

The Connected Histories of the BBC

Provenance:	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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:	<p>© BBC</p> <p>© Alexandra Palace Television Society</p>
Conditions of use:	<p>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</p> <p>historyteam@bbc.co.uk</p> <p>apts@apts.org.uk (for Alexandra Palace material)</p>
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/

Monica Sims interviewed by Frank Gillard, Part One 5 November 1986

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Page</u>
Length of her BBC career	1
Sims applies to BBC	1-2
Joins <u>Woman's Hour</u>	1-5
Moves to Television women's programmes	5-10
<u>Look and Choose</u>	7
Short dramas	8-9
<u>People and Places</u>	11
Problems of live production	12
Programme with blacksmith	12-13
Problems of filming	13-14
Returns to Radio as Editor of <u>Woman's Hour</u>	14
Type of programmes broadcast then	15-16
Differences between radio and television production	16
Difficult topics handled by <u>Woman's Hour</u>	17-19
<u>Woman's Hour's</u> relationship with Talks Department	19-20
Esprit de corps within <u>Woman's Hour</u> (Was it related to the fact that most of the team were women?)	20-23
<u>Woman's Hour</u> spin-offs	23
Difficult topics handled by <u>Woman's Hour</u>	24-26
Birth and growth of children's television programmes	27-29
Monica Sims invited to be Head of Children's Programmes, Tel.	30
Problems she encountered	31-33
morale	31
inadequate resources	31-33
Fight to get back control of children's drama	34-35
Children's reactions to programmes	35-37
Age range catered for	37-39
Audience numbers	40-41
Bought-in programmes	41
News for children	42-43
Saturday morning programmes	44
<u>Grange Hill</u>	44-45
Why she didn't buy <u>Sesame Street</u>	45-48
Attempts to stimulate children, especially poor children	49-52
<u>Blue Peter</u> appeals	52
Sims becomes Controller, Radio 4	52
Radio 4 audience	53-54
State of Radio 4 staff when she was appointed Controller	54
Wavelength changes	55
Programme mix	56-57
Audience penetration figures	58
Range of programmes	58-59
Was Radio 4 flexible enough to handle news during a crisis? (cites Falklands War)	60-61
Age range of audience	62
Peak audience times	63
Radio management structure	64
Sims attempts to counteract SE England bias of R4	65
Attempts to introduce different programmes	66-70
Unsuccessful attempt to reintroduce children's programmes	70-71
Relations with News and Current Affairs	71-73
Radio as patron of the arts	73
Sims becomes Director of Programmes Radio	74

Television took up most of BOM's time because of greater budget and higher profile	75
BOG more interested in radio than BOM were	75
Sims hoped to increase radio's profile	76
Audience attitudes to bad language	77-78
Sims's responsibilities when Director of Programmes Radio	78-84
chairing Programme Review Board	79-80
recruitment and staff movement	81-82
keeping up programme making standards	82-83
monitoring programmes	84
Takes early retirement	84
Chairs working party on programme violence	85-92
Enquiry into Radiovision in 1980 (ie idea of televising <u>Today</u> programme)	93-99
Committee on Women in the BBC Management	99-105

Under copyright

THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY CANNOT BE VOUCHERED FOR.

THIS ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC insert:

Frank Gillard talking with Miss Monica Sims OBE

Part One

RECORDED 5th November 1986

Transcribed from an audio cassette for the BBC Sound Library
by Trans-Script Services - Watford 0923 50034.

IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC. It's the 5th November 1986, and this is Frank Gillard interviewing Miss Monica Sims, OBE, whose BBC career spanned the years from 1953 to '84, I think, was it, or '85?

SIMS: '80... '84.

GILLARD: '84. '84, yes. In Radio and in Television...

SIMS: Yes, I went to and fro, unlike most people, who only go in one direction.

GILLARD: And who indeed was the first member of her sex to become a Director in the BBC. Let's start at the beginning though. You er.. you came in, I suppose, in your mid-20s or thereabouts.

SIMS: Yes, I did. I tried to get in as soon as I left university with a vague notion that I would like to work in the BBC, with no experience of anything, except having an English Degree. And I was quite rightly sent away by Appointments Department who said, "Well you'd better go and learn how to do something before you come back." So I did go away and I worked in Adult Education for a bit, and I kept on trying. And in 1953 I saw an advertisement in, I think, THE LISTENER, for a Talks Producer, and I applied and didn't get in, but then had a

second letter from the BBC saying that they were looking particularly for a few more people who would be interested in working on womens' programmes. So, I tried again. And Janet Quigley, who was the Editor of the programme at the time, was so submerged in applications from people who worked in journalism, womens' magazines and so on, that in order to weed them out she set an exam paper. And having thought I'd given... I wasn't going to take another exam in my life, I spent a whole weekend trying to answer the most extraordinary questions like um... 'Devise a series of your own choosing and write briefing letters to all the speakers you would like to take part in it.' Was one. And another very difficult one was, 'Imagine you have found a world authority to give a talk on the Third Programme and have briefed him and so on, but when you meet him find his delivery is so appalling that it wouldn't be suitable for broadcasting; write the letter explaining what you would do.' Which was a fairly knotty problem, but at least it sorted out the people who were quite serious about it, and I remember spending a long time devising programmes and so on and eventually I did.. was lucky and got in. And had my first training really in Talks Production in the BBC in the Woman's Hour Unit.

GILLARD: What did you make of the BBC when you came in?

SIMS: I was overawed by it. I was very impressed by the Talks meetings that I went to where Mary Summerville was presiding over them, and there were a lot of very sober-suited gentlemen, and a few women who seemed to me to be real blue stockings and academics, and I didn't open my mouth. One of the people who joined at about the same

time that I did was Jack Ashley, and he talked all the time and I couldn't get over it how somebody so new was so um.. articulate and able to take on these people who I thought of as being very formidable. However, I got used to it in time, and in WOMAN'S HOUR I felt immensely privileged really to be working on a programme which had by then acquired for itself a very particular reputation, and which I immediately recognised as in fact being one of the most forward-looking programmes that was on the air at the time.

