

The Day I Became A Television Star (The Luke Booth Dinosaur Project)

It all started earlier in the year when I received a telephone call from Dr Ed of Maidstone museum. He had been contacted by somebody from Channel 4 TV about the possibility of producing a programme to do with fossil collecting. Ed had spoken to the TV people about Luke Booths dinosaur discovery at Cliff End near Hastings and he then contacted me because I was in the process of preparing the bones for display at the museum. We both came to the same conclusion that, as had happened so often in the past it would be all talk and no action. We were both wrong!

Early in October Ed received more calls from the TV Company and later Luke was contacted with a view to the director and crew visiting the site near Hastings. It had also been arranged for the TV people to visit the museum to see the dinosaur bones, the 'Mantellpiece' and the copy of Bensteds book and drawings. The visit was arranged for Tuesday 29th October and I duly arrived and set up two tables with most of the bones displayed. We received a call from the TV rep to say that they would not be arriving until about 3.30pm as they were at Hastings and had been delayed. They finally arrived at 5.40pm and Dave Martell, (he was supposed to be identifying the bones) did not arrive until about 5.55pm. Bearing in mind that the museum closed at 5.00pm and that Ed had had to persuade a staff member to stay on until 6.00pm, this did not leave enough time to fully sort things out.

From the information that the TV people had gathered together they decided that the programme would go ahead. I was told that filming would start on Saturday 9th November and that I was to be at the site camp at Cliff End, near Hastings at 7.00am. All very well for them, but Angela, Martin, Tony Mitchell and myself were preparing the MLMS stand at the Kempton Park gem show for Saturday & Sunday 2nd & 3rd November, using most of Lukes dinosaur bones for the display. Also Angela and myself were going away on a short break on Sunday 3rd November and we would not be back home until mid afternoon on Friday 8th November. Still – it's all in a day's work for a TV star! So they say.

One of the things that I suggested to the TV people was that Luke should be tied at the ankles and lowered over the cliff in order for him to see if there were any more of the remains of the dinosaur still in the cliff. They thought it was a good idea and so arranged for someone to be filmed abseiling over the cliff at the weekend. Other ideas to be filmed were: - A number of family groups including the experts all searching the beach for fossils. A block of matrix containing a diagnostic bone to be cleaned and prepared on site, and this bone, together with a couple more were to be taken to a museum in Belgium for comparison. From this they hoped to confirm what species of dinosaur Luke had found. I was told that some of the filming would be undertaken in a marquee in case the weather conditions were not suitable. Also electrical services would be laid on for the air compressor and other equipment.

Bearing all this in mind we completed the Kempton Park show, **WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS!** Sorry I couldn't help myself. For those members who still do not know the Medway Lapidary & Mineral Society came first in the FLAGS competition for the best display. Angela and me had a relaxing break and by the 8th November I was ready to become a TV star.



The day did not start well – the alarm clock failed to go off, so instead of arriving at the site at 7.00am I didn't get there until about 7.50am. I parked the car and walked towards the site at Cliff End looking for the marquee. I came across a gathering of about fifty people, there were the TV crew, Dr Ed and his wife & dog, Pete Austin and his wife, Luke and others I didn't recognise. They were all wearing waterproofs, wellies and hard hats and were about to head out along the beach. The so-called 'marquee' was an open fronted tent about three metres square. There were also two two-man igloo type tents and another one about five metres round and three metres high.



At about 8.30am, on a nice sunny day the 'hard hat mob' headed off along the beach in the direction of Hastings. The tide was quite a long way out and I noticed that there was a five-man film crew out on the waters edge also making their way in the direction of Hastings. I went off to get my car and followed a double decker bus onto the site. The bus was parked parallel with the sea wall, and an open sided tent was erected in front of it. This was to be the refreshment tent and the bus was to be used as a rest place and somewhere to eat.

