The Connected Histories of the BBC	
Provenance:	The file reproduced here was provided by the BBC to be made publicly accessible through the Connected Histories of the BBC catalogue hosted by the University of Sussex. It was selected in 2021 from one of five collections: • BBC Oral History • BBC History of North Regional Broadcasting • BBC Horizon at 50 • BBC World Service Moving Houses Project • Alexandra Palace Television Society Oral History
Clearance:	Interviews have been reviewed and edited to comply with GDPR and other requirements.
Copyright:	© BBC © Alexandra Palace Television Society
Conditions of use:	This interview is available for private research. If you wish to use any of the interview in a published work or for a commercial purpose, permission must be requested from the BBC at historyteam@bbc.co.uk apts@apts.org.uk (for Alexandra Palace material)
Partner:	The Connected Histories of the BBC research project was led by the University of Sussex, 2017-2022, funded by the AHRC.
More information:	The project's public resource including more information on terms and conditions of use are available at: https://chbbc.sussex.ac.uk/

Leonard Miall interviewed by Charles Wheeler 25 May 1978

1) The Secretary
2) Man. Reg.

THIS SCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A TELEDIPHONE RECORDING, NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING SPEAKERS INDIVIDUALLY THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

RECORDING SERVICES RADIO
Tape Transcript by Audio Overload

RECORDING DATE: 25 May 1978	TIME:	STUDIO:
PLAYBACK DATE:	TIME:	RECORDING CHANNEL:
TRANSMISSION DATE:	TIME:	RADIO CHANNEL:

TITLE: ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC - LEONARD MIALL INTERVIEWED BY CHARLES WHEELER

WHEELER: Leonard you joined the BBC in 1939, the European Service which was then how old ?

MIALL: The European Service had started on September 27th 1938. It was just before the Munich Meeting of Chamberlain and Hitler when it looked as though we were going to war. Chamberlain did a broadcast to the British people. It was the famous broadcast in which he talked about the 'far-away country of which we know little' and the BBC got a request from the Foreign Office that same afternoon to translate Chamberlain's speech into French, German and Italian and broadcast it in those languages and it was a most make-shift arrangement, a chap called Walter Goetz was called out of a cocktail party by J.B. Clark and asked to come to Broadcasting House as fast as he could, somebody was taking Chamberlain's speech and translating it into German and Walter Goetz was having to read it at the microphone, it being his very first time that he'd broadcast.

WHEELER: Did anybody in these countries have any idea that the BBC was broadcasting ...

MIALL: Not at all, not at all, I doubt if anybody listened at all because it was broadcast in, I think, London Region, one of the two radio networks at the time, where there was a little enclave of time taken out to broadcast in these foreign languages.

WHEELER: So in fact it was going to listeners in Britain without much explanation in a foreign language.

MIALL: Yes, who were furious and Broadcasting House was inundated with telephone calls partly from people who were saying why was this stuff going in a foreign language and partly from people who could understand the German who thought it was being appallingly badly done, as it was because there were great moments when Goetz had to stop broadcasting because he'd run out of material. Anyway that was when it started but it went on throughout that Autumn, just a daily three quarters of an hour, French, German and Italian, in that order. And then .. it was during that time that I was applying for a job in the BBC as a press officer..

WHEELER: Can I interject at that point, wasn't there already then a Latin-American Service ?

MIALL: There was already a Latin American Service and there was an Arabic Service but this was the start of the European Service.

WHEELER: So the BBC had started broadcasting in foreign languages some years before ?

MIALL: Yes it had, yes. Not many years before, I think only about a year before but ... I'd applied for a job that was advertised in the press as a press officer at £6 per week, I was then getting £5 a week, An extra 20% was very important for me. And in those days every job had to be advertised in the national press, and there were 3,000 applicants for this job at £6 a week - there was a lot of unemployment in those days. I got down to an interview but I didn't get the job. But in the course of this long period of sifting to a short list, apparently the fact that I knew German, which I put down as a qualification on my form, had registered. And eventually I got back the chit saying thankyou for applying, sorry you haven't got the job and I felt very sad and suicidal. And then suddenly in January, my original application having been perhaps in November, in January I got a letter from the BBC saying they were temporarily starting some news talks in German, would I be interested in this, if so could I please telephone them immediately on receipt of this letter and hold myself free for an interview the next day, the salary would be ten guineas a week. I'd have come very gladly for six. But I went along and was appointed by the end of the next afternoon and I subsequently discovered that the Foreign Office had asked the BBC to start news talks in German as well as news bulletins in German and there was very strong pressure to do it and they started on two days notice

and it had been originally started by Ralph Murray who was later to become a Governor of the BBC and Ambassador to Greece but in those days was the news talks assistant who knew extremely good German and he started them off while I was getting free from the notice I had to give for my old job. And I started in early March 1939.

WHEELER: You were in charge of that department ? (Yes) How many people did you have as staff writers .....

MIALL: I .. the department was me, later, fairly soon after I'd been there Maurice Latey joined me as an assistant, and later Elisabeth Barker and we recruited Christina Gibson and various others. But it started ...

WHEELER: Who had been the Head of Roedean.

MIALL: Had she, I didn't realise that. The European Service as such was a little part of the Overseas Service, there was a news editor called Bill Newton, Con O'Neill who'd left the Foreign Office, resigned from the Foreign Office over the issue of Munich and had had a brief spell as a leader writer on The Times was temporarily working as a sub editor. There was another sub editor who was Douglas Ritchie, later to become famous as Colonel ~~Britain~~ Britton. And then there was Derek Russell who later became the Head of Publicity, they were the sub-editing staff and there was a group of perhaps six or seven German announcer/translators, that was, and similar groups in French and Italian.

WHEELER: Where did they recruit the Germans from, were they mostly Jewish refugees who were over by that time ?

MIALL: Yes almost entirely. One of them was a man called Hans Prewin, who later became famous as John P. Wynn, the setter of quiz, all sorts of quiz programmes, he'd been a successful writer of stories, police detective stories of Inspector Hornblower - but they were a talented group but they were very much kept strictly to the translating and announcing job and among the speakers I got .. my brief was to get well known English people to write scripts, two scripts per night, these were with so-called Sonderberichte which were translated into German and read by the announcer. And I was given a programme allowance of two guineas per script and I was expected to get people like Harold Nicolson and other well known English

(should be Hornleigh)

writers and broadcasters who in fact were delighted to contribute...

WHEELER: That was then even below the low Fleet Street rates for a comparable piece of what - five minute talk was it ?

MIALL: Well in those days the standard fee for a talk in the BBC was one guinea per minute but if you didn't actually come to the studio to deliver the talk yourself and it was read by the announcer, you were deemed to have been not worth the full amount and two guineas was this maximum that I could in those days pay but I had no difficulty in getting ...

WHEELER: For a piece of about 4/5 minutes long ?

MIALL: Yes or up to 7 minutes long.

WHEELER: So they were doing it for patriotic reasons in fact.

MIALL: Yes, well the German Service throughout that summer was really just trying to say one thing and that was to Germany, if you go on behaving the way you are going on we're going to fight ... that was the simple message of what we were trying to say.

WHEELER: Did you get by that time, any feedback from listeners at all, was there any kind of response or letters from people in Germany ..

MIALL: Yes, yes and one got travellers' tales, people coming back and saying, go on you are being broadcast, you are being listened to a great deal. It was .. in those days it was not made illegal but it was frowned on. The day that Poland was invaded, 1st September 1939, there was a session in the House of Commons in which there was an angry scene, I don't know whether you remember, because we were all wondering why Britain hadn't declared war, we'd given a guarantee to Poland and in fact Chamberlain was negotiating with Mussolini at the time, though we didn't know that, but it was, there was a scene in the House of Commons when the acting Leader of the Opposition, who was Greenwood, Arthur Greenwood, rose to his feet and this was when the occasion when Robert Boothby shouted "Speak for England" and I had in my desk then a statement which had been drafted by Gerry Young, later Sir George Young, British Minister in Paris, who was the man in the Foreign Office with whom we consulted in the News Division of the Foreign Office at that time - and this was a message from

Chamberlain to the German people to be broadcast on the outbreak of war. And suddenly we heard the news that as from the next day listening to the BBC was going to be made illegal. But not immediately, so that night we knew we had our largest audience. And Gerry Young was in my office and we thought we must try and get this rather important statement of reasons why we had gone to war, or why we would go to war, broadcast that night while we had the maximum audience. And by changing the wording a little bit, putting it into the subjunctive, it was possible to retain the sense of it without saying that we had gone to war, if we go to war it will be for these and these reasons. And both Young and I were very keen this should be done, and, but we had to get permission from Number 10 Downing Street. I remember we were on the air in German already we could extend it if necessary and knock on, but the moment we stopped broadcasting in German and moved into Italian of course we lost our audience. So Young and Latey and I all tried to get through to 10 Downing Street by different routes on three different telephones in our office and to simplify things we would ask for Lord Dunglass, who was later Sir Alec Douglas Home and who was Chamberlain's Parliamentary Private Secretary, and we would say we were Gerry Young and then we would put Gerry Young on the phone to try and get permission for this to be done.

Well we got through and Chamberlain had gone to Chequers and Sir Horace Wilson was sitting there, this was Chamberlain's 'eminence grise' the great appeaser of Munich, and Young was asked whether he wanted to talk to Sir Horace Wilson and he said all right and Sir Horace Wilson said he could not give authority for this to be broadcast despite the pleadings. And then suddenly Lord Halifax came into the room at 10 Downing Street and he was put on to speak to Gerry Young, Gerry Young pleaded with him, he was then the Foreign Secretary, and that was, he too said it couldn't be done, it had to be done, the permission had to come from Chamberlain. And then Halifax asked how we had treated the news of the Parliamentary Debate that day and we said honestly, we'd given Chamberlain's statement fairly briefly and Greenwood's statement at rather greater length. Halifax said "Vewy (sic) Good, Vewy Good". And he then said if we would like a statement that could be attributed to authoritative sources ... he then dictated a very tough statement indeed which we broadcast that night. And then a couple of days later on the Sunday morning Chamberlain did announce the outbreak of war.

WHEELER: And was that broadcast, was the 'Outbreak of War Broadcast' actually broadcast to Germany in Chamberlain's own voice do you remember ?

MIALL: No I don't think so.

WHEELER: It would have been translated ?

MIALL: Are you talking about Chamberlain's statement ?

WHEELER: Chamberlain's statement was in the House but he also made a broadcast.

MIALL: He made a broadcast at eleven o'clock on that sunday morning September 3rd 1939, that, that was, extracts of it were used in the news in translation, it was not itself broadcast in his voice and it was not this statement on why we had gone to war which in fact had been drafted by Gerry Young and which ....

WHEELER: And when the war, now the war had started, was there an immediate expansion of the German Service and did things become cloudier administratively and so on, proper transmitters and proper wavelengths or had that already happened ?

MIALL: It was a very, very slow process. There was an immediate expansion of all sorts of languages. There were increases... the BBC decided to broadcast in Czech, in Polish and in Slovak and in Rumanian, all sorts of different languages .. They didn't necessarily start in the best logical order, they started when they could get the right staff because you had to get announcer/translators, you had to get language supervisors who were of British nationality who could check on .. on that secret messages weren't being passed and so on. Also there was a secret organisation which was taking charge of the policy of broadcasting to enemy countries of which we knew nothing until the day war broke out and they were just getting into gear and the whole thing was very much of a .. hit and miss operation in those early months and certainly getting proper transmitters .. the Medium Wave transmitters were backed up by Short Wave transmitters before the outbreak of war but a really strong range of transmitting gear was, was a slow process.

WHEELER: So that by the time of the blitzkrieg and by the time of Dunkirk, was the German Service highly organised or not ?

MIALL: Yes, the German Service was by then certainly and we had

not only news bulletins and general talks but we also had specialised talks, talks for women, talks for German workers, they gradually developed, one specially aimed at the Navy, aimed at the armed services, we had oh probably twelve different German programmes during the day I think by then, each with some kind of a talks operation.

WHEELER: Was there any co-ordination at all at that point, between the BBC German Service and these other services that were springing up under the psychological warfare people, like this special transmission of the German Services, I'm not going to bother to spell this, well Sender Calais was one and there were others you know of ?

MIALL: Yes they all came along a lot later, they had, they didn't really start operating at that time at all. I'm slightly inhibited here under the Official Secrets Act (yes) but the, the main thing I think to remember is that in the black broadcasting, which was purported to be inside the, the enemy countries or the occupied countries as the case maybe, was an operation which was conducted, not in collaboration with the BBC, it had tactical rather than strategic .. objectives. It was designed to spread confusion, spread rumours, things of that sort, whereas the BBC's operation was essentially to establish a long-term credibility. At the early part of the war there was no point in talking about the war aims or anything of that sort, our only message to get over was the fact that we were still going to go on fighting. And..and that we were giving a service that was to be listened to because it was truthful. This involved a battle, particularly with the Services, to get out the bad news, to be first with the bad news. Service Departments, for perfectly good reasons, don't want to give you the bad news or they don't want to give it to you until they're quite certain that the enemy has already got it, so you tended always to limp along behind the German High Command Communique for instance, and one of the most successful bits of psychological warfare we conducted during the war was after the first really heavy raid on Berlin when we announced before the Germans did, bigger figures of our losses than the Germans subsequently claimed. But if you're going ... at the time of Dunkirk or just after Dunkirk, when Hitler had beaten France he made a great broadcast in which he appealed to Britain to call off the war and he would treat Britain generously and preserve the British Empire and all that sort of thing. And Dick Crossman who was in charge of the policy side of the Political Warfare, the Executive at that stage (outside the BBC) outside the BBC, and Sefton Delmer who was a former Chief Correspondent of the Daily Express

and a very good German speaker and who we used a lot for broadcasting from the BBC at that time. He later was in charge of black broadcasting, the secret broadcasting. Delmer was due to do a talk and he and Crossman and I listened to this thing of Hitler's and I remember we sat down and concocted a reply which totally rejected the idea that we'd make a separate peace, it never occurred to any of us we ought to refer this to the Foreign Office or No. 10 Downing Street or any of this sort of thing, it was... and we weren't being irresponsible it was just the mood of the moment there was no question of giving in and so, subsequent historians have mentioned the total surprise that Hitler and his inner circle found when this rejection was broadcast so fast back again and... supposing the Government had been secretly deciding to try and make a peace with Hitler we no doubt would have queered their pitch very badly.

WHEELER: Let me ask you more about this, there was, as we know from subsequent books which have been published even quite recently, really quite a sizeable faction, not so much inside the Government but certainly in the country which was in favour of a separate peace with Hitler, after Dunkirk, did you have any feeling of this in your contacts, in your BBC contacts with the Government, I mean did you get any kind of confusing directions or directives ? And to what extent were you left alone to decide policy, did you for example have to submit scripts to the Foreign Office, did they, did they look at scripts after they'd been broadcast, was there a Foreign Office person in the BBC who kept an eye on the general line you were taking in your wartime broadcasts and so on ?

MIALL: No not Foreign Office, the.. the authority in policy control in broadcasting to the enemy and to enemy occupied countries was the Political Warfare Executive and they did issue directives, weekly directives on how ... news and commentaries were to be treated. News of course you couldn't really direct in that sense but the policy line of propaganda ... These scripts were vetted by me. I was answerable to them for the policy but there was no question of submitting them.

WHEELER: What about editorial conferences, were there any officials present at any of the editorial conferences the BBC had ? (No) Never ?

MIALL: Not that I recall. There was a lot of consultation backwards and forwards, complicated by the fact that the Political Warfare Executive were in a country hide-out, but a lot on the telephone, and

after a while Hugh Carleton Greene and I used to go down once a week, to these, to discuss with the people who were in charge of the policy.

WHEELER: Coming back to the question of listener research, when I ended up in Hamburg at the end of the war and subsequently in Berlin, as a soldier, I knew nothing about the German Service beyond the fact that the British broadcast to Germany, but I was astonished to find that the best known Englishman in Germany was in fact one of the leading commentators of the BBC German Service namely (Lindley Fraser) Lindley Fraser. No it appeared then, though possibly Germans may have exaggerated the fact, that they did listen to the BBC, it certainly appeared to us in those days there was an enormous audience for the BBC in Germany right through the Occupation, right through the war, irrespective of the fact that, that it was illegal, did you have any idea during the war that you had a large number of listeners ? (yes) How did you know ?

MIALL: Well one knew partly because Goebbels used to give instructions to counter, gave instructions to counter the lines that we were taking and he wouldn't bother if he didn't think that they were significant. But at one stage ...

WHEELER: Did he mention the BBC in his denials and so on ?

MIALL: Sometimes and sometimes not. There was a, he used to put out his instructions to German editors and also he used to put out the text of his weekly article in Das Reich which gave the propaganda line of the Germans for the week. On a ...Short Wave Service could be picked up on a machine called a Hellschreiber ...

WHEELER: Which was a kind of teleprinter ...

MIALL: ...kind of teleprinter, it so happened that we had captured one of these things and we used to be able to see the instructions that he was giving to the German Editors and also see the advanced text of his Das Reich articles before it appeared on the streets in Berlin...

WHEELER: What you mean is actually this Hellschreiber was installed in the BBC (no) on the network ?

MIALL: No it was not in the BBC (elsewhere ?) it was in the

in the Political Warfare Executive.

WHEELER: But they were actually on the end of it as if they were subscribers to this network ?

MIALL: Absolutely, yes. And this is, the fact that we always broadcast and answer to Das Reich one hour after it appeared on the streets in Germany was one of the things that gave a rather ominous feeling that we knew everything that was going on.

WHEELER: When was that captured ?

MIALL: I can't recall I think, I think it was picked up in ... I don't know when it was captured, I have a hunch it was picked up in Portugal but I really have forgotten, I'm afraid. But that was one of the things that was done. Again if we go back to ... Dunkirk and to the fall of France, by this time our little News/Talks operation had spread to cover News/Talks in all languages that we were broadcasting in, including French. And on the 18th June, just when France was appearing to have to give in, there were any number of French Generals turned up in the BBC and most of them were broadcasting to America, hysterical broadcasts to say-you know,- unless ten thousand planes were delivered by the end of the week, France was going to have to give in .. And so French generals appearing in the BBC were not very impressive lot, and on the evening of the 18th June at about .. 8 o'clock in the evening we got a telephone call J.B. Clarke got a telephone call from Lindsay Wellington who was Liaison Officer at the Ministry of Information, to say that there was a French General coming round to the BBC and could we please put him on the air that night, in the, after the French News at 10 p.m. And we weren't particularly impressed you know, another French general, so what ? And of course the name De Gaulle didn't mean anything very much to anybody who wasn't an expert in tank warfare, not many people in the BBC were, I mean who knows the name of the Under Secretary for War in an Allied Country?- very few people do in fact.

Anyway De Gaulle arrived and Elisabeth Barker looked after him and took him to the studio and he arrived with ... oh the odd message that we got was that his script had already been approved by the censor. In the ordinary way censorship was all done within the BBC and this was a very odd message. We subsequently discovered that this really meant that it had been approved by the War Cabinet. But when De Gaulle came

along he had in his script at the end, that he would be broadcasting at the same time the next day. We hadn't invited him but he just announced that. There was .. incidentally we'd managed to trail the fact that he would be broadcasting, within a quarter of an hour of getting this message in the 8.15 p.m. French News. And at, by 10 o'clock there was considerable excitement about the broadcast and particularly when one saw what he was going to say. And the Director-General of the BBC at that time, Ogilvie, phoned my office to say, would we please bring this French general to have a drink with him after his broadcast the next day. And so Elisabeth Barker and I took De Gaulle, who in those days was very thin, extremely tall, along to see Ogilvie and have a glass of sherry or something with him after his broadcast. And making small talk, De Gaulle asked me whether this broadcast the day before had been recorded - and it fell to me to tell him that it had not been recorded. In those days we had practically no recording equipment. It was all disc equipment. You had to book it weeks ahead and to book anything which you had a couple of hours notice for was absolutely impossible. And so I had to explain to General De Gaulle that this had not been recorded. And I became the first British recipient of the De Gaulle temper. He tore strips off the BBC in general and me in particular for totally failing to appreciate the historical significance of this occasion, and so on, and I was desperately trying to explain in very indifferent French why it was we had not enough recording equipment. And I noticed that when General De Gaulle died, broadcasting stations all round the world broadcast what they referred to as the recording of General De Gaulle's original broadcast, but only Elisabeth Barker and I and one or two other people know that this was not so.

WHEELER: It was the second one ?

MIALL: In fact it was about the third or fourth, when he repeated much the same thing that he'd said in the first one.

WHEELER: I was going to say it sounds as though he in fact was issuing a series of clarion calls to the French people to resist (yes) and continued for some time. (Yes he did) .

MIALL: He did because again the number of people who heard him the first time was probably very small indeed.

WHEELER: So by this time in fact, just to get this clear what your

role was, you were no longer thinking in terms of the German Service mainly you were in charge of News/Talks which were syndicated, as it were, throughout the European Service in English to the various languages. Now to what extent would the talks that your section wrote or produced .. go out in the same form to a French/German/Czeckoslovak audience, presumably they wouldn't ?

MIALL: Very, very little. There were a few general talks. I remember for instance when Chamberlain died we did an obituary of Chamberlain which was broadcast in most of these languages.

WHEELER: Was it a critical one ?

MIALL: Well in a certain sense it was, I wrote it myself and I was a bitter opponent of the appeasement policy and I wrote .. in those days there was a great battle going on for the minds of the neutrals in Europe as to who was responsible for starting the war. And I took the theme really that if a chap who was prepared to go to these lengths (with) ...Hitler, (he) wasn't trying to start the war, whatever had been his other failings. And this was .. this was ..written and translated for, particularly for broadcasting to European neutrals. The Home Service, Chamberlain died very quickly you know, he had cancer and he died with very little warning of his impending death, the Home Service telephoned to Churchill at No. 10 Downing Street, to ask whether he would be broadcasting a tribute from Downing Street or from - would he like to come to the studio or would it be from Chequers or what ? Churchill said very firmly that he would say what he had to say in the House of Commons first, and subsequent broadcasts would be another matter. In the meantime he didn't think that anybody else should be broadcasting about Chamberlain though it would be all right for the BBC to broadcast an official obituary. The BBC then looked in its morgue for an official obituary and found it was written at the height of Munich and it was all about the man who had"saved peace in our time"- it was totally unsuitable. And they didn't know what to do. And somehow somebody got hold of this script of mine and added a few more details about Chamberlain's early life in Birmingham and I had the pleasure of hearing Alvar Lidell read it in his funeral voice. Lidell reading something that you've written in his funeral voice makes it sound marvellous prose.

WHEELER: Well now how long did you stay in London, you went off to America didn't you ?

MIALL: Yes well the European Service was in Broadcasting House until we got bombed out, until a landmine fell in Portland Place and knocked out the side of the building where we were, and we were moved to Maida Vale which was a very dangerous place, an old skating rink with a glass roof, it was not at all a nice place to be in, in the Blitz, they used to send an armoured car to pick us up in the evening to drive people around to get home. And then we finally moved to Bush House and I stayed there until about the time of the battle of El Alamein, in the early Autumn of 1942, by which time America of course was in the war. And we were broadcasting, rebroadcasting programmes from the Voice of America, over BBC Transmitters into Europe on Medium Wave. And there was a Political Warfare Mission, British Political Warfare Mission, under David Bowes-Lyon, the younger brother of now the Queen Mother, then the Queen. He was in charge of a small mission in the United States and he wanted experts, particularly in French and German to go and join his staff and I and Russell Page who was the French Programme Organiser at the time, were sent out as part of his mission, orginally for six weeks, in fact I stayed off and on for about a year and a half in the United States.

WHEELER: What were you doing there ?

MIALL: Well I was working in New York as a liaison officer particularly with the Office of War Information, which was the American Agency concerned with broadcasting, really trying to improve the quality of the programmes that they were doing, which were causing a lot of embarrassment to us because they .. not so much that they were taking a different line but they were, they were getting facts wrong, they were getting the mood of things wrong, they were so remote from the war that they used to say - good evening - when it was morning in Europe, or whatever.

WHEELER: They were in the war by that time (they were in the war) they had declared war by then yes ?

MIALL: Yes, well yes, Pearl Harbour was 1941 (yes) and 1941 we used to have some broadcasts that were in German, which were aimed at the German Navy, particularly submarine crews, and these were largely written in the Admiralty by a number of people, including Ian Fleming, and when Japan bombed the American Navy at Pearl Harbour and then when Hitler declared war on the United States, Ian Fleming brought in a script which was absolutely euphoric, it was really the "war's over now" words to that effect. And I, as I say, I was in charge of the sort of policy

censorship of these things and I used to have to battle with people from the services on what they'd written. And I said to Ian Fleming, "you know I've no doubt you're absolutely right in the long run but is this the moment to take this line with what's just happened ?" "Oh that's typical BBC defeatism, you don't understand these things". We argued about it and he modified it a bit but .. the next day the Prince of Wales was sunk and the tone of the Admiralty changed very, very much in the next two days with the losses that they suffered off Singapore.

WHEELER: It was a curious system the naval officers writing scripts for a submarine ... for BBC programmes going out to the submarine service because there were similar programmes being run by ..Tom Delmer's lot weren't there

MIALL: Yes there were and though again they started later ...

WHEELER: They still had not begun ?

MIALL: They began I would think about that time, sometime in '41. Originally the first black broadcasts were entirely run by social democratic refugees and sounded as though they were run by social democratic refugees. Delmer's brilliance in a sense, in his first operations was to make things sound more Nazi than the the Nazis. He was in charge of this station called Gustav Siegfried Eins. Gustav Siegfried Eins was a station which purported to be run by people in the German Army. And it was, it didn't give any news as such at all it simply exposed a major scandal every day.

WHEELER: It used to have dramatised documentaries of S.S. orgies in Berlin, in fact, among other things, it was one of the specialities in the programme.

