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ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC: DESMOND HAWKINS

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BBC ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SIDE 1

GILLARD The oral history of the BBC. It's October 3rd 1989. This is Frank Gillard today in conversation with Desmond Hawkins at his home in Blandford Forum in Dorset. Desmond, you served all your BBC career in a region. Staff career, yes, and we are going to talk mainly about regional broadcasting between us. What would you say was the role of regional broadcasting in the early postwar years? You came in in 1945.

HAWKINS Yes, that's right. Well the sort of banner headline I always carried with me was John Maynard Kane's, in some report who said, "Let every part of Merrie England be merry in its own way". And I used to quote that sometimes to those who didn't see a point in the regions. That seemed to me a very good single phrase for it. I was going into the West Country and I was going to want to see the West Country being "merry in its own way". That's as good a phrase as I can think of.

GILLARD And do you believe that was a BBC concept as well? I mean that was your concept and a very nice one, but how do you think the BBC saw regional broadcasting?

HAWKINS Well I wonder, because historically you see it had grown up from the Regions had it not. I remember the very first time I appeared in RADIO TIMES it was in a programme in 1936, which in those days was called THE REGIONAL PROGRAMME, but it included the London region, and in

effect it really was a sort of BBC second channel. But it was called regional, and because of all sorts of technical problems the BBC grew up in separate centres, didn't it. So there was that kind of tradition, and I think after the war there was a feeling of getting back to that a bit, speaking of central policy. I mean thinking of people who weren't greatly regionally minded, but felt nevertheless that the sense of regional identities was something worth keeping and restoring, and of course there was the obvious pressure of the nations of the Scots and the Welsh and Northern Ireland who had a clearer identity and wanted it to be honoured. So I would have thought the BBC for that reason, and partly I think because the Corp. after the war seemed to me very conscious of its public relations, of wanting to have a standing in communities. That I think was a very valuable part of BBC life actually. And I think that was recognised centrally, that it was desirable to be loved in Taunton and Aberdeen and Belfast, if you were going to be a great national institution.

GILLARD You had to have deep roots.

HAWKINS Yes, yes.

GILLARD Now there were you, a man of considerable reputation if I may say so. I mean you were an author, you were a poet, a novelist, a critic. You moved in very important circles in London, high circles, literary circles, and then in 1945 you came to a regional job. What attracted you to it, particularly you personally?

HAWKINS Oh very much the positive interest that I'd had as a writer in decentralising, in stopping London

becoming "The Great Wen", as Cobbet called it. And stopping it sort of mopping up all talent, becoming too big a magnet and I'd gone out into England away from central London when I could do. You know I'd explored to the West. At one time I lived in Guildford, and over the Hog's Back there was this wonderful magical country of the West Country. So that there was a kind of romantic thing about coming out of London into what seemed to me more like <u>real</u> England. But I did have this philosophical thing which I'd written about a fair bit at that time, that it really was important to decentralise, that we were becoming a much too centralised nation, so that drew me. And if I may so, this is a personal thing, which you mustn't mind me saying, but part of my job at the end of the war was working on WAR REPORT, so that I'd met the war correspondents and I had a kind of shopping list with questions for each of them as they came back, and so I met Richard Dimbleby and Wynford and the rest of them, and I met Frank Gillard, and he was going down to start regional broadcasting, and I felt this was a man I'd like to be with, and wanting to work with.

GILLARD How you flatter me then. Did you find it as fulfilling as you'd hoped?

HAWKINS Oh enormously so. Yes, I did. I mean really immensely so. I was known in a kind of joke by my North Regional colleagues as "Homo Regionalis" I was sometimes described as, and I did find a real fulfilment in being a regional man, and I mean fairly late in my life I had one or two suggestions I should return to London for one reason or another, and they were very tempting reasons. But I felt that

I would like to serve my time out in the region that I'd grown up with.

GILLARD Well how did regional broadcasting in those days fit into the general broadcasting pattern? What was its place in the output so to speak, in the programme schedules?

HAWKINS Well I was simply a producer, so that there were many things that I'm sure weren't revealed to me. But the place as I understood it was really to do two things. I mean one was to get right into the community of the region, to understand it, to rejoice in it, to reflect it, to encourage it. To be part of a larger family, a larger community. That was one thing it seemed to me that the regions were there to do. But the other was to bring into the network those particular qualities that the regions had, I mean qualities of speech and style, of talent, particularly things that might attract the nation to know about, and to share in. So it seemed to me it had this double purpose. It had to first of all satisfy the homely, local needs of people who had their own way of enjoying things, and then it had to say, well here are also things that the nation would like to have a chance to share in, and you had to be able to take it to the nation in the terms that the nation could understand it and accept it.

GILLARD The region.. regional broadcasting was part of what was then called the Home Service pattern, wasn't it?

HAWKINS Yes.

GILLARD Well then how much freedom did the

regions have to break into the basic Home Service as I think it was called and do their own job, so to speak?

HAWKINS Well that, you would almost have to ask the Head of Programmes at that time, because he knew much better than I did. But it didn't seem to me that we had any very severe restrictions on what we did. I mean there were one or two things obviously that you wouldn't tamper with that had to be there. Big national occasions, national news, things of that sort. But apart from that, I mean if we had a programme that seemed to require to be at a certain time of day or night, at a certain area in the Home Service that was expecting music or poetry or a play or something of that sort, I don't think there was anything that stopped us doing it. Occasionally, we would have a stake in a running series, and I suppose as running series became established, there was a particular problem, but I mean I can remember doing an occasional SATURDAY NIGHT THEATRE, simply because there was a space for it in the schedules, and London said they'd like Bristol to do one, and so we did one.

GILLARD What was the command structure then in the region?

HAWKINS Well the two essential figures obviously were the Controller and the Head of Programmes. The Controller tended to take a very wide view and to reckon that his programme responsibility was a relatively small one, I mean that he should appoint a Head of Programmes and should come to appointments boards for the major producing staff and so on, and they should tend to let the programme people get on with

programme making. I'm sure he gave guidance and counsel and I found it very helpful when I had contact with him, but it wasn't very often. I'd see him once a year at my annual interview, and I'd see him in open meetings and that sort of thing. But from a producer's point of view, I mean the God in your sky was the Head of Programmes. He was the man who commissioned you, who encouraged you, who told you the kind of things he thought were useful for you to develop, and provided the schedule space and the money and all that. I mean he was the captain of the regiment.

GILLARD And did you have the technical resources in the region that were necessary? I mean the basic ones, were they all there, studios and so on?

HAWKINS Yes, on the whole in radio I think they were. I mean we had a big music studio. We had quite good drama studios, and you know I wasn't aware of any great shortcomings in that sort of way. We had the standard outside broadcast and recording car type of equipment in radio. It really wasn't until the much bigger capital demands of television that one became more aware of problems. I mean I think immediately after the war the BBC was not finding it difficult to provide what the regions wanted in the way of technical equipment.

GILLARD Hmm yes, and I believe actually... was Bristol the only production centre? Let me put it that way.

HAWKINS Well Bristol was almost the only production centre. There was an obligation to Plymouth which

was always a worry to people. There was a Plymouth studio, and I say studio, a studio centre, and in charge of it was Colonel Stafford, who I believe had done yeoman work in the war in charge of the Home Guard in London. But he wasn't really a programme making man, but he was put in charge of Plymouth. There was very little talent that any of us could discover down there. I mean it was so dominated by the Navy and the dockyard, and that is a very shifting population. It's sometimes there and sometimes it's gone to sea or whatever. So that it was unlike Bristol, and it didn't have drama schools. It didn't have anything much in the way of theatre. It had nothing musically. It was a bit of a wilderness. Nevertheless there was an obligation to try to make some use of Plymouth as a studio centre. But that was the only one.

GILLARD Of course I suppose Plymouth wasn't a bad news centre.

HAWKINS No. Oh no. In that sense it was important of course, but it was the great centre of Naval Command, and I mean it was the centre through which anything from Cornwall and the Scillies and all that kind of thing. I mean it covered a bit area. But in programme making terms, it wasn't as fertile as one would have wished, and not as fertile as Bristol was.

GILLARD But then you had that great South Eastern corner of the region which extended right up as far as Brighton along the English Channel, and Bristol was a very long way from there. What about... how did you manage about getting programme material out of those, that particularly distant

part?

HAWKINS Well I've some personal guilt here, because my Controller, Sir Gerald Beadle, he took the view, and I can understand his view, and I can respect it, that the region must never go east of Bournemouth. I mean that was what he dinned into me, that we would begin to lose our identity as a region if we went east of Bournemouth. But, against that was the knowledge that the marvellous transmitter we had at Start Point, medium wave transmitter, I'm talking now in terms of radio, sprayed right up the English Channel with a magnificent signal, so that we were right up to as far as Worthing. We were getting people saying, "We listen to your news. Why do we never hear anything about Worthing in it?" And when you came of course further east, you'd got Portsmouth, you'd got Southampton, huge urban conurbations there, big audiences who were having to listen to this and naturally were restive and saying, "We never hear anything about ourselves". So that this was a running problem I think, and of course always although you can try to make your boundaries in a real demographic way, they are drawn ultimately by transmitters. I mean your audience is the audience that hears your programmes, and it was compounded when television came of course, and the big television transmitter went up in the Isle of Wight, and with it went up VHF radio, so that more that area east of Bournemouth that Sir Gerald didn't wish to go into was ... was a big slice of our audience, and you either had to tell them to go away, or switch off, or you had to try and cater for them. And I personally became very interested in Southampton where we

had simply just an unattended studio originally in the library there, and I moved Peter Maggs down there, because I found that the people of Southampton liked his way of covering them. He'd rather specialised in Southampton on the news side, when Pat Beech was news editor, he tended to send Peter to Southampton. He got on well with him, and so I persuaded Peter to uproot himself and go down, and start a little cell of one permanent man there with the idea that we would try to develop it as something like Plymouth.

GILLARD And eventually something came out of that, but not until the television age, I think.

