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Michael Standing interviewed by John Lane August 1977

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TITLE: MICHAEL STANDING interviewed by JOHN LANE

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John Lane: Michael, to begin with where were you born and what was your early history?

Michael Standing: I was born in London in 1910. My early history.. well I went to a prep-school, I went to Charterhouse, I was nearly in the Charterhouse cricket eleven. Well I played for Charterhouse a number of times, but I had to leave school early on account of my family fortunes collapsing and I went for eight years into (Baring Brothers) the bankers, whom I joined at the age of 17½ with whom I had a very happy time but I saw no prospect for the future, and I looked around for something else.

John: Your father was in the theatre I think?

Michael: All my family were of the theatre, my Grandfather acted a lot with Tree. My Father was a very well known actor before the war, before the first World War. And, .. he joined, ~~he~~ immediately on the declaration of war he volunteered for the Navy, came back from America, worked for Naval Intelligence after some active service work, and was on the British ~~Born~~ WAR Mission to America and he came back to this country and he received a Knighthood for his work in the Navy. And he then went back quite soon to the theatre and went back to Hollywood where he achieved

more or less star status before he died in 1936.

John: What then, apart from your theatrical background, took you to look to the BBC for a career?

Michael: Well it was really largely chance. One of the possibilities that was open to me was to seek an entry to the staff of the BBC through the then Chairman, Ronnie Norman, who was a friend of a friend of mine, and who put my name forward to Benjy Nichols and I had an interview, ~~and I had an interview~~ - a second interview with Rose Troop who was then in charge of the Talks Department - well he was the senior administrator of the Talks Department ~~-~~ and they told me that there was no immediate vacancy. But the following day I received a letter offering me an appointment to a post which was cancelled between my appointment to it and my arrival. So I arrived, when? in April I think it was, 1935 as a more or less redundant member of staff.

John: That must be just about a unique occasion I should have thought?

Michael: Well it was uncomfortable in some ways because one couldn't get down to anything. But on the other hand it gave me an opportunity to look around various sections of the BBC which I would never have had, had I been appointed to a solid post. And.. they, the BBC looked around for little jobs that I could do, one of them was secretary to the Adult Education Advisory Committee which was a field of which I had no knowledge whatsoever, and didn't really want to have any great knowledge to be frank. The other was to work with Seymour De Lotbiniere where I undertook production of ~~COUGHS:~~ sports talks, this was only for a brief spell but it was my first experience of producing anything for broadcasting.

John: I think your mentor at that time was more or less D.H. Clarke, can you tell me anything about him?

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Michael: D.H. Clarke was the.. I can't remember what his title was but in effect he was the senior personnel officer, a very nice, friendly person, who had been in the BBC a considerable time and who was responsible, I think, for the .. well, was probably a fairly dominant influence in the selection of people for different jobs, and it was he who after I'd been in the BBC three or four months thought that I might be a suitable candidate for instituting the role of Talks Producer Belfast, They had never had a talks producer, and I had never been to Northern Ireland.

John: I think you had a fairly successful time over there?

Michael: Well I did on the whole, I managed to create a good impression, I enjoyed the work very much. Raymond Glendenning was the OB man there and we made good friends, and I found this really a rather rich experience, but I didn't want to stay in Northern Ireland and I had made it a condition that I would only take the job temporarily and after about 6 months the opportunity arose for me to go into the Drama Department in London, not as a producer but on the administrative side and I took it. When I did so, or shortly after I had done so, I received an apparently glowing report from John ~~Southerly~~ SUTTHERY who was the Programme Director in Belfast and this led to John Reith, as he then was, to summon me to the famous panelled office and to ask me whether I really thought that I was wise to go into the administrative side when I had clearly made such a promising start on the programme side in Belfast. But I said I didn't want to stay in Belfast and I thought I was right, I had considerable family associations with the theatre and actors and I thought that the Drama Department was the field in which I could prosper.

John: Sir John always looks a very foreboding character, I think possibly this was one of the few interviews, if you were like a great many people, one of the few interviews that you ever had with him, but I believe he could be very kindly as well?

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Michael: Well it was the only interview I ever had with him. Yes he was kind, he rose from his desk and towered over me, he always used to have his desk positioned so that his back was to the light so that you faced him with the light shining upon you and he himself being in shadow, and this is slightly awe-inspiring. But, he was extremely kind and obviously my well-being was very much part of his interest and he, well he... he was pleased with what I had done but he was anxious that I should point my career in the right direction.

John: And clearly you took his advice?

Michael: Well later on I did because I went, 6 months later made another change and went into the Outside Broadcasting Department which was a programme job as opposed to an administrative one, and I never regretted doing that. My experiences in the OB Department were, I suppose, the happiest experiences of my life.

John: What sort of programmes were being produced by OB's at that time?

Michael: Well it was a time really of revolution in the OB work. Hitherto I think the public at large were completely taken up with the wonder of being able to be transported to grandstand seats at great events, and this in itself was enough to carry popularity for outside broadcasts and the commentators who portrayed them, but this was beginning to wear a little bit thin and De Lotbiniere who had just been appointed head of that department saw that it was really necessary to work out in detail the basic principles of commentary, and not simply to rely (a) upon the wonder of being able to pick up an OB, and (b) the spontaneous descriptive capacity of untrained commentators. So there was a strong tendency to specialise in the construction of commentaries and this led in the end to some of the established figures who were unable to conform to the new principles being used less and less and trained commentators, not necessarily expert in the sports which they covered, being introduced to take over from them.

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John: You are referring to people like George Allison and Teddy Wakeham, and Bob Lyle, people like that?

Michael: Yes, well they had done a very good job for the BBC and they were popular figures but they could be faulted in a dozen ways, many of them. In respect of the commentary techniques they adopted, in fact they were not really thought out techniques at all. It was enough for George Allison to boom away at the Cup Final and this was part of the atmosphere that people liked to have created for them, but he never succeeded really in giving a very accurate and fully informative description of the match itself. And when people like Tommy Woodruff whom De Lotbiniere recruited, he had retired as a lieutenant-commander from the Navy a year before I think and was a person of great promise as a commentator, when he took over some of the main events the difference was very marked, for he, though not expert in any particular sport, was able to assimulate enough information and knowledge about the event to be covered and personalities involved in it to give a feel, what you might call a verbal film account of it with the background sketched in as well as the event, as well as the development of the event itself. And this was a great advance really in commentary work.

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John: This is really where Lobby's dictum came in wasn't it, that it didn't matter a toot what the commentator felt if water was running down the back of his neck the public didn't want to know that they wanted to know what was going on?

Michael: They wanted to know what was going on, they wanted to be reminded of the.. associative material whether it was a player recently transfered for a very high sum from one club to another, or whether it was some more personal thing about an individual, or whether it was some historical thing about the event itself, they wanted the thing to be encapsulated in the commentary rather than have these other aspects, sometimes omitted altogether, or sometimes

dragged in at inappropriate times, and it was the advance study of the event and the people involved, the background, and all the facts and figures that could be associated with it that made it possible for people with quick minds and facile tongues to develop commentary in that way.

