

The Connected Histories of the BBC

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GREEN Yes, I was appointed straight to the Talks Department. Um .. I was appointed, of course, as a Talks producer and it was .. one of the extraordinary things about it was that whether we thought we were an elite or whether we were an elite I don't know but the point was that to be appointed to the Talks Department you had to be personally approved by the Director General, by Reith himself. And .. of course, Reith had got things wrong. He thought that Talks were going to be .. were the .. were going to be .. was where you would be tendentious. Of course, in point of fact, tendentiousness applied subsequently, of course, in News. But then News was purely factual in those days. But it applied very much then to Features. So that any kind of what I call politically tendentious things were nearly always with Features and never in Talks. I can't see really how a Talks producer could be frightfully tendentiousness however strong his political views were.

LANE This brought in a great many people, of course. Tell me, just at this stage, what about, in 1933, the hierarchy of the BBC. What sort of form did it take?

GREEN Um .. well .. um .. the hierarchy .. there was, as far as I know, there was just the Director of Talks, Siepmann, who I worked under and always put under - there's a subsequent story to that. Er .. and .. he worked .. directly to Reith or perhaps to .. there was a Controller in between, I think, it was probably somebody like Carpendale and

later it was General Dawnay. But these were sort of rather shadowy figures from the services, eminent men from the services who Reith brought in to try and, what I call .. I think to get some kind of authoritative control over these unruly young men who were attracted to the BBC.

LANE Reith, I think, as far as I can see, wanted to practically exercise - what has been a very argumentative situation for many, many years since - he wants to exercise day to day control over broadcasting. Am I not right?

GREEN It .. would be fair to say that, I think. It would be fair. Um .. I don't think he did exercise very direct control over broadcasting. He was much more .. the only control as Director General he could have was putting the right people in the right place. I had no evidence of him trying to interfere with the programme output. But I think, if the programme output went wrong, then Reith was very concerned and I think he thought the programme output, at that time, was slipping towards, shall we say, the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN and too far away perhaps from THE TIMES and, therefore, he used to get criticised by the DAILY MAIL who was the really effective force ..

LANE Collie Knox.

GREEN .. and .. you've got it. Collie

Knox. Collie Knox was the ..

LANE But, John, what is this story then about which was still extant when I joined the BBC of the three rings on the telephone. This was John Reith, surely?

GREEN Er .. yes. If he wanted you, then everybody .. I mean, there was a sort of .. everyone stood to when you had a thing for the Director General. But, of course, as a junior Talks producer I had very little to do with Reith. Um .. I suppose the most poignant and significant contact I had was to do with my appointment and my dismissal.

LANE John, what were the circumstances of your appointment then?

GREEN Well, I told you about .. Morrison and introducing me to Reith. But .. there're no real .. the circumstances were that, of course, I naturally went round to see Reith. This is the amusing story because the first thing Reith said to me was, he said, 'Mr. Green', he said, 'you do realise, don't you, that broadcasting is a mission?' And I replied, in a flash - I certainly wouldn't do it now but I replied, 'I wouldn't have thought so, sir, I would have thought it was the most responsible means of public communication that had probably been put into human hands'. Reith drew himself back and I thought well, that's that. And when I got back, Morrison asked me, he said, 'How did you get on with John?'

And I told him the story and he said, 'Quite right', he said, 'you gave him the right answer', he said, 'in my religion and John's' he said 'the first question in the catechism is what is the true end of man, to glorify god etcetera etcetera. In yours, it's what's your name'.

LANE

I care for that very much.

GREEN

So, anyhow, it didn't obviously have the effect .. well, then I went on and, as I left the room, I looked at .. was looking at the pictures. Reith, I may say, after that rebuff was very much more friendly and I looked at his pictures - there was a picture by Nash which the BBC used to own, sort of looking out of a window on a summer day. Rather charming picture. And I looked at that and then over the door there was a picture of a shipyard at night by Cosmo Clarke who was an RA of those days. And Reith put his hand on my shoulder and he said, 'You like my pictures?' and I said, 'Yes, sir, very much'. And he looked at the one, the shipyard at night, and he said, 'That, Green' he said 'is a man's job'. And .. (LAUGHS) .. the inference obviously was, as I walked out of the door, that the BBC wasn't.

LANE

Dear, dear, dear. Th ..

GREEN

Anyhow, the stor .. to cut a long story short, when I got back and told this story to Morrison - I think I've already said - Morrison at once said, 'Oh' he said

'it's all right, you've got the job'. I imagine that he'd settled it with Reith before.

LANE Well, that was a splendid way to arrive. John, when you got there, the divisional hierarchy .. John Reith used to divide into 'blue tabs' and 'red tabs' they tell me and this was a sort of virtue of extreme centralisation or decentralisation.

GREEN I'm not conscious of that. I can't really answer any questions .. I can't tell you more about that. The only thing, of course, that I do remember was .. the circumstances .. ultimately at the end of nine months of my own dismissal.

LANE Now, what was that?

GREEN Well, you were taken on on a three month probation and at the end of three months you had to be confirmed. And Siepmann, who was my boss, obviously wanted to get rid of me. I don't think there was any particular antagonism but he thought that I was a sort of .. you know, I .. wrong sort of political attitude or something. And .. supported by Conservatives and so the consequence was that .. I didn't get confirmed at three months and I didn't get confirmed at six months and I didn't get confirmed at nine months. And at nine months I was formally dismissed or .. told, very nicely, by Rose Troop, that Mr. Siepmann didn't think I was

