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BBC HISTORY: Donald Baverstock 22.10.85

BBC HISTORY - DONALD BAVERSTOCK

22nd October 1985

Producer: Philip Daly

Camera Roll 1. Sound Roll 1.

Scene 1. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: BBC History. Its the 22nd October 1985, and we're filming an interview, at Ilkley, Yorkshire, with Mr. Donald Baverstock. Mr. Baverstock, when you came down from Oxford and came into the BBC you made a great career for yourself in BBC Television, but first you had four years in the External Services. How much bearing did that have on your subsequent career?

Donald Baverstock: Well, I think a great deal because I'd done four years in the Overseas Services, broadcasting in English language programmes and people such as Oliver Whitley, who was very important in instructing me about the nature of the BBC, at that stage. I'd done quite a lot of work, more than most, five or six programmes a week, many of them political or current affairs as they're called now, programmes; but also a great many programmes historical and otherwise, merely to fill in my time. At the end of three years there I was a little bored and at one stage found myself saying, "I'm nothing but a flunkey to the eminent!" Because nearly everything was 15-minute scripts or half-hour discussion programmes and it was only the thought that I'd get into Television that kept me going for more than three years.

Frank Gillard: You carried that current affairs experience, then, right over into Television Talks. What was going on in Television Talks when you.....

Donald Baverstock: Very little. There were four Producers and Grace Wyndham Goldie, who happened to be in America when I arrived in Lime Grove in January 1954. - Four Producers, three of whom left within

about a year, for retirement reasons and other reasons, leaving only Paul Johnson who had been a Producer with me in Overseas Talks. We were in, as it were, the deep end. There were seven people on attachment or on probation - David Attenborough, Michael Peacock, myself, Geoffrey Johnson-Smith, until in January/June 1954, in the meanwhile much had happened because work had to be done, in June 1954 we were all made Producers in Television Talks. Grace Wyndham Goldie was made Assistant Head of Television Talks. Huw Wheldon, David Attenborough, Michael Peacock and myself were all made Producers and Humphrey Fisher actually was made a Producer in the Outside Broadcasting Department.

Frank Gillard: What was the difference between Television Talks and Radio Talks?

Donald Baverstock: Well, Radio Talks was a matter of routine, they were nearly all 15 minute scripts typed in advance, looked at in advance, circulated in advance, typed afterwards as Programmes as Broadcast, circulated in advance, deposited in Registry. The discussion programmes were fairly straightforward,involving three or four people. When we got to Television Talks you realised that (a) there were no scripts and (b) the number of people capable of talking to camera without a script was very limited, and (c) there were very few visual facilities in any case and, I think two or three Film Units available for all programmes. So the difficulties were large but, if you had a large number of prospective ideas, as I did from my experience in Overseas Talks for four years, it didn't seem difficult to me from the start to envisage quite a large number of programmes that hadn't yet seen the light of day.

Frank Gillard: And the HIGHLIGHT series was one of them, I take it?

Donald Baverstock: Well the HIGHLIGHT came after experiments in FACTS AND FIGURES, which was a detailed 10-minute programme of statistics and economic affairs. It came after a long interview I did with Peter Ustinov, which was a reminder of what one knew about recording conversation and getting the best out of a conversationlist. And one or two experiences with film, particularly a film on France called WE, THE FRENCH with Vincente Auriol and Kozciuso and Andre Labarthe, and working with Grace on a series on religion with Christophew Mayhew called MEN SEEKING GOD, which Geoffrey Johnson-Smith and I used to call "MEN SEEKING GRACE'." because we were hustled and pushed and shoved...

Frank Gillard: HIGHLIGHT was a matter of filling up a gap, wasn't it?

Donald Baverstock: HIGHLIGHT, I think, came out of my instincts that if I was going to Television Talks I wasn't going to be a politician, a politicians' Producer - I'd much rather have gone into Politics. I didn't want to go into Show business because there were quite a lot of show business interviews. But they were, I don't know, kind of fauning programmes, with eminent American directors and theatre people. I certainly didn't want to go into Drama, there was not much room in Drama and, at the same time, I didn't want to specialise. I wanted to know all about the techniques of film and the variety and diversity of people and ideas that were circulating. HIGHLIGHT started because News showed signs of getting hold of 10 minutes and I was specifically asked by Leonard Miall, "Can you fill in 10 minutes because Cecil McGivern doesn't want to let News in from 7.20 pm to 7.30 pm. This was two days after Commercial Television started, and,I think it was two days - 1955 - and my job was to find three different kinds of people and interview them in

the three different ways appropriate, each night, five nights a week. And we did that for six months. It was interesting that I got hold of Mac Hastings, MacDonald Hastings, to introduce the first programme. And I got him simply because (a) I'd heard him on WOMAN'S HOUR and then I heard that he was quite the most popular broadcaster on WOMAN'S HOUR - Radio - but the Producers of WOMAN'S HOUR were very careful to keep this fact from him, in case he asked for an extra fee. And I thought "Well, if he's that good, I'd better se e him", and I saw him in the Savage Club and threw him in at the deep end from the first night and that was the night that he - we did the programme on Grace Archer. He taught me just a little in one line. He introduced the third subject which was the interview with Mason, I think, the author. "And now we come to a slight case of murder", he said. And no words like that had ever been uttered on television, it was far too journalistic. But from then on, you could see that he was assessing the audience, and he did it for six weeks.

