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DOROTHY TORRY – INTERVIEWED JUNE 28TH 2006

[redacted]

KM – Is it ok if we start off by talking a little bit about the sort of family you were brought up in?

DT – Yes, we lived in Lincolnshire, and I had two sisters, three sisters altogether, three girls. My father was an engineer, he was a water engineer chiefly, he did agricultural things, you know, water supplies and we all three went to King Edward the Seventh Grammar School in Louth, which was a splendid school which is what I long for them to bring back because it was mixed. We paid to go, we went as boarders and half the things were scholarship and half were paid, sort of local farmers and sisters and things so a wonderful mix, a splendid school, I look back on it with great pleasure and I finished when I was seventeen, I did two sort of 'A' levels, I think Senior School certificate it was called and then I went to secretarial college, in London.

KM – What sort of dates are we talking about?

DT – I was born in 1916 and I went as a boarder when I was nine and stayed until I was seventeen

KM – So it was a boarding school?

DT – It was half, you know, a day school and people who came on trains and boarders so it was a sort of mixture, a splendid mixture, you know.

KM – Did you have brothers and sisters as well?

DT – No, I had two sisters, and they were all at the school.

KM – Were they older than you?

DT – Yes, one older, and she did classics at Bedford College and my younger one was in the Civil Service for a short time, she died rather early. And – I'm the last of the family in fact (laughs).

KM – Your parents wanted you to have a reasonably good education so they sent you to a good school.

DT – Absolutely, yes. Well, it was all they could afford really, but splendid, you know I look back on it with great pleasure and admiration.

KM – You left when you were seventeen

DT – Yes

KM – Was that the normal age to leave?

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DT – No, because I was fed to the teeth with school and I wanted to get away, rather unwisely I see afterwards because I'd have loved to have gone to university really. Anyway, my sister went to university…

KM – That's your older sister…

DT – Yes, so she stayed on longer at school and she did Latin and Greek and taught in various schools and I came to Kensington College in London....

KM – How did you find out about going to Kensington College?

DT – Oh well, because the school got various brochures from the secretarial colleges and this one had a residence for students which my parents thought was rather a good idea, so this is why I chose that very good indeed and then …

KM – And it was called Kensington College…

DT – And it was not in Kensington, it was near Whitley's and rather smartly called Kensington I suppose (laughs)

KM – Did you have to have an interview or something to go to the college?

DT – Oh, yes I did. I can't remember much about that. I came up and saw somebody.

KM – Would your family have come up with you?

DT – I think my mother brought me, yes (laughs). And in those days you know we were rather young at seventeen and eighteen compared with now. And when I'd finished my thing they asked me to, rather nicely, to stay on and teach for a few months, which I did. Then I got a job with …. I saw an advertisement for an author wanting a secretary. And I applied for it and he turned out to be an absolutely ghastly fellow and when later I worked for MI 5 for a short time, I looked him up and he was there on the suspected Nazi types (laughs), it was rather fascinating. Anyway, I then left him rather hurriedly and wrote to the BBC and this was at the time when George V was ill and I didn't hear for simply ages and so I thought this was no good and then I got a letter to say we've been terribly busy dealing with George V's death and the funeral and everything but do come up and have an interview which I did, and they took me on, which was splendid. Two pounds ten a week, which was rather large and a lot more than most people.

KM – So, who did you write to? Did you write to the BBC generally?

DT – I just wrote to the BBC. I can't remember if it was the Director General, or just the BBC.

KM – And why did you decide to do that?

DT – Well, because, I don't know actually… We'd been listening at school with passion (laughs) to Henry Hall and we were terribly keen on broadcasting, I suppose,

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which was just getting jolly interesting. And I just… absolutely marvellous to have done it, you know, the accident really, to have written and been accepted and as you probably know, we all went into the General Office, and we were taught about the BBC and the charter and impartiality and the ethos generally, you see. And then we were farmed out to anybody who wanted extra secretarial help, to various departments, and quite early on I was sent up to the DG's office – and John Reith said "keep her". So that was how I started. So I was nineteen then, soon to be twenty.

KM – I'm just going to take you back a little tiny bit if that's alright.

DT – Yes

KM – Just because it's useful for me to get some extra details. Just, at the secretarial college, was that a year course?

DT – Yes

KM – And did you learn things like shorthand and typing?

DT – Shorthand typing and book-keeping and a bit of French (laughs), and business I suppose, slightly.

KM – Was there an exam that you took?

DT – Yes, you did a passing out exam and you got a certificate.

KM – And then you did really well and they asked you to stay on?

DT – Well, obviously, I suppose, looking back, they thought I did it rather well, I don't' know, and so it was rather fun really because some of my friends were still there and we, I, giggled rather a lot, I'm afraid (laughs) in teaching them. Anyway, it was a splendid experience, really.

KM – Could I just ask you…? Some of those friends, what sorts of things did they go on to do – do you know where they went on to work?

DT – Oh yes, my greatest friend I made there was a friend until she died some years ago and she did various things, like she was mad keen on motor racing and cars and things so she went into, I can't remember the name, some famous motor car….this is awful, you see this is what happens when you're ninety, (laughs) anyway, it doesn't matter, and she was the one I kept up most with, and then she got married during the War and gave up and brought up two children, so she didn't really last very long. And when the War broke out, you see, she escaped, you see she was able to, her parents were wealthy enough to keep her. And the others…. I didn't really keep in touch with anybody else.

KM – And your sister went into the Civil Service

DT – Yes

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KM- What sort of thing was she doing there?

DT – Well, she was not a senior… she was an executive… what do you call it… not the lowest, not clerical – an executive. And she went in during the War to the admiralty. She was taken in, sort of, because they were recruiting rather odd people and then she stayed until…. I can't remember what she did really… but it was Admiralty really and then MOD when they turned into that. And I don't really… she was very secretive, so I didn't know her very well, she didn't know me very well, she didn't know anybody very well, and there we are.

