

The Connected Histories of the BBC

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Receives a few small parts in radio plays after leaving drama school	1
Opinion of BBC at that time	2
Joins auxiliary fire service during war and meets BBC 'observers'	2
Seconded to RAF to do talks on WAAF	2-3
Offered post in Overseas Service	3
Works on Radio Newsreel at 200 Oxford Street	4
Memories of working conditions and colleagues (Robert Beatty, Rosemary Jelley, Touria Campbell, Newsreel reporters, George Weidenfeld)	5-10
Made fully accredited war correspondent in 1944 and sent to Flanders	10-14
Paid less than men	41-15
Identification problem when papers lost	15-17
End of war	17
Joins Home News Reporting Unit	17-18
Turns down offer of editorship of 'Woman's Hour'	18
Prejudice against women commentators	18-19
Commentates on Princess Elizabeth's wedding	19-20
Leaves BBC established staff	20
Does contract work	21
King George VI's funeral	22-23
Organisation behind broadcasts of state occasions	23-24
Rivalry between commentators	24
Coronation in 1953	24-27
Other royal occasions	27-28
Princess Margaret's wedding	28-29
Queen's world tour 1953	29-30
Other royal tours	30-34
Commentary techniques through the years	34-36
Getting work as a freelance	36-37
Working for television	37-39
Working for Associated Rediffusion	39
Changes in BBC over the years	40
Encounters with Directors-General	40-41
Lack of regret at not pursuing stage career and great compensations offered by working for the BBC	41-42

2.

STEWART: Audrey what was the reputation of the BBC at that period, had it got a very good reputation ?

RUSSELL: Well I was very young then and I was hardly in a position to assess anything I think, but of course I thought the BBC was wonderful, you know I don't know how wonderful it was but I thought the BBC was absolutely wonderful, naturally. But anyway I was in the London Theatre in a sort of.. hovering around the London Theatre when war was declared but I had volunteered for the Auxiliary Fire Service, afterwards called the National Fire Service and I was soon called up and actually ^{seconded} did so right through the blitz. Well I thought that was the end of my career of anything at all but the curious thing is that fate does seem to have taken a hand because after all I was only a firewoman, the lowest form of life, I could have been sent to any firestation in the Greater London Area or in London itself anywhere, where was I sent ? I was stationed at the big firestation in Chiltern Street which is only a few minutes walk away from the BBC. Well that didn't bring me broadcasts but because of the proximity to the BBC, BBC War Reporters, (by the way they weren't called reporters then) I think this must have been a hangover from Reith because there was a policy in the News Division that there should be no reference to journalism at all. And so they were called observers, so I must call them observers for I was later to become an observer. But at this firestation, because it was so near, observers often visited us and also because I think the station superintendant liked publicity and liked being interviewed, they were always coming for stories of the blitz or stories of the civil defence or what was happening to firemen and firewomen. And I was put forward, quite early on, to be interviewed and I met for the first time two observers, one was Robin ^{who was on the staff} Duff and the other one was the late Terence de Marny the actor. You see here again there was the feeling of importance in the News Division of somebody who was able to project the image of what he had to say as an actor, not as an actor but because he was an actor he was going to be able to broadcast well, wasn't like now where people are employed because they're journalists, whether they have a cleft palate or not doesn't really matter I don't think.

Anyway I was interviewed over and over again and evidently one of them was quite successful because it went out in Radio Newsreel and ~~by~~ again ^{by} chance, fate taking a hand you could say, there happened to be an air vice marshall of the R.A.F. in the studio doing something about the war in the programme and he said, apparently, I wish we had that girl at the Air Ministry. And to my astonishment (and this was a conspiracy between the R.A.F. and the B.B.C.) I was seconded for six weeks to do six small five minute talks about the women in the R.A.F., the W.A.A.F. And so still in Fire Service uniform I went halfway

3.

across Britain, I went to fighter, bomber, coastal command, I went to Waterbeach and Mildenhall and Poole, all over the place, watching the women in the WAAF working and then of course when I came back I had to write a script which I'd never done before but never mind nobody noticed apparently - and I then met my first talks producer, Donald Boyd, very famous figure in the News Division before the War, ~~I'm quite sure~~, a very gruff kind of man, I should say a misogynist in his work, I won't say male chauvinist pig because he was very helpful really but he was one of those tweedy, pipe-smoking men, you knew whether he was in or not ~~at~~ the beginning of the corridor, the smell of the terrible pipe I always remember that. Anyhow he helped me a lot and I did five minutes on the air every Sunday for six weeks after the 1 o'clock News and then I began to be interested and I thought, my goodness, this is quite different to the books I read or anything, this is making words come across by your voice and by the sound....

STEWART: What sort of production did you get ?

RUSSELL: Well there wasn't really very much time for a lot of production. You know I mean in those days there were running flat out in the News Division, they were losing people all the time either going to the war or something, no I don't remember a lot but he was very, ^{kind} there was no production for me as regards the actual ^{performance} ever, with regard to the actual broadcast, do you follow, it was probably the script that I wasn't quite so hot on, see ? But after all that's the way it worked you see. Well, then we had a lull in the fireservice and the six weeks was over and I kept thinking how marvellous that was, it really was rather fun you see. And I thought well now I'm here for the duration and then I got a letter, to my astonishment, offering me a job as a broadcaster in the Overseas Service of the BBC., if they could get me released from my national service. My starting salary was £645 a year.

STEWART: Was that considered rather good ?

RUSSELL: Yes very and I kept on being told afterwards - because of course it took an awfully long time to get me out of the fireservice, at least six months you see, oh at least if not more. And then I was, whatever they do, you know, vetted and MI5'd and all sorts of things and I ^{lost} my birth certificate and all things you know in the middle of the war I couldn't find anything.

STEWART: Yes I was going to ask whether they looked into your background very carefully ?

RUSSELL: Yes I was MI5'd or whatever you call it, I was, I can't remember the proper phrase...(screened) screened. No and when various administrative people interviewed me and saw me they kept on saying you know that your starting salary should be £620 but there are exceptional circumstances. I'm not sure what they were but anyway that was the way of it. And really I was very proud indeed after three weeks at the BBC School where again we were told mostly what good employers the BBC were and the hierarchy and who answered to who from the director general up and down, you'd learn that but you didn't learn about broadcasting, good gracious no.

I was really very proud because I went and I was allowed to go and work in Radio Newsreel. Now that was the classic news programme of the war and it is still on the air in the Overseas Service today, as we know. And I think it was one of the programmes that made people realise that this was the BBC's famous and most splendid hour, you know, ..

STEWART: How long did each programme last ?

RUSSELL: Well there was one on the African Service that I think was half an hour, I think the N.American edition, you see there were different editions, the N. American I think was quarter, Overseas half an hour, European I really can't remember, it was probably half an hour, half an hour or quarter. They varied of course, they varied all the time according to the war or the situation. Well they went out, programmes went out from the basement studios of what was to become, this was my first location in the BBC, of what was to become a very famous address, well it was formerly the Oxford Street Store, Peter Robinson and it was converted into BBC premises, or war premises, it was like a fortress all the windows were bricked up, it was said that fifty feet of concrete was laid over the top of the bargain basement but I don't quite believe that but it certainly was about five feet because it must have been the safest place in London, they would never have done, if that had blown up we really would have had it, you know. But it really was a department store and when I eventually got an office I still could see through the door, at least there was no door, they were cubicles then, bricked up cubicles which were rather nice, you sort of felt very safe in some ways on the first floor I had a thing that still said "Coats and Mantles," with an arrow, you know. The ground floor seemed to be, it was called 200 Oxford Street and had that written in large type, it was really a huge canteen and this was invaluable because people eat there night and day, I don't think that canteen ever closed because of course Radio Newsreel went on all through the night, they were either preparing an edition...the food was war food but you worked so hard you didn't sometimes have time to even buy your rations, so you eat there. There were several things

5.

that reminded me of the strangeness of it all was, one is I don't know about other places, it certainly was true in the BBC all over the country, the first thing the BBC lost in the war were spoons, I don't know why, but if you wanted a cup of tea or coffee you had a self service and you went along and you came to a rather ghastly looking urn and tied to it was a wet long bit of string was one single spoon and everyone stirred their coffee or tea with that and that was it...which I always felt was frightfully funny. Well not frightfully funny but it was odd, I don't know why I remember it. The other thing which I think may have been a hangover again from Sir John Reith or the days of peace, was that every week in your office two old men, elderly men called browncoats would emerge and walk round the department on a sort of procession and one would have a large bottle of red ink and the other a large bottle of black ink. They'd stand at the door and say, you all right miss? If not you got an enormous thing of two inkwells rather like those things you used to have in postoffices you know, which was rather funny.

I went in of course not knowing anyone at all and the staff of Radio Newsreel which I think was rather large by present standards, but then you see everyone was liable to deputise for somebody else because in the war we either bombed out or lost our windows or had to fetch a mother in law from hospital or something or something, so you didn't know when you went in, I was employed as an observer that is, as a broadcaster in News but you see you might go in and they would say oh somebody's oh yes their house had a hit and they're all right, she's all right but she can't come in and so you found yourself as a scriptwriter of one day for Radio Newsreel, or a producer for Radio Newsreel. My basic job was a broadcaster but I very often didn't broadcast at all. There was an extraordinary mixture, I made friends with a very great many of them and I have them as my friends to this day, different backgrounds and nationalities, a very large proportion of amateurs to radio, like myself, you see. There was also an inflow of actors because we were always needing voices to read despatches when the recordings were not good enough standards to go through the static to get on the Overseas Service you see. There were several quite well-known actors, like Robert Beatty who was a link man. You see the recordings were inserted and there was live links, Robert Harris... the recruitment one wondered how on earth it was done. Of course the basic way it was done was that the BBC was aware that at the beginning of the war apparently, that obviously they were going to have to have more women in the BBC and so they wrote to the colleges, womens' colleges and the universities for recommendations of names. And a very old friend of mine was one of those, she was a post graduate and a very efficient producer, a very good producer indeed, she was the coolest of them all I think, Rosemary ^{Jellis} Jealous.

6.

I can give you another example, there was a very attractive woman who was recruited to Radio Newsreel on the strength of meeting a senior BBC official at dinner and sitting next to him and he thought she was so interesting and so charming, that she went to the BBC school and my word he must have been a very good picker because she had the most wonderful flair for radio, she's a very old friend of mine, very charming, but that she sat next to a BBC official at a dinner and that's the way it happened and she couldn't really, they couldn't have chosen anybody better than her for the kind of job we were trying to do.

STEWART: Might I ask who that was ?

