holiday programming. Over the first few years the station had discovered that 'live' programmes with low-budget formats with presenters drawn from local acting talent had a popular appeal for their audience. This home-spun approach continues to the present day in the presentation and tone of programmes on STV2.

The early years demonstrated striking success for this flexible, adaptive business. In the first year of operations (1957-1958) STV made a profit of £1 million. Thomson became (in)famous for his throwaway quip that the franchise was a 'licence to print your own money' (Sendall 1982: 150). The company was successful enough to be given a market valuation of £5 million which enabled Thomson to take over Kemsley newspapers, owners of *The Sunday Times*, and from there he went on to acquire Times Newspapers and increasingly his focus was the newspaper business rather than television (Thomson 1975: 58-69). Without the early success of STV Thomson would never have been able to pull off this coup.

In 1962 the Pilkington Committee expressed criticism at the quality of ITV programming. The Labour Party had opposed 1954 Television Act and in 1964 the party was elected into government with a stated aim to improve the quality of commercial television. Charles Hill was appointed Chairman of the ITA and one of his first moves resulted in most of the ITV companies having to drop their midday programmes. On 17 June 1964 Hill was invited to Glasgow to see *The One O'Clock Gang* but he was not amused, stating 'how long have you been getting away with this'

(Anon 2007b). By the end of that year after over 1700 editions the show was cancelled, one of the changes required for STV to renew their franchise. For the next four years up to the next franchise round the company was required raise the quality of a number of productions and re-structure the business, with Roy Thomson required to reduce his personal shareholding to 55% (Sendall 1983: 210-217). STV had provided Thomson with his UK launchpad, from television he had moved into newspapers, and subsequently onto specialist publishing with *Yellow Pages*, package holidays with the acquisition of Britannia Airways (later Thomson Holidays), and also oil exploration (Thomson 1975: 146). The company was floated on the stock exchange in 1965 and the original investors saw their stake multiply 22 times with Roy Thomson personally making £13 million (Braddon 1965: 301; Potter 1989: 50).

Franchise battles and consolidation as a minor player 1967-80

In 1967 the company faced its first major franchise battle when they were challenged by a consortium led by Liberal politician Jo Grimond, with television executives Alasdair Milne, Alistair Burnett, Donald Baverstock, and Anthony Jay. Milne had left the BBC after launching and editing the *Tonight* programme. He wanted to move into commercial television and claimed 'everybody I spoke to in Scotland told me STV's programmes were awful' (Milne 1988: 125). He assembled a consortium with himself as prospective director of programmes. He also invited Dame Jean Roberts, ex-Lord Provost of Glasgow. However when the consortium was interviewed at the ITA's HQ Roberts made a sustained attack on STV which did not go down well with ITA chair, Charles Hill, or with their Scottish representative, McFarlane Gray, who were both sympathetic to STV. Milne concluded that 'I have a feeling we came within a whisker of unseating them, but we didn't' (Milne 1988: 128). The official reason for rejecting the Grimond/Milne bid was that their 'interests, main activity and residence were outside the area served by the station' (Sendall 1983: 348). The new deal did have a number of conditions for STV including a further reduction in Roy Thomson's shareholding from 55% to 25%.

Despite the uncertainty there were a number of programmes that made a mark at the time. In 1967 *Scotsport* featured extensive coverage of Celtic's European Cup win in Lisbon. A documentary crew had followed the construction of the Cunard liner *Contract 736* and the programme was screened when the Queen Elizabeth II was launched on the Clyde. Another major documentary produced, directed and presented by Sean Connery was entitled *The Bowler and the Bunnet* (1967). Connery's film

investigated the new working methods in shipbuilding that had been introduced at the Fairfields Yard in Govan. The company also made John Grierson's autobiographical *I remember I remember* (1968) in association with Films of Scotland. In this period STV made tentative steps into television drama production with an adaptations of the classic Scottish novel *Flight of the Heron* (1968). The company was determined to show it could deliver the breadth of programming with a Scottish identity to rival the output of BBC Scotland. These examples of one-off programmes did show that STV could compete but they also revealed how rarely this happened at a time when BBC Scotland was the production centre for regular network audience favourites such as *The White Heather Club* (1958-68), *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (1962-71), and *The Vital Spark* (1965-74).