KM – So you wrote to the BBC and they finally wrote back… Did you have to go and have an interview?

DT - I came up for an interview.

KM – What was that like?

DT – Well I can't remember. It's completely gone out of my mind. And I can't really remember the first day except I do remember being directed to the General Office, which was a splendid idea.

KM – What was the General Office?

DT – Well, it was a large room with rows of girls with type-writers and desks and things and I think they typed scripts and so on, it was a sort of general typing office and then, as I said, it was inducting us into the BBC

KM – So, how long would you have stayed there for?

DT – Well, some people stayed for quite a time, if they didn't find a suitable berth, you know, and I'm afraid I washed my hands of it really when I left, so I don't' really know. I rather think that… Nobody stayed in it forever, because they found places eventually, and this was feeding any vacancies in secretarial side they filled, having probably worked in several different departments for a short time. I did have one thing with Programme Contracts, which was my first contact with the programme side, but that was just for a few months, I think.

END OF FIRST SECTION OF INTERVIEW

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KM – So you had this time in the general office

DT – Yes

KM – Was it a few months that you were there?

DT – Yes, because, you see… George V died, I think it was in February probably… and I probably joined in March, because it all happened very quickly when the funeral was over and the BBC got back to me, and it was not very long …. It's hard to remember… it was not very long before I joined the DG's office. And a splendid, splendid office it was.

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KM – So, how many secretaries were there? Had Jo Stanley just started as the new secretary?

DT – Jo Stanley was my first secretary and the second one was Beatrice Wilson. You haven't heard of her probably, but she was a marvellous woman, Scotswoman, who became the Governess of Tanganyika. She married Sir Richard Turnbull and (laughs), was a great character. And the next one was Kay Fuller who went into the World Service, General Overseas Service I think it was called, as a talks and features producer. And then me. I was the last Clerk to the Board and secretary. In the office there were four and the first two were the Senior Secretary and the Number Two. And the Number Two was thought to be important enough to be advertised in the newspapers, you know. And we had an Appointment Board and I remember Mary Agnes Hamilton, have you heard of her?

KM – Yes I have, absolutely

DT – Well, she was on the board, and she chaired the Appointment Board, and we recruited Nancy Thomas.

KM – So, there were four…

DT – Two senior and two sort of junior. There was a sort of very junior and then a medium one and then two senior secretaries.

KM- So, where were you in the pecking order?

DT – When I first arrived I was the lowest of the low. You see I went in and made the tea and so on (laughs) learnt an enormous amount, you know, it was absolutely splendid. And then I left when John Reith left.

KM – Why did you decide to leave then? Did you go with him?

DT – Yes. Jo Stanley went with him once and then I went off on holiday, in Cornwall, and got a letter from him saying would I like to join them. And I said yes at once, rather unwisely I think (laughs). And so, I came back to the BBC after my holiday, I think for just a few months and then left and joined him at Imperial Airways. And he was of course mad to leave when he did, in '38 because if he'd stayed on he could have coped with everything during the War. Dear Frederick was a complete disaster, you know, overwhelmed by it.

KM – So, I'm going to take you back a little bit again. Tell me what it was like working with John Reith.

DT – Oh absolutely… he's the passion of my life, you know. I'm full of admiration for him, and reading that book and all that odd sort of behaviour [Ian McIntyre's autobiography] doesn't make the slightest difference. He was the most incredible person and my first awful thing I did, he had a scrapbook. And he cut out… terribly egotistical you know, which great people are I'm afraid, the… he had cuttings and pictures from the newspapers you see, and he kept a scrapbook and he had a great

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collection…. And he said "would you stick those in". So I stuck them in any old how, in the way I did when I was a child you know. And he was absolutely furious!… it had no organisation… everything crooked… absolutely perfectly awful…. go in and take them all off and put them all back again properly you see… like this… like this, you see.. And of course that taught me the most marvellous lesson at a very early age really. If you do a thing, do it properly.

KM – Did anybody show you how to do it though?

DT – No, no, they just said – there you are, do it, you see. And of course I realise now (laughs) that I should have given it some thought! Anyway, he was an absolutely marvellous fellow because he talked to his secretaries, you know, discussed things with them. And so were all in it, you know, in every decision made. And… very sad that he left, but he was a great inspiration.

KM – Were you the most junior secretary there for those two years before you left?

DT – Absolutely, yes. Well, then when I ….. He resigned as soon as war broke out and sat at home hoping to be called by the Prime Minister for great things, bless him (laughs) and waited and waited. And of course with him not there, I didn't want to stay and so I left and came back to London and got a telephone call from a Miss Johnson of the War Office who said I understand you're without a job, could you come and see me. And so I went to the War Office for an interview and she said, right I'll be in touch… so she rang me up two or three days later and said would you report at 9 o'clock on Monday the something and (laughs) of course when I got there, I realised it was MI5. It was fascinating. I had about a year there and then somebody at the BBC rang up and said – would you come back? And I can't remember who it was. So I said yes I would, and at that time I came back as Number Two to Kay Fuller with a new Director General. I'd seen Frederick Ogilvy, he'd arrived before I'd left to join John Reith and I was number two to Kay, and then he had two others.

KM – So, how long were you at Imperial Airways for – just a short time?

DT – Oh very short time, because '38 and war broke out in '39 and it was a few months after the outbreak of war that I left, John Reith left immediately, and I left soon afterwards. It was extraordinary to have fitted it all in, looking back (laughs).

KM – So you came back and now you were Number Two. I'm just intrigued because I get the feeling that people were paid differently. There seem to have been monthly staff and weekly paid staff – so originally were you weekly paid staff and then you came back as monthly?

DT – I was weekly paid and then I became monthly paid, yes, and when I left in '57, I was thrilled to bits to be earning £1,000. And that was the B1, I think it was then called, and it was a talks producer sort of level.