GILLARD: It was of course a very pioneering programme.

SIMS: Yes, and it had already by 1953 broken a lot of barriers, and it continued to do so during the time that I was there, particularly I think in the er.. social um.. family relationships/medical/psychological field, where there is no doubt that it was the first programme which mentioned - well, I think it was the first Radio programme even to talk about the problems of divorce. And it was interesting that um.. in the correspondence between the Editor of the programme and the Head of Talks it was referred to the Head of Religious Broadcasting who had to oversee whatever was said. But one has to remember how different broadcasting was in those days when nearly everything was scripted, and I spent a lot of my time trying to help speakers write in a colloquial way and then deliver it as if they were talking. But it also meant that everything we did did go for scrutiny to the Editor and.. and higher if necessary. And.. and the correspondence of those days does show how the suspicion in which WOMAN'S HOUR was held by at any rate some people in the BBC. There was,

for instance, a discussion about equal pay, and there is an existing memorandum saying that it... that WOMAN'S HOUR must be very careful not to take sides in the matter. And it was at a time when women didn't have equal and it was thought they might be putting their own case - which I'm sure they weren't, because WOMAN'S HOUR was always scrupulous in trying to be fair and to give both sides of the question, and I don't think there was any real need to worry about that. But it was also... I was there at the time when.. it was, the programme was responding very much to listeners letters and worries about their own personal problems, and.. and it was at that stage that I think the programme got its reputation for frankness and outspokenness in.. largely in response to listeners own letters who were having marital difficulties, medical difficulties um... and looking to WOMAN'S HOUR to be a source of impartial and reliable advice. And we did go to a lot of trouble to get by.. the best experts in the field, whatever it was. But it was fun as well...

GILLARD: Yes.

SIMS: ..because we were doing very light-hearted programmes too and as far as I was concerned I had a very good grounding in a lot of different kinds of production, but in those days recordings were much more difficult and we had (YES) much heavier equipment and all that. So er...

GILLARD: It was a very studio bound programme.

SIMS: It was a very studio bound.. I mean I did a few recordings at that time, but with very heavy recorders and OBs and so on and er.. if one listens now I'm sure one would find the programme stilted, except that it contained within it so many good personalities that.. that the personalities carried it. And afterall the whole of broadcasting was very similar.

GILLARD: Yes. Then you moved over, of course, to.. after a couple of years, to.. doing much the same sort of work, was it, in Television?

SIMS: It didn't feel the same. I mean like everybody else of that generation Television was the new coming thing, and we all felt we wanted to have a go at it, and because I'd been working in WOMAN'S HOUR I was drafted really to the AFTERNOON WOMENS' PROGRAMMES, which hadn't been going very long on Television. And in.. I found the contrast between the rather academic written Radio and the real showbiz Television a considerable one. It was great fun, much less formal, and the programmes were nothing like as serious as the ones that.. that WOMAN'S HOUR had been really. In fact, I thought they were very trivial. However, they seemed to me a way of learning how to do Television, and as far as studio direction and planning programmes were concerned they were marvellous experience. And because they went out in the afternoon we had a chance - as we had done in WOMAN'S HOUR as well - to experiment actually with all sorts of things that we probably wouldn't have been allowed to do because we were not experienced enough at peak viewing times.

GILLARD: Where were you located?

SIMS: Er.. In Lime Grove, er.. in a little attic in Lime Grove which I shared I think with 6 other people. And we had... we could, we looked out on the bridge that connected the studios with the canteen, so we could always see when the great eminences of those days - like Hu Wheldon, or David Attenborough, or Gilbert Harding or Mortimer Wheeler or whoever were crossing the bridge to go and have coffee in the canteen, and then we would down tools and rushed over in the hope of getting a little glamour that brushed off on us by saying "Hello" to them. We worked very hard because we were putting out programmes every afternoon.

GILLARD: How many of you were there? I mean you were a..

SIMS: Oh not many of us only...

GILLARD: A small unit, weren't you?

SIMS: We were... we were... I can't remember, about 5.. 5 or 6 of us who became Producers, and we had very tiny little production teams. I used to do most of my programmes in those days without any kind of Assistant Producer or.. or PA, a secretary, but that was all really, and both produced and directed.

GILLARD: In other words, it was a very primitive....?

SIMS: Oh very yes, although I mean at.. when I first went, nearly everything was studio bound and 3 cameras in more or less fixed positions. But we got bolder as time went on and all.. the technology was improving all the time, and for me it was a tremendous relief to be able to go out filming. And gradually we managed to do film inserts, at that stage, to begin with 35mm and silent. But a little later we had 16mm and that was altogether more mobile, and we felt freer and.. both for inserts in programmes and for whole programmes.

GILLARD: Who was in charge of the Unit?

SIMS: Doreen Stevens, who.. had um.. political interests as well as um you know the womens' interests of fashion, beauty, cooking and all those things, family affairs, medicine. And she tried to get us to produce a wide range of programmes. I did a programme.. I did, I think the first consumer programmes, magazines on Television or on Radio come to that, with a programme called LOOK AND CHOOSE which Isobel Barnett introduced, and we used every Monday afternoon to have dozens of refrigerators or cookers or irons or something in the studio and would then try to assess them. It was a terrible business, because they all had to be blown down so as not to be too white and bright for the cameras, and all the names had to be covered up because we were absolutely careful not to advertise anything, even though of course a lot of the things were perfectly recognisable by their design and shape. It always seemed ridiculous, but we stuck very firmly to the rules. And even in the.. the words we used. We were very, very careful not to talk about even cellophane in those days, because that was thought to be