The main impact of the 1967/68 franchise round was a re-alignment of the ITV companies. From this time five network companies London Weekend TV, Thames (the amalgamation of ABC and Associated-Rediffusion), ATV, Granada and Yorkshire would become the key suppliers of programming for the network. STV was in a second group with an on-going commitment to produce local opt-out content and only occasional access to make programmes for the network. Having secured their license renewal the company was faced with a crisis in November 1969 after a fire at the Theatre Royal destroyed the main studio. Fortunately, STV had acquired the Gateway Theatre in Edinburgh, and so the studio work was shifted east. 1969 was the year that the ITV companies began broadcasting in colour, requiring the installation of STV's first UHF transmitter at Blackhill. There was a follow-up to *Contract 736* with the network documentary *The Ship From The Clyde* (1969) about the engine problems for the QE2 during sea trials. That same year they launched Scotland's first TV soap, the drama series *High Living* (1969-71), written by Jack Gerson and featuring life for the residents of the multi-story council flats which were then a new feature of the Glasgow skyline.

After the operational challenges caused by the studio fire and a downturn in advertising revenue in 1970, for the first time, STV made a substantial loss (Potter 1989: 65). To adapt and respond to new challenges the company formed a joint sales force with Grampian TV and joined the other ITV companies in a campaign to lobby for the reduction of the levy that was paid to the government. In 1974 Bill Brown, who had joined the company as a sales manager in London, was appointed both Chairman and Managing Director. He consolidated the position of the company as a junior member of the ITV network, sustaining a healthy range of opt-out public service

programming across the genres and building new Glasgow studios and offices at Cowcaddens in Glasgow adjacent to the Theatre Royal building. The Thomson organisation finally sold its remaining stake in 1977. During these years Brown sat as a member of the Annan Committee and would later identify opportunities for STV from the new Channel 4 (Potter 1989: 151).

Programmes launched during this period included the entertainment series *Thingummyjig* (1976-86) that developed the earlier format of *Jigtime* and presented Scottish music and dancing in a more informal style than the BBC had done in *The White Heather Club* (1958-68). News and current affairs programmes like *Scotland Today* always gained good ratings compared with BBC Scotland's own opt-out news. Local documentary programmes included *Weir's Way* (1976-87) with the presenter, mountaineer Tom Weir, sharing his love of Scotland's outdoors. The company continued to gain experience of drama production always with a Scottish theme and setting, for example with the children's drama *Sula* (1975) written by Lavinia Derwent, and with the new soap opera *Garnock Way* (1976-79) following the lives of characters uprooted from the city to live in one of Scotland's new towns. The company had clear ambitions to expand this area of work with a well-received adaptation of Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1978). In 1979 Robert Love joined the company in the newly created position of head of drama, later that year the company started producing the continuing drama series *Take the High Road* (1980-2003), about life in a village on the banks of Loch Lomond. STV also produced *Charlie Endell Esq* (1979), a spin-off from the ITV series, *Budgie* (1971-72), featuring Scottish actor Ian Cuthbertson as the larger-than-life character he had played in the earlier series returning home to an unfamiliar Glasgow transformed by urban regeneration.

Throughout the 1970s STV had begun to strengthen programme production experience in both drama and documentaries but the company was vulnerable to industrial disputes. In the autumn of 1979 the whole ITV network was hit by a strike. The union ACTT (Association of Cinema and Television Technicians) were demanding a pay increase of 25% and rejected an offer of 9%. The strike began on 10 August 1979 and ITV, including STV, went off the air for over ten weeks (Potter 1989). Immediately after the strike was settled the company faced a new battle. A period of sustained expansion would depend upon success in the 1980 franchise round.

Confident programme making 1980-90

In this franchise competition two new consortia, Caledonia TV and Lowland TV, challenged STV. The Caledonia consortium included TV producers Hugh Pitt and Richard Bates who had made *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. They claimed that the current programme output of STV was 'enfeebled by parochialism, chauvinism and lack of authority' however, STV won the contest with the IBA stating they were 'the most impressive and substantial of the three contestants, both at interview and in its proposals' (Potter 1989: 233). The authority did, however, want STV to find new ways of reflecting 'the national and regional culture' and so the company strengthened the board by taking on a number of new members including the playwright/director Bill Bryden (Potter 1989: 234).

