

26 September 2014 at BAFTA 195 Piccadilly

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**Anne Morrison:** I'm Anne Morrison, I'm Chair of BAFTA, and I'm absolutely delighted to welcome you all here for a very special evening, which is celebrating the career and the contribution to factual and current affairs television of Peter Taylor. [applause] An enthusiastic audience, that's what we like. I've been lucky enough to know Peter at the BBC, and for me he's been the person who's told the story of Northern Ireland with the greatest clarity and impartiality and revelation. Having grown up in Northern Ireland myself, as you can probably tell from the accent, I know that it's a part of the world where almost every fact is disputed. It's been an immense public service for Peter to have given us the insights that he has, and to do it in such a way that engaged an audience in this fraught and contentious area. But, of course, Peter has ranged way beyond Northern Ireland. Over forty years, his distinguished body of work in the factual and documentaries area includes reporting for ITV's *This Week*, through the 70s, and through BBC's *Panorama* from 1980 to the present day, and I believe there's even a film going out next week. And it includes the *Panorama* investigation *the Spies Who Fooled the World*, presenting on *Newsnight* *Brass Tacks* and *Public Eye*, his series for BBC *Two Generation Jihad*, *Modern Spies* and *Burning Desire*, about smoking and the politics of tobacco. And we're not exactly the first to extol his achievements. Over the years, as well as four BAFTA nominations, he's won a Grierson for his documentary *SAS Embassy Siege*, the James Cameron Award, the Christopher Ewart-Biggs prize for his lifetimes coverage of the Irish conflict, this year the RTS Lifetime Achievement Award, and of course he's been awarded the OBE. But let us add the BAFTA award tonight to that tally of awards. BAFTA produces a small number of tributes each year to major figures from the television and the film industries who have an outstanding legacy and have helped define creative excellence in their field. And Peter fits that description as well as

anyone I can think of. John Birt - Lord Birt, who sadly can't be with us tonight - has said of him: "You mightily deserve this recognition, Peter, for you're one of the few most important journalists of your generation, with an extraordinary canon of work which captures some of the darker truths of our time. It was a privilege to work with you." We're recording tonight's interview for the Heritage pages of the BAFTA website and through our websites including our online learning resource, BAFTA Guru. We aim to educate and inspire new generations of practitioners, celebrating the best in the creative industries. So tonight, dinner will follow an interview with Peter, followed by a presentation of the BAFTA Special Award. Without further ado, please join me in welcoming our host, producer and broadcaster Roger Bolton. Thank you.

**Roger Bolton:** Thank you Anne. Looking out at you, you're an impressive but rather scary audience. It's a measure of Peter's standing that you should have all come, but I feel a little like a first-former surrounded by prefects. So many outstanding broadcasters and journalists; mind you, only I think I'm that young. This is called a tribute evening, but most journalists think glasses are half empty, not half full, so I'll try to answer your difficult questions. I hope you will to - don't let him off the hook. Peter Taylor deserves no less. It was one of the best days of my career when, in 1980 as a young and besieged editor of *Panorama*, Peter got in contact with me. He'd left Thames - or perhaps Thames had left him - and he wanted a job. What is more, he had a story; not invariably the case with his fellow reporters. As it happens, it was not about Northern Ireland, but about tobacco. I, of course, immediately offered him the longest contract I could, which was about three months, and of course he's never left the BBC employ since. Director Generals come and go, but Peter still kept getting on the flight to Belfast. It's been even longer, 42 years since he first went as a reporter to Ireland, and, as his latest film to be



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broadcast in Northern Ireland on Monday evening shows, everyone who matters is still talking to him. Still willing to be interviewed by him. It's astonishing, and I think an unparalleled achievement, particularly in the light of the fact that he always asked the toughest questions. How has he done it? Well, I hope tonight we'll get an inkling. First, though, here are some brief extracts from some of the films he's made over an extraordinary career. [Clips package shown] Now the format of what follows is that I shall talk to Peter for about 20 minutes or so, then there will be brief opportunity, too brief I fear, to ask questions. Alternatively, we could skip supper and go on all evening, which I know you'd prefer, but we're not allowed to. Let's start with his latest film, it's going out on Monday night in Northern Ireland and it's called *Who Won the War*, and I'll ask Peter at the end of this interview who did win the war, in his view. But everybody talked to you, Peter, and this is extraordinary. Did anybody not talk to you for this film?

**Peter Taylor:** The only person who I couldn't get to interview was Dr Paisley, because he was dying, and I wrote to him and his family, and it was just not on, because he was seriously ill. This was way back in July.

**RB:** But everybody else was there, and as I say I can't think of circumstances where, 42 years later, everybody still wants to talk to you. Why are they still talking to you? You've said: "Interviewees are central to the programmes I'm making, you'll need to treat them properly." What's "properly"?