MIALL: They weren't dramatised they were just very vividly described. They were described by somebody who had a very fruity voice and a very dominant personality of voice and they, they were based on extremely good intelligence. They were totally disruptive in character and rather than constructive. When Bowes-Lyon's mission was sent to the United States we were given very clear instructions that we were to collaborate with the American psychological warfare authorities both in the Office of War Information and the Office of Stategic Services, the predecessor of the C.I.A., we were to collaborate fully on open or 'white' propaganda, and we were not to say a word about 'black' propaganda because that was how you keep a secret, secret.

And so those were our ...

WHEELER: Are you saying that the Americans didn't know that those stations were not in fact underground stations operating out of Germany, that they didn't know that the British were running black radio stations ?

MIALL: David Bowes-Lyon because he was the Queen's brother, was invited to dinner at the White House very soon after he arrived in the United States, It was a stag dinner, there was Roosevelt, there was Cordell Howell, there was General Marshall, there ~~Arnil~~ Averell Harriman, there was Harry Hopkins, and so on, the top leadership of the war. And after dinner, (this was sometime in the summer of 1942) they were all saying that they thought that Germany was about to crack. And David Bowes-Lyon asked them on what they based that, and they said it was clear evidence of tremendous disaffection in the German Army, because this station Gustav Siegfried Eins which was, had been identified as broadcasting from somewhere in South Germany was able to continue, day after day, and Bowes-Lyon told me he didn't know what to say. They kept on asking him what we thought about this thing and had we any idea exactly where it was and how it was able to keep going? And Bowes-Lyon had to be a bit stupid about this and he said, we've tried to find out and hadn't been able to identify it any more closely than they had, as to where it was, and this sort of thing. The moment he got away back from the dinner he went straight back to the British Embassy, dug out a cipher clerk and sent an urgent message back to London to say, " let us be jolly careful what we say to the O.S.S. and say nothing at all to the O.W.I. but should we mislead the President, the Secretary of State, the Chief of the Army Staff and so on ? " And he then got authority to, to inform them.

WHEELER: That's a curious episode isn't it because by that time there was a joint intelligence board sitting in New York, in which the British and Americans were in fact collaborating very closely ?

MIALL: Well if your instructions are to keep secret things secret you don't tell them.

WHEELER: But in other things they were collaborating weren't they ?

MIALL: Yes but the intelligence .. and we were collaborating on ..

WHEELER: Yes but I'm talking about the organisation run by this man

Stevenson who was recently, whose biography has recently been published which states that within a few months of the fall of France we had in fact joint intelligence operations, we were operating under another title in New York and that collaboration was in fact very close, here's an example an interesting example of the British witholding information from the Americans as a matter of policy ?

MIALL: No, well perhaps so, it, what was called British Security Co-ordination, the thing that was under Stevenson, was not concerned with political warfare. It was another secret department dealing with that. They were collaborating on their, on their particular operations but Bowes-Lyon's missions had been given these instructions originally to ... and it was simply a general instruction that if you want to keep a secret operation a secret you don't tell anyone.

WHEELER: Well now how long were you in the States altogether then, you stayed about a year and a half ?

MIALL: Yes I worked closely with these American Authorities, partly on broadcasting to Europe, partly setting up an operation out of San Francisco to broadcast British programmes to Japan. Until, I came back to Europe very soon after D Day.

WHEELER: Tell me about the Japanese operation. Was the BBC not broadcasting to Japan out of London ?

MIALL: It was but it was, its transmitters were known not to put a very good signal into Japan and one of the complications was that the, they couldn't be picked up in San Francisco. The San Francisco operation of the Office of War Information was pretty firmly anti-British, at least so it seemed to some of us. And the BBC was giving the Americans a lot of time to relay its programmes into Europe and after some time it was agreed that we should have time on the American transmitters but the things had to be originated there and I went there to set up a news room.

WHEELER: A British newsroom ? (A British newsroom) How many staff did you have ?

MIALL: Oh half a dozen I suppose, it was a very small operation.

WHEELER: Did you get your raw materials from London, much of it ?

MIALL: We got our raw material, part of it was the normal sources of news, which we wrote there in San Francisco off the ticker, partly by monitoring BBC from, in English, the English Transmitters we could pick up from there, highly complicated operation, I might say, technically, because to broadcast in Japanese you had to have them translated into Japanese, all Japanese Americans all the Nisei had been expelled from California under the wartime panic and they were at Denver, which ...(internment camps in effect?) well more or less so. But they were not allowed in the State of California. We had some Japanese announcer/translators in Denver who were, which is a thousand miles away from San Francisco and we used to have to teleprint our news to them and they would translate it into Japanese and they would then record it down a music line which was, belonged to the Mutual Broadcasting System, when Mutual went off the air, about Midnight. And this wandered all round the Rockies and through Los Angeles and all over the place and eventually it had to go through the switch censor, the American Citizen who was provided with the original in English and was checking that it had not been, that nothing was interpolated. This Switch Censor was in fact an ancient female American missionary. And by the time the programme was put to bed she had gone to bed herself. We had elaborate arrangements by which this was fed onto a telephone by her bedside with a switch, she could listen to it in bed as it went through, on its way back again to San Francisco to the transmitters.

WHEELER: Did she ever use her switch ? (no) Her bedside switch ?

MIALL: No, no no. I don't know of any occasion where a switch censor ever really had to use his switch in anger. Occasionally you would depress it to help an announcer who had got a fit of coughing or something but I don't recall any occasion during the war.

WHEELER: I'd like to come back at that point, I made a note of the word censorship, which you mentioned and then went on, how did censorship actually work in the BBC during the war ?

MIALL: Well there were two kinds of censorship, there was the strictly military censorship, not giving out information which was going to be helpful to the enemy, and there was policy censorship of the propaganda line that you were taking. As far as the line of the propaganda line you were taking was concerned that was a fairly simple operation. And it was delegated to to people like me. As far as the military censorship was concerned there were censors who also were BBC staff who went to regular

meetings, I think at the Ministry of Information, with the Service Intelligence people, who would tell them, you know, which were the things they wanted to keep quiet and which were things okay to say. And there were certain things that one knew generally, for instance you could never refer to the weather, what sort of weather it was, you could never refer to where any specific bomb damage had occurred in Britain, even when that bomb went off in the nine o'clock news and was heard all over the country, we weren't allowed to say that Broadcasting House had been hit.

WHEELER: Was that recorded that bulletin, it wasn't was it ?

MIALL: No it wasn't. It was Bruce Belfrage, who was reading the news at that time and he, in those days there was always a talk after the nine o'clock news, there was what was called the Postscript. And Bruce Belfrage had just announced the headlines and then said the Postscript, tonight's Postscript will be given by Lord Lloyd. And then this frightful crunch took, occurred and bits of the ceiling started falling down on his head and he just, he repeated "Tonight's Postscript will be given by Lloyd Lord" and that was the only mistake he made for the rest of the bulletin, and the lights were still on in the studio and he was able to go on reading but the ceiling was falling down, he had no idea what was happening in the building.

WHEELER: Was this the basement studio ?

MIALL: It must have been yes. Though wait a minute, I'm not absolutely certain.

WHEELER: For all he knew the place could have been on fire....

MIALL: No, no no it can't have been, I think it was a studio on the .. either third or fourth floor because the bomb exploded I think on the fifth or sixth floor, it wouldn't have been, the ceiling wouldn't have been coming down in the basement.

WHEELER: Well coming back to censorship what about things like submission of scripts, did stuff have to be carried away out of Broadcasting House before it could be read, before it could be broadcast ? (No) Ever ? (No.) Entirely self-administered censorship ? (Yes). Yes.

MIALL: Though I remember on one occasion, we had Leo Amery, then a, I think Secretary of State for India, a Member of the Cabinet who was a great linguist. He was due to do a broadcast in .. to Yugoslavia in Serbo-Croat and this was a time when Hitler had just signed a, an agreement with Prince Paul of Yugoslavia I think, to allow him to go into Yugoslavia and Amery had sent his script in advance to be translated and I think I had read it over or read parts of it over to somebody in the Ministry of Information. And the Ministry of Information demanded that it should be toned down in certain places. And when I, when Amery, who was a very short man, he can't have been much over five feet, came along, I had to tell him that the Ministry of Information felt he should not go so strongly. And Amery was furious at this and immediately picked up the telephone on my desk and phoned Churchill at No. 10 Downing Street and told him what the Ministry of Information wanted doing and Churchill with his latest intelligence of what was happening encouraged Amery to make it even stronger than it was. And I remember Amery was kneeling down on the floor by my desk writing down this message that Churchill was dictating to make it much hotter and we grabbed a (Yugo) Serbo-Croat announcer/translator to go down with us in the lift in Bush House, translating as we went in the lift down to the basement, to broadcast, and Amery put out this ringing broadcast which by all accounts were the things that decided Yugoslavia to resist after all and not to acquiesce with the deal with Hitler, it was one of the most exciting moments I had during the war.

WHEELER: Well now coming back to your leaving the question of censorship and coming back to your overseas career. You went, later on, to Luxembourg, what were you doing there ?

MIALL: Well by this time there was a, a joint Anglo-American psychological warfare operation called Psychological Warfare Branch of SHAEF which stood for Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force.

WHEELER: We're now talking about post 1944 aren't we, after the liberation of Europe ?

MIALL: Yes and after France had been liberated, Luxembourg with its powerful transmitters had just been recaptured from the Germans and a, an Anglo-American team was under Noel Newsome, who by that time had gone away from Bush House where he had been Director of News, and with Patrick Gordon Walker who was in charge of its German output and various other people, were

using the transmitters of Radio Luxembourg to broadcast to the Germans who were only about 5 miles away and it was at the time of the German counter-offensive, the Battle of the Ardennes, the Battle of the Bulge, and I was working there with them, really virtually until the end of the war.

WHEELER: And was this largely a military operation, did it have a lot of military involvement because it was so near the front line or was it purely civilian, did you wear uniform ?

MIALL: Well we wore a ludicrous kind of uniform, it was, we weren't, we weren't soldiers, the Psychological Branch of SHAEF was a civilian operation. But there were a lot of soldiers in it as well. We wore an absolutely ludicrous uniform that consisted of a British Private's battledress and an officer's cap and a SHAEF flash on your shoulder and no pips or anything of that sort and no war correspondents. And this was a time when Otto Skorzeny (~~zz~~) was dropping German soldiers behind the American lines in captured American uniforms and this was General Patton's Third Army and I remember driving through this area in a Jeep from Paris with a driver wearing this phoney uniform and constantly being stopped at roadblocks by trigger-happy Americans who tended to shoot first and ask questions afterwards. And their form of identification was to ask you whether you knew who had won the World Series that year, something of that, and if I hadn't just returned from the United States and had these things at my fingertips I should have been shot out of hand, I'm quite sure. But we were particularly concerned with, with really broadcasting at the end of the war, persuading people to surrender, that sort of thing. And then, but by that time I had already, the decision had already been taken to start a Corps of Foreign Correspondents, which the BBC did not have at all before the war.

WHEELER: Though it did have during the war presumably (War correspondents) war correspondents who served abroad ?

MIALL: Yes but it had no .. correspondents based in peacetime capitals. But, DG Haley decided to establish a corps of foreign correspondents and before I went to Luxembourg I was asked whether I would like to be the BBC's correspondent in Washington, and I was set to do that when I .. when the war was over. But in fact after VE Day, I was first of all sent to Czechoslovakia to get a little experience as a correspondent in the field, which I'd not had any experience of before, and ...

WHEELER: Had you in fact done news at all, you'd done news talks but had you actually reported news as a reporter ?

MIALL: Not as a reporter no, but as a sub.

WHEELER: As a sub you had (yes) and when you went to Czeckoslovakia then how soon after the liberation of Czeckoslovakia was that ?

MIALL: It was June and the liberation was May, it must have been about four weeks.

WHEELER: Was the place full of Russians ? (yes) It was. (Yes). Did you find it difficult operating in that ... in a place that was in effect being run by them, were there Russians running it (yes) at that point ? (yes) They were (yes). Yes, was that difficult ?

MIALL: It was rather yes. I went up to the Sudetenland to see where they were throwing the Germans out, ... RECORDING PAUSE.

WHEELER: Do you remember the first despatch you ever filed as a correspondent ?

MIALL: No I don't know that I do, but it was, but it must have been one of those from Czeckoslovakia.

WHEELER. It was probably my first impressions of Prague, the kind of thing they always ask you to do first.

MIALL: Yes, I was briefed by Patrick Ryan, who was then the Editor News and he did exactly ask me to give impressions of what one saw in the shops and that sort of thing. Incidentally the whole liberation of Czeckoslovakia was a story which was a complicated story, which was discreditable to all concerned. And by the time I got to Prague, a month after the end of the war, there'd been a general conspiracy to invent a different story which was more or less believed. What happened was that General Patton, the American in charge of the Third Army, was scooting along from Pilsen, in the West of Czeckoslovakia and got almost to the outskirts of Prague. And it had been agreed at Yalta by the Big Three that Prague would be liberated by the Russians. And the Russian Army was stuck somewhere South of Berlin, there was extremely heavy fighting going there, and they weren't anywhere near Prague. The Slovaks had had a successful rising the

previous Autumn. The Czechs had in fact collaborated until the very last minutes; and suddenly, when it seemed as though the war was just about over, they realised that they were not going to be on a par with the Slovaks because they wouldn't have risen against the Nazis. And they found that General Patton and his Americans were right at the outskirts of Prague. So they immediately ran up the American flags and made welcoming signs. There was an S.S. Division that was escaping from the oncoming Russians, heading to Czechoslovakia, in order to surrender to the Americans rather than be caught by the Russians. And they quartered themselves in Prague and the Czechs then found that instead of Patton, as they thought, they had the S.S. on their doorsteps. Meantime, whoever was the Russian Commander had got on to Eisenhower to say -"Hey it was agreed that we would liberate Prague". And Eisenhower then ordered Patton back again. And so the Czechs found that instead of the Americans to surrender to, they had the S.S. there. And they desperately and very ineffectively tried to battle against the S.S. who were mowing them down. And then along came something called the Vlassov Brigade. This was a brigade recruited from turn-coat Russians who had been serving in the German Army and they too were coming down and trying to surrender to the Americans rather than be caught by the Red Russians, they were again turning their coats a second time. And then when they found the, that there wasn't Patton there at all but the S.S., they joined in fighting the S.S., and it was the Vlassov Division which in fact liberated Prague. And the Red Army only limped in to Prague a few days after the war was over. At which point the Vlassov Division said you know, here we've liberated Prague and finally well let's be friends or words to that effect and they were all shipped off to Russia and liquidated. And it was, it was about the time I got there, the myth had grown up that the Red Army had liberated Prague.

WHEELER: Now as the first BBC correspondent on the scene, obviously a fairly important story, were you able, in the sort of outlets the BBC provided you with, which presumably were mainly concerned with day-to-day news, when you did news bulletins and Radio Newsreel and so on, were you able to reflect that kind of thing, were you able to report that story ?

MIALL: Well I wasn't really the very first correspondent there because there had been war correspondents who passed through at that time. My specific thing was to do a story on Sudetenland and that was what I went off to do in the first instance. I, at that stage I didn't report this story largely because I hadn't got the facts. I mean I had the gossip but you needed to check an awful lot before you could report that as fact.

WHEELER: Were there any outlets available to correspondents though in those days, who could report that kind of story if they got hold of it ?

MIALL: Well the great outlet for correspondents in those days was Radio Newsreel. The War Report had just ended, perhaps it was still going, I can't remember, but Radio Newsreel was the main outlet for correspondents. Later there was From Our Own Correspondent which started not as a miscellany of correspondents but a single talk, fifteen minute talk on the Third Programme by one correspondent.

WHEELER: But that was very much later wasn't it ?

MIALL: That was a year or two later.

WHEELER: That was very much later, but let's come back to Radio Newsreel.

MIALL: Radio Newsreel was broadcast on the Light Programme and on all the overseas transmissions and it was, it had an enormous audience, it followed a highly popular thriller/Who dunnit/Soap Opera called Barton, Special Agent, which had an enormous audience, and right up until...

WHEELER: Can you give me a figure roughly on that ?

MIALL: I have an idea it was somewhere of the order of 12 million but I'm.. I maybe wrong. You see even after Television re-started after the war, Television didn't start until 7.30 in the evening, right up until 1955. Radio Newsreel was on from 7 - 7.30, it therefore had the Television audience as well as the Radio audience. The Light Programme was the biggest audience anyway and it was the main news event of the day.

WHEELER: And Radio Newsreel gave you, what $2\frac{1}{2}$ - 3 minutes really ? (Yes) Any day of the week ?

MIALL: Well as far, as a correspondent it used to be almost everyday.

WHEELER: It was almost every day (yes) how did you do this, did you have consultation with London about what you would do that night for Radio Newsreel or did you bang off, appear on a circuit at a fixed time ?

MIALL: Well this is after I got to Washington, we're talking about,

rather than in Czechoslovakia. (All right yes) No, from Washington I used to send a cable to London each day saying what I was going to be sending. I occasionally I would get a cabled request to say, "Could you send reactions to so and so" or something of that sort, but as far as originating American News I, I said, I sent a message as to what I would be coming up with and sometimes it would be two or three different dispatches, but I had a regular circuit that was at a quarter to six, London time in the evening, which could be used, they could use it if necessary into the Six O'clock News but particularly to give them time to have a look at it and fit it into the 7 o'clock Radio Newsreel comfortably.

WHEELER: This was around your lunchtime in the States?

MIALL: Yes 12.45 Washington time.In the lunchtime.

WHEELER: And because Washington was one of the two important posts, I suppose the other was Paris, you were able to have a daily circuit out of Washington, whereas other correspondents in places like Warsaw say, possibly only had them twice a week, was that how it worked ?

MIALL: Yes I had a daily circuit that took the form of a single landline between Washington and New York and then a two-way circuit which went through the ether between New York and London. That was a rather dodgy circuit, when there were sunspots it would perhaps go down or it would fade out in the middle, something of that sort. So the New York Office would record my despatch as it went through, and if something had collapsed on the circuit, they could replay it from New York, immediately afterwards.

WHEELER: Did that mean, you said it was a one way circuit from Washington New York, did that mean that London couldn't actually talk to you directly ?

MIALL: This was simply an economy measure, one, on occasions when you needed to come in live into a programme and needed to come in on a cue or they wanted to talk to you for some special reasons, we would pay for another circuit. But we were very dollar conscious in those days.

WHEELER: Well curiously that extraordinary system lasted until I arrived in Washington in 1965 which was you know, many many years later. And it occurred to me that the price of an ordinary telephone call between Washington Office, which was not very high, not a music line or anything

special, we could in fact have total communication both ways, and that's in fact what we did, we simply had an ordinary telephone line. (yes) So that you were unable, except by special arrangement, to ...to talk to London, New York had to pass messages ?

MIALL: No, no I could talk to them but (yes) they couldn't talk to me.

WHEELER: You couldn't have a conversation though ?

MIALL: Yes. There was a lot to be said for that in my view (yes) because there was no, there was nothing done in those days of telling the correspondent what to report or how to report it. He was trusted to know more about what he was reporting than the chap in London did. The chap in London could indicate what their interest was, what the competing news was but you can do that perfectly well ..and usually much more economically in time, on a cable or telex ...

WHEELER: That's quite true, cut down the amount of chit chat.

MIALL: Yes the chat that goes on now on the leased line is perfectly appalling in my view.

WHEELER: What sort of stories did you do in those days when you first went to Washington, what was the date of your Washington, of your start in Washington ?

MIALL: I arrived there at the very end of November 1945, just after the end of the Japanese War, just after Roosevelt had died in April, Truman was President, there had been this abrupt cancellation of 'Lend-lease' which had totally thrown the British economy into a desperate state and when I got there Keynes was negotiating the terms of a loan. And that was, and the American loan to Britain was the first and most important story that I had to cover. First of all the actual negotiation as between the administrations of the two countries and then the subsequent passage of it through Congress. An American friend of mine suggested to me that if I really wanted to understand how Congress worked, it would be a very good thing to follow one bill through all its stages of Congress and I did that with the American loan. I went through all the hearings in the House and all the hearings in the Senate and the debates in both and it taught one a great deal about how Congress works and who was who in Congress. And you remember that the radio gallery in the Senate was the front row of a

public gallery, next to the press gallery and the, in the public gallery visitors used to come in on tours, brought in for ten minutes to listen to a debate and then go out again. And on one occasion I was sitting alone in this public gallery during a long filibuster on the American Loan, Senator Hickenlooper, an isolationist senator from Iowa, he was making a long filibustering speech attacking this loan and an elderly crowd of tourists came in and sat down in the row behind me and a woman leaned forward and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Are you in favour of this loan, young man ?" And so trying to disguise my accent as much as possible I whispered back 'I'm just a reporter". She said "Well I'm dead against it, I've been over there and I've seen them". It made the lead for my despatch that day.

But at that time Britain was still a major power in the eyes of the Americans, there was a special relationship, there was an equality, there was still a great deal of warmth of feeling from the war and it was a very interesting place to be. I was in those days the only radio correspondent of any foreign organisation in Washington. The French, the Americans, the Japanese and so on had none. And it was a very interesting post. It was also interesting to, really to learn the trade of a foreign correspondent and to establish what a BBC peacetime correspondent could or should do because there had been none before.

WHEELER: Were there any others in other parts of the world ?

MIALL: Oh yes, Tom Cadett was in Paris, Christopher Serpell was in Rome, Patrick Smith, I think, was in Vienna. There was a correspondent in Warsaw, there was a correspondent in Germany, I'm pretty sure. I think that's about the lot.

WHEELER: No one in Africa or the Far East at that point ?

MIALL: I don't think at that point there was, certainly not in Africa, then, there was later Robert Stimson was sent to S. Africa.

WHEELER: There was a correspondent in Delhi I think. Certainly for the assassination of Gandhi.

MIALL: Yes. Again Stimson was in India for the assassination of Gandhi.

WHEELER: Tell me did you also cover the United Nations or was there somebody there ?

MIALL: Well first of all there wasn't a United Nations as such, at that stage, there had been the decision taken at San Francisco to set up the United Nations, but one of the things I did cover was the visit of a group of people, sort of a working party from the United Nations, looking for a site of where to put it. And then once it had been established and I think it was established first at Flushing Meadow, the site of the old World Trade Fair in New York, I did cover it there for a little while and then Bernard Moore, who was in those days what was called the Empire News Editor, but had been a League of Nations correspondent, before the war, was picked to come out as the first United Nations correspondent and from then on I only had to cover the United Nations if by accident he happened to be on leave or ill or something of that sort when major news broke. And I did have two interesting assignments to the United Nations, one was when the Korean War broke out, Bernard Moore was on leave I think and I was sent up to cover the start of that and the other was when Moussadeq of Iran, he turned up in his pyjamas to .. at the time when the oil fields at Abadan were being nationalised and there was a lot of interest in that story at the time.

WHEELER: What do you reckon was the most important story you ever wrote in those early years in Washington ?

MIALL: Well I think it was the, it was the story about the significance of Marshall's speech at Harvard which started the Marshall Plan.

WHEELER: Marshall was then Secretary of State ?

Overlapped with next Tape

MIALL: Yes. There was, after the terrible Winter of '47 in Europe, a desperate economic condition all over Europe. And I remember Acheson, Dean Acheson who was then Under-Secretary of State, made an important speech at Cleveland, Mississippi in the South, in which he foreshadowed the idea of some kind of what was called a Continental Plan for a possible rehabilitation of Europe. Well at that stage, as I'm sure it must have been when you were in Washington, an awful lot of the real news of Washington was leaked by cabinet ministers, other people high in the administration, to correspondents whom they knew. There was a most elaborate system of press officers, I remember the Department of Defense had 200 press officers when I was there, the State Department had an enormous number, and all sorts of organisations kept on pushing out news at you, so the problem in Washington was not how to get the news but how to keep this flood of paper at bay. But we noticed that a number of the British correspondents noticed that

people like Reston, Walter Lippmann, were always getting scoops and it was because they knew the cabinet ministers or the people high in Congress.
RECORDING PAUSE.

WHEELER: What was the most significant story, the most important story you think you covered during those early days in Washington ?

MIALL: I think it was in connection with the Marshall Plan and it started in the Spring of 1947. I was a new correspondent, a fairly new correspondent in Washington and I had a number of friends among the British correspondents and we all felt that at that stage, we were suffering because we didn't get the leaks of what was going on, the thinking in high places in the Administration, in Congress, which a number of the more distinguished American correspondents got. There were a large number of press officers who pushed out news, the Defense (sic) Department in those days as I recall had at least 200 press officers and in the press community you got a tremendous number of hand-outs but the exclusive news, the stories that were really going on that were significant, kept on being leaked to people like Scotty Reston and Walter Lippmann and the other distinguished correspondents in Washington, who knew people in high in the administration, or high in Congress who leaked all the time to them; and three of us, Rene MacColl and Malcolm Muggeridge and I, MacColl was the correspondent of the Express, Muggeridge was the, at that time the correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, thought that we would try and get onto the same kind of personal relationship with some of the people in the Administration which our American colleagues had. And we thought we'd start with Acheson who was the Under-Secretary of State.

Now Dean Acheson had delivered a very important speech in the Spring of 1947 at Cleveland, Mississippi, and in the Spring of 1947 the whole of Europe was in a terribly bad situation. There'd been a disastrous Winter, terrible storms and freezing and floods and it looked as though Europe was going to go under. The loan which we'd negotiated with the United States had run out, partly because of inflation in America. The whole of Europe looked as though it was going to collapse economically. And Dean Acheson had made a speech in Cleveland, Mississippi, which had caused an enormous amount of interest in Europe. And so we invited Acheson to lunch and we had him to lunch at the United Nations Club near Dupont Circle in Washington. And I remember Malcolm Muggeridge, who was a member of the United Nations Club, said "I will act as host and we won't have this appalling American habit of having a lot of strong cocktails beforehand, we'll give the Under Secretary of State a glass of sherry and we'll have some nice wine with our lunch and we'll have a chat with him." Subsequently

I heard from the press officer at the State Department, Lincoln White, who Acheson brought with him to this lunch, that Acheson had a terrible hangover when he came to this lunch and he said as he came up the stairs at the United Nations Club,"If these Limeys offer me sherry I think I shall puke".

