# *The Privileged:* A case study of regional television documentary production in the 1960s

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*Abstract*: This article is about *The Privileged*, a documentary series filmed by Westward Television in 1967 and broadcast in 1968 and 1969. This article offers the series as a case study of regional documentary production in a geographically peripheral ITV franchise area. It examines how documentaries were made by Westward despite the absence of a formalised documentary unit. This article shows how producers, editors and camera operators used their skills and experience to create an ambitious and innovative documentary television series within the more constrained budgets of regional independent television. Drawing on original production papers and preserved episodes of the series, this case study reveals how *The Privileged* took advantage of new production technologies and novel ways of filming and editing. It also considers the archival afterlife of the series, which has been largely been forgotten since its original transmission. The article concludes by drawing attention to some of the problems with the series’ partial re-presentation on the BFI Player website, and highlights the potential social and cultural benefits which could be obtained by enhancing access to archival documentaries such as *The Privileged.*

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# *The Privileged:* A case study of regional television documentary production in the 1960s

This article is about *The Privileged*, a documentary series filmed by Westward Television in 1967 and broadcast in 1968 and 1969. This article offers this series as a case study of regional documentary production in a geographically peripheral ITV franchise area. It examines how documentaries were made by Westward despite the absence of a formalised ‘documentary unit’ of the sort often found in larger and better-funded production centres. Westward producers, editors, and camera operators were highly skilled and experienced personnel, but lacked the budgets and corporate support of their counterparts within larger regional broadcasters and of the BBC. This case study demonstrates how they worked within these limitations. The article further considers how *The Privileged* demonstrates a negotiation with new production technologies and innovative, *verite*-style ways of filming and editing documentary material. By the late 1960s, lighter 16-millimetre cameras, zoom lenses, and portable synchronised sound recorders had made ‘on the fly’ documentary production a reality, and candid filming styles were well diffused across the film and television industry. Yet while *The Privileged* adopts many innovative techniques of fly-on-the-wall and verite filming, access to the series’ production papers demonstrates that such innovation was more a stylistic choice than a filming strategy. Finally, the article considers the archival and social afterlife of *The Privileged* and contemplates its fate as a largely forgotten archival artefact. Despite a high budget and ambitious remit, the series failed to gain a high profile, and since it original showing it has rested unwatched in the archive. This article suggests that, fifty years after its production, the series now has a heritage value far beyond the significance of its original production and broadcast.

The 1960s is one of the best-recognised periods of technological change in British television documentary production. During this decade, portable 16-millimetre film cameras and synchronised sound recording equipment began to make an impact upon the form and style of filmed television.[[1]](#endnote-2) At the same time, production centres and sources of funding expanded: the ITV network spread across the country, and the BBC launched a second television channel. Technological opportunity and channel expansion occurred at a rate which would not be seen again until digital non-linear editing and multichannel broadcasting during the 1990s. Some programmes, series, and strands from this period are very well known, and form part of a familiar canon of British television documentary. Much has been written about the prime examples of 1960s documentary: the BBC’s *Man Alive* and, on independent television, *This Week* and *World In Action*. These programmes have benefited from the privileged contexts of their production and original transmission. *This Week* and *World In* Action were, in the words of the ITA’s 1965 *Guide to Independent Television*, “the network’s main current affairs programmes”.[[2]](#endnote-3) Because they were made by teams with identified and often well-known leaders, it has been possible to speak, for instance, of “Tim Hewat’s *World In Action*”[[3]](#endnote-4). Furthermore, these programmes were watched by a large audiences which grew cumulatively. Consequently both have, to some degree, been mythologised in academic and popular histories.[[4]](#endnote-5)

But there is another, largely unwritten, history of British television documentary during the 1960s. Smaller and more geographically peripheral ITV franchises, finding their feet in a new television landscape and staffed by recruits from diverse industrial backgrounds, also made ground-breaking documentary television. Often presented as one-off programmes or single series and seen by only a few hundred thousand viewers, these programmes have not been discussed at length in critical histories of British television. The scattered and incomplete nature of regional television archives – often lacking in both accessible archived programmes and, especially, in the written materials generated during their production – make excavating these ‘forgotten’ documentaries a real challenge. In recent years some of the gaps in regional independent television history have been filled. In his *History Of Independent Television In Wales*, Jamie Medhurst points out that documentary programming was a “strong feature” of Television Wales and the West during the mid-1960s; the company won awards for both arts and current affairs documentaries, which – in addition to highlighting local figures, also found subjects in other regions of the UK and abroad’. Medhurst highlights, in particular, an Oscar-winning documentary on Dylan Thomas (129) as well as a film about Russia (137) and “the first ever documentary on Dartmoor Prison” (69).[[5]](#endnote-6) Regional television was not limited to regional subject matter, especially in documentary and current affairs.

This article presents a case study of a largely forgotten television documentary series, *The Privileged*. The series was produced by Westward Television in 1967-8 and transmitted in 1968-9. In 13 half-hour episodes, it examined the British university system at a time of change, four years after the publication of the Robbins Report into the future of higher education, and only months before the inception of the Open University. The series’ central case study was the University of Exeter, where the majority of research and filming took place, but the series did not confine itself to local matters. Ambitiously, it assessed the very concept of university education, and its role in national educational policy. 12 of the 13 episodes survive, along with two substantial production files.[[6]](#endnote-7) It has also been possible to interview the series producer, assistant camera operator, and film editor. *The Privileged* therefore presents a rare opportunity to assess the content and production of a regional television documentary series notable both for its thorough treatment of subject matter, and for its strong archival representation.