During the time of the franchise battle STV went into production with a highly controversial subject for a one-off drama with *A Sense of Freedom* (1981), the adaptation of Glasgow gangster Jimmy Boyle's autobiography. It was the most ambitious television film the company had made to date. STV hired Jeremy Isaacs as producer and brought in the team of writer Peter McDougall, and director John Mackenzie, who had worked together on several celebrated BBC television network plays during the previous five years (Potter 1989: 275). Starring David Hayman as Boyle the film told the story of his life as a hardman in the Gorbals, his protests against the Scottish prison system, and his rehabilitation as one of the prisoners in the experimental regime at the Barlinnie Prison Special Unit (Petrie 2000: 138-40). The programme was screened late at night followed by a live studio discussion. This high-budget drama had been in production during the period of franchise renewal discussions demonstrating to the IBA decision makers that whatever criticisms the new challengers made STV could show it was now making a commitment to quality programming and that it aspired to match the level of the best BBC output.

The aftermath of the franchise competition was also a time when new scholarly discourse examined the way Scotland was represented on screen. The authors of *Scotch Reels* accused both STV and BBC Scotland of embedded parochial paternalism with recurrent images of Scotland saturated with tartanry, the kailyard, or the tough industrial Clydeside (Caughie 1982: 120). Certainly STV's contemporary output did match these categories with the tartanry of *Thingummyjig*, the kailyard stories of *Take the High Road*, and the gritty Clydeside of *A Sense of Freedom*. In

spite of the academic criticism STV dramas did continue in the same vein over the next few years when there was a consistent focus on developing the drama output.

Take the High Road became part of the ITV network weekly schedule. STV also invested £200,000, half of the budget, to enable Bill Forsyth's second feature *Gregory's Girl* (1981) to go into production (Petrie 2000: 153). The *Preview* series of 30 minutes one-off dramas was developed in order to commission writers new to television and start to build an infrastructure for drama production. One of the writers who contributed to the series was Glenn Chandler who went on to develop the characters and format for a new Glasgow police drama. The first three episode series was entitled *Killer* (1983) and was a hit with the ITV audience and network drama chiefs. Re-titled after the name of the central character played by Mark McManus, *Taggart* (1985-2010) would run for over 25 years, survive the death of its main actor in 1994, and become STV's greatest export both to the UK network and to television stations in over 40 other territories. Petrie analyses the 'significant contribution' made by the series in establishing an image of Glasgow crime as a central theme for Scottish culture and as STV's major (perhaps only) contribution to influential contemporary Scottish fictions (Petrie 2004: 148).

Alongside the launch of *Taggart* there were a number of other new developments. In November 1982 Channel Four began transmission, led by Jeremy Isaacs. Having served on the Annan Committee the STV Managing Director, Bill Brown, became one of the ITV representatives on the Channel 4 board. With *The National Trust* (1985) STV was commissioned to make a major arts documentary series for the channel. There was also drama for the Film on Four strand with *Ill Fares the Land* (1983), written and directed by Bill Bryden, which told the story of the last residents of St Kilda. After the success of *Gregory's Girl* the company continued to co-invest in feature films with Bill Forsyth's *Comfort and Joy* (1984), and *The Big Man* (1990), an adaptation William McIlvanney's novel. In 1986 Gus Macdonald joined STV from Granada TV and there was an influx of new talent across the company and a commitment to increasing and revitalising local production. This included campaign programme *Scottish Action* (1987-2002) and entertainment series *NB* (1989-97). Jimmy Reid presented a number of high profile Channel 4 documentary series such as *Reid about Russia* (1988). Macdonald celebrated the company's success with drama production but pointed to the challenges in repeating the success of *Taggart*. Children's drama *Stookie* (1985), *Bookie* (1987), and *Winners and Losers* (1988) all received satisfactory audiences but failed to become long-term returning series

because the company could be out-voted by the larger English ITV companies (Macdonald 1990: 205). Another one-off drama for Channel 4 *The Steamie* (1988) was the adaptation of Tony Roper's popular stage play but it was clear from analysis of the viewing statistics that the main audience for this New Year's Eve celebration of the lives of Glasgow working-class women was in Scotland (Macdonald 1990: 200). The company did launch more ambitious programmes across other genres with shows such as the Edinburgh Festival arts entertainment special *Acropolis Now* (1987/88), and the stand-up comedy series *The Funny Farm* (1990-93). There were also a number of studio-based network entertainment programmes such as *Wheel of Fortune* (1988-2002) licensed from the US format, and children's programmes such as *Funhouse* (1989-99) and *Disney Club* (1989-98). With this breadth of programme production the company now demonstrated that it was delivering quality and variety to a Scottish audience and this depended upon also making programmes that served the wider UK audience (Macdonald 1990: 206).

