

Stewart Mackinnon

Stewart Mackinnon (leaving year 1965) contacted the Club to ask after our progress, and to establish contact with the Club and the School. Stewart was keen to offer his mentoring services to the school, which as it happens operates a the 'Young Workforce' function, a weekly session which gives pupils access to industry specialists.

Stewart has taken a great interest in the development of films with a connection to deafness, which is very apposite in a High School context given Alexander Graham Bell's lifelong interest in the development of systems to aid deaf people.

Stewart's introduction for pupils

Stewart is a movie and TV drama producer working here in the UK and US (most recently on a series for Amazon Prime which he coproduced with Ridley Scott) and thought if any of the pupils are considering film and TV career and they or their parents wanted to have a chat about it he would be happy to get on a call. He has a number of new projects in development including a drama about one of the schools' former pupils whose mother and wife were profoundly deaf and it was this and his lifelong pursuit of a cure for deafness that led him to invent the telephone. Ironic and rather sad that Alexander Graham Bell's mother and wife couldn't make calls but in more recent times and drawing on his pioneering work, scientists have developed an inner ear cochlea implant that can cure deafness. Considering this and how we take our cell phones for granted this was the most extraordinary achievement for an ex-pupil. Steve Jobs may have developed the iPhone but he was standing on the shoulders of a former pupil who invented it.

Stewart's full-length CV – April 3rd 2022

I produce television drama and movies.

My job as a producer is to create stories – I write my own stories and adapt other stories, raise the finance, hire the writers, directors, cast and crew, make the movie and then sell it on to a distributor, broadcaster or platform.

I work across Europe and North America and recently produced a long running series for Amazon Prime which we've been filming in Canada and Germany and more recently produced an adaptation of Peter Pan for a Christmas movie for ITV. The budgets for long running series are enormous - the Amazon show ran for forty hours and cost over \$700 million dollars, involved 40 writers, 300 crew and took over five years to produce.

Movies and TV drama and games are only part of this huge media industry including social media and behind the pizzazz and glamour there are armies of skilled people financing, developing, producing, selling and distributing content - who get out of bed every day, roll up their sleeves, catch the bus and go to work. The industry is not only for creatives - the producers, writers, actors, camera, sound and lighting, composers, musicians, set, hair and costume design etc – there also many people with technical skills including electricians, set builders, carpenters, riggers, painters, drivers, editors, colourists, animators, caterers to name but a few, and not to forget the financiers, agents, publicists, lawyers and accountants etc., the list goes on and on.

My personal interest is in telling stories that have something meaningful to say - that have a clear purpose - and consider it to be a privilege to reach audiences around the world, but that's not for everyone. For many it's a 'cool' industry that provides an opportunity to work with interesting people, travel widely and build an interesting and rewarding career. The challenge for a school leaver who wants to get into the industry is knowing how to go about it – and unfortunately there is no traditional route map. School, family and friends and industry contacts, if you are lucky enough to have them, will help but everyone must find their own way. I have listed some possibilities – entry points - below but would suggest as you work out how to go about it it's important to be on the look for a mentor - someone who can help join up the dots, give advice when you get stuck and maybe open a few doors. Just someone who is steady and trustworthy to be your ally – it's a long haul on your own. It was a long time ago, but this is how I did it.

I left Royal High almost 60 years ago to start an apprenticeship in the print industry. I was then 16 years old, had no qualifications and was at the bottom of the lowest class in my year every year. It wasn't a race to the bottom for me - this was where I started – at the bottom and stayed there throughout my school years.

However, I soon learned I could run faster than most and was good at drawing but neither helped me pass exams. I remember that sense of achievement at winning races and seeing others struggle to create an image on a blank page, but it took me some time (many years) to appreciate just how important it is to find something that provides one with a

sense of achievement no matter how small the achievement may be. I knew there were others who could run faster than me but I could draw effortlessly and knew that I could do it a lot better than all my peers.

In my final year at school the rector announced a new competition for original research and thought I'd have a go which really surprised me more than anyone - I remember going to the rector's office to ask if I could submit a project and feeling like Oliver Twist asking for more porridge - but to everyone's surprise I won it.

I had come across a derelict flower mill on the outskirts of Edinburgh, did some research in the central library and spent weekends doing drawings of the mill, its inner workings and the enormous water wheel. I got to choose a few books and bought one about Rodin whose work I admired but someone, perhaps the rector, included a copy of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* in the pile of books. I don't know if any of you have read it but I like to think this was the rector's considered choice. These were the first books I'd ever owned or read and still treasure them and many years later tried to secure the rights to another of London's novels to adapt as a movie but sadly the rights were not available.

I had the good fortune to have two outstanding teachers. The Reverent Robert MacNicol was my form teacher and Nigel MacIsaac who ran the art department - both were thoughtful and kind but could be brutally honest.

Nigel told my parents I had the ability to draw but without the necessary qualifications I'd never get to Art College but despite his searing rectitude he was always encouraging. Robert MacNicol (known as the Mekon) was just a good man - he checked our attendance in the mornings - always attentive to the needs of this lowly group of ne'er-do-wells and always seeing the best in people. If we could assemble this group today, I am sure they would all remember this man's kindness and insight. What a wonderful teacher, we learned so much from him. All he needed was 15 minutes with us all every morning and supposedly for a roll call.