John: One thing he certainly did do I remember being to a lecutre and he told me this was the sort of thing you should do, was that he was determined people should not go more than about 5 minutes without knowing the score of say a football match?

Michael: Oh yes. We created certain rules and if a commentator failed to observe them it was expected of the OB man, the OB producer or the OB assistant at his side, to remind him by a note or a nudge, that he must introduce the score or whatever the ommission was.

John: How do you assess Lobby?

Michael: Well Lobby was a splendid person who I always felt should rise to the very top of the BBC and I think he would have made a jolly good Director General. He had a very clear brain and he was an extremely nice and fair person. He was a very exacting boss in a kindly way. He was ruthless really in dismissing the inept, and if people couldn't adapt themselves to the techiniques and to the approach that he thought was the right one and that we all were gradually convinced was the right one through the evidence of our own ears, he would gently put them asside and their engagements would be restricted and ultimately come to an end. This is always distressing for people who had rendered good service to the BBC but it was undoubtedly in the interests of broadcasting and in the interests of the listening public. And the foundations laid by Lobby in those years, the foundations of OB work still stand absolutely solid today and though we are apt to take it for granted now, we do take it for granted, the capacity for any commentator who

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comes on to give an adequate commentary, in those days this was anything but true. It was extremely chancy, it was extremely nervewracking work, people were not sure of themselves, they were not sure of how to tackle the job and this training and indoctrination in the principles of OB work laid down by Lobby have been of absolutely immeasurable value to broadcasting generally. And they were especially evident I think in the later years after the war.

John: Of course Lobby ultimately took on television OB's as well, it has been suggested that really if onecan put it this way, he was almost too much of a gentlemen for the in-fighting that was required?

Michael: Well that he may have been but on the other hand a person of native virtue and strong character, with his clarity of mind, though he could get pushed around by unprincipled people I suppose a bit, they usually win through in the end I think.

John: Now the OB Department of that time consisted of various people in London, and regional OB men. Who were they?

Michael: John Snagge was the Number Two Assistant Director of Outside Broadcasts, Freddie Grisewood, Tommy Woodr~~uff~~ offe, recently, very recently recruited and myself. I think that comprised the programme side of the department and the administrative side was run by Charles Max Muller who after the war himself became head of the OB department. In the regions the two most notable figures then were ~~Winfred~~ or WYNFORD Vaughan Thomas in Wales and Raymond Glendenning in Northern Ireland.

John: And of course ~~Winfred's~~ WYNFORD'S first appearance in London in point of fact I think was at the time of the Coronation up to which you must have been working at that time by 1936 beginning of '37 you were obviously directing your energies in that way?

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Michael: There was tremendous preparation for the coronation which was as we all knew to be the biggest and most difficult outside broadcast ever undertaken. We were not thick on the ground with experienced commentators for ceremonial and public events and it was necessary to man a number of points in order to cover the event itself. From beginning to end, from the departure from Buckingham Palace right back to the return to Buckingham Palace. And Oh.. there were some agonising experiences of commentators being tried out and tested, women commentators as well as men. In the end the principle role in the Abbey went to Howard Marshal, Woodrooffe had the principle descriptive role of the procession itself which he did magnificently and various of us were planted in different positions and did the best we could. On the whole the event I think was an enormous world-wide success, Well the event itself of course was monumental, the coverage of it was faulty in some respects but probably as good as we could have dared to hope in all the circumstances.

John: You say faulty in some respects, would you like to enumerate?

Michael: Well simply an inadequate flow in some cases of really good commentary. But on the whole I think the exictement and the effects, the sound of it all, the sound of the service itself spoke for itself, but the sounds of the crowds and the jingle of harness and the horses hooves and the marching men and all the rest of it created a wonderful impression all over the place. We had some extraordinary experiences.. I was in the annex of the Abbey where the great procession formed to move up the.. up to the nave and where the high offices of state and royalty assembled, and just before the King and Queen arrived at the Abbey a be-medalled figure came climbing up the ladder to our position and shouted to me "Queen Mary can hear the commentary on the route it must be stopped at once", Well this was not possible and I had to tell him he would have to go and speak to De Lotbiniere, who was in the central control room in the Abbey itself, but it was quite impossible for us to stop the commentary and anyhow I couldn't see it was objectionable.

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John: Of course there was a good deal of difficulty in getting broadcasting into the Abbey in the first instance, that I remember, but the man whose name perhaps is technically associated with that is R.H. Wood?

Michael: Yes, R.H. Wood did a wonderful job on the distribution of microphones so that the more difficult parts of the service were universally audible and it was a major engineering job, and in those days of course outside broadcasting equipment was not what it is today. There were months and months and months of preparation with, between the BBC engineers and the Post Office, running extensions to various parts of the Abbey and other parts of the route, and the thing all came together in the end after a rather disasterous rehearsal a few days before the coronation itself.

John: It was a real disaster from Lobby's point of view and I suppose took the pants off you afterwards?

Michael: Yes though it was too close to the event really to have an up and downer about it. The rehearsal was heard by the upper crust of the BBC which is never a very wise thing, and various trenchant but somewhat irrelevant comments were made, but on the whole I think the commentators were stimulated by those parts of the criticism which were really useful and discarded the rest.

John: And so with the coronation itself out of the light of course there came the Spithead review, and I suppose that is one of the things for which the BBC and one particular commentator, Tommy Woodrooffe, will always go down in history?

Michael: Yes, well I shared an office with Woodrooffe and I knew him well. He was a very entertaining person, he was very fierce really, he was intolerant and impatient, he had a marvellous command of language but he also the acidity that sometimes goes with Naval officers and when he went to the Nelson which was his former ship and from which he was to do the commentary on the review and the

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illuminations of the fleet in the evening, he was.. he was entertained in a very liquid way by some of his former fellow officers and he arrived at the broadcasting point somewhat the worse for wear, and he set about the commentary on the illuminations with great gusto and tremendous attack but he completely lost his way and he uttered some most extraordinary phrases which he repeated and one of which was of course the famous "the fleets lit up" and so was he, and eventually the broadcast was faded after 5 or 6 minutes, simply because he became largely incoherent. But in fact the remainder of the broadcast which didn't go out on the air was recorded and its very fortunate that it didn't go out on the air because there was some monumental observations which might have been admissible in the permissive society of 1977, but certainly would not have been in the more sedate atmosphere of 1937.

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John: You shared an office with him, so I assume that the day after, was the morning after and a rather remorseful Tommy?