suitable. Well, it had .. it was a bit late then because I was doing some rather important broadcasts - which we needn't go into - multi voice programmes which I'd pioneered as well as the farming which had come my way. And .. so that was the .. the .. the position and I was sorry to go back to the Bar but I thought I would get in touch with an old friend of mine who was responsible for .. one of the people who was responsible for getting me and Charlie Max Mullan (?) and other people into the BBC. He was very keen on it. He was Private Secretary to Lord Salisbury who was Leader of the House of Lords. And so I was going to ring him up but the telephone rang and he rang me up and - can you believe it? - he said, 'I understand you've been sacked'. I said, 'Philip, how on earth do you know that?' I said, 'It's only just happened'. He said, 'Tomorrow morning, at ten o'clock' he said 'you will go and see Mr. Gladstone Murray'. I knew Gladstone Murray was Reith's sort of publicity man. I'd never met him. And I went down to the office. I walked in and he said, 'Come in and sit down' and we talked a bit. And then he probed me about my colleagues upstairs. And .. he said a lot of rather pointed rude things about them and I said, 'Oh no, I wouldn't' I said 'I get on very well with X' or 'I get on very well with Y and Lionel Fielden and people like that'. And .. so I was slightly defensive of my colleagues and Gladstone Murray said, 'Rubbish' he said. 'Read that'. And he passed a note over to me and on the note from DG was 'Mr. J.D.F. Green is not to be dismissed the service of the Corporation without my personal permission'. And Gladstone Murray said, 'Always get it in writing, you can't trust anybody

in this place'.

LANE

So ..

GREEN

So my career then started in earnest.

LANE

What was the BBCs image in the great British public's mind, do you think? Was it a .. great British institution?

GREEN

Oh yes, it was because I can remember .. well, I can remember little human things like my Grandmother being absolutely glued to the earphones. She had them on permanently. And she was getting very old and things and it was .. you know, she was an intelligent woman and she simply loved listening. Particularly to the spoken word.

LANE

Is it not extraordinary that the headphone being glued to the child's ear is now there again? I mean in this day and age.

GREEN

I think it's very peculiar. And the other day I had to do, in my house, I had to do some new wainscoting and .. they took out the thing .. that the cat's whisker used to go .. the earphone used to plug in and the cat's whisker was in the window. And the builders who did it couldn't believe the story at all.

LANE

Is that not extraordinary? But I ..
I read that the BBC attracted a considerable number of men and women who believed in broadcasting almost as a social and cultural crusade. Is that fair? Is that a fair comment?

GREEN

Yes I think it's absolutely fair. It's absolutely fair and .. and I think this was one of the problems, you see, certainly with my colleagues in the Talks Department. I think there was a very, very high minded attitude. Now, the two people who might have tried to sort of what I call 'let that down' slightly were myself, as Head of Agricultural Broadca .. when I ultimately became Head of Agricultural Broadcasting and Janet Quigley who, like me, had .. I created Farming, she had created Women's Hour. And Janet and I were the two sort of .. she was a hard headed Ulster woman and she and I were the two what I call people who really weren't afraid of journalism, though we didn't want to be associated with journalistic approach, but nevertheless we did feel that broadcasting the spoken word had what I call 'practical' adaptation .. practical associations. And it's rather funny to think of it, when I eventually became Controller of the Talks Division, she was my assistant.

(PAUSE)

LANE

Lionel Fielden, a name that's .. has come up already several times, he said, 'We really believe that broadcasting could revolutionise human opinion'. That it could

Exchange things. I don't know. But anyhow there was .. there was an obligation there but purely as something factual. Nothing to do with Talks. The whole concept of Talks was something quite separate. And, therefore, the Talks Department who were all sort of high brows from the universities, like the people we've mentioned - one or two shell shocked .. intellectuals from the First World War. Some very interesting people but we won't go into that. Um .. they said that we've got .. we've got to do this. And so I was told by .. Siepmann said to me, he said 'You know, you're the chap who ought to be doing these garden broadcasts and we've got to find a regular speaker' because there'd been a few successful, what I call, broadcasts with casual ones. And the choice lay between somebody called H.P. Taylor - I can't remember whether he was the Ministry of Agriculture or Kew - and Vita Sackville-West who was very popular and a great friend of Lionel's and this man Middleton who was the Assistant Horticultural Adviser of the Surrey County Council. Well, there obviously was no choice between him and the other two higher lights. But Lionel said .. he said 'We can't have Vita doing a regular broadcast, she's too precious'. Well, Lionel knew and had sympathies with her. Taylor we thought was a bit too heavy and authoritative and the problem was were we to have this horticultural adviser from the County Council. Well, Lionel said 'I think we ought to have Middleton because of his background'. And I said 'Well what is his background?' And he said 'Well, his father is farm manager to Sir George Sitwell in Northamptonshire'. And .. he's been brought up with .. Osbert and Sacheverell and .. what was the

.. sister's name? And .. I think that they've played in the potting shed together and I don't think they can go wrong'. My god this was an inspired choice because Middleton's elder brother was something very .. quite eminent in the City. His second brother was a Sapper Colonel. And his younger brother was an Oxford don. (LAUGHS) I could tell you more story .. and one more great story about during the War when Middleton went to stay with Osbert during the War. It's an amusing story because .. I took charge of Middleton and I entered into the horticultural world. And Middleton never missed a broadcast except one. And I let him off one Sunday .. and put somebody else on instead. Probably Fred Streeter. Because I would never allow .. oh, not I. The Talks Department would never allow a broadcast to be recorded. Ever. Right up until towards the end of the .. very end of the War. It .. it .. Reith had .. I .. phrase that was used was 'sense of occasion'. And this sense of occasion was very important with Middleton. And on this one particular occasion Middleton came to me and he said .. he said 'I've a bit of a problem' he said. 'Osbert's asked me to go round to Renishaw' he said 'and spend a weekend'. So I said 'Well, you know, we'll see what we can do' and Middleton eventually went down there. When he came back I said to him 'How did it go? What sort of weekend did you get?' 'Oh' he said 'it went off all right' he said. 'Osbert and Edith' he said 'you know, they're some silly devils' he said. 'We .. we sat there at the table' he said 'four of us and' he said 'there was a waiter behind each seat' he said. 'They all ought to have been out at the front'. And I said 'Well, who

given us one' he said 'we can hang our harps on and another we can hang ourselves on'. It was that .. it was that type of humour. Er .. another little anecdote that I remember very well was during the War every thing, as you know, was scripted and .. he had .. the one exception was Middleton .. he had about five pages of foolscap and then he used to say, if time, carnations, cabbages, whatever it may be. And one Sunday he got to the thing there and he said 'Oh' he said ' we've got a few minutes left' he said 'I'll talk a bit about carnations' he said. 'Carnations are lime lovers' he said ' but if the raids go on like they've been going this week you'll soon have plenty of rubble about which you can use instead of lime'. And, of course, the telephone rang from the Ministry of Information and the whole Government .. the whole place blew up because he apparently had .. was telling the enemy how successful the raids had been that week.