trade name. But as well as these consumer programmes I also did a country magazine-type programme, which again was one of the first of its kind. I think it was before the Natural History Unit in.. in Bristol had got going, and so I trotted about over the countryside, bringing people into the studio, and also making films in different parts of the country. And it was really growing out of that that I managed to get into doing more filming, which was a great relief because so many things could go wrong when it was live. Oh one of the live programmes that I produced was a serial. We did a little drama as well, even though it went on the air at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and we only had the morning to rehearse it and it went out live - so the standards were not terribly high. But I did a.. a romantic historical novel, adapted for Television. It was by Doris Lesley, and it was called PERIDO FLIGHT. And it... I remember distinctly how we tried to recreate the hospital at Scutari in that quite small Studio H in Lime Grove, and the designer, who became a designer of big dramas later on and eventually a Director, did absolute marvels, it seemed to me, in those black and white days, of creating an impression. It also illustrated the perils of live Television, because in this particular play the heroine had a pet bulldog who was a king.. a key character in the story. And towards the end the bulldog very sadly died. We had a bulldog and we had the animal handler, who trained it very well in the studio, and absolutely on cue the bulldog died as told too by its handler, and the heroine burst into floods of tears, and for some reason the vision mixer - even though we had rehearsed the thing fairly well the day before - instead of cutting away from the dog onto a close up of the heroine's face, stayed on the long shot. And after the death of the dog, we saw it sit up and smile

at the audience saying how well he'd done, and there was absolutely nothing you could do. I mean you've never... let it happen now, it would always be cut out of the recording, but one forgets what it was like before you had any telly recordings at all. And everything, I mean if you got a good performance, fine; if you didn't it was disaster. And I had a few real disasters, which I think were good training for a Director, and if you can cope with that you can cope with most things. Oddly enough, the audience seemed to accept it at the time. I think they quite enjoyed seeing the occasional mistake, and still do in live Television.

GILLARD: Then here we are in 1986 with the BBC going back to Afternoon Programmes.

SIMS: Yes, but of a rather different kind. (YES) I mean ours were rather carefully planned to try and cover different aspects of womens' lives. They had the heading in those days of MAINLY FOR WOMEN, but I don't think those of us who worked on them really ever thought much about them being particularly for women. We thought of them as general Television programmes, and we know the audience was mixed, as it always will be, with some men watching. They probably didn't watch so much the fashion and beauty and cooking programmes, but the general interest ones, which were the ones on the whole that I did, I think quite a few other people looked in on. And it was, of course, marvellous if one of them actually got repeated in the evening. But that was only possible when we were able to record them or when they were all on film, then occasionally they were.

GILLARD: Did you ever get a glimpse of the great mandarins?
People like Cecil McGiven for example?

SIMS: Oh, Cecil McGiven was the first person I met when I arrived and he welcomed me, and he was supportive to what we were doing, though I don't think he or any of them actually ever saw any of the programmes, unless we'd made the most terrible mistake. And Kenneth Adam. But I think because they were broadcast in the afternoon, as in WOMAN'S HOUR in Radio, we were very much left to our own devices, and it was rather a surprise if anybody happened to be home in bed with a cold or something and they saw one, and occasionally would ring up and say, "Actually, that was quite a nice little programme..." in a patronising way. Which was irritating when one was really trying to extend the frontiers of Television from time to time. I mean I remember doing - I did a series called LET'S IMAGINE. And one of them was LET'S IMAGINE OTHER WORLDS IN SPACE. And we had gone to a lot of trouble to make the studio look as if it was in space, and we had some rather good futurologists and astronomers and people in the studio, and it was really quite a.. a fascinating programme which I don't think anybody saw. And I remember afterwards feeling rather disappointed, and thinking we did do something a bit new there and nobody noticed because of the time of day.

GILLARD: Yeah. Well, then er... well you had a good many years there, didn't you? You were there from '55 to '63, I think.

SIMS: Yes, and it was how I really learnt how to do Television. I think the programmes that I enjoyed the most were the ones that I made.. the films that I made with various writers about places. It was the earliest PEOPLE AND PLACES kind of series, and I made a film in Cornwall with John Betjeman and one in the Dordogne with Compton MacKensie. And I did A RETURN TO ANDALUSIA with Laurie Lee, retracing his steps in the Civil War. And went to Ireland to Edna O'Brien. I mean they were places seen through the eyes of.. of writers, which meant that you always had a very, very well-considered and interesting commentary. The pictures were black and white because we had not then gone into colour, and it was a pity because I think a lot of those films were destroyed, you know, in a great clear out, because they were black and white films. And for Archive purposes some of them... I mean they said some wonderful things, as well as them being quite... some of them, quite attractive to look at. And looking back on that time, that and the experience of live Television meant that I did manage to get a chance of trying my hand anyway...CUTS OFF

END TAPE 1

IDENTIFICATION

Monica Sims, TAPE 2 and you'll pick it up where we left off on 1.

SIMS: I think I was very lucky in Television to have a chance at trying my hands at so many different forms - both the film and the live studio programmes. On live studio programmes of course we always had to rehearse and time very carefully in advance. And I remember distinctly on one occasion having a lot of noise from a very squeaky camera, and in the rehearsal, after we'd done the run through, I spoke to the cam. the camera pusher on the talkback, and said, "Can you possibly do something about that squeak that I keep hearing on the camera before the show?" And he shouted up to me in the Gallery and said, "Oh don't you like my squeak, Monica?" He said, "I .. I rather like having it there because my family at home are watching, and they'll know I'm on the show." (LAUGH) Which illustrated to me the way every single person in the studio really wanted to be an essential part of the programme, and in those days the team was small enough for every individual to be noticeable. I mean, I think there is still a great.. team spirit in Television Studios, but it has become much more run-of-the-mill these days than it was then, when we all felt we were pioneering a little.

GILLARD: Tell us about your Blacksmith.