Situated in the midst of the 16-millimetre, sync-sound revolution, *The Privileged* is roughly contemporaneous with several ground-breaking television documentaries and documentary strands – including *World In Action* and *Man Alive*. But it is very different, in style and attitude, to these innovative programmes. In *The Privileged*, two aesthetics of television documentary – “instructive expositional” and (pseudo)“scientific observational” – mingle, often rather awkwardly.[[7]](#endnote-8) The series owes a greater stylistic debt to Dennis Mitchell than to Desmond Wilcox or to any of the verité pioneers. In *The Privileged*, there is substantial tension between two approaches to the documentary television. In many episodes, lengthy interviews are built into sedate montages and overlayed with didactic commentary. At other times, by contrast, free camerawork, fly-on-the-wall shooting, and loose associative narrative structures make the episodes seem surprisingly free.[[8]](#endnote-9) The series therefore offers an opportunity to question a reductive history of television documentary which places “radio with pictures” and “fly on the wall” on opposite sides of a technologically determined historical divide. Here, the two approaches collide.

Running to 13 episodes, vastly exceeding its budget, and featuring a lengthy in-vision introduction by the Duke of Edinburgh, *The Privileged* was intended as a landmark series for prime-time network showing, lucrative international sales, and television festival awards. None appears to have happened. After its premiere showing on Westward, the series received an inauspicious and irregular network showing on Sunday mornings in 1969; it won no awards; and the dearth of information about the series online and in library catalogues implies few sales and little or no global impact.[[9]](#endnote-10) However, this is a narrow definition of success. As this article demonstrates, *The Privileged* offered less obvious benefits – both to Westward Television, and to the crew who produced it. For Westward, the very genesis of the project was in an attempt to renew cooperative relations with the only university in the franchise area, thereby increasing opportunities to make original educational programming, and in turn bolstering chances of franchise renewal. For the crew, the series was an informal training ground and a space for experimentation, within a television production environment which, compared to its larger competitors, offered far less of either. The personal and institutional benefits of *The Privileged* far exceeded the impact of its transmission. After its transmission, all but one of the episodes was preserved in the film library of Westward Television (later Television South West), which now forms the core collection of the South West Film and Television Archive. The series captures aspects of social, educational, and regional life at the moment of its production, and is therefore now of growing historical importance. Its invisibility to the general public should be a major concern.

## Early documentaries on Westward Television

Westward Television began broadcasting on 29 April 1961, reaching Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and parts of Dorset.[[10]](#endnote-11) The franchise experienced a bumpy start: viewing figures were lower than expected, relations between staff and management were strained, and ambitions for local programming were stripped to bare basics.[[11]](#endnote-12) Agriculture, gardening, news and light entertainment initially dominated Westward’s limited schedule of locally produced programming; contributions to the network were consequently minimal. By the end of the decade, however, Westward was beginning to win recognition and awards for some of its documentary output, and these activities were to strengthen into the 1970s.[[12]](#endnote-13) In 1967, Westward’s most recent documentary success had been a forty-five minute programme about children with special education needs. Originally shown on Westward Television at 9:40pm on 2 November 1966, *So Many Children* was broadcast across the ITV network at 8:45pm on Tuesday July 11th 1967. It was heavily promoted in that week’s *TV Times*, which included a prominent feature spread on the programme.[[13]](#endnote-14) The programme captured the attention of broadsheet television reviewers, who praised both its observational style and activist message. The *Times* appreciatively noted that the programme “simply watched the activities of mentally handicapped children”, while the *Observer* speculated that as a result of the programme’s emphasis on the shortage of such schools “a few local authorities may be shamed into correcting this omission, and all of us learnt that there’s no need to look away”.[[14]](#endnote-15) *So Many Children* was a relatively rare example of an early Westward programme which made an impact on viewers well beyond the Westcountry.

Though unusual in its national impact, *So Many Children* was not unusual in form or content. By the mid-1960s, an informal documentary unit had formed within Westward Television. Its members included producer/reporter John Pett, camera operator Gerry Ewens, and film editor Jim de Wan. Their principal responsibility was the production of Westward’s most frequently-broadcast programmes: news bulletins, which were short and generally featured newsreel-style sequences of mute footage accompanied by live voiceover from the studio; and the longer *Westward Diary*, which followed the news bulletin and featured longer packaged reports. In addition to daily bulletins and the weeknightly *Diary*, Ewens, Pett, and de Wan were also members of a team which contributed packaged reports to *Outlook West*, a weekly topical discussion programme. As Pett recalled, *Westward Diary* was a “useful, more than anything else” for sharpening his documentary production skills:

One minute you entered on a donkey, or an elephant, the next minute you were talking to Cliff Richard, the next minute you were actually doing a serious film about the local police. […] So you were dealing with that melange, sort of mixture, very good for your point of view, from working, from developing, even at that age.

*Westward Diary* was a container for a wide variety of documentary features, but these were poorly promoted: films were finished too late to be included in the local listings magazine, while the magazine format, 25-minute slot, and early evening transmission time would not have invited careful viewing. News and current affairs consumed the attention of Westward’s staff, and so despite a lack of formal documentary strands and series, they acquired significant practice and expertise in this form of programming. Furthermore, *Westward Diary* offered a ready source of potential stories which – if provided with the appropriate budget – could be developed into longer documentary treatments. This had been the genesis of *So Many Children*, and this flow of ideas nourished a wide range of one-off documentaries and short series during the 1960s. *Wyvern At War*, a three-part historical documentary about the Second World War exploits of the Wessex Division, had won an Emmy in 1966.

