

THE MEMORIES OF WILLIAM GRANT AND HIS VISITS TO *THE KEEP* (1983) FILMING LOCATION

My interest in *The Keep* was a total accident. My mother, father, my very friendly Jack Russell Terrier Pip and I used to stay at Brynteg Caravan and Camping site. We picked the first week in October each year when the site and the rest of North Wales was closing down for the Winter so that we had the place to ourselves.

It was the 3rd October 1982 when, as with each year, I drove the family from our home in Tonbridge, Kent to settle into what was to be our holiday home until the 23rd. The following day I took us all to Llanberis so that my parents could do the daily shopping, leaving me in the car to look after Pip. Despite being the beginning of October the day was warm with no wind, the Town was unusually busy, as normally the hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation are closing down for the winter. Cars were parked on either side of the road with a consequent traffic jam down the middle. Whilst children were back at school they had been replaced with several coach loads of OAP's who were busily vacuuming up everything that could be bought, eaten or photographed. Everyone was happy. I sat in the boot of the car with Pip and watched events unfold. The traffic jam cleared, I became aware that everyone had gone quiet and were looking in one direction. A lady to my left said, "Oh my God No!", as a sudden chill descended. I looked to my right and couldn't believe my eyes, there were, I believe, two SS Nazi soldiers in full perfectly turned out uniforms goose stepping slowly down the middle of the road. I was of an age that had only seen black and white newsreels of German troops, in real life it was chilling and horrifying! An elderly man let out a scream and saying something, went to attack them but was restrained from doing so. At that point the two soldiers stopped in bewilderment. I have the feeling that they thought that the bystanders would say, "Hey don't they look great" but in reality it was the complete opposite. The police soon intervened and rapidly took the two young Nazi men away. Meanwhile, the elderly man was being looked after by his OAP coach friends. My parents who had witnessed the events from further up the road were also very upset. The happy atmosphere had gone, the tourists didn't want to stay and everyone dispersed. Looking back on it, it may have been a publicity stunt that went wrong, it is hard to tell, but I would not expect that Michael Mann is likely to have given the go ahead for that! I now wonder what the local papers made of events, but at the time I wasn't interested, pity! When I saw those soldiers coming down the street and was told by one of the onlookers that a film was being shot in the area I assumed that it would be in an inaccessible place well away from public view. I never dreamt that it would be to one side of a public road.

Our holidays were always spent visiting different places using the Caravan Park as the middle of a wheel. I would map out where to go the next day, leaving the caravan at about 9 o'clock we would meander our way to such places as Llandudno, Holyhead, Betwysy Coad or Portmerion. That day, October 15th we were heading off to Capel Curig but the main road from Llanberis was closed by the Police due to an accident. It was our fifth year, so I was getting to know North Wales quite well, I was able to go another way. A track, one car wide with passing places. About half way, I parked on a new area and saw a black van, on its side was written in large white letters, 'LEE ELECTRIC'. Normally that road was totally deserted. I knew of the two slate quarries, one on either side of the road. The one on the right Dracula would of felt at home in, dark and dismal. Wind and rain would pick up from nowhere and dislodge slates from the many heaps surrounding it causing them to fall about 25m to the ground and smashing on contact.

Moving on and turning a corner, I was confronted with a chap with 'STOP' written on a board. He drew his finger across his throat, I turned my car engine off instead. I was totally stunned. There were at least 50 people milling around. A whistle blew and like in *The Prisoner*, everyone froze, from noise to utter dead silence. Through a loud haler ACTION! Michael Mann was in action. Until that moment I knew nothing of *The Keep* and its set.