FRank Gillard: But the big thing you'll be remembered for in this period was, of course, TONIGHT?

Donald Baverstock: No, No, you must talk about HIGHLIGHT, you must consider HIGHLIGHT a little because it did go on for a year and we did it for five nights a week, we did discover a star in the form of Jacqueline McKenzie, who was the first satirist on television, but very elegantly done. She made her name, as I forecast in those days, that you could make your name in television providing you were consistent enough, in six weeks. And at the end of the six weeks she was being talked about in every paper. And she was paid £6 an appearance, but it was very difficult to produce her. But apart from that we did get a huge range of people in five nights

a week, three lots of people a night, all of them different, sometimes important, sometimes human, sometimes enterprising or alive.

Frank Gillard: Topical?

Donald Baverstock: Well, everything was topical in so far as we made it topical. Once you can... its an important point, about topicality. Once you, as it were, got the trust of the audience, they will trust you with what you'll come up with. You then must have the wit to angle to their likely interest and as soon as you've done that, they will listen. But we couldn't be topical in the sense that News claims to be topical. News is just what journalists agree on its worth talking about together on the day. Topicality, - we used to use the word, before it was ill-used nowadays, we used the word 'relevant'. Is this relevant to the existence or the experience of our public? And that meant all the public, or as many as we could get hold of, to keep watching.

Frank Gillard: Now do you feel we've done justice to HIGHLIGHT?

Donald Baverstock: There is one other point, actually. I'm sorry, there is one other point to make about it which is very important to me. It meant that I could recruit. I had to recruit people. I recruited four or five people, who later became Controllers and moved from that office. They could not cope with the speed of work. I then found Cynthia Tudor, and then I found Alasdair.

Frank Gillard: Names?

Donald Baverstock: Alasdair Milne. Alasdair Milne was with me for six months and then I was able to go from there to America for eight weeks, and he was on a Trainee Production Assistant's salary and he kept the programme on the air while I was away and when I came back I said, "Well, carry on with it, I'm going to do another thing" Alasdair was refused a bonus by the Director of Television when

I returned despite the fact that he produced this programme for 50 minutes a week, for six weeks, for I think, £600 a year.

cut

Camera Roll 2. Sound Roll 1.

Scene 2. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: Then the next great innovation was TONIGHT. How did that come about?

Donald Baverstock: Well, first we need to refer back to the HIGHLIGHT programme. Between September and December, I was producing seven films called THE EDGE OF SUCCESS, a series by Aidan Crawley about British industry. I privately called the series "Brink of Failure". But I did get hold of a very good Film Editor, with whom I had quite a lot of discussions during and making that programme, and that was Tony Essex. In the meanwhile Alasdair was continuing HIGHLIGHT with Cynthia Tudor, Geoffrey Johnson-Smith, and Cliff Michelmore, and we,talking together, were saying we could do more with HIGHTLIGHT and we don't want to do special reports series, in half an hour of television, its essentially quiffy, quaffy things, in which nothing is said. And so we were talking; Grace, in the meanwhile, was worried about the 'Toddlers' Truce'. There were proposals there should be five different departments doing five different programmes five nights a week. By that time I was .. Tony Essex was crucial in this, and myself and Cynthia, were saying "Why don't we take over the whole 45 minutes". All we need, and its in my original paper on TONIGHT, which was written in January, the programme went on the air in February, in my paper I asked for one sound camera, one silent and two Editors, and the rest we could find by grubbing around unused BBC facilities in Outside Broadcasts, in the Regions, and out of our own brain. We knew we could find 15 to 20 minutes of talk and interesting people and we knew how to handle them, which was crucial, from the HIGHLIGHT stage.

Thats how it came about, and we started on February 17th. The crucial thing was the pilot. We knew we had a programme there on the first night, before we went on the air, when we followed a serious interview with somebody we'd invited with a 3 minute excerpt of a Mario Rodriguez, singing Fado. And we knew that you could put entertainment music with serious discussion thought, and once that fusion had been made we knew we had the beginnings of the style.

Frank Gillard: But this was a completely new form of presentation, wasn't it?

Donald Baverstock: Yes, it was entirely different. But it was based, again, on the HIGHLIGHT approach to the audience. The interviewer was not a different thing, with different people. We assumed that the audience were interested in showgirls, important people, elderly philosophers, cranks, lunatics, attractive girls. And why shouldn't we be interested, likewise. And we put 'em all together.

Frank Gillard: And the presentation, though, was relaxed, informal, casual almost?

Donald Baverstock: Well, it had to be informal because we had no scripts, no tele-prompters, no editing. Things had to be thought out hard beforehand. And they were. Every afternoon each of us would work separately on one interview. I mean, the form of introduction was crucial. And again, in my paper on it in February '57 I said the style of the programme would be governed by the links, not the importance of the star appeal of the item.

Frank Gillard: Can you define the disciplines that you had to impose in the days of live television?

Donald Baverstock: Well, you have to help the contributors, the people appearing on the air, because they could ruin their reputation by making fools of themselves consistently, or even on single

occasion. Therefore, you had to help them prepare to be themselves. In vision. First of all you had to get rid of the irritabilities - we didn't want people picking their noses in vision by accident. And we had, therefore, to strip them down by talking to them - "If you say that you're indicating you're that kind of person, aren't you?" That sort of approach was done in continuous dialogue throughout the day and every day of the week.

FRank Gillard: How much film could you use in TONIGHT?