It is clear that documentary was by no means an unfamiliar form to Westward during the mid-1960s, even if it was usually scheduled in a relatively low profile manner. By 1967, Westward had particularly strong reasons to increase its documentary output. At this time the Independent Television Authority was considering applications for renewals of ITV contracts, and the quantity and quality of locally originated programming would be a factor in its decision-making.[[15]](#endnote-16) A documentary series with an educational purpose, a national outlook, and a substantial budget would in theory make a major contribution to the argument for the renewal of Westward’s contract. Furthermore, there was a particular benefit in making the University of Exeter the subject of such a series. In 1959, one of the strengths of Westward’s original franchise application had been the overwhelming support of local dignitaries and civic and business leaders. Among them had been Sir James Cook, the vice chancellor of the university since its inception in 1955. Yet this connection had not provided a ready source of programmes: as Westward programme controller John Oxley complained to the ITA during a franchise interview in May 1967:

until the Vice-Chancellor changed about six months ago and Dr. Llewelyn took over they did not want to know us. They were very introverted, they looked inwards and were only concerned with their own operation, not with their public image or their place in the community. To the people in the West Country the University at Exeter [sic] is just a 'green hill far away'

Once Cook’s successor, F. J. Llewellyn, was in place, relations with the university warmed considerably. In early 1967, Westward proposed making a documentary series about the University, and the two parties began negotiations.[[16]](#endnote-17)

From the outset the two parties held divergent views on the shape and substance of the – as yet unnamed – series. John Oxley, Westward’s programme controller, was the prime force behind the commission. He envisaged “thirteen programmes explaining the purpose and functions of the University”.[[17]](#endnote-18) Oxley promised that the series would deliver a wide range of aims. It would do:

a good job of information and public relations on behalf of the University […] a detailed profile of a typical British redbrick University […] be useful […] to parents who may never have been to a University and whose children may one day attend one […] be of considerable use in preparing Sixth formers for the life they may expect to lead in a University […] be useful abroad in preparing overseas students prior to their residence at a British University […] The series as a whole should prove of interest to educationalists in the U.S.A. for example[[18]](#endnote-19)

These aims were complicated, conflicting, and ambitious, and in addition, the series was to have the “very valuable ‘residual’” of providing Westward with an opportunity “to get to know the personalities of the organisation of the University at first hand”.[[19]](#endnote-20)

The University brought different expectations. While Oxley’s desires were grounded in the managerial priorities of regional independent broadcasting – to gain a national network showing; to be sold abroad; to impact upon a national political debate – for physics professor G. K. T. Conn, this approach was too inward-looking. While Oxley wanted a series that would serve the needs of regional television, Conn’s desire was for a series which would reflect in microcosm the University for which he worked. Conn lobbied for a series organised around academic research and the history of the Westcountry. “Dartmoor and/or Exmoor,” he observed, “provide each a focus for a number of programmes. Thus: Early inhabitants of Dartmoor […] Animal Life on Dartmoor […]”.[[20]](#endnote-21) Though Conn’s proposal reflected a more academic, subject-based approach to the televising of university life, he was acutely aware of the risk that such topics might make for unstimulating television:

“Early attempts should be general rather than specialised and photogenic rather than wordy. Thus out of door material does much to disarm ‘dry-as-dust’ criticism. This is not to decry educational programmes which can be excellent if they don’t patronise or become arch but to draw attention to the fact that there is no reason why many should not entertain […]”[[21]](#endnote-22)

The two sides reached a compromise over a meal in a private dining room at the Royal Clarence Hotel in Exeter. There would be thirteen programmes: some would investigate the politics and operation of the university, and look at the lives of students and staff. But, in a concession to Conn, several programmes would be reserved as a showcase for the University’s research. In the following days, at the University’s suggestion, Westward arranged for rooms on the University campus to be reserved as a production office for the series. The crew was to be embedded in the university, enjoying “Honorary Membership of the Staff Club and facilities for taking meals within the University […] [and] an occasional night in the Hall of Residence”[[22]](#endnote-23) These privileges granted, the production team began to research the work and structure of the University.

## Innovation and Practicality

Beginning on 1 May 1967, from an office in Reed Hall at the centre of the University’s main Streatham Campus, the Westward production team – initially consisting of writer and producer John Pett and production assistant Geoffrey Worrall[[23]](#endnote-24) – carried out extensive research into all levels of the university. John Pett was, by any measure, the central creative force in the production of *The Privileged*. He was by nature a meticulous planner, who had learned to write shooting scripts in the quick-turnaround environment of Merton Park Studios in Wimbledon. As he recalled:

[Merton Park] commissioned me, not to write a script, not to direct, but to put cameras to a script, so that they could take it in a day, shoot it, and bring it back. And it would be easy to edit. I learnt then the value of the close-up, the wide shot, the zoom, whatever you like to look at. Because in a day I had to make a script, and hand to a director, who could actually shoot and cut it in that time. That taught me about the mechanics of film, nothing about the aesthetics, but about the mechanics.

The programme brief agreed with the University stipulated that “the creative team and the University are entirely free to include any […] facet of University function and purpose which they may consider germane to the subject”. Pett and his colleagues took full advantage of this liberal agreement. Their research was painstaking: it included a 37-point questionnaire submitted to the University’s academic registrar R. B. Behenna,[[24]](#endnote-25) and short interviews with heads of department and selected staff from across the university’s academic and domestic departments. “The main point,” one planning document clarifies, “is to find the most interesting man involved with the most interesting research work. Check him for individual views on this university, education and universities generally and on whether he would be good material for the programme from a strictly television viewpoint.”[[25]](#endnote-26) There is nothing in the papers to suggest that these interviews were mediated through a press office, nor any member of the university’s senior management.