LANE He was a remarkable man in every sense of the word. I mean, to the point where the Corporation, I suppose, in no other case have they ever - for an ordinary broadcaster, let's put it that way - have they ever raised a monument?

GREEN No. The story of the monument .. I was responsible for. I and Roy Hay and one or two people were responsible for the .. for the Middleton Gate. Er .. I got somebody to make the gate and I think .. well, no I think Roy Hay did that and I got the money for .. well, I think the

the first things I did was to suggest a speaker for the National Lecture. You know, the National Lecture became known as the Reith Lecture after Reith had left. And I was, as I say, a junior Talks producer and I said I think that a very good person to give the Reith Lecture would be Sir Alexander Gibb. Because Sir Alexander Gibb had just written a book on Telford. Now, he was a very distinguished .. Alexander Gibb and Partners very distinguished public engineers and he had built For .. half built Forsythe (ph) Dockyard when the First World War broke out. And .. then he'd been taken over and was Chief at the Admiralty. Engineering side. And so .. I happened to know that he had given at one short period employment to John Reith .. when Reith was wounded and had come out of the army. And he was always amused about Reith because he'd had to remove Reith from whatever the job was because he was so hard on his subordinates. This is rather amusing. And .. so I suggested that Gibb. And Reith was absolutely delighted. And I can remember going to see Reith and Reith said, 'What a splendid idea' and I was congratulated on this. The talk .. the Reith .. the National Lecture was eventually given by .. by Reith. (LAUGHS) And .. the .. billing in the RADIO TIMES I got .. in those days the RADIO TIMES did no real work .. you know, no kind of editorial work. They relied on the producers. And I had billed Reith and I think I'd put his .. FRS before his CBE or .. anyhow I got the letters after his name wrong and Reith was absolutely furious and sent for me. And I got a thorough ticking off that the most important thing was that these had got to be absolutely

correct. Had I consulted a .. the etiquette expert? And so and so and so. And I said 'No sir'. And I was thoroughly ticked off and I must say I can remember going away and thinking how splendid that was. What a great place this BBC is. What a great man Reith is. Because that is a kind of thing that I was capable of appreciating and I never made a mistake again.

LANE (LAUGHS) Yes, I'm sure you .. he was a very canny Scot as

GREEN It's .. I mention that story because I think ..

END OF REEL 1 - SIDE A

START OF REEL 1 - SIDE B

GREEN .. ight into his character. Er .. the other time was that .. there was a Captain Spicer who was the administrative officer of the Talks Division which was a slightly later date - just before Reith left. And I suppose it was a sort of etiquette in the .. in the Navy for senior officers to entertain the Admiral and Reith was asked to lunch at one of the Service Clubs. And appropriately enough a couple of snotties were invited and they were me and Marjorie Weiss (ph). And so we went down there. There was Mrs. Spicer, Spicer, Reith and Marjorie Weiss and myself and just .. lunch had just started, when Reith's secretary arrived and came into the dining room, which was a most unusual thing to do in a men's club, brought three letters and Reith said 'These are very important, I've got to sign them'. And he signed the letters. I didn't see the other three but I did see the name of the Prime Minister on one and Marjorie Weiss and I, when we came out, said 'I think that was rather bad form, didn't you?'

LANE Well, it has been said that with the departure of Reith it was the end of not only a regime but also an era. Yes?

GREEN Um .. yes, I think it was. It was the end of .. it was the end of a .. of a formative period. I

Coffee House. And I can remember several sides to that. Guy used to draw cartoons and he used to draw a cartoon of Norman Luker as 'management man', the phrase just emerged. 'Management man' with all his .. staff and departments in little cubicles, you see, and there he was sitting at the .. Now, I had never seen this side of Norman's character, although when I was President of the Union at Cambridge Norman was on my committee and I couldn't really have known anybody better. But this was a very extraordinary insight. And, at the same time, he used to draw cartoons of me and I was always on the battlements of a castle with a crowd vituperating down below. And I was marching up and down with a flag norm .. on the top. And these used to get passed round the Talks Department surreptitiously and cause a lot of laughter. And I can remember Maconachie saying 'Come on, come on' he said 'let's see that stuff then'. The two things - this one of Norman Luker and I - were passed up to them and Maconachie said 'Now, for .. for god's sake, get on with the business, Burgess, and what is the next item on the agenda?' Now, the funny thing was that Norman Luker, after the War, left it and was appointed Head of Talks. I was in Australia at the time. I thought it was an extraordinary appointment, Norman. But Norman was appointed as Head of Talks and .. it really was .. quite a disaster because this psychology, which Guy had seen and which was quite unknown to me who knew him much better than Guy, was in fact given effect during that period. And as a result of that there was a mutiny in Talks and .. Curran, Charles Curran, who became Director General, Helen Arbuthnot. Um .. Helen was

that. We weren't complacent. And we were terribly self critical. And at the Talks meeting, we would tear each other's programmes to pieces. But always against the background of what I call a .. a higher moral approach which, of course, today would be regarded as quite shocking.