Anyway we gave him lunch and sherry and some nice wine and we asked him about this speech that he'd made in Cleveland, Mississippi. I might say our lunch was on June 2nd 1947 and he then explained the circumstances under which he'd come to make this speech at Cleveland, Mississippi. He had been acting in charge of the State Department, the Secretary of State, General Marshall, was in Moscow attending a conference of the big four, as they were in those days, foreign ministers. And suddenly he got a message from the President, President Truman at the White House, would he please come over to the White House, He had no idea why he was suddenly summoned to the White House, but when he got there Truman said he was embarrassed and he had promised to make a speech, he the President, had promised to make a speech at Cleveland, Mississippi, on foreign affairs. Cleveland, Mississippi was a place where his wife had either relations or friends and they persuaded the President to go and make this speech. But a man called Senator Bilbo who was a corrupt senator from Mississippi, had just been denied the opportunity of taking his seat in the Senate because of the way in which his election had been, had taken place the previous Autumn. And they were having a court case and the whole of the Democratic Party in Mississippi was rent asunder between the pro-Bilbo faction and the anti-Bilbo faction. And Truman as titular head of the Democratic Party knew that he was in for dire trouble if he set foot in the State of Mississippi. He was in a really embarrassed situation because Cleveland, Mississippi, had thought that his speech on foreign affairs was going to do for Cleveland what Churchill had done for Fulton, Missouri, a similar small place; really put it on the map. And he'd made a promise to go and he was a man who kept promises, and he was in, he was faced with a real embarrassment and he said "Dean, I want you to go and make a speech on foreign affairs in Cleveland, Mississippi. I can't go there. General Marshall is in Moscow, I've offered them Tom Clark, the Attorney General, I've offered them all sorts of people, they want a speech on foreign affairs. Will you please go and make a speech on foreign affairs" ? And Acheson said "Indeed I will, Mr. President, but I would like you to read it before I go".

Acheson explained to us at this lunch that this was because Henry Wallace had just been fired from the Administration for making a speech on foreign affairs which was out of line with the Administration policy. He didn't want this to happen to him. Wallace had been Vice-President in Roosevelt's time and was then the Secretary of Commerce. Wallace had been

fired for speaking out of turn and Acheson was determined that this wasn't going to happen to him. He then went back to the State Department and he put down his ideas about what should happen in Europe. And this idea of a Continental Plan was evolved. And he brought the speech back to the White House and he asked Truman to read it and he also suggested that it should be read by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And he also suggested that it should be read by the President's Council of Economic Advisers and that it should be read by the Secretary of Commerce who in those days was Averell Harriman. His whole point, as he explained to us, was that it should not be read by Senator Tom Connally, or Senator Arthur Vandenberg, who were respectively the Democratic and the Republican senior members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

When he brought his speech back to the White House, Truman read it, he flipped his way through it, Acheson told us, and he didn't really take in the fact that it was a totally new policy that was being expounded. But he did appreciate the fact that Acheson had got him out of a terrible jam. Acheson then made his speech which was reprinted, in full, in The Times in London and caused an enormous interest in England, although not a tremendously large interest in the United States. But we, as three correspondents, were particularly interested in the significance of this speech. And so we talked to Acheson about it and he told us this story about how he came to make the speech. And he also mentioned that Scotty Reston, James B. Reston the, then the Chief of the Washington Office of the New York Times, had come to see him and said,"This speech that you made in Cleveland, Mississippi, does this represent a new Administration policy or is this just some private kite that you were flying" ? And Acheson said, "You know, as well as I do, that the foreign policy is made in the White House, it's not made by the Under-Secretary of State, you must ask the White House". So at the next Presidential Press Conference, which in those days were held once a week, Reston got up and said "Was this speech made by Mr. Acheson his own personal views or did it represent Administration policy"? And Truman, who was still feeling full of gratitude for having got him off this personal problem considered that he'd read it, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had read it, the Council of Economic Advisers had read it, the Secretary of Commerce had read it, it was Administration policy. So he announced firmly that it was Administration Policy. Well then, this was about three days before June 5th when General Marshall was due to make a speech at Harvard, or he was due to go to Harvard to receive an honorary degree. General Marshall had been awarded an honorary degree while he was

Chief of the Army Staff during the war. And he'd made it a point of principle that he would never accept any decorations, honorary degrees, other things of that sort during the war, while chaps were being killed in foxholes. And to his embarrassment he found during the war that all the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been offered honorary degrees by Harvard University and the others had all accepted. And he didn't wish to embarrass them. And so he just wrote a letter to Harvard saying he was sorry he wasn't able to accept the degree. Harvard were flabbergasted, no one turns down a Harvard honorary degree like that, so they just wrote rather firmly saying that they hoped he would be able to come and take the degree sometime after the war. And it was fixed up that he should go and take this degree on June 7th. Well when General Marshall came back from Moscow we had a very difficult time with the Russians, mainly because of the economic weakness of the West. He asked Acheson what had been happening and Acheson told him about this speech he'd made in Cleveland, Mississippi. He said "I kicked a ball fairly high in the air but it's high time somebody caught it and ran with it and I think you should make a speech". And Acheson, and General Marshall looked up to see when his next sort of political engagement for a speech and it was about a month off but he was going to Harvard to make this, to receive his degree. So he got in touch with Harvard on the telephone and said "Would it be okay if I made a few words, said a few words on this occasion ?" They said "Of course Mr. Secretary."

(Should be June 5th)

So Marshall was all set to make a speech to carry this ball forward. It was cobbled together by a number of people in the State Department, Will Clayton, the Under-Secretary of State, George Kennan the Head of the Policy Planning Committee, all had a hand in it. And this speech was put together on the 4th June. I, in those days was living outside Washington in Falls Church and I had a neighbour whose name was Charles Kindleberger and he was very much involved in the drafting of this speech, he was in charge of this economic section of the Austrian and German Department of the State Department. And it so happened in those days that there was a programme on the BBC called American Commentary which was normally given by a distinguished American commentator. It had been started and run for many years by Raymond Gram Swing and other people like Joseph Harsch and Elmer Davis and Stewart Alsop and others had been delivering this thing on a weekly basis. But, and it was Joe Harsch's turn to deliver this American Commentary on this particular Thursday night on 5th June 1947. And suddenly Joe Harsch got an opportunity of coming on a NATO trip or some kind of facility visit to Europe and he rang me up and told me he couldn't do the American Commentary and we found that none of the other regular commentators could do it. And so the BBC, biting on the bullet, decided

that it would have its ordinary Washington Correspondent do the American Commentary for I think the first and only time. And so I was asked to do a fifteen minute talk which was in those days listened to by a lot of people in the Foreign Office, it was a very popular programme which had been established well before the war and had had a sustained audience of people who were interested in American affairs.

I wrote my talk on the basis of what Acheson had said to us at lunch, of course this lunch was a private occasion, off the record. It could not be attributed to Acheson, but one used the phrases that a correspondent does use about "the people in charge of policy are thinking in this kind of way" and so on. And I happened to be chatting with the press officer at the British Embassy at that time, who was Phillip Jordan, who subsequently became the press officer at No. 10 Downing Street; and Phillip Jordan said "Have you seen this speech that Marshall is going to make at Harvard tomorrow?" And I said "No". He said "Well we've got an advance copy of it here at the Embassy and if I were you I'd have a look at it." So I went along on my way to the State Department to collect Charles Kindleberger to drive home in this car pool and I hopped into the press office at the State Department and found this text of what Marshall was going to say. And it gave chapter and verse to everything that Acheson had said to Muggeridge, MacColl and me off the record. And I, I sat up all that night re-writing this American Commentary and I attributed to Marshall all the things that Acheson had been saying to us, in the sense that I was able to quote what he'd actually said at Harvard, but I also put in a lot of things which Marshall didn't say but which Acheson had told us, namely that it was terribly important that the European Nations should make a quick and positive response to whatever was happening on the American side, because Acheson explained to us he could not go, or the Administration could not go to Congress again and ask them to provide more financial help for Europe. They had the British loan; they'd had UNRRA; they had had various other things that .. each one of which had promised would solve the problems of Europe and produce peace in our time. And each time they'd had to come back and they'd oversold their case. And it had to be an imaginative, constructive, co-operative effort from the European side that was going to produce the result. And so in my talk, in this American Commentary, I stressed this at considerable length saying that it really was urgent that there should be a response from the European side.

Well for complicated reasons this Marshall's speech had virtually no impact in the United States, it was not broadcast on the Networks, partly because it had all been fixed up at the last minute.

There was a lot of domestic news in America which squeezed it off the front page, it wasn't carried on the front page of any main American Papers and there was absolutely no coverage of it in the British Press except in the Express which was Rene MacColl's paper and in the Telegraph which was Malcolm Muggeridge's paper. The Times did not cover a word of it except a short report from Reuter. And by sheer accident Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, who'd also just returned from the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Moscow and was terribly dispirited by the negative attitude of Molatov at that time, was listening to the American Commentary and he heard this broadcast of mine. About a year later he talked at the National Press Club in Washington and described how he had this little wireless set by his bed and heard what he thought was Marshall's voice (it wasn't Marshall's voice it was me reporting on what Marshall had said) describing this, and he described it as a "lifeline thrown to a sinking man" and he said "I grabbed it with both hands." And Christopher Mayhew, who was Bevin's Parliamentary Private Secretary told me that the next morning Marshall came dashing into the Foreign Office saying "Let's get going on this". Bevin said "Let's get going on this Marshall offer, get hold of Molotov, get hold of Bidault, we must make a European response to this thing." And they said "What thing ?" because there wasn't any word of it in The Times and there wasn't any word of it from the British Embassy and as far as the Foreign Office was concerned it hadn't happened, there was nothing in the Embassy and nothing in The Times ... and Phillip Jordon, I was chatting with later, said that the acting Ambassador, the Charge d' Affaires, because we were between ambassadors at that time, who was Jock Balfour, he Phillip Jordon had taken this script into Balfour and said "This looks very important" and Balfour had said "It's just another university oration we'll save the cable charges and send this by bag." And so nothing had been sent from the British Embassy about it, and it was simply by accident that Bevin had been able to hear this broadcast that I'd done. General Marshall explained later that he had been very anxious not to stress this broadcast as an important statement in the United States because there was a Republican Congress which was intent on economy, and if it had been pushed out by the State Department as an important statement everybody would have rung up what he called "the native heathen" and got their reactions to spending a lot more of the American taxpayers' money on the European rathole. Equally he was not anxious to tip off the British diplomatically beforehand because if he did that, he also felt he had to tip off the French and he was frightened of tipping off the French for reasons I can't remember.

And I suppose if it hadn't worked well something else would have been tried a bit later. But, you asked me what was the most important broadcast, this was it simply because by accident Bevin happened to hear it and he then took the dynamic action which was not asked for in Marshall's speech but had been asked for in this private lunch we'd had with Acheson.

WHEELER: So he really pinned the Americans to the wall and said you've made this offer let's turn it into something concrete ?

MIALL: Yes and he got the Europeans to get together and work out a co-operative plan which could be put up to the Americans and which had the excitement which resulted in the Marshall Plan and which saved our economic lives at the time.

WHEELER: Obviously rather a milestone, two things about that, one is the extraordinary passive and inactive and unperceptive role of the British Embassy with which you dealt, the second one, the BBC role; it so happened that as a Washington Correspondent you had the kind of outlet, by accident because Joe Harsch was on holiday that enabled you to deal with this in, at length and make an impact with it. Now do you think that if as a BBC correspondent in Washington you hadn't had that outlet you would have been able to tell the story in equally effective terms ?

MIALL: Probably not. I did in fact tell it in the 9 o'clock news which was the main news outlet on Radio at that time,in summary form as well as in the American Commentary which went out, I think, at 10.30 at night.

WHEELER: Do you think you would have achieved the same result if you'd only been able to deal with it in the news ?

MIALL: I doubt it. I doubt it.

WHEELER: Which leads me to the question whether, as a Washington correspondent in those days, you were satisfied with the outlets you had ?

MIALL: I think I was very glad of the outlet on Radio Newsreel which had a huge audience in those days, and which had the discipline of forcing one to say in perhaps 3/4 minutes, it wasn't quite as short as Radio Newsreel is these days, what you had to say and if you're adequately disciplined you can say almost everything in three, three and a half or four minutes. But there were other opportunities. There was started

sometime in the late 1940s on the Third Programme a series of fifteen minute talks by foreign correspondents under the name From our Own Correspondent. It subsequently became a rather different programme on the Home Service, Radio 4.

WHEELER: Was that restricted to staff correspondents of the BBC ?

MIALL: Yes it was (it was) it was "Our Own Correspondent".

WHEELER: Did it have an audience ?

MIALL: It had an audience, the Third Programme never had a large audience, it had a concerned audience.

WHEELER: My own experience, much later and I didn't become a foreign correspondent until 1958, was that on the whole, I'm talking about Radio now not Television, it wasn't until From Our Own Correspondent became a regular and well-known Saturday morning programme in which one had a 4½/5 minute outlet, that one couldn't really do justice to one's job and couldn't really unload the information that one was picking up as a correspondent, until that programme was instituted. That the news outlets, that the restrictions within which one had to operate as a news correspondent the ... suppression of one's own opinion, interpretation of news was a severe limitation and it wasn't until one's own, until the programme From Our Own Correspondent was developed that one really began to make an impact as a commentator on the foreign scene, would you agree with that ?

MIALL: Not entirely. I wouldn't say the word "commentator" I think the word "analyst" rather than "commentator".

WHEELER: Yes I think I would agree there.

MIALL: I think one wasn't asked to give one's own personal views but one was asked not simply to report facts but to try to set, put them into a perspective.

WHEELER: But that was always difficult to do as a BBC Foreign Correspondent, within one's normal outlets one found.

MIALL: Yes, when I first went to Washington I was interviewed, I was seen by Haley, I suppose he was then Sir William Haley, the Director-General and he, as I say, had been responsible for establishing the corps

of foreign correspondents and he gave me a kind of brief and he said it was not my job to comment, to make comments on what was happening, that was no function of the BBC Correspondent. At the same time it was my job to try and explain a rather difficult foreign situation for an English audience and I remember he said,"Supposing General MacArthur does something that is bloody silly, it is not for you to say that it is a bloody silly thing that General MacArthur has done. But if you care to say that the newspapers report this as a bloody silly thing, that is part of your function". Those were his exact words. It's perhaps a sophistry to report those newspapers or those commentators, whichever it is, which happen to support your own analysis of what that is. But what he was stressing was that over the long run nobody should be able to say that this chap in Washington or Paris or wherever it happened to be, holds these strong political views. He,...(or even hold strong views about anything I would have thought) Yeah.

WHEELER: Or even hold strong views about anything I would have thought. I think you point out that, precisely that problem really essentially there is no difference between choosing a New York Times leader with which you happen to agree or which happens to be making the point that you think should be made and choosing a Washington Post leader that ... makes another point. In a way I would put it to you that it's more honest leaving your, suppressing your own political views but possibly more honest simply to come straight out and say that ....RECORDING PAUSE...

WHEELER: Somebody once said to me that under the regime of Tahu Hole who was then Editor of News the BBC Correspondent was forbidden from saying it was a fine day, he had to attribute that statement to a weather forecaster, that's an exaggeration but was there any truth in that ?

MIALL: Well I had no great respect for Tahu Hole as a News Editor. And I don't think he had any particular liking for me as a News Correspondent if it comes to that. But there was in those days, which were days of monopoly, a, there was a tendency to play it absolutely safe. Tahu Hole's concern was that the News should never make a mistake, it didn't matter how slow it was, how dull it was, as long as it didn't make a mistake. I had a .. I suppose rather an up and downer with Tahu Hole when it came to the news of the start of the Korean War. I don't know whether you remember but that, .. what happened was that the North Koreans invaded the South Korea and for about a day and a half nobody quite knew what was going to happen. It looked as though people were going to wash their hands and say, " too bad. " And I then got an inkling that this was not what was going to happen and

that Truman who was away visiting his old mother in Independence, Missouri, and who'd flown back to Washington, was met by Acheson at the airport and told what the situation was, was going to decide not to wash his hands of the matter. And I sent a service cable to the BBC that morning based on the best tip-offs that I had of one sort and another in Washington, to say that I thought it was likely that America was going to take action. And I was .. I would advise them if they received messages from agencies to that effect, to use them rather than otherwise.

I was on a list of people who were to be telephoned by the White House when any important news broke and later that morning I was, I got a call to come to the White House for an important .. kind of press conference at 12 noon that day. Well I immediately, .. I'm sorry I should interrupt to say that we had recently, all the BBC's foreign correspondents received a round robin to say what we were supposed to do when important news broke and there was an opportunity of coming live into a news bulletin because Robert Stimpson, the BBC's correspondent in Delhi as you mentioned, had been almost next to Gandhi when he was shot, and Robert Stimpson gave a most graphic description of this shooting which was being recorded in Maida Vale but for some reason or other it was impossible to switch it so that it could go into the news bulletin, I think it was the 6 o'clock news, that was being broadcast at that time. And there was such a post mortem on this collapse of efficiency that we were all sent instructions as to what to do when we foresaw important news that it was important to come in live into a news bulletin.

Well I put this routine into operation, that is to say I booked the extra line from New York to Washington so that I could hear a cue from the announcer in London, I said that I thought there was important news breaking and I would be ready to come into the 6 o'clock news with it live. We went along to the White House and we were given, by President Truman's press secretary, a statement, a kind of Palmerstonian statement, quite short, about the aggression that had happened by the North Koreans and how he had ordered General MacArthur to go and give cover and support to the South Koreans and that he'd ordered the American Fleet in the Pacific to go to support the Phillipines and various other things of that sort. And it was a rather good short statement lasting about two minutes. And we were handed it by Charles Ross the President's press secretary, and I then walked from the White House to the studio which was about ten minutes away. I was using the CBS Studio at the time. Walking with 2/3 other British correspondents at the time, I think Bill Hardcastle was there and Johnny Miller of The Times and various others and they were all saying - "this is major news" and "gosh this is going to lead the paper."

And I was saying, "well it's rather bad luck on you chaps because I'm actually on the air live with this in 25 minutes time and it'll be a bit stale by the time it appears in your papers."

Well I then arrived at the studios of WTOP, which was the CBS studio I was regularly using, and I had this two-way circuit with London. And I had a very sad and unfortunately, unfortunate discussion with a chap called George Tomkin who was a kind of assistant to the Foreign News Editor who was acting as the spokesman for Tahu Hole and I quickly said you know "Is this settled that I will come into the 6 o'clock news?" they said "No." And I said "Why not ?" They said "Well it's thought that we'd better not panic anybody. What we would like you to do is to give us a considered reaction in the 9 o'clock news." Well I'm afraid I lost my temper and I was extremely rude on the circuit and, it's a thing one shouldn't be, but I was.

WHEELER: Because the circuit goes all round the BBC ?

MIALL: Yes and I, I tried to persuade Tahu Hole to come and speak to me and give me his decision and talk it over with me. But he wouldn't do so, and Tomkin kept on producing rather ludicrous arguments; "it's thought here in London that maybe the North Koreans may retire" and a series of this sort. And I just simply lost my temper and I said "Well it's no good trying to expect correspondents to have any initiative if this is what you do, if you won't allow people to come in live when the news is hot, you say come in three hours later when .. with considered reactions, this is not the way to encourage initiative." Remember as I say, I was rude. Well this started, I'm afraid, a row between myself and Tahu Hole which resulted in my finally leaving News Division.

WHEELER: How long afterwards did you leave ?

WHEELER: Korea was 1951 I think and I was, I'd been asked to go to Washington for two years originally and the two years had been extended and extended and I, in somewhere about 1951 I was asked to stay on for another two years. And I then said to Tahu Hole that I would only be prepared to stay on for a further term in Washington provided two conditions were met, and I would like to have these in writing. And one was that I would be given an assistant because up till that time I had been having to cover the whole of the United States' news by myself which meant in fact that I was practically never allowed to leave the post in Washington and you got a distorted view by staying in Washington. And partly because I was never

allowed to come home on any kind of a duty visit to see what was going on at home. And I said the second condition was the sometime during those two years I must have a duty visit back to London, partly to keep myself refreshed with what was happening in London and partly because after eight years away as a correspondent, plus two years on the Political Warfare Mission in Washington, with a year in Europe in between, I had been away from my own country for eleven years and my kids were starting to need schooling in England and I really wanted to get back into the English stream. And I had by that time, grown I think somehwat leery of promises that were not confirmed in writing from the Head of the News Division and so I said I would be prepared to stay on in Washington as a foreign correspondent for another two years provided these things were both confirmed in writing. And they were confirmed in writing. And well for a very long time I didn't get the assistant but eventually one was produced. And then came the question of the duty visit home. And there was the, in 1952 there was an American Election, it was Eisenhower against Stevenson, and Eisenhower won and he was taking over from Truman and there was one of those lame-duck hand-overs where nothing very much happens on either side; the outgoing President doesn't do anything, the incoming President-elect doesn't do anything, and there was a dull period after the excitement and strain of the campaign and the election.

I suggested to News Division that I should come home on this duty visit sometime in the Autumn of 1952 but they said no, stay there and you'd better stay there in case things happen, then you'd better stay there for the inauguration in January and for the first years of the Eisenhower Administration and gradually it got to be about April of 1953 and my term was up in August of '53. And I was particularly concerned as to what kind of a job I might be coming home to in London, if you're abroad for a very long time you get out of touch with what's happening in London and so I then wrote to remind them in News Division of this promise in writing that I should come home on a duty visit. And I got a message back to say that I could be offered a job as a correspondent in South Africa, or exceptionally they would be prepared to offer me a job in Rome or in Bonn, or I think in the Balkans. And I said I was sorry I didn't want to go on being a foreign correspondent, if I wanted to go on being a foreign correspondent I was terribly happy with Washington, it's a marvellous place for news, this was where all the news was happening, I had lots of friends and so on, but I really wanted to go, come home and have a job at home, especially because I understood they were just starting Television News

and I thought I might be helpful and so on, in some capacity in Television News. But, and I also reminded them that when was this visit going to be. And I finally got a message from Tahu Hole to say that it was okay for me to come back for a duty visit of two days. And I said this was not my idea of a duty visit and after a lot of pressure this two day duty visit was extended to five working days, which with a couple of weekends made about a nine day visit, in 1953, about a week before the Coronation, and my term ended in August and I arrived back and I saw Tony Wigan, who was then the Foreign News Editor, who was very embarrassed at having to see me and to repeat what he'd been told by Tahu Hole which was to offer me jobs in S. Africa or Bonn or the Balkans or Rome. And I said that I, again, was sorry I didn't want a job as a foreign correspondent anymore but couldn't I have a job at home. And it clearly wasn't in his role to offer me a job at home. I then went to see Tahu Hole and Tahu said that I was so out of touch with what had been going on in England, owing to my long absence abroad, that it would take me at least a couple of years on Grade C, I was then Grade A, or A minus, or A plus or something, but in the A's - before I would be fit for any kind of job in the News at home. It was made in other words abundantly clear that I wasn't welcome in News Division at home, I thought probably because of the fact I'd been so rude to him on the circuit.

Anyway I had a family of four children, I couldn't afford just to go on the breadline and these foreign correspondents jobs in S. Africa, Bonn & Rome, Balkans, were ones that one couldn't lightly turn down out of hand. But I wasn't wedded to working for News Division, I'd been a Talks Assistant, I knew all sorts of other parts of the BBC, and I said to him, "May I just look around the BBC and see if there are other places that might be prepared to resettle me in England ?" And he said "Well yes but you must give me your decision by 4.30 p.m. on Friday," this was Monday. But he said "If you leave the Corps of Foreign Correspondents you have no resettlement rights whatever, you'll just go on the redundant pool and you'll have to see what happens to you."

The Director-General, who was by then Sir Ian Jacob, always made a point of seeing foreign correspondents when they came home, and my next appointment was with him, and he talked to me a lot about how General Eisenhower was getting on as President and the political situation in America. And after a while I said to him that I was somewhat concerned about this conversation I'd just had with Tahu Hole because I said, the prospect of being put on the redundant pool with no rights of resettlement were, was not a pleasant one for me. And Jacob looked very serious and he said "I'll look into this for you". And before the end of the day a message reached me to

say that as a pre-war member of the established staff you have exactly the same resettlement rights as anybody else and not to worry about that.

I then had the job of trying to find a job and in four days when people haven't necessarily got any vacancies and they've got a lot of appointments, it's not easy to find a job in the BBC. I dashed about, chap to chap and they all seemed pleased to see me but they didn't offer any particular jobs and I, among other things I saw Sir George Barnes -(oh he was - yes was just Sir George Barnes then he'd just been knighted after the Coronation, No it was before the Coronation, he was Mr. George Barnes.) I saw George Barnes and he said the chap you must go and see is Cecil McGivern who was then the Controller of Programmes in the Television Service. And I checked with his office and the only time that he had to see me was at 2.30 p.m. on the Friday afternoon. So I made a date to see McGivern at 2.30 p.m. on the Friday afternoon and I turned up there and McGivern had been out to lunch with Sir Malcolm Sargent to discuss the music for the Coronation. And he didn't turn up until a quarter to four. And I sat in his outer office waiting and waiting and waiting, getting more worried about the time and I finally was left with about ten minutes to try and sell myself to McGivern as a chap to come and join the Television Service - it's not easy to do it in those, in that time and I don't think I did. McGivern said "Well you must go and see Barnes again" and he rang up Barnes's office and made an appointment for me to go and see Barnes in Broadcasting House at 5 o'clock. I then set off and got a taxi back to Broadcasting House and arrived perhaps 3/4 minutes late for my 4.30 p.m. appointment with Tahu Hole in Egton House. He was sitting there as Editor News, with his Deputy Editor of News, Arthur Barker, with him. He said well "Are you going to accept my offers, one of these posts as a foreign correspondent or not ?" I said well "I'm terribly sorry, I've been delayed"and I explained why I'd been delayed and I said "McGivern now wants me to go and see Barnes at 5 o'clock, can I give you the decision after that ?" And Tahu Hole said "You've had a whole week, you promised to give me the decision by 4.30 p.m I think you can give me the decision now". And I said "Sorry it's just because McGivern was very late back from his lunch" - poor old Barker was looking very embarrassed on this and I said "perhaps you'd like to discuss this with D.E.N. while I withdraw from the room for a moment?" And Tahu Hole said "Yes do that". And I went outside the door for a little while and Tahu Hole then summoned me back again after 2/3 minutes. He then said "As an exceptional measure and without wishing to set any precedents, it would be all right under the circumstances if I gave him the decision after I'd seen Barnes at half past five, rather than at half past four. And I thanked him and I went outside and I went to see Barnes.