During that holiday I visited the Keep location, in all about nine times and in all weathers, often in a lot of pain from the ruptured disc in my lower back. It was truly fascinating, so many things going on. Extras being taught how the rather messy blood jackets worked and Royston Tickner, who played Tomescu the Inn Keeper, showed them how to fall correctly when being shot. Skills perhaps he learned during his time in 'Z Cars'. He had a grey moustache and hair in The Keep, but when he was teaching how to fall etc his moustache and hair were very bright ginger and he was wearing peasant clothing. Looks like all sorts of permutations were tried out during the 'Takes' on the set only to end up on the cutting room floor! Many things that I saw did not appear in the film.

My first visit back to the quarry was to view it from the road above, whilst I was trying to absorb what was going on, there was an extremely loud bang and smoke. I just had to go and have a look. The quarry was utterly transformed into a village, in front of the pub was a howitzer gun facing up at the road. An Arriflex 35BL111 camera, nobody using it, stood only 2 metres away from me, standing by it, was a person dressed in peasant clothing, his countenance was like a bird of prey taking in every movement in front of him. He gave precise orders to a person by his side who then used a Motorola, walkie-talkie to instruct the people below. The Crew I could see liked working for him, everything he said was clear precise and to the point. As he walked away, an elderly man told me, "That was Mr Mann". It meant nothing at the time. The elderly man was in fact Tony Oliver, on his title tag was 'Eton Motor Museum' (now known as *History on Wheels Motor Museum*), it seemed he supplied the vehicles and the gun that appeared in the film. He told me much about what was going on. The front of the Keep stretched from the lift along the side of the road, to the furthest corner of the quarry and from the road down to the bridge level. All that could be seen of the Keep, from the public road, was about one metre of black plastic sheet protruding out from the base of the stone wall.

Some days later I visited the site again and was the only bystander. This time the Arriflex camera was in operation, panning as Mr. Prochnow drove slowly down the road in the Keep below our feet. I took this photo.



From L to R: Gary Spratling (Clapper loader) John Golding (Camera in blue coat) Arthur Lavis (2nd unit Director of Photography behind the camera) Bill Geddes (Key Grip with hands on fence) Anthony Gaudioz (Focus Puller in green jacket and cap) *Identification courtesy of Stewart Buck*

I remember Bill Geddes pulling down the barbed wire down whilst the shooting was done and Anthony Gaudioz wrote on the small board that was propped up against the table they were on “Director Michael Mann, Cameraman Mr Thomson”. The crew were standing behind me, one brushed my back as I took this photo in case I did something stupid. I put the cover over the lens of my camera and put the arm holding my stick by my side and a finger of my other hand in my ear. Those around me relaxed, one stifling a laugh, as a loud hailer blasted out ACTION!

Following my first meeting with Tony I met him again and had a long chat with him about the set and also mechanical engineering that we were both also passionate about. Subsequently, he had apparently found out much more about me through, could it have been his wife, talking to my mother? He had also seen me up on the road, clinging to the fence in all weathers to watch the filming, or not. I had once visited the location with my mother but having been in the Blitz and now, from the road, seen the set with Nazi's and the like, she wanted nothing further to do with it. She wanted a holiday and I wanted 'The Keep'. It was Wednesday October 20th, I had driven to the quarry only to find that there was nothing going on so I started to drive on to Llanberis. Once again I was hindered by a blocked road, this time by flood water, so I turned into what I call “Paramount Road” (Red Route), through the open gate and past a deserted Paramount guard post. The road, about half a mile long wound its way passed several old slate quarries and heaps of slate.



It was down this road on the left I saw Mr. Prochnow's vehicle (Orange Square). I stopped and got out of the car and took this photo.



I turned to get back into my car, when from the other side of the German vehicle, I heard someone say, much to my amazement, "William!". It was Tony. We talked about the vehicle, he told me that he was staying in a one person caravan just behind it and that he obtained his power from the engine of his lorry that is visible to the right, with its cabin rolled forward.

I then asked him about the other vehicles. He remembered from our first meeting that he had agreed to post to me in Tonbridge full information about the vehicles, I thanked him very much for the nice talks and wished him well. As I was about to get in my car, he came back to me and asked whether I would like to have a look at the half-track. I asked where it was parked, along the road? He said it was in the The Keep quarry!!! I parked by the lift, as Tony and I entered it two of the crew eyed me, I gave them my camera.