This was also true for news and current affairs with two incidents in 1988 that stretched the news gathering resources of the company and demonstrated that STV could deliver comprehensive news coverage for events of international importance. On 6 July 1988 a fire on the North Sea Piper Alpha oil platform resulted in 120 deaths. STV cameras were first on the scene in a helicopter working on a documentary about the North Sea commissioned from cameraman Paul Berriff. The footage was revisited twenty-five years later when STV produced the anniversary programme *Fire in the Sky* (2013) for BBC Scotland. In December 1988 the terrorist bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie killed 270 people, becoming the worst mass murder in Scottish history. In addition to the harrowing news coverage in the days following the crash the company would later draw on this archive material to produce a number of documentaries investigating this terrorist attack such as the BAFTA-winning *After Lockerbie* (1998) for the ITV network, *The Lockerbie Bomber: sent home to die* (2010) and *The Lockerbie Bombing* (2013).

This was also a period in which STV was a home for the development of new talent which would later go on to make an international impact. Emmy award-winning actor Alan Cumming made his television debut while still at drama school as a teenage tearaway in *Take the High Road* (1986) and, together with Forbes Masson, was commissioned to perform their comedy music act *Victor and Barry* (1987), with characters they would re-visit for their surreal BBC sit-com series *The High Life* (1994-5). *Kirsty* (1993-96) was a vehicle for presenter, Kirsty Young, making her first

television appearances as newsreader and chat show host on STV. *Shadowing* (1991) was an early documentary series made by the brothers Andrew and Kevin Macdonald, who as producer of *Trainspotting* (1996) and director of *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), would later play major roles in Scottish cinema. Also Craig Ferguson presented a mockumentary style archaeology series, *The Dirt Detective* (1993), prior to leaving for the USA where he would work in sit-coms and as presenter of NBC's *The Late Late Show* (2005-2014). The company commissioned independents such as Muriel Gray's *Munro Show* (1992-94) delivering a completely new style of programme about hill-walking. The scale of production across all departments of STV had increased significantly. STV was not just *surviving* the company was thriving.

There was a sense of assurance on-screen, for programme makers across all genres, behind the cameras, and in the executive offices. With this range of programming STV demonstrated it could produce a television service from Scotland to compete with BBC Scotland's output. Under Macdonald's confident leadership the company reached its highest level of achievement with popular new local programmes, drama on the ITV network and commissions for Channel 4. In the 1990 franchise round Macdonald's high-risk strategy was to make a bid of only £2,000 plus 2% qualifying revenue, and with no real competition the gamble paid off and the company was awarded the franchise. By 1990 the company had a turnover of £114 million with profits of £11.23 million (STV Annual Report 1991).

Expansion, acquisitions and mergers – 1991-2007

With a commitment to make over 1000 hours of local programmes per year in the 1990 franchise bid document the scale of programme production for both network and opt-out continued to grow throughout the 1990s. The company also pursued a number of new initiatives such as their involvement in Comataidh Telebhisein Gaidhlig (CTG) and the production of Gaelic language programmes. The key example of this was *Machair* (1992-98) a continuing drama set in the Outer Hebrides. Other notable programmes included *Dr Finlay* (1993-96) a new ITV version with stories from the late 1940s rather than the 1930s setting of the classic BBC series. The ITV network continued to screen *Taggart*, even after the death of leading actor, Mark McManus in 1994. Other new dramas were produced such as the forensic detective series *McCallum* (1995-98) starring John Hannah. The production of opt-out local programmes continued to expand with popular factual series such as *Scottish Passport* (1994-2004) and *The Home Show* (1994-2004). These long-running series

demonstrated that the company could devise innovative programming with a Scottish accent but with a contemporary feel for travel and lifestyle features. Scottish Television Enterprises (STE) was set up to make programmes for the ITV network and Channel Four. There were two high-profile network programmes featuring Gordon Brown, who had worked as a researcher for STV in the 1980s, *Out of the Shadows* and *We are the Treasury* (1997) were observational documentaries that followed Brown during the 1997 election campaign and his first three months as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The company also produced *Club Reps* (2001-2004), an early docu-soap series for ITV, following the perils of life as a holiday rep in Greek resort of Faliraki.