KM – If it's okay with you, I'm going to take you back a bit again. Did you have an idea of a career or of what you were going to do? Because I know that at the time it was usual for women to work for a short time and then leave to have children and then come back… How did you family life and your work life…

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DT – Well I never thought, it never entered my head about getting married, it was not a thing that loomed in my life terrifically, and I just lived… I didn't have any plan really, except I did know when I was at school that I'd like to be a secretary, not knowing really what was involved and I rather blazed a trail really in having a baby while on the staff, because of course when I first joined, if you got married you were sacked

KM – …I was going to ask you about that as well….

DT – Yes

KM – So when did you get married and have ….

DT – I married in '47 which was a few months after I became Clerk to the Board and Number One secretary and Clare was born in '49. So it was extremely unusual in those days for people to have babies

KM – You had maternity leave and then came back again…

DT – Yes. And Nancy Thomas stood in for me. Three months I think it was I was away. And then she went on, marvellously, to do the Open University and everything.

KM – She was a very senior producer wasn't she?

DT – Yes. A brilliant little thing … I was terribly fond of her… and intellectual. A great character.

KM – Now, I'm going to get again from you, back to those pre-war years, things like what the BBC was like. So … where were you living, at the time, when you were working?

DT – I was living…. My dear friend Rachel, this friend of mine at the secretarial college, we lived in South Kensington, in bed-sits, and endless changes. We didn't have flats in those days, it was all bed-sits.

KM – So, was that a room in someone's house?

DT - Yes. Those large houses in Kensington which were divided up and Rachel and I usually had a double room with two beds in it and we had our breakfast brought up in the morning and then we ate out, you know, it was just bed and breakfast.

KM – With a shared bathroom?

DT – Yes, that's right, with a geyser you had to put sixpence in (laughs) to get a bath!

KM – You worked long hours then, didn't you. The working day was quite long, if I remember…

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DT – At the BBC – yes, because one of my nicest places was… we advanced to digs in Queensgate which is terribly grand. 34 Queensgate. And it was simply splendid because there was Rachel, me and her sister a whole bevy of medical students from Thomas's Hospital, so we had a splendid youth, you know. Terrific fun it was but the thing was we had dinner, it included three meals a day… no… two meals a day, and three meals at the weekend. 37/6d a week (laughs) and I was kept awfully late by John Reith and often didn't get home until after dinner was served so I was rather a thorn in the flesh of the landlady who had to keep it hot for me.

KM – So you earned £2/10s and it was 37/6d, that's quite a big chunk of your wages….

DT – Oh yes, yes. Absolutely. I had a little help from my parents, you know, from time to time. But the standard of living was incredibly low compared to nowadays, wasn't it.

KM – I presume you would have been expected to come into work nicely turned out and quite smart…

DT – Oh yes. That was another quite interesting thing was Miss Freeman who was the Women Staff Administrator.

KM – I've heard so much about her….

DT – She stood in the hall on occasions to see how we were dressed when we arrived and if girls came in without stockings, they were sent away to put them on (laughing) and then Miss Redfern, I think it was, who was her Number Two who ran the General Office, used to give advice about how we should do our hair and make ourselves look respectable, you know, and proper and everything which is – times gone by, my goodness me.

KM – Did you have much dealing with Miss Freeman? How would she have influenced your life?

DT – Well, we of course,… it was rather like a headmistress, you know in a way. We were very respectful and fearful of her. She was awfully good I think, you know, but she demanded respect (laughs)

KM – Did she have her own office?

DT – Yes. Oh yes. And she had her own office, with a secretary, I suppose, and her Number Two, Miss Redfern, sat in the General Office and did most of the work, training us girls. I don't know what happened to Miss Freeman.

KM – I know that someone called Gladys Burlton arrived in the forties…

DT – Yes! I remember her. Extraordinary. She took over… she was the Women's Staff Administrator…. I'd forgotten her. I was detached by then really from the…. Rising a bit in the hierarchy (laughs) I do remember her. I remember her name.

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KM – Was there a difference between the staff who were the weekly paid sort of secretarial staff and the grander staff…

DT – Yes, definitely, definitely, a class system really.

KM - Presumably there was a canteen for lunch and things, was it all communal?

DT – Oh yes, it was. Not that the senior staff came, not the very senior staff. The Director General didn't, and the directors didn't partake but the talks producers and the heads of departments were in the canteen. That was my first meeting with Richard Dimbleby, this was during the war, and the canteen was in the basement, and we were there for breakfast, you know, having spent the night during the bombing, and I stood next to him in the queue and he's just come back from the front …. I'm getting ahead I'm afraid….. (laughs) But yes, the difference… There also, there was the canteen and there was also a thing called the Lounge…. Well that was rather superior…a little eating place, and it was… I can't remember which floor… perhaps the lower ground…. I think the canteen was in the basement…. And the Lounge was rather like a little restaurant in a way. And I remember once that Grace Wyndham Goldie brought the Queen Mother! And they had lunch there (laughs) and we were all very polite and not staring, I remember. And the Lounge was rather more expensive so you had rather senior staff there rather than the junior, but they would have been allowed in, you know.

KM – And presumably in those days you would have had tea trolleys coming around in the afternoons….

DT – Oh yes, absolutely. And one day a week we had Fullers Cake. And we had a special waitress called Mrs Swales, for the Director General, she was a splendid lady, and she particularly looked after John Reith's tea. He had Earl Grey tea and Petit Beurre biscuits in a tin, that was his tea time (laughs). And she looked after us all in a most maternal way. And then for the hoi polloi, for us, the trolley came round at tea time – you've heard all this…

KM – No, I haven't….

DT - …. With once a week Fuller's cake…

KM – What's Fullers' cake?