Michael: I don't know. He didn't come in the following day, but it's always said that Sir John Reith, Sir Cecil Graves, and one other member of the BBC upper-crust who'd been down to the review itself and hadn't heard the broadcast came back in the same carriage together in the train the following morning, opened their Times and saw the report of what had happened and none of them dared to look up over their Newspapers and comment to one another until they reached Guildford, What they commented then I don't know. But this was a very great shock - Sir Charles Carpendale that was the third member, of course; he being an Admiral was absolutely infuriated by the event and wanted the instant dismissal I think of Woodrooffe, but there was an enquiry into the thing and we all gave evidence and Woodruff eventually finished up with 6 weeks sick leave and that was the end of that. We'd all been under tremendous strain of course with the coronation broadcasts and all the associated events and that he was tired and played out was undoubted, but clearly he was also very much at fault. However, he was rescued and fortunately for he became a very fine

commentator and did some splendid work for the BBC thereafter.

John: But a lesson was learned and one would think that such strain would never be applied again?

Michael: Well I don't know ~~its very st..~~ its a very exacting job outside broadcasting, especially in those days when people were not so sure of themselves. Now, I think, people can undertake this work with less and less anxiety, you may always be caught out by the unexpected happening and you must always be prepared for it. But people now have sufficient ~~precedence~~ precedents and experience to be able to take these developments in their stride more, and I think it is much lesser the strain today than it was in those days.

John: What do you think is the effect on your stomach, or was the effect on your stomach of an outside broadcast, you particularly took to cricket?

Michael: Yes, I took to cricket but we did a great deal, one had to do a very great deal more besides. The effect on your stomach is a tendency to ulcers without doubt, or was in those days, because we were still.. these were very much pioneering days and one went to study events to see whether they were capable of being broadcast, one went to try and build broadcasts out of unlikely happenings and all the time we were really trying to develop this kind of pictorial approach which was something that hadn't really properly been done before and which meant that one in those days could very often be caught out by the unexpected happening and the dread of everybody was drying up; we've all done it, and we've all suffered for it.

John: There is a story which goes round which says that you on one occasion at Lords or perhaps it was the Oval I don't know, which will bring me to the matter of the ball by ball commentary, got to the point where there was no play happening and you were heard to say ' and there is a fly crawling up the window' I don't know whether this is true or not?

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Michael: It could be true I can't tell you. But I do remember one of the preparatory broadcasts for the coronation,I was given the job of doing the commentary on the Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London and Lobby always used to insist that we should not attempt, even in a situation like that where the pattern of the event was absolutely clear and the timing was clear, we should not attempt to work from script, we could work from notes but not from script and that we should give a much more spontaneous impression if our commentary was indeed spontaneous. But I thought I knew better than this and I wrote a number of purple passages for use during the initial stages of the broadcast and just as I was coming to the piece about the silence that enveloped everything and the history seeping out through the walls and just the noise of an occasional tug on the river, a young guards officer drove up in his Bentley right close to the affects microphone and roared me out of hearing altogether. This was a.. this so completely took me that I lost my breath my tummy went down to my ankles and I really lost control of the broadcast altogether, and of myself. This was really an object lesson in how not to do it.

John: On the other hand you put that object lesson of how not to do it very much to advantage when you went into the first of the vox pops broadcasts?

Michael: Yes. Well those were, I think, the initial ones of that were my most frightening experiences.

John: Standing on the Corner was, I suppose, a pun in its own right but it obviously you must have been brought into it for other reasons than that?

Michael: I think Standing on the Corner was thoght of before, as the title of the item, before I was actually chosen for it and I think it was purely co-incidental that I happened to be chosen for it, and John Watt who was then Director of Variety Department eventually thought that I might be the person to do it. It was just an item in In Town Tonight. It achieved a fame and notoriety miles

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beyond its deserts, simply, I think, really because people didn't know what was coming next, but nor did I. And I had some very nerve racking moments in it. First of all there was always the possibility of nobody being there to interview; secondly, there was the possibility of them not being in the faintest degree articulate and, thirdly, of their saying something they didn't ought to say. But in the end most of these difficulties were overcome and the thing began to go, the better known it was the more easily it went really and the public contributed very reasonably and very happily to it.

John: BOTH TALK Sorry..? Michael, cricket of course was very much an obvious for broadcasting, but the way in which it was approached suffered a major change when you came into the picture?

Michael: Yes we had hitherto dealt with cricket in fairly short bursts, test matches and the principal fixtures at Lords got a quarter of an hour here, and perhaps half an hour there, and in 1938 we felt confident enough to attempt full time coverage of test matches. This was a considerable innovation and of course it occupied a very great deal of broadcasting time. Howard Marshal was the principal commentator, as he had been for years and he was a well established and he was one of the people who really could adapt themselves to new techniques demanded of him, and he was a monumental national figure in those days. But we didn't think it possible for one person to sustain 6½ hours of broadcasting perdiem and so we decided to split it up very much in the same way as is done now, though I think nowadays it is done considerably better and it involves the use of cricketing experts and a great deal of the statistical side of cricket is covered by people who've made it a special study so that nowadays there aren't many of the mistakes that we made in those days. But we divided it up we each took 20 minutes and I think that first full-time commentary was undertaken by Howard Marshall, myself and Jim Swanton I think did some of the summarising, and my impression is though I'm not absolutely certain on this that Chester Wilmott the Australian who made such a name for himself later on

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as a War correspondent and who was unhappily killed in an air accident after the war, I think he undertook the commentary for the external services to which we all chipped in ourselves and I think we also used him in the home broadcasts. But this was a very great success and of course it so happened that in the final test match we had Hutton's great record and we broadcast whatever it was, 13½ hours of batting by Len Hutton.

John: A remarkable thing to have for history. Of course OB's were also expanding into other sports and therefore this involved the importation of other people with other approaches, I'm thinking for instance of Ice Hockey?

Michael: Yes well there we were lucky, it so happened that the Arthur Elvin who was then the supremo of Wembly and who introduced Ice Hockey into this country I think, had on his publicity staff a young Canadian called Stewart MacPherson, and we had contact with him on account of the fact that he was really made the BBC Wembly liaison man. We had broadcast Ice Hockey before with another Canadian called Bob Bowman who was I think originally a member of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and who was, who did some very effective and purple passage commentary on ice hockey, but was not available to us full time, and we thought we might try and develop Stewart MacPherson, this was a very happy chance because as subsequent events showed in the years that followed he had a great aptitude for commentary, he had.. well not the most intellectual of people he had a spectacular vocabulary and idiom at least so it seemed to us because it was unfamiliar for the most part, it was TransAtlantic.. and he gave descriptions I think that no Englishman could ever have, could ever have achieved. And he became very popular and was later involved in a great many other events, boxing especially, and he also became a war correspondent.

John: That's slightly leaping ahead because the Reithian influence was still very much there particularly over things like Sunday, in which of course you got the great support of the Religious Broadcasting Department ?