HAWKINS Well we got some things out of it. When I succeeded Frank Gillard as Head of Programmes, I used occasionally at management meetings and so on to point out that we were solemnly sending OB trucks and engineers up and down the road from Bristol to Southampton constantly every time we wanted the Bournemouth Orchestra or whatever, and it seemed to me to be altogether more rational to have some sort of control centre there, and to be able to bring things up the line without sending a great posse of men and vehicles down two, three, four times a week sometimes you know, with all the cost of that. But television of course made the big difference because it then became possible to get cameras in there. It's funny to look back on, but it was a great triumph at the time when we got a little camera studio on the Ocean Terminal, because of all the celebrities who used to come off the Queen Mary, from Noel Coward onwards, and if there was a camera right there, you'd get a good quick interview from them, and this

seemed a very important thing to do. But alas, the aeroplane, the aeroplane (LAUGHS) they all began to fly, and our little studio was turned into a white elephant.

GILLARD Yes, but you mentioned unattended studios. I think West Region pioneered those, and you developed quite a lot of them around the place, didn't you?

HAWKINS Yes, we did. Because when you look at the region it's a long sprawling peninsular, and communications aren't all that good, so that the whole idea of the unattended studio, which I mean clearly grew up under the two headings really of news and sport. They were the two very valuable things that you could get a reporter quite quickly into a reasonably local centre where he could operate, gear himself, he knew enough to do that, and you weren't always having to wait for him to make a two hour journey to bring his report to the microphone. And you say the West Region pioneered it, and I daresay it's so. I'm not sort of conscious of that, but I can believe that it was so, and it was immensely... I suppose another thing is of course we had a number of islands to deal with, and it's a very useful function if you want a story out of the Scillys, or if you want a story from even the Isle of Wight, it's very valuable if you've got an unattended studio in those sort of circumstances, if you haven't got water to cross.

GILLARD Yes. Now as a producer, did you find that there were satisfactions in regional broadcasting as distinct from London broadcasting?

HAWKINS Oh yes, enormously. Enormously so,

because you know, you were in the community, and you were part of it, and the people who heard your programmes were the people round about you, so that you got a lot of feedback in that sort of way. I mean some of it favourable, some of it unfavourable, but all of it welcome, because it was useful. So that in that sense, I think so.

GILLARD And there was actually a Regional Advisory Council, I believe.

HAWKINS Yes, indeed there were several. I mean there was a General Advisory Council which was very useful. I mean it was picked with great care to get as many blended organisations within it as you could do, so that if you wanted somebody who spoke with some authority for the Church, somebody for the trade unions, somebody for the universities, and then you wanted different age groups, you didn't want them all to be the same age, because it's terribly easy to get eminent people just retiring to come for an Advisory Council, and before you know where you are, your average is 63, which isn't really quite typical of your audience. So that you had to try to get these different blendings to work, and it was taken seriously, and it was valued. Then there were the specialised ones, you see there was one that dealt simply with appeals in the days when THE WEEK'S GOOD CAUSE was the only kind of appeal the BBC would allow. And you really needed to have people who understood that world to evaluate these things. You couldn't just do it on whim and personal fancy. And there was a religious advisor in the Council similarly.

GILLARD And of course there were

agricultural groups and all the rest. I mean they came and went some of them, but there were quite a number I remember, yes.

HAWKINS One I resisted, I must tell you, was Max Nicholson was very keen to have a Natural History Advisory Council.

GILLARD Oh, really.

HAWKINS And Max Nicholson was not easy to fight off. (LAUGHS)

GILLARD Was there a discernible programme policy in the region? And did other regions have discernible policies that you can remember?

HAWKINS Well I think we had a discernible policy, because I mean.. I should explain we were really a very close group. The whole of us as a bunch of producers, you know, it was round about a dozen or so, so that we would sit with Frank Gillard, who as I say was probably the inspiration of the region, and we would kick around ideas and talk with him, and we would get his feeling, and I think we would come away with a fairly clear idea of what it was we were trying to do. I mean among other things, I don't know whether you want me to talk about ANY QUESTIONS? here, but it's very relevant that one of the first things after the war was to get out on the road with a kind of programme that brought in audiences, and I mean if only to make the conviction that we were in business as a region, so that we wanted not to be shut up in studios in Bristol in a sort of inaccessible way, but to get out and about, and there were many shows in that time. I mean

I think every one of us I would think, had quite an experience of getting round the region, going into a village with whatever formula of programme we were working on. I mean I did, although I was a Features and Documentary producer, and you might have thought that was largely constructed programme in studios, but a lot of my time was spent out and about in the region, getting to know it, getting to know people, talking to them, finding out whether they listened to the programmes and what they wanted, and that would have been true I think of everyone of my colleagues, that we were constantly on the move in the region, with the microphone.

GILLARD What .. what about programme standards. I mean in the press world you don't expect the same quality of journalism in the County paper and the local paper as you get in your London quality papers. But what about... is that true in broadcasting?

HAWKINS I think in broadcasting, the big difference between then and now if I may look at now as well, was that we were big enough. I mean we weren't just a town or a county, we were a region. I mean we stretched from Swindon to the Scilly Isles, so that we didn't have to be as it were in the pockets of small communities. We stood apart from them. We hoped we spoke for them, but we didn't feel in any way, I don't think, gagged or censored by the kind of feedback that might come. In other... what I'm really getting round to is that if there was something that called for sharp and caustic comment, it could come just as strongly from a region as it would have done nationally, whereas I feel the peril now, once

you're down into very small packets like quite small local stations, there are all sorts of pressures not to be too beastly to any aspect of local life, because you are all going to be chums together aren't you? You know that is the kind of danger. I mean there is a blandness that spreads. I don't think there was that sort of blandness in the region, really because of size, I would have said. It isn't a case of individual bravery, or corwardice, or anything else. It's when you are a big battalion, you are much harder to push around, and region was a big enough battalion not to be pushed around I would have said.

GILLARD But what about the style of presentation? Was it homely and chatty and amiable, and you know and easygoing, or was it more, as the network presumably was, more formal and dignified?

HAWKINS I think it depended what it was you were trying to do you see. I mean if to start with all your programmes were going into the network so that you were matching network style. Certain things called for formality. I mean for example presenting news bulletins, you don't want a sort of chatty, winking, elbow-nudging style of presenting the news. But if you were doing what was obviously a homely show. I mean if you had something like Bernard Fishwick presenting VILLAGE ON THE AIR, well there, I mean this was a programme in shirt sleeves and it wanted every sort of ease and informality and relaxed manner with it. So I think it was a case of judging your occasion. There wasn't.. you know there wasn't just one style, except I suppose in the level of presentation,

and that I would have thought was the good general BBC standard. I mean "This is the West of England Home Service" the way it came on the air. The way an announcer, when he was being totally impersonal, he would speak as the voice of the BBC would speak.

GILLARD Is it possible for you to give us an indication of the proportion of domestic, that is to say purely regional output, and output into the networks? Was it 50-50 or round about that, or what? How would you think?

HAWKINS That's a difficult one, isn't it? Of course, I suppose it varied at different times, but I suppose 50-50 is not far wrong really. And of course it would vary enormously from one department or one section to another, so that much of the drama would tend to go into the network, although there would be good regional drama - an obvious one would be a running programme like AT THE LOSCOMBES, which was exploiting its regional character. Religious programmes - well I suppose just a quota of them would have gone nationally, but many of them would have been purely for the regional audience. So it would have varied a bit. But yes, I would have thought overall possibly about 50-50.

GILLARD And looking back now on the late 40s shall we say, who stands out in your memory as being a notable colleague in the West region?

HAWKINS A notable colleague? Yes, well very much. I've mentioned Frank Gillard already, and I won't keep doing it, but obviously so. Pat Beech, who was I think was the only one of us who had been a producer before the war.

He'd been an outside broadcast producer, and so Pat was one who had come back to the region after the war, whereas the rest of us were new boys. I think .. I mean I would have great respect always for the achievements of Owen Reid who was a drama producer. Owen was so essentially of the theatre, Uncle Lewis Casson, and Auntie Sybil Thorndike were somewhere in the background of the pedigree and you know he was Old Vic trained, and he could just as easily have been a drama student in London, but he loved the region, and so he would be one I would think of. I would think of course with great affection of Bernard Fishwick who was a singer, who was a raconteur, who was quite an expert on the folksong of the West Country, and a wonderfully rich and warm personality who particularly was out on the road a lot, and was much loved. Wherever you went, people would talk to you about Bernard and how was Bernard, and what was he doing? So I think kindly of him. Rex Redmond was a typical musician who thrived on applause. Rex needed to be loved and admired and was, and I mean for example, he had a very early relationship of an excellent kind with Michael Tippett. Now that was an important thing you see, that Tippett was in Bath, Rex was in Bristol and was talking the sort of musical language that Tippett liked to hear, and that is one of the values I think of the thing a region can do, that it would have been much harder to have done it from a man based in London.

GILLARD And he did also in fact discover people like Moura Lympany.

HAWKINS Yes, that's very true of course.

Yes, yes.

GILLARD Well OK, let's move on. There you are, this talented team of producers in Bristol or Plymouth, to make programmes, to reflect regional life, but you can't do that unless you've got talented people available as contributors to the programmes. Was there a reservoir of contributing talent?

HAWKINS Well in some areas there was, in others there wasn't. I mean let me take the wasn't first of all. One of the things I've often looked back on with some amusement was when I arrived, I inherited a lovely steel filing cabinet full of the names of actors and actresses and writers who up to about 1938 had been obviously the strength and powerhouse of the region, and I had to think what to do about this because they hadn't heard from us and we hadn't heard from them for all of six years or so, so I had to write a letter which between the lines was saying, "Are you still alive?" and "Do you still live at the address I've got". So that in that sense there wasn't a great deal to inherit. You know, we did a tremendous lot of auditioning. I mean we declared an absolutely open door policy and particularly Owen Reid and I must have sat through hours and hours of auditions to see what talent there was there. But then in other areas you see, there were people like A.G. Street, already visible above the horizon. I mean he'd done broadcasting before the war. Ralph Wightman, I mean I learnt a lot of my radio in London with Francis Dillon, Jack Dillon, and before I ever met Ralph I remember Jack saying, "When you get down there, there's a man

with a voice like heather honey" was Jack's phrase, and this was Ralph Wightman, so that those great assets were already there.

