

PINK FLOYD

Transmission: Now Possible

RC's resident archive film consultant **Keith Badman** reports on the recent recovery of two of Top Of The Pops' most legendary moments

I shall never forget the time and date, approximately 3:30 on the afternoon of Tuesday, 10 November 2009, when Dick Fiddy, of the British Film Institute, showed me the two, recently recovered editions of *Top Of The Pops*.

Finding lost clips from this now defunct, long-running BBC music series has been a passion of mine for years, and he knew it. To witness that day, 42 years after their original transmissions, the long-lost debut appearance by Pink Floyd and *only* studio performance on the show by the American band, The Turtles, was, quite frankly, astonishing.

Knowing the BBC's original disdain for classic recordings such as these (tapes were routinely wiped; films habitually junked), we have to ask, just where did this truly amazing footage originate? From the archives of one Bill Harrison, is your answer.

He has been storing, cataloguing and repairing both audio and video material for various clients in the music industry for many years now. Top-name bands, record companies, composers and arrangers have all utilised his first-class services.

"During the course of going through one of my clients' old material," Harrison told me, "I came across an old, half-inch, Sony reel-to-reel video, which he'd kept since 1967 because he believed it contained some precious family stuff. The tape, which had been recorded via the old, long-disused, 405, VHF-line signal, had even spent some time in a bank vault, the place where people would place things like precious master tapes.

"He said he would like to see what was on the tape and said 'Don't lose it'. So I carefully carried it back to my archives. One day, I was doing some recovery work on some other old videos at a factory in Chiswick (London) and it seemed a good idea to see what was on this tape. On the first inspection, I noticed it was in pretty poor shape. We do a heat treatment for old ones such as this and so we put it through one of those."

The cure in question, to remedy the break-down of the glues, waxy-ness or brittleness of the tape, is aptly known within the industry as 'baking', where the item is placed within a special, heat-controlled cubicle incubator. Harrison first gave it a 'slow bake', which was the standard kind, 55 degrees for three and a half-days. It failed to do the trick. The damage was, regrettably, far greater than it seemed.

"When we took it out and tried to play it," Bill recalled, "it was *still* sticky and so we gave it another bake," which was at 45 degrees for six days. It worked. The tape was now, just about playable.

"I dipped through it trying to find what was on it. You couldn't see a lot. I would have been amazed if that tape had ever been played after 1967. Naturally, I expected to find my client's home movies on it, of his family in their garden. It did start off with a few shots of the client's house, taken with his fairly new home video camera, but

then it suddenly cut to some television programmes, all from the summer of 1967. Stuff like the reports on the day The Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein died... items like the worldwide satellite broadcast, *Our World*, reports of when Mick and Keith of The Stones were in court, the ITN news interview with Paul McCartney when he said he had taken LSD; all kinds of little bits like that.

"Someone had taped over this client's home movies with these television shows, two of which just happened to be *Top Of The Pops*. That day, when I was watching these recordings, I had a guy called Andy Neill with me and when the Pink Floyd bit started, which soon snowed over, he got all excited and said, 'Stop, Stop, Stop. That's *Top Of The Pops*.' I said, 'What's *Top Of The Pops*? What you talking about?' He then explained."

Music historian Andy Neill recalled: "Through my work on various reissue projects on The Who I got to know Bill well. He has worked for the band for many years and now stores their archive. While

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working on another client's archive this particular day, among the items he was asked to look at, was an old videotape. I happened to be present when the engineer had a 'first pass' at running the video through after the tape had been baked.

"Although we were unable to see a clear picture, I could still hear what was, unmistakably, Alan 'Fluff' Freeman's voice. With my expectations mounting, the engineer was able to stabilise some of the video picture. He stopped and played a different part of the tape and over the speakers came See Emily Play. And there, if only for a brief moment, because the picture kept continually rolling, was the Floyd in all their '67 glory.

"For years, the group's three consecutive *TOTT* appearances always were, and still are, among the Holy Grails of lost 60s pop TV that the BBC and other short-sighted TV companies had criminally wiped after transmission. To say that I was excited and completely blown away by this important discovery was somewhat of an understatement! Obviously, because of the age and condition of the tape, which was very delicate, it was best not to risk damaging it completely by watching any further. So I suggested to Bill that the BFI (British Film Institute) would be the best place to try and transfer the material to its best state and so I referred him on to Dick Fiddy."

"I was in the office one day when a call came in from Andy", the Institute's freelance writer, researcher, Fiddy, recalled. "He's an old friend of *Missing, Believed, Wiped*, our annual event for showcasing previously thought lost programmes.

He's been involved in some musical discoveries in the past and he phoned me to say, 'Are you sitting down?' He had some really good news. He told me he and Bill were watching a tape of Pink Floyd doing See Emily Play on *Top Of The Pops* in 1967.

"They'd only watched a fragment of it, a few seconds of it, because the tape was in terrible condition and they were frightened of damaging it further. Andy suggested to him he should bring it into the BFI's National Archive where they would be better placed to preserve it and perhaps get some more pictures and information off it.

"Bill duly did this, taking his original half-inch tape to the Berkhamstead archive where he handed it over and one of our best video technicians got onto it. The tape was in atrocious condition. The oxide, containing both picture and audio, was falling off it as we were mounting it onto our machine. So, to try and dry the tape out, we had another go at 'baking' the tape.

"An optical copy of the tape was then made and on it we found two separate segments from two different editions of *Top Of The Pops*.

"On the first edition we've got Pink Floyd, Procol Harum (A Whiter Shade Of Pale), a Peter Whitehead film to accompany The Monkees' Alternate Title, and a repeat of The Beatles' *Our World* All You Need Is Love performance. On the second, you've got The Turtles (singing She'd

Rather Be With Me), Dave Davies (Tears Of A Clown), Tom Jones (I'll Never Fall In Love Again), Alan Price (The House That Jack Built) and a film, not featuring The Beatles, for All You Need Is Love.

"The quality is pretty poor, in places, there are picture drop-outs and the sound wobbles and weaves in and out, but actually, if you look at it, it looks as if you're picking up signals from the past. That's what's most fascinating about it, especially during the Pink Floyd segment. You've got pristine shots of Syd Barrett playing and looking quite the rock star, actually. Although I have to keep emphasising to people the quality is quite bad, I still there's more than enough there to keep fans very happy.

"The tape will now be sent to the BBC to work on it. They've got a great restoration team there. They'd love to get their heads on it to see what can be done. Not only can we now see what these lost clips look like, but they'll be great for short extracts so they'll be great for future documentaries or future extras on DVDs."

The hunt for other classic lost *Top Of The Pops* performances naturally rolls on. Who knows, in the not-too-distance future, I may be writing in *RC* about the discovery of some of the show's other classic missing gems: The Beatles' live appearance in 1966, Jimi Hendrix's debut from the same year, or The Doors' 1968 studio performance of Hello, I Love You, for instance. Fingers very tightly crossed.

Thanks to Bill Harrison, Dick Fiddy (www.bfi.org.uk/) and Andy Neill. www.keithbadman.com