



Embargo date: Tuesday 28th May

MICHAEL BUERK – BRITAIN'S SECRET HOMES Press Pack Interview

What appealed to you about presenting this particular series?

"Well on lots of different levels really. From a purely selfish point of view, I absolutely love doing work and going to places that I would actually pay to go and see as a tourist myself. So if these are stories that I would be interested in anyway as a member of the public to root out and see, to be paid to go and do it on other people's behalf is rather nice. I suppose as a reporter what turns me on professionally is finding stories. Either about places and what's happened there or about individuals. Or to be in a place where something extraordinary has happened."

"I think being a reporter on the level I was for quite a long time, the great attraction is having that paid-for seat on the front row of history. This job is different, completely different in lots of ways but on the other hand it's also a privileged position to go and see where amazing things have happened or uncover extraordinary stories. Yesterday we were filming at Down House, Charles Darwin's home, where he came up with the idea that changed the world. My bottom was on the same seat as Charles Darwin's! You get that sense of moment, of insight, of importance, of just being there. A strange aura of being in a place where something extraordinary has happened."

Did you have a personal favourite from the homes you visited and their stories?

"The attic room where John Logie Baird invented television. There's a bit of a connection for me, if you've made your living out of television for a long time, and the invention of television in the 20th century did change the world in the sense of it has been a window for people to know more, see more, experience more, albeit second-hand, than people have ever been able to do before. It shaped our ideas of ourselves, our idea about history. And I've had at various times, a hand in that. To think it all started in an experiment in an attic in what is now a family house in Hastings and is a little girl's bedroom at the moment. And John Logie was up there with bits of hat boxes and wire and cycle bulbs and just invented this thing that changed the world. And of course had an even bigger impact on my life. It resonated I suppose."

What was the most surprising discovery from the series for you personally?

"In some ways I was a little bit sceptical about the title 'secret' homes, why are they secret? But it's secret in the sense that even if you might know the house is there, did you know what happened there in that particular place? As a reporter you tend to be most attracted to those places that have played some really important historical part. For example I filmed at Boscobel house, which is where Charles II hid up the Oak Tree. Who knows what shape the monarchy may or may not be in if Charles II had been captured after the battle of Worcester and likely executed? What sort of country would we be living in? What course of history would there be if this little house hadn't hidden him in this extraordinary story? Then there's a house that was used as a prison for high-ranking Nazi officers in the war, and although these Nazis held out under the interrogation, when they got back to their rooms and talked amongst themselves they were far less guarded. They didn't realise they were being listened to and the conversations being secretly recorded enabled us to survive subsequent attacks in better shape than we might have done."

"So from a reporter's point of view, I like the ones that don't just have an interesting human story, although some of those are fascinating in themselves, but tell us something about ourselves or about history that we didn't know before."

Have you always had a personal interest in history?

"Yes, in certain aspects of history. I think the dividing line between journalism and history is only a matter of how old you are isn't it? Oddly enough, a lot of the stories I covered as a young reporter are now probably history rather than journalism, so maybe a historian is just an old journalist really!"

How difficult has it been to decide on the placings for the 50 homes?

"In a sense it's an interesting exercise, but how do you measure one thing against another? How do you measure the little attic room in which television was invented against some of the more extraordinary houses like one in Wales built by the richest man in the world at the time? It's an absolutely enormous, huge folly, which tells you a lot about wealth and the coal industry in the 19th century. How do you equate one with the other? It is tricky. But I think what it boils down to is the further up the list you get, the more it has to be important as well as interesting and I suppose that's the criterion that counts."

Embargo date: Tuesday 28th May

BETTANY HUGHES – BRITAIN’S SECRET HOMES

Press Pack Interview

What appealed to you about presenting this particular series?

“I think I’m very patriotic, I really love Britain and as a historian one of the reasons I cherish our country is that everywhere you go there’s amazing history either all around you or, beneath your feet. There’s something really special about the saying “An Englishman’s home is his castle”; we do love our homes in this country. We’ve been lucky enough to suffer very few invasions so there is a lot of historical ‘stuff’ left and we also seem to be natural hoarders and collectors. Whereas elsewhere in the world treasures and quirky pieces of historical evidence have been looted or destroyed by invading armies - we’re lucky enough to preserve these amazing clues to the story of Britain inside just ordinary every day homes.”

“So I love the fact we weren’t just concentrating on the great, big, grand, glorious stately homes that we might all go and visit for a cup of tea on a Sunday. The fact that some of these places – you know, the tiniest bungalow that you can imagine, could also have seen history being made. We’ve even got one story that isn’t even an actual house, it’s a railway carriage that somebody bought after the war to live in and then they slightly expanded and built a bungalow around it. So from the very grand to the very modest, every single story tells us something special about what it is like to be British and what is it like to live in Britain.”

Did you have a personal favourite from the homes you visited and their stories?

“I think one of my favourites had to be the Old House in Somerset, it’s a beautiful house anyway in one of these sleepy little Somerset villages and there are a couple there who were just decorating 18 months ago and they had a big wall that needed re-plastering so they started to chip away and suddenly realised that there was this amazing painting underneath it. They removed a bit more of the plaster and it turned out to be this massive wall-size portrait of Henry VIII sitting there looking very domineering. Which is amazing in itself, but then it turns out it was painted just after he became head of the church in England so he was obviously trying to demonstrate his power by encouraging this kind of art on people’s walls. But if you turn it upside down, the image looks like Henry’s been eaten by the devil. So obviously the person who painted it was making a really subversive comment. It’s amazing that’s been concealed for well over 500 years and only just now that it’s come to light.”

Were you familiar with any of the homes and their stories already?

“There were a lot of surprises for me. I mean I spend my life doing this, my poor kids get dragged around! Other people go off to the cinema at the weekend, we go off

and look at mad houses or new archaeological digs, so I spend a lot of my time looking at the history of the country. But a lot of these stories were new to me. I think that's the joy of the series, they are all actual homes and a lot of them are homes that have never been filmed before. Some contain brand new discoveries, so for me it's really exciting because there were lots of genuine revelations in there too."

How would you summarise the series for viewers? Which elements will appeal the most do you think?

"I think what's great is it's a real mixture of things. It's always quite nice to nose around other people's homes and you get a chance to do that. Also I think in Britain we've always loved history and the past, we've always kept these significant little things. But in this case it's all behind closed doors, it's not in museums, so you're being given a really rare, privileged, unique opportunity to see this fantastic material that is not on public display."

"You never know what's underneath your wallpaper! We went to a home in Kent and in their bedroom is this beautiful hand-painted bespoke wall decoration from 1603 but painted onto their bedroom wall, covered up until 1914 so no-one knew it was there until the owners took away some panelling and found it. You never know what secrets are hiding in your own home. Also you never know how some of the biggest moments in our history can have a clue in the smallest suburban semi. History isn't just made on the battlefields or in corridors of power, it is also made in everyday homes"

Did you enjoy reuniting with co-presenter Michael Buerk after the success of Britain's Secret Treasures last year?

"Michael and I had such a laugh, we really get on and enjoy spending time together and obviously I'm passionate about history, but he is too, so for us it's a total treat going to these places."

"What I loved about doing these series is it proves to me what a smart nation Britain is. We're putting history and archaeology on primetime television and it's getting a fantastic audience. That says to me that as a nation we're really curious and we like finding out what's around us and what's in our country as a whole."

How difficult has it been to decide on the placings for the 50 homes?

"There were more than 100,000 to choose from, so I think it was incredibly difficult for the National Heritage bodies to make the choice of 50. The homes had to say something about the jigsaw puzzle of the story of British history. They had to help us understand the history of the country a bit better. Not just be interesting in itself but say something about how we've become the nation that we are today. Also, we love stuff that survived against the odds, like walls painted over or the railway carriage, bits of history that have managed to survive for centuries. Those that didn't make it onto the list, we're all itching to explore those too, so maybe their time will come!"

Britain's Secret Homes, presented by Michael Buerk and Bettany Hughes, is new and exclusive to ITV. Friday 7 June at 9pm.

For further information/images please contact:

Fiona Galliver (Mon-Tues) / Hannah Green (Weds-Fri)

Publicity Managers Factual

Tel: 020 7157 3029

Email: Fiona.Galliver@itv.com / [Hannah](#)

Peter Gray

Picture Publicity Manager

Tel: 0207 157 3046