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Michael: Yes well up to the beginning of the war, although Reith had left two years before. The Reithian influence was very powerfully felt in the BBC. The preservation of the Sabbath was one of the principles with which he was concerned and this was very strictly applied, applause for instance was not permitted to be broadcast on a Sunday, even at a Symphony Concert. No dance music, no popular entertainment. And in the week variety programmes were scanned most carefully for the hint of vulgarity, ~~or~~, and people or producers who lapsed were very firmly dealt with. The attitude was probably really, even in those days, too rigid and too severe, but it had a great.. had a very wide support really, and on the whole it chimed with the times and certainly it was very much of a factor I think in establishing a public image for the BBC of correctness and integrity and this is something which has stood it in goodstead ever since, not least of course in its War-time broadcasting.

John: In its war-time broadcasting of course, the then director of Religious Broadcasting, because Freddie ~~Armonger~~ Iremonger had gone to be Dean of Litchfield, J.W. Welsh fought very hard for the restoration at the end of the War of that sabbatarian approach?

Michael: Well I think he wanted to see much more of it preserved in War-time broadcasting itself. He was, as far as I remember, sent to study the needs of the BEF in France during the phony part of the war and he came out with the recommendation that the forces wanted to have their English Sunday preserved for them, although they were fighting or living in a country where the Continental Sunday applied. But in the end broadcasting to the Forces, it became perfectly clear that it simply could not be sustained and in the end of course, with the general,, with the Forces Programme and the General Forces Programme, entertainment of all kinds, applause, laughter and all the rest of it was admitted to Sunday, but religious broadcasting of course was not omitted.

John: And so Michael, we come to the outbreak of war. What was the

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situation in broadcasting, and particularly in Broadcasting House, what was the feeling, the atmosphere?

Michael: Well I think generally speaking that the rank and file of the BBC were not very well aware of the plans that had been formulated, and formulated somewhat hurriedly I think for the BBC in War-time, and though everybody was deeply shaken by the prospect of war they were more especially shaken when the alert sounded after Chamberlain's broadcast and I remember.. I remember standing in the Entrance Hall of Broadcasting House with the alert being sounded and watching the people and the expression of horror on their faces as they came down the stairs to go into the basement of the BBC for shelter. However, that as everyone knows was a false alarm and the BBC had put its evacuation plans into operation, Departments were dispersed all over the place, very difficult for them to operate but actually the need for many of them to operate was greatly reduced on account of the fact that the output was then confined to a single programme which was full of gramophone records, Sandy MacPherson playing endlessly at the theatre organ, and it was a fairly dreary offering for people. And very soon public and press combined in their criticism to force the BBC, and the Ministry of Information and the Government generally here to give them something a bit more entertaining and a bit more imaginative.

John: Do you think that really the Government saw this as a propaganda machine, in other words that they could use it any time they wanted to to push stuff out regardless of whether it be valuable or not, rather than we should be a broadcasting unit on our own?

Michael: Well I think there was a great deal went on with the Ministry of Information which I was simply not privy to I was not nearly senior enough to be aware of what was going on. But it was perfectly clear that there were two schools of thought, one that the BBC should be taken over as an instrument of the Government itself, and the other was that the BBC should maintain its

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independence, and at the same time regard itself as an instrument of war both in order to provide information to people at home, but also entertainment and general opportunities for relaxation which were very necessary for people who were very hard pressed. The independence of the BBC was happily maintained but there were many many bloody battles fought over the issue.

John: Of course, OB's as such at that time had gone virtually down to nothing, if one takes Asa Briggs as a case in point in effect OB's made no contribution at all?

Michael: No well in the initial months there was no contribution really that they could make. The theatres had shut, public entertainment was reduced to practically nothing, everybody was frightened of a Blitzkrieg suddenly falling upon us and the net result was these very dreary programmes. But, after a comparatively short time things picked up a bit, public entertainment reopened, and a few outside broadcasts were given of public entertainment and then of course we saw the need for something a great deal more specifically related to the.. events of the war itself, I mean the kind of life that people were living, the entertainment opportunities that we should take advantage of to provide the forces, whether they were the three services or people who were working fairly hard in the Civil Defence and so on with better relaxation opportunities. And I think programmes, there was a diversification of programmes, and.. OB's did find a small contribution to make to that initially. The first major sporting event I think that was covered was, Oh.. when Raymond Glendenning went across to Lille to do a commentary on the soccer match between the British Army and the French Army, I can't remember who won. Then the people who had been given the responsibility for providing direct live entertainment of the forces were ENSA, under Basil Dean, who took over Drury Lane as their headquarters and sought to mobilise the entertainment profession the widest, widest range ~~COUGHS~~.. of the entertainment profession to provide live entertainment at different places for the forces. They, ENSA

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also wanted a broadcasting outlet and the BBC was quite glad to agree to this, but the BBC always wished to control what it broadcast and ENSA always wished to have an independent control of their programmes and this led to an uneasy and quarrelsome collaboration between the BBC and ENSA which really persisted more or less throughout the war.

John: I think you had one particular moment sometime in the middle of 1941 when you rejected a script which ENSA submitted, as amateurish?

Michael: Yes, well I rejected many scripts that ENSA submitted. But I think that particular one was unfortunate in that it followed two days after the Director General and Basil Dean had composed a kind of truce, and.. though I was supported when the upper-crust of the BBC read the script, my view was sustained by them it was perhaps not the happiest of moments to chose to make these outright rejections.

John: Did it have any violent repercussions?

Michael: No. I used to have dreadful rows with Basil Dean, we used to hang up on one another, we used to get on the telephone have a row and then hang up on one another and it was really not a very edifying business at all.

John: But at the same time you were entertaining the forces, the Forces Programme had come into existence in 1940, and you were not only providing entertainment to the forces but getting the forces and the civilian population too, to provide their own entertainment which was broadcast I think?

Michael: Yes that's right, we did.. we initiated a number of camp concerts to which we gave the title Private Smith, or Aircraftsman Smith, or whatever it was Smith, Entertains. And we used to do half hour concerts of the forces personnel giving their own entertainment. We also did this in factories

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with Works Wonders which ran for 5 or 6 years and consisted of the talent of the factories performing in their canteens. We also took entertainment to factories

John: This was Workers Playtime?

Michael: But that was initiated by the variety department and I think that was ..Bevin sponsored. And I remember Herbert Morrison and.. I think it must have been Works Wonders that Herbert Morrison came and opened at the Vauxhall Factory at Luton and just after the broadcast there was an alert and Vauxhall's were very worried that we had given an indication since they had once been bombed a few days earlier, that there had been some indication of the origin of the broadcast had been given on the air because at that time of course everything was broadcast from somewhere in England and the place never identified more closely than that.

John: That of course, if one can put it this way, was the lighter side of broadcasting. In the meantime you amongst others I think, were fighting to get a more realistic approach to the broadcasting of war, to bring the war to people's fireside?