LANE Yes. What I'm really basically thinking is that commercialisation .. in the BBCs Charter I think it says that not that you .. they shall not broadcast anything commercial but rather that they shall not give preference to one over another.

GREEN But you weren't allowed to mention a commodity. I mean, if you'd .. if you had .. if somebody put on a talk's to me .. 'we had a lovely picnic and I got out my Thermos flask' I would cut it out.

LANE But on the other ..

GREEN Pencil right through. I .. I don't know what I would invent as a phrase for a Thermos flask but because .. one firm made .. made 'em all. And this went right through the whole thing.

LANE Well, of course, there is the story of the Land Rover which had to be referred to as a four wheel cross country vehicle for many years.

programme planners - Godfrey Adams I think was one - regarded the listener figures as their god. And that that .. that was what really affected the planning of the programmes.

GREEN Well, the programme planners undoubtedly did but you've got to remember we're talking about the BBC .. there was .. there was a dichotomy: there was programmes and supply. Godfrey Adams, Ronald Lewin and all those people came in on the wave of .. the .. the ..making the programmes. Early days at the BBC, everything was in the hands of the producer and there was some very funny programme planning I can tell you about. I can remember the first programme I put on, THE ROYAL SHOW. I lined the whole programme up. I went down to meet all these big wigs at Bristol. The Show was at Bristol. And when I was half way down in the train, I read my TIMES and saw my programme wasn't in. And that was one. And then, of course, there was .. a fluff there by the programme planners. Generally speaking, the .. the programme planners only rose in status very, very slowly but they were always subservient to the producer. And .. when sound broadcasting was eventually established, the programme planners, of course, were .. were .. were controllers and they were .. they were our equals. I mean, they were the equals of shall we say Gielgud, me and Glock. People like that. But the old BBC, the primacy had been in the hands of the programme makers. I can tell you another funny little incident. I've just thought of one. And that was the day we had three - it was in Maconachie's day - and there were three talks on

into that little dug out of his ..

GREEN Yes.

LANE .. and seeing he and Ed Morrow, the famous Ed Morrow ..

GREEN Oh indeed, yes.

LANE .. at two o'clock in the morning, in a wreath of smoke.

GREEN I .. oh, indeed, yes. Oh well, Ed was .. he was a tremendous character. It was a sort of cave of Abdullum (?). He was amazing. R.T. Clarke who he had in there, I mean, he had all the great figures in the War. I mean, he used to come in and would probably go down there .. well, he went down to broadcast, do a news broadcast. And then, of course, the duty room was round by the canteen, so they used to slip round there and then after that, of course, would be what are called whiskies and sodas and things.

LANE But R.T. Clarke, in fact, was a .. very skilled news man. What influence did he have on the development of news, do you think?

GREEN I don't know because he was followed by Tahu Hole who, of course, I also knew very, very well

GREEN Gladstone Murray was .. I don't think .. he was a great opponent of Siepmann. There was a death struggle between Gladstone Murray and Siepmann. He lived rather opulently in Avenue Road and he knew the whole world of the press. He knew all the press barons. He knew everyone. He'd been a very distinguished airman in the War. Some people said he shot down Richthofen but I don't think that was true. Everybody had shot down Richthofen. But .. he was a .. he was a very distinguished airman and he was .. he had Fleet Street very much under his control. And this was very important from Reith's point of view. This was why he was backing me and Coatman against Siepmann because Reith thought there was a lack of balance at that period. Another period, of course, the balance might have been the other way. But as a result of that episode, I remained very friendly with Gladstone Murray but I don't think we ever referred to the incident again and we merely talked about mutual friends in the Carlton Club where Gladstone Murray knew all these people. He knew Castle-Ross (?), he knew all that world. Beaverbrook world. And, of course, I knew Beaverbrook very well because I was a friend of Max Aitken's at Cambridge. And .. no, I didn't know more .. then eventually when I went to .. in 1945, I paid a grand tour .. visit to the United States of America to see the .. the broadcasting stations for whom I had done farm broadcasting during the War and this included Canada and Gladstone Murray was then Head .. Director General or whatever the title was of the Canadian .. CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Company. And I had lunch with him at his club in Toronto and

I'd got .. there was this little Carlton Club clique of Murray, Collie Knox .. and they all got together in the Carlton Club and this was .. Siepmann was aware of this that they were gunning for him. And so he was dismissed the post as Director .. Controller of Talks and he went as Coordinator of Regional Broadcasting. And then, shortly after that, took a professorial job in America to do with radio. And I don't think ever came back.

LANE Now, his successor as Director of Talks, of course, was ..

GREEN Oh, of course. Yes.

LANE Richard Maconachie.

GREEN Of course. Yes .. well, there was a .. there was a period in between when there was no successor at all. Um .. the .. the period in between was the period really when the Talks Department was in anarchy. And .. one or two new people had come then, you see. There was a very great friend of mine and very able fellow who was killed in the War called Malcolm Brierton (ph) who'd been President of the Oxford Union and was in .. in Chambers in .. Monkton's Chambers. Came to the BBC. He became a very great friend of mine. And .. and then .. there was .. an ebullient little crowd. And Christopher Salmon. George Barnes, of course, was the .. what I call, the sergeant .. the overseer, you know what I mean.

LANE I don't see .. at all ..

GREEN Because I think I .. if you ask me now to say what I thought of Maconachie, I can't put it as well as I have put it here. And this is what is quoted in the .. Briggs history. But I think it .. perhaps it's worth putting it. There'd been some reference in the first obituary about .. young .. young Afghans, you know. Monachie .. Maconachie keeping control of the young Afghans at the BBC who were these people I'm talking about, all these ex Presidents ..

LANE Which really relates to his prior life ..

GREEN His prior life.

LANE .. in Afghanistan.