GILLARD Nothing much though, I suppose in the way of entertainment, variety stars, that sort of thing.

HAWKINS No. I think early on we took stock of what it was we could hope to do something with, and clearly big time light entertainment wasn't really for the West region. It was either London or it was North with Blackpool and that kind of thing. So we were poorly off there, and I think the decision was made to recognise it. I mean we had simply one Light Entertainment producer, and first of all it was Hamilton Kennedy, but later Duncan Wood of course, who went on to make a great career for himself. But he very wisely concentrated on fairly small programmes. He didn't try to force his way into the big time while he was in Bristol. But to his credit he found Benny Hill, and put Benny Hill into his first road show through the West Country, before he was taken up by London later. But no, that on the whole wasn't our great scene.

GILLARD Yes. Well, and how did the region discharge its journalistic role. I mean presumably it accepted that it had a journalistic responsibility, ... and opinion and controversy. Was it frightened of opinion and controversy?

HAWKINS No, not at all. I think really it's always of course dangerous to make special claims for your own region, but I would have thought West in the first decade of radio after the war, was really pushing the frontiers of news coverage. I mean the war had obviously revolutionised the

BBC's whole attitude to news. The peace time attitude, if you look back before the war of course, was tiny and cautious, and I mean it was under threat of course from the big newspapers.

BBC ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SIDE 2

GILLARD The Oral History of the BBC. Dr. Desmond Hawkins' contribution, and this is Side 2 and we're going to pick up again the question of the region's, West region's attitude towards controversy and opinion which we were talking about just now. But was the region prepared to be controversial?

HAWKINS Yes, I think very much so, for a variety of reasons in a way. Partly, I think, the people who actually were responsible for our policy-making in those areas, Frank Gillard as Head of Programmes, Pat Beech as News Editor, they were of a generation who wanted to be open and controversial. But I think also there was a national desire not to go back to the pre-war custom which had been have news as a very small element which had obviously become ludicrous through the war years, and as the country came out of the war, it was a controversial time of new ideas, and I think many people in the forces through the forces educational system had begun to have quite new lines of thinking, not necessarily revolutionary or subversive, but simply open and different, and they were used to having ideas kicked around, and I think in a way the national surprise that Churchill was defeated by the Attlee Government was a symptom of the same thing. There was a general opening of windows and stocktaking, so that it was really quite natural that the kind of younger generation who were now running the region should want to do that, and the two

things that come back to me, one was one quite local regional issue and I think this is the interest in the two different things and the other was very much a national one. Let me take the regional one first. There was a great controversy going on in Bournemouth about the future of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and they looked to the BBC region as obviously one of their main patrons. It was the region's wish to broadcast the orchestra that gave them eclat and reputation and so forth. But there were an element on the Bournemouth Council who thought this was a rather Philistine element, who thought this was all money wasted and so on. And so there was a hostility to the orchestra in various ways, and in the middle of this, when it looked as if the orchestra was going to be really badly treated by the municipality in Bournemouth, that the Head of Programmes decided to take a public hall in the town, to call an open meeting to invite some of the well known local speakers to be present and to speak, with the understanding that this was going to be broadcast live. And that clearly had a quite electrifying effect on the people in the town who were in this really quite local controversy, when suddenly they realised that they were going to have to commit themselves to what they might have been saying only just privately, and there was to be a sharp and open public debate. Now that was something really quite new I think for the BBC to have been doing at such an early stage after the war. It would have been unthinkable in the 30s, quite unthinkable. But it was a way in which I think the regional radio was wanting to stir discussion, and I mean if later we may mention ANY QUESTIONS? It was another example

of the same thing, of getting into the town of the region, or into the villages even, and promoting the sort of discussion and conversation that was a novelty then. The other one, and this is a far more national one, was a sort of general ruling that Communists were to be treated I mean rather as the IRA is treated now in the late 80s, as beyond the pale and must never be allowed access to the microphone because all they would wish to do would be to cause damage and dismay and confusion. And there was a case in the region - I think I'm right, but I'll be corrected if I'm wrong - but I think I'm right in saying it involved a Boy Scout who had Communist views and sympathies. And one can't think really of a more light-hearted tailpiece kind of a story than as it would be nowadays, of a Boy Scout who was also a Marxist. But this was covered by the Regional news and brought down considerable wrath from the central management in London, that the idea of allowing a Communist, even a Boy Scout Communist to get near a microphone, was considered a highly revolutionary thing to have done. So that it was in that kind of climate I think, that as the 40s turned into the 50s, this new kind of spirit began to blow through radio, that we really had learnt from all our experiences in the war, that news had to be news. It had to be often controversial. It had to be properly presented and objective and we all had to learn that there were many thing worth arguing about, and one of the tasks of radio was to conduct these arguments in public, so that people could join in them.

GILLARD I think the regional also opened up the very first correspondence column of the air, so to speak.

HAWKINS Yes, now on... I am wondering do you mean SPEAK YOUR MIND?

GILLARD No, it is the thing that Charles Brewer ran, do you remember?

HAWKINS Oh yes, that's right, yes I do. Yes, I'm sorry.

GILLARD I can't remember what it was called.

HAWKINS No, I can't remember what it was called. No, I <u>can't</u> remember.

GILLARD Well never mind, it was there.

HAWKINS Yes, I'm just trying to relate it to ANY ANSWERS? Because when... when did ANY ANSWERS? start in relation to ANY QUESTIONS? I ought to know, but I don't know.

GILLARD Well much later. ANY QUESTIONS? was 1948. ANY ANSWERS? not till about 1952.

HAWKINS Yes.

GILLARD And I know I speak as Head of West Region in those days. The correspondence resulting from ANY QUESTIONS? became unmanageable. It had such a huge audience, and people were every week, every weekend, writing in contesting what had been said, or saying that it was inaccurate, or adding something that might have been said which would illuminate and that sort of thing, and these letters were coming in, and I was finding I had two or three hundred a week dumped on my desk, and I thought the only way to cope with this is to have a programme on the air in which they can be ventilated. So we invented ANY ANSWERS? But that was '52, but long before then, I mean I'm talking about '47 or

thereabouts, we were doing a regional correspondence programme on the air. Opening up all sorts of quite lively issues and allowing people to express themselves about them.

HAWKINS Yes, when you say that and mention Charles Brewer it does come back to me, but I must admit I had forgotten it.

GILLARD Well now apart from news and public affairs, current affairs and so on, what about the other interest, agriculture?

HAWKINS Well I have a feeling that if we hadn't developed the Natural History Unit we might very well have become the agricultural element in radio, and since it would have greedy to try to do both it was a bit hard on those in the regional who had built up agriculture. But it did happen, whether by coincidence or whatever, so that the far and away best known spokesmen in the agricultural world, were of course in the West Region. And I'm thinking of A.G. Street, Arthur Street, the Wiltshire man, and Ralph Wightman, the Dorset man. Two very popular and very celebrated broadcasters right through that period, and of course there were others as well, good spokesmen in the farming world. There was the man who became the Chairman of the Milk Marketing Board, Drehane, was another great agricultural spokesman. He again, was a regional man. So that it was a big interest and rightly so, because when you look at the economy of the West region, it was certainly in the 40s and 50s, very largely an agricultural economy, and our towns grew up as market towns with just a big enough area around them for a horse to move, and then there

would be another market town and agriculture was their business, so that the audience was there, and happily the broadcasting expertise was there. Both Street and Wightman had begun broadcasting before the war. They'd done a little to it, but of course after the war they really became very famous national figures in radio broadcasting, both of them.

GILLARD Then the region also did a lot for country interests generally, didn't it?

HAWKINS Yes, yes. In a way I suppose that was how I really began to come into it, because I'd finished the war working on COUNTRY MAGAZINE in London, with A.G. Street or Ralph Wightman as the presenters, so that I knew them both in that capacity as London broadcasters, and I was then on a contract as a scriptwriter with Jack Dillon as the producer, so that one of the things that I looked forward to certainly in going to Bristol, was to expand the sort of country interests that were very strong in me, and it developed right across I mean from the Talks Department, Bill Kersh (Coysh) started COUNTRY QUESTIONS, I mean clearly in the mould of ANY QUESTIONS? but concentrating on country subjects. A very successful programme, with an excellent team of highly practised broadcasters. Jack Long (Longland) was in the chair, Eric Hobbes who came from the Long Ashton research station, and then often Ralph Wightman would be there, and other people of that sort. So that it was by no means only as Natural History interest, it was a broad and general country affairs kind of interest that we were developing.

GILLARD Of course although largely as you

said, a rural part of England, nevertheless there was industry in the West Region, and we had a man called Kenneth Hudson, if you remember who was our industrial correspondent, and who really brought in every kind of industry on to the air, did he not?

HAWKINS Yes, he did. Of course he is a most remarkable man of many gifts, and has since become known as the sort of King of the museum world, but before that he virtually invented industrial archeology as a subject, and he was our industrial correspondent. That began, I think, with Sir Ian Jacob who decided that industry and economic life was not getting a sufficient showing in BBC output generally, and he decreed that each region should have an industrial correspondent. It was a new post that was invented, I think by Ian Jacob, in order to expand this element of coverage in regional programmes, and I mean certainly of course a city like Bristol was immensely industrial with the huge aircraft industry to start with, and so that one of our tasks was constantly keeping in touch with Filton to know whether the Brabazon was now ready to fly, or the "whispering giant" as the next one was called. That was a steady thread in the sort of output we were doing.

GILLARD And then, well switching to something quite different, what about music? How did the region handle music. We've had the Bournemouth Orchestra spoken of, what else was there?