Michael: Yes. The services, all three of them really, had hitherto totally resisted the idea of anything more than 1914/18 war correspondent coverage, written coverage really, of the war. And there I think none of them appreciated the potential of broadcasting to portray what was happening to people at home, and also of course to portray to the forces themselves, one section of which was quite unaware of what was happening in another section. And at all levels in the BBC there was this mounting pressure to have the resources of broadcasting employed for the purpose of reporting the war. It was very difficult to make headway, the Navy especially were reluctant, and then there were various incidents with the war reporters that we were able to send out which resulted in misunderstandings with the Army and recriminations and so on and so forth.

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But, I suppose one of the small incidents which had a disproportionate effect in this situation was Charles Gardner's celebrated commentary on an aerial dog fight over Dover Harbour. This was a dramatic broadcast, he was not a specially good commentator he was totally inexperienced commentator but he was involved in the excitement of the event in the actual battle between aircraft above his head and though some people regarded this as inept and wrong and improper to apply a kind of sporting commentary approach to battles in which men were being killed, the great majority I think accepted that this portrayal - this pictorial approach was a valid one and they wanted to have themselves vicariously involved in the events of the war itself in this kind of way. Where it could be done of course without prejudice to the people involved.

John: And this really was where you went to war?

Michael: Well we all were pressing and the BBC was pressing at the very top level to get better coverage, and after months and months really of this approach, in 1943 there was an exercise involving the Army; and the Home forces were divided into two armies, or rather elements of the home forces were divided into two opposing armies and the BBC sent a team out with each army. De Lotbiniere was in charge of the whole broadcasting operation and the teams were selected to include OB commentators, news reporters, feature writers, well that's about it, and people who could mount actuality programmes. And the event was treated as a war in itself, it was.. we made dummy bulletins we operated on an accurate timetable, we covered by recordings the events, precise events as they took place, and we mounted a few short actuality feature programmes out of the products. The recordings were then composed I should say into about a 2 hour span and this was played back to the Secretary of State for War, to General Paget who was C in C Home Forces, and to other high ranking people in the services. This demonstration of what we could do in a dummy situation totally convinced the Army people and the Secretary of State that the BBC should be given considerably wider latitude to cover the war in their

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own way and with their own techniques. And this ultimately admitted much more recording and many more correspondents to the battle zones. And this really was a great triumph.

John: Of course, up to that time it had been all recording cars, was the development of the portable hand wound disc recorder, this did make everybody much more free?

Michael: Yes well actually we did quite a number of recordings especially of training activities by ordinary OB methods, that is with lines and mixing facilities which brought the different points together. We also did a lot by mobile recording as you say. But we were able under this more enlightened arrangement to start covering some of the RAF's operations from this country and to get much closer, in fact to get ourselves directly involved in bombing raids, and in RAF airfield activities as they were actually happening. I myself remember covering the Mosquito's, one of the earliest raids by the Mosquito's over Jena where the lens factories were destroyed, and of course the far and away most celebrated broadcasts that emerged at that time was when Wynford Vaughan Thomas went in a bomber over Berlin and by great good fortune the bombing run which he was describing was immediately followed by the shooting down of a German nightfighter and all this happened within the course of a single disc.

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John: Do you think this brought home to the British public that broadcasters were equally putting themselves and their lives at risk, whereas perhaps before then they'd got somewhat the view that the broadcaster was a cozy chap sitting at his fireside?

Michael: Well I don't know about sitting at his fireside, but yes I think this did bring home to them this and some of the American recordings which people like Ed Murrow made with the American Forces this certainly brought home to

them that the war correspondents put themselves at risk in very much the same way as the members of the forces themselves. Well we then felt that we had got a clear opportunity to build up teams for the big event which was going to be the, what was known as the second front, or the Invasion of Normandy. So, we were greatly concerned with the recruitment and the training of war correspondents. Now this involved for OB people the learning and the acceptance of the disciplins of journalism, they felt themselves pretty competent in their descriptive capacities but with the comparativesly narrow outlet that there was bound to be for the .. for their broadcasts, their recordings they had to learn the disciplins of journalism and impose them upon the techniques that they were already familiar with, and similarly news reporters had to learn some of the techniques of OB's that they could apply to their recording.

John: Could we add one to that and that is that the whole lot of you had to learn a fair amount of forces disciplin and activity as well?

Michael: Yes, well we had to conform of course, we weren't treated as very special people. But once we got into the way of things and we did have some opportunities for learning in this country before we got involved in overseas operations. And on the whole I think our relationship with the services was good though there were COUGHS odd incidents where things went wrong, but by and large the association was good and the results were satisfactory to forces and general public combined.

John: Do you think there was any disparity between the approach which OB's made to war reporting, which features writers made to war reporting, and which the news department made, because after all to some extent they'd been first in the field?

Michael: No I think all these things were absolutely complimentary. And I

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think that ~~there was~~, this was some of the very finest work done by members of the BBC in the whole history of broadcasting. There ~~was~~ were some very good people involved in this in the editorial side there were the promotion of the production of war report was in the hands of, alternately I think, of Donald Boyd of the Talks Department, a very experienced journalist, and Laurence Gillian who was head of Features Department and who was a brilliant chap really in his way and had the interests of the whole operation tremendously at heart. And then we had in the field already established and celebrated in the same kind of context were Richard Dimbleby, Frank Gillard, Godfrey Talbot and Edward Ward, they'd already made considerable names for themselves and the new expansion that came about in the preparation for war report drew in people like Bob Dunnit, Stewart MacPherson, Stanley Maxted, Wynf~~re~~ord Vaughan Thomas, Chester Wilmot, and Howard Marshall, Pierre ~~Le Ferve~~ Lefevre, and Guy ~~Baum~~ Byam who was unhappily killed in one of the operations.

John: In charge of the war reporting unit was Malcolm Frost latterly, previously I think it was Howard Marshall, but I have a feeling that there was a power struggle that went on there?

Michael: ..I don't remember a power struggle really. Howard was brought in long before, I suppose some 6 months or so before, D-day and he had been with the Ministry of Food and he was introduced as a sort of figurehead. I don't think he ever had a great deal to do with the organisational aspects which were in the hands of Malcolm Frost who in fact is a very cunning fellow and able to deal in competition with the Americans who ~~were~~ alsways seemed to be seeking special facilities and trying to get one over on the BBC. He was more than capable of holding his own and in fact did a very valuable job in securing positions for us in the battles that were to come. I don't.. there may have been a power struggle but I was not really aware of it.

John: So then of course we came actually to D-day and this enormous

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operation which was mounted and you landed up, whether by design or by accident I don't know, as a Naval War Correspondent and after your thoughts about the Navy being somewhat the most reticent of those who would give any information this must have been somewhat of a difficult problem for you?