GREEN Exact .. right. But there'd been an obituary about his distinguished work as Ambassador in Afghanistan. But I wrote this. 'As one of the Talks producers who were likely to prove more unruly than the Afghans, I would like to add my personal tribute to Sir Richard Maconachie. He came to the BBC at a period of unusual frustration and the threatened resignations when the cult of the temperamental producer was but slowly yielding to a more professional and, perhaps, prosaic concept. A virtual anarchy, rather topical at that time because of the Spanish War, was in operation when the

Talks Department was summoned to the Board Room in what was thought to be at worse dismissal, at least another perplexing reorganisation. It was the late Sir Ceth .. Cecil Graves who merely announced that the Governors had appointed a Sir Richard Maconachie to be Director of Talks and added, laconically, as he left the room, "He's a most distinguished public servant who I'm sure you will all like". I can always remember that cos I don't think .. I don't think Graves wanted to face up to all the Briertons and Burgesses and people. Er .. 'I well remember that the only life line that we had was the Governors WHO'S WHO in the corner of the room. And when one of those present had read aloud the Kiplinesque dossier of deeds wrought on the Indian frontier, the situation seemed more unreal than ever. Ten years later, the only exceptional word was 'like'. He'd said, 'You'll like him'. Because the whole body of young idealists and intellectuals would unanimously have preferred 'love'. The secret of Sir Richard's success in his unfamiliar assignment was his relentless logic that scattered too (?) bright ideas like chaff. He never chilled the young imagination, for at heart and in his own career, he was a romantic. His humour at the expense of his staff and often of our distinguished clients in the world of affairs, particularly in the extreme crises of War, made him a wonderful companion off duty. Above all, his loyalty and integrity were such that he gave an indescribable sense of security and personal freedom to all who served under him. It would be no use to disguise the fact that his irascibility and over haste .. hasty contempt for blunderers made enemies, even in the BBC. There were some

who could not understand what they regarded as the most unnatural devotion on the part of Talks, and later News, to their Controller. Certainly, as I look back on those happy and strenuous years at Broadcasting House, I have often wondered whether Sir Richard was unique as a person or just an exemplar of that great imperial civil service of which he was so proud. I personally am still in doubt but he, I know, without hesitating, would have said the latter'.

END OF REEL 1 SIDE B

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with Sir Richard. And it was Sir Richard who reconciled me to Mary Somerville whose successor I eventually .. she became his successor and I became her successor. And then I can remember another extraordinary occasion when he .. we wanted one of Winston Churchill's scripts changed. Seems strange now and I think Winston was then .. First Lord of the Admiralty. I think Chamberlain just hadn't gone. And there was a question of going down to Chartwell with this request. And it was thought it shouldn't be .. should be a personal thing. Maconachie sent for me and .. suggested that I should go. And I said 'But' I said 'really I can't, sir, because' I said 'I'm on the night train for Scotland where I have a ... very important agricultural programme at Cooper Angus and' I said 'I don't know what to do because all the speakers are lined up'. And Maconachie then rather strangely said to me 'All right .. do you think I could send Guy?' And he sent Guy. And Guy spent the day at Chartwell with Winston. Stayed to lunch. Stayed on to tea, although he had said he had to go at once because the BBC driver was there. Winston had said 'Oh there are masses of people' he said. 'Your driver'll have a marvellous time in my servants' hall' or whatever it was. And the driver did spend the day and the car was (UNCLEAR) day and I have never had an opportunity to confirm this story, though I've talked a lot to biographers and people - to confirm this story with Mary Soames who alone would be able to confirm what it was they did. He played croquet or something there and Winston Churchill lent him some clothes and then .. he .. he came back and, of course, this was one of his .. one of his sort of .. Guy's successes.

And he did the job of just .. purely perfunctory job but anyhow Winston had taken to Guy. That was the interesting thing. Whether he knew him before or not I don't know. And .. the .. the other thing about .. about Guy was .. was .. about Maconachie and Guy was that I can remember Guy's flat was damaged in Bond Street and Guy wasn't there and Guy got back to the thing there and I remember in the morning he told this great story about this bomb in Bond Street. He said 'Oh' he said 'I wish I was .. I wish I'd been there' and so Maconachie said 'My dear Guy' he said 'you will have been there in your memoirs'. (LAUGHS) And that was that. Well, then, of course, there was another story, of course, Guy came on to that again, of course, 'cos a bit .. later on, of course, when I went out to Australia, my flat in the Temple .. Guy wanted it terribly and I didn't think Guy was a really very suitable tenant for the Temple. And I was humming and hawing and it was at that moment that .. it was the end of .. the War was virtually finished and I went round to the Post Office to say goodbye to Shakes Morrison who was then Post Master General and he said 'Oh John' he said 'I want to see you' he said. 'What are you doing with your flat when you go to Australia?' And I said 'It's yours'. I said 'Guy Burgess wants it'. My god (?) but I don't suppose that meant anything to him at all cos Guy Burgess wasn't .. famous then. I said 'One of my colleagues at the BBC wants it but' I said 'you must certainly have it because you're a bench of the Inn'. And that was that. And Guy, I think, was very angry with me and within a few months had gone to the Foreign Office himself and hence the sad story. It would never

know' she said 'you're a bogus farmer and you're a politician manque'. And I said 'Well, you'll have to give me time to think about that'. And I had, in fact, at that time, headed a committee to reconstitute current affairs on a multi voice system because they were straight fifteen minute talks by Onlooker and various people, Air Marshals and Ambassadors and that sort of thing and I had done this job and it was a question of carrying it out. And so eventually I went back to Mary and said 'All right, Mary' I said 'I will do it'. And so I became Chief Assistant Current Affairs. I was in charge of current affairs broadcasting from 1950 until 1956. And my assistants were Donald .. my opposite numbers were Donald Boyd and .. somebody .. oh, Janet Quigley, of course. And .. who was WOMAN'S HOUR and .. looked after women's programmes. And we settled down to the job. They .. they were happy years and we had some quite .. they were quite, you know, early elections and the first elections was with Butler, wasn't it, who was a psephologist and .. Steve Bonnerjee (ph) was my assistant and .. we reorganised current affairs. I'd like to talk at length about that cos I had a different concept of current affairs .. today because I'd really wanted to .. I had in the agricultural world, you see, I knew everybody. And, therefore .. the President of the Farmer's Union and everybody we were on Christian name terms with everyone. And I thought that everybody handling current affairs should be in that position. Now, you could take a view that this would be much too authoritative and much too nervous in the thing. But anyhow I did do that and to .. handle colonial affairs in those days I