DT – Well, yes, it's after your time….(laughs) Fuller's cake were absolutely splendid. They were about 6 inches across I suppose, a spongy cake with jam or something inside and then iced all over. So there was coffee icing sometimes and lemon icing. And we looked forward to this tremendously! (laughs) And of course we had a kettle, you know. We had a kettle for the Director General so we made his tea. Mrs Swales came in and made the tea for him and – he had a fire. He poked the fire and he fed it with coal and logs..

KM – So, your day-to-day life in the office, originally, when you were first there, would they be organising diaries and meetings…. What sorts of things would the secretaries have been doing?

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DT – Oh yes! My goodness. We were incredibly busy with memos all the time. You know, people would be sending memos to say we want to do a programme about…. One of the interesting things I remember was how Janet Quigley – do you remember Janet Quigley…

KM – Yes, I do…

DT – She was head of Woman's Hour I think, and she rang me up one day and said could you try on the Director General this proposal we have for talking explicitly about child birth. And see what he thinks about it. So I went in – this was William – and we had a long talk about it and he decided this was something that was better kept private, really. Nevertheless, it did go ahead (laughs). But now, so what we did, we dealt with his… Director General's correspondence and one of us went in to take short hand notes for replies and things and then he would say "do a reply/get a reply from this/to this letter" things he wanted a reply to. We arranged the Control Board meetings and the General Council which were all the senior staff and then of course the Clerk to the Board, you see, was extremely busy dealing with the governors. Feeding them and getting their agenda and collecting all the papers and documents for the meetings and things.

KM – How often would they have been meeting, the governors?

DT – It was once a month

KM – That's quiet often isn't it…

DT – Yes. During the War it was once a fortnight. But we were then down to… marvellously… to two governors, which was rather splendid.

KM – Can you remember again in those earlier days. I get a sense that there were a lot of women working in the BBC….

DT – Yes

KM - Was there a feeling of separation between men and women….

DT – No

KM - … were they doing different sorts of things?

DT – The women were mostly secretarial and as Ian McIntyre said, the most splendid lot. Quite a lot of them graduates, but not all. And they…. They ran things a good deal, really. (Laughs) They were props to the chaps they worked for and did a great deal of the work really, in many ways. I think they were splendid.

KM – Most of the senior men would have come, I presume, straight in from university…

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DT – Yes, and this was the thing about the BBC at that time, you know before the war, was that it attracted the best and so these marvellous… the Benjie Nichols and Lindsey Wellington's and George Barnes, all those sorts of people…. And…. I was educated at the BBC, it was like going to university in many ways, you know.

KM – Do you know how they were recruited? You know you said there was an interview panel which Mary Agnes Hamilton was on for the senior secretaries. Was John Reith and those people involved in actually recruiting of the young men that came from university?

DT – Oh, he did! He absolutely chose them all, at the beginning

KM – Was it something he did alone or was there like an interviewing….

DT – Oh no, he did it alone. But then he was very autocratic, but of course, there was an appointments board for later on…. At the very beginning, he chose himself, absolutely hand picked and then, as it grew, there was an appointments board which was run by the staff department

KM – By the time you arrived, was that up and running?

DT – Yes.

KM – So, he didn't get involved at that point…

DT – No, no… I don't think I went to an appointment board. I think I was just interviewed by one person, as far as I remember. I honestly couldn't say that. I certainly didn't go before a lot of people, it was just one person.

KM – You mentioned about women having to resign and getting sacked when they got married…

DT – Yes

KM – That was actually introduced in 1932/33 – was it something people were aware of…. Were people frustrated by it…

DT – Well no, we took it for granted and it t was there solely because of the unemployment, that John Reith thought it was unfair for women to take men's jobs, you know if they'd got men to support them, that was the theory behind the rule.

KM – Because I know that there was a tribunal that if you wanted to stay, you had to go before a tribunal, did you ever come across that at all?

DT – No, no…. I remember that it existed but I had nothing to do with it and I didn't know anybody who had anything to do with it. The famous thing was his favourite telephonist, you know, who was engaged to an engineer and so he got the engineer in and said "I can't have this, because I can't do without her, you know, and if you marry her she'll have to go, what are you going to do…" I think perhaps she was allowed to stay on (laughs). It's unbelievable isn't it.

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KM – I think that they… people that they wanted to keep on… they did manage to find ways… so perhaps she did. I wonder what her name was… you don't by any chance remember her name, that's probably so long ago…

DT – Well, I could find it…but I can't remember it off hand…

KM – Was there a separate telephony place….

DT – Yes… the switchboard… and they had one senior telephonist, who dealt with the Director General's bit of the switchboard, you see, and the governors and everything. And so, he made a friend of her, you know, they knew each other and their wants and dislikes and (laughs) habits… and… the way they spoke and everything and so …. He felt he couldn't really manage with someone different.

KM – Being a new member of staff must have been quite hard… until he knew you, was he a little bit suspicious of you …at first. Did you have to prove yourself?

DT – No, not really. As a matter of fact it was an extraordinary thing, we got on, sort of mutual, really, and I remained extremely with him till he died. And he visited me quite often in Sussex and his wife used to ring me up and say "ring him up, he's having one of his depressions, ring him up and have a talk with him." And we talked on our birthdays every year. At the time, I didn't find him terrifying as some people did, or awkward at all. He's a fascinating figure, you know, being six seven and this scar on his… and very beautiful when he was that age (laughs) though he was rather hard when he got older.

KM – Is it okay if I ask you about a few names, to see if you can remember any of these women from those earlier days.

DT – Yes

KM –There's a few. Obviously there's Isa Benzie…

DT – Oh yes, yes. I can visualise her, absolutely, but I didn't know her, except as a senior talks producer. And I think she was rather… she was a Scot, wasn't she… so she was rather a favourite of John Reith, he rather liked Scots I think (laughs), naturally. But I only remember her from her reputation, we all thought well of her, she was a good person

KM – And there was also a very famous person who ran the library called Florence Milnes

DT – Oh yes! Divine woman. Absolutely divine (laughs). Terrific. She was… what happened to her….