**PT:** Well I think treating them properly means being fair to them, and with them, and gaining their trust. The amount of time that goes into persuading someone to do an interview is almost limitless, and you can only get their trust, and the trust is the basis of their decision to actually do the interview, something that you build up over many, many years.

**RB:** But there's also aftercare, isn't there. I mean, most people go and make a programme, do interviews, come back, go onto another story. You go back and talk to people after the programme's gone out.

**PT:** Well I've always – not always, I haven't always done that because it's not always logistically possible – but with regard to Northern Ireland, I would make a habit of going back after the programme, like after my *Provos*, *Loyalists* and *Brits* trilogy, and seeing some of the key people in the paramilitary organisations about what they thought of the programme. The critical question that I would ask them – and they weren't uncritical of what I'd done – is: "Do you think I had been fair and do you think that I, and my producers, had done what we said we would do?" And, although sometimes it was said begrudgingly, by and large the answer was: "Yes". And that's how you begin to build the trust, and that's the way you can go back. But also, I've always been lucky in those days when I was cutting my teeth with Northern Ireland for Thames, and with the BBC through the 70s and 80s and 90s, is that if I've said: "Look, I need to go to Northern Ireland to check out a story", or to see somebody, I've always been able to do it. I've been given the freedom and the space to do it, or I frankly couldn't have done what I've done.

**RB:** But I want to pick up on that later, because I think that freedom is perhaps under threat. But it's also a question of keeping secrets. If you take Brendan Duddy, I think whom you talked to as the go-between, you talked to him 10 years before he would talk on camera. You kept this secret for 10 years. I mean, you must know an awful lot of secrets. [laughter]

**PT:** I'm not telling you, Roger. But Brendan Duddy is a good case. For those of you who don't know, he was the key intermediary between MI6, MI5 and Martin McGuinness and the army council. And I met him way



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back in the mid to late 1990s because I'd found out that he was the key intermediary, and had been for many, many years. And I remember ringing him, telling him who I was, and to my amazement – and I was really nervous making this phone call, heart in mouth, literally and metaphorically – and when he picked up the phone and I told him who I was, he said: "Ah, I was waiting to hear from you." And I said: "Could we talk?" And he said: "Yes." And to cut a long story short, we spent the long hours of that very long night drinking an awful lot of Irish whiskey while he told me this amazing story that you couldn't actually make up and write a thriller about. And subsequently – I was sworn to secrecy – I met him again shortly afterwards, and said: "What you say is absolutely of huge historical importance" because nobody knew who this person was, and I promised I would not reveal his name or any details about him until he was ready for it, and I said: "Perhaps one day you will be ready to tell your story, and if you do so I would be really pleased, honoured, if you would tell it to me." And then, 10 years later, he rang and said: "I'm ready to talk." But it was a secret that I had to keep, yes.

**RB:** Let's go back to 1972 shall we, to the beginning. You should have been at Bloody Sunday; you should have had three crews filming for Thames. You didn't have one, and you missed it.

**PT:** Jeremy Isaacs, the wonderful Sir Jeremy who's my mentor from the 70s and beyond, knows the story. We were planning to cover Bloody Sunday with three crews. Three crews, one with the army, one with the marchers, and one just on a free reign. And the ACTT, bless them, wanted exorbitant money from Thames, and Jeremy, in fact quite rightly, although he might think differently now, put his foot down and said: "This is absurd, we can't do it." So we never actually covered the actual shooting with the three crews.

**RB:** But you were there within what, 48 hours?

**PT:** No, I was there within hours, because I heard on the news what happened at 4 o'clock that day, rang my editor, John Edwards, got straight on the plane with the rest of the world's press, went to Derry. I didn't know where Derry was, frankly, where I was going, hadn't a clue what the conflict was about. I arrived in Derry just before midnight on Bloody Sunday, and then, going with Jeremy, we did a remarkable film called *Two Sides of the Story*, the first clip that you saw in the compilation, with Jack Chapman, he was the eyewitness of what actually happened. And it's all down to Jeremy again – we used to have a thing called film magazines, you remember, 10 minute interviews? – an interview with him [Chapman], and an interview with the paras, and it was called *Two Sides of the Story*.

**RB:** And you first met Martin McGuinness then?

**PT:** I met Martin McGuinness shortly afterwards in the Gas Works, which was then the provos' gang hut, as it were.

**RB:** What was he 21, 22 [years old]?

**PT:** I think he was 20, 21, and the second-in-command of the IRA's Derry brigade.

**RB:** So when you meet him in Parliament as Deputy First Minister, and you look at each other, I mean, what do you do?

**PT:** I never ever dreamt. I interviewed him in The Bogside, that morning when I did the interview on the balcony of Stormont, looking down on the iconic statue of Edward Carson. When I met McGuinness, I always remember, because he's a great charmer. But you read McGuinness by looking into his eyes. He's got the hardest. And I wouldn't like to look into those eyes on the wrong side. And he told me he'd much rather be washing his car and mowing his lawn on a Sunday than doing what he was doing. And I thought, Peter, you can't really believe him, but there was something about him that I did



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actually believe, and that was my introduction to Martin McGuinness. But I never dreamt, as Peter Robinson says in the interview I've done for Monday's programme: "If you or I" – me or Peter Robinson – "had ever said he'd become deputy first minister, the men in white coats would have come to take us away."

