

BBC61A: An image as the lead story

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Who is she?

One of the most popular faces in the broadcast industry, but hardly anybody knows her name.

Since we took over Esser Test Charts in 2006, we have been asking ourselves who the woman on the BBC 61 chart is. What does she look like today? We asked several people in the industry who we thought would know details about the chart and how it came together.

Then in May 2012 – a day after I was thinking about a new attempt to find the details – I received the message that she had contacted us via e-mail. I could not believe it.



Through a search engine and our website, Lynne Holmes had managed to find us. Isn't the internet era a great one? We exchanged a few e-mails and agreed to meet in the southwest of London where Lynne lives today.

And here is the story:

Lynne told me that she does not know when the idea to create the chart was born but the actual production took place in 1976, when she was 22. At first the plan was to take a picture of one of the engineer's daughter for the chart, but she had red hair. They tried a wig to cover the hair but then the skin tone no longer looked natural. So they had to find somebody else. And there she was, a girl who had worked in different areas within the BBC. She started in a secretarial training course, worked in TV training, in the Drama Department and finally as a producer's assistant. Having participated in the Miss England contest, Lynne was – and still is – a good looking woman and her natural appearance with dark hair and just the right skin tone made her the natural prospect for the flesh tone chart.

Her picture was taken and turned into the BBC TEST CARD No. 61 (FLESH TONE REFERENCE). The official reference to the target can still be downloaded from the internet (www.bbc.co.uk/rd/pubs/reports/1977-20.pdf). As far as we know today the chart was produced by two companies in the early days: one was Royle Print in the UK and the other one was Porta Pattern in the US. Royle Print stopped producing test charts in the 90s, because the person taking care of the production retired and - believe it or not - they threw away all the material they had left in stock. Porta Pattern



also eventually went out of business. When Hans Hubertus Esser, an independent chart manufacturer located in the southern part of Germany, heard about Royle Print, he contacted the BBC to inform them and the BBC asked if he would be able to produce the charts. Mr. Esser consented and started producing the BBC charts and was at that time the only certified source for the charts. His company “Esser Test Charts” was taken over by Image Engineering in 2006 and Image Engineering still sells the BBC test charts No. 61, 64 and 65.

But back to Lynne. A few articles were published about the chart in the late 70s and when I visited her, she showed me a picture of her carrying the chart.

So what happened to her after becoming the broadcast industries’ “Flesh Tone Reference”? At the end of the 70s, I personally remember, it was a plum job for beautiful girls to become a stewardess. Travelling the world while also making money is what Lynne did for British Airways for 6 years. And she was good at it. One of her best-known passengers was Queen Elizabeth and it seems obvious that she received an offer from Oman to serve on the Sultan’s private jets. After a further 2 1/2 years, she returned to England but continued to work on private jets with a long list of celebrities with whom she flew with until the year 2000. At the age of 46, she decided to change her life and studied interior design. Today she designs the interiors of anything from ski chalets to country cottages, and of course, private jets.

Our dinner at the Windmill overlooking the gorgeous Surrey hills was the perfect ambience to talk about hobbies and future plans. Lynne enjoys skiing, sailing, photography, and – as she says – good food in good company. The latter is what I enjoyed that evening as well. Thank you, Lynne, for sharing the great and entertaining story of your life with us. And here is what she looks like today:

