The Informed Journalist: Anthony Howard

I can't wait to read the obits of Anthony Howard who has died today. He would understand that feeling, too. He was the the acme of the informed journalist. But as well as being stunningly well-connected and well-briefed, he was also deeply curious and not a little naughty. It all made him into one of the great political hacks of the last 50 years.

I was lucky enough to make the BBC's obituary film of Harold Wilson with Anthony. I had the pleasure of being with him as he interviewed all the great figures of that era: Shore, Castle, Healey, Callaghan, Benn, Jenkins etc. These were giants of a particularly compelling era. And Tony knew them all intimately. I delighted in the way he extracted wonderful anecdotes and important detail. But after every interview he would snort derisively and tell me exactly where they had lied or embellished the truth.

At one point while we were looking through archive of Wilson's time at Oxford he was able to tell which college was being depicted in the grainy flickering black and white footage simply by the front door.

Howard grew up on print but took to TV wonderfully, despite having what is normally described as a face for radio. Like most broadcasters I used him endlessly because you were sure of getting authoritative, incisive and entertaining analysis.

Anthony was very Old School, Oxbridge, Establishment. But he was also a sceptic who knew his job was to puncture pomposity, bust myths and challenge orthodoxies.

I suspect that he was jealous of the politicians because at heart he was a left-wing idealist who had hoped for a political career of his own. We are lucky that he remained on the outside, observing with real historical understanding, the extraordinary politics of the last half century.

[For a more critical take on Anthony Howard, go to Anthony Barnett's article on OpenDemocracy]