appointed a colonial .. ex colonial Governor. Very distinguished man. He .. who had been out in the Solomon Islands and Africa and that sort of thing. Sir somebody Stanley. And Toby Clarke looked after .. politics and economics looked after by John Brunner who was .. been in Australia .. Australia's .. ever since who .. he is now the present Brunner baronet but he doesn't take the title. He lives in Western Australia. And I built up this thing. And then the speakers that we employed during that period, you see, were .. were all Jack Ashleys and .. various well known public figures who had risen to the heights of their different career .. were the people we employed. Well then .. Mary again sent for me one day and she said 'My doctor says that I can't go on'. And she said 'I think you ought to be Controller of Talks'. And I said 'Oh well, I think that's, you know, that's really too far fetched altogether'. And she said 'Oh well, a lot of people who do' and it was rather interesting actually that it was a question of me or Charles Marriott. I was given the job. Or Jim Thornton, of course, who was the assistant. But I was given the job really not on the grounds that I was the best man for the job so much as the fact that the producers they knew who had worked with me and they would not have worked with the others. And there'd been a deputation from the junior producers and Third Programme producers to say they wanted me. And that was how I became Controller of Talks.

LANE

And that really was a very important period for you and for the Corporation.

GREEN Well, it was a very important period. It was a most important .. it was the biggest job that's ever been in the Corporation because it was Talks, Religion, Schools, News, Agriculture .. as well a thing (sic) and also straddled television. It was a .. as I think THE OBSERVER said the biggest post in the Corporation which, at that time, I think it probably was.

LANE Of course, that was the time when they were trying to marry the head of department to both sides of the medium, wasn't it?

GREEN We were trying to do .. we had what was known as a straddling operation. It didn't work. Gi .. Gilliam was trying to do Features in television. Gielgud was trying to do Drama in television. Er .. it never got to me doing Talks in television because Talks in television .. Leonard Miall was there and really Talks in television largely was PANORAMA. And PANORAMA occupied the front stage really of the .. the full stage of the current affairs field. And when subsequently, of course, I was .. Director of the Spoken Word and acted over television during the periods when Harman Grisewood was away, of course, I naturally did have that say over television. And .. I can always remember too, two things that were interesting in the thing there of the people who passed through my hands. I had dealings then with Michael Peacock and I can always remember saying that the two most able people that I had who ought to have been Dir .. could have been

LANE

No ..

GREEN

I think this is the real problem today. That people are not giving radio its full .. benefit of radio because I think they tend to think that, if it's not on television, I'll read it in a book.

LANE

But in your days, the other provinces were like - what? Religion?

GREEN

Well, religion, of course, I was in charge of for a time with .. ^{Melley} Mckie (ph), you know, who was Director of Religious Broadcasting. And .. oh, I think, religion, of course, has got its place, you see, very much in sound because, I mean, you've got THOUGHT FOR THE DAY and all that kind of thing and the SUNDAY programme and I think I've already mentioned SONGS OF PRAISE. So much of religion, you see, is the spoken word. And, you know, this has a rather funny .. there's rather a funny aspect of this. I keep harking back to my old chief, Shakes Morrison, Lord Dunrossil, and .. who was a very, very what I call broad minded Presbyterian, if you can say that perhaps .. if Reith wasn't such a broadminded .. I don't know. But he always used to say to me, 'Well, John' he said 'you must remember' he said 'in Scotland' he said 'the word is sacred'. And he said 'Pictures are something horrid'. (LAUGHS) Shakespeare had a thing, have you ever heard that? I can't .. I've never been able to find which of the plays it's in and I've always meant to ask a scholar when Shakespeare said

world which brought it to radio?

GREEN Well, of course, it's an enormously wide field. After I'd accepted to do the agricultural broadcasts, Felix Green, who was my colleague and who'd undertaken to do the agricultural broadcasts, really became disillusioned with them. His father was a wealthy landowner in Oxfordshire. And he knew a bit about farming. So he and I were the only two who did. But he wasn't really interested. He wanted to do a Talks for the unemployed with Lord Delaware who was then the Labour .. National Labour spokesman. And so he handed the thing to me. And I can remember taking on the agriculture broadcasts which is something I wanted to do secretly very much. Because when I was in there, doing general talks, it was agriculture I wanted because I was very much concerned with the state of agriculture at that time. And I was very much concerned .. connected politically with one or two people, one of whom was somebody called Lord Lymington, who was Member of Parliament for Basingstoke, and eventually became the Earl of Portsmouth. And I remember Lymington saying to me 'For god's sake, John' he said 'get hold of agricultural broadcasting. You'll do much more for British agriculture in the BBC than you'll ever do in Parliament' which is .. had been then my intention of doing. I remember those words very well. So, I think you can say that I was conditioned to use it. Well then, of course, I then had to try and put the agricultural broadcasting on to a higher plane than Felix Green's correspondent who was a .. a journalist had