The rapid progress of research satisfied Pett’s desire to carefully plan the series, but as an ambitious, headstrong and creative writer-producer he was also gravely concerned by the shape of the series Oxley had agreed to produce. In his first progress report to Oxley, delivered on May 10, Pett suggested abandoning the 13-part series in favour of “one or two 40 minute or hour long films. The difficulties in a series of 13 are enormous. They are not insurmountable but are going to take more time, thought, preparation… and money.”[[26]](#endnote-27) If a series of 13 was to be made, Pett insisted that

we take a theme common to the series […] and use this like the trunk of a tree with the programme as a branch, and the series progressing along this central trunk. Without this cohesion I don’t think you will catch the interest of either a specialist, or lay audience.[[27]](#endnote-28)

As research progressed, Pett continued to express his concerns in weekly progress reports to Oxley. By the end of May, the inherent complexity of a series of 13 was matched by worries about the “negativity” that had been revealed by research. Pett complained:

so much of the university is negative and, therefore, the programmes could also be negative. There are very few ‘personalities’ of the Oxbridge type, although we are making a list of the most televisual ones. There is an odd lethargy about the university atmosphere which, I think, ‘The Sunday Times’ described as ‘flabby contentment’ and this also provides a trap for the programmes.

As a remedy, Pett proposed a series of eight programmes each organised around an event in the social or academic calendar.[[28]](#endnote-29) He was overruled, finally, by Oxley; the series would follow the original proposal.

In addition to his concerns about structure, Pett was also anxious about the cost of the series. In another memo to Oxley, he complained: “It has been a tremendous battle to get this far and I foresee quite a few difficulties ahead. […] For instance on only a ratio of three to one we could still end up with around 30 to 40,000 feet of film. This alone will need to be carefully organised.”[[29]](#endnote-30) In consultation with director Gamble and production assistant Worrall, Pett drew up a tentative filming schedule. Filming was planned for two blocks in June-July and July-October of 1967. 16-millimetre black and white film was to be exposed in slated sequences “to facilitate editing”: “Unless this is done, and everything marked, we shall be in an unholy mess when it comes to assembling each programme.”[[30]](#endnote-31) The initial shooting schedule, covering the first block of shooting from mid-June to mid-July, fills a single foolscap sheet and gives only the vaguest details of what is to be filmed. The only technical requirement indicated on the schedule is whether or not lights will be needed – they are requested for all but two filming sessions.[[31]](#endnote-32) An undated “Provisional Costing” for the series budgeted the series at £9685: over and above the core production team, this included camera, sound, production assistant and electricians for 50 days plus overtime and the exposure of 50,000 feet of film. The budget also allocated funds to ensure that film editor Jim de Wan could work exclusively on the project for a period of three months, with his everyday duties covered by a relief editor.[[32]](#endnote-33)

Once preparatory research was completed, detailed shooting scripts were drawn up by Pett, following consultation with a director, Rollo Gamble, and camera operator John Cooper.[[33]](#endnote-34) While it seems that the entire crew had a say in how the episode treatments were to be rendered as filmed episodes, the shooting scripts suggest relatively little creative freedom for the film crew once production had commenced. Scripts were produced which minutely specified the sequences to be captured whether or not sync audio was to be recorded. A note on the shooting script for the first filming day instructs the crew:

“We have to shoot enough film to make a tightly cut building sequence […]. The sequence with titles should run about three minutes. We need really tight C.U.’s of faces. And we hope to get some kind of emotional reaction. In fact, this may not happen and there may not be many students there. This, like many other things, we can’t predict.”[[34]](#endnote-35)

For Pett, such cautious planning was “part of the reason *The Privileged* was reasonably good […] I did daily reports and all the crew had a shot list for the day and what we were trying to achieve”. What the surviving episodes and extensive shooting scripts show, however, is that shooting scripts were not used as mere planning documents, but as blueprints for the finished episodes. The close concordance of shooting scripts and final episodes calls into question the extent to which lightweight cameras and synchronised sound recording enabled spontaneity and improvisation in the production of *The Privileged*.

## Technological Change and Stylistic Negotiation

The production of *The Privileged* occurred during a time of substantial innovation in documentary film production. Lighter cameras and more flexible sound recording equipment enabled more creative, freely ranging styles. During the 1960s, the same technologies famously exploited by Leacock and Pennebaker (*Primary,* 1960) and Jean Rouche (*Chronicle d’un Ete*, 1960) made their way into the hands of documentary television teams. This happened gradually: Westward did not purchase a new Arriflex BL 16-millimetre film cameras until after 1964.[[35]](#endnote-36) Furthermore, while these technologies may have been broadly the same from one broadcaster or film company to the next, the uses of verité filming and the recording of synchronised sound varied widely. Some crews shot on-the-fly, capturing action as it happened and acquiring wild sync sound to accompany it, but this was not uniformly or exclusively practised immediately after the introduction of synchronised sound recording technologies.