And a friend of Barnes from America had arrived for the Coronation and Barnes had forgotten about his appointment with me and taken him off for a drink at his club. So I walked around Broadcasting House for half an hour filling out the time when I might have been seeing Barnes, by then having made up my mind that it was quite impossible to work for Tahu Hole any longer, and that's how I came not to be in News Division anymore.

WHEELER: So you in fact took a chance ?

MIALL: I took a chance yes, and I had the good fortune that a little while later I was in fact appointed Head of Television Talks.

WHEELER: Well coming back to this whole question of Tahu Hole, since you've been talking about him, talking to other foreign correspondents of that generation long before I became one, I got the impression that many of them were terrorised by this man, that he is some way stood at the head of an empire and it considered itself to be outside the normal administrative rules and regulations of the BBC and that he alone could resettle people or offer people jobs and they moved right outside the BBC's system of appointments and so on. And many of them were genuinely afraid of this man. Now why was this, because they were all people who were highly qualified who could have got themselves jobs in other parts of the Corporation, who'd been, as you had, in other parts of the BBC and made their names, in other words, before they became BBC correspondents, at least to some extent, why were they so frightened of this character ?

MIALL: Well he was a bully.

WHEELER: But there are bullies in the BBC today but nobody takes them seriously ?

MIALL: Well you have to stand up to bullies don't you ?

WHEELER: Yes but people didn't, you may have, you did obviously stand up to him but then you were, you had been in Washington as correspondent for the BBC for eight years, you were a household word, people knew your name outside the BBC and you were in a far stronger position than perhaps any of your colleagues, but why did they not stand up to him ?

MIALL: I don't know what it was, it was partly his personality, I think, he was a very domineering person. He was an insecure person,

he'd been appointed by a series of accidents, he'd .. risen very rapidly in the BBC and I think that he was always frightened of having strong people around him who might challenge his position. He appointed in my view, a lot of very second rate people into the News Division while he was Editor, News that was one of the things that News suffered from for a long time.

WHEELER: You mean that there was no challenge to him from inside the organisation ? (right) Rather sycophantic, second rate, yes-men ?

MIALL: Yes, yes. This was a time when Fleet Street was going through a very difficult period, there was a great shortage of newsprint, journalists were being sacked left, right and centre. The BBC was not suffering from a shortage of newsprint except for the Radio Times, It was not suffering from a shortage of air time, it was an opportunity for taking people on, but Tahu tended to appoint second raters in my view.

WHEELER: Was it another factor if this ... terrorising of the correspondents, could another factor have been that Tahu took good care to make sure that any correspondent who returned home, unless he moved into a very high level job would be losing a lot of money ? In other words he paid his correspondents well in exchange for their total and absolute loyalty ?

MIALL: Yes. I say yes with some hesitation in my voice because the principle of paying foreign correspondents well was something that was established by Haley before Tahu became Editor, News. The Foreign Correspondents' Corps were basically proposed and established by Haley when Pat Ryan was Editor, News. And Tahu Hole inherited this situation. They were paid right outside the normal grade structure. Mark you that didn't necessarily mean that they were paid well. When I was appointed a foreign correspondent my BBC pay, I think was £890 a year. I was told by the administrative officer of the News Division, that the Director-General, who was an old newspaper man himself, had established this new corps of foreign correspondents who were going to be right outside the normal grade structure and he was happy to tell me that my new salary in Washington was going to be £1000 a year. In those days it was four dollars to the pound so it was 4000 dollars a year.

WHEELER: But you presumably got cost of living allowances to make up for that ?

MIALL: Well that was what I asked and he then told me that no that was the total amount. And I said but I'm awfully sorry but I've just been working in Washington for a couple of years, eighteen months on the Political Warfare Mission in which I was getting more than twice that amount. And I was very hard pinched to live on that in America. And I certainly couldn't possibly dream of going on what was a .. the pay of a not very well paid secretary in Washington, on 4000 dollars a year. And of course they'd already put the case through the Board of Management and it had all been agreed and approved and I was in the terrible position of suddenly putting a pistol to the head to say I was demanding more than twice what had been approved for this post, because they hadn't consulted anybody about it, and in those days Controller or even a Director of a service who was hardly getting £2000 a year, but ... the News Division would not consult anybody else, it was a law unto itself in those days and they could have checked with the N. American Office, or anybody else, and found out what the costs were. But this was one of the reasons that held me up so long in going to Washington, they had to go, they had to put the case all through again.

WHEELER: Nevertheless you'd surely agree that it improved a great deal later and when I became a foreign correspondent I moved from being a producer in the Television Service to being a foreign correspondent and I was, my basic salary didn't change, in fact I took a slight cut of a couple of hundred pounds a year, but I was for the first time in my life well off and my impression was, and continues to be, that the reason why the Directorate of News had this enormous hold over their correspondents, one of the reasons why, obviously one was prestige, was that these people were in fact better off in material terms than they would have been if they had had to come home to be resettled even in a job at the sort of level they were in as foreign correspondent ?

MIALL: Yes I think this is true. And I think this was the battle that those of us who were the first line of foreign correspondents had to fight. I think we did establish reasonable cost of living arrangements. And they were not generous in terms of what the other foreign correspondents were paying, were paid. And one of the points that Haley made originally was that the BBC's Corps of Foreign Correspondents should be paid the equivalent of what a newspaper correspondent was paid. And I think that we achieved that. Now that was more than people at home were getting and it was an opportunity to save money which people at home perhaps didn't have. But compared with what the newspaper correspondents were making

I don't think we were flushly paid.

WHEELER: The other thing that arises out of this, still talking about Tahu Hole, you had this interview with the Director-General who came to your rescue, as it were, by telling you that you had resettlement rights which Tahu Hole was about to deny you, why do you think that the Director-General - it was Jacob wasn't it?(yes) Sir Ian Jacob - didn't seize on this point that one of his correspondents was being victimised, terrorised, unjustly treated, whatever it was and go further than simply say to you, don't worry you have the same rights to resettlement as anybody else? What I find puzzling about your story is that although you'd had this assurance from the Director-General that you had resettlement rights, you nevertheless took seriously this Friday 4.30 p.m. deadline. Now why didn't you regard that instruction by Hole to make up your mind by that time as invalidated by what the DG had said and why do you think the DG himself didn't say this man Hole is becoming a power unto himself and it's time I disciplined him and brought him back into the observation of the BBC's rules ? Have you any ideas about that ?

MIALL: On the second point I don't think I have, I think that's a matter for Jacob rather than for me.

WHEELER: Yes but I can't, I have no access to Jacob, I mean do you agree that there is a question there that has been unanswered up to this point (yes) that Hole was able in some way at least until Hugh Greene dealt with him, was able to exercise, was able to run ....RECORDING PAUSE.

Parts of the Tahu Hole story have been told and are now fairly well known about his dismissal and so on but I'm interested really in asking you - I know this is to some extent speculation - about the Tahu Hole phenomena, how it was possible for this man to continue to wield the very private power he held in the BBC over a very significant part of the BBC's output for so many years, why do you think this was ?

MIALL: Well I think in the first place he had been appointed to the job of Editor, News almost accidentally, in a sense that there was Patrick Ryan, Editor of Television News who left to go to The Times,(I think he possibly saw a possibility of being one day Editor ....)

WHEELER: Sorry Editor of Television News ?

MIALL: No, he was the Editor ... he was Tahu Hole's predecessor as Editor, News. He was the post-war Editor, News. And he was the man who basically built up the News Division. And he decided to go to The Times I think with an eye to possibly being Editor. And his No. 2 was a very nice man called Jim McGregor, who as I say was a nice man, not a very strong man, and Haley passed him over and he was enormously relieved at being passed over because he knew he wasn't up to the job. Ryan had proposed a scheme for merging the Home & Overseas News, I think, which Tahu Hole knew was not very popular with the Director-General who was Haley. Haley had tried to get the Overseas News and the Domestic News closer together by having a regular news meeting in which the Head of News and his deputy on each side, the Home and Overseas once a week met together. They were Ryan and McGregor on one side and Bernard Moore and Tahu Hole on the other. I think Bernard Moore was, his predecessor was Michael Barkway who went as correspondent in Canada. And Barkway was out of the running, if it was Barkway, Moore was out of the running by that time he'd gone to the United Nations, I can't remember which it was. McGregor was out of the running because ... Haley didn't think he was up to it and Ryan left. And he had to offer this job really, at this stage, to Hole because he was the one man in this area that he was seeing regularly. Hole had arrived as a New Zealand correspondent during the war and at a time when the BBC was very anxious to encourage all Commonwealth participation, anybody from the Commonwealth who arrived in London got a job in the BBC.

WHEELER: Like being a black in America today ?

MIALL: Yes. A different concept. Bob McCall from Australia ~~Robert~~ Warren McAlpine from Canada, all sorts of people, were put into jobs in order to knit the Commonwealth together in the war effort. And Tahu Hole who arrived, first of all as a free-lance news commentator on Radio, was then taken on in a job to run the News Talks in the Overseas Service, a job which had been run at one time by Peter Pooley, and another time by Norman Collins, and Tahu Hole gradually moved himself up in this area. And he then became the deputy to the Editor of what I think in those days was called Empire News, Overseas News, and he happened to be one of this inner circle that saw Haley regularly about news. And I think he was appointed simply because he was there rather than for any other reason. I think that he personally felt that he was not up to the job. I think he felt insecure. I think this was one of the reasons why he was always frightened of other people supplanting him and why he deliberately set about trying to frighten them.

Now the reason why the News Division seemed to be a law unto itself, a kind of BBC empire within the BBC empire was partly Haley's doing. Haley, when he established the Corps of Foreign Correspondents, was very concerned to make sure that the Foreign Correspondents were not going to have public relations pressures put upon them. There was a, there was a correspondent, a war correspondent in Cairo during the war whose name was John Nixon who was subsequently killed on the way to Norway. And he had been working as a correspondent in Cairo and at one stage he reported in great detail an embassy garden party and the people in News said, do you know why ever did you report this garden party in .. in your despatch at such length, it couldn't possibly have been anything we'd have wanted to report. And he said well I was under very great pressure from the Ambassador's wife to send a despatch on this garden party and I didn't expect you would use it but I simply had to tell her I'd sent one. And this was something that Haley regarded as a very bad mistake on the part of a foreign correspondent just because of the local public relations pressures. And he also foresaw that other people in the BBC would want to get a man who was resident in Washington or Paris or wherever it was to act as a general fixer for the BBC and he said their news judgement will be clouded, we will have to have them totally separate from the rest of the BBC. Now in a sense that was a logical thing. In practice, when one gets out into the field you are the BBC's News Correspondent but you're also a public relations officer for the BBC. If somebody rings up and says "how can I subscribe to the Listener?" it's no good saying "write to London," you tell him there and then. You have to do a lot of things which are in the ordinary nature of a BBC chaps job, you cannot remain a pristine pure news only correspondent, I think. But this was the theory and it was in a sense based on a good logic.

WHEELER: I can see the logic of this, I'm not sure that I would quite look, agree that .. in order to preserve the BBC Correspondents' independence it was necessary to go as far as Tahu Hole was allowed to go. What interested me mainly, I think, is why for example he was able to enforce, or apparently enforce, and be seen by the correspondents which is the important thing, to be in a position to enforce, rules that went right against the contract they signed when they joined the BBC for example. I mean there's no question that anybody in the BBC is allowed to put in for any other job in the BBC at any time with the proviso in the foreign correspondent's case because he needs to be replaced and because he is overseas, he has to give six months notice. Yet Tahu Hole somehow managed to persuade all his correspondents that they no longer had that right. Now why was there never

a, not a mutiny but why was there never an objection to this formally by a correspondent, why did noone ever challenge this, in the present day BBC this couldn't have happened ?

MIALL: I did but in a sense I lost. But, I didn't lose in the sense that I was not thrown out of the BBC and I was given another job. But ...

WHEELER: But if you'd been in a somewhat weaker position, if you'd been a younger, less experienced correspondent who hadn't had these eight years in Washington behind him, you might have lost that battle (yes I might) in fact I think you would have done.

MIALL: Well it was true as you say that you had to sign a special waiver of your normal contract with the BBC, which was essentially concerned with giving six months notice rather than three months notice, which was the normal thing in the BBC. A perfectly reasonable thing in terms of settling somebody else in a foreign country and all the problems that that raises. It was also, I think in Tahu's mind, the idea that he was establishing a Corps of Foreign Correspondents who because they were being paid more than the normal correspondents on pay, were not going to be a problem of resettlement at home but could be shuffled around from one post to another.

WHEELER: But most of them in fact, you were an exception in that you only did one, that you only occupied apart from your special correspondent's stint in Czechoslovakia and so on, you only occupied one post, but most of them in fact willingly went on to the next place didn't they, it was understood that they would ?

MIALL: Yes, I doubt if others had been abroad for ten out of eleven years and stayed abroad for ten out of eleven years, perhaps they had, but if you are parents of young children who are wanting education in England and you've been abroad for ten out of eleven years you have a reasonable expectancy of coming home I think.

WHEELER: Well now staying with Tahu Hole but leaving aside this question of discipline and the Empire and so on, what I'd like to ask you is, do you think that the somewhat severe restrictions he imposed on his correspondents and there's no question that they were kept along a very narrow purist definition of what was news and what was analysis and with very few exceptions were unable to do much to explain the place they were working in

to the viewer, certainly not to interpret the news without running up against Tahu Hole and his various assistants in London. Do you think that this contributed to the gap that has developed and has never really been bridged even to this day, between News and Current Affairs in that over a period a lot of people in Current Affairs, particularly in television, regarded BBC staff correspondents abroad, who worked for news, as people they really didn't want appearing in their programmes ?

MIALL: That's a very difficult subject you've raised because it's a very big and complicated subject. It goes to the nature of television magazine programmes and the style of a particular programme. In the days when I was Head of Television Talks and we started these current affairs programmes, magazine programmes like Panorama and Tonight and various others, I found that one of the problems was to avoid them becoming a ragbag. And a programme like Panorama really only has a style if it deals with subjects in a certain way and it has a certain anchor man and,and a certain series of correspondents who regularly appear on it, if all the odd news correspondents happen to pop up there and then pop up in the news it becomes, it doesn't, it ceases to be a programme in its own right, it becomes a kind of ragbag. And this is one of the problems I think. It's also a problem for the foreign correspondent who in a foreign country very often knows that he he knows much more about the problems than the chap who is sent in on a three day mission with a camera crew who has perhaps a rather over-simplified view of what's happening. In my day as a foreign correspondent we were all recruited from Radio and we were none of us trained in television. I left Washington before Television News started and so it wasn't a problem. Once Television did, Television News did start under Tahu there was a deliberate policy of having no cult personality, there was no newsreader's face even shown reading the news. It was a sound announcer seen off against stills. And then you went into a piece of film and then you had a voice off against further stills.

Well we at the same time were starting Panorama in the Television Service and using reporters who were doing the same kind of job as a news reporter now working for Television news does.

WHEELER: None of them members of the staff of course, all free-lance people under contract ? (yes) Which gave them a little more freedom than a BBC staff man would have been allowed to practise.

MIALL: It was partly because .. Hole didn't allow his correspondents to appear in other programmes, it was partly because they had not been recruited

with a training for television and it was partly because we were still in those days feeling our way and you didn't want to be committed to somebody for too long, you wanted to be able to drop him if he didn't turn out to be good and a television performer's life is sometimes a short one.

WHEELER: But if you were doing, for example, a Panorama on the American Convention and you wanted to use your staff Washington News Correspondent Leonard Miall or his successor as the BBC's man on the spot who knows what it's all about because he's been following the whole campaign and didn't arrive on the scene yesterday, you could still use him, they wouldn't impose on you the duty to continue using him in subsequent Panoramas you could drop him for the next four years couldn't you, and yet this never happened. Now what I'm trying to drive at really is, did the personality of the Head of News, in the way News Division grew up, in fact impose this split which has never been bridged in the BBC and which no other broadcasting organisation knows in fact ?

MIALL: Well I think that, I fear that in a certain sense that I'm rather responsible for this split. I don't favour the split at all but I think that Tahu Hole thought that when he got rid of me that Friday afternoon and when I told him I was going on the redundant pool he'd got rid of me and that I was going to be unemployed. And when he found that I'd been appointed Head of Television Talks and that we were putting on programmes which were of a journalistic kind and which the audience seemed to appreciate much more than they did the Television News programmes that he started off with, he found that almost unforgiveable.

WHEELER: So that both of you had personal reasons really for not being on speaking terms ? (yes) And so that you as Head of Television Talks wouldn't in fact have been able in practical terms to ring up Editor, News and say let's have lunch and discuss how we can collaborate ?

MIALL: He would have had great difficulty in collaborating with me.

WHEELER: And you probably with him at that time ? (Yes perhaps so) So you really think it was a matter of personalities, it so happened, sheer luck that you had two people in these two rather key jobs who felt personal reasons and professional reasons were not on speaking terms, that that contributed to the gap between News & Current Affairs, it's very interesting isn't it ?

MIALL: Well he was a very difficult person for other people to collaborate with. There was a committee that was set up with Tahu Hole and Cecil McGivern representing the Television Service and John Green representing Sound Current Affairs, that was designed to produce a report on how Current Affairs & News could collaborate. And it was described I think as "three minority reports" in the end. They were totally unable to come to any meeting of minds.

WHEELER: I think I might be permitted to say at this point when I left your department, in Television Talks as a producer to join News as a Foreign Correspondent which was something that I'd originally joined the BBC in order to do, that was my first interest, this was regarded as really rather a remarkable thing and I was even referred to as a traitor by somebody very senior in Television Talks, I'll mention her name, Grace Goldie. Now this was towards the end of the ... Tahu Hole was still in office, nevertheless what is curious to me is that even after Tahu Hole had been sacked the period of non-co-operation between News & Current Affairs survived and it's really only in the last what, 4/5 years that it has to some extent been broken down so that although Hole has moved in his job, you have moved from yours many years ago now, nevertheless this .. gap persists, now why is that ?

MIALL: Well there was a long-term rivalry which was based on all sorts of things. For a start off the News, when News started at Alexandra Palace they were able to command film effort, camera effort, resources of a kind that the Television Service could not begin to do and the Television Current Affairs people were very envious of what they regarded as a totally extravagant use of resources by the News Division which didn't use these very economically. At one stage after the Television News had come under severe criticism, publicly, for its lack of showmanship, Tahu Hole asked McGivern as Controller of Programmes, if he could supply people from the Television Service to give a kind of Television expertise gloss to what he was doing, which was essentially an operation run by people trained in Sound Radio who had no experience in Television whatever. McGivern who never forgave Barnes for giving away what he regarded as the vital heart of the Television Service that News should be run by somebody outside the Television Service, McGivern promised to provide Hole with what he wanted. He then passed the word that this was the moment to get rid of your duds, any members of staff who weren't really up to it could perhaps be suggested for being transferred to Telvision News, to provide this Television expertise. It was a cynical operation. And a lot of the duds of the Television Service were moved up to Alexandra Palace, I think that was part of the problem.

WHEELER: Cynical operation, this whole episode seems to say quite a lot to me about higher reaches of the BBC there must have been something very wrong with senior management to allow this state of affairs to grow and not to intervene. There were by that time after all, people called Editors, News & Current Affair, or did they come later ?

MIALL: No, much later.

WHEELER: They came later ? (yes) In fact the first one was Hugh Greene (yes) a man who did something about this ?

MIALL: It was after Hole had left that Greene was appointed Director of News & Current Affairs. Hole was anxious to have a seat on the Board of Management and at that stage Jacob decided to move him away from News and he made him Director of Administration without any responsibility for staff administration.

WHEELER: That was the point at which there might have been a break-through, an historic break-through in the amalgamation of News and Current Affairs when Hugh Greene, who was as it were regarded as clean by both sides, and was a powerful personality, could have brought News & Current Affairs together, but he didn't ?

MIALL: Well he brought them very, very much closer together than they'd ever been before.

WHEELER: They were less hostile but they weren't actually friendly were they ?

MIALL: No perhaps not friendly, mark you I think geography has a lot to do with it, if one set of people are at Alexandra Palace and another set of people are at Lime Grove, it's a we/they relationship as it is a we/they relationship between Alexandra Palace and Broadcasting House, or between Broadcasting House and Lime Grove.

WHEELER: Well let me ask you, as somebody who has worked at the top, well close to the top of one side, at the top of the other, whether you think there should be in fact an amalgamation of News & Current Affairs, the extent to which it has reached that point today ?

MIALL: I think it would be sensible yes.

WHEELER: Would you have interchange in the staff and so on ?

MIALL: Certainly.

WHEELER: And do you think it would upset the purity of the news correspondent if he were invited to appear in programme like Panorama and Tonight (not at all) you think this could be done. In other words what has happened in BBC Radio where the amalgamation is fairly complete could it be done in Television ?

MIALL: I would have thought so certainly.

WHEELER: If it weren't for administrative problems ?

MIALL: Yes.

RECORDING PAUSE.

WHEELER: Right now let's go back to the point at which you have become Head of Television Talks in 1954 and you're in charge of the BBC's chief impact, the most controversial, political programmes. Now what kind of government was in, complexion of government was in power when you took your job and to what extent did you feel independent of political pressures ?

MIALL: Well at that stage it was towards the end of Churchill's government and Churchill, Churchill was Prime Minister, Attlee was Leader of the Opposition. They'd both belonged to a pre-television age, they were not interested in television and there was not really very much political pressure from the top at that stage. There was a good deal of political pressure, it was partly connected with the battle that was going on at that start of Independent Television, at that particular time. And there was certainly difficulty in terms of using some of the people who were being employed by the Conservative Central Office as agents for the Establishment of Commercial Television. But when I came back from Washington, for instance, I was horrified to find that it was not possible to cover a party conference, I'd been used to the coverage of the National Conventions and at that stage the Labour Party was deeply split between the Bevanites and the non-Bevanites and the Labour Party were determined not to have their rows published to the Nation. And they took the line that they didn't want Television to cover party conference.

WHEELER: Except by reporters who were present and then reported indirectly what they'd seen and heard ? (yes) In other words it could be

done in any programme in addition to news but it mustn't be recorded ?

MIALL: No actuality. (No actuality) I mean you couldn't stop a reporter being there and saying what had happened but they didn't want the thing paraded in its actuality form.

WHEELER: And what was the BBC's response to that ?

MIALL: The BBC's response had hitherto been on the line that if one party won't do it then we won't do it for anybody. In fact the Governors were being, beginning to change this situation and I certainly argued to Jacob and Grisewood, his Chief Assistant at the time, that why don't we say "We will cover any party that will let us in, even if it's unfair". And in 1954 we did in fact do that, we covered the Conservatives only, because they were prepared to let us in and the Labour Party were not. And I remember going to the Labour Party Conference in Scarborough and telling Hugh Gaitskell that we were going to cover the Conservative Party Conference and the Labour Party was committed by resolution to prevent the Television coverage. I said look, "You're in very grave danger that you will find you will never be covered on this thing unless you get this situation changed". It was therefore changed, that there might be an experiment the next year, the Labour Conference of 1955 was in Margate, allowed us to cover one morning the Tueday morning of the Party Conference would be allowed to be covered without any committment to the future, so we had to go to the enormous expense of putting in an OB and a team of people merely to cover one morning's worth. It was in fact the North Region OB that was used, it happened to be free at that time, it trundled all the way down to Margate and the lighting engineer from North Region whose name I have forgotten but who was a nice chap, throughout the Monday was testing his cameras with the full lights on. Edith Summerskill was the Chairman of the Labour Party that year and on the, late on the Monday evening she announced to the delegates that it had been all right today but she must warn them that tomorrow morning television was going to be allowed in the hall, hisses in all directions, and everybody said no, however it was said it was only an experiment without any prejudice to the future. The next morning she arrived with a cap over her eyes and dark specs and everybody else on the platform had dark specs and of course the lights were exactly the same as they were before and the Labour Party had to admit rather reluctantly that there, that it didn't seem all that much worse than it had been the day before. Well that was the beginning of the ....

WHEELER: Did they monitor, did they, was there any commentary at all or was it purely treating like a football match and wall to wall coverage.

MIALL: Well there was linking commentary and there was, and we had interviews with people taking part.

WHEELER: Which is roughly what takes place now, (yes) in fact it's not an occasion for great controversy today (no) so it's stayed more or less the same. What about the political parties' attitudes to the kind of thing that Panorama and other programmes did, did you find that they were, as television grew in popularity and the size of the audience increased, current affairs programmes began to pick up audiences of between 8 and 12 million, did you find that the various party headquarters, or perhaps even governments and leaders of opposition and so on, complained about the content of programmes ?

MIALL: Umm all the time. Yes certainly. One of the things particularly was the programme called In The News which was a debate, an argument on topical issues among four MPs and this constantly caused pressure from ....

WHEELER: How did you balance four MPs in those days ?

MIALL: Well the form was, when I came into Television Talks, the first thing that I was told by George Barnes who was the Director of Television was that I had got to take over this programme which had previously got the BBC into a lot of trouble because for reasons best known to Cecil McGivern I think, he had hired Edgar Lustgarten and John Irving... (Irwin)

WHEELER: Lustgarten was a kind of Television Barrister wasn't he ?

