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Clare Lawson Dick's reminiscences

Recorded in Sound Archives on 30 March 1979

35 years in Programme Planning

The Management of Home Service and Radio 4 in Difficulties

MEMORIES of the 1939 - 45 WAR:
(Part I)

I retired on November the 1st, 1976. More than two years later, in January 1979, I went to Broadcasting House to discuss the possibility of recording for the Archives. I thought I knew my mind. I would say "No". I had almost forgotten my forty-two years with the BBC and didn't particularly want to try to recall them.

As chance had it, I made my way to my appointment through a heavy fall of snow. There was a transport strike for good measure. Oxford Street was deserted, the few people about - dark against the white - assumed the importance of figures in a painting by Lowry. I didn't realise it but the scene reminded me of the bitter winter of 1940 and a flood of memories were about to be released.

When I reached Broadcasting House, I made my way immediately to two places of pilgrimage; the two large ladies' cloakrooms on the lower ground floor. At once it felt like 'home'. These were the cloakrooms I had used in the war, looking in their mirrors to touch up a face rather the worse for a night spent in the underground shelters of the BBC. When I returned to the entrance hall I met an old friend and colleague from that time, and said to him 'I thought I'd forgotten the BBC, but I find I'm still intensely emotional about it'. And he answered:'It's those basements. It still smells of the war down there'. He was right - those basements had been our burrows. To come in from the blitz - hurry down to them - brought the inner glow of arriving at the place where one was meant to be. Where one joined one's tribe and took part in the rituals we all understood so well, continually gossiping

with one another, eating re-constituted eggs, drinking ersatz coffee, sleeping three hundred at a time, huddled on the floor of the Concert Hall. We knew every turn and twist of the basement corridors and every sleeping, washing, eating and working place down there.

Undoubtedly my most intense experiences were in World War II, but my forty-two years on the staff can be divided neatly into three parts: Pre-war, between May 1935 and September 1939; the war years; and the long period after from 1945 to 1976.

I hope these random memories may give a flavour of what it was like to work in the BBC in its early days and in World War II. I joined the staff in 1935. Those were the hungry thirties and the great peak of two and three quarter million unemployed was only just beginning to go into decline, I was therefore delighted to be offered a job in the Registry, filing letters. Those were the primeval days at the BBC. There is a statue, carved by Eric Gill, in the entrance hall at Broadcasting House. It is called 'The Sower' and the inscription on its base 'Deus Incrementum Dat', was still translated 'Sir John Reith gives you your Annual Increment'. No alcohol was allowed on the premises. There had been comparatively recent examples of persons involved in divorce cases being dismissed. And so were any of the girls who decided to get married.

You might think that restrictions such as these would have prevented lively people from wishing to join the BBC but I remember the staff of those days as having an exceptionally high proportion of brilliant and amusing people. And in any case, some

undesirables managed to get under the net. It is amusing to think that the BBC went to war with Guy Burgess on the staff and also the younger brother of Lord Haw-Haw.

I never expected to stay for long. I simply collected my weekly wage of £2.15 shillings and reserved my energy for going out in the evenings. But a macabre atmosphere was developing. You never went to a cocktail party in those days without meeting a refugee with strange and bitter tales of concentration camps. I remember one who told me that not only were people done to death in them but that orchestras had been formed which played to drown the cries of those being herded to their execution. And I remember thinking, I could believe about the executions - mankind is wicked enough for that - but the orchestras, why that's so bizarre that it's impossible. Poor man, his experiences must have unhinged him. Well, I was to know better later.

When war did eventually break out I was with my parents at Dorking. We listened to Chamberlain's sorrowful voice telling us that we were now at war with Germany and to the air raid alert that followed immediately he had finished speaking - it was a false alarm, but impressive at the time. Then, pausing to be photographed in the garden with my gas mask slung over my shoulder, I set off by motor car with another BBC girl for Wood Norton, the secret establishment of the BBC near Evesham. At least we had thought it was secret, but within hours of our arrival, the detestable Lord Haw Haw had broadcast a message over the German radio: 'Hello! the BBC at Evesham, are you settling in comfortably?'

When my colleague and I arrived we were reprimanded for being late. Apparently the signal to rendezvous had been the declaration of a State of Emergency a day or two earlier, and we had waited for the actual declaration of war. We were then taken to our billets. Mine were depressing - a cottage with the plumbing unchanged since the turn of the century, owned by two old ladies who were deeply suspicious of their guests. In a few days I moved to a small and gloomy villa. It stood opposite a large cemetary in which rested the daughter of the house who had committed suicide not long before. An enlarged and tinted photograph of her stared sadly down from my bedroom wall and I quite understood how she felt. Fortunately I moved again, quite quickly, to a cheerful little house near the Evesham railway station. It was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Smedly, members of the fruit and canning family. They were kindness itself to me, Mrs. Smedly and I still write to each other at Christmas. My last billet was with the Picketts - a most unusual pair. Will had been a foreman-painter and carpenter in the television service at Alexandra Palace. He was in his fifties, a period piece who seemed to belong to the Edwardian era rather than to 1939. He was over six foot tall with a black drooping moustache and pale blue eyes. His wife Leah had been born on the Royal Estates at Sandringham and she had been lady's maid to many members of the aristocracy and most of royalty. Mr. Asquith, then Prime Minister, had given her away at her wedding to Will, and, she told me, that as he led her up the aisle, he had whispered in her ear that he was giving away something he would like to have kept for himself.

Will and Leah had rented a ramshackle mansion on the banks of the River Avon, and they enterprisingly took in a few billetees for the BBC. The younger brother of William Joyce, Lord Haw Haw, was also on the staff of the BBC, he too had been sent to Wood Norton. Will Pickett knew him well, indeed in his capacity as foreman-painter he had trained Joyce in his work at Alexandra Palace. Will had obviously been dazzled by the Joyce brothers, he admired enormously their command of language and powers of argument. But, he told me, the family lived in absolute squalor with the springs bursting out of the sofa in their living room and their garden full of rubbish that had just been chucked into it. Will had been so impressed by the Joyce brothers' theories that he had put on a black shirt and marched with the Mosleyites through the East End of London. Leah had followed him and hauled him out of the column. She had the stronger personality of the two and more common sense.

The arrival of the BBC evacuees had amazed the natives of Evesham, but I think they rather enjoyed the shock. Val Gielgud, Head of Drama, had brought two Siamese cats with him and had asked if a tray of sand could be placed under his bed. Mary ~~Hope-Allan~~ Hope Allen, a brilliant drama producer, was disconcerted when she fascinated a parrot in the house to which she was sent. Obviously the bird had never heard anything like her full blooded laugh before and it picked it up in no time and laughed as often and as loudly as she did. Marianne Helweg, another member of Drama Department, beautiful and clever, told me that as she set out late one evening for her work at the Wood Norton studios, her landlady remarked 'You say you're going to work, but I know very well what you are doing'.

Wood Norton,itself, still had the air of an Edwardian mansion rather than a war time redoubt. It had belonged to the Duc d'Orleans and the fleur-de-lys motif was sprinkled everywhere. We were told that a bath, shaped like the Duchess, had been hastily removed just before the staff arrived. If so it was a pity that there was no Betjeman there to protect it. The Registry, in which I worked, was in the Duke's handsome panelled library.

Some of the most amusing departments in the BBC had been sent to Wood Norton on the outbreak of war; the Drama Department, accompanied by the actors and actresses in the Drama Rep; the Theatre Orchestra; a bevy of exotic foreigners who were in the Monitoring Service; and the Features Department, headed by brilliant Lawrence Gilliam, who immediately set to work to produce a series called 'The Shadow of the Swastika', in which Marius Goring played a terrifying Hitler. This series cast aside BBC inhibitions. Until we went to war there had been some decorum in the way in which the Nazi Government was referred to on the air, now their story could be dramatised and told in all its sensational depravity, the BBC could be as rude as it liked.

The September of 1939 was gloriously sunny and, together, all these miscellaneous BBC personalities eat Victoria plums, bathed in the River Avon and drank rhubarb wine at a little village called 'Wyre Piddle'. The brilliant autumn was followed by the witheringly cold first winter of war time. For weeks the centre piece of the view from my bedroom window in Leah and Will Picketts' tumbledown mansion on the banks of the Avon, was a swan dead and frozen into the ice in the middle of the river.

I have always enormously enjoyed the 'dotty' side of the BBC. We had a private siren at Wood Norton, not that we expected raids by enemy paratroopers or commandos, such horrors were unknown to us, but it is interesting to remember that the IRA had been bombing in London and elsewhere in 1939 and it was thought that they might have a go. I was delighted to receive an instruction which read: "If the alert is sounded, staff must run into the woods immediately and lie down. Preferably in pairs."

