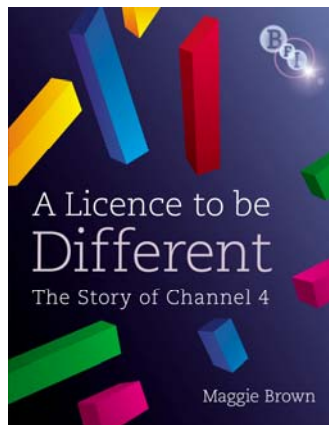


## BFI book press release



# A Licence to be Different The Story of Channel 4

## Maggie Brown

**Published 8 November 2007**  
**£16.00 (paperback, 368pp)**  
**ISBN: 978-1-84457-205-2**

This is the gripping story of the highs and lows of Channel 4, published to coincide with its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Maggie Brown's riveting account of the birth and development of this unique cultural institution traces Channel 4's history from its unlikely founding, under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, through the chaotic early days to its uncertain present, with calls for Channel 4 to be privatised in the wake of scandals such as the *Celebrity Big Brother* racism row.

Maggie Brown looks at the channel's stand out, innovative programmes such as *The Tube*, *A Very British Coup*, *Brookside*, *The Big Breakfast* and *Brass Eye*, and outrageous shows such as *The Word* that led to Chief Executive Michael Grade being branded Britain's 'Pornographer-in-Chief'.

She examines the rise and fall of Film on Four and its rebirth as the digital channel FilmFour; the short-lived plan to merge Channel Four with Five; the channel's success with genres such as lifestyle programming – from *Location Location Location* to *Wife Swap*, and US imports such as *Cheers*, *Friends* and *Dawson's Creek*, and the increasing and, it's argued, damaging reliance on *Big Brother*.

The story is informed by first-hand accounts from key figures in the C4 story – Jeremy Isaacs, Richard Attenborough, Liz Forgan, Michael Jackson and Mark Thompson among many others – of what really went on behind the screen, fleshed out by unprecedented access to Channel 4's archives.

### About the author

Maggie Brown is one of the UK's leading media journalists. She writes for the *Guardian's* media section and website, and also contributes to a range of other publications including the *Evening Standard* and *The Stage*. She was one of the founders of *The Independent* and, as its first media editor, started its media section. She is a regular jury member for the BAFTA and Royal Television Society awards.

**Maggie Brown is available for interview.**

### Channel 4 at 25 – at BFI Southbank in November

Next month BFI Southbank celebrates Channel 4's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary with an exemplary programme of its TV and film screenings (see below for more details). On Thursday 8 November from 6.20pm – 7.30pm, Maggie Brown will present a talk about the history of the channel based on her book and illustrated with clips. Signed copies of the book will be on sale in the BFI Filmstore. Tickets £5, concs £4 (Members pay £1 less). BFI Southbank will also be hosting **Channel 4 - The First 25 Years** an academic conference on the history and impact of Channel 4, on Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 November.

### For further information please contact:

Jill Reading, BFI Press Officer  
 Tel: (020) 7957 4759 or e-mail: [jill.reading@bfi.org.uk](mailto:jill.reading@bfi.org.uk)

## Notes to editors

### Channel 4 at 25 – at BFI Southbank

Prime examples of the best of Channel 4's programming will be presented as special events, including the pilot of *Peep Show*, accompanied by an on-stage interview with the writers plus Mitchell and Webb. Simon Pegg and Jessica Stevenson will discuss their sitcom in *Spaced on Stage*. A daring evening of comedy by Chris Morris will include the controversial *Brass Eye: Paedophiles* (2001), while *A Very British Coup* (1988), *Longitude* (2000) and *The Government Inspector* (2005) remind us of the powerful dramas brought to us by Channel 4. *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1981), directed by Trevor Nunn and John Caird for the RSC, will also screen (running at just over eight hours).

Channel 4's contribution to the British film industry has also been considerable. It has funded or co-funded talents as diverse as Stephen Frears with *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), the Amber Collective (*In Fading Light*, 1989) and Jonathan Glazer with his debut feature *Sexy Beast* (2000), and sponsored international talents such as Neil Jordan (*Angel*, 1982) and Aki Kaurismäki (*I Hired a Contract Killer*, 1990). All of these titles screen in the season.

The Welsh language broadcaster Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C) – also 25 years old this year – is celebrated with a special screening of *A Penny For Your Dreams* (*I Fro Breuddwydion*, 1987). Plus, in November, examples of Four Docs and Four Animation will screen for free in the Studio at BFI Southbank.

**Channel 4 – The First 25 Years** is an academic conference that will be held at BFI Southbank on Saturday 17 - Sunday 18 November. During this weekend event there will be four sessions providing a platform for leading scholars to discuss the history and impact of Channel 4. Opening with the question for debate: *What Did Channel 4 Do For Us?* further topics of discussion will include: an appraisal of S4C, *Cult Programming on C4*, *Channel 4 News*, *Channel 4 and Sexuality* and *Channel 4 and Ethnic Minority Audiences*. Also up for discussion is the brand and identity of the channel and what it means to television audiences today.  
[www.bfi.org.uk/education/conferences/c4](http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/conferences/c4)

### For further information on the BFI Southbank season and academic conference please contact:

Ilona Cheshire, BFI Press Officer (Film)

Tel: (020) 7957 8986 or e-mail: [ilona.cheshire@bfi.org.uk](mailto:ilona.cheshire@bfi.org.uk)

### Where to buy BFI books

BFI books are available from all good bookshops, from the Filmstore at BFI Southbank, London SE1, by mail order from the Filmstore on 0207 815 1350 or online at [www.bfi.org.uk/books](http://www.bfi.org.uk/books)

### About the BFI

There's more to discover about film and television through the BFI. Our world-renowned archive, cinemas, festivals, films, publications and learning resources are here to inspire you. [www.bfi.org.uk](http://www.bfi.org.uk)