MIALL: Yes. Well he was a barrister who had worked as a BBC producer on sound originally and then who had started this programme as a free-lance. And he and ...John Irwin who was a free-lance director and these two free-lances ran the BBC's main political programme and they originally totally chose the .. who should appear,(without reference to any higher authority at all ?) No originally not.

RECORDING PAUSE.

MIALL:

RECORDING CONTINUES.

WHEELER: What were Lustgarten's politics did he have any identifiable politics ?

MIALL: I don't think so. He, he'd been President of the Oxford Union I think his instincts were Left Wing but the people he chose for this programme were essentially people who were performers, and they were characters who were well out to the Right or well out to the Left. The original team was Bob Boothby, W.J. Brown, Michael Foot and A.J.P. Taylor. And the orthodox parties on both sides, objected to the Right being characterised by W.J. Brown and Bob Boothby or the Left being characterised by Michael Foot and A.J.P. Taylor and after a lot of pressure from, on Barnes and others it was decided to split up this original team and only have it on a certain number of occasions in the course of the series and to try and get other MPs to take part too. And my job really was to see that one got a combination of good performers and people who were a mixture of things.

WHEELER: Did it become duller as a result ?

MIALL: I don't think so. A very large number of people made their political reputations on In The News, one for instance was Jim Callaghan who was one of those who was brought in. But this was a programme on which there was constant political pressure. There was constant political pressure on almost everything and party politicals were just starting about that time. And there was a kind of dutch auction going on among the party machines as to who could ask for the, for the greatest number of resources from the BBC. It was one of those operations which, which there were no real ground rules, they had to be made as they went along. A party political broadcast on Sound was a simple matter, it was a talk of ten minutes or quarter of an hour by so-and-so who arrived with a script and was put in front of a microphone in a studio and that was it. But television in those days, before the Teleprompter, before tape recording, was a live programme in which you couldn't have just one person talking at a microphone, so they had to invent new ways of doing things. And they tended to try and outdo each other. One party would say we'd like an OB at Uxbridge and another OB at Scarborough and a third OB in Hereford and one had to say "You can't do that, we simply cannot spare things". There was a kind of gamesmanship going on among the professionals to see how much they could make the BBC cough up in the way of resources.

WHEELER: Had the business of interviewing politicians, bringing politicians alone into the studio begun in those days. You've talked about In The News which was a chairman sitting as Speaker in a Debate but when did the business of bringing in the Home Secretary to grill him about this, that and the other, or even the Prime Minister of the day to interview him about issues, when did that begin ?

MIALL: Well there was a programme called Press Conference, which was a programme in which one person was interviewed by four journalists, one of whom acted as a kind of Chairman or Moderator for the programme, that was already running, it had been started by Grace Wyndham Goldie and it was running when I took over Television Talks. And I think it was Eden who was the first Prime Minister who was interviewed on that. We were just beginning to interview Cabinet Ministers.

WHEELER: If you were to look at a transcript of that programme do you think that the style would have been 'matey', deferential, searching, how would it compare with today ?

MIALL: I think in the early days it was much less searching than it is now.

WHEELER: Was it deferential ?

MIALL: Yes I think so.

WHEELER: What sort of people would be used as the Chairman and the Questioners in that programme and how were they chosen ?

MIALL: They were Fleet Street journalists, they were chosen by us in Television Talks. There were three or four standard Chairmen who were used. One was Francis Williams, ...

WHEELER: Who had, as it were, a Labour label round his neck (yes he had) would he be balanced by an alternative Chairman with a Conservative label ?

MIALL: You wouldn't always have Francis Williams as Chairman of it. And you would be certain that on the panel you would have a journalist who was connected with a Conservative paper. But Francis Williams had been the Editor of the Daily Herald and he'd been the Press Officer at No. 10 Downing Street, under Attlee, there was no doubt about him being a Labour supporter at all.

But he was used as a, as the Chairman, it's a sort of playing captain of a team this was, it wasn't a moderator, it was simply somebody who would ask the first question and keep an eye on the time and ask the last question and you had a balanced group of journalists rather than taking a neutral person to chair the discussion.

WHEELER: Did the BBC in those days ever use staff correspondents in that role, in the role of questioner rather than, I mean staff correspondents, for example the BBC's Parliamentary Correspondent ever figure in a thing like that ?

MIALL: Not in Television Talks, no.

WHEELER: Was that a matter of policy apart from the sort of thing we've been talking about, was it easier for the BBC to do these programmes using outsiders only ?

MIALL: Yes I think the answer is, yes it was easier, because Tahu Hole wouldn't allow his correspondents (we're back to that) in anything other than News Programmes. This was one of the problems. We were experimenting with people a lot in those days. We were using people who had a knowledge of politics and if you're using people who had a knowledge of politics the chances were that they had some kind of political views. And it suited us in those days certainly, to have people who were not on any long contract, so that if you thought you were over-using somebody you could drop him without any embarrassment.

WHEELER: Did you find that your political experts were better in those programmes than your general good broadcasters, people like say Richard Dimbleby who was the anchorman, the first anchorman of Panorama when it became a weekly programme, did you find that your Fleet Street people on the whole turned in a better performance, a sharper performance when confronted with politicians than ...

MIALL: On the whole yes I think so. Richard had, Richard was a very good interviewer in fact. He was a very polite interviewer, he wasn't as abrasive as some interviewers were and in my view some interviewers have gone a stage too abrasive, it became a kind of fashionable thing to lean over backwards to see how brave you were in talking to people. But it was a kind of reaction from the kind of forelock-pulling attitude that the old BBC staff correspondents had, you know when they interviewed somebody

at an airport, "Could you tell me, Sir, the purpose of your journey ?"

WHEELER: Did you ever find that your outsiders, who were abrasive, got out of hand, went further than producers and editors and heads of depts., in BBC Television Talks, would have liked ?

MIALL: One of the big difficulties with all of these, reporters, commentators that one used for instance on Panorama in one's early days, you would send them abroad, particularly abroad or it might be at home, into some situation to report on, they would conduct a whole series of interviews and they would help edit the film and add a commentary to it and then at the end from the studio they would want to tell the audience what to think. And this was a constant battle one had with the political, people who'd had political experience ...

WHEELER: They called it a "sum-up" I suppose ?

MIALL: They called it a sum-up and it was essentially giving their views on what it ought to be. And we had constant rows. In those days as Head of Television Talks I had to be present at virtually every Panorama that went out because you had to support the producer who was busy enough with the technicalities of getting the programme out, on arguments with the high-powered commentators who wanted to say this, and wanted to say that and regarded as a monstrous BBC censorship of freedom of speecn that they were not allowed to ....

WHEELER: Why did you not simply say to the commentators that there would be none of these up-summers in any of these film reports they brought back from abroad, period ?

MIALL: Well very often you needed at the end of a film story which didn't really come to any satisfactory conclusion, you needed somebody to tie the ends together without actually saying what his own personal views are, what the rights and wrongs of the situation were.

WHEELER: Because most film reports tend to look terribly untidy when you get them back into the editing room you realise that you didn't come to any kind of conclusion and you need that ....

MIALL: Yes but it's one thing to tidy up a report, it's another thing to tell people how to think.

WHEELER: You used Labour Members of Parliament as television correspondents didn't you, you used Woodrow Wyatt, you used Christopher Mayhew ?

MIALL: Well we used ex-Labour Members of Parliament.

WHEELER: Yes former Members of Parliament, yes.

MIALL: And we used future Conservative Members of Parliament, too.

WHEELER: As regular commentators?

MIALL: Christopher Chataway, Geoffrey Johnson-Smith...

WHEELER: Christopher Chataway, at the time he came to Panorama was not a Member of Parliament.

MIALL: No I said future ...

WHEELER: Future yes, but you didn't know. Now the point of my question is simply this, that did you find for example, the Conservative Central Office was unhappy about the fact that these quite high-powered former ministers, former junior ministers in the Labour Party were being given access, were regular members of the Panorama team and there was no such comparable animal on the Conservative side whatever somebody's future may have been nevertheless there was no such weighty personality on the Conservative side, did that cause trouble ?

MIALL: Yes I think it did. Most of these people were ones who had been recruited by Grace Wyndham Goldie, who was herself a Conservative, tended to recruit right wing ex-Labour MPs and Wyatt, Mayhew and originally Aidan Crawley, though he later became a Conservative, were her particular choices who I sort of inherited on this situation.

WHEELER: Were they chosen because they were better material, presumably they were better journalistic material than .. noone would have excluded a suitable ex-Tory if he'd happened to come along (yes) did you find in your job ...

MIALL: It was partly because at that stage it was a Conservative majority in the House of Commons and a lot of Labour MPs had been thrown

out of work and were looking for jobs.

WHEELER: Yes, so that at a time that, in any Parliament there is more talent available on the Opposition benches ?

MIALL: Right yes, or on the people who have just lost their seats yes.

WHEELER: And is that something that the other party, the party in office hoisted in when you explained it to them ?

MIALL: Yes I think the Conservatives were never desperately worried about this. When Conservatives go out of office they tend to go into the City, when Labour politicians go out of office they tend to try and get jobs in journalism or broadcasting. This is part of the difference between the two parties I think. They were both of them I think, in a sense, more worried by the use of ex-Liberals, (like who ?) Ludovic Kennedy and Robin Day who'd both stood as Liberal candidates in the 1959 election.

WHEELER: Why should they be worried about them, I mean they were not identified in the public mind particularly as ex-Liberals. If you went to the man in the street and asked him about a Robin Day programme he would hardly say he was an ex-Liberal, or Ludovic Kennedy for that matter, they were known primarily as journalists weren't they ?

MIALL: You're talking about them now but if you were talking about them in 1959 they were people who had just stood for Parliament.

WHEELER: They were better known as ex-candidates ?

MIALL: Well they'd been appearing on election programmes in support of their parties and I think this is one of the problems with dealing with current affairs on television. The Conservatives tend to feel that the whole thing is being run by left-wingers, the left-wingers tend to feel that the BBC is entirely the voice of the Establishment and the two major parties tend to feel that in fact it's run by a lot of wishy-washy Liberals and the Liberals think they are being excluded entirely because of the pressures of the two big party machines. As long as that ...

WHEELER: And where in that great undergrowth is the truth ?

MIALL: Well I think as long as there is equal crossfire you're all right. The problem is if you get the fire only coming from one side.

WHEELER: Well now talking about the fire coming only from one side or the other, which of the two major political parties on the whole, interfered more with the BBC in your experience as Head of Television Talks ?

MIALL: On the whole the Labour Party. I would say. (why) Because but particularly when Harold Wilson was Prime Minister, though this was largely after my time as Head of Television Talks, he had an almost paranoic interest in what was said about him or about Labour, on television. And MacMillan tended to shrug it off.

WHEELER: Was that because MacMillan didn't watch television because he was doing other things ?

MIALL: He could may well have been but it's also I think .. the Conservatives had been in power for thirteen years and Wilson had succeeded Gaitskell as Leader of the Opposition and the BBC is always closer to the Opposition in a sense, than it is to the Government in power because the Opposition spokesmen are not debarred from taking part in the rough and tumble of ordinary programmes and they're always coming on the air.

WHEELER: And also perhaps because the BBC in the nature of its business in journalism is challenging the status quo because it is questioning it, reporting it, challenging the status quo because it is questioning it ?

MIALL: Yes and it's investigating what the Government is doing. And the Labour Party, in that long period out of office, because it found that the BBC was questioning what the Conservative Party was doing in office, they had a sort of feeling that they were its natural allies and also because the press were against them, on the whole, apart from the Daily Mirror, they really had no support in the National Press, but the BBC as a kind of nationalised industry must really be on the side of the Labour Party, that was the kind of thought that people had. And then when suddenly we had a change of government they found the BBC was just as much investigating what the Government was doing, the Labour Government because it was investigating as much as when it was a Conservative Government, they suddenly thought it was a stab in the back. And I think also because Wilson really was enormously concerned about what his image on television was

like, he took a great deal of personal interest which other prime ministers had not tended to do.

WHEELER: When Wilson was appearing on television would he attempt to have any influence over the correspondents who were talking to him for example, or would he say I don't want to be talked to by X or Y or Z ?

MIALL: In my experience all politicians would try and influence that. And they would try and influence almost everything you did.

WHEELER: Well how do you cope with a request by a politician that he be interviewed by so and so because so and so knows the score, or this is the sort of chap I can talk to, how do you cope with that as a Head of a Department or a producer ?

MIALL: Your problem, I think, is to decide whether he has got a reasonable case or not. You can't very well ask a chap to be interviewed by somebody who has such a personal distaste for that it is really an agony for him to be in the room with him. This was a case for instance with Eden and Malcolm Muggeridge, they simply, Eden was not prepared to talk to Muggeridge. But at the same time you had to find somebody else who was not a stooge. I don't there was any one formula that you can apply.

WHEELER: Can I ask you about that before you go on ? Was Muggeridge aware of the fact that Eden was unwilling to speak to him ?

MIALL: Oh yes I think so.

WHEELER: He was. (yes) He accepted that as reasonable, he didn't make a great song and dance when you ....

MIALL: Mark you he had done some extremely bitter cartoons of Eden when he was Editor of Punch, this was really only a sort of return for that.

WHEELER: He didn't dash off into the blue and say I'm being censored by the BBC ?

MIALL: Not on that issue no.

WHEELER: What about Heath, you mentioned Wilson, he was touchy as a television performer, worried about his image too, did you find that he tried

to exert influence ?

MIALL: Not to me, he was much less of a problem. No I can't recall any occasions when he did try any ...

WHEELER: What about the relationship between you, as Head of Television Talks and the hierarchy in Broadcasting House, did you ever have any problems with them, did you find that as programmes like Panorama became more popular and their audience expanded partly I think because they were breaking new frontiers in television, they were tackling subjects like artificial insemination and lots of other things, childbirth and so on, which hadn't been on the screen before, did you find that Broadcasting House was worried by this, by the aggressiveness, journalistic aggressiveness (yes) of Panorama ?

MIALL: Yes I think they were. I think it was a problem really of adequately taking people into one's confidence, that what you were doing was something that was responsible that you weren't just being a professional enfant terrible. Again it's slightly a problem of geographical location. There was a big distance physically in those days between Lime Grove and Broadcasting House before Westway was opened, it was over half an hour's journey and a telephone service that didn't work very well, it was not very easy to communicate and there was a considerable problem in getting confidence, particularly of the Director-General I think, in what was being done on the television side.

WHEELER: Who had fairly old-fashioned ideas in the nature of his own career ?

MIALL: Yes but they were a lot less old-fashioned than one might think. I, Jacob fought a very good fight, I think, on certain things. For instance the abolition of the Fourteen Day Rule which was a most monstrous operation which had been started, like so many of these things, as, on perfectly good grounds and became an albatross round the neck.

WHEELER: I'd like to talk about the Fourteen Day rule. Was that introduced with broadcasting in mind, because it only affected broadcasting didn't it ?

MIALL: Yes it only affected broadcasting, it was brought in during the war when you had a coalition government and Butler introduced his 1944 Education Act. And he appeared on Radio just before it was to be debated in

the House of Commons to do a kind of Ministerial Broadcast as to why this was absolutely right and go through and explaining it to the nation, before it was being discussed in Parliament. And the Governors of the BBC at that time quite rightly said, it is wrong that the fact that there is no Opposition in Parliament that broadcasting should be used for just a piece of blatant political propoganda on behalf of somebody's bill no matter how worthy. And they instituted the idea that it was quite wrong for a Minister to broadcast about something just before it was going to be discussed in Parliament. That was how the 14 day rule started.

WHEELER: So it was actually imposed on the BBC by the BBC ?

MIALL: It was a defensive move by the BBC's Governors to prevent the politicians using the BBC for propoganda purposes.

WHEELER: And were the Governors aware that it might in fact inhibit them in their broadcasting ?

MIALL: I don't think so. Then at the end of the war, the return of political party divisions and party political broadcasting and controversial broadcasting, then the thing became a, well in the first instance it became a convenient reason why timid people at the top of the BBC could avoid awkward situations. But it very soon became a political albatross and the BBC was determined to get rid of it and the Governors and Jacob were in the forefront of trying to get rid of it.

WHEELER: We're talking now about when ?

MIALL: End of the 1940s beginning of the 1950s. I think probably about 1953/4 or something.

WHEELER: It makes it a fairly long battle because if I could bring up an example of that and ask you about the time I recall when the 14 day rule was a major inhibiting factor, it was at the time of Suez when it was a matter of national debate and everybody was taking sides on the controversy, everybody was debating it and we in Panorama were unable to talk about it in direct terms because of the 14 day rule. (yes) Now it was got round on that occasion by reporting the reaction of foreign countries to Suez and the debate therefore became fairly one-sided. Now that was a period when the Government was exceptionally touchy about BBC broadcasts, were you under heavy pressure in those days, at that time ?

MIALL: Yes. The 14 day rule was something I'd never heard of when I was a Washington correspondent, it was only when I came back to Television Talks that I knew of its existence. And one of the things that worried me most of all was the fact that there was a kind of conspiracy of silence. Because the most important subjects were not being discussed and nobody knew that they were not being discussed or why they were not being discussed, there was no reference to the 14 day rule at all, it just doesn't didn't exist, In the public mind it didn't exist.

WHEELER: The BBC for example never said we cannot touch this subject tonight because of the 14 day rule ?

MIALL: No, no. And it was just a kind of gentlemen's agreement that this was kept of the air. And I got crosser and crosser with this situation and I remember one time we had a session of In The News and it was just after Eisenhower had tested the Hydrogen Bomb at Bikini, a thing which is in the news again at the time we speak. And we were debarred from discussing or making any mention of the rights and wrongs of exploding the Hydrogen Bomb because it was, there was due to be a defence debate in the.. within the next fourteen days. And I must confess that, spurred on by me, the Chairman of In The News said that we are not discussing this thing because of the rule that we are not allowed to discuss it, this is coming up for debate within the next 14 days in Parliament and we had two rounds, round the table in which all the MPs from different parties said that they thought this was a monstrous rule. And by then we'd brought it out in the open that it existed.

WHEELER: And they didn't break the rules and actually discuss the issue, they merely (no, no) now what do you suppose...(no they made a major protest) Now what do you suppose the reaction of Parliament would have been if somebody on the BBC at that particular moment, for example, which after all was a foreign story, it was not as hot as the Suez thing, what would have been the reaction in Parliament if the BBC had unilaterally .. declared it invalid, or ignored it and simply said this is a gentlemen's agreement not the law, it is not part of the BBC's charter, it has no basis in law and therefore we're just going to ignore it from now on ?

MIALL: This is the essence of a gentlemen's agreement isn't it ? If it is between gentlemen the assumption is that if you're a gentleman you stick to it even though it's not got power of law and you don't like it. What we in fact did was, immediately afterwards, was to say to the Government

at the next meeting with the Parties which takes place once a year and discusses all aspects of political broadcasting, the BBC said very firmly that they were no longer prepared to regard this as a gentlemen's agreement and were not prepared to go on honouring it and if the BBC, if the Government insisted that it must be so, then under the Postmaster General's licence powers which he has, his reserve powers which can order the BBC to broadcast or not to broadcast anything if he really wants to exercise it, he must so exercise it. And Dr. Charles Hill who was the Postmaster General was forced into the position that he had to issue a ukase which said the BBC must observe the 14 day rule. And this was a splendid opportunity from then on, on every possible occasion, people said, this ludicrous 14 day rule is preventing me from saying this and the whole thing came into disrepute. And within six months I think it was it had been abolished because it had ceased to be a gentlemen's agreement.

WHEELER: Leonard after all your years in News working very fast and working to an immediate deadline did you find current affairs, particularly in television, cumbersome?

MIALL: When I first started in Television Talks at the beginning of 1954 I think they were cumbersome in the extreme. Television was only just moving at that stage, Television Current Affairs were only just moving from Alexandra Palace to Lime Grove. And there was no last minute programming there was nothing at all topical, a current affairs programme was something that you got your speakers up to Alexandra Palace at 10 o'clock in the morning and rehearsed them all day and finally went out in something in the evening. Of course everything was live, this was all pre-videotape unless it happened to be pre-filmed and there wasn't much of that because there was very little sound filming in those days. So most of the performers on current affairs programmes were really more or less exhausted by the time they went on the air. One of the first things I tried to do was to get a much simpler arrangement with people arriving much later in the day and not so much rehearsal. It was always important to get people to the studios fairly well in advance because one of the things that was always a problem was that people were very frightened of television, and sometimes they would tank themselves up with liquor beforehand and you were stuck with somebody who was really not too fit to go on the air. And one of the reasons why one did get people to the studios fairly well in advance, partly because you had to do your rehearsals and then leave a lot of time for the cameras to line up, and partly, because if they did arrive with too much alcohol in them it gave you a chance to get them black coffee and that sort of thing and get people in a better condition before they went on the air.

WHEELER: They did occasionally though get drunk on the premises as in the famous Panorama with Brandan Behan.

MIALL: Yes. And the famous Animal, Vegetable & Mineral too if it comes to that.

WHEELER: What was that ?

MIALL: That was an occasion when Glyn Daniel by a series of accidents happened to have much too much to drink and ....
Animal Vegetable and Mineral was a kind of quiz with archeologists pitting their wits against a museum and Glyn Daniel, who later became Professor of Archeology at Cambridge, was the Chairman of this programme and the normal form was that the team, which consisted usually of regulars but usually had one new archeologist who was being tried out, would rehearse in the studio with some objects which they would not be actually having to identify on the programme. And after the rehearsal they would all go to a restaurant called, Beoty's in Wright's Lane in Kensington. In those days Lime Grove had no hospitality arrangements of its own and they had a meal there and then came back again and did the programme. On this partic ...the programme was produced by Paul Johnstone, and he had a very unsatisfactory secretary and we managed to get her moved. And on this particular day, which was her last day of work ...

WHEELER: What is an unsatisfactory secretary ?

MIALL: Well let me tell you. Almost everything that she did was done wrong. But on this particular day Glyn Daniel warned us that beforehand he was going to have to go to a party that was being given by the Cambridge University Press somewhere in Central London who were his publishers and he'd got to make an appearence there at that time.
However it was arranged that this girl would organise a taxi to pick him up and bring him to the rehearsal. Well on her very last day she forgot to do this and Glyn Daniel waited around and kept on looking out and the taxi didn't come so he went and had another drink and finally he rang up and said whatever has happened, and they checked on it and she had to admit that she had totally forgotten to order this taxi. And so, by this time they had held the rehearsal with somebody else playing Glyn Daniel's role.
And they said to him you'd better just get a taxi yourself and go straight to Beoty's Restaurant you see and he arrived there in a very bad temper indeed.
And everybody thought he was just in a bad temper because the, you know had

had mucked up his taxi arrangements. In fact he had had rather a few drinks too many. The visiting archeologist on this occasion was a German archeologist, who'd come over or was in the country, they had their meal at Beoty's, Glyn Daniel appeared to be sulking throughout the meal and not saying anything. And it was only when they got back and went on the air live that people very soon realised that Glyn Daniel was not absolutely in the state to be the normal chairman of Animal, Vegetable & Mineral. He picked up one object and said," this is a dagger and it's used for killing people and there are some viewers I'd like to kill right now." Waved it at the camera. Well Fleet Street immediately sent photographers and reporters to Lime Grove to get the BBC to make a statement and the reception at Lime Grove warned Paul Johnstone in the gallery that there was a huge mob of pressmen waiting for them there. And so Johnstone who was quick-witted on this sort of thing decided to smuggle them out into the courtyard of Lime Grove, through the Wardrobe and get Mrs. Daniel to bring her car in there and drive them all away so that they would never go out through reception at all. This old German archeologist, who had not noticed that anything was wrong, kept on saying as they were being pushed along through the wardrobe area, "But vy are ve going this way ?" And Paul Johnstone said "Oh there's a huge crowd of autograph hunters in reception, we'd never get through". "Oh"he said "this television is a marvellous thing, to think that the people should be interested in the signature of an old German professor".

WHEELER: Did they, did the Governors on the whole, did Broadcasting House react in a fairly relaxed way to this kind of incident when people were drunk on the air or when people said things they shouldn't have said and so on and when Fleet Street took undue notice of what we were doing ?

MIALL: No, no I think not because it was a thing which caused offence in people's homes and certainly there was a tremendous row everytime it happened. The Governors reacted certainly.

WHEELER: There were a lot more rows in those days about programmes like Panorama particularly, than there are today, is this because programmes were more outrageous in those days, do you think, or was it because the Governors were more sensitive ?

MIALL: I just don't agree with your premises at all (you don't) I'm afraid, I think the Governors today pay just as much attention to programme output as they did then, if not more. And the rows that happened about Panorama were nothing to the rows that happened about Yesterday's Men.

WHEELER: And that's going back a bit as well. Going back to the sixties.

MIALL: No, no Yesterday's Men is the Seventies.

WHEELER: Oh is the Seventies. (well) But hasn't the Television Service ...

(No)
17.6.1971

MIALL: Sorry, I think perhaps it was the Sixties.

WHEELER: Well whenever it was, has television as such become more autonomous now in that Broadcasting House leaves it to the Television Service more than it did in those days, to clean up its own mess and police its own operation ?

MIALL: I am not sufficiently working in television, these days, to know the answer to that one.

WHEELER: But in those days, let's talk about those days, wasn't there in fact a fairly close degree of control by Broadcasting House over what was done in the Television Service ?

MIALL: Yes certainly there was.

WHEELER: Now what form did that take ?

MIALL: Well it took the form, which I don't think has changed, and that is the Director-General was the Editor-in-Chief and he was concerned with the most tricky things that one did. But I think that is certainly the case still, certainly was the case under Curran as Director-General.

WHEELER: I would recall that in the 1950s the Chief Assistant to the Director General, Harman Grisewood, used to visit Lime Grove, physically every Monday, for a long period to discuss the contents of Panorama, that certainly doesn't happen or anything like it today, now when did that stop ?