I remember Evesham with affection, the absurdities and the pleasures of our communal life, the glorious countryside, the bicycling, the excellent country food, still no rationing to speak of, it was the last chance to eat hearty meals for several years. Yet, I was delighted to be recalled to London early in 1940, it was my home town and it seemed natural to spend my war in it. I had a new job in the Secretariat, mostly I answered programme correspondence from listeners who wrote to the BBC but I also did some research for the archives, and for papers which were being prepared for the Board of Governors.

I had met Germaine Chevreau at Evesham. She was one of the harpists in the Theatre Orchestra, and I went to live in the top floor flat in her charming house on the edge of Regents Park near the Zoo. We were a household of ladies; Germaine and her sister Jean, their mother and Germaine's daughter Cecile, all delightfully French. As France fell, my little French household mourned especially, the nights suddenly became bright with search-lights fingering through the sky, crossing and re-crossing each other. This produced a horrible mixture of foreboding and excite-ment, obviously the war was about to reach London. I was relieved

when it was announced that the Zoo had exterminated the Black Widow spiders and the poisonous snakes, but I don't remember giving a hoot for the wolves, which we could clearly hear from Germaine's house, howling on moonlight nights.

When the blitz started, our neighbourhood caught it almost at once. There were a few nasty nights when the bombs fell and there was no retaliation then, one glorious night, London rocked to the roar of our own anti-aircraft guns. It was an immense relief, at least we were barking back. One morning on my way to the BBC by bus, we passed a German plane, intact and forced down on Primrose Hill. The conductor danced and cheered on his platform, and I made a special journey to Camden Town to see a bus which had been caught by a blast and hung by its front wheels from the first floor balcony of a house.

We had little sleep at nights, our own guns and falling shrapnel adding to the noise made by the enemy. When the front door was open the streets were as light as day but with a red glare. I thought if I could only sleep through a quiet and peaceful night I'd never complain about anything else in life. Sometimes when I'm discontented I try to remind myself of this, but I cannot recreate the feeling. Very soon we were hit. An incendiary came through the roof and into my bed in the attic flat. I was away for the weekend, but the house went on fire and firemen came in and soaked it. As my flat was uninhabitable, I came to collect my belongings. I shall always remember the sight of Germaine's lovely drawing room, with its pale grey carpet, its grand piano and its golden harp, ruined and degraded by fire and water. It had been so civilised and it was brought

so low. In the drawing room I met a fireman. He told me that his heart was broken by the canaries sitting desolate in their cages in the bombed out houses. Exhausted as he was, he had been collecting them - splendid fellow. He reprimanded me for leaving our damaged house, he said I should stay and try to dry it out and reclaim it. I was ashamed, but I took off with a case of singed clothes for Broadcasting House where I felt my duty and my future lay.

I was still in the Secretariat, but my work by then chiefly consisted in minuting Control Board meetings and, in particular, the Overseas Services Policy meeting. I was therefore privileged to follow the policies of the BBC at this exciting time. As the meetings were often very lengthy and the minutes were needed as quickly as possible, I slept in Broadcasting House and drafted them late in the evenings.

In the daytimes we worked above ground. Then, as the sirens went at dusk, we descended to the basements, three floors of them, one below another, and there we worked and played, ate and drank (there was an underground restaurant and a bar) and slept on the floor on pallets until the daytime. It was at this time that I identified emotionally with the BBC. Never shall I forget the intensity of that communal life. In those basements you would find Freedom Fighters from France still in the fisherman's blouses in which they had just rowed across the Channel; elegants like Eve Curie, daughter of Marie Curie; exotics like the coloured singer Elizabeth Welsh, trapped there for a little while by the raids; secretaries formed into fire-fighting teams; producer, actors, writers, journalists, war correspondents, and

the wonderful members of the BBC foreign teams who broadcast to Europe and the world.

Early in the raids the corner of the Langham - still a hotel - was hit, and Broadcasting House was damaged by the blast. The German radio immediately announced that Broadcasting House itself had been hit. I met a friend in the corridor who said, "Hurry along and you'll see a French Colonel. He's just going to broadcast and they believe they can rally France round him." I hurried along and saw De Gaulle stalking ahead. He had been taking sherry before his broadcast when the building was blasted and my friend had carried off his glass with the bowl snapped off the stem as a souvenir.

The large Concert Hall in Broadcasting House was turned into a dormitory. The seats had been removed from the auditorium and the staff laid mattresses on the tiered steps, wriggled into sleeping bags made of sheets and drew a rough blanket over all. A washing line, with blankets hung over it, divided the men's section from the girl's. A friend once told me that she had been overcome with curiosity in the night as to who was on the other side of the blanket and, lifting the edge gently, had found herself peering into the glistening face of an Arab. One night ~~Sir~~ Mr Frederick Ogilvie - then Director General - appeared at the back of the hall and said,"Will the girls please get down amongst the men as there's a time bomb just behind them in the excavations". In a second the men were on their feet, dragging on their trousers and generally arranging themselves, whilst we girls whistled down amongst them without waiting for any decencies or courtesies.

(Ogilvie knighted after he left BBC)

One night, when Oxford Street was being pounded, and Broadcasting House was rocking to the explosions, the staff became too nervous to sleep in their usual bedroom, for the Concert Hall was only semi-security. And they got up and several hundreds of them wandered about the basements. This was the only night I knew of when this happened. Walking with three friends - all of us in pyjamas and dressing gowns - we met the Director General who said we could use his sub-basement redoubt, a bare brick room about the size of a bathroom. We were grateful and lay down on its concrete floor sharing the single available cushion between the four of us. Then, through the wall from an adjoining studio we heard the voice of Ed Murrow beginning a broadcast to America with the words,"This is England's zero hour" and we felt more wretched than before.

It amuses me now to think how often I have walked out of Broadcasting House in the morning in my pyjamas and dressing gown. I was making my way to Welbeck Street where a friend provided me with a bath. I thought nothing of it at the time for, walking with me in every sort of disarray, were the crowds who had just come up from spending a night on the Oxford Circus Underground platforms.

Most of the staff who slept in BH volunteered for security services; in the Home Guard, in fire-fighting teams or plotting the course of enemy aircraft on a screen so that, when they came too near Broadcasting House, a bell could be pressed to summon staff to the basement. I plotted aircraft and was also taught to fight fires, my instructor being a retired deep sea diver. He was elderly and from time to time his mind wandered and he

would tell us how to manage if our air pipe was severed whilst we were at the bottom of the sea. "Dad's Army" has never seemed an exaggeration to me, that's exactly what it was like.

A last blitz story to give the flavour of those times; one particularly bad night a few neighbours came in to shelter in Broadcasting House. I was sitting on my mattress on the floor of the Concert Hall, sharing it with the landlord of a pub in Langham Street, his wife and his daughter of about seven. The little girl was very upset because her cat, frightened by the noise, had run out into the night. I tried to comfort her and said that cats could see in the dark, and he would find a nook or a cranny to creep into where he could hide until the morning came and the raid was over. The next night an enormous bomb fell on Langham Street. It knocked down forty-two houses. Never shall I forget the noise they made going up and never shall I forget the noise that the bricks of forty-two houses made coming down. Amongst those who lost their lives in that incident were my three companions of the night before, and the sweet little girl, so anxious for her cat, has lingered in my memory.

MEMORIES of the 1939 - 45 WAR:

(Part II)

Here are a few completely random war time memories:

In 1940, as France was falling, I came into Victoria Station on a morning train on my way to the BBC and I saw a touching sight. A small group of French soldiers - officers and poilus - about eleven or twelve men in all, got off the train on which I had travelled. At the ticket barrier they were met by four or five English officers who had been waiting for them. After a few moments conversation, they formed a tiny column and marched briskly through the station. France was collapsing and it was not a moment for exuberance or cheering, but all the people on the station came to a standstill and turned towards the French soldiers, and as the tiny column passed the men silently raised their caps or hats in salutation. I had to hold back my tears, and I wondered how the Frenchmen felt, and I was proud that the English had found so dignified a way to express their deep feeling for France at her time of tragedy.

Laly Anderson sang her famous song 'Underneath the lamp-light by the barrack gate' over the German radio to the Africa Corps, but the Desert Rats were captivated by it too. The British army psychiatrists were disturbed by this and asked if the BBC could invent a counter song. Bobby McDermott was then a programme planner, but he was already famous as a contributor of sketches to the Gate Revues, and he had also written the lyric for a much loved popular song 'Transatlantic Lullaby'. The army psychiatrists asked him to see what he could do and gave him several Freudian words to include in the lyric. I remember that they included "Water", "Gun" and "Apple". Bobby did his best and the psychiatrists were delighted and said"You've managed to get in everything but

"water". Alas, Laly Anderson continued to be the darling of the Desert Rats, and Bobby's song died an early death.