SIMS: One of the programmes, the country programmes that I did included various country people in the studio, and one of them was a

very nice old man who was a Blacksmith in Cheshire, and he'd come down to London to take part in this programme to talk about blacksmithing and how it had changed over the years. And he couldn't get over the studio. It was a totally new experience for him to go into this very artificial environment and he kept saying to me, he said, "I've never seen anything like it." He said, "I can't think what it reminds me of." And then later on after the rehearsal he said, "D'you know, Miss Sims, I've reme.. I know what it reminds me of." He says, "It reminds me of the time just after the First World War when I went down a coal mine." (LAUGH) And there was.. it did look a bit like a coal mine with the bright lights in places and darkness in other places. But after all that studio experience, it really was a great relief to get out into the open air and do some filming, except that in the early days we were filming on 35mm and there weren't so many women directing film then, and the cameramen used to look a bit askance at having to have a woman going around with them, and wondering really whether one was going to be able to do the job. And to begin with I don't suppose I... I mean I certainly didn't know anything like enough about it. And I am actually very grateful to the cameramen and technicians of those days who really taught me. And they were very charming and didn't.. I mean in the end accepted one just as one of the team, but because of this I felt it was behoven on me um.. not to behave like the little woman and to do everything that was expected of a Producer and Director. So I used to help carry the equipment around, because one.. people were always saying, "Well, of course, women can't do it because they can't carry that heavy equipment." And actually it isn't as heavy as all that, on the whole. Although I do remember walking all over St (INAUD) Golf

Enodoc

course in Cornwall behind John Betjeman, carrying the camera tripod and various other assorted things and it really was heavy, and I was determined not to show it. And I can remember also on.. several occasions climbing up crumbling winding staircases to the top of church towers to see whether the view from the top was going to be the one we wanted, and I simply loathed it. And I used to grit my teeth and say, "You know, well if the cameraman can do it I can do it too." And I have a very healthy respect for what cameramen achieve in those circumstances. But I also think it's very important for women to behave properly, and not to expect any concessions.

GILLARD: Yes. Let's now then bring you back to Radio, because after, what was it, 8 years doing Television family programmes, you came back to be Editor of WOMAN'S HOUR.

SIMS: Yes, I was very doubtful about it, because I loved being a Producer and I've always agreed with people who say that the best job in the BBC is being a Producer. You had much greater freedom and you have much more satisfaction if you manage to make a programme that really works, and I wasn't sure whether I wanted to try my hand at this Editorial job, but it was a challenge and I admired the programme very much, still. And I came back, actually, for a very short time, to find out really whether I could do it, while Joanna Scott-Moncrieff, who was the Editor, went off to have a baby, and it was meant to be just a temporary holding situation, and in fact I did go back to Television after it, and Joanna came back to run the programme. But she actually found that particular job was too much to combine with having a.. a

young baby and family life, so I was asked to go back and do it permanently. And by then I'd had a taste of it and thought that it was something I ought to try and do. And I had a very... I was lucky, because we had a very good team of Producers already there, and we were still in the days when we felt we were doing new things, and we were in fact um... treat... tackling a lot of subjects which we thought were necessary for that particular audience, and WOMAN'S HOUR.. her strength has actually always been I think the fact that the audience has taken such a large part really in deciding the.. the contents of the programme. And we did, for instance, I think, the first series about the problems of the older woman. We did a series about the problems of women on their own. We did things about unmarried mothers and their... and their difficulties and so on. It was very liberal in every way. And we did quite a lot about relationships inside and outside marriage. And for some we were criticised, but usually I think the talks were done in a sympathetic but not over emotional way, that was accepted by the.. the audience. I did on one occasion have one absolutely furious telephone call when I was in the office, and a programme about the problems of middle age was going out and we had a doctor talking. And the 'phone went and I lifted it to hear an absolute torrent of abuse and swearing at the other end, an apoplectic man's voice. The man shouting at me, saying "Why don't you take that filthy programme off the air?" And I was a bit surprised. It hadn't seemed filthy to me, yes OK medical/clinical perhaps but not anything else. And this man went on and on and on and when finally he calmed down enough to say, "Don't you realise it's being broadcast over all my market stalls?!" And I must say it threw a new light on the programme, because one tended to think

of the listeners at home just in one or two, but of course WOMAN'S HOUR in those days was on the Light Programme, and the Light Programme having had music and WORKERS' PLAYTIME and all those things going out were perfectly suitable for going out on a Public Address System over market stalls, and WOMAN'S HOUR most of the time would have been suitable, but certainly not the kind of thing we were ever.. thought we were making the programme for. So he did have... it caused us to think rather carefully. It didn't stop us, mind you, 'cos our audience at home was more important.

GILLARD: Did you have to make big mental adjustments coming back to Radio?

SIMS: Oh no. I mean I don't think producing, whether you're producing Television or Radio is any different. I mean Television has the added excitement of what you do with the pictures, but the bones of making programmes and thinking what you're going to do are exactly the same. So I had to make no mental adjustment at all, and in fact in Radio I've always been rather keen on trying to see how far one could go without pictures. So I wouldn't shy away from doing visual subjects on Radio, if you get ri...good speakers, you can do a lot. I mean I was.. it was very interesting that for.. when I recently WOMAN'S HOUR had a painting exhibition at the Tate Gallery, because they'd done a series on painting, and WOMAN'S HOUR listeners had sent them in to the programme, and you can't get really more visual than that, but it worked because the.. the talks were good enough. (YES) So I've never thought

of Radio as being restricting, although I have enjoyed both and the particular problems of each medium. Just..

GILLARD: WOMAN'S HOUR was.. sorry.