It was it seems a day that Michael Mann was filming somewhere else. Parked just a meter from the lift was this real German half-track with a tray underneath and oil dripping. Tony said the driver had been a bit ambitious and had cracked the sump!

My memories of that visit are quite specific. On my right were three homes with their front doors wide open, I was expecting to see thin plywood walls but instead they were nearly one metre thick and built of stone blocks. Tony said these buildings were real and that the construction crew had spent many days lovingly building them and were very sad that they would then have to destroy them. I am not sure what stones were used, because they were covered in white paint. The homes were refreshment areas for the crew, actors and set equipment. The furthest one, that had been built on the knocked down slate quarry office plinth, had a chimney about midway, and door openings on either side leading into another room behind. As far as I could tell there was no attic. The middle home was also just one big room the smaller one by the lift I think was the loo. I looked at the smokeless chimney and then at the grey smoke moving a few centimeter off the floor and two very ill looking crew desperately trying to get what appeared to be signal flare smoke to go up the chimney, and not succeeding!

On the left was the open sided barn where real animals were kept together with their attendants. Slowly walking on passed the rock on the right, we came to the church on the left. Suddenly the door

opened and out came the 'vicar', he took one step, saw us, and nearly dropped his papers as he stumbled over the dog, poor dog. Although the door was quite wide the vicar was as well, it was like seeing a cork pop out of a bottle. They both composed themselves, turned and went back in. At the back of the church was a pine tree in a pot that normally cannot be seen. There was a small room built on the back for the set crew who would suddenly dash out with brushes, pieces of set, spare rocks etc and then vanish when things needed adjusting, tidying up, or to get the continuity right! I sometimes saw this from the public road. I remember one occasion when one of the stunt men exploded his vest in the wrong direction and was severely told off by Mr Mann. Mops and cleaners rushed out and in a couple of minutes all was cleaned up, including the stunt man.

Then there was the pub this too was built like the homes, but a lot stronger, it had a basement where the camera could be pushed when it rained. It had a first floor that had to take the weight of one of those cameras and the people. Tony took me up those concrete steps now lying flat on the ground that can just be seen in Photo 3 of 'MY PHOTOGRAPHS' reference "C", and through the door, passing a lady on the veranda hammering away at a typewriter, of the old non electric variety. I was expecting to find an empty room, but was amazed to find rustic tables, chairs, and a shelf on left side of door with bottles on it. The old type of fireplace built about one metre out from the wall and a very narrow staircase going left, the pub didn't look big enough to have an upstairs! It seems that several scenes were spent on people using the steps and being filmed from indoors. It was one of my visits standing up on the road when I saw this lady do four running up the stairs and four down with a camera and crew outside on the grassy track. When we emerged from the pub I looked to my left, I asked Tony what "that" was, he said 'THE KEEP'. To me it just looked like black plastic sheet with white bits and a square opening without doors, nothing of interest. He told me the plot of 'THE KEEP' and where his vehicles would be driving to and from. I was in a lot of pain by this time, so Tony and my mother helped me down those steps. I told my mother to go away, it was so embarrassing to have my mother around. She, naturally, got cross and went back to the lift. I wanted to savour this one visit but I also had to make my way back to the lift, collect my camera and return to the car. Off we went to Llanberis for a sandwich lunch.

I visited the set many times, I just watched, kept quiet, got out of their way when I needed to without any fuss.