(Must have been 1941 - not Sir Harold until 1953)

During the blitz in 1940 (Sir) Harold Nicholson, then a Governor of the BBC, attended a Control Board meeting. I was there to take the minutes. We arrived to find the room in which the meeting was to take, had been wrecked by a bomb the night before. The windows were out, everything was in wild disarray. All the officials present, including the Director General, ~~Sir~~ Frederick Ogilvie, who had lost an arm in World War I, set to work to bring in undamaged chairs and to make the room usable. Only (Sir) Harold Nicholson sat red faced and glowering whilst all the activity went on around him. He was furious that the room hadn't been prepared for his visit in advance.

During the war I went to the Rivoli Bar at the Ritz with a handsome man. By chance we met Guy Burgess there. He was quite well known to my companion and I knew him quite well for he was a talks producer at the BBC at that time. Guy Burgess joined us and dominated the conversation, talking about war strategy. Suddenly he turned to me and said in a most malevolent voice: "I hope you don't mind my talking to him?" I was naive about these matters at the time, but my startled thought was 'Good heavens, he thinks he's my rival'. Burgess had a most powerful personality with a good deal of ruffian in it. No-one could miss the fact that he was a homosexual, nor did he make any attempt to conceal it. It is amusing to think that he was for so long persona grata with so many politicians and foreign office officials.

The leader of the BBC team of Frenchmen in exile, who broadcast to their country during World War II, was du Chene. This

was a nom de guerre for he was, in peace time, Michel St.Denis, famous in France and in England as a producer in the theatre. He was the most attractive of Frenchmen and I admired him particularly because he was afraid of the raids but never let this fact stop him carrying out his duty. One day he told me a story that for him epitomised the British phlegm that he admired so much. He had hailed a taxi on a night when the raid was bad, and asked to be driven to his house on Primrose Hill. There were several near misses on the way. When they arrived he said to the driver 'Come in and have a drink with me my friend, for we have had good fortune on our side tonight'. 'So we have,' replied the taxi driver, 'The lights were green all the way'.

In the winter of 1942, a message was sent to the BBC to say that the Navy in Scapa Flow were suffering from boredom, could the BBC do anything to amuse them? It was decided that the ITMA team- almost all elderly parties - should make the long journey north and put on a programme before an audience of sailors. Just as they were about to start, a message came 'Hold everything. Don't send them now'. The Navy then dashed out and sank the 'Scharnhorst'. Shortly after came another message 'Send ITMA up now'. The recording of that show is in the archives and the shouts of laughter of thosetriumphant young sailors makes them the most marvellous radio audience that I have ever heard. As Mrs. Mopp said on the occasion itself 'Bless their bellbottoms'.

When the raids were on, everyone queued for breakfast in the underground canteen. The only exception was when firemen sometimes came in, weary and dirty after fighting fires in the

neighbourhood all night. Way was made for them to go to the head of the queue. One morning I saw a set-to between the Director General ~~Sir~~ Frederick Ogilvy and J.B. Priestly, who had had to spend the night in Broadcasting House. Priestly was extremely annoyed and said to ~~Sir Frederick~~ Ogilvie that it was disgraceful that people of their importance should be held up in the queue. 'It is by putting over very different views in your "Postscripts" that you have become so much admired by the public' replied ~~Sir~~ Ogilvie Frederick who was rightly outraged.

MY 35 YEARS IN PROGRAMME PLANNING

I have been asked to describe the principles on which I planned programmes. I joined the BBC in 1935 and became a programme planner in 1942, and I remained with radio planning for the next thirty-five years, first as an Assistant then as Chief Assistant, as an Acting Controller and finally as Controller, Radio Four.

In World War II I worked on both the Home Service and the Forces Programme which were planned jointly by a single team. After the war I worked on the Home Service and finally on Radio Four. The method of planning I have used has been evolution rather than revolution. Even now in 1977 the main news times on Radio Four of 0700, 0800, 0900, 1300 and 1800 have come through unchanged from the old Home Service. Evolution however has been on a grand scale, for it has had to keep pace with changes in the nature and objectives of the post war Home Service and Radio Four, and it has been necessary to try to reflect the immense change in the social and cultural attitudes of our times. There has been a constant weeding out of tired or out of date programmes and their replacement by new ideas. But I cannot emphasise enough how difficult it is to find first class new ideas.

In 1970 Generic Radio was introduced and Radio Four became an all speech programme with a few musical exceptions. In 1973 there was an even bigger programme opportunity - broadcasts to schools were confined to VHF only leaving Radio Four medium wave free to carry programmes for the general public all through the day times. The then Controller, Tony Whitby, designed

the most effective and simple layout to fill the important period 0905 to 1200 on Mondays through Fridays, and his design was an immediate success. "Woman's Hour" was taken over from Radio Two to fill the period 1400 to 1500.

I felt that change by evolution enabled Home Service, and later, Radio Four, to keep a character and a programme structure which was instantly recognisable to listeners and which enabled them to find their favourite programmes without difficulty. I've certainly held it as a principle that the most futile action a planner could take would be to try to give the schedules a new look by fiddling with existing programmes, retiming them, changing their lengths, slightly altering their briefs. I believe that changes should only be made when the planner had a very clear idea of the new programme forms he wants to put in and a strong belief that they would be more attractive than the programmes they were to replace. Examples of these two methods, of changing the schedule, are Gerald Mansell's brilliantly successful creation of "The World at One", an entirely new programme concept, which entailed the replanning of the whole of the key period between 1200 and 1400 on Mondays through Fridays. And an example of the "fiddle" method, the recent shortening of "Today" which has left the programme still in the schedules but a shadow of its former self. This is not to say that the production of key programmes like "Today" will not fall below standard from time to time, but they should then either be replaced by an entirely new and creative idea or the struggle to restore the standards of the sagging programme should continue. Trimming and titivating old programmes

is unlikely to be effective.

During World War II radio was the life blood of the country. Today radio is instant, convenient, inexpensive and companionable. This fits it splendidly to play an important role in modern living. I have always believed that Home Service and later Radio Four should appeal not only to the intellect but also to the emotions - all of them - and that it should also call up race memories. I thought the services would be a failure if the listeners did not look on them with affection, and I believed listeners should turn to them for relaxation and to be "taken out of themselves". I never forgot that the audience was made up of millions of individuals, and that each individual can have many moods and many tastes. Some programmes, for example expensive light entertainment shows placed at peak hours, could be considered a failure if they did not pull in big audiences. Other programmes would be designed for large minorities, for instance "Gardeners' Question Time". Yet others, by their nature, could be expected to attract only small minorities, for example the in-depth examination at forty-five minutes length of current affairs subjects in the series "Analysis". Each of these programme strands wasof value and the size of the audience was only one way of estimating their success. Programmes with small audiences like "Analysis" might be judged on other qualities, but I believe Radio Four should be expected to pull in sizeable audiences for most of the day. The requirement that bound these disparate programme strands together was that each should aim at high standard for its type. This was not at all easy to achieve and in particular it was extremely difficult

to restore standards and creativity in programme areas where they had sagged. Light entertainment in radio has had a particularly difficult time. Comparatively recently it originated shows which were enormously popular, "Take It From Here", "Hancock's Half Hour", "Round the Horne". Now, with the changing tastes of the times, comedy producers seem uncertain whether or not they should move into the field of blue jokes and black humour that are used so widely in the cinema, on the stage and in television, and yet do not seem altogether to suit radio. It is obvious that radio comedy has not yet found the form that will satisfy the late 70s, and the experiments recently broadcast on Radio Four would seem to show that the young light entertainment producers are exploring the wrong avenues often falling back on pastiche and the camp. What is needed is a number of acts of pure invention, like the "Goon Show" in its day. Sadly, it is difficult to see the source from which such creative innovations might come. Only a few producers are creators. Also the full frontal world of the theatre has disconcerted some drama producers who do not wish to be thought old fashioned. These problems and that of bad language, can only be solved by the creativity, taste and flair of the drama and light entertainment producers.

Apart from the majority audiences, I have always felt that there was some minorities who had a special claim on radio. Those who, for a number of reasons, were housebound for a good deal of their time; women with young children, the elderly, the sick, the disabled. For them radio can be a lifeline and I never forgot it.

I have left reference to news and current affairs to the last because of their importance. Radio Four is the main news service of the BBC, it broadcasts bulletins all through the day. There is a special reason why it should be hoped that the public should be in the habit of listening to news on Radio Four. In times of national crisis, a general strike, a fuel crisis, rioting, civil war, the outbreak of war between nations, radio will remain on the air long after television, with its tremendous demands on resources, has closed down. The whole history of our times has shown the importance of radio in emergency, revolution or war. I would expect Radio Four in some form or another to be the last ditch BBC network on the air in times of trouble.