Michael: No it wasn't because once we were admitted the Navy couldn't really have done better, they.. we were accepted and greatly helped. I was put in charge of the group of correspondents on D-day on the Normandy Invasion and we had people with the Merchant Navy, with various branches of the Navy itself, I was in a Headquarters ship. I cannot now remember exactly how people were disposed.

John: But do you think really that broadcasting was accepted that the Navy then said 'Right. These broadcasters are here they've got to report us we will accept it and let's forget the past?'

Michael: Oh yes, Oh yes, I think they absolutely accepted it and they were very .. and they were often very pleased indeed with the result and of course ships and ships crews who got involved in some of the detailed reporting or personnel that were interviewed and so on, this they greatly appreciated so long as it was decently and accurately done. Of course we correspondents were all in tremendous competition with one another, what was available to the BBC when War Report started was the total reporting output English speaking reporting output of the World, all journalism, all English speaking broadcasters from America, Canada, Australia, and from the World at large. So we were competing for places for quotes in War Reports with all the best of writers, broadcasters the world over. And though it was often, one could often be desperately humiliated listening near front lines to the evenings War Report to which you hoped your contributions were going to be acceptable and find that everybody else's were but not yours! But in the end I think we came to accept that the editorship had been very fair, very enlightened, if very exacting and

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that when we did get a piece in it was a source of considerable pride, when we didn't well we just had to take it.

John: As one of those who was at the receiving end of your report somewhat involved slightly in War Report I must say there was a major battle to get material and the amount of material which came in was utterly fantastic.

Michael: Yes well there must have been a tremendous flow, of course some assignments were positively given to correspondents and as a result were bound to be quoted and we were sent, or we sent ourselves on to study undertakings that simply had to be broadcast. I spent a long time for instance, with the creation of the Mulberry Harbour at Arromanches and I did some quite long pieces on that. Well these were aspects of the war that had to be covered and of course were, the story was spectacular and one was given the opportunity to cover this in some depth and the resulting recordings were broadcast. But in the competitive day to day battle incidents one always took a great chance. And I remember our ship being attacked by a rocket firing Messerschmitt I think it was, and me lying on the deck with my portable recorder going simply terrified but uttering commentary all the while and sending back the results in record which I thought would be a spectacular success only to find that an American had done exactly the same thing but his recording was preferred because his ship had actually been hit by the rocket whereas ours hadn't.

John: Michael, with all the experience which was gained in this form of reporting, what influence and effect do you think it had on post-war broadcasting and its techniques?

Michael: Well I think one of the effects was to make the journalistic element in the BBC much more alive than it had been before the war at any rate, to the potential of broadcasting itself, and to the techniques the range of techniques involved in broadcasting. BOTH TALK. On the other side I think it increased

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considerably the respect of none, essentially journalistic broadcasts for some of the principles on which journalism in broadcasting operated. In fact I think that the two came to understand one another very much better, and I'm sure that had a good effect.

John: Do you think there was any risk at any point in the immediate post war years of the old old division of news being one thing and everything else being something else.?

Michael: Well the news situation in the BBC I suppose has always been a somewhat contentious one, the point at which news cease and current affairs began, and who should be responsible for what and whether the two were separable and whether the whole operation was not really similar to the publication of a newspaper and ought to be under a single editor instead of carved up as it always has been in the BBC.. These things are still I think to some extent unresolved and the difficulties are still aparent.

John: Of course there was a very contentious man up at the top on the news side and that was A.P. Ryan.

Michael: Yes, A.P. Ryan did a fine job during the war and I think enormously influenced Ministry and Government on behalf of the BBC to give us, (a) to preserve the freedom of the BBC, and (b), to give us better opportunities of coverage. He certainly as the senior Command of the War Reporting Unit gave reporters a vast amount of encouragement and help, and was generally very sympathetic to their problems. I don't know exactly, I was not involved, and I simply don't know the aspects in which he was a controversial figure.

John: On the other hand he was probably much more for that sort of thing than for instance Benjy Nichols. Now Benjy is reported as having refused to allow in the early days of the war the sound of the guns on the Maginot line to

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be broadcast after Richard had recorded them?

Michael: Yes, well he was a member of the old school and I think he never allowed himself to get out of the controls which his membership of the old school imposed on him. He was greatly wedded to the idea of what you might call the cultural sack in broadcasting policy, to put on a popular programme and follow it immediately by something which people ought to enjoy even if they weren't going to enjoy it at all, the idea of the improvement of the public through broadcasting rather than the entertainment of the public with items that they wanted, it was what they should have rather than what they wanted that was what he was always after. But he was a person, of very considerable ability and though I think some of his ability was misdirected especially in the years that followed the war when he probably should have broken out a bit more from the pre-war attitudes of the Corporation.

John: Of course he was faced with a new and different style master when W.J. Haley came in, and therefore there must have been some dicotomy?

Michael: Yes well I was never deeply involved with Haley except in respect of my appointment as head of the Variety Department.

John: So how did that come about?

Michael: Well at the end of the war De Lotbiniere returned to his pre-war role as director of Outside Broadcasts and I naturally had to give it up and I was made an Assistant Director of Outside Broadcasting and for a few weeks really we worked very happily together because I had great affection and admiration for Lobby. But quite unexpectedly one day I was summond by the Director General and I was told that John Watt was leaving the Variety Department and actually leaving the Corporation and asked if I would take on the Job as head of the Variety Department. I was totally unprepared for this I didn't feel

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that I was very well qualified for it and I was very reluctant at first blush to take it on, but I thought about it a bit and of course I'd had a considerable experience of variety artists and variety production of a rough type during the war when we had undertaken so many assignments on behalf of the Variety Department who were exiled from London and we were in London and I knew a bit about it and I had theatrical family background and I wondered whether I ought to do it. I think if it had been left to me and we'd just been left that straightforward request I probably would have turned it down. However, Haley seeing my reluctance said that he would put the proposition to me in this way, he said, If you take this job on and succeed in it well and good, if on the other hand you take it on and do not succeed all that we shall remember of that is that you came to the help of the Corporation at a time when they badly needed your help, for we have nobody else who we feel confident at putting in this job and all that will be remembered is that you assisted us when we wanted it and your failure will not be recorded.

John: In the instance of course it wasn't a failure. But when you went there you are quoted as saying that the reputation of the Variety Department was very low, pretty well the bottom of the decline which set in 2 years before, and this was something you said to Dick Howgill?