**RB:** Did you ever feel intimidated, scared? You must have had death threats.

**PT:** Oh no, I never had a death threat. I mean, I've been warned, going to a secret meeting, that if ever the road to that meeting leaked out, I would be the main suspect, and that I was told in no uncertain terms. This was on the loyalist side...

**RB:** There was occasion when you were going from the south to the north, and you had to get in the boot of a car, and you were being taken to speak to the IRA, and it can't have been very pleasant in the boot of the car.

**PT:** That was one of the most difficult moments. I was in the back of a car covered with a blanket, going to listen to the tapes of three alleged informers whom the IRA had, quotes, "executed", and I met a group of IRA men with AK-47s in this remote place, and it was worrying because I suspect the SAS knew what I was doing, because there are very few people in the intelligence services who didn't know what every journalist was doing at the time.

**RB:** Well, there are two dangers, aren't there. There's danger from the people you're talking to, and there's a danger you get caught in an SAS raid because they'd followed you through.

**PT:** Yes, that's the worry. When I was in this cottage – you know, with a peat fire smoking in the corner – and I remember this old Woolworth's Alba cassette recorder, and they'd put in the tapes that they'd done before they killed the informers, and the

tapes begin with a spoon being beaten on a pan. They couldn't get the tape to work – glitches aren't new – that was pretty hairy. But I was rarely threatened, because if you're filming with paramilitaries ... if they agree to talk to you, usually it's because they want to tell you something; always it's from their point of view. And it's in their interest to actually look after you. So the dangers that I've been in are nothing compared to the dangers that Jeremy Bowen and all the reporters go through in the Middle East.

**RB:** Maybe so, but everybody thought they may be a British spy initially, and Special Branch would come down and talk to you, they came down and talked to me as editor; they would try and pump us for information. Even, on one occasion I remember, with a reporter being asked to go to the MOD: "Would you go along and look out for certain things." I didn't go, but these things were going on. So were you ever suspected of being a British spy?

**PT:** I think I was, on two occasions. One occasion when I was in Derry – Londonderry – when somebody I knew came up to me and said, "Peter, be careful, because there are people here in Derry who think you're working for MI5." And this wasn't a joke; this was a sort of friendly warning to be careful. And I said to the person, "I can assure you, I'm not working for MI5," because I would say that, wouldn't I? And I wasn't. Never had. But it sort of brings you up sharp, because the IRA was increasingly infiltrated by the intelligence services, MI5 and Special Branch. But was a sort of coded warning to be careful. But I've always been open about what I've done.

**RB:** And yet, paradoxically, a little bit later in the game, MI6 talked to you. Why did they talk to you? Why did Michael Oatley – one of the key figures – why did he talk to you?



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**PT:** Michael Oatley should not have talked to me; he never got permission. He didn't ask, he just did it, because he knew if he'd asked, they would say, "no." And he did it, and got wrapped over the knuckles by, I think, Sir Richard Dearlove. And interestingly, I wanted to re-interview Michael Oatley – who should be Sir Michael Oatley, but he's not – I wanted to re-interview him for *Who Won the War*, the programme for next week. Michael was very keen to do it because he, and his colleagues in the intelligence services, and many others on the other side, were instrumental in getting us to where we are, all this covert back-channel operation. So Michael said, "but this time, I'm going to ask permission, and they'll let me do it, because from MI6's point of view – SIS's point of view – it's a good news story." So Michael got in touch with whoever it was – he actually wrote to them, and emailed me the thoughts he put in the letter, and the answer came back to say, "no, you can't do it." So I then rang a contact in MI6 and said, "I can't understand this, you know, he's already done the interview." "Yes, but he shouldn't have done it." "Why can't he do it again, just to say what he thinks about where we are, and the role that he and his colleagues and everybody's played in it?" And they said: "No, we don't do that." So Michael Oatley was a very courageous man. He did it because he wanted people to know the story of what had gone into getting us to where we are, so that people really appreciate where we are, and will do all they can to maintain it, and he did it also not just for himself but for Brendan Duddy, the "secret peacemaker" as we called him, who had played such a heroic and vital role over so many years.