RUSSELL: It was Mrs. ^{TURIN} ~~Touria~~ (phon) Campbell. We also of course had a series of quite famous people who were given the chance to try out to see if this particular rather high pressure work suited them. I had Celia Johnson ^{the famous actress} following me around on one or two sessions when we went out with recording cars I have to confess she didn't like it and ~~she didn't~~, that didn't work at all. We had Peter ^{Quennell} ~~Kennel~~ working, the historian and well I don't know I can't remember when he faded out but he certainly wasn't in for the duration. Well then of course there were the professional broadcasters also working in Radio Newsreel from the Commonwealth and they, I learned a lot from them because they were professional broadcaster and they'd been in it all their lives, people like Colin Wills from Australia, Bing Whittaker from Canada, Ed Mürrow U.S.A. Stan Maxted, marvellous man. Chester Wilmott who was to be, I think the most brilliant war correspondent of the whole lot and another man who was a producer, a Canadian called Jack Peach. I met him after the war again in Canada actually. There was another woman, an American talks producer who always seemed to have a boyfriend where the war was, you know she was invaluable because she would whistle up a boyfriend on the subject of a Greek crisis of Elas or Enosis or whatever ~~or~~ - and she certainly whistled up a boyfriend who was an expert and who really covered almost the whole of the Nuremburg Trials for us, he was a Polish lawyer and he was a very accurate broadcaster. Well now the whole of this outfit was presided over by what was I think the ablest immediate boss that I was ever to know in the BBC, Peter Pooley. I think he was pre-war BBC probably doing a very simple job, he was a very able young man indeed, very pale, very fair, very lethargic in his movements but the point is that he had a complete grasp of what was almost any political or war situation and of course you had...your scripts went through him apart from security and policy and everything and sometimes I would be very worried that I wasn't doing as well as I should have done but you'd show it to him and he was immediately aware of the weak spot, you knew at once he was right, he was marvellous.

7.

I think he went to NATO after the war, I'm not really sure. Of course the conditions of work, especially for the scriptwriters and the producers was, well hectic is a mild word you see because so often they were overtaken by events and we'd have a half hour programme ready to go on the air you see and suddenly the whole thing had to be scrapped because of, they were indeed at the mercy of events, a completely new script, new inserts, new everything had to be put together in as little as an hour and a half, mind you there were lots of experts around, you know you could whistle up somebody who knew but this happened certainly at the fall of Singapore, that was really a terrible night for them and because they didn't know it was coming quite so soon. And I remember also because I was sitting in the studio on that occasion, I can't remember what I was doing, I think I was producing the N. American landings was another, when we didn't know the whole ^{or several programmes} thing was just ditched you see. One had to remember to be always mindful of censorship, not only for security, and policy scrutiny by that was to avoid annoying our allies or our neighbours, or giving a bad impression of Britain. And of course you, one forgets it you know, one must never mention the weather, I'd forgotten that till I was trying to think round what sort of things we had to contend with. And of course most inserts of recordings done outside were sort of inserted with live narration but there was sometimes live inserts as well as the linking material because they...there wasn't time you couldn't, you just went straight in. Well, there was always an official probably from The War Office if you'd been working in that field, sitting beside the producer with a censor key and it was sometimes rather a delicate situation we had³ very brilliant Jewish/Austrian political correspondent, he rose to be political correspondent, he'd been in the Monitoring Service before that I think..and for a time I don't know, I really am just guessing...but being foreign he probably wasn't totally cleared and so the censor would sit with the producer throughout the programme and he is now the man who is Lord George Weidenfeld the famous publisher.

Of course people say that the damage could be done before the switch key could be used, which is probably true but I think it made people more careful, you know you really sort of remembered and weren't silly about it you see, I think. Well I was the only woman observer, all the others were talks producers or scriptwriters and I must say that at that time there was no prejudice against women at all, I was a pair of hands and I think they were glad I was there, in spite of the blunders I made. ^{I just learnt on the job} I became fairly quickly I think, integrated into the team but what was more important to me as a person was that I think, I think I was taken for granted and I took on assignments rather as if I was a taxi on a rank, just as they came along whether there was no concession made whether they were hazardous or unpleasant or very easy ones, I just you

know..terrible things like the bomb on the Catford School where all these children were blown to Heaven and I didn't like...I always...I didn't like them at all, I did a lot of unexploded bomb stories, they were very unpleasant, the famous one, ^{nicknamed} Herman, began to tick when I was in the crater but...I beat a hasty retreat on that one I can assure you.

Well then I spent three months covering the story of the shelling of Dover at intervals. For my future, my future sort of likes and dislikes something happened earlier in that I heard, a great many people heard the marvellous commentary made by Charles Gardener ^{an correspondent} of the dog fight over the Channel of a Spitfire and a Heinkel I think it was a Heinkel and I thought my word that's what broadcasting is like, of course everything was recorded, he recorded his thing but it was marvellous it really was. I'm sure it's in Archives. But I only mentioned that there because it was my beginnings of seeing what I thought I wanted to do after the war, I was only doing short reports and things but I thought, that's that's what broadcastings all about as far as I am concerned. But when I was in Dover...that happened much later of course I was in Dover nearly up to September 26th which was the day the Calais guns were captured or the day after the Calais guns were captured and I spent a lot of the time with the ack-ack battery on the cliffs and in Dover Castle and of course the main problem in that part of the war was for broadcasters and engineers, collecting actuality, was how to get the material back in time for the programme. And this was really quite a problem and very often there was no alternative but to go driving back to London with the stuff, you'd catch one edition whatever it was, there was always one about to go out you see, but it might not be the one you would have liked to have gone into. And then just tail back to Dover again. But to keep the BBC on the air, and this was done for another purpose, transmitters were put up I think almost at the beginning of the war, all over the country they were known as 'H' transmitters and 'H' they were known as 'H' transmitters and I was told to keep quiet about them but I talked to an engineer the other day on the telephone to ask his if I was right in this and he said yes they were no secret to me, I said well I was told to keep my mouth shut about them. Well then it got so heavy and difficult going back to London every time that we became, they manned the transmitters and I have marvellous memories of at the end of a day or generally at night driving out of Dover and finding a ~~sort of~~ rather wet damp field and hoping that some ominous sort of shadows were not bulls but cows and walking towards a slit of light which was coming from under a door of a hut and you were at one of the 'H' transmitters and then we would, the reporters or the observers as we were would broadcast the stuff back to London and then...you see these

9.

little transmitters were there just in case Brookmans Park was knocked out and the whole of broadcasting was.....you see it was all sort of subdivided up and then we used them just to get the material back to London.

STEWART: And it was recorded in London ?

RUSSELL: Of course, no well we recorded it anyway and then we played it back or did a straight piece yes. Mm..Mm.. things did get easier in a way I think as the war progressed I've no information truthfully of this but I think it was obvious that certain advance information when the BBC was proving its worth and the War Office really suddenly realised what a marvellous job was being done for accuracy and everything else and speed too, I sometimes wonder if a certain amount of advance information wasn't filtered through to the high-ups who then used their discretion and told Peter Pooley to watch out for a news break on 'X' hours or 'X' days. I think that, I don't know we seemed to know, I've seemed to have been aware of something building up before the battle of Alamein, I don't know how I knew....

STEWART: I think we were all very sensitive to....

RUSSELL: Indeed we were, we were and of course everybody knew not the actual day of D-Day but it was within so many days, we knew that and partly because by this time the War Reporting Unit had been formed and the men were all war correspondents and Richard Dimpleby was in charge of the office by the way at that time.

STEWART: Oh now wait a minute, the War Reporting (Unit) Unit this is a new thing that came at the time of...

RUSSELL: Before D-Day, sometime before D-Day because you see they went to Burma and various places but it became but I became more aware of it because of course we were thinking in terms of the second front, you see, it really came into its own at the time of the second front. Well we began to know that it was imminent because the correspondents that you knew, your old friends were disappearing all the time presumably either to the coast or to be briefed in the detachment of the Air Arm or whatever it was they were going with on the first wave and they crossed the channel you see and so you knew but it was very strict security, every, even those of us who were left in London with not very much of importance to do and I remember a very nice Canadian man called Kent Stephenson and he was so desperately disappointed that he wasn't going over in the first wave, this was really terrible because he felt it was

a kind of humiliation all the other men were and he wasn't and of course he was the one who went over later and in fact was killed - it seemed so tragic. Anyhow I was with Kent quite a lot in those days. We were all given code names you see and my assignment was really very innocuous and I also felt rather sad I wasn't doing something more important naturally, I just had ..I just had to go to Trafalgar Square when I was given the go-ahead and interview nightworkers or anyone on the reaction of hearing the news that we'd crossed the channel, the second front had opened up you see. And the plan was that I would be telephoned when I heard my codeword which was 'geranium'. Well of course I didn't sleep for nights because I thought....I was told to go at once to be there in quarter of an hour if I could, I hardly undressed, anyway on the great day the telephone rang and a voice said, "flowerbed" well I was half dressed and halfway down the stairs when I realised I hadn't had the right code word. I need hardly say it was a freudian slip. However I did plenty of exciting stories. The next day the D-Day 1 I was taken in convoy to watch the first wounded coming back from Normandy and though this is only a personal thing, it was a bit of a problem at the time because I suddenly realised I had the most appalling cough and of course it was whooping cough. But however.... I was taken to St. Mary's Hospital after that and they did marvellous things to me because they gave me something and I was never sick and I was never off.

STEWART: You managed to keep working all that time ?

RUSSELL: Listen, we were so short I mean I just said to the doctor I said I can't get whooping cough on D-Day don't be daft ^{but} and I did it then well obviously...anyway I was fortunate to be made a fully accredited war correspondent in the autumn of '44.

STEWART: Did you then go abroad ?