To further complicate our understanding of the Westward crew used film and audio recording technology, the exact, day-to-day, usage of equipment in the production of *The Privileged* remains somewhat mysterious: extant production papers do not include daily progress reports or itemised equipment requests. Production papers reveal that *The Privileged* was generally shot by a single camera team consisting of Pett, a camera operator, sound recordist, and electrician; sometimes, but not always, assisted by a production assistant.[[36]](#endnote-37) The cameras routinely available to the production were an Arriflex BL16 and Bolex H16.[[37]](#endnote-38) There are many zoom shots throughout the series, but no direct confirmation of what make or model. However, in one exceptional instance the production papers refer to the need to hire a “20 to one zoom” – almost certainly an Angénieux model. As a result, given the extremity of the zooms on screen, we can be fairly sure that the team routinely used an Angénieux 10:1 zoom lens. For *The Privileged* the majority of filming (56,600ft) was done on 100ft or 400ft reels of Ilford MK5 film stock; a significant amount (13,700ft) of Ilford FP3 was also used. A small amount (800ft) of G30 and G36 stock was also exposed. All of this was mute film: only 1500ft of magnetic sound-on-film stock was exposed – about two per cent of the overall footage.[[38]](#endnote-39)

While Leacock, Pennebaker, and Rouche had led the way in the early 1960s, by the time that *The Privileged* was produced in 1967, members of Westward’s documentary crew were still familiarising themselves with relatively new equipment, and even moreso with the possibilities and challenges of a novel approach to documentary. The novelty of these techniques is reflected in the unstable terminology used to describe them. The shooting script for a sequence depicting students receiving their examination results calls for a “verite sequence as students see results”. Another calls for a “free film sequence of couples on beach at dawn” and “Free camera sequence using camera to express thoughts of couple”[[39]](#endnote-40). Yet another script makes reference to “so-called ‘actuality’ filming”. [[40]](#endnote-41) This variation in language, and its tentative nature, betray both the novelty of verite filming styles and the perceived riskiness of their use. This attitude had significant consequences for the style of *The Privileged*, and the production logistics underlying its filming.

Many documentary productions adopted verite as a filming strategy – capturing live action using lightweight cameras, zoom lenses and sync sound recording because this was the only way to capture one-off events. But this was not the case for *The Privileged*. Close examination of the finished episodes reveals that verité in *The Privileged* was more a stylistic choice than a filming strategy. Far from being captured on the fly and by chance, most sequences were scripted in advance in painstaking detail and edited in close accordance with the shooting scripts, leaving little room for unexpected actuality to intrude upon planned episodes. The episode “Pawns”, which examines university life from the perspective of a pair of freshers and a pair of finalists, is a case in point. It begins with a short introductory sequence depicting the four students on the beach at dawn on the morning after the Summer Ball. Pett, narrating, explains that these students are “in a sense the pawns of the educational game.” The episode title appears in vision over a lingering shot of the students, followed by a mix to the arrival of a train at a railway station. Thus begins an intercut two-minute sequence of shots from two filming assignments, both of which took place at Exeter St Davids railway station on the same morning in October 1967. The sequences depict, in turn, a male student and a female student arriving on their respective trains, disembarking and walking along the platform with their luggage, before waiting at the station entrance for transport to their university hall of residence. The female student is shown getting into a minibus and being driven away; the camera accompanies the male student in a taxi.

**[INSERT FIGURES 1-4 HERE]**

These sequences are identified in the shooting script as “actuality filming”, and while they take advantage of portable cameras and sync sound, they were nonetheless choreographed in minute detail, and appear in the final edited episode in much the same form as they were planned – the script even notes the likely intention to “intercut arrivals”. Camera movements within individual shots are prescribed too: as a sequence captured, ostensibly on-the-fly outside the station, shows. A female student (identified in the shooting script as “the girl student”) awaits her transport at the station entrance. The camera zooms back and pans as she walks away from the waiting crowd and towards waiting taxis (see Figure 1). Shot hand-held from a distance through a long lens, and with much movement of the camera, this short shot – a small component of a much more substantial montage – gives every appearance of having been captured casually, without rehearsal, or as if by chance. Yet the shooting script shows that it was carefully planned in advance:

“C.U. of Darryl and ZOOM or PULL back from her as she looks around for transport. Isolate her if we can.”

In other parts of the series, shooting scripts describe not only the camera movements and framing, but also the dramatic or editorial impression which they are intended to create. The script for the beach sequence requests the film crew to capture a:

“Free film sequence of couples on beach at dawn. Concentrate on bedraggled finery. Ties awry. Couples (and our own couple). THIS MUST GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF YOUTH WITH REAL LIFE SOON BEGINNING. ROMANTIC PERHAPS BUT ALSO RATHER SAD.”[[41]](#endnote-42)

By contrast, true actuality filming, of events which the film crew would be unable to control, appear to have been seen as a hassle. The Privileged crew shot a sync sequence in which an academic from the Institute of Education interviewed four school leavers about their thoughts on the education system. The shooting script warns: “It is another ‘pig’ to film and we will probably have to do it on the ‘pod’ […] basically a question and answer session on which we are eavesdropping and will have to be played as such. It would be difficult to get girls to repeat answers. Sorry mates.”[[42]](#endnote-43)

The production materials also show that sync sound recording was used only sparingly in these actuality sequences. In the railway station sequences described above, for example, sync audio was recorded to accompany only about half of the shots in the sequence. A later sequence from the same episode, in which a male student meets the warden of his hall of residence, begins with a very brief exchange in sync audio, before the sync audio dips out to be replaced by a voiceover of the male student recounting this meeting taking place on screen. This, indeed, is the dominant mode of sound design in *The Privileged*: it is a documentary built largely out of silent footage underlaid with separately acquired audio. In an approach to sound design which recalls episodes of *Morning In The Streets* (Denis Mitchell, 1959) speakers – especially students – frequently appear on the soundtrack anonymously and without introduction. Only on a few rare occasions is the voice of the interviewer audible; on fewer still are his questions shown on screen in “reverses”. In only a few episodes are the full possibilities of sync audio exploited to their fullest extent. In one such episode, the camera follows students around a summer ball, capturing interviews with some of them in the dimly lit, noisy environment of a student union building. This is one of the relatively few points at which the series appears to offer a truly unscripted, fly-on-the-wall view of student life. It is the exception to the dominant sound design strategy deployed across the series.