HAWKINS Well I think one of the nice things that I look back on was the cultivation of choral singing in

the West. It is a strong tradition, and Rex Redmond was Head of Music, and he was a man very fond of choral music. I mean he recruited and trained and developed the West Country, West of England singers who were a very fine group. But apart from that he ran competitions for choirs, and often if we were doing some general documentary about a part of the region, Rex would say, "There's a very good choir there. They would do a good item for you", and so on. And I can remember meeting the Looe singers with Bert Middleton, who was a famous Cornish character down there, and I remember going down to the Lizard once to some small village where there was again a very excellent choir. So that that was certainly an indigenous element that was developed. I suppose although the North Country is the brass band country, there was a lot of good brass band playing and that was another thing that was strong. In composers, I suppose Michael Tippett was the great man we had, and there was a very early, and good liaison between Tippett and the region musically, and I think we mentioned earlier Maura Lympany as a fine soloist, so that there was a good standard of music, and much of it was indigenous, and that was a good thing. There was really no point in duplicating what could just as well be done in London by the big music department.

GILLARD What about indigenous drama?

HAWKINS Well, (LAUGHS) this is going to be historically I think, a very remarkable story. There are periods in a nation when somethings for some reason are in vogue, an accent, or a part of the country, or some cultural tradition, and undoubtedly in the 40s and 50s there was a great

romantic vogue for the West Country, for the West Country character, the West Country voice. It was thought to be romantic and pleasing and so on. Part of the success of Street and Wightman and those sort of people was that they talked with this nice West Country burr. And the same in drama. The comedies of Eden Phillpotts, the plays of Jan Stewer, Charles Leigh the Cornish writer. These men who could write really good comedy in dialect, and with another homely sentiment to them, they were immensely popular. And then suddenly you find that nationally, this comes to an end, and two or three generations later, suddenly the Liverpool sound was the thing. It's terribly smart to have a touch of Mersey in your voice, and the West country has now become rather unfashionable. But undoubtedly we had a following wind with us in the 40s and 50s, whenever we did any kind of play that had a West Country colour to it, and I suppose I mean in the long run the great figure we had was Thomas Hardy of course. There were all the novels, and we knew them well, and it seemed sensible to serialise them, to dramatise them and to run them as classic serials. And we were a happy combination there, because I did know Hardy well, I'd written a book about Hardy, and he was very much a subject of mine, so that I delighted in the thought of dramatising the novels, and Owen Reid of course was a fine drama producer, so we each knew exactly what we were doing. I was writing the script, Owen was producing and casting it, and as we had I think a respect for each other's talents, we didn't fall out, we didn't squabble. We didn't feel one should be doing something else, and so we had quite a long run. We did

worldwide. I mean, he produced one or two other writers, but I wrote five of them with him, and they were, I think, a feature of that period in broadcasting.

GILLARD Oh, they were great classics without any doubt, and they'll always be regarded as that, I think, and part of the reputation of the West region today rests on that, and we even.. they were so great, they even managed to attract the attention of one of the greatest composers of the age, did they not?

HAWKINS Yes, this is the MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE which is interesting in two ways. The one the author was thinking of was that Owen had noticed that Vaughan Williams had become interested in writing for the cinema. He'd written the music for SCOTT OF THE ANTARCTIC, and we were going to dramatise the MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE, and Owen had the bright idea of inviting Vaughan Williams to write the incidental music for it, the theme music, mood music and so on. And to our delight, he was fond of Hardy and was clearly welcoming another adventure having discovered how you write for the cinema, he thought radio would be another interesting thing for him to turn his hand to, and he was at once responsive. You know, we said we want, at this point we want thirteen seconds of music which takes us from this kind of mood to a quite different kind of mood, and he would make a note of that, and back would come something that would do just beautifully for the linking passage he wanted. And when the time came to record it, we had the West of England Light Orchestra. It wasn't a full symphony orchestra, but it was a quite useful light orchestra, and their

instrumentation was adequate for what he was writing. And to our delight, he said he would come down and conduct it, so we had a splendid day in the music studio with Vaughan Williams himself conducting his own music for it. And the other thing I look back on, and this is a tribute to Owen I think, the part of Henchard in the MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE is obviously a massive part. I mean it's like Tess, it's a great dramatic solo, and really your production is going to stand and fall to a very large measure on your casting. And London, who were going to carry it, had suggested that I might think about Godfrey Tearle who was a fine, nationally famous actor of the period, and was prepared to do a reading of the part, so that we could hear how he would do it, and there was another famous actor who've name I've forgotten, who also was considered, and we had a local actor in Bristol, Hedley Goodall, who was a very fine actor, though he wasn't nationally known, and Owen brooded a bit over the three of them, and rather to my delight, he decided that we should do it with our own local actor, Hedley Goodall, who gave really the performance of a lifetime in it. I mean he's never, I think, stopped living it. It was a tremendous success, and one other thing I think of, again this says something about regional methods, the Elizabeth Jane was played by Barbara Jefford who had just played Juliet with John Gielgud at Stratford, but about two years before that, had come to us and done an audition when she was training with the drama school in Bristol, and she'd come down and done a little audition, and we'd marked her down then as somebody we ought to be thinking of using. She had this astonishingly rapid rise. Gielgud took

her as his Juliet, and she'd never done any serious radio, and so she was our other main casting there.

GILLARD And of course at the other end of the drama scale, we did light drama. Tell us something about AT THE LUSCOMBES?

HAWKINS On well this is really quite a great thing. We had living in the region Denis Constanduros who is just at the moment now having a wonderful discovery. He's been dead some years, someone has discovered a book he wrote about his grandfather, and I saw a copy of it reissued in a shop a few days ago. But Denis was the nephew of a great broadcasting lady of the very early years, Mabel Constanduros, who was partly a comedienne, but partly a playwright, and Denis had learnt his trade as a playwright, collaborating with old Mabel, before the war this would have been. And then he settled in the West Country, so there was a writer who was available to do something rather, if we could think of the right thing to do, and somebody, I think it may have been Frank Gillard, I don't know who, but somebody said, "Why don't we do some sort of running West Country serial?" And so the idea grew that we should put Denis Constanduros into this particular harness, and get him to dream up and start writing, what really was an ancestor of the family soaps. I mean it was something like THE ARCHERS of the present day, except it happened only once a week, because clearly we hadn't resources to do it daily. It happened once a week. But I think also it was rather more carefully written, and perhaps because it was weekly, you could give rather more care to it both as writer and as producer. So

this was decided to be launched and there was enough casting available, and this was one of the ways it seemed in which we could breathe some life into the Plymouth studio. Brandon Acton Bond who'd been sent down from London as a trainee and who'd worked with me for a time as a sort of trainee features producer, but he was clearly.. he was a drama man essentially. His father was a figure in drama in earlier days, and so the plan was for Brandon to go to Plymouth and to start this new drama from there and that would give a nice shot in the arm to the Plymouth studio. My contribution to that was there was an actress in Plymouth, they were very rare, but there was one very good one called Ruby Luscombe, and I remember saying at the time, at the first meeting when this was being discussed, the best woman's parts you could deal with quite easily when you get there, was Ruby Luscombe. Well poor Ruby, she never did get into the series as it happened, because it just fell out differently. But her name was, if not immortalised, at least it was given a good long run.

GILLARD Because the series was called AT THE LUSCOMBE'S.

HAWKINS That's right. Yes, yes, it was called AT THE LUSCOMBE'S.

GILLARD I believe it was enormously popular, wasn't it?

HAWKINS Yes, it was. It really was. Wherever you went round the region, everyone would know the Luscombes. They would talk to you about them. If ever there was a village flower show or a church fete, it was going to be

opened by Mrs. Luscombe, or Mr. Luscombe, or Dot Luscombe, or one of them, and they really were widely known and loved through the region, and it ran and ran until I mean virtually the region in radio finally thought it was running out of steam, if that's a nice word for money, and it came to an end.

GILLARD We, I mustn't put it that way... the region also were of course within its resources, was pretty good at documentary work, wasn't it?

HAWKINS Yes, I am just wondering.. I'm just wondering what you are meaning here by documentary work. I mean it's such a portmanteau kind of word, isn't it? One thing I think of, I mean we were talking about Brandon Acton Bond, and he did one or two very fine, very detailed documentaries. He did a portrait of a field with Ralph Wightman, which was widely praised, much remembered, and has been revised since. That .. rather the kind of thing that Charles Parker did in Midland with his documentaries on the herring fleet. I mean occasionally you got a sort of a connoisseurs piece of that kind, which took a great deal of time and effort and recording channel time and all the rest of it, but was worth having. And then there were all sorts of bread-and-butter type documentaries. Then there were magazine... I mean for example, we did a thing called COUNTY MIXTURE where we used to go to each county and make a big one hour celebration of that county with anything that seemed to be typical of the flavour of it, and I think one of the things that you were trying always to do in the region was to get at whatever was the real flavour of life in that part of England,

and I go back in a way to Kane's and "Let Merrie England be merry in its own way in each part". You know, you'd find when you were doing a programme like COUNTY MIXTURE that there were all sorts of things in Devon or in Wiltshire that had a quite particular flavour there, and of course delighted those people to find that somebody had heard of lardy cake, or somebody had heard of some famous folk tale that was a great joke and so on.

GILLARD It was much the same, wasn't it, in children's programming?

HAWKINS Yes, yes. (COUGHS) Sorry. One thing I think we haven't said is that the point of the region in radio was that it was a complete system in itself. I mean it was a miniature of London in that it had light entertainment, music, drama. Any kind of radio, it was represented by at any rate one producer, and then when you got to CHILDREN'S HOUR you find really almost the same thing, although with a Jack, or rather a Jill-of-all-trades, but still doing some music, some drama, some story telling, some talent scouting, some outside broadcasts. I mean the men and women who are producing regional CHILDRENS' HOURS were incredibly versatile in that way, because they reckoned that children's tastes were just as varied as adults.

GILLARD I suppose the thing that epitomises the children's programming of West region was the series called COWLEAZE COWLEY'S FARM.

HAWKINS Yes, yes. Yes, it was. That again, was I suppose in something of the tradition of Romany who'd been a great figure in early days in broadcasting in

London. This idea of an adult with a couple of children in a sort of countryside and nature context, and Ralph Whitlock who was a farmer's son, and himself a farmer in Wiltshire, he became quite a talented writer. (I'm sorry, Frank). (COUGHS) (OFF MIC COMMENTS)

GILLARD Desmond Hawkins has cleared his throat so we'll pick it up again at COWLEY'S FARM.