Michael: Well I don't think it was exactly the reputation. The reputation, the public reputation of the Department wasn't as low as all that, it wasn't very high but the moral of the Department was very low and this was understandable partly because, like all other departments but perhaps affected more than most other departments, the Variety Department had been subject to all the dreadful deprivations that the war brought about. It lacked facilities, it lacked studio amenities, it had great difficulty in recruiting artists, on the whole the profession outside the entertainment profession was very guarded in its reactions of the Variety Department, it felt it was a powerful competitor and it was very careful to safeguard its interests. Artists had been recruited to the

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Forces, there was less talent available, and the pay was low, and Variety more than anything else I think, felt itself to have producers earning a comparatively few hundred pounds a year, dealing endlessly with people outside who were earning tens of thousands of pounds, and there was no kind of parity between the two. That, and the fact that it was tired, it had had these great difficulties to contend with operating outside of London, had all conspired together, all these factors had conspired together to put the Department really on the floor and the final thing was the fact that John Watt departed rather a bit under a cloud. And so when I went into the Department I obviously had to find means of picking it up off the floor for a start and if I could do this and improve the morale of the department I felt we stood a reasonable chance of producing better programmes.

John: Of course it was the ideal breeding ground for corruption and that sort of thing which was inevitable almost under the circumstances, song plugging and so forth and so on had to be able to find their way in if the moral was low?

Michael: Yes, well I think there were one or two people there who weren't too fussy about the ethics which they really should have sought to preserve. Its not a very easy matter really. The practices of that world, the music publishing world, the record making world and the light entertainment were itself.. remain and always have been very different outside the BBC to what they have to be inside the BBC and what is corrupt for members of an institution like the BBC maybe common accepted practise outside. For instance, within a few weeks of my appointment I received from a very well known band leader a parcel containing a large inscribed silver cigarette box. I didn't even know the man, I returned it to him with a note saying it was kind of him to send it to me but I was afraid I couldn't accept it, and he sent it back and said 'don't be silly of course you can', and then I had to write a very much more frigid note to him and returned it for the second time and he did not pursue the matter. I met him a few months later and told him how foolish I thought it all was and.. anyhow

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we got on friendly terms and that was that. But he saw absolutely nothing wrong in what he did, though obviously the purpose of the gift was to promote his interests, I on the other hand saw everything wrong with it and that really reflected our entirely different points of view. But this general practise of softening up people with gifts or making available to them things which they would like and which weren't normally available to them was really part of the practise of that industry. The difficulty was when our staff became involved in it, and especially was it difficult if our staff became involved in it without reporting the fact at the time, or seeking permission to accept whatever favour was offered. Most of the troubles the BBC underwent, the fur coat business of Harry Roy, giving a fur coat to Tawny Nielson, the charges of corruption which were brought against Roy Speer, and the more celebrated case of Hughie Green who brought a charge of conspiracy against the BBC and Carroll Levis and various individual members of the BBC and other parties, they were all really the product of indiscretions within the BBC which would have always been indiscretions and foolish conduct but in which the people involved would have been preserved from prosecution or any such thing had they declared the facts at the time.

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John: Michael, obviously you felt that the BBC's reputation was at stake. Do you think that their attitude towards all this was right?

Michael: Oh I think it was entirely right really, I think it was the only possible attitude that you could adopt, a public corporation you couldn't have your people operating in this kind of way and subject to these kind of influences. But as I say I think that in this particular area of broadcasting people were very vulnerable to this kind of approach, especially as they themselves considered themselves to be, and were in fact, badly underpaid. However, my attitude on joining the Department was first of all to of course to survey the scene and to see what the factors were that were contributing to this low morale and I think I identified most of them.

The first thing I did was, within a couple of weeks, was to assemble the whole Department, producers, secretaries and all the ancillary groups, and to tell them exactly what they really could expect from me as their new boss, and the attitudes that I wanted them to adopt. I faced this whole event with some trepidation for I thought that there might be explosions in the Department, however, they really took it very calmly and took it very well and in the end I must have struck the right note I think because they applauded and accepted it and that was that. I then proceeded to write a long report on the Department and its problems to Haley, the Director General. And after the management had had some time to digest this I went, I was summoned to see the Director General with Nicolls and Ashbridge who wa s then Deputy Director General, and they went through my report and they did so very fairly and I think I stipulated 10 necessary points of action which I felt were indispensible to the Department's future. Most of these were concerned with internal developements the relationship with other Departments, and especially the relationship with the planners. I found that there had been some appalling delays in dealing with projects put forward by the Department, and I remember Ashbridge questioning the word appalling and said what kind of delay was I talking about. A matter of a few weeks was inevitable in broadcasting operations I must remember there were other departments involved in contributing to programmes etc., I said I'm not talking about a few weeks I'm talking about a few years and that silenced him. They were on the whole ready to accept that both the approach that I made in this document and 9 out of my 10 points were accepted there and then and actioned and Nicolls was instructed to take action upon them. And as we emerged from the room I went out with Nicolls and he said to me, "Well, you can congratulate yourself on that. I don't think in the history of the BBC has 9 out of 10 points ever been accepted on the recommendation of a head of a department." So I felt well satisfied with that and I sought to implement what I had proposed. I can't say that the planner relationship improved overnight, but it certainly improved over the months that followed and generally people, I think, began to feel that they were being positively led and that they could turn to their

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boss for support and assistance when they deserved it, but that they wouldn't get support and assistance if they didn't. And this I think is the proper relationship that should exist between a head of a department and his staff.

John: You certainly had an attitude towards the risqué joke although of course you had the classic master of the double entendre hanging around at that time in Tommy Handley, but at the same time other forms of the comdey show were developing and the old type comedian was vanishing so that possibly the risqué the blue joke was vanishing with it?

Michael: No I don't think it was vanishing with it, of course in those days the whole public attitude towards this kind of thing was quite different. I drew up, I assembled and annotated, directives which had been issued to the Department over the years as the do's and don'ts of what could be broadcast and what couldn't in the context of variety programmes. And it became quite celebrated in recent years and the object of ridicule in the press of the 70's. But it was an appropriate document for those days. It forbade the use of effeminate characters in programmes, it forbade jokes about curates or the church, it forbade impersonations made without the consent of the artist being impersonated or the person being impersonated if they were not an artist. It forbade jokes like 'Winter draws on', and all that kind of thing which seem absolutely ludicrous in the present much more permissive age, but it was appropriate at the time and it was totally accepted at the time, and in fact treated as a very useful guide to producers. We were always up against people who attempted to introduce the smutty stuff, well I think smutty stuff should be inadmissable even today, but witty double entendres are quite another thing and it is very difficult to judge really. It has always been a highly subjective matter what is or what isn't admissable in public entertainment and obviously different criteria apply in different contexts. But on the whole we erred, as err we certainly did, generally on the side of caution and much was excluded in those days which would have been totally permissable in the

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present day.

John: Basically you therefore are saying that you need to have control over your production staff. And that the emergance of creative ability needs to be at any rate somewhat disciplined?

Michael: Yes well I think it does because I don't think that a producer whose vision is limited at the time to the particular production on which he is engaged is going to have a wide enough perspective to see how it fits into the broader context of programme output. And though one should never seek to restrain the imaginative development of producers, one must, I think, prescribe the impermissable line of development and I think this is a help to producers and writers as well as to the BBC itself.

John: You said that you were getting on and making progress with the Programme Planning Department, of course the master strategist there was Godfrey Adams. What about Godfrey?

