

**Lorraine Heggeseey**  
**Doctor of Letters**  
**Durham Cathedral, 7 July 2025**

It isn't often Arthur Scargill and Strictly Come Dancing come in the same sentence... but this afternoon – we celebrate the career & contribution of the missing link: LH.

For those of you baffled: Lorraine was the tenacious investigative journalist who publicly exonerated the former leader of the National Union of Miners, Arthur Scargill, from a smear campaign that suggested he had misappropriated funds during the Miner's strike (he hadn't). She was also, as the first female controller of the BBC, responsible for reinstating Saturday night as 'event' telly when she commissioned Strictly Come Dancing.

Her stellar career – which also includes commissioning the return of Doctor Who and Britain's Got Talent - began here, in Durham. While studying English, Lorraine worked on the student newspaper The Palatinate and knew that she wanted to work in journalism.

It was also here, that we see the manifestation of Lorraine's capacity for vision, backed by a determination to pursue it. Having held out to study Arts & Humanities – Lorraine's dad wanted her to take Law – she graduated in the late 1970s wanting a job in journalism, an industry then dominated by men. Having been rejected from the BBC's news training scheme –male peers from The Palatinate got interviews – Lorraine grafted in hospital radio and at the Acton Gazette. Undeterred, she applied a second time to the BBC and got in.

Lorraine subsequently worked across sports, science, social documentary and news television – working her way from being the lone female in the room jockeying for good stories, to increasingly taking on roles with greater responsibility. It's hard to talk about Lorraine without mentioning the decision she made as head of Children's BBC to part company with a Blue Peter presenter publicly exposed for drug taking. What is more striking is her willingness to own that decision by personally explaining it to children on camera.

Which brings us to values.

Aside from determination, Lorraine's career has been shaped by a willingness to say Yes to opportunities and, in the absence of opportunity, to create it. Working in sports programming, she realised exciting assignments were being distributed over drinks in the pub. She invited herself to the pub. She hasn't got stuck by what seems impossible, but has worked to expand the possible. On This Week, colleagues (male) pitched for good stories by playing football on Friday afternoons. No: Lorraine drew the line at playing football! Instead, she nobbled the editor on a Friday morning – before football. Lorraine took those experiences into her leadership roles, creating equitable cultures of opportunity for others that released her colleagues' energy and creativity. She has created workplaces where individuals – at whatever level, from whatever background – felt valued & secure enough to take creative risks while knowing there was a safety net to catch them if it didn't work out. To thrive, people need support – including, sometimes, support to fail.

In 2012, Lorraine secured funding to start an independent production company Boom Pictures. Commercially successful, Boom was also committed to supporting the regions and nations in having resource and opportunity to make good tv. Through her role as CEO of the Grierson Trust, Lorraine seeks to improve diversity in the documentary making population.

So, I trust Lorraine's dad got over her decision to study Arts & Humanities instead of Law because, in this context, Arthur Scargill meets Strictly Come Dancing makes perfect sense. Lorraine's creative energy excels in the Arts but has always been – and continues to be – underpinned by a commitment to the humane.

*Vice-Chancellor, I present Lorraine Heggessy to receive the degree Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.*