RUSSELL: Well not at once but I did go abroad because of course so many women were by that time going abroad, nurses and WAAF and Fanfy ^{Fant Aid Nursing Yeomanry} (phon) and ATS and goodness knows what they were all going abroad but my opportunity came really when a detachment of the ATS went down to Southampton and they really were the first British women to become combatants in a war overseas. And they, we went to, actually I think it was outside Liege we were never allowed to mention the name I think it had a number which was rather funny really and lived in Nissen Huts this was the terrible winter of 1944, everything frozen up and these young girls had to melt the snow to, and boil it up to either wash in or to wash their hair which was always a terrible consideration one way and another. I may have been fully accredited but I

was not given an engineer at all but I was supplied with one of the first "portable question mark" pieces of recording gear and it looked like a small gramophone and it was supposed to cut discs and you wound it up with a handle just like a gramophone and you had, were given an issue of large blank acetate discs. And in the cold weather this was almost impossible to do you see you couldn't because anyhow for recording you must have a reasonable temperature at least I think so, at least that is what I was told, and I got a lot of teasing in the battery because the only way I could manage this in this appalling weather was to wear about 8/10 discs underneath the blouse of my battledress and I looked a very sort of curious square shape in front. But this was the only way to get the things to cut you see. But of course I went on and on trying and trying to make this thing work and it really was not very efficient. I didn't know that all the men had rejected this really terrible bit of equipment and I struggled on unsuccessfully. I learned later that there was an apocryphal story that Richard Sharp the war correspondent once in frustration and rage threw one of these things out of a window somewhere in Burma and luckily didn't kill anyone because all the streets are very crowded but that was the end of that and that somehow was a gesture for the war correspondent really and nobody really used them after that. Anyway finally my little tape recorder packed up completely and if it's not too long-winded when the BBC had some anniversary and had an exhibition of its equipment and things and it was in a house, a big building, Marconi or something outside Tottenham Court Road and they had a lot of the war equipment and I in an idle moment, not affection, had scratched my initials on the thing and the actual tape recorder was there in the exhibition, I nearly fell about. It didn't work of course, it didn't work when I had it, it was really rather funny. I don't know whatever year it was well anyway mine packed up and I thought it was no use appealing to London for another one would only be sent out and people would be saying how like a woman you see she can't make it work and so on. So I sent a signal to Frank Gillard who was already of course overseas, you know all the way through he went in with the first wave and I think at the time he was in Brussels. And then he was moving onto Eindhoven and very generously without any fuss at all, as I'm sure there would have been from London, it was lovely to be away from the base of the BBC and work, he sent Harvey Sarney, one of the senior engineers who was to become a great friend, with mobile recording gear and so I stayed on at the battery with him and we just recorded all the things that I'd tried to record, we repeated them all and I think really got very good recordings indeed. But although I have a great, the greatest admiration for BBC engineers I do think the curious thing is that that period the BBC was a bit behind hand because we were still on the vans had single turntable

12.

equipment which meant you had to change the discs every few minutes and the Germans apparently were already using magnetised tape. Actually the magnetised tape, the name of it was Manetophon as I discovered from a book that was written by ^{MAURICE Bertram} Morris Goram who did his best to try and get converted to tape at that time. But there we were and we didn't, the BBC had just launched an improved system of disc recording and they weren't interested to changing to tape. Well Harvey Sarney and I spent several days repeating the interviews and London I must say was pleased, it was used round the clock and later when I was to go to Eindhoven I heard those recordings coming back on a German station because James Joyce's sort of opposite number was a woman ^(Loud HAW HAW) called Mary of Arnhem and she was always broadcasting propaganda to British troops and this was really scurrilous because it was saying these girls what are they here for, we know what they're here for and anyway Britain is losing the war and all of this but to hear your own voice coming back from the German station at that time was really rather curious.

STEWART: What were the nature, the principle nature of the reports that you did send back ?

RUSSELL: Oh well when the guns went into action at night and of course how the ATS were doing their job, they were on predictors and view finders and all sorts of things, technical things which I'm afraid I don't remember very clearly now, about the work of an ack ack battery and life what it was like and you know the way the Belgians were coming to sell eggs to us and give us little presents of sabots and things like that because they were so thrilled that you know part of their part of the world was in British hands. Oh ^{Now} ~~all~~ there were hundreds of stories marvellous stories and marvellous officers too the ATS had, marvellous. Of course they were all handpicked you can imagine but anyway then when it was finished up I didn't go home I went on and I went to Eindhoven to really a hostel which was taken over by the army as billets for all the BBC men who were concerned with the advance of British troops, through Holland and preparations were at that time I think in progress for the crossing of the Rhine when I went there and it was mostly maintenance of equipment and the vehicles that had to be working in appalling conditions of mud and road surfaces and everything else, the engineers that I remember best who were there in that billet at Eindhoven, was Harvey Sarney, Noggs Newman who I'd worked with in Britain quite a lot and Sid Gore who was a wonderful character a very nice man, the correspondents - well I remember Frank Gillard, Chester, Willmott, Wynford Vaughan Thomas and I seem to remember Howard Marshall was there for a time and also, he drifted in, I don't really remember much about him. Also Carleton Greene the future director general was there, I don't think

he was a war correspondent, he was there for some administrative purpose you see, I suppose looking after things. In a way it was quite an adventure to go there because after all there were no women in the billets at all and I felt rather sorry for these men and indeed for myself because it was no fault of my own that it was rather as if I was invading the precincts of you know going into a mans' club in London instead of going in the main entrance instead of going in the ladies' entrance, well there wasn't one you see. But they were very kind, solicitous and friendly, Frank gave up his room so that I should be near the bathroom and the fact that we had no hot water didn't matter, I don't know, they were kind and I enjoyed being there very much as far as one enjoyed anything in war. I think they were dreading my arrival you know...and anyway my first essential of course was to wash my hair because we'd had a rough time and I hadn't taken my clothes off for some nights... well to be honest I didn't really relish the idea of letting my hair dry slowly in curlers for an entire day in cold weather in this large company of gentlemen you see. But they were very inventive, the Germans had had the billets before and left behind a lot of popup toasters and some of the engineers and I think Frank sort of urging them on, made me a marvellous hairdryer out of the German pop-up toasters and then we all felt better.

But of course the work I did at Eindhoven was mostly background stories and the men were doing the hard news, the situation of the war naturally, I mean I didn't do any of the brave things they did at all and I did background material a lot of it and there was plenty of it, plenty to find. Like for instance there was one day I discovered, two women, one of them was I think English and had been attached to the Red Cross and she'd made friends with a Dutch woman and they were really indomitable, they took over a half deserted well it was completely deserted but half ruined factory. And they did this for the old and the ill and the blind because for the first time in my life I realised that refugees flying from the enemy or the battle or whatever are likely to desert their elderly relatives and I was with them when we found some poor old blind man who'd been without food and water in a cellar for days just left there, he hardly knew what was going on you know. And so they shipped them all to this factory and they had soft food for them a huge great tub which they put everything in, like a sort of perpetual soup you know. And this was really a wonderful story you know. Well then I was instructed to go to Antwerp which was now in British hands and Harvey Sarney and I went, Gillard was against it he thought it was a bit tough and it was rather, we walked right into the worst week of flying bomb attacks in Antwerp of the war, when there were 7 or 8 flying bombs in the air at once, you could see them you never heard the silence because there was always another one to

14..

to come droning on. That was very tough really but it was interesting you know.

STEWART: As a war correspondent you get what I think is called danger money.

RUSSELL: No I didn't and I think I was certainly being paid, I know now I was certainly paid much less than the men because when I, we were in Antwerp we had one rather terrible incident in which we seemed to get involved in trying to help. There was a direct hit on a house full of young marines and the casualties were appalling and we helped with the truck in various ways, we tried to help. Then we went and had some food and then we went back and discovered there was a signal to say return to Eindhoven. Well I was delighted of course but of course as a city is in military hands you can't leave without permission of the town major and so we went to sign our names to say we were leaving because they ^{had to know where every accredited person was} knew everybody who was in the contingent was there. And as we left a sergeant came up and asked our names and we gave our names, he said oh yes well as a matter of fact...commanding officer wants to see you, I thought my goodness what have we done. However he was very complimentary and said that we'd given quite a lot of assistance in fact..he was really very complimentary indeed. And as he said goodbye he said I'd like to do some good to you people I happen to be a friend of one of your director generals, this was when we had you know 'William & Mary' sort of Graves and Foot or whatever they were...he said I'm going to write to them. Well we went away and were abashed and very chuffed at all this and went back and thought no more about it. After about a week the first thing that happened was that I got a letter from the Accounts Department saying we're a little worried about your expenses, I think I was being paid something like 8 krone a day or 8 francs a day or something and we would like to increase this to 36 a day which will be more in line with your colleagues. So I thought 8 - 36 is very good. Anyhow a week later I got another letter from another department and it said, in view of your excellent work in Belgium and Holland and France and Germany, we would like you to have two annual increments in one, that's £75/£75, my salary went up to that I think I was still being paid less than the men, in fact most of my career I have been paid less than the men, but on this occasion I know they were shamed into paying me something.

STEWART: Do you very much resent this Audrey ?

RUSSELL: Well no, certainly not in the war, I certainly ^{didn't} ~~don't~~ resent in the war at all because the men what the men did in the war that was worth a

15.

lot of money what I did in the war was was..trivial by comparison. No I do resent it on other occasions. I was very angry when on one occasion I discovered on a royal tour that one commentator, a very great friend of mine was being paid £25 a week more than me and we were both doing exactly the same job, exactly the same weary miles and in fact I think my output was larger than his. COUGH. I resented that and I complained and...well I was very severely ticked off, didn't worry me.

STEWART: Who was it who ticked you off ?

RUSSELL: Oh the head of outside broadcasts, I went to see him, Charles Max Muller, ~~because~~ there's an old adage in the theatre you know and I was told this by a very dear friend of mine who was in the theatre, a Jewish manager and he said, never seek to find out what other artists are being paid, you're only going to get upset. Well maybe there's a lot of truth in it but I think in the theatre there's star quality and there's histrionics and there's everything, it's quite different in the BBC, it's not at all the same and we were doing an identical job and I think my output was larger than his.

STEWART: Why do you think they resented your questioning how much you were paid, why was that ?

RUSSELL: Well I think ..they don't like any applecarts upset, you've got to be frightfully pleased in the BBC with everything they do to you, they're such good employers, don't forget that.

STEWART: Now if we can go back to the war again, I assume that like everybody else in the services and so on you had to carry identification papers and wear round your neck two things...(yes)...what did you actually carry as a BBC correspondent ?

RUSSELL: Well you had your accreditation papers as I remember it and there was an identity card and a BBC identity card and all of those sort of things you know, that's what it really was.

STEWART: So you never had any difficulties about being identified ?

RUSSELL: Well oh yes. On one occasion I was, I didn't lose, I didn't lose them but in fact my clothes were taken away from me to be deloused and I had all my identification in the left hand pocket but that is a rather roundabout way of saying that I went on a RAF mission towards the end of the war where

Lancaster bombers were touching down at various places in Germany and in France picking up small groups of British prisoners of war who had got left behind, hadn't gone with the main contingent coming home and, no it was quite funny as an incident, it was a funny incident but I took over nearly three hours to try and establish my identity which was very peculiar. The thing was that I went up to Mildenhall from where we left and the officer commanding said you can't possibly fly on this mission we're flying over territory, some of it is... not yet been cleared of the Germans and you've got to wear a parachute. So I was wearing a skirt as my uniform so one of the queen WAAFs lent me a pair of blue slacks, I know this is a long boring story but it shows you why there was this mistake. So I had a khaki top and slacks well I also had a beret which I lost during the exercise, it took about $2\frac{1}{2}$ days this exercise and we picked up prisoners all over the place, this was really very, very interesting because we expected that at least the crew and the pilot expected great jubilation but you see the prisoners were so quiet and so silent, they were sort of spent by that time and it was very touching because everywhere we went they kept offering me cigarettes because they'd been given it, it was the first time they'd been able to give anything or offer anything to anyone.