The coverage of current affairs in radio is also a power and a problem, it has great faults, among them the mania for theorising about tomorrow's news. Also the use of nonentities to comment on events, who become pundits simply because they broadcast so regularly. The selection of subjects for coverage is also a difficulty, media values do not always coincide with the values of the public. But in spite of all the difficulties it is the news above all and also current affairs coverage that makes Radio Four an essential service in the life of the nation.

THE MANAGEMENT OF HOME SERVICE and RADIO 4

in DIFFICULTIES

I was invited to take the post of Assistant in Programme Planning in 1942. And I remained in Programme Planning, eventually becoming Controller of Radio Four, until my retirement thirty-five years later. I'm still proud of the fact that I was the first woman to be made a BBC Network Controller.

During those thirty-five years I was able to see, in a way that probably no-one else could, the strange succession of chances that meant that the Home Service - later retitled Radio Four - was never given the intensive period of creative thought and redesigning that should have fitted it for its role in the post war world. A series of checks and even great misfortunes prevented its smooth development. I was often called on to hold the Service together at times of difficulty and even great crises, sometimes for long periods. It was a role that was often extremely taxing and exhausting, and it was never fully realised by top management. Indeed I think it would have been an embarrassment to top management to face the fact that, what was in many ways their most important radio service, was so often in troubled times and so often through their own actions - or lack of action.

It was the war time when I joined programme planning. In 1942, Television was off the air for the duration and the two domestic radio services - the Home Service and the Forces Programme - were planned jointly by a small unit with a Director of Programme Planning in command. The Director was Godfrey Adams, a brilliant, complex and wayward man with a sardonic wit. He had been with the BBC from the Savoy Hill days. Radio was at its height. Audiences for key broadcasts: the King, Winston Churchill, ITMA,

were as large as any later achieved by television, and radio was popular and had great influence with its listeners.

When the war ended BBC television was revived. Its start was slow, but by 1953 television audiences were growing fast, whilst the radio audiences began to drain away like the bath water when the plug is pulled out. None of us knew if, in the end, the bath would not empty entirely. This had not been expected. It was rather a painful time to be in radio, Television was full of confidence and rather patronising to the "Senior Service". It seemed as though the new world belonged to them. Radio had yet to find a new and distinctive role to play.

Radio organisation was quickly changed after the war. The Forces Programme was ended, and the central planning unit, under its Director, was disbanded. Instead two teams were created to run the two domestic services - the Home Service which continued, and the Light Programme which replaced the Forces Programme. Sir William Haley believed that this would result in healthy competition between the two. Lindsay Wellington returned from his war time job as BBC American Representative to become Controller Home Service, and Godfrey Adams was to work under his command with the title Head of Home Service. Lindsay Wellington, I think, felt that his role as Controller was to stand back and view the Home Service in perspective. I myself felt that this meant he was too far removed from the actual construction and invention of his own service. It seemed to me that he approached his work more by way of comment on the action of others than by architectural designing of his own. This was a pity as he was an excellent and experienced practical planner from the pre-war days.

It seemed too, that as we turned to face the post-war world, Godfrey Adams belonged to the past. His heydays had been the twenties, the thirties and the war time. I wasn't surprised to find his name mentioned in the Evelyn Waugh diaries when they were published years later. Intelligent, well educated, amusing and eccentric, he was already a period piece. I know he felt demoted. He had lost half his empire and was to run the Home Service only. He was to be closely supervised by a Controller. His title had been changed from "Director" to "Head". I think he felt at a loss. He, and his staff from the war time programme planning unit, had known there would be changes and had suspected that they might not be welcome. On the day that we were told the details officially, we three war time planning assistants: James Langham, who was to leave planning altogether; Bobby McDermott, who was to be attached to the Overseas Service and myself, who was to remain with the Home Service, all went out together to a nearby tavern to have a drink. But Godfrey didn't come with us; he said he would rather be on his own. We all knew he had had a blow and felt most sympathetic to him.

Before long Godfrey Adams had a severe accident, he fell from the step of a bus. I remember that I thought at the time that this accident might almost have been a relief to him, as it kept him away from the office for a considerable time. Lindsay Wellington appeared at his best in this emergency. He took off his jacket and hung it on the back of a chair and he and I got down to urgent and detailed work on the schedules which were in rather a state of disarray. In the 1950s Godfrey Adams was found dead of a heart attack in his flat. His body

had lain there undiscovered for several days. When he had not returned from his holiday on the day we expected at the office, we had smiled and wondered what he was up to. But we hadn't thought it tactful to make enquiries, and as it happened, his family was away.

By this time Lindsay Wellington had been promoted Director of Sound Broadcasting and Andrew Stewart, another figure from the early days of the BBC, had become Controller of the Home Service. It was now necessary to choose a new Head of Home Service to succeed Godfrey Adams and the two new men, Controller and Head, should have formed a creative and vigorous team. Alas, Lindsay Wellington had many fine qualities but they did not include that gift of the gods - a flare for picking winners. He chose Ronald Lewin. Lewin was highly educated and academically brilliant. I often noticed with what elegance he could draft a paper or write a memo. Since his early retirement he has used these qualities in the writing of the many portraits of the military leaders of World War II that have been so well reviewed. I always thought he would have made an excellent Head of Secretariat and, in that post, his many periods of ill health would have been less devastating. The Head of a Network should be robust, physically and psychologically.

Lewin had been a radio talks assistant, a role that had suited him, but he found his new post a daunting task. In particular he found taxing the long meetings with programme producing departments at which proposals were put up and accepted or rejected by the head of the service. Whilst most people feel attracted towards someone who accepts their ideas, many can feel aggressive towards someone who rejects them. Putting up with this is part

of the job but Lewin found it very difficult and often looked ill after chairing these long and argumentative meetings. He suffered from a depressive illness and was under strain all the time. The Controller, Andrew Stewart, gave no sort of balance to the intelligent but overwhelmed Lewin. Andrew Stewart - also Lindsay Wellington's choice - was authoritarian and narrow. His judgements and decisions were forceful but formed on the values of the past. He would have liked the world of John Reith to be restored and he placed a large photograph of this "forefather" on his desk. Andrew Stewart was very ambitious, and so was Ronald Lewin, but to my mind they were both unfortunate appointments. Andrew Stewart had high hopes of becoming Director of Sound Broadcasting when Lindsay Wellington retired, but he was suddenly moved sideways to the post of Controller Scotland. He spoke to me once of his chagrin at this move and said that Management had made "a very great mistake".

Under the guidance of Andrew Stewart and Ronald Lewin, the Home Service meandered on. To Lewin the evenings remained the "prime time" and this was the period to which he devoted most of his thought and most of his programme allowance. This, in spite of the listening figures which, as time went on, showed ever more clearly that the Home Service would gain its biggest audiences in the day time. For example the audiences for the seven and eight AM and one PM news bulletins were far larger than that for the nine PM bulletin.

I think Lewin had a penchant for the evenings because this was the time when he himself and the world of academics he admired, were most likely to be free to listen. I remember that he

reprimanded me once for placing an interesting programme early in the evening. "Don't you realise" he said,"That the Master of the House doesn't get in until about seven thirty. I myself don't get home until then." I thought the phrase 'Master of the House' already had an old fashioned flavour, and I noted too that seven thirty, as a time for arriving home from work, applied more to the commuter belt in the South East - in which Ronald himself lived - than to the country as a whole. Lewin was not really interested in the period between nine AM and six PM, when women predominated in the available audience, and he left it to me to plan that time as economically as possible. I thought it a most important time for the future of radio.

A striking example of the thinking of those days concerned Schools' Broadcasting. Until 1973 Schools' Broadcasts went out on both the medium and VHF wavelengths of the Home Service (later retitled Radio Four), so too did Further Education broadcasts. The general listener who didn't want to be educated, had nothing to listen to between the hours of nine-five AM and twelve noon and two to three PM. Indeed Andrew Stewart, in a moment of extreme ignorance and folly, granted extra periods to Schools between one-forty and two PM and this was absolutely "prime time" for the general listener. It took years of pleading on my part- conducted privately between myself and the Head of Schools Department - to persuade him to surrender it again, and he did not do so until long after Andrew Stewart had returned to Scotland - the evil that men do lives after them. Lewin gave me no support, but I lobbied constantly for schools to be confined to VHF, leaving medium wave available for general programmes. Lindsay Wellington,

who was rightly intensely proud of Schools' Broadcasts, thought my campaign foolish, he even used the word 'vulgar'. When Frank Gillard succeeded Lindsay Wellington as DSB, I wrote a memo to him on the subject and he returned it to me with a short hand written note in the margin, in which he stated that my proposal was not only undesirable it was technically impossible. This in an age when men were already walking on the moon. I remember too a senior engineer lecturing me gently on the undesirability of speaking of a medium wave and VHF Network. He said the use of the word "Network" might give the management the idea that they could be split. He said Engineering Division was absolutely against it.

