

Tony Bannister



Tony Bannister being presented with his award by Jonathan Edwards.

Tony Bannister was awarded the Royal Television Society Lifetime Achievement Award on 28 February 2015. He was born on 13 August 1947 and lived in temporary accommodation on Markeaton Park prior to moving to Chaddesden where he attended both Cherry Tree Infant and Junior Schools, winning a prize for a charcoal drawing he submitted into an art competition. He then moved to Morley Road School before winning a scholarship to the Joseph Wright Art School in Derby at the age of 13. Moving to Derby College of Art, he eventually gained his degree in Art and Design from Leeds Art College. In his final year at Leeds he worked for Yorkshire Television as a Graphic Designer on some of their first programmes. He was advised by one of his colleagues to try and join the BBC. He started work at BBC Newcastle on Bridge Street in 1969 and stayed there until 1985 before moving to a new BBC building in Fenham where he set up his own team working on set design.

The Royal Television Society Lifetime Achievement Awards is to honour an unsuspecting member of the audience at the Hilton — in this case, someone who, over four decades, has made an outstanding contribution to the TV business in this part of the world.

Amongst the things said by his nominators was: *A few years ago, I arranged a visit to the BBC North East for some students on a Media Production Degree Course. Tony met with them and his enthusiasm for his work and the value of graphics, impressed all the students. He is a good role model for many young people coming into the industry — a very nice person, who always makes time to talk and discuss issues.*

Tony was always a vital part of the team — quiet and modest, but delivering ‘the goods’ efficiently, and in a friendly and willing manner. When we were studio-recording on Sundays, there was more than one occasion when a caption change was needed urgently — Tony would come in to make the change, even though it was his weekend off. I’ve been delighted still to see his name in the credits of programmes coming from Newcastle decades later.

During the early 70s the BBC expanded its regional output to include regional drama, politics and light entertainment. All set design as well as graphics design was produced by him, and he supervised the construction of sets on site at the old BBC premises in New Bridge Street. During the late eighties the BBC was expanding its output from its new BBC premises in Newcastle, and he became the Graphics Designer for the ever-increasing output for children’s television. A range of programmes including Jackanory and a number of children’s dramas were made in Newcastle. He designed the opening title sequence for the highly successful children’s drama Byker Grove. More recently, he has made an outstanding contribution to the regional magazine programme Look North, the regional current affairs programmes Close up North and Inside Out, the Sunday Politics programme and children’s network television.

Everyone who has worked with Tony at the BBC in Newcastle comments on his enthusiasm, innovativeness and commitment to the programme-making process. After over 44 years in the business, he has started to reduce his work load... although the thought of Tony retiring creates a level of disbelief!

His work on set design must be mentioned. Our set for *Townscape* was remarkable, particularly in the first series when it was squeezed into the confines of the Broadcasting House (New Bridge Street) studio — like a Tardis, it was considerably larger than the room it was built in. Subsequent series came from the Pink Palace, but the temptation was resisted to expand the cosy set, which so brilliantly echoed the ethos of the ‘best of the built environment’ programme theme. Without Tony’s quiet work behind the scenes, television in the north east would have been much duller. I strongly support his candidacy for an RTS Lifetime Achievement Award.

Making the presentation, Jonathan Edwards said: *I’m delighted to tell you about the winner of this award who I first came across when I started doing some work for the BBC in Newcastle. This is a man who began his career in the early 1970’s working on producing captions using black and white Letra-set. He quickly mastered the latest TV graphics technology — such as Aston and Paintbox — and before long was designing sets and graphics for local and national shows such as Townscape, Jackanory and Byker Grove.*

He is quite a simply a graphics wizard who forty years after his first foray into captioning remains at the forefront of today’s digital technology, easily harnessing everything from 3D to special effects for the benefit of programmes produced from the BBC studios in Fenham.

*Ladies and gentleman, I am so thrilled to be able to present the Royal Television Society Lifetime Achievement Award to **Tony Bannister**.*