Anyway I then lost my greatcoat because there was a man who had pneumonia and we wrapped him up in it with the medical orderly so I had no coat and when we arrived the aeroplane was diverted owing to bad weather from Northolt to Bovingdon in Oxfordshire. When we landed I suppose I did look rather scruffy, we all piled out of the plane, they were all very excited to be back in England again and we were met by WVS ladies, Red Cross ladies, and I had chocolate biscuits pressed on me and cigarettes and everything and I was taken in and then the medical officer said good gracious me we haven't had a lady before I said look I only left England two days ago, it's quite all right but of course I suppose I'd better be deloused, before I knew where I was I was stripped behind a screen, I was you know, deloused all over with a spray and they took my clothes away, then I was given a sort of male garment which I put on and waited and then I said look can I possibly use the telephone because we've been diverted I want to get the recording car which is at Northolt now...don't worry you can listen to the BBC anytime at home, you must be feeling awful. They wrapped me up in a rug and put me on a sofa and I said but look I must tell you, look I, my name is Russell.....etc etc....all of this, they said now never mind calm down we'll be giving you know pills later then we had an enormous meal, I thought well I'd better have it so I went in, they didn't give me my clothes back yet. Finally I had to go behind the screen again and I suddenly saw a woman doctor, she was medical of course and I called out to her and I said listen for Heavens sake can I have my clothes back I am not a former

17.

prisoner of war, I haven't been in Germany for months or half the war I only left the BBC two days ago and so they got my things out of the drum where the clothes were being heated, they came back boiling hot and there were my identity papers and we laughed a good deal - but it took nearly three hours to do it. We got the recording car, the recording car did arrive from, all the way from Northolt to Bovingdon and we did some very good interviews, that's the end of that story.

STEWART: Where did you end up in the war, in what country ?

RUSSELL: Oh Norway, I was in Norway for the liberation and for the victory celebrations there I don't remember really very much about it because you were always being kissed in the street and offered weekends and I, it's all in a haze of schnapps, I don't remember a thing about that. But I came back and I did part of the victory parade in Britain.

STEWART: The commentary ?

RUSSELL: Yes I did, yes I did no no I was working as a reporter I wasn't really a commentator then you see, that's how I ended up it was marvellous.

STEWART: So then what happened - the end of the war came you were...

RUSSELL: Well you see really the end of war contract ended in a way and one wondered what on earth was going to happen and of course everyone was jockeying for position and there was, everybody was anxious and worried and anxious to get out of uniform and see what their future was, if you know to look after their wives and children and all of this. And the next thing that happened was they...I was told that there was a Home News Reporting Unit for the Home News, now Radio 4. And that it was an experimental thing and this and that, this is where I hit for the first time in my career really the feeling of discrimination and prejudice against women because don't you see there was much more competition, the atmosphere in the war was really rather wonderful it really was, there was none of that terrible competitiveness and ruthlessness that you get in a big organisation that has to have people who are performers, you see. Anyway I think I was very lucky, I got a job in this but I was told it was very experimental and nobody knew what was going to happen and it was A.P. Ryan who knew that I'd been...he was the Editor News and I think on the strength of being a war correspondent I got it, which was very lucky.

Donald Boyd was the head of the outfit, Richard Sharp was his assistant, I think Godfrey Talbot was in it, certainly Douglas Willis and then there were two newcomers who'd never seen a microphone before really and they both became friends, Richard Williams was one and Roland Fox who was to become the political correspondent was the other, but they really didn't know about radio they really didn't they'd been on newspapers and I think Roland had been in the army, I don't know about the other fellow. Anyway we started and after about 4 months I first of all recognised that I was being relegated to much smaller stories than the kind of stories I'd been doing which was only natural. And then I realised that the two newcomers had already been put on the established staff of the BBC and I was still on trial. And then I really was angry, I was angry, I had not been so angry since I'd been to France. I was very angry and I said if I'm not on the established staff within a month I will leave the BBC for ever. Well give them their due they did it in a fortnight.

STEWART: Who was it you went to see on that occasion ?

RUSSELL: Oh I think it was Boyd and everyone right and left I can't remember, I really can't remember. But I was getting restless because you know I was doing stories about flower arranging, competitions, childrens' creches but people were sort of you know, engineering round for things, I had various people who offered me tentatively jobs including Norman Collins and I know this surprises people probably, surprised me, he was talking about, he asked me to lunch and I, he talked all about a wonderful new programme that was going on the air every day and it would never end he said, honestly it'll never end well I think he's about right and he offered me the editorship of the first Womans Hour. Well he never forgave me but I didn't really want to do that I had already in my head what I thought I wanted to do, one was to get into television or two, I did get into television but in a different way later, two, I was, I decided, I heard Richard Dimbleby and I thought I don't know I think I could be a commentator if I really put my mind to it. Well I went on applying for things and getting nothing, I applied for various jobs, I was told to apply for one job and thought I was almost certain to get it and I didn't but Raymond Baxter got it instead so you couldn't have anyone better really.

STEWART: Do you think again that was prejudice, they didn't want a woman ?

RUSSELL: Well I think no he was an outstanding candidate, he was an outstanding candidate. But of course there was lots of prejudice. I think yes, I mean, Lobby, I saw the famous De Lotbiniere and he said no, no, no, I don't think a woman commentator...no no we've tried before you know no no...

Richard Dimbleby said you'll never be a woman commentator, he kept on telling me, he said stop trying, no you haven't got the stamina....anyway then you see when things got more feminine Princess Elisabeth announced her engagement Lobby realised he was going to have a royal wedding on his hands and he then perhaps began to veer round and thought perhaps I ought to be a commentator. So I had an audition at the Ideal Home Exhibition of all terrible things and I was also did one little tiny piece on St. Pauls on New Year's Eve or something. Then of course the inter-departmental rows started because he then applied for me to do, to be a commentator in a small place, a very small...and the chief work was done by Wynford and Richard. But the rows started then because the News Division refused permission and this is really where I began to part with News Division and part and very nearly parted with the BBC because they didn't make allowances for any kind of versatility, they didn't make allowances for you to try and do something that you wanted and really I was being relegated to three minute pieces about, as I say, cat shows and dog shows...so Lobby said look I want to fight for you to get you for this but I don't know what may happen I said go ahead. And so I did the wedding of Princess Elisabeth and Phillip from the Citadel, do you remember that building it's now covered with ivy, it's at the end of the Mall, they said from Admiralty Arch but they thought that the citadel sounded so warlike that we didn't say so but it was in fact from there.

I think I...I met a lot of discrimination there, I was given a No.2. who was a rather miserable little man and he disapproved and so did his secretary too, oh yes lots of women disapproved. And in fact I can tell you later when I did the King's funeral Lady Stocks ^(one of 1st women members of House of Lords) said to me, I was horrified when I heard, read you were going to do the King's funeral I thought I'm sure that woman will cry. I said to her, I'm not paid to cry. But oh yes women were very...oh yes didn't like the idea at all. I anyway, did the.. back to the wedding, I did the wedding, I think it just got by, it's not very good and I wish they didn't use it but they still use it now you know because it gives a description of the bride's dress, Queen's dress.

STEWART: Were you given good facilities, good back up facilities ?

RUSSELL: Were you given good facilities ? No there were hardly any, none, hardly any then, don't forget it was the first ceremonial occasion after the war, you couldn't expect the BBC to lay on people to do research or anything, you did your own research and everything, but I really needed somebody to tell me, give me a few tips because to do a ceremonial occasion is very different to doing a three minute war report or whatever you see, it's very different and I just tried to devise my own technique and that's why I think

so much of commentary is a very personal thing because everybody in a way devises their own technique to do it. You see I think that's so I mean, however it just got by. It got far more praise than it deserved, I always hate hearing it I can't bear it when they use it, you know. Anyhow I then sort of began to go on with the News Division becoming resigned to it that I should be sometimes allocated to another department you see. So the next thing I did was the Silver Wedding of the Queen and George 6th and then, this is my real breakthrough, the inauguration or coronation as we would call it, of Queen Juliana in Holland and I, that was my real breakthrough because I owe so much to Wynford Vaughan Thomas, I was really floundering about you know, not really knowing how to cope at all and Wynford, a marvellous commentator himself, he took me in hand and we, we almost stayed up all night the night before and he kept on showing me things to do, things to watch out for and...I mean I always keep saying this on the air, I've said it a hundred times, I will never forget his generosity of information which is the greatest generosity there is, I'm sure.

STEWART: When was it and why was it that you eventually and forever left the BBC ?

RUSSELL: Well the door of the cage was opened for me in 1951 which was the year of the Festival of Britain. It's very hard to answer why I left because you see conditions now have so greatly improved, not because of me leaving or anyone else leaving, but they really have improved, you now can be versatile in the BBC you're not tied down so much in the way that you were, that was really my main reason, I was by that time really deeply interested in trying to be a first class commentator, I put in for a job again I was told that I might get it, I didn't get it and I was advised, well I don't say, I don't say advised specifically but discussion was that, why didn't I consider going under contract to the BBC, getting my freedom, then I could do all sorts of things and well I was advised and indeed partly promised by De Lotbiniere that he would put me under contract if I had the courage to leave the BBC I could see I would never be a commentator on the staff, that's really what it came to. By this time I sort of, well I suppose I overdo it always, I always do too much research but I, you know was fascinated with what words can do in a commentary and I thought yes this what I want to have a go at, I really do. Well with the Festival of Britain coming up I left. I, the News Division I think were a bit fed up with me at the time and they were very nice in the end and in fact Tahu Hole who was Editor News at the time when I went to say goodbye..they really were they were very generous and nice and gave me a party and everything and he said, as I sort of shook hands at the door,

21.

he said you are doing the wisest thing. Which was very encouraging of him I don't know whether it was because he was glad to get rid of me or not but anyway...and so with the promise of all this there was the Festival of Britain which I hoped, I still had a certain responsibility for my mother, it wasn't very easy, one didn't you know envisage inflation or any of the things that have since happened which make a pension worth much less than it used to be but I had to face the world without a pension and had to face the world and chance that something was going to happen.

Anyway my term, they determined, was May 8th or May 10th or some day like that and I must say one of the most kindly and generous things, well it was not his money but...Lobby was very thoughtful and he asked me to see him and he said well yes we'll put you under contract, we...you'll come under contract to us you've given in your notice but why do you have to leave on January, May 8th because all the major broadcasts of the Festival of Britain will be over and you're probably going to have to do them and not get paid except just the ordinary salary. So he managed it and he got it that I left on May 1st 1951 and the next (COUGH) day I was in St. Pauls or outside St. Pauls with Richard Dimbleby for the opening ceremony and I was with Wynford at the Festival Hall for the first concert of the Royal Festival Hall. So I had a marvellous sort of the boat was pushed out in a most marvellous way and I I had a lot of work you see. Then I was put under contract, which were of course much better terms than a salary, that's how I ..and then I did go under contract to the Outside Broadcast Dept., which was very pleasant indeed and I went on learning my job.

STEWART:

Was there any resentment or jealousy ?