HAWKINS One of the interesting things I think were the childrens' programmes with its range of radio styles and methods and so on was that they had an important drama component, COWLEY'S FARM was written by a young Wiltshire farmer, Ralph Whitlock, who's gone on to become a well-known writer, and this took children to a farm in the persons of two children actually in the programme, so the children could identify with them and they went round the farm with Whitlock. And the tradition of CHILDREN'S HOUR really was to find dramatists like Ralph Whitlock, to encourage them to think of children as an audience, and certainly the most remarkable one in the case of the West was Robert Bolt, who was a schoolmaster at Milfield, and was encouraged by Molly Austin, who in those days was Children's Programme Organiser, to write for West Regional children's programmes. He wrote marvellous fairy tales about dragons and goodness knows what else, and that was his first essay in writing drama. He still owes us one, in fact, because he became rather busy and went to other things, and never quite wrote the very last one that was due. But it was great to have seen him start like that.

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC

Frank Gillard interviews Desmond Hawkins

(TAPE 3)

..... Desmond Hawkins' contribution, talking to Frank Gillard, and we're now on Side 3. I haven't warned you about this, but let me ask you now. What was the relationship then between say, the Documentary producer in Bristol and the Head of Features Department in London, or the Drama producer in Bristol, Owen Reed, and the Head of Drama in London.

HAWKINS Well I suppose it would vary from departments and to what extent past relationship might have been. I mean I had come to Bristol from Features Department in London. I hadn't been on the staff there but I'd been under contract as a scriptwriter there, so that I had a good relationship with Laurence Gilliam, and that other relationship that was important in fact was the Chief Executive editor of a national series. If you remember... but if you remember my background was that I'd been a scriptwriter on COUNTRY MAGAZINE, so that I had a natural relationship with Jack Dillon in that sense, and he knew that if I was going to produce it from Bristol, at least he had some idea of the sort of quality it would be. But I think in general, it was always an uneasy relationship, because the heads of department in London took the view, and were justified in taking it, that they had an ultimate responsibility for the quality of the BBC's output in that field. If you were the BBC's Controller of Music or Head

of Drama, you felt you had that responsibility. And the other side of the coin that I remember was Val Gielgud once saying that if he could have strangled THE ARCHERS at birth, he would have done so. And that I think shows the uneasy side of that relationship, that you had on the one hand the professional head who said he had his ideas of what drama should be, or music should be, and then you had the region saying that the whole point of autonomy is that we must at times be allowed to go our own way, despite your professional dislike or disapproval. So that I think it turned quite often on personalities, rather than on doctrine. Where there was some sort of establishment of trust and confidence it worked well. Where there wasn't, then you would get frictions with either a region saying, "Well we don't care what you say. We're going to do it". Or the Head of Department saying, "I am not going to have that sort of thing on the network, because I don't like it". And that is obviously unhappy and unhealthy. But often, I think more often than not really, there was respect for the work of the regions, and more and more of course as time went on. People came down and worked in the regions a bit and went back.

GILLARD Yes, I'm sure confidence was the key to the whole thing, and in the case of the West Region, the confidence grew to be pretty strong in documentaries, and you were invited to do quite important programmes for the network, were you not?

HAWKINS Yes, I mean I think an interesting case of the way in which the regions were winning trust in London was very early... the News Year's Eve programme running up to midnight, and the you know, the chiming in of the New Year and so on, which of course had always been a London programme, and one year they decided to let Bristol do it. And I mean we were quite capable of doing it. A.G. Street was our man as much he was a network man, and we had an orchestra. The problem I think, was more a technical one that an engineering one, because regions hadn't been set to handle elaborate hook-ups, and I mean this meant having people all over the country hooked-up by line. But I mean London said yes, it would be a good thing if it did once come from outside London, and so we had .. and I suppose because I had been used to that sort of work, we did the New Year's Even, and oddly, it was the most professional broadcaster, Richard Dimbleby, who nearly wrecked us, because Richard was in the Pool of London, and he was a very good broadcaster of course, and I put him late, as one of the late items, talking about London seen from the river, and actually looking at Big Ben you see. And Richard of all people, went on beyond the time that he was given, and I was in the control cubicle, far far away from the studio. There was no way of speaking to him except by the cue light, and I thought the only thing is to press the cue light twice instead of once, and pray to God that they'll realise I mean jump the next cue, and go to the last bit before midnight. But that apart, there was no trouble and we were there when the bells rang out, and it was a slight feather in the cap of

Bristol I think, you know that it had gone off alright.

GILLARD Well there remains Light Entertainment, and we've already said that it was a region not rich in light entertainment facilities. So we had to invent new kinds of light entertainment in many ways. I am sure... and you were behind some of that.

HAWKINS Well I guess you are thinking of Johnny Morris probably. This was a sheer piece of luck, because when I decided to stop being freelance, or a contract scriptwriter and to come on to the staff, I was living at Aldbourne in Wiltshire, and Johnny then was the farm manager of a very big farm, and I met him a lot at parties and drinking in the pub and so on, and I was enchanted by this personality and the extraordinary fascination he had for people. Going round with Johnny in Aldbourne was like with the Pied Piper, you know. If you moved to another pub, everybody else moved, and he clearly had a wonderful gift as a very lovable personality and a great fund of merriment and laughter. And so when I joined Bristol, I remember this, I sent him... there were telegrams in those days, and I sent him a telegram which said, "I've joined BBC. You are my secret weapon". And I asked him to come down and do an audition, really rather frightened you know, because sometimes people who in private life and at parties are irresistible, when you get into the rather clinical atmosphere of a studio, somehow it isn't quite so sparkling and bubbling. However, my colleagues were there, Owen Reed and Pat Beech, and they thought there was a lot to this man. And Pat

gave him various sort of Aldbourne news stories to do, and Owen used him as an actor when he could do, because he had a very good Wiltshire dialect. And I started doing programmes with him, particularly each week doing a different job, and sending him off to do all kinds of things, to be a stop and go man, and once I had him scene shifting at Covent Garden, and so on. And gradually we realised that this was a quite unusual talent, because he wasn't really in them music hall tradition. He wasn't in the tradition of the professional comic, who gradually perfects an act. He was much more 'direct experience of life'. He never repeated anything. I mean each thing he had to go out and have an experience, and come back and write it. So that he was quite an important asset, and what I liked very much, when we were... when radio was declining as far as we were concerned in terms of light entertainment in radio, and in television it was a very difficult world to get into, that the light entertainment producer we had, Brian Patten, decided that really he was the man to take over Johnny Morris and develop him, so that he was partly in the light entertainment field, but with a very sympathetic kind of producer, and of course the jaunts that he did round the world with Brian Patten I think, are among the classics of pure radio, because it was inconceivable in any other medium. You couldn't imagine the same kind of thing happening in any other medium, and he then went on of course, and did television.

GILLARD Yes. Well now let's leave the golden age of radio.

HAWKINS OK.

GILLARD Which we both look back on with great affection, and a high degree of satisfaction and a sense of fulfilment I know, and let's come on to the coming of television. In the late 40s and early 50s, it was beginning to spread out from London around the country, and of course the Regions were beginning to say, "Where do we fit into this?" And at the outset, the auspices were not very favourable.

HAWKINS No. I mean there was of course, in London a very unhappy rivalry between radio and television. Television on the whole was hostile to people who worked in radio. It didn't much want them. And it was really a special London toy until the Government authorised the sort of capital expenditure that took television out of London and took it to first the big population centres, I mean to Manchester, and Birmingham, and Glasgow, and gradually it became a national medium. But it was a very gradual thing, and the attempt really to sort of graft the BBC radio on to this new medium, I don't think worked at all well. I mean there was a feeling that because a man was the Head of Drama Radio, he must therefore automatically be responsible for television drama output and so on. So you had people who were geographically separated from television. They were sitting in Portland Place, and television was down at Lime Grove, and who hadn't worked in it, and yet somehow feeling that they ought to be

steering it, and so you got all sorts of awkward currents developing, and nobody quite knew what the Regions use was going to be, and what we were going to do with the people who were there. And then there was a scheme to start training some radio producers in television, and this was done, I think looking back on it, at the time when commercial television was going to begin. There was obviously going to be a raid on BBC for anyone who had television skills. I mean obviously there had to be. There was no two ways about it. If commercial television was to start, much of the personnel had to be milked out of the BBC. So I think the opportunity to go out and be trained was so that you were there as a reserve if too many went. And I went up to Lime Grove to train in production, and Nicky Crocker went up to Wembley to train in outside broadcast techniques. And I did the full spells as a drama director in Lime Grove, and there was no mistaking the hostility to anybody coming from radio. I worked with a man called Dennis Vance, who .. I was his caddy, and tea boy and the rest of it, to learn the trade, and I mean he said, "When you go in the studio, be careful that something heavy doesn't drop from a great height on you, if they know that you've come from radio. It was quite like that.

GILLARD Yes. And indeed the Beveridge Committee, sitting around about that time, the late 40s, early 50s, envisaged no regional television at all.

HAWKINS No, and nor of course did the people

in television themselves. Part of this drama... the only training course you could do in production was in terms of drama, and we had one session on engineering, and Doug Birkenshaw, who I mean was the head engineer in television. I forget whether he was called Chief Engineer, or Head Engineer, but he was the top man in engineering, and he lectured to us, and showed us a map of where the transmitters were, or were going to be. And of course I looked at WENVOE and I knew enough history of the West Region to know that there had been a problem in sound when there'd been an idea that Bristol and Cardiff could run in double harness, and so I said to him, "Well if you are going to put this transmitter at WENVOE and it's going to serve Bristol and South Wales, what's going to happen to regional television?" And Burkinshaw replied, "You must get these radio ideas out of your mind. There will never be anything that you would think of as regional television - it's technically impossible and far too expensive." And so that was me slapped down, but I still had a feeling we'd get to it one day. (LAUGHS)

GILLARD Well in 1952, television came to Bristol, in August, and of course the situation had to be faced, because the Region I am sure, was quite determined it wasn't going to be left out of television. But what resources did it have at that point?