I was left standing about like a 'spare whatnot at a wedding' and after talking to one of the organisers I found out that Scott Morphey, (the person who was going to prepare the bone) would not be arriving until about 10.00am. I spent the next couple of hours taking photographs and walking around on the beach. Eventually Scott arrived and we spent another hour or so setting up the fossil cleaning equipment in the 'marquee'. By about mid-day the tide had come in quite away and the 'hard hat mob' were heading back towards the base camp. Scott and myself decided to meet the 'mob' along the beach and I noticed that there were five army personnel coming back as well. They were supervising the abseiling over the cliff that was to be filmed later in the day. I made the comment that the water would be up to the cliff by the time they were to film, but this didn't seem to matter. I suppose that if one of them fell then landing in the water would be a softer option than landing on the beach.

Once the 'mob' had arrived back at the base camp there was a lull in the proceedings. Then about 1.00pm it was time to film a spot of bone preparation work. A nodule containing a piece of the pelvis bone was chosen as the subject, (it was the only piece left that I hadn't already prepared). The filming was to take place in the marquee with Scott, Dave Martill and one of the two girl TV presenters. After a short rehearsal the filming got underway. The scene featured Scott and Dave Martill sitting at the preparation table and then the girl presenter came in and Dave Martill introduced her to Scott. Scott stood up, shook hands and went to sit down and promptly fell flat on his back. A great start I thought. The only thing that Scott hurt was his pride.

The filming carried on for about an hour and then we were told that the food had arrived. This consisted of baguettes with different fillings i.e. tuna, ham & cheese, prawns etc and a packet of crisps. It was noted that all the packets of crisps were salt & vinegar flavour. Obviously the local pub had a stock of these that they hadn't had much call for and decided that this was a good opportunity to get rid of most of them. The baguette course was followed by a jam doughnut washed down with a cup of tea, coffee or a can of drink. The children loved it and spent most of the time running in and out of the bus and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

Following this there was more filming in the marquee and on the beach and by this time the sky had clouded over, the light was fading and most of the 'mob' had left. Scott and myself were left to extract the bone from

the nodule and generally clean it up ready for Sundays filming. In fact when Scott arrived home he was up until about 1.00am in the morning working on the bone. I left the site to set off back to Maidstone at about 5.30pm. As I said at the beginning, "the day did not start well", it didn't end well, I managed to take the wrong turning coming out of Hastings and found myself on the way to Brighton! I finally found the correct route and arrived home at about 7.30pm. It had been a long day and I still hadn't become a TV star.

The next day, Sunday it was overcast and raining so I decided not to get to the site until about 8.30am. I actually arrived at about 8.45am and found that things were not the same as they were on Saturday. None of the 'mob' was there, only the TV crew, Scott and a couple of army personnel were on site. The weather was 'grotty', it was raining and windy, waterproofs were definitely needed. Filming could not be undertaken using the marquee because of the windy weather so the large igloo tent was to be used instead. Apparently they wanted to film a sequence which should have been filmed the day before and involved the use of the nodule containing the bone. This was slightly awkward as the bone was now completely removed from the nodule. Scott and myself had to try and find as much of the pieces of broken matrix as we could so that the nodule could be reconstructed.

While Scott was being filmed in another scene I had the job of trying to carry out the reconstruction. I spent the next two hours on the bus using pieces of matrix and modelling clay trying to make the nodule look like it did the day before. I managed it just in time for the filming and told the producer that it could only be filmed from one direction otherwise quite a lot of the modelling clay would be visible. The filming took about ten minutes and the bone was then removed from the matrix so that it could be used for the next scene. The TV people didn't seem to understand that the bone was the real thing and couldn't be used like a stage prop being taken apart and put back together at will.

At about 2.00pm the food arrived, it was the same as the previous day and the crisps were still only the one flavour, salt & vinegar. I must add that throughout both days there was always tea and coffee available even though it was from a flask. It was still raining and Luke appeared wearing his waterproofs, he had just come back from along the beach where he had been sent to look for more fossils to be used in one of the sequences. By about 3.30pm most of the filming at the site had been completed and the film crew had gone off to a spot along the cliff top where the abseiling sequence had taken place. Scott and myself were left to try and clean up the piece of pelvis bone ready for use in another scene that was to be filmed later in the local pub. We were still there in the marquee at about 5.00pm, by then it was dark but the rain had stopped. The TV crew had left us a generator running in order for us to use the air compressor, the light and other tools that we needed. The igloo tents had all been taken down and packed away and the TV crew went off to the pub for more filming. I walked back in the direction of the sea wall and looked back towards the marquee



where Scott was still working, it was quite a sight. This ghostly white tent with a lone figure sitting at a table, it must have been quite frightening for anybody who was walking alone along the sea wall at that time.

