

# The Story of Limehouse Television Studios



In the early 1980's a number of Television executives created Limehouse Productions with the aim to be an Independent Television company making programmes for BBC, ITV and the newly launched Channel 4. After securing funding they looked for a site for two new studios.

They eventually decided to renovate an old warehouse in Docklands that had been built on the original "Canary Wharf". This was considered a bit of a coup for the London Docklands Development Corporation who were desperate to regenerate the Docklands area and the company benefited with the grants and loans available for new buildings.

The two studios were to use the shell of the warehouse and fill it with state of the art equipment. Architect Terry Farrell supervised the project and Limehouse Studios was born.



**The newly built Limehouse Studios with hospitality boat outside (photo Martin Hawkins)**

In 1983 the studio opened it's doors and programmes began to be

made. The studios soon gained a reputation for producing high quality shows which included dramas, entertainment shows and innovative shows for channel 4.

Perhaps the most famous show produced here was Spitting Image the satirical show that at its peak was seen by 15 million viewers. The puppets for the show were made in a workshop in the back of the large warehouse.



The Spitting Image Rock Star gallery.



Spitting Image was really known for it's political satire.



Other shows included Who Dares Wins was a forerunner of the Alternative Comedy scene, Rory McGrath, Julia Hills, Philip Pope, Jimmy Mulville and a very young Tony Robinson.



Yes there was even Cookery Programmes in the 80s – This one made stars of Jilly Gooden and Oz Clarke.



Limehouse studios were the scene of a celebrated concert featuring the Rock and Roll legend, Carl Perkins with George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton and Dave Edmunds. Other notable productions included Drama's such as Cyrano De Bergerac, Moliere, The Mysteries and Julius Caesar.

Entertainment programmes such as Treasure Hunt, This Is Your Life, Network 7 and Channel 4 Business Daily Music featured in Rock in the Dock, Queen recorded the video for I Want to Break Free here, other videos made here included ones by Diana Ross, Marc Almond, London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Communards.

Not everything recorded at Limehouse was a success though. Harry's Christmas written and performed by Stephen Berkoff (now a local Limehouse resident) was considered too depressing to show at Christmas and was never broadcast. However with the studio going from strength to strength the future

success seemed assured except the London Docklands Development Corporation who had welcomed the project with open arms now had a company that which wanted to develop the whole Canary Wharf site.

After much discussion in the late 80's, Limehouse Studios which was then owned by Trillion, sold the site at a large profit and in 1989 the studios were demolished to make way for the Canary Wharf Tower that now dominates the skyline.



**Limehouse Studios being demolished (Photo Martin Hawkins)**

Many who worked in Limehouse studios at that time have fond memories and pride for the quality of work produced in that period. Local councillor Gloria Thienel remembers that she had heard from a neighbour that the studios were looking for a receptionist. Gloria applied and was pleasantly surprised when she got the job and so began her connection with the studios.

Gloria remembers the camaraderie amongst the staff, "It was very much a feeling that we were all part of a family". These views are echoed by many other staff who worked there and enjoyed the idea of working in a small team rather than the larger organisations such as the BBC or ITV.

Gloria also remembers it was a great training ground for the rising stars of television both in front and behind the camera. Many went on to have highly successful careers. However it was not all plain sailing as Gloria explains "Most of the performers were great and easy to work with but there was one or two "divas".

It was also hard work with most staff working long hours to complete tight schedules.

Although the studios life was short, lifelong friendships were made and reunions of the Limehouse staff are still well attended.

Other than Gloria there is still connections to the modern docklands, the famous hospitality boat The Sloop John D that was

moored outside the studios, run by caterer Lorna who now owns the Leven restaurant boat in West India Quay.

It is sometimes typical of the Isle of Dogs that some enterprises rise and fall quickly (the London Arena being another example), however for a very short time in the 1980s, Limehouse Studios in a renovated old warehouse in the middle of a run down docks area was creating a little piece of television history.