Donald Baverstock: Well, we set out to make 5 minutes of cut film per unit, per day. And we got up to about 10 or 12 minutes of cut film within a very short time.

Frank Gillard: It was an enormous success?

Donald Baverstock: It became a success after about six months but I think we knew it was a success after six weeks. The important thing, though, in that first six weeks was the recruitment of people. We didn't bother with appointments boards, it was obvious we needed more people, and our judgement in selecting the ones who would come in and work well, and deciding gently which ones had tried but really would be embarrassed,to go, was fairly crucial. This was done in the form of discussion amongst us all and general agreement that one wouldn't do,another might be good. Fyfe Robertson came in one night into the Club with Gordon Watkins because Gordon Watkins said he had something to say about a story - he was then working on Picture Post and that evening I said "Let Fyfe Robertson go out and be the Reporter himself". We had to make the decision as quickly as that.

Frank Gillard: And how much freedom did the Producer have in a Department of this kind, handling quite controversial material?

Donald Baverstock: Well, we made sure it wasn't controversial. We used to look

controversial, but I knew what the BBC could do and what it couldn't do, and I knew that if we were straight up and down we could not be accused of using the television to campaign, using it to benefit our own patronage, our own patronage to benefit ourselves, using it to show-off. We could do most subjects that weren't forbidden in The Charter, because very little is forbidden in The Charter. BBC allows you to do what you like providing you don't bring the BBC down as a result of doing it. So actually I was, and Alasdair quickly learned, as a result of HIGHLIGHT as well, we were actually more knowledgeable about what the BBC should be doing, as well as could be doing, than most other people above us except for Grace, who went along.... and if there was any difficulty or problem I used to put a line out to her. I didn't allow Grace to interfere with the items or the selection of things because you couldn't have double leadership.

Frank Gillard: Did you get feedback from D.G.s and Boards, Governors....

Donald Baverstock: Very little, actually, very little indeed. But one didn't need it, Grace used to say, "Oh, they seem quite pleased at Programme Board" and thats all. We never went ot the Television Centre.

Frank Gillard: These were in the McGivern days. Now what about Cecil?

Donald Baverstock: Cecil, curiously, - now this is a large thing, about Cecil, because he comes up later, in my life. Cecil McGivern, I only met twice, I think, for any conversation at all, in the BBC, though his spirit pervaded it. And I'll give you an instance of why. Huw Wheldon, whom I used to talk to quite a lot, he was a very good talker and always had a point, he told me once that Cecil was a marvellous man, you know, and he quoted some memo. He said, "Look at that crisp, majesty you're commanding". But, on another occasion - and this is a good story about Cecil

Huw Wheldon told me in length, as he often did, that he'd been on holiday with Jacqueline to Lourdes and he'd been in to see Cecil McGivern. "He's a strange man" he said, "You know, I told him about the horrors of Lourdes, and the relicry and the commercialism, and hideous crowds of gawkers. And then we went into the Grotto, Jacqueline and I, and do you know, Donald, there was a moment when I thought Damn it, there may have been a miracle here. Most astonishing mixture of sensations. I've just been in to see Cecil and I told him this. And, do you know what Cecil said?" When I said, he was a Roman Catholic, he ought to go to Lourdes, he said, "I'll never go to Lourdes, Huw," "But you're a Roman Catholic" said Huw. "I'll never go to Lourdes, Huw. What do you want me to do? See all the commercialism and lose my faith? Buy a pair of sandals and lead my wife and children?" That was Cecil, a man who told himself his own truth.

Frank Gillard: We'd better move on. Can you, in one minute, tell us about the Churchill 80th Birthday programme?

Donald Baverstock: Not really, not in one minute. The Churchill Birthday programme was mainly the result of ,of intensive dialogue between myself, Cawston (Richard Cawston) and Grace, particularly. The TelevisionCentre was saying, repeatedly, "You cannot do this programe - its either going to be a super-ogatory tribute, or its going to look like a premature obituary." And, in the end we arrived at it by saying "this is something we <u>ought</u> to be doing, the BBC <u>ought</u> to be able to celebrate Churchill's 80th Birthday programme, therefore we will do it direct to him and the viewers will look in on it being done to him". And at the last moment, when he was watching and we didn't know whether he would talk or not and to see

that 80-year old man, turn to camera with tears running down his cheeks, and then compose magnificently phrased sentences without any hesitation, in Eighteenth Century language, was one of the great moments of television.

Frank Gillard: Tense in the Control Gallery? Tenseness?

Donald Baverstock: Oh, murderous in the ..... Grace's hat was all over the place and cues were being mistook, but nevertheless, the programme ended properly and it was an achievement.

Frank Gillard: He was not much interested in television himself, I believe, Churchill, was he?

Donald Baverstock: I don't honestly know. He didn't appear very much, no.

cut

Camera Roll 3. Sound Roll 2

Scene 3. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: Did the coming of Commercial Television hit talks for six?

Donald Baverstock: No, I think it made us realise how important we were. Commercial Television started in '55. PANORAMA started in I think the same night, with Michael Peacock in charge, and Dick Cawston in charge, with Dimbleby doing it. Dimbleby was selected because of his magnificent performance in the 1955 Election which Michael produced and we thought that PANORAMA made a good showing. We were going on the air with TONIGHT, the next night. But we were impressed with their razzamatazz and their presentation, and realising that anybody could build a Presentation studio and could join programmes together in a schedule. After that we watched occasionally, but for the most part, in TALKS Department we were wondering, would there be any room for us, against this kind of competition. We, in turn, concentrated on TONIGHT and my discussions were almost certainly with Michael Peacock, Huw Wheldon, Grace Wynham.