At about 6.00pm Scott and myself decided that we had had enough and cleared our gear up and put it into our separate vehicles. We had been left a walkie-talkie phone and contacted a member of the TV crew so that they could come back to switch off the generator and pack away the marquee. We both made our way to the local pub where we found the TV crew filming

another sequence in the restaurant area. Perhaps they were filming the dinner they were to have in order to claim their expenses back.

There were a couple of more sequences to be filmed and that would be that for the day. The main scene was to be Ed, Luke and Dave Martill supposedly arriving back from Belgium and confirming that Lukes dinosaur was the oldest Iguanodon found in this country. Apparently this was the end section of the TV programme. While the film crew were setting up I heard the producer say to someone, "all this talking, it sounds like a pub in here". By the time the scene was ready most of the pub regulars had left. I thought to myself, 'my chance to become a TV star must happen soon'. Then Scott, a woman from the 'mob' and ME were told by the producer to sit at a table in the background – what an opportunity!

By the time all the filming was finished it was about 7.30pm and I decided to make my way home. I managed to take the right route this time and arrived home about 8.45pm. I had also been told that I was required at Maidstone museum at 10.30am the next day, Monday for further filming.

I managed to get there on time, which was just before the film crew. The filming was to take place in one of the natural history rooms. This is the room which at present is empty and will eventually house quite a lot of the museums fossil collections, including Lukes dinosaur bones. I was told to set up two tables with most of the dinosaur bones placed on display. The film crew spent an hour or more setting up the lighting equipment and deciding the best positions to film from.

The section to be filmed was towards the beginning of the TV programme where Ed was showing Dave Martill the bones that had been found. This scene was to also show the comparison with Lukes dinosaur bones and those of the 'Mantellpiece'. Ed and Dave Martill were to be filmed coming out of Eds office and my part was to stand at one of the tables making out that I was examining some of the bones. This scene was rehearsed and filmed about half a dozen times before the producer was satisfied with it. From the angle of filming I don't think that I actually came into the shot.

By the time this had all finished it was about 1.30pm and it was decided to take a break for lunch at one of the local pubs. Suitably refreshed we made our way back to the museum for more filming and to my starring role in the programme. Exciting 'int it'. The scene was set for Ed and Dave Martill to be looking at the 'Mantellpiece' and then for them to come over to the two tables where Lukes dinosaur bones were set out. Dave Martill had to look all excited and make comments like, "Wow! There's a lot here" and "I see that some of these have been cleaned, who did this?" Ed then pointed at me and I actually had to say something – my chance for fame had finally arrived. We rehearsed this a couple of times and filming then began. It was great until I had to say my piece. I said my words ok but unfortunately it was before Dave Martill had finished his lines. There was a few swear words uttered and we started again. This time it went alright and I finally mumbled my words, which were something like, "The two vertebra, that block, the long bone and this block". There were a few more words from Dave Martill and I then had to say, "I think that's a good idea". Pretty impressive stuff don't you agree?

There was some more filming after this and at about 4.30pm the producer wanted to film another scene, which involved Bensteds notebook and was to be filmed in one of the other rooms of the museum. I wasn't involved in this so while the film crew dismantled thier equipment for use in the other room I spent another half an hour or so packing up the dinosaur bones. My starring role over I said my goodbyes and left them to it. I wasn't required for the next days (Tuesday) filming. This was the part of the TV programme where Ed, Dave Martill, the girl presenters and others were being filmed on Eurostar and taking some of Lukes dinosaur bones to a museum in Belgium for comparison.

You realise of course that not having seen the finished programme they may decide to cut out the scene which involved my, how can I say, 'inspired performance' and I don't actually become a TELIVISION STAR!

David Rayner