MIALL: I don't ... funny I can't remember him coming there at all. I used to ring him up about it, I can't remember him ....

WHEELER: I remember him coming down for a long discussion on a programme about artificial insemination for example. There were other programmes too that were (yes) where very senior BBC people used to come down and actually

argue with producers about the content of the programme, now that, that kind of thing has stopped somewhere along the line, it certainly doesn't occur today.

MIALL: I think it probably stopped when Hugh Greene became Director of News & Current Affairs. I think.

WHEELER: The system of referral upwards was then introduced and it was left to people to refer things upwards if they wanted, it was up to one to decide whether to refer it upwards or not ?

MIALL: Well that in theory has always been the system. I think there have been occasions when particularly a programme like Panorama was so much in the firing line that the Director-General felt he had to know what was going to be in it each time.

WHEELER: But as head of the ... I'd like to pursue this because it is interesting, it is something about BBC editorial control - as Head of Television Talks you were in charge of Panorama's output, directly in charge of it (yes) and the Editor of Panorama worked to you directly as Head of Television Talks. Now under the system that operates today if something had gone out on the air that had caused trouble, you presumably would then be summoned as Head of Television Talks or Director or Head of Current Affairs Group as you now would be called, by your superiors, either in the Television Service or in Broadcasting House and asked how this had happened. But in those days there was actually editorial control being asserted in Broadcasting House before the event, in other words before the transmission actually occurred ?

MIALL: Sometimes. (on occasion) On Occasion yes.

WHEELER: What sort of things would that refer to, what kind of programmes were they ?

MIALL: Well I remember there was one occasion when there had been one of the first interviews made with Makarios, and Churchill got on the telephone to Jacob and said,"this mustn't be allowed to go on".
And Jacob came down to look at this piece of film in Lime Grove and see actually what was said. And having seen what was said he told Churchill it was going to go on. This was somebody who'd worked in Churchill's outer office throughout the war. There was on that kind of an occasion previewing of programmes.

WHEELER: That was a political case wasn't it ? (yes) A piece of direct political, an attempt at direct political appearence by, interference by No. 10. Correct me if I'm wrong, I would say from my memory, that in the fifties, the middle fifties, it was more likely to be interference with sociological subjects that were in those days considered to be controversial and perhaps not family viewing, like childbirth, sex anything of that kind ?

MIALL: I think so yes, possibly.

WHEELER: And this is something that absolutely no longer happens to people, that these frontiers have been broken through.

MIALL: Yes I think that's so. RECORDING PAUSE.

WHEELER: Now when you went to television talks from news, you inherited a senior producer who became your deputy, who has become a famous personality in television, Grace Wyndham Goldie; strong-minded, highly energetic, did you find it easy working with somebody who'd been in television that long and even had quite a lot of experience for a deputy, outside television ?

MIALL Grace Wyndham Goldie and I, I suppose, were the two main candidates for the job of Head of Television Talks when the vacancy occurred at the end of 1953. Another candidate was Andrew Miller-Jones who was the other senior producer in the department. And I imagine it must have been a close-run thing between me and Grace Wyndham Goldie who got the job. Because at the, after the board was over I was asked by Bob McCall who was the Assistant Director of Television whether I would have any objection to Grace being made Assistant Head of the Department, no such job existed at that time. And I said no. I think if I'd had time to reflect I probably would have said yes because Grace is not a very good 'assistant head' of anything, she likes to run things herself, that is in Grace's nature. And it was not an easy situation particularly as she and Andrew Miller-Jones were on very poor personal terms. I found that Grace, it was a difficult thing for me who had had no direct experience of directing television to have to take over the headship of a department which .. morale was not in very good shape at that time, it was a small, it was rather the 'cinderella' of various output departments of the Television Service at that time.

I found that Grace had enormous qualities of, she had great standards, she had very clear powers of communication and she was a very forceful personality. She was not the easiest of colleagues. She was extremely feminine, she liked to take all the credit for everything and it

was not easy sometimes and Grace would behave in a way that had she been a man you would have gone out and hit her. She was not an easy colleague but she had got very, very great strengths and I found that much the best way of using Grace was to put her energies and her single-mindedness onto one project after another, to start them off. But once started she tended to drive the producers up the wall by too much interference in minor detail and they would come and desperately complain and say could they please be taken off this, she didn't know how to ride on an easy rein I think. But much the best thing, I found, was to get Grace to start a new thing and once it was going well to move her off and start something else.

WHEELER: You're talking about things like the Tonight programme, the first Tonight ?

MIALL: The first Tonight programme, Monitor, the switch over of Panorama from the old programme under Andrew Miller-Jones, when he left, to being a weekly programme, each one of these things she started it off but then very soon moved over.

WHEELER: When you say she paid an enormous amount of attention to detail how far down would she go, would she for example, sit in on film stories at the cutting stage and try and influence how that film was cut, would she leave that kind of thing to producers ?

MIALL: Oh no indeed she would very much insist on that.

WHEELER: Because I recall an occasion when I was making a programme with Christopher Mayhew where we actually went to the lengths of hiring a cutting room in Ealing so as to be able to get away from this kind of constant interference. Now it had its kind of beneficial side this kind of interference though didn't it (yes) she was a very very tough questioner who would ask people why, ask producers to justify their decision to do things in a certain way, unless one could intellectually justify what one was doing she'd explode the ...

MIALL: Yes these were her great strengths and this is what kept the standards high. And in a very short time Television Talks Dept., became a dept., that the ambitious and the keen wanted to join. Different depts., in the Television Service at different stages, are the fashionable places to go. When I first arrived in television, OBs and Light Entertainment were the things that everybody wanted to get to, on other occasions it was Drama. On other occasions it was Features at Kensington House, but for a long period

it was Television Talks, we were expanding, we were doing programmes more and more that were wanted. And the proportion of output of the Television Service that came under the heading of Television Talks was going up all the time In addition to that of course hours were going up too. When I first joined Television the .. television started at 7.30 p.m. in the evening. With the start of ITV we managed to get it pushed to 7 o'clock with about a couple of years later we closed what was called the "Toddlers' Truce" between 6 and 7, and gradually expanded it.

WHEELER: One of the curious things that struck me when I went into television in '56 was that some of the really key jobs in terms of important programmes like the Editorship of Panorama were occupied by people who were still in their twenties. They had not only quite sizeable staffs of people and quite considerable editorial responsibility subject obviously to supervision, but nevertheless they were running important programmes, they were administering large budgets by those standards and yet they had had very little experience in journalism. Some of them like Michael Peacock had come straight into Television from the street as it were, in this case the London School of Economics and within a very short time had become quite powerful broadcasters, quite powerful producers, now was this a disadvantage do you think ?

MIALL: I always used to say when you were looking for a producer in Television Talks - and in those days producers were always their own directors - what you wanted was a combination of the qualities that made for a good fighter pilot and the qualities that made for a good don. You didn't always find them in the same person. I think some of the qualities that you wanted for a television producer you could certainly get in the young and intellectually bright. I think some of the disadvantages of these very young producers in considerable positions of power was that they were not always very good on their human relations. And I think one or two of them subsequently came unstuck in their later careers as a result of unhappy, overpromotion in their youth.

WHEELER: Which was a result, I suppose, of the expansion that went on particularly in the sixties when there was more airtime and a second channel and you simply didn't have enough people to fill the sort of supervisory positions. Now one of the things that's occurred to me is that if you look back over the years you'll find that some of the most talented producers in the BBC actually only spent three or four years of their lives producing and they were pushed into assistant headships and so on very early on in their careers, now was there no way to keep these people in the more creative jobs longer than they actually were ?

MIALL: It was not very easy because you must remember that you had a tremendous drain-off of producer strength when ITV started. ITV had done no training of their people themselves at all they just simply offered the bait of very much bigger salaries to trained BBC producers. And this did create a gap which involved filling up. A lot of people were coming on attachment to television, they would spend six months having been through the course and worked on programmes and if they showed themselves to be any good the chances were that they ... they stayed. The output was increasing it was important to have various depts., headed by people who had experience as producers. If you got a new dept., or if you got an expanded area that needed somebody to control it, it was on the whole much better to employ one of the people who were there who was perhaps a bit young than to get you know an administrator from Broadcasting House, or somebody you hired from outside. So it may have been a disadvantage for them not to go on being a producer, some of them actually go back to being a producer after being, a spell at being an assistant head or something of that .. some of them didn't work out very well as assistant heads and went back to becoming editors or producers. But I do agree with you that it is a disadvantage from a chap's own point of view not to have had more time as a producer, at the same time you can't deny him the promotion that's there.

WHEELER: Do you think the BBC became top heavy in its upper reaches during this period of time ?

MIALL: Not compared with the way it is now.

WHEELER: Well that's interesting, I mean do you think it has become more top heavy with the years, the proportion of supervisors to creators has in fact, has changed over the years, if it has why, how did that happen ?

MIALL: I don't know how it happened, I certainly think it's happened. I find it rather difficult to say now for instance who is in charge of Current Affairs in the Television Service, there seem to be about six people who are. In my day it was much ... mark you it was much simpler when you had one channel rather than two channels.

WHEELER: Let's get onto this question of the second channel because that was your next job after you left Television Talks, after you stopped being Head of Television Talks you were given a special assignment weren't you ? Were you the originator of, not the originator of the idea that there should

be a second channel but the originator of the structure that the second channel finally adopted ?

MIALL: When the BBC had put its case to Pilkington for the second channel various people began to think about what they should do if they actually got it. And shortly before Pilkington reported a small committee was set up of which I was the Executive Secretary under the Director of Television, Kenneth Adam. And there were perhaps half a dozen people from the main output depts., and we were concerned partly with the structure and nature of the programme but in those days we were much more concerned with the actual nuts and bolts of how to get it on the air. It was partly because the planning that had been going ahead by the engineers, for instance, for more studios and things of that sort, was in a very, very slow time compared with the pressures that were on the BBC, partly of its own making and partly from the manufacturing ... the television set manufacturers to get it on the air quicker. And what we had to do was in fact, prepare a bare minimum of a service that could go on the air in about 18 months time. Now the Pilkington Committee told the BBC that it could have a second channel provided that it was on 625 lines and in UHF. This involved rewiring the whole of the Television Service gradually. It involved recruiting a whole lot of people. It involved a great change of equipment and in the first instance a lot of our thought was concerned with simply how one could get enough studios to start a service at all. And if you look at the shape of the BBC 2 as it started there were a lot of programmes that came out of the Presentation Studios, there were rather a lot of programmes that came provided by News Division. There were a lot of programmes that came as a result of new use of OBs and there were quite a lot of drama that came out of Glasgow. Now when you looked at the reason for that, it was that you had spare studio capacity in Alexandra Palace and in the Presentation Studios at Television Centre and in the News Studios in Glasgow and in the New OB Units that were going to be on 625 lines before you had time to convert the other studios in Lime Grove and in Television Centre.

WHEELER: Well now are you saying there that the editorial content of the second channel was largely dictated by physical considerations ?

MIALL: It had to fit into physical circumstances, as all television always does, has to.

WHEELER: Well now did you begin with a brief from higher management about the nature of Channel 2 for example, was it settled when you began its

planning period, whether Channel 2 should compete with Channel 1 on equal terms and the audience or whether it should become a sort of minority, Third Programme type of channel which would not bother about, not be concerned to attract the mass audience ?

MIALL: No this was in no way set down from on high, this was something that we discussed in our own committee and made our own minds up about. We were fairly early determined that it was not going to be a television equivalent of the Third Programme on Radio, it was not going to be a highbrows ghetto so to speak. It was designed, it was bound to be a minority programme. First of all in the first instance it was only going to be going out from Crystal Palace, it was going to be quite a long time before the UHF distribution network could be installed around the country, it was going to be a long time before people were going to be converted to 625 lines. At that stage we weren't quite certain when we were going to go into colour, all these things were bound to keep it a fairly small audience.

WHEELER: You knew it was going to cater for a geographical and numerical minority but did you early on make up your minds that you would or would not go for a minority of tastes ?

MIALL: What we decided to go for was, yes was a minority of tastes and was a choice so that if you happened to have - well I think in those days when you had Panorama on BBC 1 you had a Western on BBC 2 and one of the difficulties in planning choice in television we discovered in the course of these discussions in the Executive Committee that was planning BBC 2, was what do you mean really by a choice? And when you started to analyse it you found that what people wanted was not drama on one channel and football on the other channel because you found a lot of people liked both drama and football and if it was good drama and good football they were terribly annoyed. What they wanted in a curious way was a bad programme on one channel and a good one on the other. And then it wasn't difficult to decide which channel to go for. The problem was really how do you plan in this kind of ... what is a choice, what is the opposite of drama, is it non-drama ? Is it football ?

WHEELER: Now in that sort of question as opposed to the technical and administrative, organisational questions, was there any consultation between that committee and producers, people lower down in the ranks on the BBC ?

MIALL: Yes there were a fair amount of dicussions at departmental meetings.

WHEELER: So that the kind of thing that people would be insisting on now in the present day where you get much more insistence on consultation, producers saying they want a voice in the appointment of editors of programmes and so on, so that was already in fact the case, that the opinions coming from the, from working producers were affecting the decision of the committee were they ?

MIALL: Yes, in those days the problems for any producer or anybody with any programme ideas that he wanted to get established, was simply the physical circumstances - have you got a studio, have you got any film effort, have you got this and that, it was not much good producing bright ideas for programmes that were unrelated to the sources that were available. And the resources were very strictly prescribed. That was our problem in getting BBC 2 on the air in the first instance. This was I think always a problem in the Television Service and people particularly working in Radio didn't at all appreciate the complications of this. Remember for instance just before ITV started and when we were going to go in to an extra half hour, there was, the first quarter of an hour from 7 - 7.15 was to be a news and (Radio) Newsreel. The first quarter of an hour from 7 - 7.15 was to be a news and (Radio) Newsreel programme then briefly have the weather and then there was to be from Birmingham a daily television version of The Archers. And this was something that McGivern had, Controller of Programmes, had planned, partly because he had no more studio space available in London. And after looking at these pilots that were being made in Birmingham, about a month or so before the programme started, before ITV started, in other words somewhere round about a month before September 22nd 1955, McGivern came to me and said "I cannot take this Archers from Birmingham it's not going to be good enough I've got to scrub it, you've got to mount a programme from Television Talks in Lime Grove." And I said "Well what have you got in the way of studios ?" He said "I haven't got a production studio at all I'm afraid but you can use the Presentation Studio" which was a tiny little studio in Lime Grove, with one camera and all you could do was to arrange a kind of interview situation. And we organised a programme that was called Highlight that went on the air between 7.15 and 7.30 and this, the essence of it was the interest of the guests who were being interviewed, the skill of the interviewers and one new television technique which was really to get a reporter who could mimic things and .... I can't remember her name* but there was a very funny girl who was sent out to report the Chelsea Flower Show or something and came back and gave a most vivid series of facial grimaces which made it a very interesting

* (Jaqueline Mackenzie)

programme. Well we had no film effort and we had no studios, it had to be done in this tiny little room. But the skills in interviewing that were developed there, particularly by the two young producers that I put onto it who were Donald Baverstock and Alastair Milne was in a sense the beginning of Tonight.

WHEELER: This was Cliff Michelmore as anchor man wasn't it ?

MIALL: It was Cliff Michelmore and Geoffrey Johnson Smith were both being used as interviewers on this thing I think alternate days or weeks I can't remember which.

WHEELER: What you've just said about the shortage of equipment having an influence on editorial policy, on editorial decisions, an example of that I remember when on Panorama, Panorama sent a team to Hungary to cover the Rising in 1956, and I remember you reminding me before we left that if we took the sound camera to Hungary and lost it the programme would have to come off the air because that was the only sound camera available. Now we were then still on 35 mm, were you by the time you started Channel 2 building up into the 16 mm mode which became cheaper and .... ?

MIALL: Oh yes we were indeed and one of the first things that we were discussing was the purchase of extra cameras and they were all, a number of them French as I recall, 16 mm cameras. It made a tremendous technical change when we could get away from (sound,) silent film which you added effects and dubbed commentary on to sound film and when you got away from the old 35mm sound film onto the much more portable 16 mm.

WHEELER: Did you have a licence fee increase to play with when Channel 2 was being started. Was there a great amount of money available for this or did you have to scratch it out of existing funds ?

MIALL: I simply don't remember whether when the licence fee was increased in relation to that operation. It was at a time, as I recall, when the Television Licence Fee was £3 and then the Exchequer added a £1 levy which did not go to the BBC but the licence-payer had to pay £4 and about that time, after about a year or so the BBC managed to persuade the Exchequer to give proceeds of that extra pound to the BBC. There was also a tremendous windfall in the way of back income tax which had been wrongly collected from the BBC and which came forward, but I simply cannot remember at the moment the problems of finance but I know broadly speaking

(1. Aug. 1957)
(1. Oct 1963)

we were encouraged to do it as economically as possible. But we knew we had to do the purchasing, the buying of all these new OBs, the purchasing of brand new cameras, it was a very, very expensive business to start the infra-structure that could start BBC 2, quite apart from the revenue.

WHEELER: And would be vastly more expensive today if the BBC for example were to take a third channel ? (yes) When BBC 2 finally went on the air, I believe in the middle of a power cut, what was your job then ?

MIALL: I, by that time, had become the Assistant Controller of Programme Services. But let me tell you about that night, because that was a funny night. For reasons which are complicated, BBC 2 was due to start at 7.20 in the evening, that was its starting time. And 7.20 was in the middle of the Tonight Programme which was the dashing, inventive, bright, clever programme that was the evening newspaper of the air. (On Channel 1) On Channel 1. There'd been a publicity campaign organised by the BBC's Publicity Dept., which was designed to show, make people realise that they had got to buy new equipment, new antennae and so on before they could get this new channel. And this was done in the form of a kangaroo with a baby kangaroo in its pouch, somebody, some pressman christened these 'Hullabaloo and Custard' and the people on Tonight had a bright idea that although a very few people would actually have converted their antennae and got the new 625 line sets and were within reach of Crystal Palace on the opening night nevertheless if they were rather clever they could show the opening of BBC 2 to the whole of the rest of the country by sticking a 405 line camera in the Tonight studio in front of a 625 line monitor. And they, this was before there was any kind of regular standards converter, and so they had this bright idea and they tried it out to see that it would work, and it would work. And then of course they had to add that little touch that made Tonight the programme that it was, they would have a baby kangaroo in the studio, as well, but watching the thing. Whether this was based on sort of celebrated J. Fred Muggs at the Coronation I don't know. But they signed up with Chipperfield or one of the circuses to have a baby kangaroo delivered to the studio on this particular Monday.

Well as luck would have it the baby kangaroo died about three or four days beforehand and the whole concept seemed to crash to the ground, because they couldn't get any other baby kangaroo. However somebody said "Well if we can't get a baby kangaroo, if we can't get Hullabaloo let's get Custard." So they got a full grown kangaroo which turned out to be a great

brute of a creature called George, the sort that Australians box against. And they got George brought up in the property lift to studio E in Lime Grove which was next door to the Panorama studio, D, in those days. And they had George there with his handler and they adjusted the lighting as between him and Cliff Michelmore and then just at about three minutes to seven, just as they were about to go on the air with the Tonight Programme, the lights began to flicker and then they went out. And they went out in the most massive powercut there's ever been in the whole of London. The whole of London went, lost its power, Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, all street lights, the whole of London went into darkness. And after a short while the message came up to the studio that it looked as though it was going to be some time before power was restored, they'd better go down stairs to the hospitality room where there were candles and sandwiches and something of that sort. So they all trooped down the stairs, the lifts of course no longer running, down to S.3 or wherever it was. And as they went they tended to bump in the dark, bump into George and the handler got George to a place just outside the lifts, the property lift but George wouldn't go down the stairs and the lift wasn't working. So the handler just had to keep him there.

Meanwhile there were frantic things going on because, Alexandra Palace happened to be just outside the powercut area. And the Crystal Palace was also outside the powercut area. So the transmitters were working all right and it was possible to feed something from Alexandra Palace. Well Alexandra Palace then had the problem of keeping two networks, BBC 1 and starting the brand new network of BBC 2. And they did a manful job particularly Gerry Pri^e^stland who in those days was acting as a sort of personality newscaster and he was explaining to the BBC 2 viewers what had gone wrong and also coming up with bits of news and that sort, and finally in desperation they put on one of the old cowboy films that they had standing by at Alexandra Palace in case of this sort of emergency was to take place. By this time - or certainly by the time the cowboy film was over ...

WHEELER: That was going out on Channel One ?

MIALL: That was going out on Channel One and there were sort of odd announcements going out on Channel 2 explaining what had happened. But the big problem for Channel One - the programme immediately after Tonight I think was What's My Line, or This is your Life or one of these programmes and a light entertainment programme which also had to be scrubbed, and they had the cowboy film instead. Panorama was the next programme on the air

that night and Panorama was starting off from, it was essentially about the Beatles and it was starting off as an OB in Liverpool with Richard Dimbleby on a site in Liverpool, the home of the Beatles or something of that sort. And that was going to work perfectly well, no problem of power there, it could get to the transmitter. But almost all of the rest of Panorama was on film. Film was in studio D and Paul Fox was then the Editor of Panorama and he realised there was going to be a major problem. He rang up Alexandra Palace and said "Have you got enough telecine to put out the rest of Panorama from Alexandra Palace if we can get it there ?" And they said yes they could. So Fox ordered the whole of the Panorama team to drop everything, grab their cans of film and their scripts if they could find them in the dark and race to Alexandra Palace which was a fairly easy but dangerous operation because no streetlights were working you see. But I don't know what time they had to get there but they had to be very quick.

WHEELER: Forty minutes drive.

MIALL: A good forty minutes drive and they had you know, about 35 minutes to do it in, or something of that sort. So one after another they picked up their things and one after another they ran into George who was standing outside the lifts, crash, bang, bang as this huge surly Kangaroo as one Panorama producer after another crashed into him. Anyway that was the way that BBC 2 started.

WHEELER: Did they get Panorama on the air ?

MIALL: They got Panorama on the air.

WHEELER: They managed it ?

MIALL: Yes they did.

WHEELER: What was your next job and when did you take it ?

MIALL: My next job was Assistant Controller of Programme Services, in Television. This was when Lobby ceased to be, de Lotbinière, S.J. de Lotbinière, ceased to be Controller of Programme Services and went to be Controller West Region and his Assistant Controller was Ian Atkins who was made the Controller of Programme Services and I was made the Assistant Controller of Programme Services. And that was to me, it was a most educational period as far as I was concerned. First of all it involved a great deal of

collaboration with engineers which I had not had before. And secondly I had particular responsibility for the requirements of the Regions in technical resources and I did a lot of travelling around the Regions. And I was also sitting on the Committee which planned the expansion and development of Television Centre, it was called T.C.D.C., Television Centre Development Committee, where we sat with the Architects. This was, I found this a particularly interesting operation, because Television Centre was the first custom-built television building. No firm of architects really knew the requirements of a television service. Norman and Dawbarn who were the firm of architects who built Television Centre, were very good at working with the practitioners and so exactly how a make-up area should be planned, what the requirements for dressing rooms were and so on, was something which they learned and which I'd known very little about beforehand. I found this a very interesting experience. But basically it was educational for me, it's not so much fun dealing with things as it is dealing with ideas and people.

WHEELER: On that question of the Television Centre do you think on the whole that you and the architects did a good job, do you think you hit the right kind of design, what are the limitations, did you learn things after the thing had been built, would you have done things differently if you could do it again today ?

MIALL: I think, it's a very, very difficult site, it's a very small site to work on. I think one of the difficulties of the original planning of television and it was originally always in the hands of people who'd worked either in drama or light entertainment or both, but never in anything else. And the assumption was that if the studios were big enough and grand enough and complicated enough to cope with light entertainment and drama then they could perfectly well do for anybody else. Well current affairs, talks, things of that sort, wanted not so much an enormous studio but rooms nearby where you could talk to contributors, small hospitality rooms and cutting rooms, things of that sort. I also thought it was a mistake, really, that your MPs, your people who were in positions of power in the Establishment should always be going to a rather dingy old film studio in Lime Grove, whereas the actors were all going to the brand new and exciting place in White City. I think if I were planning the final stage of the Spur for instance I would make certain it was used for current affairs because I think it's most important to have news and current affairs physically close to each other. And I don't think you could expect an M.P. to go any further from the centre of London, further out than to go to White City, it's difficult enough to get, to persuade them to spend the time to get there.

WHEELER: Did the BBC put its Television Centre in White City because it was near Lime Grove, because it's a strange place to put a Television Centre isn't it, it's very inconvenient, it's far from the centre of affairs like Westminster and so on. And was it the fact that the BBC already owned some real estate in Shepherds Bush that made them build the Television Centre nearby ?

MIALL: I don't think so. I think that they had already bought, I'm not quite certain about this but I believe that they had either bought or negotiated the buying of the White City site before Lime Grove came on the market. But all television studios, anywhere in the world have to be in, not in the high rental areas, you cannot afford to have your, the huge area of a drama studio in the West End. You could have with advantage a current affairs studio.

WHEELER: But that would mean splitting the Television Service. There was in fact a large site on the South Bank available which the BBC decided was not a good address.

MIALL: I didn't know that. The, Lime Grove was bought, I happen to know very, very quickly indeed. It came on the market, there was going to be an auction for it and it was when Haley was Director-General and he got the Governors to agree to buy the site over a weekend before it went up for auction, it was bought like that, which was quite a fast moving ....

WHEELER: And it was during this period as Assistant Controller of Programme Services, wasn't it, that you edited the Memorial Book to Richard Dimbleby, who died of cancer ?