Throughout this period the structure of the business changed significantly. In 1993 GMTV took over the morning slots from TV-AM and STV became a major stakeholder in the company helping to guarantee its place as the producer of the early weekend morning children's programmes. In 1996 Gus Macdonald stepped down and Andrew Flanagan became Chief Executive, and over the coming years he supervised an expansion of the company into new areas of business. In 1996 the company paid £120 million for the *Glasgow Herald* group of newspapers, meaning STV was evolving into the biggest publishing-broadcasting-media conglomerate in Scotland. In 1997 STV was renamed the Scottish Media Group and acquired Grampian Television for £105 million and raised its stake in Ulster Television from 1.9% to 14.9% (Bonner 1998: 478). That stake was sold the following year for £23 million enabling the company to go on a spending spree in 1999, setting up *The Sunday Herald* newspaper, acquiring a clutch of trade and professional magazines titles, plus the advertising firms Baillie Advertising, Primesight, and the cinema advertiser Pearl & Dean. The corporate expansion continued with the acquisition of Ginger Media from Chris Evans. In June 2000 Scottish Media Group rebranded itself as SMG plc (Scottish Media Group) launching another major acquisition with Scottish Radio Holdings. In 2001 the company peaked with a turnover for the first half year of £152.7 million on which the operating profit was £36.4 million. Chief Executive Andrew Flanagan announced that the company 'continues to go from strength to strength' (SMG Annual Report 2002). However, this proved to be a turning point as in the following year equities went into free fall and the money that the company had borrowed to pay for expansion became an unsustainable debt. In late 2002 SMG put their newspapers and magazines up for sale and a deal was made with the US-based Gannet group of papers, however the share price of STV never recovered from this massive over-expansion. Over the next five years the company went into retrenchment and the impact of the Communication

Act 2003 would create uncertainty across the ITV network with new regulations allowing a phase of mergers making SMG vulnerable (Anon 2007a).

The crisis caused by over expansion was reflected in big changes for both the broadcast network and local production parts of the business as the confidence of the 1980s and 90s disappeared. *Taggart* did continue for ITV and there were other dramas such as the adaptations of Ian Rankin's *Rebus* (2000-2007), however, this was commissioned from independent producers Clerkenwell Films rather than directly from STV. In 2003 the company announced the cancellation of its long-running soap opera *Take the High Road* which had failed to sustain support from the ITV network. There was some new local opt-out drama such as two series of *High Times* (2004, 2008) but the scale was significantly reduced. In 2006 the company moved from the Cowcaddens Studios to new facilities on the banks of the Clyde at Pacific Quay, however, around the time of the move many local factual series were cancelled and broadcast production levels were reduced to the minimum requirements of the terms of the franchise. In July 2006 Flanagan resigned leaving the company with immediate effect, the period of expansion was over. This was the start of a new phase when STV would have to fight for survival.

Reconstruction 2007- 18

Over the past ten years there has been a gradual process of reconstruction and recovery. Rob Woodward, previously Commercial Director of Channel 4, was appointed CEO in March 2007 and put together a new strategy to return the focus of the business back to television. The company has faced the challenges to maintain a Scottish identity alongside the merged ITV plc and to have a suitable portfolio of productions for both network and local output. The SNP Government set up the Scottish Broadcasting Commission, led by Blair Jenkins, a former Director of Programmes at STV, to investigate public attitudes about the television service(s) in Scotland. After public consultation this revealed dissatisfaction with current arrangements for both STV and BBC Scotland and the Commission's report, *Platform for Success*, outlined ambitious cross-party aspirations of the devolved Scottish Parliament about how the audience in Scotland could be better served. At the same time STV was embroiled in a battle with the ITV network relating to financial arrangements. In 2009 STV made a direct legal challenge to ITV about the cost of programming, and, in order to save money and increase local audiences, replaced a number of network programmes with its own opt-out content. In November the

company played *The Greatest Scot* (2009) series scheduled over five weekday nights with programmes seeking the public to vote to find the most worthy Scottish figure, an accolade finally awarded to Robert Burns. Eventually the dispute was settled with STV agreeing a pay-out of £18 million to ITV (STV Annual Report 2011). Even with this resolution the network refused to commission further series of *Taggart* and the final programme was transmitted in 2010. From the heights of local and network production in the decade from 1986-96 STV's television production was now reduced to the local news service and a minimum level of other programme-making (Kanter 2011).

In the period since 2010 the company has slowly started to secure new production work with documentaries such as *The Lockerbie Bomber: sent home to die* (2010) and network commissions with studio gameshows like *Catchphrase* (2013-17). The company has started to position itself as an independent production company when pitching to the other broadcasters. For the first time they have secured commissions for the BBC network with *Antiques Road Trip* (BBC 2 2010-12, BBC1 2013-18) and with landmark documentaries such as *Fire in the Sky* (2013) and *Dunblane* (2016), and in 2017 STV secured their first large-scale drama series since 2010 with *The Victim* for BBC 1. The company has started to rebuild local opt-out production using established talent and formats for example with actor, David Hayman, retracing the steps of Tom Weir in *On Weir's Way* (2014-16), and presenter, Carol Smillie, in search of *Scotland's Real Heroes* (2013-15), and with the annual *STV Children's Appeal* (2011-17). Other commissions include work for Channel 5 and ITV 2.