This is another compromise between technological innovation, novelty and practicality. Using out-of-vision audio interviews was a strategy which John Pett had adopted out of necessity when making *So Many Children*: parents were unwilling to speak on camera about issues which were, at the time, highly sensitive. Some of the interviews captured in *The Privileged* are also somewhat sensitive – students complain, for example, about the quality of teaching and about other aspects of their university experience. However, these interviews were filmed by a camera crew recording sync audio – not captured on tape recorder alone. The decision to separate the interview audio from the footage was made on purely aesthetic grounds. When viewed alongside contemporaneous episodes of documentary series such as *Man Alive*, the relative lack of sync audio in the complete episodes may give the impression of technological impoverishment. The series’ production papers contradict this view. While Pett and de Wan’s choice of sound design may have made an outdated by the late 1960s, it was nevertheless a knowing choice, and not the symptom of a lack of equipment or expertise on the part of Westward Television.

## Teamwork and Challenge: Documentary’s Tacit Functions

The example of *The Privileged*, and the other documentary series made by Westward Television during the 1960s shows that tight budgets and scarce resources did not limit the outlook or ambitions of producers. On the contrary, they forced a mingling of skills and generic specialisms. During a franchise interview in 1967, John Oxley cast Westward’s small size as a virtue, vividly articulating the way in which the company’s intimate working environment encouraged greater and faster creativity in programme-making:

the right creative climate is of paramount importance in any kind of programme, not just in light entertainment. Unless you allow your creative people to have the necessary freedom of operation you can give them all the money in the world, all the facilities, the best script writers and so on, and you will not get anything more than rotten television. This is one of things which [editor in chief] Terry [Fleet] and I appreciate most about working in regional television, that the lines of communication are so short. You do not have to wait half a day if you are a cameraman and you have got a suggestion to make on a programme in order to see the programme controller. You walk ten yards up the corridor and there he is.[[43]](#endnote-44)

Oxley’s comments to the ITA panel may sound like making a virtue out of a necessity, and expressed in retrospect, they might sound like a rose-tinted view of the early history of regional television. But the example of *The Privileged* indicates the reality behind Oxley’s argument. Documentary programming served two purposes for Westward Television. It fulfilled a basic contractual obligation to produce locally originated programming, of which documentary, current affairs, and educational material would have the clearest public service value. More subtly, however, the production of documentary programming provided vital training and development opportunities for Westward’s staff producers, camera operators, and editors. At the BBC and in larger ITV companies, there were greater opportunities for film production camera teams and editors to undergo formal training. Apprentices, joining with little experience of the television industry, could see clear career progression ahead of them. Within Westward there were comparatively few such opportunities. For several of *The Privileged*’s production team, the series provided a first or early opportunity to work in a long-term documentary context. For more experienced crew members, the series – and other documentaries made during the same period – offered a satisfying creative challenge, and fostered a sense of creative collaboration and teamwork.

These benefits remain vivid in the memories of surviving members of the production crew. When separately interviewed in 2015, almost 50 years after the production of the series, John Pett, John Kingdon and Jim de Wan each recounted similar stories of the significance of the series in the broader context of Westward’s documentary and current affairs output. For John Kingdon, who served as assistant camera operator, the series offered a first taste of life as part of a film crew. After starting his career working as a studio camera operator, Kingdon bought his own Bolex camera and became Westward’s freelance cameraman in Plymouth, shooting mute sequences for the short evening news bulletin. Just as *Westward Diary* provided story material for longer documentaries, so for Kingdon it provided training opportunities, as he was soon invited to join the large *Diary* team on assignment. From there, Kingdon recalled, it was “a natural progression” to work on longer format documentary assignments. *The Privileged* challenged Kingdon with a “very great learning curve”, but it also offered opportunities to film material solo and to receive constructive feedback from more experienced colleagues. Kingdon recalled a particular occasion on which *The Privileged* offered an expanded opportunity to develop as a film camera operator:

For one of the episodes we went to Cambridge and while Gerry [Ewens] was doing interviews with various people, John Pett said to me, take your Bolex and get around the city and take whatever takes your fancy: buildings, you know, general shots. So I did that and when he saw it all he said he was absolutely knocked out with it all. And it's probably the biggest compliment a director made to me at that particular time.

For Kingdon, then, working on *The Privileged* was a much greater training opportunity than the shoot-and-pray work of a news freelancer. Yet the same series offered different advantages to the more experienced members of the crew. John Pett vividly recalled an ‘instinctive’ understanding that the production team had generated by working together. For Pett, his relationship with the camera operator, Gerry Ewens, was invaluable when it came to working with the camera operator who was to record his vision on film:

[Gerry Ewens] filmed every location filming […] we'd already worked together, on [*So Many Children*] and various other films. And we had a shorthand. Which I think was essential, when you're working with someone like that. He had an instinctive feeling for an image which, you could describe what you want. […] the shooting script normally would be for a static location, either an interview or within the labs, or within somewhere like this, where people were taking exams. That would be quite precise in a way because Gerry and I understood the nature of television and the close-up, and what I wanted from him, and he knew, it was him particularly, was not the standard close-up like this, but the side close-up. Something that gave an actuality feel to it. And he was very good at that. And also he was very good off the tripod. […]He was great handheld, and I gave, because we were in tune together he knew what I wanted, and I told him, and we put on the shooting scripts the basic shots that we wanted. Shots that without I knew I couldn't cut.