It was not until 1973 that Management, galvanised at last by the threat posed to BBC Radio by the imminent start of commercial radio, offered Tony Whitby, then Controller Radio Four, finance which enabled him to run programmes for the general listener throughout the day. An offer he took up with great excitement and listeners responded immediately and with enthusiasm to the new programmes he designed. Until 1973 it was left to me to choose inexpensive programmes to fill in the daytimes when schools were on holiday and this amounted to about three and a half months a year. It was a thankless task, for no regular audience would be established even if a series was popular with listeners. It would be taken on and off the air to suit schools' holidays and term time. I can't remember any members of the Directorate even mentioning the holiday programmes.

The most notable invention of Lewin's time was "Today", it was an immediate success and was a programme of influence all

through its early years. I myself am not sure if the seminal idea for "Today" came from Richard Marriott, then Assistant Director of Sound Broadcasting, George Camacho, then Head of Talks Department, or Ronald Lewin - all three of them worked to bring it about.

Ronald Lewin was not a robust man. He was always under strain and he suffered from deep depressions and was often on sick leave. In the last years of his tenure, many of his colleagues realised that something was wrong and I was always being asked questions. I was very often asked what the Management of the day thought about the situation. The answer was "Nothing". They seemed to be quite unaware that anything was amiss. Indeed I shall never forget the utter astonishment of Richard Marriott, then ADSB, when I went to his office on the 7th November 1964, to tell him that Ronald's wife had just telephoned me to say that he had had "another breakdown" and that she had just driven him to the Atkinson Morley Hospital "again" and he would remain there for some time. Lewin never returned to the BBC.

It gave me a wry smile when Frank Gillard said to me that if I had not worked so hard and supported Lewin so well he would have collapsed sooner and Management would have realised earlier what was going on. I never thought it was my duty to point out to Management something that they had every opportunity to notice for themselves. All the relevant members of Management: Gillard, Marriott, Standing, saw Lewin regularly. The failure was theirs. Besides I was Ronald Lewin's Chief Assistant and he had the right to count on my support. However, on the 13th January 1965,

Frank Gillard met me in a lift and said I had held the fort "magnificently". This must have consoled and pleased me for I noted it in my diary.

With Ronald's sudden departure, the Home Service, which was in a rather dilapidated condition and in need of renovation and redecoration, slid into my lap. I had for a long time, and without recognition, been doing much more than the work usually expected of a Chief Assistant, and I had now six months in which to run it whilst Ronald's affairs were settled and the date of his early retirement finally decided. Just one of the crises I had to face came within weeks of Ronald's disappearance, the extensive alterations to the schedules of the Home Service made necessary by the last illness and death of Sir Winston Churchill. It was no joke to deal with that sort of thing alone.

David Lloyd-James was later attached to help me on an acting basis. I scarcely know what to say about this. He was an old friend and an intelligent man with many years experience in the BBC but, like Ronald Lewin, he suffered from a depressive illness. He told me himself that he was an endogenous depressive and that his illness was hereditary. I actually had to wait for several weeks before he could appear in the office, because he was away with a nervous breakdown at the very time he was chosen by Management to be attached to the Home Service to assist in the crisis that had struck it because of Ronald Lewin's breakdown. When we began to work together it became apparent at once that his memory had been affected by the breakdown from which he was only just recovering. Even if he made notes, he could not remember

what duties he had been asked to undertake. Management had, of course, been aware that he had just had a breakdown when they chose him for the attachment. I did not therefore even think it worth my while to raise with them the question of his ability to to carry out complicated and detailed work on the Home Service schedules. I simply did it all myself - and very anxious and exhausting it was. I have had many thoughts about the ability of the Management of that time to judge staff and their capabilities. I believe the triumvirate of Gillard, Marriott and Standing were hopeless at it.

It was an immense relief when G.E.H.Mansell took up his duties as Head of Home Service in May 1965. He was enthusiastic, creative, energetic and a splendid organiser. Within a short time he had begun the extensive changes to the key period between twelve and two PM which enabled him to start "The World at One". This innovation was immediately successful and set a new style for current affairs programmes. But less than four years later, whilst there was still so much to do to improve the service, he left to take up other duties. He had been appointed Chairman of the Policy Study Group which was to recommend the future design of radio in the 1970s, and the recommendation of the Committee was adopted and Generic Radio started in 1971. In theory, Gerry Mansell was to return to Radio Four (for the Home Service had been retitled during his tenure) when his task with the Policy Study Group was completed. But, as he walked briskly and cheerfully out of his office on his way to start the new job, I thought to myself 'He won't come back', and I was right.

I took over on November 11th 1968, and for the next eleven

months ran the service with the title 'Acting Controller'. I believe that no-one but Gerry Mansell and myself realises that it fell to my lot to do a great deal towards the arrangement of the schedules for the new generic Radio Four which was to be, with very few exceptions, an all speech programme. Gerry Mansell gave me a single sheet pattern showing "Entertainment", "Current Affairs", etc. etc. and it was my task to fill it in with actual programmes and to get it costed and sanctioned for its demands on facilities. I remember my first draft was far too expensive and I had to comb out an immense sum, always a difficult thing to do.

I remember going on holiday and taking with me the folder containing the relevant papers for planning the next Quarterly Schedule. I remember sitting in the courtyard of a little inn, set in the vineyards above Lake Leman, working endlessly when I should have been enjoying myself in the sunshine. Again it was a difficult and exhausting time. Only two planners ran Radio Four - the Controller and his Chief Assistant - Gerry was both vigorous and effective and with his departure my work increased enormously. I was lucky to have Cormac Rogby, the Presentation Editor of Radio Three, attached to me as Acting Assistant, and he gave me all the help he possibly could, but it takes rigorous training before a planner can, for instance, draft a Quarterly Schedule, and I had to continue to do the more complicated jobs of the Chief Assistant myself as well as acting as Controller. There was a sense of deja vu about it all and I remembered the hard times when I had run the service during the long months before Ronald Lewin's premature retirement was announced. Shortly before Gerry Mansell, his task with the Policy Study

Group completed, was due to return, I learnt that - as I'd always guessed - he wouldn't do so. He had been appointed Managing Director of the External Services. (No, Director of Programmes, Radio)

Tony Whitby succeeded him as Controller in October 1969 and he remained Controller until his death in February 1975, just over five years later. In this short time he was original and creative. He had a special flair for picking out the clever ideas of other people and developing and embellishing them. Programme staff were always bringing him their ideas for his opinion and, a graceful trait and one that is not common, he never failed to give credit to those who had had the original idea, and was always most generous in acknowledging the efforts of others. To my mind Tony Whitby had an excellent concept of the importance of Radio Four and of the role that it could play and he built on the successes of the past, changing the structure only after careful and constructive thought and intensive study of the evidence available from Audience Research Department. He had a remarkable talent for interpreting the statistics provided by audience research. But he gradually became ill and in 1974 he learned that he had cancer of the liver and that it was inoperable. He told no-one, neither Management nor myself, but as I watched him lose weight and turn yellow and spend ever more time having distressing treatments in the Westminster Hospital and ever more time away on sick leave, I could do nothing but recognise what was happening. The Management of the day, who saw him frequently, remained quite unaware that anything serious was afoot. When his death came it was an immense shock to them. I could not help remembering the astonishment of an earlier Management when they learnt of Ronald Lewin's breakdown.

It was heart-rending but a privilege to work with him and to see the courage and resource with which he dealt with his mortal illness. He was looking into the future and planning for it to the last although he knew he would not take part in it. Ian Trethowan has said that Tony Whitby's death was at the end of an era and a tragedy for the BBC, and I agree with him.

On his death in February 1975, I was appointed Controller and held the post for eighteen months. I was proud to be chosen but I was already exhausted emotionally and physically and there was scarcely time for redesigning on a big scale. As chance had it, in the period just before Tony's death and during my Controllership, we were assailed by a number of political crises which caused heavy work. Dealing with them took up much of my time and energy. I handled, alone, two General Elections coming within a short period of each other, the extensive changes made necessary by the Fuel Crisis of February 1974 (which brought down the Heath Government) and the EEC Referendum. In addition, at this time, programme cuts had to be made, and Radio Four and Radio Three programme streams amalgamated at certain times of day, for economy reasons. Again it was hard times. My consolation in all this was the large number of colleagues at my own level and below who gave me their support in the hard times. I had about three hundred letters of congratulation when I was at last made Controller. These letters, and the annual reports written on my work in my last years by Gerry Mansell and Tony Whitby, were more than I deserved.