Goldie

Frank Gillard: But what about the battle for the ratings, with Commercial television?

Donald Baverstock: They didn't arise at that time.

Frank Gillard: Tell us about them when they did?

Donald Baverstock: The BBC line, you see, throughout that period was "OH, we're still the National Institute of Broadcasting"- it was a phrase used all the time - and they were only beating us in the London area because there was only Commercial television in the London area. Then, when it got to Birmingham and the pattern repeated itself, "Well, then we're still getting the larger part of the public" And this attitude, that we were still the major Broadcaster because we had more numbers in the public, was held to by people in Broadcasting House for five or six years, after commercial television started. And the Network didn't climb up the country until the end of 1960. At the same time there was another thing going on, which I don't think many of us agreed with as a principle, in Talks Department, which was that the BBC must not aim for the majority audience - 60/40 is the aim. Anything else would be a sign of our decline in quality. We knew jolly well that while the BBc had some of the best programmes, it also had some of the worst programmes. And this was commonly talked about - the weeds have got to be got rid of, until you can get new plants to grow. I don't think we had admiration for Commercial television and we got very, very few ideas from it. The phrase that I like is one that I've only read recently. "Troy in her weakness lives, not in her strength" We were only too aware of the weakness of the whole schedules and of the difficulties of making talks programmes. And when people praised us for being the largest

audience of Talks Department programmes, consistently, with 7 million,five nights a week; we were saying, "This is wrong that we should be getting 7 million audience a week. On two nights a week, the largest audience of the BBC's schedules"! And this was obviously cock-eyed because we were on the air from 6.45, at that time, until 7.30 pm. So there was no ease.

Frank Gillard: So how did the BBC win back the audience?

Donald Baverstock: Well, it didn't happen, I can assure you, until I became Assistant Controller in 1961, and that was done, in a sense, by me because there was no one else to do it. Kenneth Adam had not made much of an attack. I had a fortnight before he even talked to me after I moved into my office, waiting for Stuart Hood to arrive, and I went through the files that were left there, and could find nothing at all to indicate there was any answer. I also went through the schedules and the rating books. very clearly, and decided to remove all kinds of programmes which were stale and which were losing audiences. And they included CAROLE CARR SINGS at 8 o'clock at night, or the LOOK Programme, done from West Region with Peter Scott warbling on in an unscripted whirlwind way and there were endless pictures of birds. Birds, birds, birds, it was with him, and if we add 10 minutes of marvellous pictures of turtles, well it was stretched into 30 minutes. And the audience was showing its ennui. So a lot of programmes were taken out. Another point was that I made the NEWS at 9 o'clock. Stuart Hood thought this was a very good idea because we could talk about it as the "watershed" and account for all difficult programmes being put after the NEWS. It wasn't for that reason the NEWS was moved to 9 o'clock. It was moved in order to force the BBC Television Service to realise they had to

schedule programmes after the NEWS as well as before. When I arrived there the NEWS was sometimes at 9.30, sometimes at 10.30, sometimes at 9.45, but you could bet your bottom dollar there was nothing of any interest after the NEWS. It was a sign of packing up!

Frank Gillard: I want you to tell us about the extra million.

Donald Baverstock: Ah well, I did see Sylvie. SILVEY After we'd invented several new programmes, which other people said I'd had nothing to do with which is a lie, and I said to Sylvie that it was possible to get to 50/50 especially as we'd had the help of the Equity strike. And he was aghast! In my office, and said we couldn't do that without a decline in standards. And I said, "I'm not suggesting that you should drop MONITOR and put in a Quiz show. And I'm not suggesting that you should try to make some sort of jump through hoops or jump off chandeliers into half a ton of elephant droppings", I remember saying. "We're not going to do that kind of programme. All it needs is 40 million viewer hours per week to switch sides", because I'd calculated the difference. It was 80 million viewer hours. If I could get a 40 million viewer hours switch sides. And then I said, "We do 40 hours of main broadcasting. It means a million on every programme. MONITOR has got to get better and knock its audience up to 3 million. And there are reasons why its not good enough, why it gets 2 million. And, similarly, with BILLY COTTON'S BAND SHOWcan't get more than 12, but it must aim for 13. And if we get a million on every audience away from the other side, we've got to 50/50. So we've got to go for quality improvement all round, not quality derrogation as a principle."

Frank Gillard: And you achieved it?

Donald Baverstock: We got to 50/50 before Channel 2 started. And then there was a dilution of effort into Channel 2 and I think it dropped back a bit.

Frank Gillard: Lets jump ahead, or back whichever it is, it doesn't matter, to TW3.

Donald Bverstock: Oh, I did incidentally, on the audience figures, I did receive one reprimand through Stuart Hood from Board of Governors during those years, and it was "You must not put this about. It will mean a decline in standards". That was Broadcasting House trying to air its opinions.

Frank Gillard: Now, about TW3 then? Your Manifesto. Before the programme ever took the air, this great controversial thing that everybody still talks about. What did you say in your manifesto?