MIALL: Yes I was asked to do this by, really by the Board of Management, a matter of days before Richard Dimbleby died, when it was known, quite certainly that he was going to die very, very quickly. They wanted to produce a memorial book as soon as possible. And I don't quite know why I was chosen to do it, I think somebody had liked a broadcast that I did about Ed Murrow who had died. I did the sound memorial tribute to Ed Murrow. And anyway they did ask me to get this together. And my concern then really was to get a book out that would be a reasonable tribute to Richard, as fast as possible. And he died just before Christmas and we got out the book just after Easter. It was actually on sale the week after Easter. And all sorts of people who'd worked with Richard Dimbleby dropped everything and wrote, quickly, pieces for it. I, we-wrote a lot of the material and edited a lot of the material and in fact worked until about 3 o'clock in the morning almost everyday, at home and

brought it back and had it typed up during the day. We were searching for photographs because as a book there was as much concern with television as Richard's life had been, it had to have a lot of photographs in it. I got some very good help with finding photographs of him doing all sorts of different things and it was one of those books which had a simply phenomenal sale. It sold nearly 200,000 copies and it was in the best seller list for many long weeks.

WHEELER: It was a paperback wasn't it ?

MIALL: It was a paperback yes.

WHEELER: And what did it sell at ?

MIALL: Ten and sixpence. (10/6d) in those days. Yes.

WHEELER: Is it still in print do you know ?

MIALL: Unfortunately not, no. It's .. they finally couldn't print anymore. The profits from it were all given to the Richard Dimbleby Cancer Fund, we gave £25,000 to it. Unfortunately as far as I was concerned it was written in BBC time, the Books Editor of the BBC who helped me, Tony Kingford, who was very helpful in the production of the book, told me at the time, "By the way if you'd been paid the minimum royalty they pay on these occasions you'd have made £9000 by now".

WHEELER: And the charity would have got that much less.

MIALL: Yes.

WHEELER: And you also went to India ?

MIALL: Yes. I did. There was a time in the very early days of All India Radio when it was in a terrible mess and they, the then Government of India asked the BBC if they would send out somebody to help them sort out this mess. Lionel Fielden was sent out before the war. And in a kind of reprise of this situation, they wrote to the BBC and said, we are, have problems in starting a television service, they had got a very small experimental, educational television operation, funded by the Ford Foundation, which was going in Delhi but they wanted to get a much more of a television service going.

WHEELER: What year was this ?

MIALL: 1965. And particularly, Indira Gandhi was at that time the Minister of Information and Broadcasting and she had been on a visit to England and she had been taken round by Jennie Lee. And Jennie Lee had sold her the idea that television would be the solution to the problem of illiteracy in the Indian Villages. If only they would have television their problems of over-population, illiteracy, crop-control etc., would really be solved. And Indira Gandhi had more or less waved her hands and said "Let there be television in the villages". And there was a commission, known as the Chanda Commission, which was the equivalent of a sort of Annan Committee looking into the general status of All India Radio and also into the problems of providing this kind of television service. And they really wanted somebody from the BBC to come and tell them how to do it. And the BBC wanted somebody who had had experience, both on the programme side and on the sort of engineering and planning operation side. And I was detached for a couple of months to go out to Delhi and give some advice, which as far as I was concerned was really partly tactfully cutting the concepts down to size and explaining that you couldn't automatically, overnight, provide television in villages that hadn't already got electricity. (Or radio even) Or radio. And also giving some advice on the general treatment of radio, and on the status of All India Radio. Yes I was particularly trying to urge to them, that a lot of the things they wanted to do, like instructional programmes about birth control, or about crop control or illiteracy would be far better done on radio not on television.

WHEELER: Did you find them receptive to that sort of advice ?

MIALL: Not very, no. One thing was that Pakistan already had television and the other thing was that Indira Gandhi had said let it be. I think it was one of my functions, was to write a report which would enable them to blame it on me that it couldn't be done, rather than anybody there have to say that it was his fault it couldn't be done.

WHEELER: But they actually did it and now 10/12 years later 13 years later, it's still very much in its infancy isn't it ?

MIALL: Yes, the, when you say they did it, they didn't do it, they had a war with Pakistan instead.

WHEELER: Well they eventually did it yes.

MIALL: But they have not yet, I think really, given All India Radio the status it needs to have in order to have a little courage and ....

WHEELER: Because it was then very much still, and indeed still is, but they're trying to get away from it, a Government Department, (yes) it was Government sponsored, run television, television and radio done by civil servants.

MIALL: Yes and done by civil servants who were also responsible to another layer of civil servants. They were civil servants anyway but all the details were fixed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, to whom they had to work.

WHEELER: And was that the beginning of your international career, again, or reintroduction to your international career ?

MIALL: Yes it was, in a sense, because Donald Stephenson who was then in charge of International Relations or as it was rather old fashionedly called in those days "Overseas & Foreign Relations" was pleased with the job that I'd done in India, he was dissatisfied with the way the New York Office was being run at that particular time and he said to me, "Is there any chance that we could persuade you to go back and work again in the United States ?" And I said "Yes". By now my children had been through the educational tunnel or almost through, the last one was about 16 or so, hadn't got very far to go and there was no immediate problem of .. abandoning the family or anything of that sort, and I said, "Yes I would be prepared to do so". I had originally gone before a working party that was headed by Oliver Whitley, that was looking into the whole status of the Overseas Offices at one stage and when I was Washington Correspondent, as you must know well, one works very closely with the New York Office. In the early days the New York Office was under Bush House. And this committee under Whitley was really deciding what ought to be done about the Overseas Offices, should they continue to work to Bush House or were they now more concerned with domestic broadcasting and so on. And some of the advice that I'd given to the Whitley Committee was that, first of all that I thought the job of the Head of the New York Office, was now a very important programme contributors job, an office like the New York Office, for instance contributed more output to networks, radio and television, than most regions did for instance. And I thought that the Head of the Office ought to have the status of a regional controller and in those days when regional controllers took it in turns to have a spell in London, I thought that it wouldn't be a bad idea if this chap too was part of that cycle.

And I'd given evidence to this kind of effect. So when they asked me if I was prepared to do it, I then having been Assistant Controller of Programme Services and before that my job as Head of Television Talks had been raised to Assistant Controller or Talks & Current Affairs by Hugh Greene, I'd been an Assistant Controller for quite a long time, to step down and apply for the job of a Head of Department below an Assistant Controller, I said was not on. That either they wanted me to go back, in which case they could appoint me, or they could have a board, but I wasn't going to sit on a board and not be appointed for a job that was lower rated than my existing one. And they said fair enough. And so I was appointed and I went to New York just before the end of 1966 and stayed there until about Easter 1971.

That was a, it was not a very nice time to be in the United States but professionally it was an extraordinarily interesting time. The time of all the Apollo Moonshots, it was the time of the confrontations of 1968, the campuses being aflame, it covered Kent State (the anti-war movement) the anti-war movement....

WHEELER: The riots in the cities, the blacks yes.

MIALL: All that, there was plenty of news happening if it wasn't particularly nice news, most of the time.

WHEELER: And a lot of, a lot of attention by programmes like current affairs programmes in London with whom you'd worked, who were constantly out there with more or less permanent camera teams and people like that ?

MIALL: Yes and by this time satellite communication had developed that one could feed television by satellite. And it was also the period of breakthrough for selling BBC programmes, or getting BBC programmes onto American Air, this was the time of Forsythe Saga and Civilisation and things that made the breakthrough.

WHEELER: Was selling BBC programmes part of your job ? (yes) It was ?

MIALL: My predecessor tended to let the Enterprises man work to Enterprises at home, the engineers work to the engineers, the current affairs man worked to current affairs, the radio people worked to radio and he was a kind of hotel booker. It seemed to me that you can't run the morale of an office unless everybody's quite clearly working to the head of the office and they can have a dotted line relationship to the parent body in London but in the last analysis they had essentially to work to you.

And I was very much concerned with the problems of the Enterprises people in getting their programmes onto the air. And it was, for instance the Civilisation programme was almost entirely the result of an operation that I persuaded the British Ambassador to have a showing of it in Washington and that was, that was where it all started from.

WHEELER: Do you think that whole operation of selling BBC programmes which though you were taking a personal interest was nevertheless not under your control, do you think that could have been strengthened, made more effective if it had been done more through the New York Office than it was in fact ? In fact should the whole operation have been centred in New York ?

MIALL: When you say centred in New York, I don't quite understand what you mean ?

WHEELER: Well perhaps not centred because it obviously has to be centred in London, but a powerful branch office under you in New York, would that have boosted.. it always seemed to me that it was a slightly hit and miss operation ?

MIALL: Well it was a slightly hit and miss operation because there was a slightly hit and miss agent that had been appointed by the BBC who finally sold out with a great capital gain to Time-Life Films and (they) became the agents for the BBC. But whether one could have done one's own selling operation with a whole team of salesmen based on the New York Office, I don't know whether that would have been more successful or not.

WHEELER: You never had the feeling that if you'd had a high powered staff of salesmen there you might have been able to get a bigger share of the cake for the BBC and that Time-Life would take less of a cut ?

MIALL: I think that we could have made better contacts there on that sort of thing, but I doubt very much whether a lot of BBC people or a lot of locally hired American salesmen, you'd have had to have more office space and that sort of thing, whether you really would have got more out of it than paying .....

WHEELER: It was always very difficult wasn't it, to sell high quality BBC products to American Networks, to the larger networks, did you, what was the reason for that that people like educational television would buy BBC stuff and largely live off it but it was very hard to persuade NBC and CBS and people to take them ?

MIALL: Well in my day it was quite hard to get Educational Television to take them too. It was very hard to get NBC & CBS to take them, in the first instance, because they didn't think very much of BBC series, programmes like Z Cars were too British oriented. They were not very interested in taking BBC documentaries because they all had enormous documentary departments of their own that could never get any airtime and the last thing they wanted to do was to sacrifice airtime. And there was a kind of myth that Americans could not understand British accents. This was broken down partly by the mid-Atlantic accent of David Frost and the certain success of the NBC version of That was the week That was (TW3) and it was particularly broken down by the success of the Forsyte Saga. The Forsyte Saga had been made in black and white and it was offered to the American Networks, they all refused it because it wasn't in colour, this was just at a time when they were wanting to say that everything that they originated was in colour. It was sold to the Educational Network and they put it on the shelf and there was a .. sometime after the Carnegie Commission had reported and while they were still setting up the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, as it became, Fred Friendly in an impetuous way financed with Ford Foundation money, an experimental thing on sunday evenings on the Educational Television Network, called the Public Broadcast Laboratory (~~sic~~) PBL. And this started off fairly well and very soon became a very dreary, dingey programme. . And after about a year Friendly and the Ford Foundation decided to scrub it. But they had to, they couldn't really lose all that amount of face by saying the whole idea was bad. They put out a statement saying that the idea of live interconnection on Sunday nights - and I must explain that before this PBL had started there was no educational system at all on the weekends, it was something that only operated on weekdays - that this had shown there was a demand for a different kind of programming on Sunday nights and particularly live programming, a live interconnection. So they got hold of the one programme that was going reasonably well, I can't remember, I think it was called The Advocates, but it was a kind of argument between the Boston Station and a Los Angeles Station with people producing witnesses on the side to argue a case, rather like a programme the BBC ran called 'Your Witness' and they would do this live on some topical issue of the week and that would justify keeping up the live interconnection. But what could they do for another half, another hour or so. And then suddenly they remembered they'd got the Forsyte Saga sitting on the shelf and they stuck that in. And Sunday night was a rather dreary night on American Commercial Television, anyway, and more and more people started watching and getting hooked onto the Forsyte Saga, because the Educational Stations weren't transmitting colour anyway, so the fact that it was only in black and white didn't, nobody noticed. But it did have a phenomenal run.

WHEELER: And that was the break-through for BBC Television in America was it, the first major series ?

MIALL: It was the break-through for BBC production. I was always appalled by the contract that the BBC had made over the Forsyte Saga with MGM, which gave the BBC the distribution rights in the British Empire but not Canada, which meant in fact, Australia, Hong Kong, Malta, Singapore, New Zealand, while MGM in return for giving them the rights to make use of the Forsyte Saga stories, kept the distribution rights for the whole of the rest of the world. And you know, Ireland, the Continent, Russia, Israel everywhere else (Canada) N. America, it all went to MGM.

WHEELER: Does that mean when you say kept the distribution rights, that they also were able to sell it ?

MIALL: They were able to sell it.

WHEELER: For 100% of the money in other words ?

MIALL: Yes, yes and it was a lunatic contract to make. It was very difficult to make MGM cough up the rights to Forsyte Saga.

WHEELER: How did MGM have the rights to the Forsyte Saga as such, a film had been made of the Forsyte Saga which MGM had presumably bought, but had they bought the rights....

MIALL: Galsworthy had sold them the rights to the book in 1924, I think it was, and in some form or other although television wasn't thought of in those days, the contract was so worded that it was construed as including the television rights.

WHEELER: Presumably it was described as the dramatic rights, or the visual rights ...

MIALL: That sort of thing yes. But, this is one of the things that I've always been worried about in both BBC Enterprises and in co-productions, that there is a tendency for people in return for a short-term gain, and in co-productions for a bit of extra programme money which is badly needed to get the thing into the schedule, to give away the baby with the bathwater. I mean what one should have done, in my view, in any sort of arrangement that one makes with any kind of co-financier, whether it's MGM or whoever, is to say, "All

right you are contributing the rights, which we will estimate as being worth this amount of money, we are putting in the BBC's production of the thing with the costs of mounting it, which will represent that amount of money, with any repeats there will be residuals that will have to be paid to artists and so on, but we start of by we having put in say 60% and you having put in say 40% you by all means sell it in these areas where you have good salesmen operating and we will sell it in these areas where we have good salesmen and we'll take out the profits in the proportion of 60 - 40 (from either place) from either place". This seems to me a business-like way of doing it. But to give away to you know the whole of the distribution except for Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Malta or wherever it is, financially was a disastrous thing.

WHEELER: Well now hard on the heels of the Forsyte Saga in the United States came Civilisation with which you were involved, in which you got the British Embassy, the British Ambassador to show in Washington, did the BBC make a better deal on that one, better for itself ?

MIALL: Oh yes much better.

WHEELER: How did that work ?

MIALL: Well in that case we had the sole rights, we paid Kenneth Clark, we weren't having to pay MGM or anybody of that sort.

WHEELER: And so Time-Life merely took a proportion ?

MIALL: Yes it was in fact, it was before Time-Life I think, it was when Robeck, who was the BBC's agent, I think was selling it himself. It may have been, it's certainly gone to Time-Life now. But in this particular occasion was, the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences in its Washington Chapter, when John Freeman arrived as British Ambassador said, "Here's an ambassador who has worked in televison, perhaps we could have a free evening at the British Embassy if we could cook up a reason for having an evening there." And they suggested this and could they see some samples of recent British work. And Freeman asked me if the BBC would play on this and I said yes by all means and they got also a documentary that had been made by ITN, I've forgotten what it was about, but I discovered that this ITN programme was going to be in black and white and I got hold of the Enterprises people, Civilisation was still going out in England at that time, I said I wanted to borrow one of your best prints of Civilisation to show this simply in terms of gamesmanship in ITV. And I then persuaded John Freeman to

(Academy)

invite not only the Chapter, the Washington Chapter of the Television Production ...who essentially were concerned with current affairs, all the Washington people were, they didn't do any drama productions or anything of that sort in Washington, that he would invite people from the National Gallery in Washington to come and see this as well. And they came and they got so excited about the film on seeing it, they asked me to go and see them the next morning and said could we arrange to show this thing at the Gallery ? And they started showing at the Gallery and there were queues ¾ mile long.

WHEELER: And they projected it on a large screen so that in fact it was shown in much better conditions than anybody could have seen it on television. I saw it several times. It was marvellous.

MIALL: Yes, but that started it off. The combination of Civilisation and also the production quality of the Forsyte Saga, by this time gave the BBC a name in N. America and then the whole series of other major programmes, particularly in those days produced by Aubrey Singer's Features Dept., the Ascent of Man and Alastair Cooke's America. One of the things I'm most proud of in my BBC career, was that they were having great difficulty in getting Alastair Cooke to sign his contract with, for the America series and Stephen Hearst I think who was the man responsible, said could I please possibly get him to sign up this thing. And I was entitled to go up to £1500 per episode as Cooke's basic fee. And I signed him up at £1000 which is what Kenneth Clark got and didn't have to go that extra £500.

WHEELER: Very cheap at the price.

MIALL: Extremely cheap at the price. But of course it has made Cooke into a millionaire because the books and the other residuals that he got from that America series has .. was quite another matter. Let me just tell one story about Alastair Cooke which you may or may not know. When he was first invited to make a film, it was a long time ago, his friend Nunnally Johnson who was a film writer and film director, decided to make a film called the Three Faces of Eve which we've often shown on television. It's marvellous film about a schizophrenic girl in New Jersey. And it was a true story. But it was made into what is now called 'faction' it was a dramatisation of a true story. And Nunnally Johnson wanted to get somebody who was well known to establish that it did really happen despite the fact that this girl was being played by (Olivia de Havilland.) And they first tried to get Ed Murrow, and he refused to do it. And so they, Nunnally Johnson

(No, Joanne Woodward)

then asked Alastair Cooke if he would do it. And this involved Alastair simply appearing - and in those days he was the front man for a programme on ABC Television that was called Omnibus and was a kind of Monitor of the United States, he was well known as a face in America at that time ...

WHEELER: Monitor with a capital M, an arts programme ?

MIALL: Yes. Cooke he always loved going to California and he was working for the Manchester Guardian, I think it was called in those days, which was notoriously mean on letting him have the expenses to go over to California. And so he thought he would accept this and it was going to be fun to appear in a film anyway. And the phone then rang and it was the studio in Hollywood saying that they had heard from Mr. Johnson that Mr. Cooke was due to take part in this film, should they discuss the terms with him or with his agent. And Alastair said I'll get my agent to call you back and then went rushing round saying "Anybody know a good agent ?" And they said you see a man called Irving Kohn and Irving Kohn is a New York lawyer who is a very good lawyer who is still Alastair's agent. Alastair went to see him and he explained, this was actually not more than a morning's work that he was going to have to do, it was a fairly simple job. But what he really wanted was if he could fix it up that the studio would pay for him and Jane Cooke to fly to Hollywood and if they could fix up a hotel for about a fortnight the studio would pay for and if there was some little honorarium so much the better but the important thing really was the fare for himself and his wife and the hotel room. So Irving Kohn picks up the phone, calls the studio and in no time flat they arrange first class fares for Mr. & Mrs. Cooke from New York to Hollywood and back, three weeks in an airconditioned suite in the Beverly Hilton or whatever it is and then the little matter of an honorarium comes up. And Alastair with his knees knocking together heard Irving Kohn say, five thousand dollars, why a journalist of Mr. Cooke's reputation wouldn't leave his post for a penny less than 15,000 dollars. Alastair with his knees knocking that he was going to lose the whole thing. And after a bit of haggling they settled for something like 11,000 or something of that sort, the figures may not be absolutely accurate but it was in that order. And ...no I'm sorry I've misquoted I must tell this again. What Irving Kohn said was "5,000 dollars Mr. Cooke wouldn't go Hoboken for 5,000 dollars; Hoboken is just across the river from New York into New Jersey and then he was asked, no no a journalist of Mr. Cooke's reputation probably wouldn't go for anything less than 15,000 and then they settled for this. And this of course is why an agent like Mr. Kohn is very well worth having because he argues figures that you'd never dream of asking for yourself.

WHEELER: ....outrageous as to make such demands yes. What about Cooke, tell me more about Cooke. He was, everybody knows he is an extremely accomplished broadcaster, he didn't always find broadcasting easy did he, radio broadcasting ?

MIALL: When you say easy, define what you mean by didn't find it easy ?

WHEELER: He took a lot of time and a lot of trouble he was also fairly nervous wasn't he ?

MIALL: Yes. One of the things that is rather surprising is that Alastair's delivery is not as splendidly fool-proof as it appears to be. As the years went by and Letter from America had got more and more .. done so many of them he tended to write them in a rather casual way, beginning them perhaps an hour before he was due to come in and record. And he'd come along and go into the studio, by himself, and I used to have it fed through to my office so that I could listen to what was going on. And he would read his script and he would cough and he would splutter and he would fluff his lines and so on and everytime he did this he would just gently go back to the beginning of the paragraph and do it over again. And then sometimes I used to dash in and tell him, correct a fact or two which he hadn't bothered to look up and he'd got them absolutely wrong and he'd rewrite it and re-record that paragraph. Then he'd come and sit and chat with me, it was usually on a Thursday afternoon at the end of the afternoon and he'd have a glass of whisky and talk about Cambridge days and things of that sort. Meanwhile the engineers in New York Office would get together with their razor blades and they would take out every fluff, every cough and splutter and they knew his modulation of his voice so well, the cadences that they could just leave exactly the right time while he appeared to be searching for a word and this beautiful, perfect delivery would then be played through to us on the, so that we would hear how it sounded and then it would be sent off, usually by air, to London for playing in London.

WHEELER: So that it wasn't in fact in the execution a totally flawless performance, could he have done this live, would he have been capable of doing such a flawless performance if he'd had to ?

MIALL: Oh yes he could, as indeed for instance when he was asked to speak to Congress in the bicentennial year, he did a very good performance, he certainly could and he's done a great deal of lecturing. But sometimes

they were a bit on the slapdash side and he was always very anxious that nobody, no visitors should be allowed to watch him at work while he was recording.

WHEELER: In fact there was a special curtain wasn't there, that covered the glass that overlooked the controlroom and the studio which was drawn when Alastair Cooke was recording and never drawn for any other reason ?

MIALL: Yes. I was there when he made his great impact on the American Networks in a curious way, they gave the Peabody Awards, do you remember, these are awards that are given every year in the United States for Radio & Television for the best performances in this, that and the other and there was the best light entertainment and the best comedy, they seem to have all sorts of different categories which in fact cover entertainment shows. And on this particular occasion, I think it must have been about 1950/1 I remember Harman Grisewood was visiting Washington and, I think a lunch was held in New York, but I took Grisewood to this occasion and Alastair Cooke received what was the most lowly Peabody Award of all I think, which was the Contribution to International Understanding, or something of that sort for Letter From America. And there were Bob Hope and there was Jack Benny and there was Fred Allen and all the great comic men of the United States were there and all the heads of the networks and each one of them received his award and made a short speech which his gagman had written for him. And the gagmen were not on very good form that day, and they weren't very funny as one after another a rather bad speech, and then finally at the end of it, Alastair Cooke, who nobody there had ever heard of at all, he was an English, the correspondent of an English newspaper that was never even heard in the United States and never seen on television, was called on to go and receive what was probably about the last of the awards of the afternoon. And Alastair at the end made a most beautifully delivered and terribly funny speech and it brought the house down. And all the heads of networks immediately said to their chaps, go and sign that man up and he had all sorts of offers to appear on television and radio programmes, particularly on television which was just getting going then. And it was as a result of that he became the front man for this new Omnibus programme.

(1952)

WHEELER: How does the BBC and how did you both as an overseas representative and later as Controller of the, what became the International Relations Dept., of the BBC, cope with the problem of an intelligent division between what you were doing as representative and what your representatives were doing and the correspondent on the ground ?

MIALL: There have been, as I think I've mentioned earlier on, a historical division between the role of the correspondent and the role of the representative which was laid down by Sir William Haley when he first established foreign correspondents. I think that originally it had a very great deal of sense to keep these operations totally separate. I became rather less concerned about the value of that separation as I went on because I think one of the troubles with the News Division is that it has been a kind of separate empire within another empire and that it does not help News or the rest of the BBC to have it so totally separate from all sorts of other things which are equally separated from one another. Publications, Enterprises all these things are rather different from other parts of the BBC. But there is nothing so magnificently different about News in my view that would justify it being a totally separate operation. I found that it was sometimes an embarrassment to have two BBC offices in the same town for instance, the same capital city. As far as the local inhabitants were concerned with apparently two equally statused people in charge, not quite knowing who is the main one that they have to deal with when they've only got one opportunity for an invitation, do they send it to this man who is the correspondent or this man who is the representative. The old days of representatives, before I became the Controller of that division, there was a kind of idea that the BBC had to have a kind of ambassador in the main capitals, whose role was to show the BBC's flag. This I thought was a total nonsense. It is not the BBC's job to have an ambassador who shows the BBC flag and who tries to behave like a second class ambassador.

A BBC Representative has only one of two functions, I think really, one is either to provide programmes from the country he is in for the BBC or to help distribute the programmes of the BBC in that country. He has a lot of minor, other little jobs, like clearing copyright or fixing up facilities or all sorts of ... I mean he's a fixer, he's a locally based fixer for any department of the BBC. But basically he's either concerned with feeding programmes in or feeding programmes out and if there isn't a job to be done there then you oughtn't to have a representative.

The Newsman is also concerned basically with feeding programmes in and whether there is a tremendous difference between the news programmes that are being fed in and the current affairs programmes that are being fed in and the documentary programmes that are being fed in and the drama programmes that are being fed in or whatever it happens to be, is only a matter of kind in my view. I wouldn't have said that there is a big distinction between having a news correspondent and having a representative. In all the places where I have happened to work, either as a correspondent and I've been both, or as a representative, I have happened to get on reasonably well with the

with the chap in the other seat. And it has not been a personal problem. But I've never thought that it's a very good logical division. I think it's a division that's based on historical accident which doesn't occur in other broadcasting organisations.

WHEELER: Would you be in favour in America for example, since we're talking largely about America, of putting editorial control over the news correspondent under the representative ?

MIALL: Any representative of any part of the BBC who is working abroad has got to have a dotted line relationship to his home department. I also think that the man who is in charge of the operation in the United States, for instance, ought to have enough sense in the news area, that if it comes to a kind of conflict, as it sometimes does, between the needs of the current affairs chaps and the needs of the news chaps and some priority has to be given on facilities or something, he ought to have the right kind of status to give a decision that would be respected by both.

WHEELER: Do you think you could, that a news correspondent working in the States in fact could manage with merely a dotted line relationship with his editors in London, doesn't it have to be something much stronger and much tighter and much more effective than that ? In other words the whole process of news gathering would suffer if you were to interpose between the correspondent in the field and his editors in London, some kind of a second entity like the representative ?