When I was a child I had a book called "Les Malheurs de Sophie" in which a little French girl went from one misfortune

to another. It may seem as though my BBC career could be summed up as "Les Malheurs de Clare", but that would leave out all the fun and friends, all the privileges - and the salary. I always was, and remain now, devoted to the BBC.

TONY WHITBY AS CONTROLLER RADIO FOUR

Tony Whitby was appointed Controller of Radio Four in October 1969 and he remained Controller until his death in February 1975. He was forty-six when he died. He had learned, in December 1974, that he had cancer of the liver but he kept this a secret at the BBC saying that he'd been operated on successfully for diverticulitis. In fact it had been an exploratory operation and it had revealed that he had only a short time to live. He was, therefore, Controller for just over five years.

It was always a pleasure to see him at work. His mind was very quick and his command of English, both spoken and written, was fluent and witty. He was creative and had many original ideas. He had a special flair for picking out the clever ideas of other people and developing and embellishing them by throwing out his own thoughts and suggestions. His office was often visited by producers who wanted, not so much his guidance - for guidance can be stultifying - as the stimulation of his conversation. However much he was involved, he never forgot to give credit to the originator of the idea, a graceful trait and one that is by no means common. I muself wish I could have worked with him earlier in my career, I could have learnt from his originality and informality.

Tony was born in 1929. His father was a commercial traveller in paints, and their home in Bristol was quite a humble one. Neither his mother nor his father had much formal education. There was tension between his father and mother and

their marriage, after many years, ended in divorce. Both his mother and father had unusual traits which one could see passed on to Tony and used by him in a more effective way than they had been able to use them. He was his mother's pride and joy, and, I have been told, had to make a conscious effort to break away and establish his personality in its own right. This he did when he went up to Oxford.

The first turning point in his life came when he gained a place at the Cathedral School in Bristol. Mr. Rich, the Headmaster, recognised his quality and encouraged him to try for Oxford. He gained a scholarship in languages to Saint Edmunds Hall but read PPE and got a second. Then he was awarded a scholarship to Nuffield College and read for a B.Litt. His National Service in the army gave him a wonderful year in the Intelligence Corps in Vienna, there he revelled in the arts and began to collect pictures.

He began his career proper in the Home Office, married, and started what was the major passion of his life - writing plays. His first play, "Meet me by Moonlight" was produced in Salisbury and, at its first night, the distinguished critic, George Black, stood up in the aisles in the interval and said to immense applause: 'I am taking this to London'. That gave Tony an introduction to Binkie Beaumont and the play had a five month run at the Aldwych Theatre. It seemed that his career as a playwright would be both brilliant and easy but, as it turned out, his first play was his most successful. He wrote several more, of which "The Chicken Girl", "Love by Appointment",

"The Breadwinner" and "My Son's Father" were all performed. He was making notes for yet another play when he died. I have heard it said that his playwriting distracted him from his work at the BBC, and it is true to say that it was a passion with him, and absorbed him almost totally whilst he was at it. Ian Trethowan once said to me, that he thought that Tony's idea of immortality was bound up with his plays, and I agree. He was once asked what his idea of paradise was, and he answered immediately 'Looking down and seeing a theatre full of people laughing at one of my plays'. It was not by chance that he wrote comedies. Laughter was the way he dealt with the complexities and tragedies of life. He relished the absurd. His playwriting did absorb him totally whilst he was at it, but it happened in outbursts for comparatively short periods, and it gave him the stature and interest of operating both within the BBC and beyond it. The danger for most of the programme staff is that they are never measured against the world outside and do not have this cross fertilisation.

Tony Whitby left the Home Office in 1958 to join the BBC. He was recruited by Grace Wyndham Goldie who had an eye for a brilliant young man, and he joined as a talks producer on the radio current affairs programme 'At Home and Abroad'. Later he transferred to television as an assistant producer working on 'Panorama'. He was then asked to start 'Gallery', a programme presented by Ian Trethowan - later to be a Director General of the BBC. From 'Gallery' he moved to 'Twenty-four Hours' which he took over and ran himself when Derek Amoore the editor was

promoted. His work in television had been intense and had perhaps put him under strain. It was at this point that he was invited to become Secretary to the BBC, a post that he accepted. He told me that he had just begun to weary of this establishment post when, in October 1969, he was appointed Controller of Radio Four.

I had been acting as Controller for nearly a year whilst Gerry Mansell chaired the Policy Study Group and I now had to return to my post as Chief Assistant. I always remember the aplomb with which Tony greeted me when I went to the handsomely panelled office which he occupied as Secretary, to congratulate him on his appointment. He flew across the room, kissed me and still holding my hand said: 'You will be asking yourself why him? And you'll be asking yourself why not me? And I don't know what to say'. It was done so naturally and with such high spirits that I really loved him for it and we worked together in complete accord from then onwards.

He was very professional in his work. He was intelligent enough to build on the existing programme structure of Radio Four where it was solid and successful but to change it with clever and sometimes brilliant strokes where it could be improved. And this was a continuing process. He had a remarkable talent for interpreting audience research statistics, and he studied them very carefully before he rearranged the schedules. One of the biggest developments undertaken in my thirty-five years in planning was when, in 1973, Radio Four medium wave and VHF networks were split to enable programmes for the general listener

to be broadcast throughout the day on medium wave, whilst Schools, Further Education and the Open University went out on VHF. Tony Whitby's design for the new daytime programmes on medium wave, Mondays through Fridays between 0905 and twelve noon, was an immediate success with listeners.

A dominant trait in his character, and one from which I benefitted greatly as I worked with him, was the high esteem in which he held a woman's intelligence and ideas. He took women as seriously as men. Esther Rantzen has paid tribute to this trait, and she had good reason to be grateful for it, for Tony spotted her in a lowly job in the BBC and helped promote her. To treat women as intellectual equals is rare, even today in 1979, and in my experience it shows that the man has a good deal of confidence in himself. I have noticed that those to whom it is of great importance to believe that men lead and women follow, often in fact feel threatened by women.

When, in 1974, Tony learned that he had cancer of the liver and that it was inoperable, he told no-one, neither Management nor myself. But, as I watched him lose weight and turn yellow, and spend ever more time having distressing treatments in Westminster Hospital, and ever more time on sick leave, I could not do anything but recognise what was happening. The Management of the day, who also saw him frequently, were quite unaware that anything serious was amiss. When his death came it was an immense shock to them.

It was a strange experience, heart-rending but a privilege, to work with him and to see the courage and resource with which

he dealt with his mortal illness. He was looking to the future and planning for it to the last, although he knew he would not take part in it. Michael Mayne, then Head of Religious Broadcasting Department, Radio, told me that Tony had written to him asking him to arrange his Memorial Service and that Tony had written that, whilst he had no formal belief, he was proud to have been brought up in the Judao Christian tradition. He may not have had any formal belief, but I thought he had rare spiritual qualities. He faced his own death with extraordinary courage and by his example taught Joy, the wife he loved so much, and myself and the small team working most closely with him, how to accept his going.

Ian Trethowan has said that Tony Whitby's death was the end of an era and a tragedy for the BBC. Tony was not ambitious in the unpleasing or calculating sense of the word, but he wanted to play a part in his world and to be remembered for having played it well. Many of his colleagues believed that he would have gone on to the Board of Management - even to be a Director General of the BBC, if he had not died at the age of forty-six.

WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE WRONG

(Part I)

I have often been asked if I think that there is prejudice against women in the BBC. Up to the level of Producer women run about the place like rabbits. After that there's a remarkable thinning out, and in 1977 the BBC has reached the age of 54 without a single woman having made Board of Management. There is undoubtedly prejudice in the BBC, but I believe it simply reflects the social climate of our times. Most men, and many women, are conditioned in their attitudes to the working relationship of the sexes and the conditioning is accepted so naturally that they're usually not even aware that they are affected and would be surprised if it was pointed out to them. I will give a single typical example of conditioned thinking in action, which at the time I found both amusing and exasperating. The Reith Lectures started in 1947 and have now been running for thirty years. In all that time only one woman has contributed to the series, Marjory Pelham in 1961, and very good she was, the audience reaction to her lectures was most favourable.

In due course a memo was circulated asking for suggestions for the Reith Lecturer for 1962. It was written by a senior official in Talks and Current Affairs Department, Sound. A number of names were put forward, I myself suggested Mrs. Pandit Nehru. She had been the first High Commissioner of the newly created State of India, she had just retired from this post and was therefore free from official restrictions and able to undertake such assignments. I suggested her because of her unique experience. She was a daughter of two worlds, East and West.

