Who were they then?

Oasis in 1992 were a band at the end of the music industry in many ways. They played every gig they got offered until people queued round the block for tickets for the biggest concerts the country had ever seen. Those queues have vanished in place of a hundred thousand people hovering over a laptop in their bedrooms. I’m sure they’re warmer and drier nowadays, but we as archivists, film-makers and custodians of our visual heritage are striving to be able to look back and see how it was then.

The most precious resource – people

Of all the resources available to the modern day researcher, the most precious is not the database, the file-naming software, nor even the huge resource that is the internet. The greatest resource in my experience has always been… people.

And no matter how well catalogued an archive collection might be, there will always be more information to be gleaned by talking to the people who filmed, logged, or processed the footage along the way. This was never more the case than in research I undertook recently to find the ‘lost’ footage of Oasis’s first television appearance.

The event, the myths and the mis-rememberings

I had heard mention of Oasis’s never-seen television debut in books such as the biography of Tony McCarroll, the band’s first drummer and also on internet fan forums. Tony recalled the event being the 1993 Red Nose Day supporting glam rocker Alvin Stardust! (Remember the high-heeled leather-fisted ‘Coo Ca Choo’ guy? That’s him!)

Kate Arthurs, the partner of the band’s rhythm guitarist, Paul ‘Bonehead’ Arthurs, had since published her scrapbook1 of photos and press cuttings, which included two photos of the band playing at what she named ‘Blackpool Roadshow (Telethon June 1992’.

This was quite confusing as, according to McCarroll their first TV appearance was for Red Nose Day, not the Telethon. Perhaps the performance was at Red Nose Day after all. But there was no Red Nose Day in 1992, and there was no major Blackpool events at Red Nose Day in 1991 nor 1993. And anyway, in 1993 Oasis weren’t doing these kinds of gigs (they were on national radio by then), and in 1991, they were still recording their demo. It must have been the ITV Telethon in ’92 and Tony McCarroll had just his glare. Rather than a stadium of testosterone-filled males as an audience, though, he had members of the Salvation Army, St John’s school choir and a handful of technicians. They all looked nervously back at the aggressive singer with the long hair and face like a hooligan, all set to attack. I laughed, as I knew that Liam meant no harm. Not sure if the little girl who was crying at the front did, though.2

So was it in Blackpool or Manchester? Telethon or Red Nose Day? Time to ask some people some questions…

First stones unturned – ITV, Granadaland and beyond

The first stop on my search for the footage was the obvious one of Granada.

Granada studios, looking down over Manchester for generations, is an icon in the city’s skyline. But ‘Granadaland’, as it’s known to many, also has a place in the hearts of many television viewers and indeed many of us archivists and was merged with another regional broadcaster, Carlton, in 2004 to form ITV. The old Granada library system in turn was merged with the rest of the ITV network in 2008.

So, I made enquiries with a number of people at ITV, where quite coincidentally I found myself working on a freelance contract for a few weeks last year, but there was no apparent record of Oasis at the Telethon. Perhaps the performance was at Red Nose Day after all. But there was no Red Nose Day in 1992, and there was no major Blackpool events at Red Nose Day in 1991 nor 1993. And anyway, in 1993 Oasis weren’t doing these kinds of ggs (they were on national radio by then), and in 1991, they were still recording their demo. It must have been the ITV Telethon in ’92 and Tony McCarroll had just


James McDonald’s quest for the ‘lost’ footage of the 1992 television debut of Oasis

Still in search of his ‘Holy Grail’…
mis-remembered it in his book.

My colleague Tom Haigh, archive producer at ITV Studios, had previously looked for this footage when working on a series called Pop Gold. Tom’s exceptional knowledge of the ITV cataloguing system allowed him to pick out the items that were most likely to contain the long-lost clip. He also advised me to get in touch with Elspeth Hanna who had been the archive researcher on Goodbye Granadaland and was a mine of information on all things Granada. She also said the footage was unfamiliar.

I contacted a company called Kaleidoscope, as they’ve retained some old VHS off-air recordings from Granada Regionals, and you never know – one of them could have the performance in it. They didn’t.

Chris Perry at Kaleidoscope had a good trawl and dug so deep on footage of Oasis that he uncovered everything down to a 1992 item on the ‘Oasis’ shop in Meadowhall Shopping Centre in Sheffield. Alas, not quite what we were looking for… this time.

## Knowing the needle you’re looking for

It’s a lot easier to find something when you know what it looks like and many thanks must go to Tom Haigh in the next leap for finding a discussion thread on the Missing Episodes online forum confirming that the Blackpool Roadshow was an event – presumably usually held in Blackpool – that was commissioned by Granada Studios to provide outdoor live music on the weekend of the 1992 Telethon. We finally knew what we were looking for.

With a bit more searching Tom and I had found the name of the organiser of the Blackpool Roadshow, found a contact number for her and then I just phoned her up. What an out-of-the-blue phonecall that must have been for her but she remembered lots about the show and confirmed that Oasis appeared at the event and may even have performed twice. She couldn’t recall if they were broadcast, but said that they were definitely scheduled to be on television for one of the national opt-outs when they go to the regional coverage. Shirley’s brother Johnnie had in fact been friends with guitarist Bonehead’s brother Martin and that’s how they got the gig. As Johnnie recalled:

“What a day that was. I was the engineer – I’m surprised that day didn’t kill us both off or at least persuade us to leave the industry! It was Martin Arthurs, who asked me if there would be any chance of a slot for his brother’s band on the Telethon gig. Shirl’ already had a stacked schedule of artists but said to me “Sure, I’ll get the guys slotted in”. The day before the event, we were down at Granada TV’s grounds, setting up the two stages and organising the PA and OB cabling links. I was working away and noticed Martin and a bunch of guys standing over on a corner of Granada’s buildings. So we went over to meet him and the guys. The next time I saw them it was on Top of the Pops in October”  

Shirley dug out some old schedules for the Roadshow event and it did indeed seem that Oasis appeared twice that day, not quite ‘supporting’ Alvin Stardust, but certainly performing later on the same stage. The national broadcast of the Telethon on ITV would regularly go to the regions, similar to how the evening television News does now. These opt-out items were broadcast from regional studios such as Granada in Manchester.

As I watched through these items, being introduced to up-and-coming television presenters who never quite up-and-came, I was reminded of how far television graphics have come in 20 years.

However, the opt-out tapes that have been kept at ITV do not coincide with Oasis’s performance times. If anybody out there recorded the North West regional broadcast of the ITV Telethon in 1992 on their state-of-the-art VHS recorder, please do get in touch with me! Or even if you remember seeing it on television. I haven’t even had that confirmed as yet.

A dozen or more people later and collectively we had pieced together a puzzle that was initially only offering a few broken jigsaw pieces of clues. Others that deserve a mention are David Huggins whose private research into Oasis’s recording history is second to none. See www.oasis-recordinginfo.co.uk for lots of useful info if you ever find yourself needing it!

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