MIALL: I don't think so. I don't think it would anymore than it would with the current affairs man. The job of the man in charge of the New York Office of the BBC is to, in my view, is to provide the climate under which, News, Current Affairs, Enterprises, Engineers whatever they happen to be who are based there, can work efficiently and can serve their home departments in London with the maximum of efficiency. His job is to see that the office runs well, the staff are well looked after, that they have got the right kind of facilities and as such he's in charge. And as far as I'm concerned it would not worry me at all that a News Division man was locally responsible to him, I know this is not the case at the moment and I can imagine plenty of people who might not be the right kind of people to be in charge of news correspondents on the basis that news correspondents for the last 30 years have been living in a separate world.

WHEELER: Yes but I would say, I mean since we're talking about this

I would say that you would create an impossible situation if you were to transfer the control of say the BBC's Washington Correspondent from the London Editors to another body in the United States, you would simply be complicating the arrangement. If for example the Washington Correspondent of the BBC would say I must go to California now in order to cover the assassination of 'X' and you then interposed a third party who'd have a say in this operation.

MIALL: I don't think you appreciate the job of the representative in the United States. I would never be somebody who would intervene with the current affairs producer in Washington and say you can't go to California at that stage if there's a good reason why the current affairs want him to go to California. That is not the job of the Head of the Office. No I think the job of the Head of the Office basically is to see that everybody has the right facilities and climate in order to do the job efficiently. When I went to New York one of the things that I had to do was to try and establish an efficient method of communication between London and New York and vice versa. And while I was there the Senior Editor .. Senior Engineer in New York a man called David Gregory, discovered that there was something called a 'dataline' which is now known as 'the leased line' which provided you with satellite communication on a two way basis between London and New York. And this could provide voice communication for correspondents, it could provide telephone communication and it could provide simultaneously two separate telex communications. And the cost of this for the exclusive use of this line on a 24 hour basis was £70,000 a year as originally estimated. I was interested in this because it sounded as though on the face of it it might be a rather useful idea. And I was interested to check up on what we were currently spending on the different forms of communication, telexes, circuits and telephone calls. And with some difficulty I got an assessment made. And the answer was that it was approximately £90,000 a year that we were already spending. And so I thought well if we can save £20,000 a year by installing this operation it might be very well worthwhile doing. There was always a difficulty that you mightn't save all that money because some people would still insist on making private telephone calls or sending private telex messages or something.

WHEELER: Which is precisely what happens at the moment.

MIALL: Yes. But on the face of it it looked as though there was a good chance that you could save a substantial amount. And I then tried to persuade the BBC to consider this operation. In order to save the £90,000 a year that we were spending three people who had regular rates had to chip in some money from those regular rates. The Engineers, Foreign News Dept.,

and the Central Services, that's an extremely difficult thing for anybody in the BBC who has control of a regular rate to chip in any money from that rate. The moment he does that he loses control of that money and therefore is reluctant to do it. And I found, for six months I tried to press this idea on London and I got absolutely nowhere, I just got stalling answers and I was getting rather tired, I and David Gregory, both of us, we were wasting an awful lot of time on writing memos and we were wondering whether this was ever going to happen. And I happened to be coming on a duty visit to London and I said to the then Controller of Overseas & Foreign Relations, Donald Stephenson that I would like to get this settled once and for all, whether we should do this and take on this dataline or not. And otherwise we were just wasting our time, if it wasn't to be tried okay stop it.

When I came to London I found that there was a tremendous reluctance on the part of each one of these separate departments which controlled money to relinquish any of their annual rates in order to set up what might be a general saving. And I got Stephenson to organise a meeting of all concerned and I persuaded him to let me have the first word and I said "I have no idea whether this leased line would work at all, it might not, it might have all sorts of difficulties and I think the only way one could possibly find out would be to have a very short experiment without any commitment whatever and would anybody be opposed to a very short experiment without a commitment ?" You would have to be awfully dog-in-the-manger to refuse to try an experiment without a commitment and so all the chaps who'd been prepared to say "No" bit on their lips and agreed to a short experiment without a commitment. And we got the minimum equipment installed that was necessary to make it work and you remember better than I do I think, Charles, because you were there in Houston when Apollo 13 set off on its ill-fated mission and it looked as though the three astronauts were going to hurtle into space forever. I think about a week after we got the leased line installed and in practically no time we'd almost covered the total cost of this line in a number of special circuits that had been arranged.

Now since that time it has been extremely easy for correspondents, speakers of all kinds to contribute programmes from New York to London. I've often wondered whether that was a good thing we installed that leased line. In my day, as I was telling you earlier on I used to say what I was coming up with from (London,) nobody ever told me what to report; when I was in New York one of the things that worried me slightly ... incidentally I should say that one of the things I agreed at the very beginning about the leased line which could be used either for telephone calls or for correspondents' despatches, was that News should have total priority on the use of it because giving news despatches was far more important than making telephone calls.

(Washington)

And that was a principle that I established at the very beginning. My thought at that point was that people coming up with a hot piece of news that they wanted to get into a programme. It tended to be interpreted by the News Division as meaning "News Division had a right to use this line for interminable discussions" of partly about editorial policy, partly what they wanted correspondents to, partly about whether somebody's school allowance had been paid, it was a method of communicating with the correspondents rather than sending them letters or telexes and I got very cross, from time to time, and used to interrupt the circuit when a lot of people were wanting to use the telephone and when News people, News Administrative people were insisting on using this for a minor piece of communication which could have been done perfectly well on a telephone call or by a telex message or by a letter.

WHEELER: Because it was simpler. (yes) Can I come back to this question of the difficulties you'd had of getting this leased line adopted by the BBC or the cost of accepting it by the BBC - this seems to me to say quite a lot about the nature of the BBC's Administration and organisation. Now there is a body in the BBC called the Director of Finance who presumably is at least nominally responsible for all the BBC's financial expenditure, now why isn't it possible if someone like you as the American Representative has a case which quite clearly is in the BBC's overall interest to accept but which is difficult to sell to individual competing departments, since you have mentioned them, why isn't it possible to sell something like this at that level of the BBC and have the instruction handed down to the various departments that they will do it. In other words has devolution in the BBC gone too far ?

MIALL: I think it has. I think that this started as a swing away from the Reithian days when the producers, the people who were concerned with putting on programmes really had no responsibility for money at all. They were responsible only for getting hold of the right speaker and putting him on the air, somebody else negotiated a fee, somebody else ~~clipped~~ checked the accounts, it was no longer, it was not a problem of the original Radio Programme People to have to worry about money. That was dealt with by the Administrators and if you read all, any of the programme or any of the memoirs of early radio people there was this constant battle between the programme makers and the Administrators who looked after the money.

One of the big things I noticed as a difference when I came to television was that the television producer was concerned with money and he was concerned with technicalities of resources, engineering facilities, things of that sort which didn't worry a radio producer as long as you had a studio and perhaps a tape recorder that's really all you need to worry about.

But the television producer had to know a great deal about the resources available and the mechanics of how they worked. You also needed to know a great deal about finance because it was disposing of a lot of money and he could run the Corporation into a great deal of cost.

When I first joined the Television Service there was a distinction between programme allowance and the sort of general costs. And the programme 'Above-the-line' allowance was really the only thing that the producer had to worry about. And if he could get the use of an OB or something of that sort he didn't have to pay for that out of his programme money. And towards the end of the financial year when programme allowance was always overspent you'd find all sorts of ludicrous programme ideas coming up and going on the air which involved a hideous use of staff resources, OB resources, whatever it was, anything to avoid the things that were direct 'Above-the-line' costs. Well that changed and it changed when total costing came in. And it changed also when McKinsey reported and when (the management consultants brought in by Dr. Charles Hill, Lord Hill as he then was, really basically I think because he wanted a white-washing of against the accusations that the BBC was extravagant in the use of its money. I don't think the BBC was, any large organisation obviously has occasional moments when it is not going to have the right control over something, by and large the BBC is a fairly efficient organisation and takes a very responsible attitude towards the expenditure of money) but McKinsey recommended first of all a total devolution to the two or three managing directors of External,Radio & Television so even the Director-General had virtually no control of money once McKinsey's recommendations had been put into effect. And secondly that it was in turn devolved to producers, editors, people who are actually in control of a certain stream of programme output as to how they would spend the money. And the central organisations, the Director of Finance as you've just mentioned, were really given no control of money at all, I mean they had to add up the books and to warn the Director General when he was getting overspent and that sort of thing. And one of the curious things about finance in a large organisation it seems to me, whether you're overspent or not is a matter of policy rather than of fact, you decide that you're going to write off a lot of equipment or something and you find that your economic situation has changed overnight.

But basically the control of money is tremendously devolved in the BBC and it's because it is so devolved that it is very difficult for anyone person be it the Director of Finance, the ...anybody in any central position to say there is a very large economy to be had for the BBC if you and you and you will all get together and chip in something and I will allocate how you spend it. For instance lots of television programme organisations

for instance hire helicoptors to, for use in programme operations. I remember when I was Assistant Controller of Programme Services there was a suggestion from one helicoptor firm that they could give us a much cheaper rate if we would hire so many hours of helicoptor time over a year from them and then parcel it out among individual programmes. We could not persuade producers of those programmes to accept a share of a cheaper rate, they each preferred to hire helicoptors when they wanted to and pay a higher rate.

WHEELER: There is on the other side, there is an advantage in this though isn't there because you get a man like the Editor of Panorama who instead of having to go for money all the time and therefore instead of arguing with his bosses - unless you give me more money I can't put a programme on - knows at the beginning of the year what his budget is and knows that he is going to have to stay within that budget with a result that he quite deliberately having done a couple of very expensive programmes involving say a lot of filming overseas, would deliberately go out for very cheap ones, do a studio item, do a domestic item in Britain and probably the system saves the BBC quite a lot of money in that respect ?

MIALL: Yes I think that's true, now that you're on to total costing because he really is saving real money and he's not shunting 'Above-the line' money onto'Below the line'money but I still think there is a problem in a large organisation which is priding itself on being one BBC, that it's not one BBC financially, it's a lot of little BBCs financially.

WHEELER: Should it become a lot of little BBCs organisation to match that system do you think ?

MIALL: I think it would lose a great deal if it did.

WHEELER: Why what would it lose ?

MIALL: I think it would lose the basic spirit that drives it.

WHEELER: Now how long did you stay in America, when did you leave ?

MIALL: I stayed in America until about Easter of 1971. By that time I had been four and a half years and I was appointed, sometime in 1970, I think about May or so of 1970 to be the Controller of what was then called the Overseas & Foreign Relations Division to succeed Donald Stephenson who was retiring. The reason why this was announced in the Summer of 1970 rather than a bit nearer to my actual coming back from New York was that the

Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference was due to be held in Jamaica in I think it was June of 1970. And in those days the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference was only held about once every three years. And the BBC was very much responsible for running it and I, it would be necessary for me to go along and see how it was to be, how it was run and to meet the other people who came into the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference before I had to run one myself. It was also important as far as the Commonwealth was concerned not to say that the BBC's American Representative was coming down to Jamaica because it happened to be that Jamaica was near to New York. It would look like a piece of sort of American imperialism and so my appointment as Controller of Overseas & Foreign Relations had to be announced publicly before I went to that conference in Jamaica.

The Conference in Jamaica was complicated by the fact that the man who had been the Secretary of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference had suddenly resigned about six weeks before the Conference took place, a substitute had had to be put in. The Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference was something that was, was really a derivation from Reith's interest in setting up basically rather similar public service broadcasting organisations to the BBC in the old White Commonwealth and also setting up or helping to set up All India Radio. And the, one of the first things that happened in 1945 or 46 at the end of the war was another Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference. And they were held about every three years very much at the instigation of the BBC and the BBC had really organised them round the Secretariat and so on.

WHEELER: Were they any use to anybody, do you think they had any great effect on broadcasting, you mentioned India for example, as we've said earlier in the programme Indian Broadcasting has always been under Government Control and I can't imagine really the BBC and All India Radio with very much in common.

MIALL: I've been to a lot of Commonwealth Broadcasting Conferences now and I've been to a lot of international meetings of broadcasters of other sorts, European Broadcasting Union, of the International Institute of Communications and so on, in my view the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference is much the best, very much the best.

WHEELER: In terms of what, proceedings or results ?

MIALL: Not .. I don't think I would say either. It is a meeting essentially of Directors-General, they are supported by other members but it

is at the Director-General level. It is one of those professional meetings of people in the Commonwealth which I think insofar as the Commonwealth has a meaning today, is the only kind of meaning that it does have. It is professional groups getting together and talking with a certain common background partly of language which is most important, and partly of a general attitude towards law and towards a, .. life generally, that is very valuable indeed. And the discussions at the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference are discussions which are not minuted in detail if people wanted to go off the record there are records kept and taken down but if a director-general wants to let his hair down and talk about the problems he's having with his government he then suddenly finds that a lot of other director-generals (~~sic~~) have the same kind of problems, he's not alone. And it is a great sharing of experience. As I say I've been to a number of these things.

WHEELER: Without surely much direct impact on programmes, whereas your, the other thing you mentioned the European Broadcasting Union is a much more practical body, don't you agree, that has direct impact on programmes if only because it arranges interchange of programmes and material ?

MIALL: Yes. I don't think that the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference, the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association as it now is, has any great impact on BBC programmes. I think that there's a situation here where people like the BBC are on the whole contributing knowledge and experience and not gaining from it. But that contribution is an important thing to make. It sometimes stiffens other peoples' resistance I can think of the discussions we had with the people in charge of broadcasting in Uganda for instance which was jolly useful to them and must have affected their programmes a bit. I don't think they affected BBC programmes. The European Broadcasting Union as you say, is a quite different operation in terms of BBC programmes because the European Broadcasting Union was established primarily as a programme exchange operation. The Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference was an exchange of concepts rather than an exchange of programmes.

WHEELER: Modelled to some extent on the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference ?

MIALL: Very much so, very much so. Originally it was, it was much of a long-term swanning operation, it took about three weeks, the Director-General went, he normally took with him the Director of Radio, the Director of Television, Director of Engineering, the man in charge of educational broadcasting, I think that one of the difficulties that the BBC ran into

for instance, shortly after the appointment of Lord Hill as Chairman was the fact that Sir Hugh Greene and Kenneth Adam and Frank Gillard and everybody else from Board of Management, except Oliver Whitley, all went off to New Zealand for about a month or so and left Oliver Whitley and Lord Hill in charge of the BBC and the balance was tipped between the absentee Director-General and the ambitious Chairman who was always keen on a more executive role for the Chairman than had been the pattern in the past. And I think the situation was never totally recovered.

Now when we went to this Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference in Jamaica it was again based on a kind of three week tour. The host country always wanted to show the visitors different parts of his nice country and in Jamaica we started off in Kingston, we moved after the first week to Ocho Rios and then we moved after the second week to Montego Bay and Charles Curran who was at that stage the Director-General had to come back because a general election was called and he also made it quite clear that he thought that a director-general could not sensibly spare three weeks to go away to attend a broadcasting conference. He also thought it would diminish the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference if it was attended by people who were not at the Director-General level. And he stressed that in future the Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference should be held more often, about every two years instead of every three years and that it should be about basically a week or ten days and not a three weeks operation and we should get down to business and do it much more quickly.

WHEELER: Was that accepted by the others ?

MIALL: That was gradually accepted by the others and there was also at the same time pressure from the General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission who was Talbot Duckmanton, that what was just a conference should become more of a broadcasting union, like the Asian Broadcasting Union or the European Broadcasting Union. And as result of the suggestions that he or his nominee the Deputy Director-General, Clement Semmler, made at some of the broadcasting, these Commonwealth Broadcasting Conferences, a small working party was set up of which I was a member, which was ~~designed~~ to decide whether we couldn't turn this rather incoate conference every 2/3 years into something that was more of an organisation. And in my last year as Controller of Overseas & Foreign Relations, I did a trip round the world visiting the various overseas offices for which I was responsible and I drafted out a kind of constitution for this broadcasting, this Commonwealth Broadcasting Association which I separately sold to the different broadcasting organisations in Canada, in Australia and various other places where we went through.

1973 ✓ And we finally held a working party in Henry Wood House in the Autumn of 1974, 1973 perhaps it was. Memory fails. Anyway it was accepted and the new organisation with a Secretary General and a permanent establishment is now functioning and is functioning very well.

But going back to the European Broadcasting Union, this was started, as far as television was concerned, by the physical fact that you could only get a television programme before you had the Eurovision infrastructure of television lines across Europe - you could only get a television programme, for instance from Rome to London if it was broadcast throughout Italy, picked up from the Italian border by Swiss Television, broadcast throughout Switzerland, picked up in France, broadcast throughout France, picked up in Belgium broadcast throughout Belgium, picked up across the Channel and broadcast in Britain. Now that was the position in the 1950s. And it was the possibility of extending television particularly for major state occasions, or major ceremonial occasions that resulted in a group of people of whom Cecil McGivern from the BBC and Jean d'Arcy, the programme director of French Television and a man called Pugliese of RAI the Italian Television Service and Marcel Bezonson was the programme director of Swiss Television, and they were the people who got together and were in a position to make decisions there and then that this programme would or would not be carried. And it was only because they could make those decisions that programmes could go from one country to another. That was in the 1950s.

After a while these programmes became so important that it was worth having permanent television circuits around Europe so they could be broadcast from one country to another without necessarily being carried by the National Networks. And it was particularly useful as a news exchange. Because the system by which the different networks of Europe inject news into this existing network now three times a day, provided the whole of Europe with a service of newsfilm, with a speed that you couldn't possibly get by delivery from an aircraft. And this became a terribly important way of distributing newsfilm rapidly. This is the particular value of .. of Eurovision for television.

The other terribly important side of it was the provision of television via satellite especially in the early days of satellites when you only had one satellite and you could if you were having for instance the coverage of the first landing of the moon which I happen to remember because I was there in Houston when it happened. There was a European Broadcasting Union team that were making this programme, it was in fact led by Dick Francis of the BBC but it was a mixed team of people from various European Broadcasting organisations who were making one programme, it was going to be fed via satellite to the whole of Europe and indeed to Eastern Europe as well because there was

was only one satellite you could use and you could, you therefore had to agree on what you were going to send. Subsequently, it's been important for instance for Olympic Games because although you might now have more than one satellite for use the costs are so horendous that it was only by a combined operation that you could bring them within a reasonable compass. At the same time you had all sorts of legal problems coming up about copyright internationally you had all sorts of technical problems coming up on the engineering side and in the European Broadcasting Union you really managed to sort these things out. And although I think it has been an expensive operation I think it has been an enormously worthwhile operation in terms of keeping horizons open for television which I think tends to be inward looking rather than outward looking.

WHEELER: Did you ever try and broaden this out, it's always occurred to me that there is an awful lot of waste involved in this television industry we work in, that there are Germans today making documentaries in the Congo, there are Frenchmen somewhere else doing things, there is a British crew, at least one, doing something somewhere else in the world, there are Americans doing things and very often except by sheer luck the various broadcasting organisations have no idea what the others are doing and that in fact the exchange of news could be broadened out to include all sorts of other material, there's too little interchange of material, was this ever discussed at your level in International Relations when you were running it ?

MIALL: Yes it was and indeed there was a programme done regularly on BBC called Europa which was based on this very concept by which all those who were in engaged in magazine current affairs magazine programmes would pool information about where they were sending camera teams and what they were having and exchange film, it was a programme which Ronnie Noble ran for television. I'm not sure that he isn't doing the same thing for Yorkshire Television at the moment.

WHEELER: Yes but it's not a thing that's really been exploited do you think this whole question of exchange of television ?

MIALL: I think the real basic problem for Eurovision is the lack of a common language. The fact that the Eurovision Song Contest, Jeux sans Frontières are about as far as you can go on really common television programmes it's sad but it's a reflection of the European problem.

WHEELER: You don't think that we're all becoming more liberal about

using each others' programmes gradually. The BBC, the British in fact, hang back, I know when I was working in Europe that an enormous amount of British material was shown in Holland for example where they simply don't have the resources domestically to produce enough television for their large number of channels and therefore they're forced to go abroad for material and that we do this much less and in fact a British audience might be willing to take much more in a foreign language or have things dubbed or good subtitles or whatever it might be than in fact we're doing. In other words there is a big potential market here which could be exploited if we had the organisation to do it ?

MIALL: I think it's not only the organisation but also the will. I feel rather sadly at the moment that Britain is going through a rather isolationist period. I totally agree with you that the amount of, for instance international news which we see on television compared with what almost any other television service shows in Europe is very small indeed. We contribute a great deal to both BBC & Visnews to European Organisations, we take very little indeed, it has to be a major story usually with a very strong British interest to it before it tends to get onto our screens and I think this is partly a result of the change in Britain's international position.

WHEELER: I was going to suggest with great respect that possibly the BBC has over the years put too much emphasis on its international relations and still does and not enough emphasis on international programme exchange. That there are, relations between various broadcasting organisations are developed with great care and love and affection and a lot of effort and money goes into this and not enough effort actually goes into producing results that would have a direct programme, direct impact on programmes ?

MIALL: In the days when I was in charge of International Relations my concern was essentially to arrange a climate by which you could get programmes exchanged, there was no other real object in international relations at all, except to be able to get programmes exchanged. There was I suppose one side of it, was training of particularly third world countries who were very anxious to have BBC training and this was a fairly large part of our job. That was not very much concerned with programme exchange. Programme exchange is something that is easier said than done. Every now and then at one of these international conferences somebody says "Let's have a general programme exchange about so and so" and we'll all make a programme about this and then we'll exchange them and instead of one person making 13 programmes you'll each make one and you'll get 12 for the price of your one.

And this keeps on cropping up and what happens is that you get one programme that you like which is the one you've made yourself and twelve programmes you don't know what to do with because they're absolutely no use to you. So these general programme exchanges are no use at all in my view. Equally so one of my jobs as Controller of Overseas & Foreign Relations was to go with the Director-General when he was going on a trip overseas as a kind of ADC in a sense, to the DG, because when the DG went abroad, which he has to do and this really is a kind of ambassadorial visit, particularly to Iron Curtain countries where there's a great deal of prestige to be had for having the BBC come and visit you, it's very important the DG does not go alone, he needs a witness, he needs somebody to relieve him of the conversational battle so that he can get a chance to eat something at a meal and he isn't the only person who is answering the questions. I did a lot of travelling with Charles Curran when he was Director-General and a lot of it was to Iron Curtain Countries. Now they always wanted programme exchanges and they always wanted programme exchanges that were based on a barter system - you give us 29/39 issues of the Forsyte Saga and we'll give you 39 programmes in Bulgarian - it was simply not on as far as we were concerned. You could sell people Forsyte Saga, you didn't want the 39 programmes in Bulgarian, even with subtitles, they weren't good enough programmes for a start off. They weren't interesting enough. I don't mean to say you couldn't take programmes from overseas. Of course you could. The Television Service has taken a lot of programmes from Eastern Europe as well as from Western Europe, for instance a great number of very good children's programmes always come from the other side of the Iron Curtain. But barter programmes is not a way of exchanging programmes. Barter was a good idea until money was invented. It's very much better to buy the programmes you want and sell the programmes you want rather than to try and do it on a knock-for-knock basis.

WHEELER: Let me ask you one last question, we've just about reached that point, suppose you had not retired from the BBC as Controller of International Relations, suppose you'd stayed on to become a rather Reithian powerful Director-General in the BBC and you had eight years in which to put all the ideas into practice that you must have dreamed up while you were soldiering on, what would you do with it, what would you do with the BBC if you had freedom of action ? What would you change ?

MIALL: That's the kind of question I would like a little notice of.

WHEELER: Well you must have eager desires off the top of your head ?

MIALL: I think that I would weed out quite a lot of the layers of top administration. I think one of the troubles with the BBC is that it is not a very good butcher. It has not yet found a good way of easing people out of jobs for which they're not suitable. It sometimes is a rather brutal butcher, the BBC can be very unfair to people and has been in the past. It has not yet found a way of getting rid of a lot of people who really perhaps are not serving a useful purpose and I think that one of the problems has been that you tend to appoint them to some other job which sounds all right and put in somebody else in his place so you really have two people doing the job of one. I think one of these days the BBC is going to have to change that. I believe passionately in the value of the licence system, not in advertising as a form of revenue. I do think however that the licence system is something which has become a political football, especially when governments are very evenly balanced when you have governments with tiny majorities if they have majorities at all. And in an age of inflation you can't expect governments to put up the licence system when they think it is going to be an unpopular move.

I have tried to say this to the BBC without any success so far. But it must get away from expressing its licence as a yearly figure. The licences for the rest of Europe, I see some licences for television are about £49 a year. They're only £49 a year because they're never expressed as £49 a year, they're expressed as so much per month or so much per quarter. Now your subscription to a newspaper, if it was expressed as a yearly figure would be far more than the BBC's licence, you wouldn't dream of paying it if you thought I've got to pay £90 to The Times, or whatever it is, to take it. But so long as the BBC is talking about £21 or £24 or £28 or whatever, it is going to be a political football. In my view if it could get on to being expressed as a monthly payment so that you're talking about £2, the £2 licence that you go for. Once that is established and it maybe that you're going to lose money and it maybe because you express it as a monthly payment you have to allow somebody to opt out for a few months a year and that costs the BBC something in income, the difficulty here is that neither the people in charge of the BBC finance or the people in charge of the Post Office, pay their bills on the never-never system in the way that most of the people in the country do. But if you could get it established as a £2 licence once and for all, then because of inflation it has to be a £2.10p licence or £2.25p licence, well that's the kind of change that's happening in the grocery shops all the time, on your car parking, on everything, it is not something you have to wait for an election for and if I were in charge of the BBC as Director-General, the one thing that I would do would be to battle for a change in the way that the licence is expressed, simply to

get the politicians off the hook because they can got to bat for a £2 licence where they can't go to bat for a £24 licence.

INTERVIEW ENDS.