RUSSELL:

Not in the O.B. Dept., I don't think you can say so then I think they were getting used to me there but I do think that I discovered in a way a sort of subconscious antipathy that was shown at that time, 1951 in the News Division, I think this was so because my job was advertised in the press and there were hundreds of applicants and in fact I got quite nervous I thought my word all these terribly clever journalists are going in for this I must have been out of my mind to leave. But anyhow I knew several of them and they got to the stage of ringing me up and saying, if I get a board what'll I say and what should I do and how can I learn it, this and this and this and I almost had my candidates and some of them were very distinguished women journalists much better educated than I was and I sort of predicted who was going to get it. When it came to the point it went to the weakest candidate I think you would imagine, she soon faded out, they then engaged somebody else

22.

in the News Division and I'm afraid she faded out too. I think it's a kind of subconscious thing which doesn't exist happily now but did at that time.

STEWART: What was your next big freelance.....job ?

RUSSELL: Well I wasn't freelance you see I was under contract to the BBC and I've lurched under contract more or less ever since, I'm freelance now but there are all sorts of contracts as you know. But I think probably the next big milestone for me was the King's funeral, February 10th wasn't it or 8th....the death of the King anyway in February 6th '52 and I had already been sent - the King was ill of course - to Ceylon because Princess Elisabeth was deputising for the King on the tour that he was going to do and he going to start in Ceylon and then go to Australasia and of course then I was recalled I was in Ceylon when the King died and recalled to come back for "funeral broadcast return soonest" and back I came, catapulted across the world, without very much time before the funeral of course so I wasn't able to do quite so much research as I might have been. This was a very great ceremony and I was very fortunate in many ways. First of all I had a marvellous position I was in the Horseshoe Cloisters at Windsor Castle looking out onto the steps just sitting quietly in the window on the first floor of the Horseshoe Cloisters looking out at the steps and seeing first of all the other way, seeing you could see one window, you could see the cortege coming down from the Round Tower at Windsor Castle under the archway and in to the foot of the steps seeing the coffin taken off the gun carriage and carried up and of course with all the Royal Family present. This was really a great and wonderful occasion, I was fortunate in many ways one was that I was able to sit down to do the job because I was in a house you see and you can't always because as a commentator you sometimes have to stand on a high windy ledge you know with no rail in front I can tell you. So it suited me from that point of view, I also happened to have a marvellous , calm No 2. you are always given a No 2 who is really supposed to get any information you want at the last moment, keep people away from talking to you, and he really was - Frank Anderson - he was a manager wasn't a broadcaster or anything he was deeply upset at the death of the King and I think this was because of that he remained silent and he didn't ever say aren't the flowers lovely and do look at this he just left me and I was able to sort of sit there waiting for this tragic and sad procession to arrive and I think it paid off he was very kind and gentle and helpful. There's an awful lot in it you know being a No. 2. isn't easy.

STEWART: Have you ever been a No. 2. ?

RUSSELL: No I'm sure I'd be terrible because I'd start telling people what to do. No thank goodness I never have.

STEWART: But from the point of view of organisation a great ceremony like this must for the BBC involve so many people, so much technical know-how from the point of engineers.....

RUSSELL: Well the engineers of course are the people really...I have all sorts of theories about what I would like to do if I was director general for a day, you know or prime minister for a day, one thing I'm quite certain should be done, I don't think...perhaps it is done now I don't know I haven't been in the BBC school, is that there should be classes or courses or some kind of instruction at which you are taught how difficult it is to organise a whole great broadcast like that and how difficult it is too for the engineers who should be taught how difficult it is to broadcast and I think that this would be a very great help to everyone. I must say I always feel very humble in a control room and I look at all these switches and dials and everything else I think good gracious this is, this here at this particular point is just for what the rubbish I'm going to say, you know this is a great thing I mean...

STEWART: Do you not find then...during your career that you did not fraternise with the engineers they weren't.....

RUSSELL: Yes oh yes but I don't think one appreciated, at least I always thought I didn't I don't know about other people, I daresay the men do, but I always felt that I, when I shouldn't have, I under estimated the immense difficulty of the engineers, oh no some of my best friends are engineers, oh no not at all. But at that funeral you see Richard Dimbleby was in the chapel I was just outside the chapel in Horseshoe Cloisters, there was somebody else at the railway station at Windsor and probably the best commentary of the lot came from Frank Gillard at Paddington Station which was I thought the star turn of the day.

STEWART: Now before an occasion like this do all the commentators gather together ? (oh yes) And discuss what they're going to say so that there's no (overlapping) overlapping ?

RUSSELL: Well that's the theory the trouble is you very often do overlap because the subject ^{that} is barred for you turns up in front of you and there's nothing for it but to do it. But of course there is a plan made out at least Lobby used to do this, there's a plan laid out and it says, Audrey Russell

24.

is going to see the procession down to so and so, do the so and so, not refer to the flypast because that will be taken at a later date or something I mean you know and that will be taken by somebody else or so and so. And so you lay off some things and some others. Yes that's the theory of it but it you see you're at the mercy of events, things don't always happen in the way you anticipate you have to anticipate everything.

STEWART: And was there rivalry between the commentators ?

RUSSELL: There's rivalry between anybody in a very competitive job isn't there you know of course yes, of course.

STEWART: Did it become at all sort of vicious and unpleasant on any occasion ?

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RUSSELL: I think that's a very difficult question to answer because I think that performers, this is a considered opinion which I hope doesn't apply too much to me but I don't think if you are in the performing arts, and I don't say it's an art it's a craft, it's not awfully good for your character I think you become very egoistic, I think that you can so easy...easily become somebody who thinks well what I've got to say is much more important than what anyone else has to say and I'm over-running in time, I'm going to steal into this man's time, he can't, he's got nothing to say, what's he got I've got the most wonderful anecdote in the world, now you cannot really define whether that is vicious or whether you are being nobbled by somebody who has completely ditched all you're going to say, or whether it is *merely* ~~nearly~~ the personality of people who are performers. That's my answer to that one.

STEWART: How much time did you spend preparing for your commentary for the Coronation ?

RUSSELL: Well I knew I was going to be one of the commentators at the Coronation about 8 months I think, before and then I was given a certain amount of time because I was at that time under contract to the BBC and so you know, I can't remember it was minimum guarantee or what kind of contract, there's all sorts of contracts but this was a minimum guarantee and that is they, the BBC say they will pay up to a certain extent but if you fall back and don't earn it you probably are going to be sacked, I always made my minimum guarantee I'm glad to say but I think it was that or I may have been under contract, anyhow I was allowed a great deal of time and I prepared for about nearly six months on the Coronation, I didn't use of course nearly a quarter

25.

of what of course I learned but you did really have to know as much as you could about it, and so it was about six months but of course I did other broadcasts as well and I did a lot of broadcasts for, at Bush House because I was already becoming almost an expert on Coronations, only a page ahead of the class but never mind, for the Overseas Service, talking about what was going to happen and what was it.....I did a whole series called Coronation Report, went on for weeks, months I think as far as I remember. But I did have a certain amount of time off, I think I wasn't expected to work quite as hard on broadcasts itself at the time getting ready for the Coronation.

STEWART: Now how do you make your cor...your preparations to find out information, do you have particular sources, can you get it all from the BBC ?

RUSSELL: You can get it all from the BBC now the research done by the BBC now is absolutely excellent, I would query its excellence in the earlier times, because well I think probably the people that did it, weren't experts, there was some marvellous research done by a Dr. Moray I think in News Information he did a lot of, he was wonderful for research. There was some of his research which was mostly concerned with who was coming and what was happening and who they were and their pedigrees and so on so that you knew everything and things like that. The ceremony actually of the Coronation was certainly the most impressive I've ever seen or ever will see in my life, there was no question about it, it was so magnificently organised, it was really superbly organised but this is partly because I think that Westminster Abbey there's no place I know and I've broadcast from cathedrals and churches all over the world, there is no place where everything happens with such a sort of effortless inevitability you feel it could happen any other way, shouldn't happen any other way everything is right in Westminster Abbey, they never overplay it, it's never pompous. There's a kind of restraint, processions walk at the right pace, there is nowhere like Westminster Abbey. But you know I really do think that anyone working in the BBC ought to feel very proud, anyone who is involved in this because a great deal of the success of the Coronation and indeed other ceremonial occasions now, now is because of the presence of the BBC, there's no question of doubt about that. You see things weren't always so well done there was all sorts of hitches and muddles at the Coronation of Queen Victoria and indeed of other people too, James II they lost the sword of state at the last moment and it's known that Queen Victoria whispered to the Dean at some stage during the ceremony, pray tell me what to do next, the bishops know nothing. Well you see also the Archbishop of Canterbury put the wedding ring of England on the wrong finger and the poor little queen had to stay half the time of the reception with her right hand in a bowl, a finger bowl of iced water because

26.

they didn't want to cut this great heirloom that's always worn at coronations. And you see the Archbishop who did this was regretful afterwards and in his diary and I've seen his diary, the archbishop of the day, it said, "we should have had a rehearsal".

Well you see with audiences of 21 million the establishment have suddenly come round to the fact that ceremonies have got to be properly organised and it is entirely due to the presence of the media, there's no question about this, it's very unlikely that anything goes wrong or seriously wrong because of the new attitude, there's participation of an audience of millions and it now is very carefully rehearsed, everyone taking part including broadcasters, should be told what's happening and are told what's happening. I talked for a long time to a friend of mine, Michael Standing, who was at the Coronation of King George VI in exactly the same position as I was at the Coronation of Queen Elisabeth II and he told me a) it was very hard to get any information at all, there was the feeling that, well these chaps from the BBC you know rather interlopers, when it came to, he was only allowed I think to attend one rehearsal but I was allowed to attend all the rehearsals except the private one for the Queen & the Duke and the Arch.....and the Archbishop of Canterbury and so I had information showered on me because of this new audience and the need to do it and it's entirely really because of the media that broadcasting has brought about this change.

STEWART: Did you have access to the Palace, could you ring them up and ask ?

RUSSELL: Oh yes but that's a very wise decision of the BBC you can't if you're on the staff or you're under contract I think, I don't know about under contract but you can't keep on ringing up the Palace you've got to go and do it through somebody, well this would be intolerable wouldn't it the numbers of people working with the BBC bothering the Palace. So you ring whoever the BBC, I can't remember who it was or is, I can now, because I'm entirely free I ring the Palace frequently but I couldn't really do it in all fairness when I was under contract because, I mean this would be ridiculous, poor Palace would be swamped for ever by the BBC, you know. It was, oh yes and this was almost the first time that the BBC did us proud ~~always~~ because they published rather pretty folders, I know they were plastic but they looked like leather, and they were for your papers, for your notes and for everything and sort of blue plastic that looked like leather with H.M. Queen Elisabeth II, Coronation June the something, whatever it was, rather nice and when I got to my commentary box there was a little sort of cake box thing and a little note inside which I've

27.

kept and I've got it in a commonplace book I have at home because I thought it was so charming, it said, "This luncheon box contains, 3 rounds of sandwiches, finger rolls, cream chicken, 1 buttered bap, 1 individual meat pie, 1 hard boiled egg, tomatoes, 1 portion of gruyere cheese, salt, 1 portion of fruit cake, Penguin chocolate biscuit, apple, pear, banana, one bar of chocolate, 4 ozs of barley sugar, two paper serviettes, two paper cups, two drinking straws and will we hope keep body and soul together from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. - this was the Catering Dept., of the BBC now you couldn't have anything nicer than that. .

