

## ROUGH JUSTICE

The original Rough Justice programmes were produced in the BBC's Current Affairs Department by Peter Hill. He began work on the concept in 1979 and began production in 1980.

He introduced two new forms of work into this area of research. First, having already produced investigative programmes on other subjects for the previous ten years, he introduced a set of formal investigative procedures, bringing into the re-investigations the latest forensic scientific techniques as well as new means of obtaining important documents.

However, perhaps his biggest revolution was to make three programmes in a series all at the same time. This, though risky, proved very cost-effective. It allowed more money to be spent on research.

Hill also worked in close cooperation with the BBC lawyers – and also introduced the idea of having a senior legal figure ( usually a former appeal court judge) to supervise the work being undertaken. He also worked very closely with Tom Sargant of “Justice”

Hill also insisted that Rough Justice should always follow up cases - with petitions to the Home Office etc. Once a case became a Rough Justice case, it remained in the programme until it had gone through the Court of Appeal.

Hill's “Rough Justice”, some dozen programmes in all, went through three separate series, from 1981 to 1985. After this Hill left the programme when the battle between Lord Chief Justice Lane and Rough Justice took place.

The BBC took the programme out of Current Affairs and placed it in the more “documentary style” department, Features Group. Although subsequent programmes carried on the Rough Justice work, they did not have the strict discipline of the original series. This was no reflection on the team which took over the work. It was simply because such was not necessary by then. The original series had broken down many of the barriers, and after the public reactions against Lord Lane's outrageous criticisms of the programme, which were voiced not only in the Commons, but the House of Lords, he was never likely to criticize it again.

The Current Affairs series of Rough Justice covered the cases of Jock Russell, Michael McDonagh, John Walters, Margaret Livesey, Ernie Clarke, George Beattie, Alf Fox, Anthony Steel and Anthony Mycock. The presenter of these programmes was Martin Young.

Programmes in the Current Affairs period of Rough Justice won several awards, including an "Outstanding Journalism" award from the Royal Television Society to Peter Hill for his work on the series.

After Peter Hill left the programme, he continued working on such cases because of the Rough Justice pledge to do so. One such was that of Anthony Steel. It was a typical Rough Justice product. This had been the second programme of the third series of "Rough Justice". It was transmitted by the BBC in October 1985.

Hill brought this case to finality in 2003 when Steel's conviction was quashed in the Court of Appeal

It proved to be the biggest case he ever worked on – though it is currently being rivaled by the case of George Beattie which Hill has got back into the Scottish Court of Appeal, unsuccessfully, twice already.

In the case of Anthony Steel, exhaustive investigations were done by Peter Hill and his tiny team. Literally, every producer of such fish key rings in the world was contacted. Every retailer in Bradford was visited - as were all the distributors in England of such fancies.

It became clear during the early stages of the investigation that the police in Bradford had either lost or thrown away the original key ring. However, the Defence solicitor had hired a particularly diligent forensic scientist who had taken such a detailed description of it (there were no police photographs of it) that retailers readily identified as distinct from all others on the market. The police took to following the "Rough Justice" researchers around Bradford - asking retailers for the description of the key ring that the researchers had mentioned. It seems to have been the only means of getting the information they had thrown away.

The "Rough Justice " team suffered more harassment from the police on this case than on any other case. On one occasion the team was tipped off that their next interview had been infiltrated by the police - an officer was posing as a relative of the next interviewee.

Christine Aldred - who identified the ["Carol key ring"](#) for "Rough Justice" was threatened by a well-known "copper's nark" that she would find his foot in her throat if she talked to the BBC.

This kind of action culminated in a meeting Peter Hill had with a senior officer in Bradford - where the officer claimed that the police thought the camera crew and research team were students from Leeds University messing around during a Rag Week! That officer did not realise that the "Rough Justice" team regularly used surreptitious recordings in such circumstances - for their own defence against the police.

The most difficult person to approach was the mother-in-law Vera Smith. She refused all overtures and objected when her photograph was taken, perfectly legally, in a public place. Having started the campaign against Steel, she wished to avoid any personal responsibility for her actions.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the "Rough Justice" research was the hypnosis session conducted on the man who saw the Austin Cambridge car near the scene of crime at about the time of the murder. Comparing his original statement with the hypnosis recollection, the most striking aspect is the description of the back of the car, which convinced everyone on the team that the car was an Austin Cambridge and not a Morris Oxford, which is very similar.

The most difficult technical aspect of the programme was covering the confession. Reading it alone would have taken many minutes - and would have been boring. Further, the best way to look at the confession would be in situ - to see how Steel's version matched the reality of the terrain. Martin Young and Peter Hill, who scripted the programme, asked Paul Wilkinson - Steel's friend and no relation to Carol - to re-trace the route mentioned by Steel, and read out key moments of the confession at the relevant locations.

The most amusing visual - and perhaps the most telling - moment in the programme was when Martin Young released a large balloon on a string whilst standing at the back door of Steel's house. The camera was placed in the position Carol had been in when Steel had claimed to have seen her. The balloon was above the roof of the house before the camera saw it! It demonstrated that Steel could not possibly have seen Carol as he had described it in his confession.

"The case of the Tell-tale Fish" as this programme was called, was the penultimate programme by Martin Young and Peter Hill. [Lord Lane](#) was already enraged by their earlier work and determined to put them out of business.