KM – She worked until she retired… she kind of set the library up..

DT – Absolutely. Absolutely marvellous, and terrific wit and awfully amusing. And we got the most marvellous service. The Director General's office just had to ring for anything to anybody and it was an absolutely terrific service, so we were very

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privileged really. The one thing that amused me very much was… I got the 137 bus to the BBC from Sloane Square and it changed route, you know, and Florence Milnes used it and it went to some ghastly place in the East End or something and she said "I'm outraged! This is a communist plot" which made me roar with laughter that it wasn't such a respectable route as it used to be, and she was a great wit really. And brilliant.

KM – There's someone I've come across who probably wasn't around, but she was called Elise Sprott… Does that name ring a bell?

DT – Yes…. It's awful really because I remember… I think I can visualise her being rather stout, but I've forgotten…

KM – And I've got Rhoda Power, who was a drama producer…

DT – No, I don't know about her at all. She was working with Val Gielgud I suppose?

KM – No, she actually worked with Mary Somerville in Schools..

DT – Oh yes, Mary Somerville of course I remember. She was our most senior lady.

KM –Would she have had meetings with John Reith herself?

DT – Oh yes. He saw the heads of the departments a lot. I don't know if they wanted to discuss programmes or something. They would come and say can I see him, they wanted to discuss so and so and we'd make an appointment and he's spend an hour I suppose or quite a lot really. The door was closed for quite a long time. I mean he didn't sit there not seeing anybody, he was seeing people all the time and walking about and visiting offices and people used to love it when he walked in and said "how are we doing" and "what's going on", that sort of thing and people felt in touch but then there were 4,000 when he left and it started with four, and it went up slowly and then of course when the war broke out it absolutely burst its banks. Which is what upset Frederick Ogilvy, he just simply couldn't cope with the expansion.

KM – Was Mary Somerville quite a formidable sort of person or was she approachable, can you remember?

DT – Mary Somerville was an absolute sweetie. She was rather ill health, you know, I think she was diabetic…. No… she was charming and cuddly and sweet really. Highly intelligent of course. I didn't know her terribly well but I knew her to have lunch with her and talk things over. And she was good at her job, I think. You know they got an awfully good reputation the schools broadcasting with her, and her number two was Alan Cameron, who was an extraordinary fellow who was married to Elizabeth Bowen.

KM – Because Mary Somerville had a child.

DT – Illegitimate?

KM – I'm not sure…

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DT – That's news to me…

KM – I know she was married but I think she had a long term partner..

DT – You see that is extraordinary, that is absolutely news to me and this is the difference…

KM – Because she was always called Miss Somerville…

DT – Yes

KM – But she was actually Mrs Brown

DT – Oh was she. How extraordinary because I didn't know. And when she retired to somewhere near Southampton near the water? – a lovely sailing place, Chichester Harbour sort of area, I thought, dear Mary, she's all on her own, but she wasn't. This is all so extraordinary because all these sorts of things went on and we were totally unaware and there were just a few whispers, you know but its now so much out in the open, which I rather regret.

KM – I know also there was another person who became senior producer who was Mary Adams

DT – Oh yes

KM – She also had a child. It's very interesting. You know Ariel, the BBC magazine that started in 1936, must have been just when you started…. And I know there's a lovely little bit when they're talking about Mary Adams having pictures of her baby on her wall which seemed to be quite surprising…

DT – Yes, yes… and was she married…?

KM – yes she was…. I think everybody was married…. (laughs)

DT – Well, it's rather interesting you see because looking back, I realise that I was really rather brave to have a child in the middle of being Clerk to the Board..

KM – Did you have a nanny….?

DT – Yes, yes, and you see and we decided … my husband was in the Navy, and we decided, we didn't have a lot of money, we decided that as long as I could earn more than we had to pay the nanny, I wanted to continue, so I continued until Clare was eight, I think.

KM – Do you remember Ariel…

DT – Yes, I do

KM – Was that something that was looked forward to and enjoyed…

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DT – Oh very much, absolutely. I can't remember very much about it. I do remember that they wrote a very nice thing about me when I retired

KM – What was your maiden name?

DT – Singer. And of course, obviously they were just waiting for me to go, I think, so that Ian Jacob could organise this marvellous big office, like the War Cabinet you know, based on the War Cabinet (laughs) which he was the Deputy Secretary, to look after the Board. And I think he used this opportunity to get rid of the …. [not clear]… Which I deplore, really … What is so fascinating about being Clerk to the Board is that we had this wonderful relationship between the Director General and the Governors, and one was always mending bridges, really, you know and stopping awful things happening. Which I … I just think Alasdair Milne wouldn't have been sacked… in those days. We did seduce the governors terrifically. They came in saying we're going to, you know, alter the place, we've got lots to do. They gradually succumbed. Filled with admiration most of them, you know.

KM – Would you contribute or were you literally just there taking notes…

DT – I couldn't. The only thing, I did lose my temper once or twice, but that wasn't really allowed… so I was really taking minutes at the meetings and what was so fascinating, looking back on it was we had sort of an equal number of left and right and when difficult things came up for discussion you always knew that the left would say okay and the right would say no and then they'd discuss and discuss and then they'd meet and make a decision which was quite often a compromise. But it was a lesson in how intelligent people, with opposing views can discuss things and reach conclusion, which is the basis of our political system really, isn't it

KM – And I know there were some quite interesting women governors because you had Mary Agnes Hamilton at first. She sounds like an extraordinary person…

DT – Yes, she was a great hero, wasn't she, of people, in those days. I was a junior at that time and so I didn't know her very well. We had Barbara Ward who was Deputy Editor of the Economist

KM – And was there Margery Fry as well?

DT – Yes, Margery Fry, she was before my time, unfortunately. Splendid people you know we've had on the Board, haven't we…

KM – And was there Caroline Bridgman as well?