Donald Baverstock I can't remember. I did use the word "cant". I think I should also have used the word "humbug" which is a word I've been thinking about later, which is an English gift, actually. And necessary for the oiling and the mechanism of living together. And, in a way, one of the sources was an impatience with the Current Affairs broadcasting and the way in which public affairs were talked about. The British. Britain. The Government. They were all used to indicate parts of things, actually. The Foreign Office would have been a better word than 'The Government' in many cases. And the treatment of politicians as if they were all of onebreed, when I knew there were personal ambitions and personal animosities between them. So the idea was to be concrete again.

Frank Gillard: But how did the programme come about then?

Donald Baverstock: Well, first of all, there was already much talk about doing things with an audience, talk with an audience. But, secondly, I offered it to Frank Muir and Denis Norden and Tom Sloan.

I talked to Drama Department about it. By doing a later-night programme on a Saturday night, when the audience was a day away from work and a day away from going back to the grinding routine of work. It was Ned Sherrin and Alasdair who took it up and laid on a pilot which lasted 2½ hours; Grace said it was intolerable, couldn't be put out. I said I will take the responsibility of putting it out because there was 40 minutes of "gems" in it and we cut all the dross which included all the Establishment Club stuff, lots of things, and names were dropped and there was 45 minutes left, and we went on the air, without telling anyone.

Frank Gillard: But was it the BBC's great, satire effort, in the age of satire?

Donald Baverstock: It wasn't intended to be satire. We'd watched all the satire. Satire implies scorn, and we were not scornful of English life, but we were irreverent about its foibles. That was the intention.

Frank Gillard: But its said to have been full of smut. Was it?

Donald Baverstock: No, that was a curious intervention by Stuart Hood before the second series started, or just after the second series started. I think that was prompted by insistences from either Kenneth Adam or from other members of the Board of Management. Stuart talked to me very little about it though I sent him a copy of that memo and insured that he, as Controller of the Television Service did not take responsibility and I even pushed the responsibility, apparently, off my own shoulders, so that one programme would not bring the BBC down. It was just another new programme from the BBC.

Frank Gillard: What about the people who contributed. What about Frost and so forth, Bevin Levin and...? (David Frost)

Donald Baverstock: Well, they were all invited by us. I suggested some of the forms of the items and I think I only wrote three lines for it.

But later, Ned found most of them. I'd suggested Levin. And thats all there is.

Frank Gillard: Thats it?

Donald Baverstock: Its very briefly it.

Frank Gillard: What about the Kennedy Assassination programme. Is there a story in that that you want to tell, or not?

Donald Baverstock: Yes, there is a story.....

CUT

Camera Roll 4. Sound Roll 2

Scene 4. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: Of all the TW3 programmes, the one thats going to be remembered longest is the one that was right out of the mould and that was the Kennedy Assassination programme.

Donald Baverstock: Yes, I remember it to such an extent that I have it framed in my study - the Senator Humphreys' address into Congress, into the Congressional record. I sometimes read it, actually.

Frank Gillardf: Why did that happen?

Donald Baverstock: Kennedy was assassinated on the night of the Television Producers' Ball and I was curious because that night we were collecting five awards, at the table that I'd booked, for various people on TONIGHT productions or on TONIGHT. And there was our evening ruined because Alasdair and Ned immediately went back to the Studio, determined to do a programme about Kennedy's death the next night. I got back to the Studio about 9 o'clock and watched the special programme laid on involving three Prime Ministers and several journalists. Obviously, it was a feat of organisation. I didn't like the tone of voice in which the journalists participated, as if it was just another current event and it was their job to utter their

comments on it. It seemed to me that this was a different kind of occasion and the programme was inadequate for that occasion and the mood of the public. I got on to Alasdair and said "I think you can do a programme, providing you make it an elegy. Its not a commentary we want. The mood is elegiac, I think, and it needs somebody who can write with the correct gusty sentences and the short, precise jab. Its an oration of a specfic kind and the person to write it is either Bernard Levin or Robert Bolt". And we obviously got hold of Bernard Levin first and I think Bernard's piece both on him and on Johnson, which was brilliant - the King is dead, long live the King! sort of tone - was due to the fact that we had seen straightaway that this was - there was something to be done; there was a mood to be... as in the Churchill 80th Birthday programme. There was something we ought to do. There's a phrase in Montaigne "A man is free when he is allowed to do what he should do and allowed not to do what he should not do"

Frank Gillard: And this programme made an enormous impression not only in this country but in America.

Donald Baverstock: I think we judged that in London, that night. Knowing they were short of material to fill their television channels I got on to Kenneth Adam to ask him to get me Dennis Scuse. He couldn't do so, so I got on to Northsh the Vice-President in NBC whom I'd met three months earlier and told him at four o'clock in the morning, our time, that there was a converted recording of this programme on its way to New York,it would arrive atso and sotime and that he ought to get out there, get hold of it and view it that morning because it would certainly be of interest to him. And it was shown twice on the Network of NBC and I think it was the first BBC

specially made programme ever to be shown twice on a Network.

Frank Gillard: It was a great programme. Now, lets talk some more about your time when you moved out of Talks and you became Assistant Controller, Programmes. This gave you a much broader canvas, surely?

Donald Baverstock: Well, it was a question of... I was offered the job by Kenneth Adam in his office and he told me that four people had already been approached and offered the job but had turned it down. They were Peter Dimmock, Pat Beech, Leonard Miall and somebody else. I said, "Yes, I'll take it". I think he was surprised. I'm not sure, still, whether he didn't want me to take it in order to get me into a negligible Assistant job because, for the first fortnight after I arrived in the office I had to spend my time worrying about furniture and curtains. I saw nothing of Kenneth Adam until Stuart Hood himself, arrived. But then there was work to be done and I was the only one there who was familiar with what needed to be done, I think.