**RB:** I'm going to have to move on from getting the story to what I want to talk about: trying to get it on air, which sometimes is almost as difficult. It's difficult to remember now that in the you're your programmes were 'blacklisted' by the IBA; [it] would not allow them to be broadcast. And

by 1979, at the latest, journalists like you and I were being briefed by senior army intelligence officers, like Brigadier Glover, that the IRA could not win the war, but that it could not be defeated. Getting that message across was very difficult. If you jump ahead seven years to the *Real Lives* programme that was a disaster for the BBC internally – which you weren't involved with, and neither was I – which consisted of portraits of Martin McGuinness and [inaudible] and Gregory Campbell, it caused the Board of Governors to ban it, disastrously. And one governor, Lord Harewood, called it "a Hitler loves dogs" programme. So, in Northern Ireland, you would be able to broadcast, because they knew what was happening, and when you tried to get things on the network, it was astonishingly difficult. Why do you think it was so difficult?

**PT:** Well, I think two things. *Real Lives*, it was a brilliant programme that Eddie Mirzoeff exec'd, which was just a profile of Martin McGuinness as family man and Gregory Campbell, loyalist, on the other side in Derry, an ordinary man. It basically said, these are the so-called terrorists – applying to Martin McGuinness, not Gregory Campbell – and the message that they were ordinary people caught up in an extraordinary situation, and then driven for political reasons and social reasons to do what they did. That was one thing. And that was the unpalatable message that Mrs Thatcher called "giving the IRA the oxygen of publicity." And the roof fell in, as many of you will remember. That's one thing. But the things I was doing at Thames, under Sir Jeremy: they were looking in detail at security policy. I started off in innocuous programmes, because I was trying to find out and understand what was happening in Northern Ireland, [and] why. So I did a series of 'isn't it awful'-type programmes with young children from both sides, coming together... and then the more I read, the more I talked, the more I knew, the more I began to understand that the



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root of this problem was a political one, with deep historic roots. And I started looking at security policy, looking at interrogation, and was frankly shocked to find out, and then to believe – because I talked to wonderful doctors – that suspects were being beaten up, incarcerated in interrogation centres, to get them to sign confessions that would put them inside the Maze prison. And that did not go down well. And the Amnesty report basically confirmed what we had said.

**RB:** But they didn't want to know them. On the mainland, there is this denial, and with the BBC, and with the IBA, representatives of the good and the great and so on, they were in the end on the side of the politicians who did not want to know. Has that changed now? Absolutely?

**PT:** I don't think it has changed that much. It was a question I was asked during an interview a couple of days ago in Belfast, about how the, quotes, "mainland" – and "mainland" is an unacceptable word to nationalists and republicans – people in the rest of the United Kingdom, what they think about Northern Ireland. And I've said in the programme – and I believe this – most of my friends, they say to me: "Why are you going back to Belfast, it's all sorted, isn't it?" Sorted, it is not. And it certainly is far from sorted, although we've made an incredible journey, all of us, in our different ways. But I don't think Northern Ireland has ever really been an issue with the majority of the British public. The Scottish referendum, huge huge issue – one part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is still part of the United Kingdom, and will remain so, I think, for the foreseeable future, for a long, long time. And until the IRA started planting bombs here, when perhaps many of you were nervous about going on the Tube, or going on buses, that's when it brought the conflict home and of course that's why the IRA did what they did here on the so-called "mainland". But trying to explore the roots of the conflict, and why the IRA were doing what they did, and that most

of them were, you know, they could have been your sons and daughters, which was something that Michael Oatley found out going to Derry way back in the early 70s, and try to explain what the so-called war was really about, and look at avenues that could be explored to try and resolve the conflict, which is why I became so involved in the back-channel – not me, involved in the backchannel, but I felt that that process was so important as a way of resolving conflict, and that also applies potentially to many other conflicts in different parts of the world.

**RB:** Can I leap forward again though to talk about the personal pressures you were under? How did you keep your emotions under check? When you were talking to people who had killed and maimed, and in some cases blown up children; have you got, somebody used the expression, "ice in the soul"?

**PT:** I have to remain detached when I'm doing an interview, without ever forgetting that the person I'm talking to may be a mass murderer, maybe somebody who's planted a bomb that's killed dozens of people. And I must never forget that, and I have to frame my questions and ask them, in a tone of voice, that will reflect what most of the audience are thinking, and what they would wish me to ask, and the way in which they would wish me to ask it. But I have to remain detached, to a certain degree, so I can do the interview. But when I was doing the *Loyalist* series, with Sam Collins, it was very difficult because some of the loyalist killers, murderers, were difficult to deal with. But coming back to the trust thing, they knew what we were doing; we'd make it clear what we were doing. I'd always provide a list of question areas before – not the questions, because the interview takes on a life of its own, so they weren't taken by surprise. But the tone of some of my questions. And when I pushed them, actually [it] got fairly hairy and a couple almost got up and walked out.



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**RB:** But how did you feel after? You came home, you had two small kids, you come home sometimes from listening to the recordings of people, informers who had been beaten up to a pulp, who the IRA were about to come and put the execution order on. You've listened to those things, you've met people who've murdered, cold bloodedly. You come home and, what? Your faith in humanity; how do you isolate yourself from that?