SIMS: No, I was just going to say about WOMAN'S HOUR at that time was I think in a very (YES) privileged position on the Light Programme, because it was really I think the only serious Talks programme surrounded by music, and it did mean that the field was open to do more or less anything, and we tried to do more or less anything. I mean both sort of humorous entertaining items as well as perhaps more.. some more weighty ones. Though never anything at very great length. And I do think that the problems of WOMAN'S HOUR became a lot greater when the wave lengths were all changed and it went on to the Home Service where it was surrounded by other Talks programmes. It also lost quite a lot of the audience who were used to listening to the music, but liked to have that one hour which was more or less a speech programme, and I do think that things have changed - it's not that I don't think the programme is still necessary or well done, I just think it doesn't quite, can't have the impact that it had in those days when it was very often the only programme dealing with a lot of topics that women at home would otherwise not be familiar with. Very interesting, I mean the range of people who took part in the programme in those days and still do. We used to even though it was.. we knew the audience was fairly widespread, to do every so often a round up of what was on in the theatre and the cinema, sometimes in London because people would come to London and anyway we found that the audience, even though they weren't

going to be able to go to the theatre, would like to hear about what was happening. And one has to remember this was in the days before KALEIDOSCOPE and other programmes dealing with theatre reviews. And one of the speakers who did reviews for us at that time was Mary Stocks, who of course was very well known to the audience through ANY QUESTIONS? And I remember it.. it's I think an interesting comment on that particular.. on the Swinging Sixties, which it then was, that one of the plays she talked about and had liked very much and recommended was THE KILLING OF SISTER GEORGE, and she.. we did a rehearsal of her piece and when I listened to it I realised she hadn't actually explained what the programme was about and that it did in fact involve a Lesbian relationship. And I said to her "Don't you think you ought to explain that, because some people might not want to see it for that reason and perhaps should be warned?" And she looked at me in great surprise and said, "Certainly not," she said, "I will not use that word." And so.. and I realised of course it hadn't been in general currency but was by then I think, and I said, "Oh, why not?" And she said, "I don't want to give perfectly innocent middle aged and elderly women who share a house any cause to feel embarrassed, and it might embarrass them." And I felt very chastened by that and er.. I mean it was.. it was both a sensible remark for people of that age group, but actually a very.. almost incomprehensible to a younger generation, that people should take it in that way. But as well as...Mary Stocks and other eminent people, WOMAN'S HOUR I think was unique at that time in encouraging the ordinary listener to speak for himself or herself, and we did a lot about how people managed on their money, their housekeeping budgets and so on. Which meant that we involved people from up and down the country, and it

stopped the programme from becoming too London South East-based - we were always very keen to try and involve the whole country as far as possible. And we were also at that time doing a lot of international items, and we had people who sent us letters from abroad really all over the place, and so we did get some insight into what was going on in China or South Africa or other country.. or America, as well as having our domestic speakers. And I think at the time it was the only general magazine programme on Radio that was.. that had this kind of variety within it. And reviews of the papers as well, which nobody else was doing at the time.

GILLARD: You were as it were a department within a department, weren't you, WOMAN'S HOUR?

SIMS: Yes, yes...

GILLARD: WOMAN'S HOUR was embedded in Talks. How much editorial freedom did you have and how much did the Controller of Talks interfere with you? I suppose it was John Greene, was it or..?

SIMS: It was George Comarchio.

GILLARD: Oh yes.

SIMS: Really very little. Um..

GILLARD: Very little interference.

SIMS: Very little interference. Yes, I mean I did refer occasional items, because by then not everything was scripted, we had a lot more recording facilities and mobile recordings and so on and much.. a lot more discussions and unscripted talks. And I did occasionally refer an item if I thought it was going to be for some reason controversial or to raise peoples' eyebrows too much, but having you know explained that it was going to happen I can't remember any occasion at all when I wasn't defended - if there were criticisms - by the people who were running Talks Department at that time. I was very lucky I think in being left alone to get on with it really. But I've found that in most of my life in the BBC and it's not.. I certainly didn't ever feel that this was in any way anarchic and that there was nobody who was going to come down on me like a tonne of bricks if I got it wrong. (LAUGH) But I was conscious of a feeling of trust, that I and the people I was working with would in fact behave responsibly. That we would understand what the BBC's policy was and would interpret it to the best of our ability. And I certainly, I've never been connected with a programme that has gone out of its way to defy the general BBC ethos. I mean perhaps we should have from time to time, but working within that ethos, it seemed to me that we were able to do more or less everything that we thought was necessary at that time, so we didn't need to rebel.

GILLARD: As a Director of Radio I always felt there was a great esprit de corps in WOMAN'S HOUR. That your people all had their tails up all the time. There was a great degree of self-confidence if you like which I approved of heartily, and I thought that perhaps a degree of the success of the programme was attributable to this.

SIMS: Yes, I'm sure it was. I'm sure it's because the team felt that they were doing something nobody else had, that they were genuinely performing a public service for the audience, and one has to remember that particularly at that time how isolated many people in the audience were - without public transport, perhaps living with young children on...CUTS OFF END OF TAPE

Under copyright

IDENTIFICATION

Miss Monica Sims TAPE 3 and we were talking about the esprit de corps of WOMAN'S HOUR.

SIMS: I think it was partly because we felt we were performing a social service in that we were giving people information that they needed, and we were also in fact, though we didn't realise it I think at the time, spearheading quite a number of activities and almost campaigns. For instance, we did quite a lot on the need for mothers to be able to visit children in hospitals more frequently, and if necessary stay in hospitals, and quite a lot of what we did was instrumental in getting that movement going. And I remember we also had a talk from a woman with agoraphobia, which got a huge response from other sufferers and led in the end to a self-help group, and.. and a lot of other items of that kind, particularly.. and medical advances and so on which caused women to go and demand of their GPs the possibility of certain kinds of treatment they'd heard about in WOMAN'S HOUR. We actually felt we were doing.. performing a useful social function. We also found it great fun, because we were able to do such a variety of things. We were not at that time an entirely female team. We had some men who were producers in the programme, and for instance the Current Affairs was nearly always produced by a man, often we had people who were training, who would come and spend a few months with WOMAN'S HOUR, and they were often young men. But nevertheless, we were a group of women who were quite ambitious within the BBC, and felt we had to show that we were as capable as the men of making good programmes. So I

think the fact that there were more women in that team than there were in most was quite a strength for us. Though we didn't regard ourselves as a particularly militant feminist group; we just took it for granted that we would have exactly the same opportunities that the men would. In fact we didn't really, because we didn't find it so easy to get our stuff into the evenings, really, but that's partly.. our own fault, because we were just so busy doing our programme that we probably didn't suggest as much as we might have done if we'd had a bit more time.