Frank Gillard: Now, you've mentioned Stuart Hood several times. He was the Controller of Programmes?

Donald Baverstock: He was appointed Controller about two weeks, about a month - a few days before I was appointed Assistant Controller. Who agreed my appointment I don't know.

Frank Gillard: Tell us a bit about Stuart Hood and how you worked with him and what sort of chap he was?

Donald Baverstock: Well, he was extraordinarily intelligent. He read and spoke in four or five languages. He was capable of writing, of translating English books into Italian; he was an authority on art. He was an excellent cook. He knew his music. I never thought he was all that involved in the BBC. I think he was

a curious thing of which I'm told Sir Thomas Brown of the 17th Century was one of the examples. I'm beginning to think now that Stuart was a kind of solipsist. A solipsist is a person, I suppose, who knows what he knows himself and knows that no-one else can know it. Its not introversion. He did tell me that.. I've told some people that story where I came back from Oxford where I'd taken him to have dinner at HighTable at Christchurch - I've thought about this for some time - he... I was chuntering on about converting the BBC into a multiferious thing with fifteen departments, each one of them with its own style and its own leadership; and chuntering on about this - it should be on a college basis: there was no such thing as Oxford University, there were twentysix colleges, with the exception of the Registrar's Office which nobody knew where it was. Make it like that and it would go on down the centuries. I chuntered on like this. And he stopped me suddenly by saying "Donald, if you want to imagine life in Communist Russia, you must imagine the BBC being the whole country". This was an extraordinary way of putting a thought. It wasn't as if the BBC was a collective, or Communist, and he was not a Communist or an anti-Communist. He was curiously detached from it all and, including, television.

Frank Gillard: What would you say were the strengths and weaknesses of television then, at this stage, when you became ACP and Hood was CP?

Donald Baverstock: Well, there were weak programmes which were there for want of anything else. So I coined the phrase, actually, "We must get rid of bad programmes in order to force good ones in". And I dropped a lot of programmes including WHATS MY LINE and THIS IS YOUR LIFE because they were American. I chucked

out PERRY COMO which had been there too long. I dropped LOOK and CAROLE CARR sings because they were only attracting a four million audience at 8.30 at night and most people were watching the other side. I dropped classic serials after a year because they seemed to be too easily done and one couldn't get film scripts but one could dozens of classic serials scripts and after two serials, one produced by Vivien Daniels called MAGNOLIA STREET and another by Daffyth Griffiths in Wales called THE VALLEY THAT DIED. We had the Francis Brett Young series THE HOUSE UNDER THE WATER. I rested those for six months. This didn't endear me to Light Entertainment Department, or West Region, or Drama Department but it was necessary to force new programmes into existence.

Frank Gillard: And you could do that, could you, inyour position. How could you....

Donald Baverstock: I had to clear everything with Stuart Hood. There was a certain amount of friction when I changed Children's programmes and said the Children's Producers... The Drama programmes and the Light Entertainment programmes for Children's Programmes should be produced by people who knew about Light Entertainment and knew about Drama. There was no point in knowing about Children's drama in itself. There was a considerable amount of friction but most of it was cleared - all of it was cleared through Stuart Hood.

Frank Gillard: Were you much affected about the limitation of output?. There was a limitation, wasn't there?

Donald Baverstock: Not really, no. We weren't affected by that, at that stage. The Toddler's Truce had been the last limitation. There was a limitation insofar as I adopted a but that came later....

Frank Gillard: Well, what achievements would you say, then, when you were ACP and later when you became the Chief of the Network, gave you the most satisfaction? What d'you look back on with greatest pride?

Donald Baverstock: I think. Well, though Huw Wheldon in this house had denied I made any contribution during those four years. "Forget about them", he said. The fact is I did initate the large scale output of drama series with Elwyn Jones, who was cruelly treated by the BBC, principally because of Sydney Newman. He was very difficult to work with but he made a massive contribution and Z CARS was the first of them. I also started a major output of documentaries, though Huw Wheldon again denies this. But I set the target of 50 hours of documentaries a year when we were producing about 5. And I in a sense shuffled the place up a bit so that it was ready for being able to do BBC2. Which wasn't going on the air, anyhow without much difficulty. It had been managed. It had not been led.

CUT

Camera Roll 5. Sound Roll 3

Scene 5 Take 1.

FrankGillard: Lets look at the early sixties - the coming of the Second Channel. What were the problems there. How was it brought about?