Pett felt that he shared a similar ‘instinctive’ relationship with Jim de Wan in the cutting room:

The editor Jim de Wan and I had worked together several times, he was what I would call a real professional. He came from London. And he and I worked together very like Ewens and myself, because we knew instinctively what we wanted and he had the skill of cutting film. […] For me editing was a matter of rhythm, and cutting. And I think Jim had that. And what he did was take material that I had, and turn them into sequences within themselves. So therefore we had the material we wanted, but that was good, because that was good from his point of view too, because it actually turned that into the rhythm, the continuity, the development of the shot.

Jim de Wan, interviewed separately, relayed similar memories of working with Pett:

I used to work with John Pett a lot. We had a lovely way of working. He would do his script, we’d sit down and view the rushes, and then discuss what he wanted to do, and then I’d follow his script more or less. He was usually out on location when I was working on his films. If anything went wrong - he used to phone in every night, I’d say it’s all worked except for this and this, and I suggest we do whatever, and he invariably took my advice.

Taken together, these recollections enhance the importance of documentary production within Westward Television, emphasising tacit benefits of training production personnel and satisfying their desire to meet creative challenges. Overlooking documentary and current affairs contributions made by regional independent television companies therefore misses a vital part of the story of the smaller independent television companies.

## Remembrance and Re-use

For decades after its production and transmission, *The Privileged* remained out of the sight and reach of the public. At first, it rested in the archive of Westward Television and Television South West, before being transferred to the South West Film and Television Archive. Though preserved, almost complete, it was in most all other respects ‘forgotten’.[[44]](#endnote-45) The series was neither repeated in prime time nor commercially released; it has escaped critical attention; it was produced by a relatively low profile team. A small portion of the series can now be viewed online, but the majority remains confined to the archive. What is the value, then, in ‘remembering’ the series?

Very few of Westward Television’s early documentaries are available – legitimately or otherwise – to the viewing public. Documentary television made for other broadcasters is more readily accessible. Entire episodes of *This Week* and *World In Action* can be found, in convenient breach of copyright, on YouTube; so can a number of episodes of *Man Alive*, in addition to those which are available, legitimately, on the BBC’s website. It is not so easy to view Westward Television programming. Little can be found on YouTube, and the South West Film and Television Archive offers only limited selections of short clips online. The BFI’s Unlocking Film Heritage initiative has recently enabled the digitization of hundreds of film clips from regional archives across the country. Many clips captured during this initiative are now presented online within the Britain On Film section of the BFI Player.[[45]](#endnote-46) *The Privileged* is among the series to have been brought to light through this initiative. However, the parts available at the time of writing – 20 minutes of one episode and 13 minutes of another, both of which had an original running time of approximately 26 minutes – represent only a fraction of the overall production.[[46]](#endnote-47) While this new archival access is to be warmly welcomed, it exposes a number of critical shortcomings in the BFI Player’s treatment of material which originated from television. Of greatest concern, in the context of the Player’s re-presentation of *The Privileged*, is the unacknowledged editing of episodes available via BFI Player. The two episodes available – “The Pawns” and “The Loose Change” – are presented if they were intact, topped and tailed with the series; original opening titles and credits. The fact that the episodes are missing parts of their original content – in one case amounting to half of the original running time – is not acknowledged in the metadata, while the edit points in the mutilated online versions are not made obvious. Any viewer without access to the complete version of the episode will be none the wiser as to these alterations. Other criticisms of the BFI Player are more general. The interface offers a limited amount of metadata. It does not allow searching by originating television company, and while many clips are short items or excerpts from longer documentaries, the user cannot readily browse to the ‘parent’ series or collection. In many cases the interface does not reveal the precise date on which footage was transmitted, nor the position of an excerpted episode within an overall series. This does little to encourage broader searching within the catalogue of the originating film archive, and the misleading title “Britain On Film” masks the degree to which the BFI’s online archive is populated with material created for television.

Thus, while the tip of the Westward iceberg glints upon the surface, the only way to access the full range of archive material carefully preserved and expensively digitised by the South West Film and Television Archive is to travel to Plymouth and consult it in person. This is not to fault the diligent and committed efforts of the staff of that film archive; across the board, better access is needed to material of such unique cultural and historical value. Highlighting the place of *The Privileged* within the broader documentary production history of Westward Television allows a better articulation of the importance of collections held by regional television archives – and an opportunity to highlight their significance in tracing the social, educational, and environmental history of regions of the United Kingdom.

This is vital, because the importance of remembering a forgotten regional television drama such as *The Privileged* goes far beyond the notion of packaged programmes from which clips may be may be extracted and presented in a web interface or museum installation. SWFTA, built upon a foundation of material donated by Television South West after its franchise ceased at the end of 1992, is as much a repository of local and family history as a holder of films and television programmes. The Archive holds a wealth of material which, if shot on a narrower gauge of film, might be described as “home movies”: *The Privileged* alone includes shots of families on holiday, groups of students, University staff at home with their young children and pets. Yet these scenes are probably not known to many of the people depicted in them. Home movies are usually known to exist: even if languishing in a biscuit tin stored in an attic, their existence – if not their precise location or preservation status – is known to those who were involved in their creation. This is not the case for domestic scenes included within forgotten television documentaries. Watching such old material, the researcher wonders whether descendants of the interviewed subjects – some of them only very recently deceased – have considered the possibility that a film archive might hold the only moving images of their loved ones. At a time when funding for heritage organisations is at best uncertain and at worst eliminated altogether, what value might be placed upon these images? The global genealogy industry is worth billions of pounds – Ancestry.com alone netted $211.4m in revenue in the second quarter of 2016.[[47]](#endnote-48) What new streams of volunteers and customers might offer their time and money to regional television archives if they were seen not only as keepers of films and television programmes, but also as vaults of family history? Perhaps, by unearthing regional television documentaries – even when they are forgotten, low profile, or even regarded as low quality – it may be possible to reimagine regional television archives as centres for family history, and in turn engage a new generation in the urgent work of moving image preservation and access.