it. And I appointed to do the talks Professor Scott Watson who was the Regius Professor .. not the Regius .. Thorpian (?) Professor at Oxford. That's to say the top agriculturalist there. It so happened that he was at that time very free. His time was free because he never really got down to the job in Oxford. He was inside the outside agricultural world of young farmers and things like that. Largely I think because the Univeristy didn't make it very easy for him. He had been the great figure .. agricultural figure at Edinburgh. And so I really had Scott Watson for seven years at least at my side as a .. I had a constant tutorial from the greatest mind in agriculture at that time. Now, this surely was an enormous help to the BBC. He did his year's stuff. We then moved on to Anthony Hurd. From Anthony Hurd we had a .. somebody at the Ministry of Agriculture called J.G. Stewart (?) who was the only civil servant who actually had a farm and whose brother was Principal of the Moulton Agricultural College, the Northamptonshire College. He was followed by the golden age of agricultural broadcasting which was Wilfrid Mansfield. Wilfrid Mansfield was Director of the University Farm at Cambridge. Er .. he happened to be somebody I knew very well in another connection because he had a great friend, who was also a Fellow of Emmanuel and they shared a room, called Stanley Bennett with whom I had done some small historical work at Cambridge and also was Treasurer of the Union when I was President. And so I used to spend a tremendous amount of time .. I was always in and out of Emmanuel College. And then, of course, the War broke out and .. and a new world, a new era came about. A very

interesting phase actually because what happened was that the War started and I was summoned back to - as a member of the Talks Department - I was summoned back to my war time disposition in whatever it was to be and was told by the Corporation that .. agricultural broadcasting is finished for the War because now we've got serious things on our hand and, you know, it's .. it's been great fun, you've loved doing agricultural broadcasting and you've done it very well ..

LANE Can I interrupt here, John?

GREEN Yeah.

LANE What sort of broadcasting were you doing then in the immediate pre war period for .. for agriculture?

GREEN Oh it was .. it was .. during the winter months - all but the summer - three quarters we were doing .. we were doing a straight talk every week called FOR FARMERS ONLY. When the War broke out, I think we called it FARMING TODAY. So we had that talk but it closed down with a bang in .. in October .. in September, 193 .. And, therefore, I was really finished with the BBC. They put me up at the Langham Hotel. They wouldn't let me go back to my flat for quite .. three or four months. They put me into the News Room where I didn't think I was very useful and I sat with Richard Dimbleby and I can tell you a lot of stories about News then.

Teddy Thompson, various people like that. But I then had made up my mind to leave the BBC at Christmas and obviously I was to .. to go to the War, you see. And about that time, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, who was one of Lymington's friends with whom I was very much connected, was then President of the Farmers Union .. Minister of Agriculture. That's right. He'd been President of the Farmers Union. He came round to Ogilvie, the Director General of the BBC, and said, he said 'You do realise the position we're in, we're short of paper for the technical press, we're short of petrol for farmers to go to meetings. Every farmer in England has got to be galvanised to this war effort. It can only be done through radio and that's the one thing you've stopped'. And so Ogilvie who didn't know much about it, I think, said gently, 'What do I do?' and he said 'Well, you get hold of John Green because' he said 'he knows everybody in this particular field'. And that was how I went back and I suppose round about February I became .. what I was - in charge of agricultural broadcasting again .. with Dorman-Smith, who I knew very well, as Minister of Agriculture. And Cleveland Fyffe (?) who I knew very well who was Secretary of the National Farmers Union and was a brother of the Lord Chancellor. His brother was Lord Chancellor. And I worked very, very closely with them and then .. Hudson .. Churchill became Prime Minister and then .. Churchill by that time took agriculture very seriously, knew nothing about it himself, and so he appointed his .. one of his key men who'd really had Foreign Office experience who was Lord Hudson to be Minister of Agriculture.

LANE

That was R.S. Hudson.

GREEN

R.S. Hudson. Yes. And R.S. Hudson took over. The first thing R.S. Hudson did to do (sic) was what everybody else had tried to do at that time was to get control of agricultural broadcasting and take it to the Ministry of Agriculture. This, of course, was a crisis.

LANE

This was anathema to the BBC.

GREEN

Anathema to the BBC. And this was right on my doorstep. And .. so I had a long talk with Maconachie and this was rather a case of 'yes minister'. When Chamberlain had made the .. made Dorman-Smith Minister of Agriculture in 1939 .. he had also put his star man from the Treasury as Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture. Sir Donald Fergusson. And .. Donald .. Sir Richard Maconachie went round to the Ministry of Agriculture and he had a talk with Donald Fergusson and those sort of people managed those sort of things in their own way and the upshot of it was that there was to be a Broadcast Planning Sub Committee, which was a sub committee of Hudson's thing. The Broadcast Planning Sub Committee was to be chaired by Anthony Hurd and was to be .. the secretary was to be me. Well, Anthony, of course, by that time, was well inside the BBC .. ethos if you like. Mansfield Scott (?) that sort of thing. And so it was very simple for me. It was really no change. Well then, Hudson had taken another precaution. He'd wanted to bring a high powered

GREEN

Well, of course, it was a great responsibility. There were two elements. There was news and there was a question of pep talks - keeping people up to the scratch. Not that they wanted keep .. the farmers were only too pleased to do what they could. Likewise the gardeners and likewise the domestic food production. So I would have said that the broadcast talks in the War were a cross between News - perhaps a little austere news - and further education. That's to say how to get the farmers to do things better - to get the cow to make more milk on less food, to ...