HAWKINS Well very little. It had simply an outside broadcast unit, and of course that was very often was

planned and used from London as simply a national resource. As it had to be, I mean one has to realise that the whole capital for development of television created a scarcity. The pressure was on all the time to expand. The audience wanted more. But it logistically, I mean those of us were used to radio, it was such a costly and cumbersome thing, that you couldn't get to the sort of position you wanted to get to, anything like as quickly as you would have liked. So we had, as I remember, simply an outside broadcast unit over which we certainly didn't have full control. But we had the use of it for one day, either a week or a fortnight, I forget which, to do a magazine programme by simply decanting it into the music studio. But I mean operating it as an outside broadcast unit. And later, when I started the LOOK series with Peter Scott, I had to go out always to Lime Grove, to have a studio to put it on the air. And then even later, when we got some sort of facility in Bristol, I mean we had awful difficulties over tele-cine. We had to have a think called GENLOCK, or otherwise you got frame slips every time you went from studio to film and all these, you know, all these sort of dreary technical problems beset the Region - not from incompetence or ill will, but simply because of the slowness of organising both the finance, and the technology for the sort of development that was needed.

GILLARD I believe that in the early days, even that OB unit had to be shared with Wales, didn't it?

HAWKINS Yes, I'm sure it must have been. Oh

yes, it must have been. Because it would have been, I suppose it would have been in the earliest days probably pushing its signal by relays into WENVOE, wouldn't it? Yes, it would have been. I mean we didn't have a television control room in Bristol for some while.

GILLARD It was two weeks in our part of the region and two weeks in Cardiff.

HAWKINS Was it?

GILLARD It was.

HAWKINS That doesn't surprise me. But somehow, we had this use of it to do the magazine that, we called it WESTWARD HO, didn't we? And Cliff Michelmore fronted it. And I had an idea we did it... perhaps we did it every fortnight, did we? This drive-in practice, as it was called, of using the OB unit, but putting its studios and all its ..equipment in the music studio at the back of ... the radio music studio, that was developed quite considerably, wasn't it? We even did drama out of the music studio, did we not?

HAWKINS Yes, you see I think there was great pressure, understandably, on the programme making side of the Region, to get every possible value we could out of this outside broadcast unit. But it was a cackhanded way of doing a production of course. I mean you hadn't got the sort of

lighting that you wanted. I mean you'd got no catwalks overhead. You were in an orchestral studio, and you just decanted your cameras and did the best you could. But you know, it's often forgotten I think, that the sort of conditions in London also, in which you went on the air were very difficult. I mean I can remember doing a 90 minute play with the firm instructions that if one of my three cameras (not five), one of my three cameras went down, I was under orders not to come off the air, but to go on with it as best I could with cables tangled up, and everyone trying to replan camera moves and so on.

GILLARD All live.

HAWKINS All live, yes.

GILLARD But in the West Region, there was considerable advance on the film front, wasn't there?

HAWKINS Yes, and a lot of credit for this goes in my mind to Pat Beech. You see Pat had been in the Region before the way. He'd gone off in the war and had joined the Army film unit, and had had some fairly hairy wartime experience in Burma where he had been filming. And so he had come back, the one among us, who really taught the grammar of film. I had no film background, technically at all. I simply discovered when I started doing NATURAL HISTORY that I was desperate for film. You know this was obviously the winner in

television in that field. And so that Pat was a simply marvellous ally to educate me, apart from anything else. And when we were looking at what kind of future we might have in television, I mean just as we had done, what ten years before, we'd said "What are our assets in radio? You know, which way are we going?" And so as television began to dawn, we had the same sort of discussions, "What ought we to be aiming at?" And it was Pat who saw the value of the huts that belonged to the Inland Revenue in those days, that they were pulling out of, and that they offered to us to take over these old huts, army-type huts that they'd had in the garden of the house that we were buying. And Pat at once could see that these would make excellent cutting rooms, and that what we ought to be doing was trying for all we were worth to get into the film business, because we were going to have an awful job to get any kind of big television studio in competition with Manchester or Birmingham. Much bigger forces they were. Much bigger populations. They had more political clout inside the Beeb. So that we were not going to get very far in the queue for a big studio. But with film, we could be ... we had much quicker lighter footwork you know, that if we could get some good film, well we could get that in. But the other side of it, that must be said was that McGivern you see, who was Mr. Television in those, was anti-film. I can remember a meeting at which McGivern really slapped down Jack Muitt (PH) who was Head of Films, and at an open meeting, he said, "I tell you again, Jack, you must understand you are a service department. It is your job to supply films that other departments may need. You

are not in the business of making film programmes." Because he was a very.. greatly electronic man, and he used to talk about the cameras sort of nursing and massaging this artiste and that artiste, and he was very romantic about the electronic camera. But very anti-film.

GILLARD Interesting. And there were surely, very limited opportunities on the air anyway, opportunities of getting on the air, were there not, for regional television? I mean you've told us that regional radio had almost unlimited access whenever it wanted to, but not so television.

HAWKINS No. I mean partly of course that we weren't equipped in the way we were in radio. I mean in radio we had specialist producers from the word go, in the whole range of programming. In television we didn't. One or two of us got some training and tried to develop whatever strand we had any talent for. But there'd never been any question in those early stages that we were quickly going to have a television producer for every kind of programme making there was. And that, I think, has remained essentially the television pattern. There was a time when we got towards a fairly balanced output with some music and some drama and some religion, and some this and that.

GILLARD But all network.

HAWKINS Yes, all network, yes, yes. Yes, oh

yes. Oh in regional terms, no, I mean Burkenshaw he may have been wrong, but he was only half wrong, because they jolly nearly throttled the regions. And we had this one magazine for a long time, and then gradually we got a bit of news. But I mean again, I remember saying once to Ian Jacob, "You're sending us into battle with paper hats and wooden swords". Because we were told all we were allowed to do was to read a bulletin of news. We couldn't expect tele-cine. We couldn't expect pictures, and we were supposed to be competing of course with the rising contractors in Southampton and Bristol and Plymouth. And no, the regions were never in the position in television that they were in radio.

GILLARD And that's really a case right up to today, isn't it? That regions, that regional television is very, very limited even now, when television is so well equipped and so lavishly provided for.

HAWKINS Yes, it is. And I suppose it always will be so. But I mean the solution that the BBC in its wisdom came to was instead of trying to do the whole range of programmes from regions which they had to an extent tried to do in the 50s, that the answer really was to plant, or develop or encourage one major specialism, and that that was the way that the network would use regions. That was what they really liked most of all. The other very negative way was to use regions to host programmes that were created in London and simply wanted studio space, and which we used to call

"warehousing" and regions would find if they didn't have anything better for now, they would find themselves simply "warehousing" programmes that had no particular reason to be in their building at all, of course. I mean it simply came down with this complete team of artistes, performers, producers, and did its stuff in the studio and went away again. Well, no... sorry... I was just hesitating ..... I mean I talked with Joanna about London exporting its unemployment, which of course was another thing that it did in a way.

GILLARD The thing is that whereas regional radio nourished regional culture, regional television never had the chance.

HAWKINS No, that's quite true. The only really indigenous kind of television in that period was the weekly magazine and the slowly expanding news magazines, the nightly magazines. They were the only two outlets that were really available to any sort of indigenous abilities at all. And you know it's difficult to see how you reverse that now, because it's more and more become a greatly industrialised industry. (Sorry!)

GILLARD It's alright. Well I suppose it's inevitable because of the sheer cost, isn't it, and the logistics of television that you can't localise it?

(NOISE ON TAPE)

HAWKINS Well I've always been a great

believer that you can't do something if you do really passionately want to do it. Oh it's been.. (NOISE ON TAPE)

GILLARD You were saying that the policy was, very understandably to try to establish specialisms in regions. I know that the West Region at one time had some ambition to become a drama centre, and indeed scored some drama successes. Isn't that so?

HAWKINS Oh yes. There was a period you see, before Sidney Newman became, Head of Television Drama, when it was still in the English tradition of the English theatre. And they liked regional plays of a regional sort occasionally into the network, so that I mean, Lorna Doone was a case in point. London said, "West Region, Lorna Doone is your kind of subject. Would you like to do it as a serial?" And we did it. And we would have done one of the Hardy's if they hadn't been tied up with film copyrights and things and so on. So that there was a period when that was recognised and I suppose the other, the oddball in a way, but a remarkable event was THE TRUE MYSTERY OF THE PASSION, which was produced in Bristol cathedral, was done with outside broadcast gear. I mean it was in its day was a prodigious enterprise, and it seemed quite reasonable that that should come out of the region at that time. But then when drama broke away in television from the theatre tradition, I mean whereas I'd always done when I'd been at Lime Grove, the 90 MINUTE PLAY, which was the West End theatre kind of play. But Sidney Newman brought in the 50 minuter, the soap opera,

the Z CARS all these kind of things, which had no theatre ancestry, were purely film industry. And I mean by then of course with recording coming in, television was being industrialised and run as an industry, and you could get greater output by those sort of methods of working - 50 minuters, you know run quickly, like through the studios, and the single regional studio was not what Sidney Newman wanted. When he first came down he said, "I want two studios here with the same dust on the floor of both every week, or I don't want to know about you, and he didn't want to know about us, and he closed us down. And there really was no answer to that. I mean the whole concept of television drama had changed.

GILLARD Luckily though, you had another speciality to fall back on, and that's what we're going to talk about on the next side.

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC

Frank Gillard interviews Desmond Hawkins

(TAPE 4)

GILLARD Side 4 of Desmond Hawkins' conversations with Frank Gillard about the oral history of the BBC, and we've now come to the story of the Natural History Unit. Desmond, your great fall-back specialism in Bristol was of course, Natural History. Did the television service recognise from the beginning, or early on that there was some expertise in Bristol on this particular topic, or did you have to drive it home to them?