*The Privileged*, then,deserves to be remembered – along with many other programmes currently preserved in obscurity. It is, on its face, a valuable document of British social life and educational policy at a crucial moment in the 1960s. To historians and scholars of television, its reveals a lesser-known aspect of the early history of regional independent television. It adds to an existing picture of the complexity, professionalism, and ambition of early regional television documentaries, while also demonstrating the importance of such programming to the training and development of creative and technical personnel. Furthermore, with its broad scope and lofty aims, *The Privileged* reflects one of the important ways in which smaller regional broadcasters articulated public service values through their regional characteristics – making documentaries which were simultaneously local and national in their topic and outlook. With an ongoing heritage value well beyond the study of television history, the series ought to provoke a closer examination of television documentary making in the South West, which should in turn help to make the case for increased investment in the regional film archives – with an emphasis on their role in reimagining television archives not only as libraries of programmes, but as memory stores for future communities.

**Image Captions**

*Figures 1-4: Shots from “Pawns”*.

1. For the influence of cinema verité and direct cinema on British television documentary in the mid-1960s, see Peter Goddard, John Corner and Kay Richardson, *Public Issue Television: World In Action, 1963-98* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007). Stella Bruzzi, in *Seven Up!* (London: BFI, 2007), offers a useful contextual discussion of British television documentary at this time: see pp 22-28. A broader account of documentary technologies can be found in John Ellis, *Documentary: Witness and Self-Revelation* (London: Routledge, 2012), 33-44. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. *ITV 1965: A Guide to Independent Television* (London: Independent Television Authority, 1965), 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Goddard, Corner and Richardson (2007), op. cit., 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. In addition to much academic writing touching upon *Man Alive*, the BBC itself contributed towards this memory-making by way of a *Late Show* special onbroadcast in August 1993. See John Ellis, *Seeing Things* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Jamie Medhurst, *A History Of Independent Television In Wales* (Cardiff, U. of Wales Press), 69; 129; 137. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. The episodes are on 16mm black-and-white film and Beta SP tapes at the South West Film and Television Archive in Plymouth. The production papers can be found in file 1789, boxes 30 and 95 at the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office (hereafter PWDRO), also in Plymouth. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. I borrow these terms from Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower, 2005), 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. This episode was provisionally titled “Dreamtime”. Memo, PWDRO File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Westward planned to transmit the series weekly at 2pm on Sundays with a repeat at 1225 on the following Saturday; Tyne Tees also transmitted the series starting in the same month. Network showing came in January, at a similar time. An energetic promotional campaign including 500 copies of brochure sent to all university vice chancellors and county education officers, British Council and FCO – 5,000 copies of brochure published. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain: Vol. 2* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Ibid, 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Jeremy Potter, *Independent Television in Britain, Vol. 4* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 183. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Scarth Flett, “Children in a school of hope”, *TV Times* (London edition), July 8-14, 1967, 2-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Henry Raynor, "TV as a positive force", *The Times*, 12 July 1967, 6; George Melly, “The dangers of a proxy climb”, *The Observer*, 16 Jul 1967, 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. CITATION [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Minutes of Programme Contract Interview, 19 May 1967. Box 3995188, ITA/IBA/Cable Authority Archive (hereafter ITA Archive), Bournemouth University. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Letter, 27 Feb. 1967, PWDRO File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Letter, 7 Mar. 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Programme Proposal, February 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. Letter, 20 March 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Memo, 2 May 1957 (*sic* 1967), PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. Memo, 17 May 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Memo, 10 May 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. Memo, 26 May 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. Memo, 2 June 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. The team ended up shooting over 70,000 feet of film – a ratio of about 6:1 – and considerably exceeding the overall budget. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Memo, 5 June 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. Provisional Budget, 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. By June the budget had risen to £11,165 – mostly due to increased anticipated costs of printing, negative cutting, and editing. The budget continued to climb throughout the production process, and by the end of November 1968, just prior to transmission, costs had risen to £15,739. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. Memo, 26 May 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. Rollo Gamble’s name appears hardly anywhere else in the production papers, and the surviving members of the production team do not recall his close involvement with the series production. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. Shooting Schedule, 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. Application for Appointment as Programme Contractor for South West England Area. Box 3995188, ITA Archive. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. Memo, 25 May 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30, and Memo, 2 May 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. Memo, 12 July 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. Film Stock Record, 1967-8, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Shooting Script, 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. Shooting Script. 23 June 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. Shooting Script, 1967, PWDRO, File 1789, Box 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Minutes of Programme Contract Interview, 19 May 1967. Box 3995188, ITA Archive. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. Here I refer to the expanded definition of ‘forgotten’ developed by Lez Cooke, Billy Smart, and John Hill. See “Reflections on a Research Symposium”, Forgotten Television Drama. 22 March 2014. https://forgottentelevisiondrama.wordpress.com/2014/03/22/reflections-on-a-research-symposium-university-of-ulster-belfast-campus-20-21-february-2014-by-lez-cooke/ [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. Britain On Film, BFI. <http://www.bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film> [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. “The Privileged? The Pawns”. BFI Player. <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-the-privileged-the-pawns-1968-online>; “The Privileged? The Loose Change”. BFI Player. <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-the-privileged-the-loose-change-1968-online> [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. Ancestry.com LLC, ‘Ancestry.com LLC Reports Second Quarter 2016 Financial Results’, 20 July 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)