**PT:** Well, you don't. Two different lives. One is my own. Domestic and personal life with a family. And I talk about what I do to close friends, and still do today, which is a sort of release for me, and you know close friends today are interested and listen, and that helps me a lot. But when I'm over there, I'm in a different mode, but I'm still me. I mean, there aren't two 'P Taylors'; I'm this different mode. I'm the same person doing the interviews as I am at home, but you need the stability of the home environment, the family and friends. And the great thing tonight is seeing all you here, because all of you, in different ways, are not just colleagues, you're friends; and that means a huge amount, and I can discuss things with you, you can discuss things with me. It's that which makes it possible, that's what enables me to keep my sanity, if you like. To touch reality.

**RB:** You had incredible support from your late wife, Sue McConachy, a fine journalist in her own right, and much loved and missed by all whom knew her, and I'm sure by just about everybody in this room. But you have spent an extraordinary amount of time in Northern Ireland, rather than at home. It's been total commitment; it's 24-7, often. Do you have any regrets about that? You've given your life to it.

**PT:** Do I have any regrets? No, I have no regrets about what I have done, and I hope the way in which I've done it. I do regret not striking the life-work balance better than I

perhaps did, over 20, 30 years. Perhaps best to ask my two boys, who are here, about Daddy's life-work balance! And I've learned from that. And Sue, who would have been very proud to be here this evening. But my boys and close friends are here; it's something which is necessary to keep me grounded, and still today it's that closeness with dear friends that makes it possible.

**RB:** We'll be clear one thing. You're not retiring? This isn't being held because you're retiring? [laughter]

**PT:** Well, I hope it's not past its sell by date!

**RB:** It leads us onto one more serious question. Could you do today what you've done in the past, with the BBC commissioning system as it is? I mean, I'm shocked that the film you are making, that it's going out on Monday night at nine o'clock in Northern Ireland, has only just got a slot on BBC Two at 11.20 at night. It's an hour long, it's about who won in Northern Ireland, it has all the key players, it has extraordinary moments in it, and you didn't know until a few days ago if it would be transmitted on BBC Two. And what strikes me, what you need, for your programmes, is not a controller that says "that's a great story" but a controller that says: "Peter, go and find a great story, and I'll budget you. Now you'll have to persuade me, but I will back you."

**PT:** I think that does work. If I think I have a great story, I'll discuss it with my colleagues in development and with Clive Edwards, or whoever's the commissioning person, and the way it used to work – and worked with the *Brits* series after *Provos* and *Loyalists* – [I] went straight to the controller Jane Root, talked to Jane for five minutes, she said, "I want it." That's it. There's no treatment, nothing. But it was based on what we'd done with the previous two series. With *Secret Peacemaker*, [I] went to Clive, said Brendan Duddy is prepared to talk; went straight up to see Roly Keating, spoke to Roly for five to 10 minutes, he was very interested.



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I said: "Is that a commission?" He said: "Yes." In fact, he said: "Ask Clive, he's the commissioner." But you know, I mean the commissioning process is necessary but it does take a long time. In the end, it's all down to the controller and the schedulers, who are critical.

**RB:** Peter, you're being terribly diplomatic. [laughter] I know you want to keep working, perhaps we'll move on, because I'll put you in an impossible position.

**PT:** I'll just say one thing about the 11.20 slot for this film, which I think is an important film. That's not meant to be self-serving. It is a pity that a film which I think is important is going out at 'cocoa time' – 11.20 – but it should be in peak time. It's too important to be relegated to 11.20, and I say, why can't it go on BBC Four at 9 o'clock? But – but – I've been able to make the film. BBC Two. Clive Edwards put some money into the budget that made it possible, and I'm grateful that I was able to do it, and it was fantastic working with colleagues in Northern Ireland, and it will be transmitted. It's there. So, yes it would be nice if it had a better slot, and it does reflect priorities which don't need explaining, but it's there, and it will be on iPlayer, so I'm grateful that it's going to be transmitted on BBC Two, albeit at 'Horlicks time' – that's the main thing.

**RB:** Last question. Small one. Who won the war in Northern Ireland?

**PT:** You'll have to watch the programme. [laughter]

**RB:** Let me put one quote to you. An embittered Seamus Mallon says: "This was the triumph of the extremes at the expense of the moderates." You say, in a piece of commentary: "The Armalite paved the way for the settlement." And you also say, maybe I'm giving this away, that you wouldn't be surprised if a united Ireland does emerge.

**PT:** I was going to give you a sneak – strictly off the record – preview of the conclusion. That's true, I mean, what I say at the end is that, viewed through the prism of the present, the Brits and the Unionists won the war, because the Union is secure. As secure as it's ever been, and will remain as such for many years to come, in my view. The Brits won the war, because the IRA is no more. But the impossible – the unthinkable – has already happened. I did this piece to camera at Stormont. Because Martin McGuinness is up there, as Deputy First Minister; formally, I've always believed, the most senior IRA person on the island of Ireland. Although I don't say that in the piece to camera. And also, dining with the Queen at Windsor Castle. So the unthinkable has already happened. Then I say, so I would not be surprised if – choosing my words very carefully – if, at some stage in the long years ahead, a united Ireland did emerge. And that is my view, and I was encouraged to give my view by colleagues.