My breakthrough came from a chance conversation my mother had with a neighbour whose son had started an apprenticeship as a lithographic artist. I didn't know what the job involved other than knowing it had something to do with the print industry and it was a way to become an artist. My dad had a friend in the print industry and a few weeks later and like many other failures quietly slipped away from school to start a five-year apprenticeship. The grand door that is opened once a year was not for the likes of me. I am being unfair but then thought this was for the grandees to step through and go on to do great things. On reflection I think it's a lovely idea!

By any measure I was a failure at school or was it the school that failed me - probably a bit of both but I left knowing it could only get better. Perhaps it was Nigel and Robert or maybe the prize or the unconditional love I got from my parents but who knows what I'd have done if my mother hadn't had this chance conversation with a neighbour - but it gave me a door to walk through.

My parents didn't know how to advise me, how could they. My father was 19 years old when the war with Germany started. He volunteered to join the army thinking it would be a good opportunity to learn to drive, mastered that in a few days and volunteered for a new initiative that was being planned. He spent three gruelling months in the highlands with 50 others learning how to survive but only my dad and one other 19-year-old from Glasgow survived the course and few weeks later they were both on a boat to north Africa. It was the beginning of the SAS. My dad came home five years later but his friend didn't make it - my dad buried him somewhere in France.

My dad was a tailor's cutter which is a highly skilled job - tailoring is a long-standing tradition in our family - my dad's father and his father before him were all master tailors in Edinburgh - and when he retired he was the last master tailor in Scotland. He made the most beautiful hand-crafted suits for the great and good including prime ministers. (Ironically one of our daughters now works in the same industry - she studied Latin at Edinburgh University but is now working with the fashion designer Vivienne Westwood - but that's another story). But tailoring wasn't for me.

I really enjoyed my apprenticeship - and learned so much from my 'journeyman' Tom Bee, a wise and brilliant graphic designer who is still one of my closest friends. My passion for drawing never left me and spent every night of the week going to evening classes at Edinburgh Art College. One of the tutors suggested I apply for an Andrew Grant scholarship which I won. This was renewed each year for four years - all my fees and living costs were paid. From there I won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London and spent a further three very happy years there. Again, all my fees and living costs were paid.

I continued to work with my designer friends in Edinburgh. I was doing drawings for Jim Downie who is undoubtedly Scotland's most talented graphic designer and also still a close friend. We worked together on various Scottish publications including *The Edinburgh Review*, Festival posters, Scottish Tourist Board promotions. I also worked closely

with Gordon Brown on the Red Paper on education and before leaving Edinburgh was invited to work with the theatre director Trevor Nunn on set design for a season of plays he was directing at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford.

After moving to London and the RCA I was doing drawings for various magazines and publications including the Sunday Times, Time Out, Nova, Management Today etc and regularly contributed to the underground press including OZ, Rolling Stone and Black Dwarf. I was also showing drawing at the international drawing Biennale. Everything then seemed possible – Quentin Blake, Ron Kitaj, Peter Blake, Peter de Francia, Stuart Hood, Eduardo Paulozzi (who spent his childhood in Edinburgh) and David Hockney were my tutors. I spent my last year at Royal College in the film school and graduated with an MA (my one and only qualification) and was awarded the Royal College drawing prize. It was a substantial sum, and I bought a motorbike and a derelict bothy on the Isle of Mull.

I stopped drawing to focus on film making shortly after being invited to work in the USA with two other illustrators Ralph Steadman and Roger Law (Roger went on to create Spitting Image). We all turned it down when we were told we'd be working for Playboy magazine. It was a line I wasn't prepared to cross. I'd spent seven years learning how to tell stories as an illustrator and film maker and now wanted to use these skills to tell my own stories.

I read a fable some years ago that gives me great pleasure which I think provides a touch stone for life ...or at least my life

A young peasant boy had fallen in love with the local princess but when he asked the king for her hand in marriage, he was told he could if he brought her a piece of moon rock. The peasant boy looked up at the moon and after a moment of reflection asked the blacksmith to chain him to a large boulder which he dragged around for many years and when released was able to jump high enough to land on the moon but when he returned with the moon rock the king was dismissive - the princess was already betrothed. Sadly, he'd taken too long. In truth he'd been misled the King who would never let his daughter marry a peasant but if he had the marriage would never have worked, but the peasant had taught himself how to jump higher than any of his peers and was now wary of spin and fake news. I like to think he found the right girl, is happily married and considering a career in the film business and is now looking for a mentor.

I've set out some of the films and other initiatives I've worked on below -

Films

Stewart Mackinnon is a Scottish film and television producer, founder and former CEO of Headline Pictures. He produced the film Quartet, the international Emmy winning television film Peter and Wendy, and the Amazon Studios series The Man in the High Castle. In 2020, he founded Circle Pictures.