STEWART: And were you in your box from 6 o'clock ?

RUSSELL: From 5.30 I was there till 6 in the evening actually, but it was a friendly touch of the catering, of the canteen to do that I mean they were so sweet all this mass of food, I don't think I eat any of it or much of it, I was far too nervous, I had the banana I remember that. And it was eaten by various people, there was a poor little page boy who was out of sheer nerves was sick and I don't know why he didn't go to a First Aid Centre but he was brought to me so he sat on the floor of the commentary box until he was required and I looked at this child, I thought I think he'd be better now if he had some food so he had quite a lot, he had a choice anyway. But no, no this was really wonderful, it was marvellously arranged the whole thing. The only thing that went wrong was that I, the car to fetch me, because of the crowds were so great with the rain that of course I never got to the car, I never got to the car and this is how I was able to go in and see where the Queen had had lunch which was rather thrilling.

Well I've done an enormous amount of work at Westminster Abbey I wasn't in the Abbey for the Queen's Wedding I was in, as you know, Admiralty Arch or so-called Admiralty Arch, there was Princess Margaret's Wedding, Princess Alexandra's Wedding, Princess Anne's Wedding and the Queen's Silver Wedding so the first one I was in a builder's cradle which was 70 feet up, I made a frightful fuss about this, oh yes I threw temperaments and all sorts of things and they modified it by covering in the sides with hardboard so that you didn't have this terrible thing, you know looking down, really you couldn't see anything either, it was a foolish place to be, but however it was modified. And then I was in the triforium itself for Princess Anne and then I was promoted to the organ loft for the Silver Wedding of the Queen, excellent broadcast...you know. Of course it's very curious, also I don't mean to rub this in about prejudice because I've been very lucky, I sort of ducked under the rope and got away with it I think but you see there's still a subconscious prejudice but it undoubtedly was getting less at that time but before, even

28.

if I was doing a very important broadcast and doing possibly the whole thing on my own like for instance the Duke of Kent's Wedding in Yorkminster, which I did - well I wasn't formally asked to do it and say we want you to do the commentary at the Duke of York, Duke of Kent's wedding, I met someone in a passage who said, oh Audrey yes,...we'll be wanting you to give a little description of the dress at the wedding....I think I was on the air for about an hour and fifty minutes.

STEWART: When you're on a job like this how is the handover operated, are you wearing cans all the time ?

RUSSELL: Oh yes all the time and of course you also have a terrible thing known in the trade as dirty talkback and this is somebody in the control room who thinks that you ought to be reminded of things. Well sometimes they can be very useful and can be very helpful because they're timing the departures of people like for instance at Princess Anne's Wedding someone in the control room called me on the cans, while you're talking you see this is the very difficult thing not to answer back but..and said the Queen Mother has left Clarence House 5 minutes late. Well it's very helpful those are the kind of things that are very helpful, they don't always, they like to assert themselves sometimes but not always the people are very good. Oh yes you hear your own changeover you do hear your own voice unfortunately which is very boring.

STEWART: Have you ever had any occasion when you've been ..there's been a really gross delay which you've had to fill in somehow ?

RUSSELL: Princess Margaret's departure on her honeymoon at Tower Pier, 47 minutes. That was really terrible. Well I hope it wasn't too terrible but yes 47, I think...I think that's my longest, I don't know I've had 37 minutes with the Queen once at St. Albans live on the air but I was not anticipating, I'd done the commentary in the morning from Westminster Abbey and I wasn't anticipating a long thing, in fact I was persuaded to do it, I wanted to do because I had to go that night to Rhodesia that night believe it or not after those two broadcasts...anyway I was persuaded to do it because they said look here we're not going to come over to you, we're not going to come over to you until we see or you tell me we've got a music programme you tell us the car is in sight we will then join you in ten seconds and you just do her getting out of the car and getting into the Royal Barge, seeing her getting onto the Royal Yacht Britannia but you see Wedding Fever starts after the ceremony and Canada then wanted it live and then everybody else wanted it

29.

so they said start now- you see and of course she was 47 minutes late. But I had great help in that because he was there as a spectator an old friend of the war, Bing Whittaker, the Canadian and he kept his head marvellously pointing things out to me, of course I took the Tower of London down step by step and put it back again, you know, stone by stone but yes oh yes that happens often.

STEWART: So you're always prepared for that this is one of the things you al.....

RUSSELL: Wasn't really on that occasion because I didn't anticipate anything more than sort of five minutes, ten minutes at the most, no I wasn't but I am, I try to be, I don't say I am, I try to be you know. It's a very personal matter you know this business of doing commentaries because you're using your own technique and you find some words are more evocative than others and you ration yourself before and you say I'm never going to say, I'm only going to use such and such a word twice or once, because it will lose its effect, you know but it does need I think great concentration at the time you really can't have people chattering at you unless they're going to tell you something vital like the Queen Mother's late or early or something. There was a woman journalist in Ottawa who asked if she could come and watch me at work, well I'm afraid I'm not very good at that, I don't mind a television audience, I don't being, having an audience when it's an audience but I hate somebody breathing down my neck, can't bear it - however she was nice and she came and she was very quiet and tactful but I must say when I read her article I was astonished to find myself described as a "lonely self-absorbed figure talking to herself".

STEWART: Is it true that you've been the only regular BBC commentator for royal occasions and royal tours and...(state visits) ...state visits ?

RUSSELL: You mean as a woman yes. Well yes I think so, yes, yes I am yes surely, I started going on royal tours in well I was on one when the King died you see or began it in Ceylon but the first major tour that the Queen made round the world was in 1953 after the Coronation, November we left London and we went westwards round the world and I must say it took six months which was a very long royal tour. Looking back I'd describe it now as a sort of stage coach tour because we were travelling in BBC trucks or cars, most of the way not all of the way because of course we had to fly some places but not many, not when we got to Australia certainly or New Zealand, there were twin turntables by then but we were still without tape, still without tape and we went by train and air and it was certainly very slow indeed by comparison with

30.

the highly professional arrangements for the Queen & the Duke using the Royal Yacht to the uttermost and for the accredited correspondents moving from place to place in a well-organised military airlift and of course on the second tour which was ten years when the Queen went, I mean many tours between then but, the 2nd tour, there was one in 1953 and then the other '63, the first time we had engineers goodness knows what we even had a manager but in the 2nd one ten years later we had midget recordings which we did ourselves, we became our own engineers in fact with either a Nagra or a Uher or in times a Ficord you see those two, but the first tour was, was tremendously interesting of course because a because it was so long and because it was the Queen's Coronation Tour. Incidentally you soon discover on a royal tour that it's very unwise even if you're with the BBC that may have alternative transport, not often nowadays, to deviate from the official arrangements that have been made for you by the host government you are the guest of the host government and you may think oh well I'll take a later plane because I'd like to have a look at Karachi or I'd like to have a look at so and so and do some other recordings or interview a prime minister or something, but the thing is that the later plane on a commercial flight is booked up and has been booked up for years because everybody's following the Queen and you can take you days to catch up with the tour again with disastrous results with your employers I can assure you.

I think it's to live in a perpetual rush and in a way especially in Asia you live in a 'month of sundays' because you see the day of the Queen's arrival anywhere is a national holiday and of course as I say in Asia particularly there are all sorts of religious festivals which also mean it's a holiday. Then there's our own Sunday and by then you've moved on to the next national holiday and the next place because you never stay anywhere more than three nights and it is very often only one night anywhere.

STEWART: How did your stamina survive this ?

RUSSELL: Touch wood not too bad, not too bad, not too bad, not always so good in the difficult places like Nigeria where you were liable to get all sorts of tummy upsets and things like that but actually I know in Nigeria I was the only person who survived the strain because I washed my teeth in boiled water, at least I put it down to that. I was the only person at the BBC who didn't get ill at some time which wasn't bad really considering, there was a bit of luck of course but you get used to living you see with no shops, no banks and no hairdressers open, you see it's a month of sundays and nearly always. You see in the Commonwealth Countries not on the state visits but in the Commonwealth Countries you nearly always have several mayors at the same function and this is because the mayor of the last town wants to see how his rival town is

getting on and the mayor of the next place wants to learn how to do it properly so that there's an awful lot of mayors around among other things and they catch up on a lot of information and by the time we really settle down to doing royal tours you see you find that the organisers have decided to copy the country before last and you, they bring a travelling postal and cable office with them there's a Chinese laundry which always appears which is very welcome and they even try to make the hairdressers open for the ladies, if any, sometimes yes.

STEWART: How did you get your despatches, commentaries whatever, back you recorded them on your new.....

RUSSELL: Well sometimes they were live...we managed to do one absolute feat in New Delhi the Queen arrived in New Delhi after 16 hours flight she then made an eleven hour, eleven mile state procession with India's millions on either side of the street welcoming her and I was at the entrance to *Rashtrapati Bhavan* in New Delhi which was the old Vice Roy's palace and the idea was - and this after this long flight of 16 hours and the arrival and the state drive - that we were going into the 8 o'clock news. And the timing was so exact, we did, we went into the 8 o'clock news live which really was incredible. I had the most appalling commentary position I mean I was on the top of one of the domes which are rather like the domes of Brighton and I didn't know whether I'd slide off down on to the ground if I tried to sit on it, so I just had to stand on the curb of this thing you know as it went round, very very uncomfortable indeed and I did it live, the timing was right you think of that after all that journey and everything. Later that night in the Queen happened to spot me at a reception and this is so extraordinary because really they have such extraordinary vision these people, I know it was at the entrance gate and she stopped me and she said, I saw you on your perch this morning, do you have to be so high? I thought yes I wonder, I couldn't go into details but it was really very difficult.