DT – Yes. Her husband was Chairman and then, when he died, or finished, they appointed her, Lady Bridgman, to just an ordinary governor. There was Stella Reading, Marchioness of Reading. And Barbara Wootton was my hero and she became quite a friend and I see that she became the first female life peer.

KM – She was yes, the first to take her seat. When you retired in 1957, you were still very young, weren't you?

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DT – I was forty one

KM – So, did you then work again?

DT – No, I didn't until we retired to Sussex, really, I suppose to look after Clare, in a way

KM – Was it your choice to retire?

DT – It was and the reason really was because he had one more committee… well, it was partly, I was rather tugged, you know, between the job and Clare, really. And then we had another enquiry, you know these Ulswater and Pilkington's and Beveridges and committees and of course it was really awful working, gathering all the information for those committees…

KM – Was that one of your jobs then?

DT – Well, not me directly because it was really …[can't catch this word] but we were terribly involved with it and it sort of interrupted what we were doing. They were essential I realise, these enquiries, for the renewal of the Charter, but they got terribly in the way, really. And so it was the combination of the two things that I decided to give up. And became rather fond of country life, which was lovely

END OF NEXT PART OF INTERVIEW

KM – I just wanted to ask you about the social networks and things that would have existed at the BBC because you obviously would have made friends there and I think there were all sorts of clubs and things that would have happened and I don't know if you were involved in any of those…?

DT – Oh yes. The BBC Club of course was just round the corner in Chandos Street, that was where people went for a drink in the evening. There was also, which I patronised in my early days, there was a Sports Club at Motspur Park. Where I played hockey (laughs) for the BBC for sometime, but that was in my early days. I gave that up quite early I should think. Socially, I'm not a belonger, I'm not a joiner on the whole, so my friendships were rather more personal, I didn't belong to the dramatic… What I did do (exclaims) was to belong to the BBC Club Choir and that was the most marvellous experience because we went to, once a week in the lunchtime, to Marylebone High Street and we sang – we had someone playing the piano to accompany us – and we sang. We went in for competitions, and we won once because Adrian Bolt came in to do the base, we were short of basses and he came in to do the bass singing (laughs) and we won the cup, because of him really. That was splendid, so that was really the only thing I joined and that was a great experience.

KM – You could have time off at lunch time to do that, were you allowed?

DT – Well, we did it, we somehow fitted it in you know, I suppose we had dispensation perhaps once a week for doing our singing and coming back a half hour late I suppose really, but that was fun.

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KM – Did you work on Saturday mornings then?

DT – Occasionally, yes, I'd forgotten that. We took it in turns then. I used to bring Clare in sometimes when I was on duty because I was sort of looking at post and seeing if there was anything urgent coming in and it was nanny's day off (laughs) so I used to bring Clare in to Broadcasting House but that was I suppose once every two months, not much more than that and of course the programme staff were there all the time. We didn't have quite so much recording as we do now. And of course at Christmas, it was buzzing over the Christmas holiday. And people got awfully drunk I'm afraid. Do you remember Lance Sieveking?

KM – I know his name

DT – He was a great one for parties, I think

KM – Did you have a lot to do with programmes…?

DT – Well, unfortunately one was only with the top part of the programme really, the policy, the decisions and the general and the programme making pattern really. Not with the detail. So when my predecessor Kay Fuller went into the General Overseas Service I was fascinated. She took me into the studio and showed me the recording things and everything which was new to me, so that was rather fun. But I suppose we were too busy really. We were an extraordinarily busy office. And we were only brought in if there was controversy or crisis on the programmes

KM – And I suppose Broadcasting House was very new when you were there

DT – Yes, it was '32 wasn't it, and I was there in '36 so it had been there four years. You see that there [points to pewter style bin] well those were along, about six were along every corridor filled with sand for cigarettes and an acquaintance of Clare came across one of those – and I'm thrilled to bits to have it

KM – Is it actually from Broadcasting House?

DT – Yes, and at some stage…it's no smoking now I suppose, because Clare and I are keen smokers, so she produced that in case I set the house on fire! So those were part of the décor, somebody described it as an Art Deco building which I suppose it was, really and so those were a feature with the fire things, you know… fire extinguishers on each corridor. And it was all beautifully clean. It got rather shabby of course during the war when we had all the bombing and the sleeping in the Council Chamber

KM – Were there things like… I've read that there was… was her name Miss Towner, Caroline Towner who used to be a main receptionist and greet people at front reception

DT – I don't remember her

KM – And there was also a matron….

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DT – Oh yes! Absolutely splendid of course and if you had some little discrepancy you went to matron or if you weren't feeling well and the Director General used to go and have his sinuses done by matron

KM – And things like pensions, were you in a pension scheme?

DT – Yes. Unfortunately, I started off, because it was compulsory, so before I left I took out with me the few pounds that I'd saved when I worked with John Reith and then when I came back it was a terrible muddle, everything had gone to pot during the war, and I was missed out of the pension, not that I bothered very much because I retired anyway at 41, but anyway most people of course. I think it works rather well because my few remaining survivors are doing quite well. The pension scheme has been well managed, hasn't it. Now this is what I deplore in modern life so much. In those days people went in to the BBC when they were 20 and stayed until they were 60 and you got all the feeling and the ethos and the companionship and the working together. Well now, every bodies here for a few years and then they're off

KM – I was going to ask you a little bit about your status with your family and friends. How did they respond when you got a job at the BBC?

DT - I don't remember, really. What I do remember is that it was simply lovely, as I said, it was a monopoly. If you said I work at the BBC, then they knew at once what that was. Well now you say you work in broadcasting, it might be anything. But at that time there was just the one organisation and it had a terrific reputation. You know you really were rather special to work in the BBC and of course they had the most marvellous people, particularly during the war, we had George Orwell and Tony White and everybody joining in those days.

