

## SIMON CHANNING WILLIAMS 1945-2009

### A Personal Recollection by Jack Gold

Simon was a truly great producer with a credit list of first class, award-winning films. But producers, and certainly not great ones, are never found fully-formed and wandering the pavement in Wardour Street.

They are made by their own experience, enthusiasm and dedication.

Like many of us of his generation, Simon was a product of that great period of British film-making taking place at the BBC during the middle 1960s and 1970s, the era of the single film, shot on location and with a running time of average ninety minutes. I first met Simon in 1971 on "Stocker's Copper", a Play for Today by Tom Clarke set in the Cornish clay strikes of 1913. I was directing, John Bruce was First A.D. and Simon was the Unit Manager. Back then, Simon had limited experience but the apprenticeship involved on this shoot was truly a baptism of fire.

The film takes place in the eerie moonscape of the clay pits of Cornwall and involved crowds of striking miners, militant police, fight scenes, union meetings, choirs, working in the pits and period trains. This required the detailed co-ordination of locations, actors, extras, technicians, transport, period design, wardrobe, make-up – and not forgetting the all-important catering. And Simon's work did not take place at the end of a telephone in London - it involved the essential ingredient of personal contact on the ground, persuading, mollifying and pressing, watching the schedule and the budget – and this was the in the time of tiny support crews, if any at all. So Simon's contribution was just enormous. He and I, John Bruce and all the crew shot the film in only nineteen days... we were under schedule by one day.

And we went on to win a BAFTA.

John Bruce later told me of an incident on the shoot which summed up one of the essential components of Simon's success, his pure dedication to the job in hand. Apparently it was the habit of the local miners we were working with to hold a Sunday morning cider-drinking. To test the manhood of those soft Londoners they invited John and Simon. Guess who won? It wasn't John, nor the miners. It was Simon, a man to be missed.