Michael: Well Godfrey was a dear fellow and a close friend of mine and a person I think much to be admired in many respects. He had a very good brain and he was very able at his job but alas, I don't know, perhaps he got by-passed in potential promotion and I think he got weary of the job and his abilities seemed to decline and he made one or two gaffes and.. his whole reputation dropped away from him. In the War-time as assistant to Nicolls and Controller of Programmes he did a fine job and it was very sad indeed to witness his decline. And perhaps it was as well that he contracted some horrible illness and died quite quickly before his decline went too far.

John: So by the time you came to leave the Variety Department to become Controller of Entertainment, you were fairly happy about its state. But didn't you feel that you were rather leaving the microphone behind to become an

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administrator, rather becoming too much like an impresario, perhaps the big brother over their shoulders of the whole of the entertainment side of broadcasting?

Michael: Well I had left the microphone really when I stopped broadcasting in 1945, and though I was very much concerned of course with programme contents side of production and development of ideas as head of the Variety Department, I'd ceased to function as a direct contributor to programmes, I suppose the natural ladder of promotion was to become the Controller of the Entertainment Division. This was a job which you could make as much, or as little, of as you liked really. My predecessor had sought to intervene minimally, I thought I ought to intervene more without interfering and involve myself in the activities of the various departments that I then commanded to the extent of becoming fully aware of all the individuals contributions and really of helping them on their way with their problems. You don't want your boss to be breathing down your neck all the time, but you do want to feel that you have recourse to your boss at any time you are in difficulty and that you get a sympathetic and helpful hearing.

John: You don't think that in a way perhaps you were trying to apply a veto and that could have been felt?

Michael: No I never sought to apply a veto. What I was doing in the main was supporting the supply departments in their arguments with the planners, that is when I thought that their arguments were valid. Because at that time the editorial rights of planners were limited to broad editorial considerations and detailed production issues were really vested in these departments that made the programmes. As things went in the years that followed the province of the supply departments became more and more eroded by the intervention of the planners and though this was greatly resented initially, gradually I think through sensible working by the planning authorities it came to be seen that there were broad considerations affecting the planning of the total output which must bear upon

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the individual contribution and which were not necessarily seen by the people making individual programmes.

John: So, in 1957, you moved once again; your last move to become Controller Programme Organisation. I suppose really that this was a logical move because you'd obviously shown a great interest in the supply side of the situation and with Lindsay Wellington as the top man it was logical that you should join him and take this on?

Michael: Well I was his first programme lieutenant in the years 1952 to 1957 so far as the entertainment division was concerned. But we instituted a reorganisation of responsibilities at the top which resulted in Dick Marriott becoming Assistant Director of Radio, of Sound Broadcasting as it was called then, and taking over from me the responsibility for programme content and production and taking responsibility as well for the whole planning operation of Home, Light and Third programmes. I assumed responsibility for the staffing the logistics, the personnel and general administration and the finance of the radio output, both in London and in the Regions. I therefore, .. and I was made Head of Establishment of Sound Broadcasting which is a position which nobody has really been able to define, but in effect it means that you are the senior man with an oversight of all personnel. This was a more convenient way of operating. It meant that the fact of what I referred to earlier of bringing planning and production into a closer relationship so that the two could co-ordinate to produce a proper balanced overall result was promoted by this arrangement and at the same time the administrative and logistic factors were also brought together and more effectively controlled and I think this system worked quite well.

John: In fact you really, in the broadest sense of the word, became a sort of Father confessor?

Michael: Well.. father confessor so far as the personal problems of the staff

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were concerned. Dealing with disciplinary matters yes, But generally we saught to operate with Lindsay Wellington, Dick Marriott and myself as a kind of triumberate, we shared our,.. many of our problems, not all of them, and I think we were accepted really as the ruling trio. It didn't make a great amount of difference whether somebody had a grievance or a trouble went to Dick Marriott or came to me, and he and I were on the best of possible terms and ready to share our problems as they arose. And I think this was a happy arrangement.

John: Now that you have left the BBC two questions seem to arise, one, do you have any regrets anything you wished you might have done, and secondly, how do you see the BBC now that you've been away from it for 5 years, and its future?

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Michael: Oh Lord. Horrible question. Regrets. Well I always wondered really whether I wouldn't have enjoyed myself more if I'd remained in the ranks of broadcasters. I did get to the point in 1945 where I could approach the microphone with considerable amount of confidence, vastly more then when I first approached it in 1936. I'd had a very wide experience then of programme making in one form or another, and of broadcasting myself in one context or another. And I had a reasonably high reputation. I certainly enjoyed doing that kind of work and I wondered whether I should have tried to stick to it and not climbed up the ladder. But on the whole I think its probably right, and I think I was able to lead people quite effectively and my impression is rightly or wrongly that people were reasonably happy under my leadership. Whether this is true or not I don't know, at any rate people were good enough to give me that impression and if you get that kind of response from staff then I think their management becomes essentially a rewarding operation in itself. But on the other hand when you go into the upper echelons of places like the BBC you do get involved in politics and pressurisation which sometimes seems really unacceptable.

And one worries that decisions are being taken with sometimes insufficient evidence or sometimes based upon wrong judgements, but I suppose this is inevitable at the top of any institution of that kind. No I don't think I have any particular regrets. I certainly have enjoyed, I especially enjoyed the years from 1936 to 1945 exacting though they often were, because I think that kind of work pulls out the best in you if you have a faintly creative germ. But I didn't unenjoy what followed and where I was successful that in itself was a stimulus.

John: And how do you see the future of the BBC now. She's no longer Auntie in fact the younger generation tend to refer to the Beeb, is this you think a marked for the future?

Michael: Well the BBC has changed a good deal in the eight years since I left it. But so has the world to which it is broadcasts, and I really am not intimate enough with the affairs of the Corporation, the internal affairs of the Corporation to have much of a view on how it stands at the present time. I think it has had the most acute, horrible difficulties in the field of politics and I think the very fact of a much more permissive and some would say, though I don't think I would, enlightened attitude on the part of the public at large this brings with it appalling difficulties of an editorial kind for an institution like the BBC, especially one which has been founded on the principles enunciated by Reith and sustained by him, and sustained by the BBC until some years after the war. I think what the BBC has perhaps lost to its great detriment is the wide public belief that what the BBC did right down to how it pronounced words, its grammar and its syntax and its general attitude towards the proprieties of life were correct and set a pattern for people. I believe that people want to be guided whether they consciously do or not, I think that sub-consciously people have not got the standards clearly set out before them, I think they need guidance and I think they need help, I think they need comfort, I'm not sure that the

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BBC is now able to give this in the measure that it once did and I think its a pity, I think this is a public loss. But I'm not sure how it could be retrieved or whether its retention was ever a serious possibility. I just regret that it doesn't stand quite where it did.

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