Donald Baverstock: Well. The BBC had been awarded the second channel after the Pilkington Report Submissions. Much of the time of the Leadership of the BBC was spent in drafting these submissions and in lobbying, and I saw Hugh Carleton Greene at dinner in the Television Centre maybe a dozen times during those months between the Pilkington Report and the agreement of the Government, and I must say I admired his ability and tact and

patience at these meetings with everybody including Solicitors and Town Clerks and M.P.s of all Parties. I thought to myself thats one job I never will want. I could not have played that political argy-bargy with such tact and such diplomacy. I admired him immensely and never wanted his job after that. But once it was declared we then had about a year and a bit to organise it and we had no clue as to what we would do. And there was a major problem over resources and with what facilities we'd make the programmes. There was also the problem of where would we find the Producers of the programmes,

so the next six months was spent on Appointment Boards as far as I was concerned. It was very interesting at those Appointments Baords. I'd said, originally, that nowadays for work on..... Everybody would have to have a Degree as its more or less the equivalent nowadays of a good, Matriculation Certificate when I was a boy and 78% or 80% or more were Graduates, young graduates, admittedly. The other interesting point is that Kenneth Adam's original instinct, which I stopped at the Finance Meeting on the Monday morning before he was going to propose it, I stopped Kenneth Adam from appointing Grace Wyndham Goldie, as Controller 2, and it was I that said that Michael Peacock was the only one to be Controller, because it needed organising force and Grace, in any case, apart from being slightly elderly for the post, was valuable in charge of Talks and Talks Group.

Frank Gillard: Did you hammer out separate policies for BBC1 and BBC 2?

Donald Baverstock: No. I had wanted, and this was my mistake in the BBC or my error of omission. I had said, and I still think I was right, that we should, from the start, have thought of BBC2 as separate

from BBC1, that the Controller of it should be seen as an Editor and he should have his sources of supply which he should lead encourage and depress, according to his instincts, and that this should take the form of different departments working only to one or the other Channel. But there wasn't much hope of this being achieved because this would contradict the whole Administrative Centralisation as well as the Engineering Centralisation which I was willing to tolerate, to such an extent that I find that I wrote a draft note about it and then didn't bother to submit it on the grounds I knew it wouldn't succeed. There was too much pressure to make this a manifestation of the BBC rather than to create another style of programming which would be rivals of each other.

Frank Gillard; But you must have had a co-ordination machinery otherwise you would both have doing drama at the same time?

Donald Baverstock: Well, to tell you the truth, Mike devised what he thought would fill the schedules, which I disagreed with or agreed with but I didn't say so - I didn't say anything. A lot depended though Mike wouldn't know this, a lot depended on my giving him stuff, or allowing stuff that I could have done with and in which I played a part. THE GREAT WAR was given by me as a starting series for BBC2 against Alasdair Milne's wishes, and Alasdair had brought back Tony Essex from outside the BBC inorder to produce the series and thought it was the biggest mistake I ever made. But nevertheless, it had to be done to give Michael Peacock enough to start it off with. But it didn't start strongly, but nobody expected it to start strongly. It was an achevement it get it on the air.

Frank Gillard: Shall we take this opportunity to get you to say a word or two about the Beadles, the Adams and those people?

Donald Baverstock: Well they were.... Beadle was a pre-War man. Assumptive, or conceited, I don't know. I only saw him two or three times none of them very fortunate occasions. When he turned up as Director of Television there was a Staff meeting in one of the Studios to which 400 people went, and he declared that he was now Director of Television, that he didn't claim to know anything about television but he did know about policy, and he did know about the higher aspects of policy. And he wasn't so much booed down as greeted with silence. And then questioned in a hostile way by almost everybody present. I remember particularly, Berkeley Smith, who was then Assistant Head of O.B.s I think, got up and said, "Don't you realise, Sir, that Assistant Heads must roll" Which I thought was a good remark. But Beadle was a dull, conceited man. He used to give good lunches and serve good wines and Huw Wheldon once, at one of those lunches said, "For the Director of Television, Donald, we have a very good butler".

Frank Gillard: Kenneth Adam, then?

Donald Baverstock: Kenneth Adam, I think, was insecure throughout. He, again, has had a very curious career. You see, he left the BBC twice. He's a College Prize man - at Cambridge. But he'd never made much of his life and he'd had curious jobs like P.R.O. to B.O.A.C. because he was a friend of Miles Thomas. He'd been Press Officer during the War and I can't imagine what that job involved. He'd left BBC as Controller, Light Programme. Before he came back.. Somebody brought him back, I suspect it was Beadle, and then put Cecil McGivern in an impossible position because Kenneth Adam had to try to do something but all the loyalties were still with Cecil and when I became Assistant Controller and Stuart Hood became Controller it was

obvious Kenneth Adam hadn't had much effect on either the leadership of the production process, or the advancement of the service as a whole.

Frank Gillard: What about Huw Wheldon, himself?

Donald Baverstock: I think Huw Wheldon was possibly the most interesting person there. He was quite the best talker. I still remember phrases that emanated from our conversations...."Never preach the sermon thats in you, Donald". Thats a very thoughtful phrase, I find. He told me a story about going to make a speech in Cardiff at the Chamber of Commerce. I asked him what about and he proceeded to tell me at length but the substance was that he'd argued the BBC was a professional broadcasting service and by professional he mean't a self-governing activity like doctors or lawyers, self-governing. And I said, "You mean we're an autocracy?". And he said "Yes, of course, we're an autocracy. We're autocratic self-governing." And I drew from that conclusion that everybody in the BBC was self-governing and had to be encouraged to be the BBC in embryo or in micro-cosm itself. And if everybody was, always being contained within the BBC, you'd be as free as you wished.

Well, that was opposed to the Management idea which was fostered by these idiots over in the Administrative Headquarters, who thought that people were managed. That you could order people to have ideas because having ideas was a matter of routine. It wasn't. You had to have fresh ideas every day.

Frank Gillard: Then where was the motor of the BBC? It wasn't with Beadle, it wasn't with Adam. McGivern had gone. Where was the driving force?

