

Bryan Wharton interview

SB: You started working for the Sunday Times in 1964, what was the role of photographs in newspapers then?

BW: Well, it was pretty limited. I had been working for the *Daily Express* before that largely because it was at that time of course a newspaper selling 4 and a quarter million copies every day, but it was above all the only one that used photographs properly, and that's why I wanted to work for them, and did, for 3 to 4 years before I then joined the *Sunday Times* because the *Sunday Times* **continues..**

SB: Columnist Philip Oakes says that working with you was serious fun and that your pictures show it. Are there any from the set at the National Portrait Gallery that still make you laugh when you remember how the shots came about?

BW: I mean George Brown in New York at this fearfully smart party on the Queen Mary. We had taken the trouble, as one always does when you are stuck on a place where you are dependent on radio to get any news as one was then before satellites. When I heard that George Brown was coming on, and it was 2 o'clock in the morning I knew perfectly well that he would have been imbibing at some considerable rate, and at that time he was Foreign Secretary. Nobody, none of the American television teams or photographers knew who he was. **continues..**

SB: Can you talk us through what happened with the Germaine Greer photo shoot?

BW: Yeah, Germaine lived in the studio next door at that time that she was writing *The Female Eunuch* and she was a singer strangely in some university program, almost a kind of student footlights thing, and she used to come in here every day because of this dome in the ceiling and hit top C, and I knew she was working on this book, and it was the *Oz* crowd who put the magazine together, and I can't remember why we did the photographs but it was one of those things that happened, and she is essentially sending up men's attitude towards women, quite rightly, at the time **continues..**

SB: Would it be right to say that your photographs of George Brown and the 6th Marquess of Bath reveal a mischievous side in your character?

BW: I Suppose so. It might reveal a mischievous side to their character more than mine, but I respond to it if I see it in them I will go along with it and so to that extent, yes!

SB: Is that also true of your photograph of Cliff Richard with Mary Whitehouse?

BW: Oh yes, I can't look at that without smiling. It reveals so much about both of them, their essential god-bothering, as we would once have called it. But that came about because I was actually photographing Mary Whitehouse, not for the first time, and I was always fascinated by her, because she was so preposterous in some ways and so absolutely certain **continues..**

SB: With your photographs of Laurie Lee or Allen Jones, who suggested the setting for the portrait?

BW: The setting for Laurie Lee happened because we were drinking together in the Chelsea Arts Club and that's where it is, and Laurie always had a grand passion for women, as indeed so have I, so it seemed perfectly natural to include Venus de Milo, who sits in the garden, a statue of her anyway. He had his violin and started to serenade her. It just happened like that because we happened to be in the Chelsea Arts Club, **continues..**

SB: Do you have a particular favourite portrait photograph you have taken and why is it your favourite?

BW: I have several actually. I like the one of Peter O'Toole in Dublin, not only because he made me drink a bottle of whisky first, because I had to drink for him that day, because he couldn't drink any more. He did order red lemonade. 'At least the colour is sinful' he cried. I like that because that's good memories, even if the aftermath of that isn't so good, with half my liver loss. I like the one particularly of Gulbenkian. And he said of it 'You've caught my touch of evil' dear boy, so I still like that one in the taxi in the collection, and also the other one.

Interview by Susan Bright