**RB:** Now we've given some of the conclusions away, but believe me, it's a cracking film, not least watching Gerry Adams' face – or, watching Peter Taylor's face when Gerry Adams yet again denies being a member of the IRA. It is one of the funniest moments in recent television history. Right, ok. I've talked for a little too long. And thank you very much, Peter. Now some questions, and please put up your hand although it may be stating the bleeding obvious, please tell us who you are.

**Question (Graham Benson, former Chairman of BAFTA):** Peter, you talk about the surprising recent history of Martin McGuinness' elevation. What did you think about his statement the other day, when Dr Paisley died, that he's lost a dear friend?

**PT:** I believe what Martin McGuinness said, I know him well and have known him for 40 years. And I talked to McGuinness, because getting McGuinness to do the interview took



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some doing, and resulted in having a half an hour with him in his Deputy First Ministers office, not the Gas Works in Derry, right, in which I had to convince him what we were doing, why I wanted to do the interview, what I wanted to cover. But during that process, that conversation, I asked him about Dr Paisley and his interpretation of Dr Paisley's 'change of view', to put it mildly. And that's when he said, and this was just chatting off the record, that Paisley became, amazingly, "my friend." He had a really strong relationship with him. And he was one of the few people allowed to go and visit the dying Dr Paisley, and that's what he's done. It's easy to dismiss it as 'Provo propaganda': "Well he would say that, wouldn't he." But I believe it to be true, and when you see the two of them, the famous sequence of them sitting down and laughing – the Chuckle Brothers – that's absolutely true. And it is an astonishing journey that both those men have made. I simply can't believe it. And that's why. How the extremes have triumphed. The middle, as Roger says – Seamus Mallon, who is almost in tears during the interview, and David Trimble, who admits he made mistakes: they were the good guys; they eschewed violence. The SDLP – John Hughes, Seamus Mallon – stood against it heroically for years and years and years. And in the end, they're squeezed, because the extremes are in power and to make peace – this is a sad fact, an unpalatable fact again – that violence works, or in terms of Northern Ireland, has taken the situation so far, before the political process takes over. That is a fact, so I think it's real.

**RB:** There's a brilliant piece where you're in the interview with Tony Blair, where you ask him, did he believe or know Adams was in the IRA and McGuinness, and Blair says: "Well we wouldn't have talked to them if they weren't."

**PT:** Actually that's John Major ...

**Question** (Steve Hewlett): Peter, anyone who's worked with you – or watched your work, and everyone here has done one of the other, or probably both – will have heard you asked the question of people who've done some dreadful things: "Why." When I was with you in the Maze prison you asked it of the Loyalists, you asked it of the Republicans, and I can well recall that at first base, the Republicans all had pretty good answers. And the Loyalists – Billy Giles we saw there fell apart, because he didn't have a very good answer under pressure from you. The Republicans didn't have that good answers either, many of them, as it turns out; not as individuals. But you've asked this question of people who've done terrible things, often called "terrorists", all over the shop. I wonder it's the same question. But with hindsight and with reflection, how different do you think the answers are, in other words, are the people who you ask it of today really in the same mind-set as the people you asked it of then, or is this different? It's the same question, the answers often sound the same, I wondered if you think they are?

**PT:** That's an important question, Steve, and in next week's programme... [laughs] or at 11.20. Two loyalists, whom we'd interviewed in the *Loyalist* programme, one of them Jackie McDonald – Steve, you know he spent time in the Maze prison – and the style of the programme is, I show people I've interviewed before clips from what they said then, and ask them what they think about... Do they feel the same now, what do they think about where we are? And I asked Jackie McDonald. The clip was, he justifies killing Catholics, basically, because it was a war, that's the line they took. He says it was wrong: "I realise now that it was wrong; killing people was wrong, it didn't get us anywhere." But, Billy Hutchinson, who's [of] the other Loyalist paramilitary wing, the UDF rather than the UDA, I said: "What did violence achieve?" And he said: "It stopped a united Ireland." Now, I don't believe that



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was the case, but I do think the Loyalist campaign in the late 90s did play its part in a situation that led to talks and subsequently the ceasefire. But people have changed. And what's really interesting is the Tory grandees, Jim Prior, saying: "Violence has worked." Norman Tebbit, after the Brighton bomb when I showed him the awful clip of him coming out on the stretcher and his poor wife crippled for life, he says: "The ceasefire was worth it", because of what happened afterwards. Now you expected Tebbit to say: "I will never rest until they are all in their graves." So attitudes have changed.

**SH:** To what extent are the majority are the jihadis the same as the IRA, is what I'm trying to get at? Is Ireland the same as Iraq?