Of course the BBC, it's very welcoming in a way because you go to radio stations on Commonwealth tours that have been organised originally and probably started by a BBC personnel and so the system of running the radio station or television station is so much like it is at home which is rather nice. And so in turn you rely on them for all sorts of information and sometimes help with transport and contacts and so on but the other side of the coin is that we are landed with a major part of the broadcasting on the local network as well as the work for London. This is partly because in the past and early on, not so much now, they were rather inexperienced in royal things and absolutely terrified and they're delighted to see you and it can also be that someone in London whose probably never been on a Royal Tour has no idea of

32.

the pressures that are upon you, decides to be generous with your services. The worst example of this was when Mr. Max Muller of the Outside Broadcasts Dept., literally gave me away to the local radio station in Tanzania I don't think I've ever quite forgiven him that. It was at the time of the Independence of Tanzania and the Duke of Edinburgh was there and the local ^{Head} ^{European} broadcasters did really exploit me up to the hilt, I had a lot of work to do and they took a holiday and they not only did that they brought their families with their children to each commentary point and they all sat there and sort of joked and said ha ha it's my day off we can see you doing it and so on and I really had no help from them at all, I left on rather poor terms I'm afraid in Tanzania. But that's happened, likely to happen anywhere but mostly in the under developed countries, nowadays of course it's more or less stopped because most of the countries like Australia we had to help Australia on that first tour but the second time ooh they were much more you know au fait with everything they didn't need our services at all we didn't have to do anything they were very kind and very nice.

All royal tours that I've been on were before the advent of the satellite which has made communications so much easier and to London. You see this was an extra chore at the end of a day's work. We made contact by circuit at least once every 24 hours to London and you go to the Local Studio to do this generally or sometimes you have to go to a transmitter if there isn't a studio, I used to have to go to the transmitter in Alice Springs because there wasn't a studio but the chain is from that local studio to a landline to Cable & Wireless Transmitter and the main transmitter wherever it happens to be in the world, I maybe trespassing now on the engineers I hope I'm not inaccurate, they relay the voice to a chain of transmitters all the way to Britain and then finally it goes by landline to the control room in Broadcasting House and on to a recording channel it is incredible isn't it and it's all done in a matter of seconds really, makes one quite awe struck I think. I've done hundreds of recordings that way and I... there's one thing that always happens it's rather, in a way it's got a sort of emotive feeling. When the contact is made with Foreign Traffic at night sometimes you have to wait because the Queen is talking on the telephone to Prince Charles and it's the same channel as the BBC channel and so it's scrambled you don't hear it but you know that somebody's talking on the telephone, or the...the weather's wrong you have to wait so very often you don't get finished with your job till three in the morning. But when you finally get through to Foreign Traffic in Broadcasting House and I've noticed everybody that I've been with the same things happen, it's very curious, several expensive minutes are used up asking what the weather is like at home.

33.

And it always happens that way. I never know if it's a hidden symbol of homesickness or what but you're sweating dripping, oh rain is it oh lovely how is it everything...you know..this is what happens always. Anyway I wouldn't have missed going on any royal tour I'd love to go on some more and I loved travel and of course it's the marvellous unique opportunity of seeing things in close-up which you never do and also seeing things that are laid out to be at their very best for the Queen you never see it. I've panned for gold - and found it in Bathurst New South Wales - I've been in a tin mine in Nigeria, I saw diamonds in small sacks in Sierra Leone, I went three miles down the Lake View and Star Gold Mine in ^Kalgoorlie, I think I was the first woman before the Queen ever to do it in fact I went down, they asked me to go down, I wanted to go for the fun of it, they asked me to see if I thought the Queen could stick it because the heat is absolutely unbelievable and well it seems terrible to interfere but I did say I thought it was unnecessary to go to the final depths because my hair was dead straight by the time..and dripping wet and I thought that's not going to go down very well. I managed to avoid the tiger shoot in Nepal but I've seen elephants and lions and all sorts of wild life in Uganda with the Queen Mother and all of which I hope has made in some time or another some interesting broadcasts, that's what royal tours mean to me anyway.

STEWART: Yes it's not so much travelling as galloping.

RUSSELL: Oh galloping yes, galloping, galloping, galloping, there's no stop, no stop at all. But I gather it's much easier now though of course the BBC doesn't send such a large team it isn't necessary because it's so much easier to get things back and of course it's particularly easy or easier, not easy, in places where the BBC has its own office, like New Delhi, like you know you really do feel you're coming home, you go in and you see the old airgraphs on the table. State visits of course...well I've been on all of them in Europe except Yugoslavia.

STEWART: State visits? Oh accompanying the Royal Family you mean?

RUSEELL: Yes, yes, yes accompanying the Queen the difference being that one is the Commonwealth and the other's a visit to a friendly foreign power, you see but they're much more like a party, the emphasis is on entertainment. And of course you're much nearer home especially in Europe.

STEWART: And they're not such hard work presumably?

34.

RUSSELL: Well they're only hard work for a very short time, they are hard work but it's 4/5 days that's all you see it's very different going 12 weeks which is the average tour today, 6 months was the first marathon but you know. No they're quite....and you see the way other people run their radio stations I mean they don't need your help and anyhow it's probably in a different language so you don't have to do anything like that but you see how they do things which is interesting, I must say the French are very efficient in television, at least I think so.

STEWART: Over your years Audrey you've studied the various techniques of commentating on sound radio, now what are these various techniques and do you find that over the years they've changed at all ?

RUSSELL: They've certainly changed considerably of course I seem to remember some of the early commentaries, commentators, they did really rather whip things up with excitement on ceremonial occasions and also rather falsely I think they whipped up the excitement of sporting events and I found all this very artificial. The funny thing is I think it was really the ridicule of comedians that stopped that people were always imitating BBC commentators on the stage and it killed it stone dead. And then people like Richard Dimbleby and Howard Marshall they went through I think a more naturalistic phase and Richard of course became notorious for the 'reverential' approach you'll remember. I don't think this was quite fair and in his defence I would say, there's something very odd about doing a commentary because it really seems in some ways rather bad manners. Now very often certainly in the old days and I've had it myself too, you find yourself at some point in a ceremonial broadcast very close to the royal personage, they're walking past or something and suddenly it seems to be rather as if you're making personal remarks, being rather rude and it's only inevitable especially for a man with the good manners of Richard that you rather lower your voice and that gives it that kind of reverential hush, I've done it myself - but I haven't felt anymore reverent than I did or otherwise, at least I don't think so.

Well apart from that particular syndrome I think things settled down to a situation between all the extremes and then with the appearance on the top line as it were of people like Wynford Vaughan Thomas, Frank Gillard Raymond Baxter who is a very fine commentator, I feel always very sad that he gave it up for his science programmes but he's very good at that too. Well they really did very imaginative and sincere descriptions of what was going on in front of them. So that a true picture could be seen in the mind's eye of the listener at home. You see I think a commentator has got to evoke the imagination of the listener as well as his own imagination and in fact they

have to really meet half way or should do. Now I think on the whole now that some commentaries are a dying craft, I really think it's nearly finished partly because again the listeners have become viewers and they don't want to do the same thing, they don't want to take the effort of raising their own imagination, they really do want to see a very, well a sort of factual, colour photograph that moves, that's what they want to see, they don't really want to meet you half way.

STEWART: Does this depress you ?

RUSSELL: No not really I think you have to take it in your stride it's rather sad I think a lot of people have worked very hard in working up a way of doing a commentary and it soon won't be needed because after all even to this day all commentaries on sound are much shorter than they used to be. I think the other day in the opening of Parliament in the old days we used to begin and seeing the Queen from the moment she left the Palace all the way down to the procession, down to the House of Lords and all the way back, but now no not at all a political correspondent does a short introduction shows the Queen in the House of Lords then we hear her speech and then that's more or less it, that's even on sound you see. This is absolutely so. Of course they're getting less and I think that say for instance the Royal Maundy which I've been very lucky to have been associated with, I've done it 21 times, believe it or not. But one day, one day it will be done as an ordinary service with no commentary either before or in the beginning or at the end, at least I foresee that this might happen, I would be very sad indeed of course, terribly sad.

STEWART: Do you think possibly the reason for this is that good commentators are not any longer being trained they're not looking out for the imaginative person who has got a flow of words and an eye for a scene and therefore that is why they're having to drop it ?

RUSSELL: No it is because the listener has become a viewer and although you can say as much as you like well what about handicapped people I mean it's marvellous the fact that blind people can listen to commentaries and so on but even there in say 10/20/30 years already science is marching ahead with new electronic devices for the blind and I don't suppose it will give much hope to many people but a certain number of them will be able to have this curious kind of whatever it is, this kind of vision in the brain, you know they're plugging things in and doing things, so even the blind won't be interested

36.

in a straight sound commentary they'll be anxious to see what they can get out of the picture, frankly I feel you may say it's an exaggeration but you may think that if Prince Charles doesn't hurry up he's not going to get a sound commentary at his wedding at all.

STEWART: Do you in any way regret having left the staff of the BBC ?

RUSSELL: No. Not really. I have been very happy with my independence you know, no office hours, not really that a commentator has office hours because you work such funny hours anyway yourself either very late in the morning, in the evening, or very early in the morning or something so you don't really have office hours in the way that most of the staff do. But you have to remember that if you are out of the BBC under contract you're going to have to go through stretches in the wilderness quite a long way and you've got to keep your cool, I would say Winston Churchill's not the only bricklayer. You know and sometimes well I know this can happen, sometimes you'll find that you are not getting work and you think well honestly you're on a special contract known as 'minimum guarantee' and if you don't get the work you can't fulfill your guarantee you see, you've got to fulfill that if you don't fulfill it you're sacked at the end of the year it's not going to be renewed.

STEWART: Now how do you get, do you manage to do that do you have to stamp down the corridors of power and remind people that you need the extra job ?

RUSSELL: Well that depends I think on your own *temperament* I'm afraid I'm rather proud and I sit and wait. I must, if I may say so, I never did go down on my minimum guarantee though I've had one or two narrow shaves I can tell you. To be honest I think that if I was at the beginning of a career now in 1977 I would hesitate much more about taking the plunge of leaving the Corporation staff because well so many of the reasons of why I left have been swept away it is possible now to be versatile, you don't always have to, you can get lent from one department to another which you couldn't do when I was on the staff or at least not without a row or some kind of umbrage being taken. I think the conditions of work, the days off, the holidays, everything, salaries are much better for everyone, and indeed the advantages of being a member of staff are much greater. I can't answer about pensions because I chucked my pension over the windmill I sort of didn't think of inflation but I did think well I don't know money changes value what will it be worth, 6 boxes of matches by the time I'm whatever age I'd have to be. So I thought take a chance you know. I saw it as the only way out in which I could be a commentator because I'd failed to get onto the staff as a commentator but I was promised this contract

if I left and so BBC don't mind you leaving, they're delighted because they think well if you get decrepit and hopeless they don't have to keep you on. Of course it's part policy I'm sure. I think if I'd stayed on the staff that was another consideration at the time, I am very much a believer that if you really want to make a big career in the BBC you leave the microphone obviously you try to get into the hierarchy. But as I hadn't had a university education I didn't think I would have managed to do that, I couldn't really have gone for higher things like aiming to be a controller or director of something or other, but anyway I think I would have enjoyed myself much less.

Stewart

RUSSELL: But don't you think this is false thinking on the part of many people who imagine that those who work at the microphone in the studio actually doing the broadcasts are lesser mortals than those who administer ?