HAWKINS I think I had to drive it home, although it turned out not to be difficult. But I don't think it was thought much about in television. I mean when I went up there to do my training course, they just knew I was Features Producer, Bristol. But I don't think they really knew the kind of thing I did in radio. I mean really the turning point I suppose in terms of television was the fact that "Mr. Television" was Cecil McGivern, and he and I had been buddies in Laurence Gilliam's Features Department you see. So I knew Cecil well. He'd gone off into the film industry for a rather unhappy spell, but he had been in the film industry and then come back to television, and I of course, had stayed. But I was meeting him as a colleague and an old chum, so that it was possible for me to go up and say, "I want to come and have a

look at television, and see what's to do", and this was before I'd done a training course. And he said, "Well Richard Dimbleby's doing a very good programme on LONDON LIFE every week, you ought to go out to Alexandra Palace one night, and have a look at it". So I went out one night and had a look at it, and talked to Richard, who I mean just incidentally, impressed me enormously, with the fact that he'd come back with the sort of fame that he enjoyed then, could have done many things, and it was almost really like going into a monastery to go off to Alexandra Palace in 1946, or whatever it was. I mean nobody ever heard of you hardly, except a few people with sets in the London area, and he said to me afterwards, he said "This is the future, and I've decided I've got to learn it absolutely thoroughly, and one day this is what ... this will be the mass medium you see". So anyway, so I had that relationship with Cecil, that's really why I'm saying this, so that when Peter began talking, Peter Scott came down to very near Bristol, which was an enormous bonus of course. He was just up the road at the new grounds at Slimbridge, and when Peter said that he had a sort of performance he did to raise money for the Wildfowl Trust in big town halls up and down the country, and he thought that there might be something in this for television, I'd just come back from my spell in drama, so I was full of wanting to do something with what I'd learned, and you know I felt able to say to Cecil, "I think Peter Scott's got something that would work, and I would like to have a bash, and how about it" in that sort of informal way. I mean which was sheer luck, because not many producers would just happened to

have had that sort of relationship. So that it began to some extent with that sort of favourable wind, which it might not otherwise. I mean rather freakishly I think.

GILLARD Let's then trace how it got to that stage really, because it .. the early projects began almost immediately after the end of the war didn't they, in radio?

HAWKINS Oh yes. I mean this was the real beginning of the Natural History Unit. I mean people talk about it as if it only began in 1954 or something, but no, no, it began in '45. And when I first got to Bristol, there I was a new boy, with quite a new relationship with the Head of Programmes. I had simply met him over WAR REPORT, and so the question was what was I going to do? What use will I be? What sort of things shall I turn my hand to? And as we took stock of what there was in the Region, and what seemed worth developing, the thing that stood out was that we had this wonderful countryside in the West Region with considerable natural history interest, and a part of England that the audience loved and came down to for their holidays, and wanted to know about. And so Frank Gillard said to me, "Well you're interested in this kind of thing, aren't you?" And I was, simply as an amateur bird watcher. I mean I had no degree in Zoology or anything, but it was a great interest of mine, just privately. And so he said, "Why don't you try to put together one or two programmes and see how they go?" Well now what I had also as an asset was that as I finished in London working

on COUNTRY MAGAZINE, I'd met Ludwig Koch, who had recently arrived as a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany during the war, and had just started making recordings of birds. There had been nothing at all before the war. I had done a programme, my very first ever programme, almost prophetically was called A NEST OF SINGING BIRDS, and at that time there was no recording of any bird that sang available in the BBC, and they hired a musical artiste called Mr. Imito, who could do anything from a man sawing a piece of wood, to a nightingale singing. So it was rather interesting that I began with that, then in COUNTRY MAGAZINE I met Ludwig Koch, and Jack Dillon was very taken with the sound pictures that he made. And this was, you know this was something important in radio that for the first time it had something to give to listeners that they could not get anywhere else. They could actually <u>hear</u> the sounds of nature. If they'd never heard a nightingale sing in their lives, they could now on the radio hear it happen. So that I did realise that there was something important and new there, and so the thing was to put together two or three programmes, and think of a format and so on, and I thought THE NATURALIST was a good title, and then I thought, I won't have the usual signature tune. In those days every programme always had a signature tune. I thought I won't have a signature tune, I'll have one of Ludwig Koch's recordings, and that was a signal to people that this is going to take them to where the action is. It's not just going to be people talking in the studio. And that, I mean one of those accidental things turned out to be quite an inspiration, because my favourite

wild sound, to me the sound of the wild in England is the calling of a curlew, and Ludwig had a very good recording of it, so I thought that will be my signal. We'll have the call of the curlew and that will tell the audience what's going to happen. And Ludwig was in No.1 with as I remember quite well, a scientist from the marine biological station at Plymouth, because I was keen to bring Plymouth in, and marine biology was rather a new thing, and then I had the Reverend Mr. Butters who was the Chairman of the Devon Bird Watching and Protection Society, and so that was the cast for No.1. And Frank Gillard said, we'll see if the Home Service will take any of these. I think they said rather cautiously they would take three. I forget if that was the right number, but it was something like that. And they approved of it, and so THE NATURALIST was under way. I began with Geoffrey Grigson as the Chairman, and he didn't stay for long. He was leaving the Beeb and going off to freelance, and he had a lot of goodwill still, and he came into the programme occasionally, but he didn't want to go on presenting it, and so then I had Brian Fitzgerald, who had a long, long run at it, and most people would think of him as the Chairman of it. But in fact Geoffrey was Chairman of the earlier ones, and it was Geoffrey who suggested the phrase that we flew at our masthead, was "a programme of science and observation". And that had a great meaning for me. What I wanted to do was to bring together the scientists who I mean at that period were really making immense advances in this particular field of natural history, and the field naturalists, because I felt that gave me a link with the general audience.

I didn't want to be playing to senior common rooms and just a few cult friends who would say "How splendid" you know. I felt we must get across to ... I mean the point of working in the mass media is to get across to a mass audience. And I wanted therefore to have with the chairman, two speakers, one who would be a scientist and the other would be a keen, accurate observer who talks on the whole in the vernacular speech rather than in scientific jargon. So I wanted gamekeepers, water bailiffs, reserve people, all those sorts of characters, preferably with a good regional voice. I had a wonderful gamekeeper, Walter Fletcher, off the North Country moors. I had Frank Sawyer, a marvellous water bailiff from the high fishing areas of Wiltshire, and so on. And when you put them with the man who is the academic boffin in that particular subject. If perhaps we were doing otters, or we were doing grouse or whatever it was, the interplay between these two coming to the subject from such very different sides, that I think was what gave the programme its spark.

GILLARD Well it certainly became a national institution on Sundays at lunchtime, wasn't that so?

HAWKINS Yes, it did. A story I always cherish is that John Burton who joined the programme much later as sound recordist, I mean after Ludwig had gone, in fact John Burton was in the line of succession to Ludwig, and when he'd been doing his national service in the army, as they did in those days, after the war, but while you still had to do a

national service. He had actually managed to be knocked down in the barracks for switching off the BILLY COTTON BAND SHOW and going over to THE NATURALIST, because he wanted to hear it. And told me proudly, that he got a bloody nose once from his devotion to THE NATURALIST.

GILLARD Of course there were soon all sorts of spin-offs from THE NATURALIST. I mean there were a number of other series, were there not?

HAWKINS Yes, I think the thing we found, you see THE NATURALIST was a good broad general term to start with, but we were trying to do everything from Miriam Rothschild on fleas, to somebody else on mammals of various kinds, pole cats, whatever it might be.. and botany as well. So it was a huge field and there was a specialist bird hungry audience at that time, and so they wanted THE NATURALIST almost always to be dealing with birds. So it seemed sensible then to start BIRDS IN BRITAIN, and you see where I was so lucky, in that generation there were very fine field naturalists cum-scientists. I mean polymaths, you know there were men of wide culture. Peter Scott was one, James Fisher was another, and James Fisher was my front man for BIRDS IN BRITAIN, and it meant that I could concentrate on being a producer, and I could trust their judgement in the suggestion of speakers. I didn't have to vet them all you know and so that we got a higher rate of output in BIRDS IN BRITAIN and then to exploit in more detail Ludwig Koch's recordings, we had BIRDSONG OF THE MONTH,

and that was just as the name implied. It took three or four birds that anyone with a bit of luck if they wanted to, could go out and hear during that month. And of course we were dealing then with a fairly naive and ingenuous audience compared with what it has since become. I mean a sign of the times was I remember was I remember as bold venture, when we got into television later. I was saying let's do a programme called AWAY FROM THE NEST, because everybody's bit of film was always of the easiest target, which was a bird sitting on a nest. So that we had to sophisticate ourselves as the audience sophisticated itself. But early on, this BIRDSONG OF THE MONTH served a very good purpose I think.

GILLARD But you were doing these natural history programmes not only in the Home Service. I mean you were putting them into the Light Programme, which was aimed deliberately at a mass audience that didn't really want to be particularly serious. But they were finding a good foothold there, were they not?

HAWKINS Yes, they were, and I mean we had very good backing there from Kenneth Adam. I have various treatments from Kenneth up and down the years from the good to the bad, but when he was running the Light Programme he was a very good friend, and he said, "Do us some sort of outdoors programme" and in fact we called it OUT OF DOORS. And as you say, I mean this had to be for the Light Programme. It had to be fast moving, and it had to be not too complicated. But it

was lovely you know, to feel that we were working across to that audience, and then simultaneously, I mean the other thing I think it was a feather in the cap, was that Nico Tinbergen (PH) did his first broadcast for Third Programme from Bristol, because I think Fisher probably tipped me off that he'd come from Holland, he had this new Chair of Animal Behaviour at Oxford, and was clearly going to be one of the great men of his generation, and he came to Bristol and did his first for the Third. So we really were straddling in those days, all three Home, Light and Third, which was wonderful

GILLARD Hmm, yes. And then this was all being done, was it not, on as it were, the statutory regional resources. You had no special Natural History staff.