**PT:** No.

**Question** (John Taylor, Peter's son): I was going to ask the same question. To what extent are the mujahideen different from the people in Ireland?

**PT:** Well there are mujahideen and mujahideen. Isis, or Isil or IS, is very different from the rank-and-file mujahideen ... Salim Boukari, who was a bomber, who was in prison but released now, he was living in England, he was a typical mujahideen, a mujad, who wanted to fight because he wanted to get the foreign invaders, the British and Americans, out of Iraq and Afghanistan. That's the sort of mujahideen that you can begin to understand why they're doing it and the political reason that drives them. Once you're into Isis, Isil, and I still haven't been able to work out precisely who they are, and their structure is based on the Saddam military who were sort of kicked out.

**RB:** Because they wouldn't talk to you. You cannot talk to them. I mean, everything you've done in Northern Ireland is talking to everybody. You cannot talk to them.

**PT:** Well I think the chances of my going to Raqqa, you know, "take me to Mr Baghdadi", and my returning with my head or having drained the BBC's coffers, is zero.

**RB:** Talking to militant, relatively extreme Muslims in this country... there are many that will not talk to you. You have to get Muslim researchers to talk. So the thing that was central to the way you worked in Northern Ireland, this personal relationship built up over a period, is not possible.

**PT:** That is true. And I find that extremely depressing. And when I did *Generation Jihad* – I use my words carefully – militant jihadis, a couple who were just released from prison who'd been convicted for terrorist offences, wouldn't talk to me. I think partly because they didn't like the work that I'd done and also, they will only talk to people who are either Muslim or they believe either have their ideology or are sympathetic to it. So I had to do it via Mobeen [Azhar], who's a brilliant AP who's Muslim.

**Question:** I wondered if there was any comparison between the way in which the government responded to terrorism in relation to Ireland and the way it's responding to the threat of terrorism now, in your opinion.

**PT:** Well, I think the present situation is not comparable with Northern Ireland. But the similarity is certainly in the 70s and 80s, and the early 90s: the response was a military response. Certainly in the 70s it was hit the IRA. And in the 80s, it was undercover operations – the SAS – to hit the IRA and give them what they were giving us. To a lesser extent in the 90s, when politics were beginning to show their face. So yes, the British response was essentially security. The response on an entirely different scale, with a very different enemy, but the principle was the same: you use force, maximum force, basically to kill, to wipe out the enemy. We were never going to wipe out the IRA as



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people in the film and previous films will admit. I don't think we're going to wipe out Isis, because of the nature of what Isis is; the danger is that, in the process, you create hundreds, thousands more young committed jihadis. I'm just glad I'm a politician not a journalist [laughs] That's a Freudian slip.

**RB:** On that cheery and entirely mistaken note, I'm sorry to cut you so short. There will be an opportunity later to applaud, but I'm sure you'd want to now applaud one of the best, if not the best, journalists of our generation. [applause]

**PT:** A point of clarification, take two. I'm just glad I'm a journalist and not a politician. [laughs, applause]

[BREAK]

**Sir Jeremy Isaacs:** I'm going to present the Award to Peter Taylor after making a few remarks because I have so much that I would like to say about him, and about this event. I love being in Northern Ireland, and I've had the good fortune to be there quite a bit, working with Robert Kee on the history of Ireland. But I've never attained the notoriety or celebrity that Peter apparently has in the streets of Belfast, where people in whatever pub they went into ... were coming up to him all throughout the evening, saying, "Peter, it's you!", and all that sort of thing. My initial experience of Northern Ireland was being asked, when I arrived there, whether I was a Catholic or a Protestant. And when I said: "Neither, I'm a Jew," they said: "Yes, but are you a Catholic Jew or a Protestant Jew?" [laughter] I got filmmaker Neil Jordan to put that into a film he made called *Angel*. I go back a very long way, for all those of you who've never heard of me. I was in television when [there were] only two channels and only one Dimbleby. In those days professional footballers like the great Tom Finney, for example, who was a plumber, professional footballers of great skill

and esteem were paid roughly the same wages as were paid to the thousands and thousands of football supporters that stood on the terraces to see them. That's a different world. And in those days, Paris Hilton was a hotel. Now I want to say absolutely categorically two things, that this event, this evening, is a hugely important and hopeful one, and BAFTA are to be positively congratulated for bringing it into being, because the kind of current affairs that Peter Taylor practices is one of the veins or arteries of lifeblood in the broadcasting system. Broadcasters have a responsibility, articulated in the BBC's injunction to itself to inform, educate and entertain, in that order, to tell people what is going on in the world, and helping them to understand it. And my goodness me, the complexity of what is going on in the world, and the horror of it, comes closer to us every day. We need current affairs broadcasting. I see the other day that the BBC Trust, which is not my favourite institution, but the BBC Trust has urged the executives of the BBC to make sure the number of *Panoramas* a year does not fall below 40 and that those programmes acquire, we're told it says, some of the investigative abilities and practices of other broadcasters ... So for this organisation, BAFTA, at this time, to say that current affairs matters, and must be performed to the best of our abilities, is hugely important. The other day the governors, or the Trust, told the BBC to have 40 *Panoramas*. We can agree with that and hope they can be even half as good as the programmes which Peter has made for *This Week*, Martin Smith with *Panorama*, for all sorts of people who are here and, by the way, made with them. The one of the things we know about television is that no individual ever made a successful programme or series on their own. The programmes are made by the skills of those on the production team whose job it is to think and decide and pronounce and lead and inspire ... When I think of the work that people like Peter have done, I think of those