It seemed to me that the Brynteg caravan site was used by the crew etc and I believe by Michael Mann also but I did find out that all the B & B's and hotels in Llanberis had been taken over by actors, crew and others visiting in connection with the production. My father, who used to take my dog for a walk around the site, met a lot of the crew and told them that Pip belonged to me. That same evening my mother said "Do you want to go to The Keep?". "Pardon I said, what's the catch?". The catch was I could not use my two crutches, but instead to use my very nice walking stick. It seems the sun was glinting off the shiny metal surfaces and was distracting the crew on the Set. I could see this was going to be painful so I wore my back brace as well. One evening there was a knock on the door, my mother answered it. She came back, saying a lady had given her passes and to be at Paramount entrance at precisely 10am the following morning. I wondered what for?

Instead of parking where I normally did Tony said to park by the blue lift. Tony and if it was his wife, were waiting. My camera was taken from me by the crew and the four of us descended into the set. The four of us arrived at the gate, where the Passes and my Kodak Instamatic camera were taken from us. My father stayed with Pip. My mother, embarrassing, but she carried my oxygen cylinder in case I had an Asthma attack, had to come along as well. We were shown into an open sided jeep and taken to the lift where we met John Golding. We shook hands and went into the lift and then for a guided tour around THE KEEP.

It was an utterly different tour than Tony's. Mr Golding was a man of few words but his eyes never left my face. This time the set was totally devoid of people except for the animals. The set was totally differently lit. Coming out of the lift the white homes were softly lit, a feeling of gentle warmth, relaxing. When he talked to me it was the voice of authority, not nasty. We talked. As we came around the side of the rock I was confronted with THE KEEP. It was lit totally differently. It was horrific I actually stepped back, this was genuine, I couldn't believe the change. I think this was the reaction he wanted. It was more over powering and full of dread than in the film! We did go into the pub. As filming had finished he talked, unfortunately I cannot now remember what about. On the way back to the lift, we met Tony who told Mr Golding that the half-track was working again. As Mr Golding had to go, he left Tony to walk me slowly back to the lift.

It was the last day of my holiday, and I think also, the last day of filming. When I arrived and looked down into the quarry, the half-track vehicle was parked outside the church and the crew were milling around. John Golding took up his position about two metres from me up on the road, looking down. The crew then grouped together, I had a feeling what was going to happen next and I started to edge away from Mr Golding, it was his day not mine. But a large hand gently touched me on my shoulder to stop me moving and nudged me back to my original position. One minute or so later the entire crew raised their glasses to him with three cheers. A photographer took a photo of them and then turned and took a photo of Mr Golding, so somewhere on the cutting room floor is me! I was completely overwhelmed! I watched the crew start to drink amongst themselves. I turned to say something but found I was totally by myself, the road was empty. I shuffled around to look into the quarry, deserted, totally devoid of any living person. I felt very sad, I wanted to at least say thank you to them all. At that point the weather started to turn wintry, I took one last look at The Keep set and left. That was the last day of my holiday. My parents had to put up with sitting in the car for about eight hours, whilst I enjoyed the once in a life time experience!

From that day in October until early 2020 when these notes were assembled and Stewart Buck provided me with such interesting and helpful photographs and information concerning the location filming, I had been under the impression that it was Michael Mann himself that had shown me around the Set. Indeed, I was summoned by the lady who knocked on our caravan door that night with the three passes, to go to Paramount to see Mr Mann. However, I now understand that it was John Golding that showed me around that day. Whilst I am unlikely to ever know the truth, I have a theory! I was in my driving clothes that day as all my nice looking clothes had been used up, in two days time we would be returning home so I looked like a rag bag which had gone through a hedge backwards! I was naturally allowed in by the four crew and Mr Mann may well of wanted to show me around 'his Keep', but when he clapped eyes on the rag bag that turned up, he may of not of wanted to have been seen dead with me. Instead he must of told John Golding to guide me round. Looking at how well dressed Michael Mann is in Stewart's photo I can now see why!! "Have our photo taken together by someone,oh dear! Destroy the camera film quick!".

It continues to be a great privilege to have been allowed to go down onto the set, witness some filming and to have seen the great man, Mr Michael Mann in ACTION!