KM – So which Director Generals did you work under …. After Reith there was…

DT – Ogilvie. And then Robert e was brought in to tidy the place up and then it was William Haley. He was taken on as Editor in Chief first with Robert e, because Robert e was a most marvellous business man but he didn't know Mahler from Beethoven (laughs) He'd never heard of anything but an absolute sweetie, and so William Haley was the brains, and then he took over as Director General and he left to be Editor of The Times and was followed by Ian Jacob who was rather wished on us I think by the government, really.

KM – So was it very different working for those different men?

DT – Totally different. The thing about Reith was, as I told you, he took us into his confidence entirely and discussed things with us and treated us as equals really and was the same. Robert e felt out of his depth altogether. Ogilvie was a sweetie and an academic and Queens University Belfast Vice Chancellor and a charming fellow and went to pieces and Kay Fuller and I decided that we ran the BBC for some months because he was almost at breaking point. And we were sort of stiffening him up and giving him advice, talking to the Chairman about it, talking to Sir Stephen Tallents about it and trying to get everybody to get something done and of course the Chairman eventually sacked him because he was out of his depth. And so they got e in to tidy up the administration. And Haley was splendid. He was a Reithian

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completely. Ian Jacob was a very good administrator and he said to me one day "You know Dorothy, we've got to give the people what they want" and I was thunderstruck because this was the first time that it had ever entered my head because Reith's attitude was they must be given what we think ought to want (laughs). And we must be a little ahead of them and stretch them. Stretch their intelligence and their minds and just be a little ahead all the time. And suddenly we had Ian Jacob saying well, anything goes, we've got to give people what they want, which of course has happened really.

KM – I'm going to ask you a few more early questions if that's alright…. Through my studies I've realised that the BBC was very modern and seemed to have quite a positive attitude towards what we'd call equal opportunities. Was that something you were aware of when you were working there?

DT – There wasn't this business about gender. Feminism hadn't started really, when I was there. So there wasn't a feeling about the difference of the sexes but there was certainly a feeling that once you got in – this is what I used to say to people, get in to the BBC at the lowest possible thing and then once you're in, the whole place is open to you. You look on the notice board for the vacancies and you can apply

KM – So there was a notice board with jobs coming up – and could literally anyone apply?

DT – Yes, absolutely. And of course quite a lot of the secretaries went on to do administrative and production work. There was no difficulty if you were that way inclined. If you had the skills to do it. I didn't feel any barriers at all getting on.

KM – And did you ever have any ambition to do anything else or where you very happy doing your secretarial….

DT – I could have gone on forever, it was the most marvellous job, you know, because you had everything. You had all the programme side. You had all the music side and all the political side. You see we were terribly mixed up with politics in every way, so it was an incredible job. And meeting all these marvellous people. Marvellous governors. Two of the outstanding ones that I loved were Harold Nicholson and Lady Violet Bonham Carter – have you heard of them?

KM – I have, yes.

DT – And Harold Nicholson was a darling and I met him quite often, went to stay with them at Long Barn before they got Sissinghurst you know, and met Vita, terrifying you know. And Lady Violet. Great Character.

KM – Was she one of the two governors during the war?

DT – No, the two governors during the war were the Chairman, Sir Alan Powell and the Vice Chairman CHG Millis?? Who was a businessman. And then for a short time, I can't remember for how many years, they just had two. And when they expanded them they took on Lady Violet and Harold Nicholson. And I suppose one or two others, I can't remember. This was before we had regional governors. And Lady

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Violet and Harold Nicholson were terribly anti-Haley. They turned up their noses at him and thought… but they were completely won over, because he was a splendid, cultivated, madly intelligent man. No presentation you know but as sound as a bell really and a great favourite with John Reith. I always sort of thought that it was a question of your quality of mind if you could be friendly with Reith instead of oppose him, you know. And Ian Jacob opposed him. And I think that sort of belittled him in a way. But Haley was thoroughly in sympathy with everything Reith had started. He was I think the best Director General. Ian McIntyre said Curran was awfully good…

KM – Just a little bit about the war years and women in the war years in particular…[Mention of secretarial school set up during the war]

DT – Actually the war is an extraordinary time, you know, because the bombing was so persistent and we were sort of madly trying to stay alive really. And we were also starting every week almost a new foreign language service, every time a country was over-run, we started a new service. So although I'm slightly aware of that Margaret D'Arcy thing [she set up the BBC Secretarial School] I'm not madly interested. I had my mind on other things, (laughs)

[Interview rambles onto something about Jo Stanley and Reith's diaries that doesn't go anywhere…]

DT – That was the sort of thing that John Reith did. I'm going to send my letters to the archive, they've said they'd be quite pleased to have them, when I die, and one of the things he did was on July 15th 1916, he was in the war, in the trenches and he wrote me in long–hand two pages of exactly his entry in the diary, which I've got. To take all that trouble. Absolutely amazing, you know.

KM – Are you in the diary for the later years?

DT – Absolutely I should think but I've only seen the edited one

KM - When you came back as the Senior Secretary, did you have to be interviewed at that point?

DT – No. Sir Frederick Ogilvie said "I hear Miss Singer is in the building, couldn't she come back to us?" Because I'd got on quite well with him before and so it was awfully haphazard during the war, I'm afraid. And the fascinating thing was the naivety about the bombs because when the one fell, the unexploded one, 500 lbs in the gramophone library, I think, Kay Fuller and I were in the basement and we heard about this, and we said we must go up and rescue the minute books and the Corporation seal. And so, against the orders of the security people, we climbed up the stairs, opened the safe and brought down all these books and the seal into the basement (laughs). And meanwhile the fireman said "I think I can deal with that bomb, I'll go and throw it out" and of course he went up and it exploded and blew him to bits. Awful. And that was sort of our attitude when it first started. And then the second one was when I was living at Albany Crescent at the top of Portland Place, in a rented flat, and we had an unexploded bomb and so they said get out, so I ran all the way down Portland Place with the awful noise, and when I got to Broadcasting House, there was a great lump of the Langham Hotel was suddenly in the street so we

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had to climb over. Marvellously reaching Broadcasting House. Safety really. And then of course later it had a bomb in its side

KM – Did you make very good friendships when you were there?