GILLARD: Was there then much spin-off from WOMAN'S HOUR itself into general programming?

SIMS: There was a little, but not very much. We had.. we worked very hard to get a weekend programme, because we realised that a lot of the audience we would like to get at were working during the day, and so we wanted a programme at weekends where they would be able to hear it but also their husbands would, because a lot of the letters we had from listeners were "Oh I do wish my husband could hear this..." and so we tried very hard to get, and it was quite difficult, but we did eventually get a weekend slot which had.. it went up and down, and later on WOMAN'S HOUR spun-off into TUESDAY CALL, but that was after I'd left the programme. I did, like everybody else, I mean I was.. I did a few general Talks, because we were able to put up proposals for them, which may or may not get accepted, but we were certainly regarded as a Unit our own getting on with our own thing, and really I don't think many people, apart from you Frank, really took very much notice of what we

were doing unless we did something which got into the Press because for some reason it was controversial.

GILLARD: Did you ever have any idea of the size of the audience you were addressing in WOMAN'S HOUR?

SIMS: I always.. I used to try very hard to find out, and it's very odd that, because in Television I always knew the size of the audience. In Radio I hardly ever did and it was not something we really worried about; it was in Television we worried about the size of the audience. In Radio we took it for granted that the people who wanted the programme would go on listening to it, and quite honestly it was only very much later that I got involved or worried about audience size. We seemed to get a good feedback, and that was good enough for us. I think it was really the contact with the audience that was WOMAN'S HOUR's great strength, because we used to get a great many letters, and we often also recorded views and comments from people who'd written to us, and that was very often the reason that WOMAN'S HOUR was the pioneering programme in trying to deal with subjects that clearly the audience wanted to hear about. And in some cases, it dealt with things that the BBC had been thinking about for quite a long time, but not quite getting round to doing because they were slightly worried about perhaps frightening people or shocking them. WOMAN'S HOUR, I think, was the first programme to do something about homoeopathy - an unorthodox form of medicine which the BBC hadn't treated and thought perhaps it shouldn't be doing until that time. I think it was the first programme to have a talk on how to tell children that they were adopted when they

were. The first programme to deal with anonymous letters as a serious problem. The first programme to talk about homosexuality - which certainly came out of a letter from a wife who had discovered that her husband was homosexual and was worried about it, and asked questions of which.. which were dealt with in WOMAN'S HOUR to a certain extent. It was also the first programme to deal with prostitution, which had not been considered suitable to talk about in public, and Lord Wolfenden of course was a GUEST OF THE WEEK at the time of the Wolfenden Report (LAUGH). There were.. there were a lot of programmes about motherhood and different techniques of birth and so on. And I was interested when WOMAN'S HOUR had its 40th birthday recently, that a young academic researcher who had been looking into the written Archive, written Archives of the BBC, found records of correspondence with WOMAN'S HOUR and so on, and looked at the subjects of Talks and said that she felt that in the 50s and 60s WOMAN'S HOUR may have been guilty of emphasising too much the need for a secure, stable family life and the bond between mother and child, to the extent that it might have made listeners feel guilty if they went out to work, that it was so important not to break that bond, and that she compared this with current programmes, which she said were working in the other direction and perhaps making women feel guilty if they weren't going out to work and having interests outside the home. I think it was an interesting comment to make. I don't actually think it was justified. It shows the dangers of going only to the written Archives to find out the contents of a programme, because there would be a lot of correspondence about some of those particular series because they were contentious. My own memories of the programme are that it was not hammering on about one particular point of view,

since it would always have a feedback from the listeners which would balance it, even if the expert speaker had given a view about psychology, for instance, we would always on a succeeding day get another view, may be from another expert, but if not from the audience at large. And one of the great advantages of a daily programme and having a correspondence column in it was that one could make sure that we were not giving out biased information. We tried very hard not to do that, and I think on the whole succeeded. I did learn how dangerous it was to play around with correspondence columns. I mean I saw how easy it was to stimulate interest to get a great outcry by reading one letter, and you had to be really scrupulous in representing through the letters you read what was you felt to be generally the reaction of the different segments of the audience. But I was.. I've always been interested in programmes where the audience feel that they belong to the programme and have their own right to say what they think about it, and perhaps the BBC hasn't encouraged that kind of involvement by the audience in all its output as much as it could. It's something I've always worked for, and have.. and I've never really worked on a programme where I haven't had that kind of feedback, which along with the audience research that you get from Audience Research Department and the sheer head counting, I think means that you can keep in touch as far as possible with what people are thinking.

GILLARD: Yeah. Shall we move on now to your.. the next chapter of your career? You in 1967 of course went back again to Television and became Head of Childrens' Programmes. Could we begin by hearing something about the back history of Childrens' Programmes in

Television? There was Freida Lingstrom, there was Owen Reed - I'm not quite sure what happened then.

SIMS: Childrens' Programmes in Television really I suppose were built on the strength of CHILDRENS' HOUR on Radio which had had a very commanding dominating position in Radio, and when Television began after the War - I mean it had had even in the very early days MUFFIN THE MULE and puppets and cartoons, and it was after all a cartoon that was the last programme shown on Television before the War, a MICKEY MOUSE one, but after the War I think it was Freida Lingstrom who said if Television was going to be seen in peoples' living rooms, children would see it as well as grown-ups and there ought to be some programmes, as there had been on the Radio, specially designed for those young children. And she was the person really who laid the foundations for the Childrens' Programmes Department in addition to the entertainments provided by a few cartoons and puppet programmes like MUFFIN THE MULE. And she brought over really from Radio the idea of LISTEN WITH MOTHER and turned it into WATCH WITH MOTHER, which she designed very carefully to cover all aspects of a young child's life. I mean it wasn't just a series of pretty little puppet programmes, they were really quite well thought out in terms of child development. I mean ANDY PANDY, which was such a favourite, was a clown figure who depicted and could do everything a 3-year-old could do, the movements could be accomplished by a 3-year-old. He performed actions and sang songs which a 3-year-old could join in with, and she was very concerned with this pre-school audience which was at home during the day. BILL AND BEN was a fantasy, very imaginative programme. RAG TAG AND BOBTAIL was the sort of