HAWKINS No, no. I mean not even when we started in television, when I was beginning to feel the pressure a bit, and I said is there any hope I'd get an assistant or whatever. I asked for three things actually. I asked for a pair of binoculars. I asked for Witherby's handbook of British birds, and I asked for an assistant. I was denied the binoculars, I was denied the Witherby Handbook of Birds, which I went out and bought, and I was ... my Head of Programmes fought hard to get an assistant, and in the end, all he could get out of administration was I could have a studio manager seconded to me. And the way that came about is worth telling, because this particular studio manager - I'll name him in a minute - but he was a young lad who'd started in Plymouth,

and come up to Bristol, and in those days studio managers worked on a rota, so when you're a producer, you never knew who you were going to get on the grams and on the mixing and so on. It was whoever was on the rota, you see. I mean you knew them all and they were nearly all nice competent people - you didn't worry. And it suddenly dawned on me one day that I always seemed to get the same one, and I couldn't think why, and I said to him one day, and his name was Tony, Tony Soper, I said, "Tony, is this an amazing coincidence, or are you fiddling the rotas?" And he said, "I'm fiddling the rotas". And I thought, "Well that's good. That's the sort of chap I like". I said, "Why are you doing it?" He said, "Well I'm interested in the kind of programmes you do, and I want to work on them, you see". So when I was told I could have this one studio manager, (LAUGHS) allowed to me, to become another pair of hands, I said, "Could it be this young Tony Soper?" And of course he's done fairly well in that world since.

GILLARD He certainly has. Yes, yes. So you obviously had some mileage behind you when you were able to go to Cecil McGivern and say, "Well now you're in charge of television and look... and here is something that clearly is a natural product for television". And on that basis you began in Bristol, or having to go up to London to produce it in the studio, to do some natural history work for television, and I suppose the programme called LOOK was the outstanding programme of that period, was it?

HAWKINS Yes, it was. You see all there was at that time really... Mary Adams had made some sort of relationship with George Cansdale at the London Zoo, and he used to come to the studio in a really rather stiff and formal sort of presentation with a keeper who was never named, as he was of the servant class. (LAUGHS) (George Cansdale was very conscious of class differences), so just a hand used to appear on the side of the screen passing him a monkey of some sort. There was that, and then Cecil Madden, who had been slightly pushed out of the centre of the stage, but was in charge vaguely of buying film series of one or two sorts as packages, and he bought in Armand Denis and Michaela. And I think that was what was happening. The about the time I was beginning to think about LOOK, David Attenborough was working with the London Zoo in terms of collecting expeditions. They were sending out collecting expeditions, I mean under their own steam, for the purposes of the London Zoo, and David very sensibly had said if he came along and brought a camera, this could make an interesting bit of television. So he was really beginning to pioneer that sort of collecting type programme. And mine began, I mean just to put it in more detail. Peter having arrived at the new grounds, and having James Fisher as you say, I'd got a considerable momentum up, and I now knew a lot of subject matters. I knew a lot of the people in that world who would be valuable in television. Those were all assets, but what touched it off was that to raise money, Peter had discovered that he could combine his fame as an artist - he was a very good quick artist. He could take a big sheet of

paper and very quickly do you a bird, and he would do it with an amusing comment, so that he could handle an audience very well in those terms. He had obviously good anecdotes. He was a nice personality, and then he had got one or two little bits of film that he'd shot when he'd been abroad, and he'd made up this sort of medley as a fund-raising thing, and gone around the country doing it. And he was telling me about it one day and saying he thought we ought to think about it as a way of doing television, and unfortunately, wherever he was doing it, I couldn't see it. He only had a few more to do that year, and they were all in you know, in Newcastle or I don't know where else, Aberdeen or somewhere, and it was a day when I had a programme and so on. And we were wondering just how to do it, and I said, "Well if I fix it up somewhere in Bristol, will you do it, and I can see it?" And I had a son at the Bristol grammar school in those days, and I knew the headmaster very well, John Garrett, and I said to John, "Would you like to have Peter Scott come and do a performance for your boys?" And he said, "Well of course I would". I said, "Well I can arrange it. The only condition is you let me sit in the back, because I've never seen him do it". And it was born in that rather on-casual way. Peter came and did his stuff to the grammar school, and I sat at the back making notes and thinking how I could somehow turn it into a television programme, and afterwards we compared notes and began to see a format for it. And at that point, you know I talked to McGivern and got encouragement from my own management in Bristol, and so I mean again, we were given just a very limited trial run idea. We

didn't even call the first one LOOK. I think we, you know, hadn't thought of having a series title then, then we got one. And I suppose what turned the scale was that, and this you see was the importance really of good contacts when you're in a specialist world. It was Peter, not me, who went to the Ornithological Congress at Berne, this international Ornithological Congress happens only every fourth year, and always in a different country. This time Switzerland was the host, and at Berne, Peter saw a film by Heinz Seilman (PH) which he'd made for the Ministry of Education in Bavaria at an awkward length, thirteen minutes on woodpeckers. And Peter came back raving about this thing and said, "It's very good. you ought to try and get it". And so I got in touch with Munich and got this film, and we showed it one night, and that really made us. I mean it was a ... of course television in those days was a monopoly. ITV hadn't started, so the whole nation if it wanted to look at television could only look at that one BBC channel, and this wonderful filming of woodpeckers, I mean things that nobody dreamed was possible then, like filming them inside the tree and all this sort of thing. I mean it was a sensation, and the following morning the supervisor of the switchboard in London rang me up and said, "You may like to know that our switchboard was totally jammed for three hours after the end of the woodpeckers programme. We simply couldn't cope with the calls coming in". And of course so often it takes just some one thing like that, doesn't it, to swing things right round and the next conversation with McGivern was a very easy one. (LAUGHS)

GILLARD Yes, and LOOK ran for fifteen years or something.

HAWKINS It must have done. It must have done, with many directors because I didn't direct it for all that long, because soon afterwards I became Head of Programmes and so ... I mean Eileen Moloney directed it for a time, Brian... Brandon Acton Bond, and .... Crocker, it had several directors. But I did keep...(COUGHS) Sorry! I did keep fairly close to it, because you know it was an important to nurse, and the great problem then was film. It was ..you see it desperately needed film. The thing that I had to learn was that in radio when I thought, "Why don't we do a programme on bird migration, or something of that sort you see?" The easiest thing in the world in radio. You know the two or three world experts on migration, and do a bit of film ... a bit of sound of starlings twittering on their way or something. In television, you don't start by saying "What subject shall we do?" You say, "What material have we got we could use?" you see. And I quickly learned it was no good thinking up ideas of which there was no pictures. You had to have pictures, and it was a very... it was an extraordinarily narrow world then. You see 16mm film, which was to be the bread and butter of television was scorned by the film industry. I mean all the early film editors were 35mm men. They made it quite clear they thought they were slumming when they came to work for the television service. The film makers, I mean the film stocks, they only reckoned to have the sort of quality that people use

for holiday snaps. They didn't reckon to have a serious quality check on 16mm, and when you went out into the world and said, "Who's actually making anything worth showing, if there was anything, you were up against Disney straight away, with a great deal of money who would buy up the whole man. I mean they'd buy everything. Every stitch of film he'd shot, and that was the end of him. So it was no good going to see him. And I went all over the place trying to find film makers. Then we began running competitions at home to try and build up filmmakers in England who would work with us. And that gradually paid off. Heinz Seilman (PH) became our benchmark with the woodpecker film, and then we quickly got him under contract with us, working with us, and deciding where he'd go next and that sort of thing. But he was just one man, and of course one man's output television swallows in a week with no trouble. But we used to bring anybody in who looked as if they had a talent and sit them down and show them Seilman's woodpeckers, and we used to say, "That's what you've got to do. If you're a nice amateur with an interest in birds, but you don't really want to take it too seriously, we suggest you give it up. If you really think that you've got a sufficient professionalism to really want to say 'that man is not going to beat me', then we'll back you". And that was how we worked. Sometimes it was very difficult because again capital equipment. One of the best men we had was Ron Eastman who did THE PRIVATE LIFE OF THE KINGFISHER and really answered every trick of Seilmans, and did it on an inadequate camera. Well it was adequate in some ways, but it was a Bolex, and he ought to

have had an Arrowflex, and he hadn't... got anything like the money to buy an Arrowflex with. And I suppose again in a small outfit these are always things you could do. I could somehow fiddle the money that paid for an Arrowflex to equip him, without actually losing any BBC money out of it. But you had to do those sort of things sometimes, you know. It wasn't ready-made. It wasn't there to be picked up. And I used to get very cross occasionally, when we went to America and they used to say, "Oh well, of course, you've got a wonderful audience in Britain. All the British people all love nature. We can't do anything like that". And I used to say to them then, you know it wasn't a freely given audience. You have to win it like any other one. And of course in a competitive situation, if you are going to hold your place in peak time, you are competing with all the other programmes that might have been done. So it's not quite as easy as it looked.

GILLARD You did send out of course, some BBC people on expeditions. I remember the Galapagos expedition. That was a wonderful thing.

HAWKINS All first of course we simply didn't have the money to do any big expedition work, and I mean rather sadly, the old BBC administration which I used to have lots of squabbles with, they classified this as a talk, you see. And the fee for a talk as whatever it was, you know, I suppose Peter probably got £50 or something, and nobody really wanted to hear about buying any bits of film or any nonsense like

that. The whole point is they were meant to be cheap programmes. Well you can get so far you see, but then there comes a time when you want to do more. And when the centenary of Darwin was coming up and was going to be great world event, Julian Huxley rang me up one day and said, "Can you possibly send a team to the Galapagos and do a programme about it". Because he was then at UNESCO and he said, "We're working on the Equador Government. We believe they'll declare the whole of the Galapagos a nature reserve as a gesture to the Darwin centenary, and they'll let us put a biological research station there. And in those days, the sort of prestige of the BBC television service would influence the Equador Government a great deal". And dear Julian Huxley was the tough radio man. I mean he thought you just simply sent a OB unit off at 48 hours notice, you know, and a week later you had the programme on. The time was terribly short, and I found out that there as absolutely no way of getting to the Galapagos, and there wasn't in those days. And I lunched the Equadorian Ambassador and more or less said, you know, "Can you lend me a gunboat?" (LAUGHS) "I've got to get Peter Scott there in time to make this film for the Darwin centenary". And he, bless him, said "Well yes, the Navy will have to do it, because there is no other way of getting there and back". And so the Equadorian Navy took Peter and the young Tony Soper, who we'd been training as a cameraman, and just the two of them went on this expedition, and came back with film that was shown, and that was the beginning of our experience of expeditions in a way, and it all went smoothly, and the Equadorian Government did

make the Galapagos as a nature reserve.