Donald Baverstock: Well, it was in the different departments and in members of the different departments. Elwyn Jones was a force in drama with

me. Huw Wheldon was a force in, as it were, the moral purposes of things. Grace was a force in the public purposes of things. And I was a force in one or two ways, I suppose.

Frank Gillard: Where did the Regions come into all this?

Donald Baverstock: Well, they didn't seem to want to exist for a large part of the time. I had a lot of trouble with the Regions. I went around them more than any other Controller had done and ended up having to talk to Producers about <u>having</u> ideas and putting up proposals. I went to Bristol most beneficiently. I went to Cardiff quite a lot because I liked Howel Davies. And they were far better talking outside the office than they were talking inside the office. But the Welsh. I <u>must</u> use this phrase about the Welsh. From a programme I did on Wales, WHO WERE THE WELSH on St.David's Day. Dr. Tom Jones, I used, as the last person to talk, and I went to see him in Aberystwyth and said "Tell me about the Welsh, I want you to finish this programme". And he had a marvellous phrase, at the end, which I still remember. For no reason at all, he said, "And if you ask me, 'Are the Welsh honest' I'll reply that they're artists. They give a flurry and a flourish to their speech a trifle beyond what the facts strictly require, in the eyes of the less attractive, less imaginative neighbours across the border" And there, certainly, was the English/Welsh tension used for all kinds of programmes.

Frank Gillard: But was this reflected in the ....

Donald Baverstock: I couldn't get them out of them, No. SONGS OF PRAISE I met it. And Howel Davies co-operated with that idea from the first and that was invented simply as a way of using up the Outside Broadcasting effort otherwise standing idle in the Regions. I assure you it was invented to utilise the facilities.

cut

Camera Roll 6. Sound Roll 3.

Scene 6. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: Educational television. Classic case of really quite a serious clash between the Television Service standing up to Television standards and a functional department with quite other purposes.

Donald Baverstock: Yes. I don't know whether its education or television, actually. Its the use of what they thought of the power of television. Actually it was the use of the success of people creating television programmes by people interested in something else, namely, what is called education. And they were educationalists. Not educators. They wanted power. Power over money. Power over resources and power over the public that was delivered to the television screens for them. They were not of the type that could attract people to watch the television screens. Scupham was the Arch-Bishop of this crowd of people seeking an alternative activity that would be more interesting than the boring one of joining Educational Committees and things like that. So I never liked them, and there it is. I don't like educationalism, anyhow.

Frank Gillard; And what was the outcome of this great conflict?

Donald Baverstock: Well, it was a conflict, I thought, between me and Scupham, but I've since heard that Stuart Hood had been taking my points all the time. I demonstrated that Schools Television was costing twice as much as Entertainment Television and Drama Television and Current Affairs Television. It cost twice as much in terms of staffing and in terms of resources and film cameras used. And therefore one was ready for these people with their plans. Their plans were to produce an hour or two hours of material through Committees with Scupham controlling the content, the placing, the timing, wanting to sit on every committee that

would affect them on both sides of their programme. And this was quite intolerable. He came from Broadcasting House. He had an office in Broadcasting House and he came equipped with all these people working in Radio and Administration and who had felt themselves squeezed out by this comparatively small number of people in the Television Centre. It - I found him an attractive man because he was so blindly certain as educationalists are and humourless with it, to boot. He was a most uninteresting man totalk to. I don't think uninteresting people can produce interesting programmes, really.

Frank Gillard: Donald, one minute, from you. How do you look back on the BBC now. What do you want to say, for your Epilogue?

Donald Baverstock: Well, I have a good array of epilogues. I think the BBC ought to be more and more aware of its traditional nature and they cannot be aware of their nature as an institution without being more aware of the English constitution. The BBC is an extremely English institution. A) it constitution is unwritten. It consists of a Charter about that long. Its based on precendent and practice, and trust. While its trusted it will continue. If its not trusted it won't continue. That trust does depend on numbers of audiences, to some extent. But it also depends on other things. I think it depends on its continued creativity. Once it becomes stale it will become poor. But its an English institution and is nothing like the IBA however much the IBA wants to say its like the BBC. The IBA could have been invented by any Jap or German or foreigner of any ilk. Its a regulatory institution. Very easy to invent and invented mostly on the Continent. The BBC is unusually English just as the curious Sovereignty we have, the role of the Privy Council and the role of the House of Commons. They are all unique to the Anglo-Saxon political tradition.

While we're aware of that, the BBC will remain. I don't think there's much more to say.....

Frank Gillard; Why did you leave?

Donald Baverstock: Oh, I'd just got beyond. I'd been there fifteen years and I was aware that hostility was not only there from the Newmans and the Sloans, each of whom wanted to be a Baron over their own resources, and each of whom was fairly barren of ideas themselves, I think. But this hostility was being as it were supported from all kinds of places. Too many people were working totoo many Heads and you cannot have leadership, which I was offering instead of which you have Management by rule and that is not a way in which the vitality is kept going. You cannot order people to have ideas. You have got to stimulate and give them.

Frank Gillard: So do you look back with bitterness or with....

Donald Baverstock: No, No. I look back with a certain amount of sadness. But then I do on the history of this country.

cut.

Scene 7. Take 1.	2 Shot	MUTE	
Scene 8 Take 1	Frank Gillard	MUTE	
Scene 9 Take 1	Congressional Record on Kennedy Assassination TWTWTW. Dec 4th 1963	MUTE	