beginnings of NATURAL HISTORY. THE WOODEN TOPS were really about relationships within a family though they seem very dated now - a family in which they had a daily help and very well-behaved they were. But they were genuinely in their time however old-fashioned they may now appear to be, pioneering programmes which really considered the needs of the young child. These were followed and there were spin-offs really from them in various other directions. There was a magazine programme called STUDIO E, a studio-based programme. There were painting clubs and there were the beginnings of drama for children - all made by what became a really quite strong Childrens' Department. And when Owen Reed was Head of the Department childrens' drama was at its strongest. They did two plays a week specially for children. They did JENNINGS and BILLY BUNTER. They did Dickens, they did adventure stories like THE SILVER SWORD, to begin with done live and then repeated also live. And then later recorded. There were light entertainment programmes like CRACKERJACK in those early days, and the very beginnings of . . . BLUE PETER, the magazine programme which afterwards grew and became twice weekly. But there was a hiatus in the development of Childrens' Programmes when the Department was really altered and the.. the high spending elements of it hived off to the adult departments. Drama went to Drama; light entertainment went to Light Entertainment, all... and various programmes were put into the Regional Centres, like Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol and the staff went with them. So what was left in Childrens' Programmes Department were the programmes for very young children, WATCH WITH MOTHER, and some of the early magazine programmes like BLUE PETER, and that was about all. A programme for deaf children remained. And it was amalgamated then with WOMENS' PROGRAMMES,

AFTERNOON PROGRAMMES and turned into a Family Programmes Department, and Doreen Stevens was the Head of this Department, and when I was doing AFTERNOON PROGRAMMES originally there was still a separate Childrens' Department, but later they were put together. It was.. I never, I mean I think it was Donald Bayerstock* who finally carried out this decision, which was partly because I think there were worries about the ever increasing costs of drama, for instance, and light entertainment, and the feeling that higher professional standards would probably be achieved if they went into the high spending departments, and clearly there's a much more difficult background and history to all that, but I wasn't there to observe it. I know that it was a very bitter time for the Childrens' Department, because that - rather like WOMAN'S HOUR - had a great esprit de corps. They did care very much about the needs of their particular audience and observing Family Programmes all around the world I don't think that you ever get the best childrens' programmes out of that sort of set up, because if you make them for the family you are always thinking about the adults in the audience at the expense of the children. And you get good childrens' programmes where you have producers who really understand a lot about children at different ages and are making programmes for specific age groups. And by the time I was invited to go back to Television, Hu Wheldon had decided that the Family Programmes idea didn't work, that there needed to be a Childrens' Department again, and I was invited to come not as Head of... Doreen Stevens had left by this time, not to be Head of Family Programmes, but specifically to be Head of Childrens' Programmes, which I did. Mind you I was very doubtful about whether to go. I didn't really know much about children, I'd never worked with children, and

* and Kenneth Adam, Stuart Hood
and Joanna Spicer

when I said at the interview that I didn't.. I really felt I didn't know enough. Hu said, "Oh you've been a child, haven't you?" (LAUGH) And that really clinched it.

GILLARD: Yes. So you had to scratch virtually there did you and build up a Department?

SIMS: Yes. Well there was the nucleus of a Department there and some very good people who were still in there. Ursula Eason was there as Assistant Head and she'd been running it for a short time, and Biddy Baxter was running BLUE PETER. There were a number of other experienced producers still left and they really taught me um.. about Childrens' Programmes. I mean I had a certain background of Television, but there were people running PLAYSCHOOL and JACKANORY - they remained - and WATCH WITH MOTHER, and a programme for deaf children. That was about it really. And I was determined to get back into the Department the drama and light entertainment and quiz shows and so on that had previously been lost many years before, but that took quite a long time.

GILLARD: All right for the moment, yes. Well.....CUTS OFF

END TAPE 3

IDENTIFICATION

MONICA SIMS - TAPE 4 and we're talking about Miss Sims' time as Head of Childrens' Television. You had some very particular problems there of course in running Childrens' Television.

SIMS: Well, the first problem was one of morale because the programme... the people had gone through a very depressing time of seeing the Department really downgraded, as they felt, and a number of people had left. So one of the problems was to get back some of the money and resources that the Department had had before, which took quite a long time to do. It also meant reassuring the producers who were there that their efforts were in fact being appreciated by the BBC as a whole, and I think for a time they hadn't been. I think Childrens' Programmes were regarded as off-peak and they didn't.. they weren't very expensive and more or less anything would do. And it was perfectly clear to us in the Department that on the whole Childrens' Programmes are more expensive to make than grown-up ones, because you can't just for children have talking heads - children find it very boring. You actually have to have a lot of interesting pictures and action and activity and music, and all the things that make for lively Television. And it.. in those early days, I had to fight quite hard to be allowed to get those resources. One of my very earliest off~~ers~~ meetings I remember was with Paul Fox, when he was Controller of BBC-1, and we had been showing the same WATCH WITH MOTHER programmes since Freida Lingstrom's time, with hardly any new additions to them, and it was quite clear that some of these programmes, though they were marvellous,