She had been born in India, and educated in Great Britain. She loved both countries and had homes in each of them. She had taken part in the struggle for Indian independence and had been imprisoned by the British. She belonged to the great ruling family of India and Nehru, the first President of the new State, was her uncle. And she was a most remarkable broadcaster who gained exceptionally high audience ratings whenever she went on the air.

Later a second memo from the Senior Talks Official was circulated, pulling together the various names proposed and commenting on those he thought most suitable. He had added a postscript at the foot of his memo 'Mrs. Pandit Nehru has also been suggested, but you may not think it wise to have a woman give the Reith Lectures in two consecutive years'. He could never have asked himself if it was "wise" for men to give the Reith Lectures year after year, that seemed to him only right and proper. A secretary, whom I had always admired for her great common sense, read the memo and remarked to me 'He believes he has raised an important policy point. And it is for thinking of this quality that he is paid a very large salary'. The danger that he pointed out to his male colleagues must have seemed to them a very real one for I have never heard Mrs. Pandit Nehru's name mentioned in this context again.

I must add that the BBC official who gave this careful advice, and prevented the BBC from falling into a pitfall, was in every way a lesser figure than the stateswoman he judged. She was internationally known and he was not. She had played an

important part in the political life of her country and he had not equalled this in his own career. And she was a brilliantly intelligent and original thinker. To this day, for the BBC, women's place is in the wrong.

WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE WRONG

(Part II)

The thirties were a period of high unemployment and I was delighted to be offered a post as a clerk in the Registry at a salary of £2.15 shillings a week. And in the Registry I remained for the next five years, filing letters. There was little chance for the promotion of women in the pre war days. A small number were sprinkled through the staff in the more senior posts, some as producers, some as administrators. These women were rather like the statutory black invited to cocktail parties given by liberal Americans in the fifties. They both signalled the fact that Management was aware that the role of working women might develop and satisfied Management's conscience that they were doing something about it. And they could always be pointed out as examples. None of the women had made Board of Management. Indeed a woman has still not risen to that position even today in 1979. It must be remembered however, that the BBC was only holding the attitudes and conforming to the customs of those times. Those were the days when the most highly paid woman in the Bank of England was the lady cook.

However, to me, and to quite a lot of girls who thought like me, an unpleasing aspect of those days was the powerful all women section of Staff Department, headed by a Miss Freeman, with her unattractive title 'Women's Staff Supervisor'. Once recruited for a lowly job, you were looked on by her as conceited or even rebellious if you tried to move upwards.

The Women's Staff Supervisor and her team of ladies were often rather trivial. One girl was reprimanded for walking through the door of Yarners (a popular coffee shop near the BBC) without standing back to allow a more senior secretary to go through first. Watch and ward was kept over dress. Anyone who came without stockings on a hot day would be spoken to at once, and it was only after the outbreak of war that women were allowed to wear trousers. Even then a male staff administrator wrote a memo to the Women's Staff Supervisor stating that, whilst the wearing of trousers in war time conditions was allowed, it was not to be encouraged. He added that he himself made audible remarks when passed by a lady wearing them. We girls on our side were too polite to comment in return on his old fashioned, high stiff collars worn with a silk stock and fastened with a pearl pin.

My generation already thought and felt quite differently and the more avant garde amongst us were contemptuous of our Women's Supervisors.

Although much of the annoyance was about trivial matters like dress and decorum, it could be dangerous to be in their bad books for those were the days of hire and fire, and staff who annoyed could be easily dismissed. Clever and original, Jo Plumer, came down with excellent degrees from Oxford and was safely placed as a secretary. In the years to come she rose to be Assistant Head of Children's Hour. Jo told me that, much to her delight, her own personal file was sent to her in error. In it she read the note of her first interview with the BBC and

Miss Freeman's summing up - 'Will need to be ridden with a tight rein'.

I myself committed a 'booboo'. After some years in Registry I applied for the post of play reader in Drama Department (salary £4.00 a week) which had been advertised internally. I was boarded and, long after, the Chairman of the Board told me it had taken them some time to decide whether I myself or the man who was eventually chosen should get the job, so I had done quite well. But Miss Freeman called me up and told me I had caused great consternation and, she added, "insulted" my seniors by applying for the post in an incorrect manner. I pointed out that I'd filled in an official application form in great detail, but she said that made no difference, I should have sought her permission before filling it in. And I have no doubt she would have refused it. It is difficult to imagine in these days my dreadful embarrassment over this incident.

A friend of mine, Helen, brilliant at school and at University, applied for the post of talks producer, which had been advertised in "The Listener". She told me the story of her interview with great gusto. She was seen by George Barnes who had the delightful title 'Director of the Spoken Word', Helen told me Barnes had grown ever more delighted by her qualifications and her style as the interview progressed and he offered her the job. At this point she let slip a remark about 'My husband'. His manner changed at once. 'If you are married', he said, 'the interview has been a waste of time. The BBC doesn't employ married women'. 'That's too bad', said Helen, 'We only married last week and we've been living together for two years before that. Would you have taken me on if I'd applied eighteen months

ago?' George Barnes was embarrassed and said 'Probably we would because we wouldn't have known anything about it'. 'The BBC's moral attitude seems confused', said Helen 'Would it help you if I took a lover?'. But George Barnes thought not and this exceptional and creative woman never applied to the BBC again.

The old fashioned unit under the command of its Women's Staff Supervisor was swept away soon after the outbreak of war and a more satisfactory organisation was introduced. Miss Freeman became Staff Welfare Officer, Health, for a short time and then, rather late in life, married and retired from the BBC. So there was a happy ending after all.

SIR STEPHEN TALLENTS:

A Portrait as I knew him.

Sir Stephen Tallents joined the BBC in 1935 to fill the newly created post of Controller Public Relations. He was well qualified for he was an innovator in that art or science, whichever it may be. He had worked in the Empire Marketing Board and had written a pamphlet 'The Projection of Britain' which had had seminal influence. When the Empire Marketing Board was shut down as part of a Government economy drive, Tallents took charge of public relations at the General Post Office. Here again he was the centre of a remarkably creative outburst. In particular the film unit at the Post Office in his time was outstanding and has a place in the history of the development of the documentary film. When World War II broke out the BBC moved Tallents from public relations to the supremely important post of Controller of the Overseas Services. Under his command they grew from a small pre-war nucleus to an immense multi-language output, broadcasting the story of Britain at war to the world. It was after the Overseas Services had expanded, and after their tremendous influence had been recognised, that the Foreign Office made their successful bid to take over the European Services of the BBC.

What sort of man was Tallents? He has written his own autobiography, 'Man and Boy', and it reveals him both as a product of his time and as an unusual and original personality. He was born in 1884 into a rich family. His maternal grandfather was Thomas Cubitt, the Victorian builder who, among other feats, filled in the swamps of Belgravia and covered the land he thus

regained with magnificent houses. He also refronted Buckingham Palace.

Tallents was brought up in the kindest and most comfortable of Victorian households. His upbringing was also conventional and might have been stultifying if he had not had so well defined a personality. He loved the simplest way of living and would have been very happy as a peasant.

Tallents was educated at Harrow and Oxford; he took a course in French at the University of Grenoble and, like many of the young men from privileged backgrounds in his day, he worked for some time amongst the poor at Toynbee Hall. In 1909 he started his career proper in the marine office of the Civil Service. In 1911 he was invited to transfer to the Board of Trade, where, with Sir Hubert Llewellyn and William Beveridge as his seniors, he took part in the struggle to set up the first Labour Exchanges. He joined the Irish Guards in September 1914 and was gravely wounded in France in 1915, on a day when his battalion lost a hundred killed and missing and three hundred wounded. Indeed he told me that he never expected to recover. A sadistic surgeon who used to examine his wound and then look up and say 'You won't get over this you know', confirmed him in his belief. In the second World War, Stephen Tallents and I shared "Shelter D" - a small brick cellar under Egton House. Once when a brisk raid was in progress overhead, he told me that he had faced death and lost all fear of it at that time when he was so sure he would die. Years later I

saw him in his last days, composed and still full of mental vigour, conducting some last valuable strokes of business for my brother Oliver, to whose public relations firm he acted as adviser. Tallents recovered from his wound, but he never returned to the Western Front. By 1917 he was working once again with Beveridge, helping him draw up a scheme for food rationing on the Home Front.