To appeal to changing audience viewing habits the company has embraced digital innovation with the STV Player for streaming and on-demand viewing and a news app launched in February 2016. Also by combining their city local TV licences STV has launched a second Scottish channel. STV2 has ambitions to reflect what is happening across Scotland with a distinctive schedule, however, currently the channel is dependent on repeats of old dramas and *Fair City*, a soap opera bought-in from Ireland. There is a new joint-venture with ITN to present national and international news with Scottish editorial control with *STV News Tonight* (2017). The channel also provides coverage of events such as *Live at the Fringe* (2015-18) from the Edinburgh Festival but, in a highly competitive multi-channel environment, the regular daily programmes *Live at Five* and *The Late Show*, offering basic studio magazine formats, have yet to prove their popularity. The rest of the schedule is made up of programmes such as *The People's History Show* (2015-18) and *Peter and Roughie's Football Show*

(2015-18) demonstrating that in many ways the company has come full circle over 60 years and returned to low-budget programmes with a local accent aiming to appeal to the core Scottish audience. Having demonstrated that the programmes could attract an audience on STV2 from January 2018 the *Peter and Roughie* format has been adapted into *Friday Night Football* for a weekly opt-out slot on the main STV channel. When BBC Scotland launches its dedicated Scottish channel in autumn 2018 the duopoly will both have extended hours to represent Scotland on screen, however, with the audience now able to view international programme content across numerous devices and able to select from hundreds of channels this competition has been transformed from its early days in the 1950s. The 21st century challenge will be whether these channels will be sustainable and attract the size of audience to justify their budgets.

Life after sixty....

On 25 April 2017, the day after STV 2 was launched, CEO Rob Woodward announced he would leave within twelve months. From January 2018 the company started a new phase led by Simon Pitts, who has spent the last 14 years as one of ITV's executive team leading the development of strategies to transform the network's operations on the digital platforms. Looking ahead in 2018, apart from the news, local programming previously shown in opt-out slots will now be transmitted on the two additional 'second' channels. The fact that STV2 started operations 18 months ahead of the new BBC Scotland channel may be significant. If STV are to become more than just a 'survivor' and minor player they will need to regain the programming ambition and business confidence of the 1980s and 1990s. Pitts will need to apply his insight into future trends for broadcasting in order to maintain STV's position as a junior partner with the ITV network, and to develop innovative, sustainable, and profitable local services, combining the strength of their two channels which can deliver a wider breadth of programming than has been produced for the past decade and which can properly represent Scotland and serve the Scottish audience.

Postscript

On 16 May 2018, after this article was originally uploaded for online publication, STV published details of a new three-year strategy based on the incoming chief executive Simon Pitts' review of company operations. As was anticipated in the article, STV is now moving forward to a new fifth phase which aims once again to adapt the business

in response to changes in the wider media landscape. Pitts' review identified three objectives; to maximise the value of the STV broadcast business, to grow the reach and impact of their digital platform, and to use their status as a producer-broadcaster more effectively in order to improve the success and profitability of STV Productions (STV, 2018). The immediate outcome of the new strategy was the announcement of the closure of STV2 and the sale of the local television licences to the That's Media Group Ltd. The rejection of the local TV initiatives and structural changes to their news operation will result in over 50 redundancies.

STV's fifth phase is a complete transformation of the strategy from Rob Woodward's period (2007-17), as was his reconstruction of the company after taking over from Andrew Flanagan (1996-2006). One possible reason for Woodward's resignation on 24 April 2017, the day after the launch of STV2, was predicted in the financial press a few months earlier (Dunkley, 2016) as the market became aware of the growing share holding in the company by activist investment fund Crystal Amber Media. Owning 14.5% in May 2018, this fund manager is now the largest shareholder in STV and yet has publicly criticised the weakness of the share price, a move that has been interpreted as a declaration of an interventionist strategy in preparation for a possible take-over (Wright, 2018). After all this is, and has always been, 'commercial television', and from Roy Thomson six decades ago to Simon Pitts today, the real agenda for STV is addressed in the boardroom with a focus on shareholder profits rather than through a pure commitment for programming which serves and represents the Scottish audience.

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