DT – Yes, absolutely. Kay Fuller was one of my favourite friends and she came to live near us in Sussex and I found a house for her. And another one was Anne Shed. She was an Australian who worked in the overseas service and Noreen Northwood who was also a producer in the World Service. She lived in Barnes and I kept in touch with her. And Nancy Thomas is the one remaining friend and I've got another who lives in Sussex who was a junior in my office and we've kept in touch and she went on to do programme contacts or something of the kind. But most of them are dead. And what made a difference to me was that all my contemporaries were eight years older. I suppose it was the timing of the BBC. They were all born in about 1907 or 1908 and I was '16 so they've all gone, on the whole (laughs).

KM – Most of your women friends…. Had most of them had a university education?

DT – No, they were mixed. You see, it was all very well for you but it was much more difficult in my time. Girls didn't go to university very much, except the very bright ones and the rather wealthy ones I suppose. Did you ever hear of Greta Hope Simpson? A most lovely, lovely woman. She was a university graduate and she was secretary I think to Cecil Graves, who was the Deputy Director General. And Nesta Shoyer?? Have you heard of her? Well these were excellent…. And Beatrice Wilson, who was the governess of Tanganyika later on. She was university educated. Isobel Shields was, wasn't she. [She was Reith's first secretary]

KM – Was there Betty Nash as well?

DT – Betty Nash was the second one, so there was Isobel Shields, Betty Nash, So Stanley, Beatrice Wilson, Kay Fuller, me. And that was the end of this marvellous arrangement, I think it was. However, it wouldn't do now. The Corporation's too big, for this sort of rather amateur thing (laughs).

KM – Did you also know Janet Adam Smith

DT – Oh yes, well she was a great favourite of John Reith's. She was a Scot, wasn't she. She was a little before my time I think. She was early days, wasn't she.

KM – I think that both her and Isa Benzie, Reith knew their parents and so it was their parents who'd got in touch with Reith and that's how they got their jobs eventually. So it was a sort of old boy's network that worked for some of the daughters of his friends as well.

DT – Of course John Reith was a great one for giving jobs to people that he knew. There was a great deal of nepotism, do you call it… (laughs) But it was reasonable in those days, you know, it wouldn't do now, but it fitted in quite well in those days and he did get people that he knew and could depend on.

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KM – Would they mostly write to him, or did they go to the universities and actually recruit people?

DT – What I don't know is. He got these marvellous chaps who were there when I joined that I've full of admiration. And he must have advertised when he was collecting his staff and quite a lot of them went straight from university and one or two of them did other jobs, small jobs before, but they joined very young in their twenties, early twenties, I suppose and stayed. A most marvellous lot. When I worked later when Jeff was not able to get a job and we were rather hard up (laughs) after leaving the Navy I worked at the University of Sussex for some years while Clare was at Battle Abbey and I was appalled at the standard of the staff compared with the BBC. It was an eye opener to me, really. I suppose the standard had fallen in the BBC since then but in those early days they were absolutely marvellous, terrific people.

KM – There's just a couple more things and then I think we can pack up. Just a teeny bit more about Miss Freeman. I think there was a handbook for staff as well, was there?

DT – Oh yes there was. I wished I'd kept that and I also wish I'd kept a staff list, you know I ought to have pinched one when I left and brought it with me because it was so nostalgic. There was also this lovely thing about how to address people, members of the clergy or the aristocracy and all this sort of thing which was really important in those days (laughs). And certainly the handbook for staff, I do remember that vaguely. But with Miss Freeman, I can see her, terribly well, and I didn't really come into contact with her terribly much the only thing I do remember is that she was terribly keen on people dressing properly and behaving properly.

KM – I've read somewhere that there were different toilets for different… senior women…

DT – Absolutely. What was so splendid for me in all those twenty one years is that I had access to the governors' toilet. And they had a men's and a women's and the Director General's staff and the Director General had these two on the left hand side, just along the corridor. And I remember one occasion which amused John Reith awfully, he was taking me to a charity matinee and I had to change into something suitable and I was standing in my slip when HAL Fisher walked in, and he'd got the wrong…. He was rather doddery at that time (laughs) and he'd got the wrong loo. And he told me to leave at once, please, because I was not supposed to be there. So I said you're not really…. (laughs) and directed him to the proper one. But that was a great luxury, really.

KM – Was there quite a lot of socialising with John Reith, then would he take you out to….

DT – Oh yes. Absolutely. We went out to lunch. I think McIntyre says that, the great thing about this was the great thing about secretaries that they did everything. As he says, Isobel Shields chose Melissa's school and presents for Lady Reith and looking for flats and things, you know and a great deal of socialising. Not only with

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me and Reith and other people but all of them, you know. A lovely time to have been there, altogether.

KM – Did you meet his wife, Reith's wife?

DT – Oh yes! Because I used to go and stay at Harrier's House in Beaconsfield, his rented country home. That's the extraordinary thing about John Reith, that he never owned a house and he rented Harrier's House in Beaconsfield. And then he got the Archbishop of Canterbury to rent him a flat in Lollard's Tower and then he got the Queen (laughs) to rent him apartments in Holyrood House (laughs) It's really extraordinary. He was not only absolutely splendid and of course he took us to… the other thing he did was suddenly say it's a lovely day, we'll go to Kew Gardens, this is awful really, so he sent for the car and the chauffeur, the driver and we went for a walk in Kew Gardens in the Spring and then came back and worked all the evening, you see. But this was sort of the lovely thing he did. And then going to theatres and first nights and things with him. Splendid really.

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