

Victoria's own secret war

'This is not the war of the newsreels - it's about tiny domestic difficulties, chilly church halls, lumpy custard. And Nella is fighting her own war, one that she hopes will end in liberation' So said comedy actress Victoria Wood as she filmed *Housewife, 49*, the story of wartime Barrow woman Nella Last



Comedian, actress, singer and writer Victoria Wood's first big break in TV came on *That's Life*. She has had a number of successful shows including *Wood and Walters* (with actress Julie Walters), *Acorn Antiques* (part of her ...As Seen On TV series) and *Dinner Ladies*

Victoria Wood and a star-studded cast and crew spent a busy three days in Barrow in July 2006 filming *Housewife, 49*, which was screened on primetime TV in December. The story followed Barrow housewife Nella Last's struggle to finally forge her own identity within her difficult marriage, and come to terms with the fact that her adored boys have grown up and no longer need her.

Filming took place on Parade Street, Roanhead, Walney Island, Barrow Island and Town Square. Hundreds of people watched as the actors, extras and technicians went through their paces. Watchers will have felt sorry for the actors and extras who were dressed in heavy winter period costume in the middle of the hottest week of the year for Barrow. The story of *Housewife 49* begins in 1939 in Barrow-in-Furness, in the first strange weeks of the Second World War.

Nella, who is recovering from a nervous breakdown, fears she will not cope with her younger son Cliff leaving to join the army.

In the story, Cliff encourages Nella to find an outlet for her feelings by writing a daily account of her life for Mass Observation, a government-linked project aimed at examining the lives of ordinary people.

For Nella the diary is a way of articulating everything she can't say to her husband and it strengthens her determination to help the war effort, despite his reluctance to let her leave the house.

She joins the local Women's Voluntary Service, run by Mrs Waite (Stephanie Cole), and the companionship and sense of purpose she finds there gives her the joy and energy that is missing from her marriage.

Victoria said: "This is not the war of the newsreels - it's about tiny domestic difficulties, chilly church halls, lumpy custard. And Nella is fighting her own war, one that she hopes will end in liberation."

"It wasn't just about rationing and dried egg and people painting their legs brown to look like stockings. Not just average wartime things but the story underneath of a middle-aged woman in crisis."

"We went to Barrow-in-Furness to look at Nella's house and walk around the town to get an idea of what it might have been like."

Victoria and her team paid a number of fact-finding visits to Barrow in order to prepare for the production.

She spent a great deal of her time at the Dock Museum researching through the archive material, as

well as visiting potential locations to deliver recognizable images of Barrow on film.

Victoria was interested in the fact that the war also offered a great deal of independence to many women. "Suddenly women were being expected to do things outside the home and it was being encouraged by the Government," says Victoria, "so there was a whole different twist to the way women were perceived and all at once it was OK to put your child into nursery and go and work in a factory."

"It gave Nella the chance, and the excuse I think, to get out of the house without being criticised for it, because it was for the war effort."

"She was a woman with a strong sense of duty and she felt that duty was to her husband and sons - which is an attitude very much of the time."

"But Nella was also bursting with wishes to do other things even though she was caged in by her generation and circumstances."

"The war just opened the door for her a little. She was a special case because she was depressive and her husband didn't like her to go out, so she led a very restricted life until she joined the WVS."

Location Manager for Granada TV, Gary Barnes said that the team had been grateful for the tremendous assistance they had received from Barrow Borough Council before and during the filming. "It was shaping up to be tricky, but all the planning came together and the location shots of Barrow gave *Housewife 49* a very firm sense of place."

■ *Nella Last's War: The Second World War Diaries of Housewife, 49 is available now from Barrow Tourist Information Centre.*



BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE: Victoria Wood films in Barrow as Nella Last, a middle-aged housewife during the Second World War



CRUISE CONTROL : The 837-passenger luxury liner Prinsendam

Luxury cruises in as reputation grows

THE biggest, most luxurious cruise ship ever to visit Barrow is due to set sail to the town in 2008.

Town Centre Manager Ann Taylforth says that the planned visit of the 38,000-tonne *Prinsendam* is another boost for Barrow in its attempt to become an

internationally known cruise ship port for the Lake District.

"The *Prinsendam* is a five-star ship," said Mrs Taylforth. Chris Clouter, Operations Manager for Associate British Ports said: "It is a significant visit and another feather in our cap."

The *Prinsendam*, which is owned by the Holland America line, is 699ft long and 106ft wide.

It can carry up to 837 passengers and has a crew of 443. Nicknamed the *Elegant Explorer* it is known for long-range, exotic itineraries. The cruise liner visit confirmed

for 2007 is the slightly smaller 23,000-tonne *Delphin Voyager* which will dock in the town in August to allow its mainly German passengers to visit popular spots in the Lake District as well as take a peek at Barrow's many attractions like Furness Abbey.



Pictures: KELLS PHOTOGRAPHY

ELEGANT: The foyer underwent a major upgrade in 2006

Stars lining up for more sell-out dates

ANOTHER exciting few months lie ahead for forum twenty eight. The Council's Arts and Entertainments venue completed the second phase of its refurbishment in Autumn 2006, with a major upgrade to the foyer, café bar and restaurant, Tourist Information Centre and office accommodation.

Public reaction has been hugely positive and the venue is now planning the final phase of the refurbishment which will involve replacing the auditorium seating and upgrading stage equipment. This work will take place in summer 2007.

The autumn programme of events continued to delight customers and international artists such as Tony Hadley and Elkie Brooks played to sell-out audiences.

The spring programme again promises an exciting mix of artists, shows and events.

In February punk legends of the 70s and 80s, The Blockheads come to the venue in addition to the welcome return of Barbara Dixon (already sold out).

March and April see appearances from soul legend Alexander O'Neal - fresh from his appearances on BBC's *Just The Two Of Us*, and The Christians and Black.

In March, the venue will host the renowned Moscow Ballet, and in a special one-off performance to conclude an intensive weekend of learning how to stage an opera, students from Dowdales School and local adults will form a chorus and showcase sections from Il trovatore with professional singers from the Royal Opera House taking the principle roles.

The huge success of BBC's



"Strictly Come Dancing" has turned the public on to this vibrant and popular leisure activity, and Jason Parkinson, resident teacher at Blackpool Tower Ballroom, continues through until the end of April with the ever-popular Dance Nights - everyone can come along to learn and enjoy.

In March, stars and former winners of "Strictly Come Dancing", Darren Bennett and Lilia Kopylova return to the venue with a stunning show.

Local young bands continue to be showcased in the popular "Up & Comin'" under18's music nights, and the three year Music Factory project comes to an end in April with a grand finale evening. This fantastic project has provided the Borough with many memorable musical events and the evening promises to go with a bang.

If these events have whetted your appetite to learn more about the programme at the Borough's premier Arts and Entertainments venue, either pick up a Spring Brochure from forum twenty eight or visit

www.barrowbc.gov/forum28



RELAXING: The cafe bar and restaurant have been refurbished