END OF REEL 2 - SIDE A

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of the Agricultural College at Writtle, called Sandy Hay and Sandy Hay and Miss Bostock, they were the great .. my great assistants in this thing. Sandy used to look after the overseas side and we had a series of broadcasts .. I remember Anthony Hurd did one North American station. Clyde Higgs, of Warwickshire, did one. They both went over .. on an aeroplane during the War, an RAF bomber in the War, and it was the coldest night, they said, they've ever had. And then I went over to America and .. to see the station that I'd taken which was one called KS00 South Dakota. And I used to broadcast every week and I got a neighbour of mine here, a farmer's wife, and she did one to Canada. And so .. I don't know. I don't suppose there were very many but there were about .. twelve probably, a dozen of these stations. And this was the beginning really of what they now call 'rural communications'. This was broadcasting outside the country. Well then, another aspect of that was that the Australians were in real trouble because everybody in Australia had - when the Japs really became, you know, started .. submarines in Sydney Harbour and things. They were really .. did become concerned about their agriculture because all the male population had .. picked up and walked off the land. And, therefore, they saw that broadcasting was very important. They sent a figure over here, in 1942 .. had sent, called John Douglas who was a civil servant. And John Douglas came over to find out what Britain was doing, how Radio was helping the War effort and I had him in London. And this was to have a very long knock on effect because that was why I went to Australia at the end of the

European War. Because, by that time, the external broadcasts were going well, the internal broadcasts were going well and .. everything was .. was .. was going well. And so .. the Australian Government said to the .. British Government said to the Australian Government, 'You've lent us a lot of technologists during the War who've been invaluable, can we repay you because your War isn't over yet?' Jap War was going on. And they said, 'Well, we don't really want anybody who knows about grassland or sheep or wool or anything of that kind but we are .. would like somebody who knows about rural communications'. And Hutchinson said to Hurd, 'Well, that's got to be John Green, hasn't it?' So, I went out to Australia. Of course, the War was over when I got there and .. but I stayed there. The BBC had lent me for two years and so I worked out the two years as a kind of agricultural attache really. I .. I operated in New Zealand for the Ministry of Agriculture.

LANE This would suggest really that both American and Australian farming - at least in broadcasting terms - owe more than a little to Britain.

GREEN Oh yes, because we were the kings of broadcasting. I mean .. and in those days, you see, there was no .. there were no really commercial broadcasting in Australia. The ABC hung on the word of Britain. There was, of course, commercial broadcasting in Canada but CBC was the dominant figure. This was another 'first cousin' of the BBC.

.. what happened there was , of course, it was perfectly clear that 'Dig for Victory' would look after the gardeners. And we had the immense prestige of Middleton. The farming was already firmly established and we had a ready made audience who loved the Mansfields and Scott Watsons .. of this world, you see, so that was all right. But there was .. during the period when I was out of a job in that autumn, 1940, when the BBC had decided to do away with agricultural broadcasting, I was down here in the country a good deal of the time because I wasn't .. I hadn't got anything very much to do, except, as I say, I used to go to the News Division and that sort of thing. But I wrote a letter to THE TIMES and I said that for the duration of the war it's been decided that we should be without bacon and eggs - the Englishman's breakfast has gone - because the pig and the chicken, the single stomached animals that didn't live on grass and, therefore, their supply was cut off. And it was cut off with a bang on .. on October the first. From then on, farmers couldn't get any food for them except what they got from their ration card and there was no bacon and eggs being produced. And I wrote a letter to THE TIMES and said this is the moment to revive the village pig club. And, as a result of that, an amusing correspondence. And Alec Hobson, who was Secretary of the Small .. the National Pig Breeders Association, wrote in .. a letter saying how right I was and (DROPS VOICE - UNCLEAR) Hudson called a meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture. It was a packed meeting and we put forward this idea and they decided to start something called the Small Pigkeepers Council. The Parliamentary Secretary, Cedric Drew,

later Sir Cedric Drew, was the Chairman. I was the Vice Chairman, at the BBC at the time, and also Hobson was the Secretary. And we set up this model organisation to start pig clubs. But where we had made a mistake was it wasn't that the pig had to go back to the village sty, it was that the waste was on the balloon sites, the coal pit heads, the police stations, the urban congre .. aggregations of people, and so we had this fascinating, absolutely fascinating movement called the .. we called the programme, at the BBC, BACKS TO THE LAND. There was no controlling body for it. There were .. there was the British Goat Society, there was .. Rabbit Council, there were various things and there was no controlling body. And so I started something called the Backs to the Land Club. We had a quarterly dinner which .. you couldn't have a public dinner during the War but we did because .. the Farm Institute of Staffordshire provided the food. We met at the Langham Hotel which, of course, was then closed down but there was the Bolivar Room was vacant. And .. we had every Minister came at Christ .. the Ministers of Agriculture always came at Christmas. All leading figures .. the .. oh, the authorities on rodents and pests and .. town councils and all that, all came to the Backs to the Land Dinner. The .. lunch got up to about sort of, you know, you used to get up to about sixty or seventy. And I reckon we really were the sort of Jockey Club. We controlled domestic food production. The only thing we did that wasn't strictly edible, we .. we joined the racing pigeons to it because this had a tremendous stimulus effect, you see, on morale. And I reckon that domestic food production, apart

always rather distracting cos they always had about half a dozen other things they wanted to do. There were people in the Corporation who wanted to get hold of them. Therefore, one didn't get the concentration that I wanted on purely agricultural things. And so, with the help of Godfrey Baisley, who you've heard of, in those days of THE ARCHERS, we .. I decided that I would hold my meeting in Birmingham. I also was very much assisted with the fact that John Dunkley, the Controller in Birmingham, was very keen on agriculture. He had a small farm at Evesham. And Godfrey used to organise a little tour. We used to go round the sort of leading farms in the area and this sort of thing. And this all worked extremely well. And then I think that still continued after I had .. when I was Controller of Talks, I think, probably but I had then to give agriculture up because it was become so centred in Birmingham that I had to give it up. I know the real reason now, I've just thought of it. The real reason why Birmingham had to be the home for it was we couldn't have found the studio accommodation any more in London. Before the War, only a little agricultural television had been done from Alexandra Palace but, I mean, to do anything big we had to have the facilities. So I'd established the tradition of having the meeting there and then, in addition to that, the logistics of the situation demanded that it should be in one of the regions. And Birmingham .. Bristol was already full of natural history and that sort of thing and so Birmingham took over and became the home of farming and gardening.