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producers in the commercial television companies that I knew who created the climate in which good work could be done. I think of Phillip Whitehead, I think of David Elstein, I think, though this was after Peter left Thames, of Roger Bolton. And when I think of what the BBC does – and Peter has not worked for anybody but the BBC since he left Thames to go to the BBC, or to try his luck at the BBC – I think of the work of the people in this room like George Carey, Tim Gardam, Peter Horrocks, and I am full of admiration for what they have done, and they should understand that this Award to Peter is partly also an Award to them. Now I come to Peter. He isn't a celebrity, he isn't flash, he doesn't bully or behave combatively with the people he's interviewing; the very opposite. He's quiet, he's modest, he's honest, and he listens. He listens to what people say to him, and he gives that to us. And Roger Bolton beautifully brought out the absolutely principal ingredient in what Peter does that matters so much: he is trusted by the people he is talking to, and we trust him. And people who are asked what the devil they were doing in some awful business like the war that was going on in Ireland. They can on both sides of the battlefield know that the person who's talking to them is someone that they can trust. That makes a hell of a difference. So Peter, I would like to say to you that nothing that's been said this evening has begun to do justice to the great skill and scope and intensity and perseverance of the work that you do, but here you are, and this is our opportunity to say thank you, to congratulate you, and to say you are an absolutely terrific person, you are an adornment of the profession of journalism, I was trying to think what I could say about you sometimes over the last day or so, and I've decided that what I want to say is ... that you are 'Mr Valiant' for truth. Because it's the truth that you have to get, you have to get it right and, more than anybody else I know, in these long and complicated subjects that you tackle, you

have got it right, and thereby made our understanding of the world better. [picks up BAFTA Special Award] I may not be able to hold onto this because it's very heavy. My God, it is heavy. However, I would like to invite you to come up here and to receive a Special Award of BAFTA for everything you've done.

**PT:** Thank you all, more than I can actually say, and thank you Jeremy for those incredibly kind and generous words. Jeremy was my mentor at the beginning. He was my alpha and omega, and still is. To avoid the Ed Miliband error, as I don't have autocue so I just made a few notes. First of all, I want to say thank you to everybody, but also to particular people and institutions. I didn't get the chance to say this with Roger: thank you to Roger, too, for that really enjoyable one-on-one. To say thank you to the BBC because without the BBC I could not have done what I have done, what we have done together, I don't think, for any other broadcaster. And despite all the difficulties the BBC has faced, and will continue to face, it is a unique organisation. I've always been proud to work for it, there is a huge amount of goodwill out there for it. I sometimes wish the BBC would be more proactive in selling itself and capitalising on that goodwill as licence fee and charter renewal approaches. I think there's a tendency for it to be reactive rather than proactive, but I could not have done it without the support of the BBC and the BBC's core value of public service broadcasting, because what I do, what all of us here do, is give meaning to what public broadcasting is, and without public service broadcasting, I certainly wouldn't be here, I wouldn't get to do what I do, and I don't think most of us here would be in a position that was in any way different. I want to thank Anne, Chairman of BAFTA, for introducing it, for your kind words. To the Board of BAFTA for this huge, huge honour, and to the Television Committee who judged that I was worthy of it. To Neil 'Bubbles' Grant who not only taught me to breathe



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underwater but also put in a word for me with the Television Committee, I understand, my spies tell me. To Kam Kandola Flynn and her amazing team who organised this incredible evening, the food, the guest list, and trying to work out the tables was a bit like doing a sort of wedding list, and to all of you without whom I would not be here. And just looking around I feel I am in the company of dear friends and dear colleagues and you are all very special to me, and as Jeremy has said – he's pre-empted me – this is also for you. And if you give me your addresses you can each have it on your mantelpiece for a week. And to Roger for conducting that very enjoyable interview. To my family, to Ben and Sam. And Aniella and Milly couldn't unfortunately be here, and to other absent friends who would have loved to have been here, like John Birt and many others, but circumstances did not permit. And to Jeremy, for presenting me with this and saying those very kind words which I will think of whenever I dust this down, or give it a polish. Thank you everybody, thank you BAFTA, thank you friends and colleagues, and [lifts trophy, laughs] I hope this isn't a sell by date, ok? Thank you all very much indeed. I hope you've had a good evening.

[END]