In 19... In 1919, with the war over, Tallents volunteered to go to Poland to act as one of the overseers to the distribution of relief in ravaged Eastern Europe. This was followed by the most extraordinary adventure of his life. Lloyd George knew him personally and in 1919 chose him to head a mission to the Baltic. He was there for eighteen months. Tallents had a flair for picking staff. With him on his mission went a fellow officer from the Irish Guards, the youthful Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander, later to become Field Marshal.

In 1919, the three Baltic countries - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were menaced on two sides. Germany had capitulated in the West, but a large German army under its commander, General von der Goltz, was still fighting successfully on the Eastern front and the avowed intention of von der Goltz was to turn the three states into German colonies. Although unwillingly, the Allies had to tolerate this as the three states would otherwise have been overrun by Bolshevik forces. For Russia, although in the throes of her own revolution, was occupying a large part of Latvia and she intended to swallow the three states if she could. In all, six groups were manoevuring for control. In addition to the Germans

and the Bolsheviks, the Baltic Landswehr, a force recruited from Balts of German descent and sympathetic to von der Goltz, were in close liaison with him. White Russians were grouped in armies on the Russian frontiers poised to overthrow the Bolsheviks and the Nationalists of the three states intended to throw off both German and Bolshevik control and establish themselves as independent. The Allies supported the Nationalists. They saw the advantage of three small buffer states between Russia and Germany on the Southern Baltic shore. The Supreme Allied Council of the Allies, sitting at Versailles, made it clear that they did not intend to intervene with an expeditionary land force to restore order. But the British sent a fleet in November 1918 to show their support for the Nationalists and to contain the Russian fleet at Kronstadt. Tallents was given the title 'British Commissioner for the Baltic Provinces' and, with a small staff, was sent into this turmoil to see what he could do. For a few days, at a time of great crisis, he was actually proclaimed 'Acting Governor of Riga'.

In his autobiography, Tallents writes: 'Britain and Britain's sea power exercised in the turbulent years of 1919 to 1920, a predominant influence on Baltic affairs. It was largely because of this influence that the three Baltic countries lived tranquilly between 1920 and 1940 when Russia annexed them'. Tallents told me, and this he has not put in his autobiography, that each of the Nationalist Governments in turn approached him to ask if their countries could become part of the British Empire.

Tallents said it would have been impossible for Britain to protect them, but it shows the prestige of the British Empire at that time. Alexander has described vividly just one crisis in which Tallents played the central role. In early June, 1919, the British mission moved to Riga. The Estonians and Germans were fighting a dozen miles outside the town. Tallents could not allow this war within a war to continue. Estonia had been cleared of Bolsheviks and the German advance had no legitimate purpose. So, accompanied by Alexander, Tallents set out to arrange an armistice. Alexander in a letter home wrote: 'We set off in a special train at midnight, and reached the point about five miles behind the Estonian lines. Here once again we heard the "rat-tat" of the machine guns and the music of the artillery. We crossed the lines in a motor flying the Union Jack and a white flag, and stopped at a school house about a hundred yards behind the German lines. Here we met representatives of the Estonians, the Landeswehr, the Latts and the Russians. The conference started at nine p.m. and at three-thirty the next morning the armistice was signed. It was a terrific struggle to get the different sides to agree, but Tallents was marvellous and pulled it off, although several times I thought it was impossible. The whole proceedings were very dramatic. We all sat round a table in a bare room with candles flickering in the draught. Tallents was tremendously alert, business-like'. Alexander adds that French representatives obviously did not understand a word of the discussion in English but looked "frightfully formal and severe", whilst the American

representative made longwinded speeches entirely off the point and was rather snubbed by the Germans.

By the terms of the treaty of Strasdenhof Armistice, the Estonians agreed to stay their ground and the Germans to withdraw from Riga within forty-eight hours and from the whole of Latvia by the end of October. It was a great triumph for Tallents' diplomacy. Telling me of this episode Tallents pointed out that he had no land forces in support and the British navy could scarcely follow him on shore. He said he went to bed without the slightest idea whether von der Goltz would retire or not, and woke in the morning to hear, with great astonishment, the sound of the German army leaving Riga. The Germans also withdrew from Latvia by the end of October as they had agreed. In July 1919 the Germans made a new attack on Riga. In order to stop the Baltic Landeswehr from joining forces with them, Tallents put Alexander - still in his twenties - at their head and told him ... told him to march them to the Bolshevik front and keep them there out of harm's way, "We wanted to march on Riga", said one of the Balts later,"and perhaps we ought to have done it in our own interests, but in that case we should have had to knock Alexander on the head and we liked him far too much so we stayed quiet in our trenches."

There is a group photograph taken on the Bolshevik front. In it Colonel Tallents wears the tweed cap and suit of an English country gentleman. Colonel Alexander is wearing a remarkable winter blend of Irish Guards and Russian uniform, and a Bolshevik representative and officers of the Baltic Landeswehr are in jackets,

breeches and high boots. An unusual company in unusual clothing.

The Baltic adventure was undoubtedly the peak of Tallents' career and he was awarded the KCMG for it. This experience put him in a different class from the other senior BBC officials of his time. A difference recognised by Reith who, Tallents told me, had said: 'If I sacked Tallents he could get another job the next day unlike the rest'. One should remember how many of the top directors of the BBC in the 1930s had been fighting men in World War I. Reith himself (who had gained his famous facial scar in the trenches), Sir Noel Ashbridge, Admiral Carpendale, B.E.Nicholls, Sir Stephen Tallents and many more. It set a style at the top level that was manly. These were men who had lived life at its rawest and survived.

Looking back I feel that Stephen Tallemts and the BBC never quite suited each other. I think that a very likely reason for this was that the two distinguished posts he held - Controller Public Relations and Controller Overseas Services - were neither of them close enough to real broadcasting. His qualities were that he was unusual. He had a flair for discovering talent in others and a rare preference for looking to the future of the arts rather than to their past. In the posts he held at the BBC he was an "official", removed from the noise actually made on the air. He did not deal directly with writers, composers or performers. I remember him saying to me 'The man at the top is only the chauffeur of the Rolls Royce. He doesn't design it. He doesn't build it. He just puts on a uniform and drives it'.

Tallents seemed to have played a foolish part in the embarrassing case of Lambert, the Editor of "The Listener" and the Mongoose (see Asa Briggs). But I remember Tallents telling me that the famous memo signed by himself in March 1936, in which Lambert was warned that his career might be affected if he persisted in bringing an action for libel (a letter which encouraged Lambert to file a suit immediately) had been written by Tallents at the direct instruction of the Board of Governors. He said the Governors never confessed this publicly and left him holding the baby.

Tallents had many lifelong and distinguished friends, from Field-Marshal Alexander to Lloyd George (with whom he took me to tea in 1940), but he had few close associates at the BBC. He and Sir Noel Ashbridge liked and respected each other and he had a close relationship with A.P. Ryan, whom he had recruited to the BBC in 1936. But, whilst he was warm and affectionate with his family and friends, he was reserved and even shy with most of his BBC colleagues. I think Sir John Reith had divined correctly that Stephen Tallents was a cut above the rest of his senior staff - and I think this left him rather isolated.

In 1941 the Foreign Office set in motion its scheme for the eventual take-over of the policy control of the BBC European Services. I suppose the most surprising thing was that they hadn't assumed control on the outbreak of war. But perhaps the Foreign Office hadn't realised the influence these broadcasts were to have in Europe and throughout the world, until the BBC and Stephen Tallents

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had built the service up and proved it.

In 1941 Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick was loaned to the BBC as Adviser on Foreign Policy. After a short and difficult period in which he and Sir Stephen Tallents ran in double harness, with Tallents ostensibly in "control" and Kirkpatrick "advising", the Foreign Office took over and their man Kirkpatrick became Controller, European Services. Tallents, who had had to put up with the ignominy of all this, left the BBC and returned to the General Post Office, where he worked until his retirement a year or two later. Thus it was the Foreign Office in whose service Tallents had gone on the Baltic mission, a task for which he had been rewarded with the KCMG, who, many years later, ended his career by a rather painful manoeuvre.

Long after, travelling on a bus, I met Sir Frederick Ogilvie who had been Director General whilst all this took place. Sir Frederick had been dispensed with himself by then. "We paid him off handsomely" as Sir Alan Powell, Chairman of the Board of Governors, once remarked to me. On the bus, Sir Frederick said to me that he realised he should have resigned when Stephen Tallents was edged out and he regretted that he had not done so. It would have been a striking and a brave gesture, although it would have achieved nothing. And of course, if he had resigned, he wouldn't have had the 'golden handshake'. It may be thought surprising that I should have had conversations of this sort with senior officials when I myself was still the clerk whose function

it was to take the minutes of Control Board meetings. I've put it down to the fact that most men feel safe in saying what they think to a woman when they might feel it indiscreet to express themselves so freely to a man who might later turn out to be a rival.