Artist:

Mackinnon designed the artwork for the British TV movie The War Game and went on to draw illustrations for Oz, Nova, Time Out, the Edinburg Review, Spare Rib, Ambit, The Times, Sunday Times and Management Today, and was featured in the Radical Illustrators issue of Illustrators magazine (no.38) published in 1981 by the Association of Illustrators in which co-editor George Snow singled out Mackinnon as "perhaps the greatest single influence on today's Radical Illustrators."

Producer

In the 1970s and 80s Mackinnon directed and produced a number of films including the Brechtian film Because I am King and Ends and Means written by Andy McSmith.

Mackinnon went on to found Trade Films which produced films and television such as The Miners' Campaign Video Tapes, When the Dog Bites, Woodbine Place, Border Crossing, an interview with Paul Rotha, and the Northern News Reel, which was distributed to trade unions and members of the Labour movement around the UK. Working closely with Murray Martin (Amber Films) and other independent film makers, Stewart was closely involved in devising the Workshop Declaration (1982) in partnership with the film union ACTT and Channel 4. The Workshops worked with their local communities, women's organisations and ethnic minority communities, and by 1988, some 44 workshops had had films funded and screened by Channel 4. So began a decade of experiment with progressive and aesthetically avant-garde documentaries and dramas screened on British television, which continued until 1990. Trade Films also established the first film and television archive in the North East of England, the Northern Film and Television Archive.

In 1988 Mackinnon co-founded the Northern Screen Commission with Sir Peter Carr, the North East Media Development Council (NEMDC - a policy forum), the North East Media Development Agency (NEMDA - the operational arm) and the North East Media Training Centre (NEMTC which also provided a course for deaf students). Mackinnon went on to found Common Features, which produced films such as *This Little Life*, winner of the BANFF Award and the Dennis Potter Award.

In 2005 Mackinnon founded *Headline Pictures*. The company has developed and produced film and television including *The Man in the High Castle* for Amazon Studios written by X-Files creator Frank Spotnitz, based on the novel by Philip K. Dick; the feature film *Quartet*, directed by Dustin Hoffman; and feature film *The Invisible Woman* directed by Ralph Fiennes.[29]

In 2020, Mackinnon and Jere Sullivan founded *Circle Pictures*, a company to produce feature films and television drama

Selected filmography

- *Because I am King* (1980, directed by Stewart Mackinnon)
- *Ends and Means* (1983, directed by Stewart Mackinnon written by Andy McSmith)
- *The Miner's Campaign Tapes* (1984, co-produced by Stewart Mackinnon) winner of the Grierson Award.
- *When the Dog Bites* (1988, directed by Penny Woolcock)
- *This Little Life* (2003, directed by Sarah Gavron) winner of an RTS Award, Dennis Potter Award and BANFF Award.
- *Bag of Bones* (2011, adapted by Matt Venne from the Stephen King novel)
- *Quartet* (2012, directed by Dustin Hoffman)
- *The Invisible Woman* (2013, directed by Ralph Fiennes)
- *The Saboteurs* (2015, written by Petter S. Rosenlund) and winner of the Prix Italia.
- *Peter & Wendy* (2015, directed by Diarmuid Lawrence and winner of an international Emmy)
- *The Man in the high Castle* (2015, adapted by Frank Spotnitz)

[This gives a brief](#) but useful overview of the UK's media sector

These links provide some useful points of entry to the industry

BBC

The BBC offers a variety of entry schemes in television. The Production Trainee Scheme, open to both grads and non-grads, is its gold standard fast-track paid traineeship offering placements in TV and radio around the UK and mentoring from a senior BBC manager. The Production Apprenticeship, aimed at those who don't have a qualification above Level 3/A Levels, offers paid work on a range of TV and radio productions while studying towards a Level 3 Apprenticeship in Creative & Digital Media. Both of these entry schemes and many others are detailed at www.bbc.co.uk/careers/trainee-schemes-and-apprenticeships. The BBC also offers a wide variety of four-week work experience placements in all areas of the business, detailed at www.bbc.co.uk/careers/trainee-schemes-and-apprenticeships/work-experience and individual job vacancies across the organisation at www.bbc.co.uk/careers.

Betty

Betty is always looking for talented individuals with creativity and ambition. Their website can be found at www.betty.co.uk CVs are submitted to Betty's talent team via The Talent Manager – www.thetalentmanager.co.uk, or alternatively freelancers can email at talent@betty.co.uk Throughout the year, the company offers a variety of internships and trainee roles to help new entrants get started in the industry. Betty's partnership with Creative Access www.creativeaccess.org.uk helps them to provide internships for talented young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. The company's yearly office runner role is another route into the industry and many of the runners have gone on to have successful careers within the industry. Betty also offers work experience placements from time to time.

Channel 4

4Talent is all about supporting fresh talent to build great futures in the media industry. The broadcaster offers apprenticeships in Business Admin and Creative & Digital Media, a Graduate pr

Comprehensive Stewart Mackinnon article by Rick Poyner in the *Design Observer* edition of November 2011, first published in 'Varoom' issue no. 3 in September 2007.

designobserver.com/feature/stewart-mackinnon-ruptured-and-remade/26288