RUSSELL: Well I don't think they're lesser mortals, I never think so because we are at the sharp end, we are the people who take the can back if anything goes wrong, nobody else does really you know you are the one who gets the blame if you say something wrong or you do something wrong or you're not good or something. No I don't think that I don't believe that at all. But I do think that well....you're sort of in a way only a performer, it would be very thrilling wouldn't it to run Radio 4, I wouldn't mind having a crack if I was asked but it's unlikely I think at any time.

STEWART: Why did you go and take on television committments when you had this very big name in radio ?

RUSSELL: Well you see I've always been interested in television and I didn't turn aside from it I've managed to, in a way have, I don't know whether you could call it a career quite but an intermittent career in television not only in the BBC but with one of the early commercial companies Associated Rediffusion I was with them for 2½ years under contract, that was early in the 60s and the funny thing is, well it's rather a bad sign, I didn't really make the big time in television in the sense of perhaps I was very lucky and fortunate in sound, but I've appeared on television and **done** much more television and am deeply interested in television much more deeply interested in television than many of my colleagues in the BBC seem to be aware of. I was trying to remember when I first went on television actually it's very strange it was my first appearance was in Panorama with Richard Dimbleby. Well there was a very good reason it was the night that the Queen returned from her first world tour of six months back to London,

great jubilation everywhere to see her home and I had been on this journey and so I was interviewed by Richard. Then after that I managed to get a few sort of odds and bobs you know but I got odd jobs I did circuses then I think somebody thought I ought to be groomed for dress shows, well that I really did, I did really stand away from that as far as I could. I went to Monte Carlo with Richard Dumbleby for the ^{Prince RAINIER} Renier/Grace Kelly wedding which was very exciting and great fun.

STEWART: Now what was the difference then between doing the commentary and as from television, for television and radio on an occasion like this ?

RUSSELL: One is, one is telling the whole story the other is annotating on a picture but of course the Grace Kelly wedding was just so funny in so many ways that it was amusing whatever one did because you see there were two factions in Monte Carlo at the time, there was the Roman Catholic church that was very anxious for you to have all the information possible about the bride, about the bridegroom, about the brides maids about the Bride's dog about anything, about the dress everything, (would you like it in Swedish ?) people kept thinking I was Swedish, I didn't want it in Swedish I wanted it in England, in English but on the other hand there was MGM, Metro Goldwyn Meyer who were making a life story of Princess Grace, now they didn't want any of the commentators to know anything or to get anything because they were making this film. And actually in the end in the event Prince ^{RAINIER} Renier after the marriage was evidently strong enough to be able to forbid it so the whole thing was scrapped but when we were doing the commentary which was really hilarious this was a hilarious incident, Richard handed over to me as soon as we saw the bride coming down the steps, she stayed in the palace with the rest of her family, they stayed in the palace at Monaco and when she came down this horseshoe staircase and the Rolls Royce or whatever the car was, drove up to the door to take her with her father to the cathedral, they got in, Richard handed over to me and I started straight away of course, describing the bride describing the father and everything else and after, it was the quickest thing I've ever seen done on television by Radio....Television...what was it called... RTF (RTF) anyway marvellous bit of work they did but anyhow the car went about 15/20 yards across the courtyard and then stopped. And for a moment, Richard whispered something to me saying watch out or something and I looked again and I saw the car went into reverse, in fact this was a rehearsal for the film. So we had to cut straight away to the crowds outside and I went on talking about the clouds and darling little children and everything else and then they were clever and quick enough not to show the bride leaving with her father

again and we kept outside, outside the cathedral, we went in and I suddenly found myself talking about flowers I'd never seen and all sorts of things for hours till she got to the point where it had stopped and then we picked up again and do you realise there was no communication between any of us at that time, it had to be done jolly quickly.

I must say I liked working for Associated Rediffusion they were very pleasant people to work with and they gave me the kind of things I liked doing and that I knew a bit about, I can't remember them all, I know I had a few circuses but I did for example the state visit of General de Gaulle to London and I did most of the coverage for that it was very exciting. I think my contract with Associated Rediffusion does show to the credit of the BBC, shows how flexible they are, they weren't giving me very much work on television and I was still mad keen to get into television and so my agent arranged two contracts to run at the same time and the idea was I was to do sound radio for the BBC and no television for them and Associated Rediffusion agreed with this and television for Associated Rediffusion. It worked all right up to a point and then it began to get a bit troublesome and difficult because sometimes by accident both wanted me for something on the same day and this was really crazy so I thought this out and I thought in two minutes, I am going to make everyone dissatisfied I'll have no employer at all so I retreated I pulled out of Associated Rediffusion and they were very nice but they, they still sort of thought of me I'm glad to say, they offered me a retainer for Churchill's funeral which was two years away, Operation Hope Not. I did think well my war years were a sort of symbol of everything to do with Churchill I would be, think it was a greater honour to do it for the BBC and I didn't know that I was, they didn't ask me so long in advance but I did of course and I did it with Robert Hudson in St. Pauls, which was a tremendous occasion. But it wasn't the end of television curiously enough I then, I don't know how I got into that, I really don't, I worked in the BBC's magazine programme for nearly six years, I think it was over six years at Alexandra Palace as a contributor to Town & Around the little magazine programme. It was not sort of the big time great commentaries or anything but it was really reporting but the Editor was a man called Fletcher, very charming man, he did sort of know that I was very interested in art and knew of my interest in architecture and the stately homes and so he jokingly used to call me 'my heritage correspondent'. But, I really honestly do you know it was one of the happiest years, or some of the happiest years in the BBC I enjoyed it very much because I love pictures and anything to do with them, I did the Queen's Gallery Exhibition and so on. And since then of course I've done the odd things.....

STEWART: They were the happiest years perhaps because you had greater freedom and more support ?

RUSSELL: Oh no not support I think you always get support in the BBC yes indeed you do, no but I am very interested with what you can do with pictures and close-ups and changing from one to the other and so on and it's you know another way of doing the same sort of job, I enjoyed every minute of it anyway.

STEWART: Now you've been with the BBC since, well all these years have, has there been any noticeable difference in the behaviour of the staff their way of thinking, their way of shall we say dealing with you ?

RUSSELL: Well you see I'm now at the stage when I have an anniversary value, very shortly it'll be a fossil value I'm quite sure and so I don't get asked to go out and interview people but I get interviewed all sorts of people interview me and ask me my opinion on this, that and the other and strange young men I've never met who run magazine programmes approach me and I do an interview and that's all I see of them, probably never see them again you know, it's always a different one. On the whole I think they are very efficient indeed. I think probably more efficient than I was but it's more cut & dried and it's much, much slicker, not a bad thing, I think I probably recorded far too long interviews and then spent hours and hours and hours deciding what I would cut and what I would keep in and so on, they're slicker, there's no real feeling that this interview is going to be a thing, an issue of trial and error it's got to be right first time. I think that in all large organisations you'd say about meeting members of the staff and things, you do have to run into a strata of mediocrity because there's never enough people of high intelligence to go round, I don't know what you say is the answer I suppose much more careful recruitment but that's easier said than done. I sometimes have wished that a broadcaster who is as I said before at the sharp end could perhaps have more access to people with perhaps a bit of a higher IQ if it doesn't sound very patronising and perhaps this does happen for members on the staff, I'm not on the staff perhaps I don't have that kind of privilege maybe they do I don't know as an outsider.

STEWART: Have you ever met any of the director generals and talked (oh yes) about your work with them ?

RUSSELL: Yes, yes indeed I did, I made the most appalling what might

have been unless he was a....but he was a very generous and forgiving man, I met a man at a very large party that was given for Charles Chaplin and his wife and family and my uncle was at this party and he suddenly seized me by the elbow, brought me across and said here's somebody who is longing to meet you, he wants to meet you. And so a name, the noise was fantastic and there was a lot of champagne and this man who was very charming said to me, I've always been interested, I've always wanted to know why you left the BBC. And I made the fatal mistake of telling him, because it was Sir Ian Jacob. But he didn't bear me any ill-will. I told him in full, I'd had about three glasses of champagne, you bet I did. Yes of course, I met...I met ..well Charles Curran and I did an election, or a bye-election together when he was a reporter. And who else? Carleton Greene I met in the war when he was in Niemegan I think it was or Eindhoven one of those awful places in the war and of course I met Sir William Haley who was always very kind to me and very nice and charming and I met him again after he'd left the BBC too and he was on The Times, very pleasant indeed it was a great thrill but I'm always rather shy with people as grand as director generals, I think I don't sort of make the most of it.

STEWART: Do you sometimes regret that you didn't in fact pursue your career on the stage?

RUSSELL: I really was in the long term very glad to exchange the fantasy and romance and fiction from the fact and the real life and the document I really, the war, I grew up and out of the theatre I think, you know. I've always considered that I was very very fortunate to have a career in the BBC I mean that absolutely sincerely because the BBC is really rather extraordinary as a place when you come to think of it, it has a charisma that hasn't faded at all in spite of all the competitors on sound and television it's unique, even the initials have a sort of magic and I suppose if you call charisma a sense of grace it's that and it can rub off a bit on any individual who is even associated in the remotest way with the BBC, people you know ooh you work in the BBC...ooh, and really all that's very gratifying indeed you know. And I also think you have great freedom in the BBC I don't know I've never worked on a newspaper or for a magazine except odd articles but nothing... you really have great freedom in what is said or written once you've been given a programme really it's quite incredible there's very little interference on what you say and how you say it and there's a feeling of being trusted once you, this is especially true of course of commentaries because really nobody knows what the commentator is going to come out with, sometimes he doesn't know himself...but then there's the entree into so many worlds so many personalities, this is something the BBC gives you. I mean say you want to meet

a famous art historian, Lord Clarke ^{Art Historian} or somebody terribly grand and very interesting, or a distinguished astronomer like Ryall ^{the astronomer} or any one of them, well he's glad to see you because you come from the BBC, this is absolutely true. And then there are so many organisations within this vast organisation. There's the reference library which I would put top of anything I wouldn't have survived in the BBC without the help of the reference library. It's a true broadcasting library, you don't have to read McCauley's History of England there's a kind of ragbag of everything about almost every subject but at the same time the library has access to the finest libraries in Britain if you really wanted to do something in depth and then the librarians do so much work for you too, sometimes in a hurry..I mean the other day I couldn't remember the date when the shelling stopped in Dover, I rang up the BBC and I had the answer in minutes, now this is really quite something you know. And I do think that it's the library to whom we should all be very grateful for the great reputation for accuracy that the BBC has. I mean I could go on forever on this, I mean even the catering dept., is versatile, it ranges from a sort of trolley service of bland coffee on the landing outside an office to luncheons, to buffets, suppers to all sorts of things, even I think they did the luncheon for the Queen and I'm sure it was a lovely meal. I wasn't there ! The BBC is also a kind of Aunt Sally you know rather like the Royal Family who can't answer back, I must say I'm very fond of the BBC.