were getting worn out - I mean even physically worn out. You couldn't go on running them much longer, and certainly some of the attitudes did feel by that time a bit out of date, and we didn't want to get rid of them but we wanted to add to them with er.. some newer programmes. And I remember him looking at me in absolute astonishment that I should be asking for so much money to make a quarter-of-an-hour series for very young children, because they were extremely expensive to make. Anything involving animation, which takes so long, is very expensive, and all these programmes involved puppets or line drawing animation, and were not cheap. However, if you actually counted the number of times you were going to be able to repeat them for probably the next ten or fifteen years, they worked out on that basis to be very cheap indeed. The trouble was that money was very tight and getting the money up front to make that sort of thing was quite difficult, and so we were only able to proceed very slowly but just gradually, gradually we got a few more of those things going. And MAGIC ROUNDABOUT was already there when I arrived, and we went on making more of them, and having been such a great success - at the time it was then just before the first News of the evening, we wanted to make more of those 5-minute series of different kinds, and they eventually lead to programmes like PADDINGTON BEAR and THE WOMBLES and so on, all of which have not only been very successful in audience terms but have been very successful for the BBC commercially because they have led to so many spin-offs and merchandising and so on so that it.. we were not in fact being profligate in asking for a lot of money for one-off programmes, and we thought some of our colleagues in other Departments were wasting money unnecessarily sometimes when we saw how long they had to make programmes

which would only be shown once or twice, and here we were building up a library of material which could go on over a great many years with continual replenishment. It was a very, very sore point when the BBC went into colour. I can remember having a terrific battle to try and persuade the Controller to let us make the BLUE PETER travel films, that they made during the break when the programme was off the air, in colour, because I said these films would be being shown.. repeated in BLUE PETER, as they always did - highlights of their foreign expeditions for years to come, and er... But we didn't get the money for quite a long time to be able to go into colour. And for children particularly, where they had colour sets, and of course not everybody did, it was a huge advantage to be able to have coloured Childrens' Programmes as well as the black and white ones. So one of my.. my battles, certainly at that time, was er.. getting the resources to do the programmes we were doing and to replace them well enough. To increase the staff, because we were running on a very, very tight number of people - not enough really to do the programmes as well as they should have been done, because so many Producers had been taken away from the Department. Now they, some of them provided programmes to go into the timeslot that was allocated from the Regions, and that was fine, but gradually they.. those Producers tended to be absorbed in the Regional output and so the supply dwindled, and we needed to get back some of that output into our own Department - although some things like CRACKERJACK, continued to come from the Light Entertainment Department, and puppet programmes came - I remember PINKY AND PERKY came from Manchester. And we also were able to have from Manchester other programmes like SCREEN TEST for instance, a film quiz. But it was during.. it was an exciting time

because we were starting a lot of new programmes as well as developing the ones that existed. And I felt that we would really be able to count ourselves a proper Childrens' Department if we could once get drama back under our own auspices. And there had continued to be drama at weekends for the family, and this included very good classic adaptations of Dickens and so on and also DR WHO started on Saturdays, so there was a family provision, but neither of those productions were intended specifically for the child audience. And I had remembered some of the very early productions that I'd seen of Childrens' Programmes, in particular THE SECRET GARDEN, and always thought that we should within our own Department be making those childrens' classics. And eventually we managed to get enough money to do that. We managed to do.. first of all, some adaptations of contemporary childrens' books because there has been a great flourishing of writing for children during the 60s and 70s particularly, and some of the.. the books we did, like Nina Baydon's ~~CARRIES~~ WAR, for instance, Peter Dickinson's THE CHANGES, were very relevant to childrens' lives really, and so we did some of those. We also did some of the classics and went back to E. Nesbitt ~~and Ivy~~ ? *Cast* ~~Compton Burnett.~~ I remember when I.. it was soon after I'd gone back to Television, to Childrens' Programmes, that we had the great change in the way the BBC did its costing. We went on to a system of total costing. Until that time Childrens' Programmes had always managed to scrape by by borrowing facilities and so on from other Departments, but it was a hand to mouth existence, and in fact although at the time we all rather resented the extra work involved in the new budgeting system, I think the total costing system perhaps made it easier for us to play swings and roundabouts. We did have a huge output in the end. I mean

we were doing um.. within a few years, we were doing eight or nine hundred hours of programmes, so we had a pretty...

GILLARD: A year?

SIMS: A year. So we had a pretty large programme budget with.. which we could move between series to a certain extent, which is the way we actually managed to introduce a lot of new programmes.

GILLARD: I know you had a very keen perception of the impact of Television on children.

SIMS: (LAUGH) I don't know that I did particularly but one couldn't really avoid it, it was so obvious that the children themselves were responding massively whenever we gave them the opportunity to respond, and because we all believed that Television for children was not as Owen Reed described for "the slumpers and sagers" but was to try and stimulate the child at home to take an interest in the world outside in what was going on the Television screen, and to engage in some activity as a result of it, that we actually did a lot of encouraging children to do things on their own. We had a lot of competitions and encouragement to write in. I mean BLUE PETER still gets about three thousand letters a week from its audience as it did then, partly because a lot.. it told the children to suggest things they would like to see in the programme, and carried out what the children suggested. But not only BLUE PETER, I mean we had actually to be rather careful because if you once say to children, "I'd love to see your pictures on a certain

subject..." you will be overwhelmed with thousands and thousands and thousands of them and unless you have the staff to cope with it, which at the beginning we didn't have, you could really get into trouble by simply not being able to deal properly with the childrens' response. And we were always very, very anxious that children should feel that we were taking what they did seriously. I mean things.. in BLUE PETER, childrens' letters are still individually answered, which is quite a marathon effort and very unusual - except for competitions where they just get too many. But a proper letter from a child gets a proper response, and this is partly because Biddy Baxter who was.. still the very good Editor of this programme once as a child herself wrote to a childrens' comic and joined the TEDDY TAIL CLUB or whatever the comic was running, and she wrote a letter and had a very nice letter back and a badge and news about activities of the Club. And the following year she wrote again and told about all the new things she'd been doing in the last year and she received exactly the same letter back again, and she was so disappointed that it was a great object lesson to her and when she ran BLUE PETER she swore that that would not happen to the children who wrote in to the programme - that their letters would be answered properly. And so she and the team invented a complicated card index system, so that if a child writes in they always look up and they know whether the child has written before, and this is an encouragement of an involvement. It's something that happened in WOMAN'S HOUR as well to a certain extent, but was in the childrens' field the numbers were so enormous that we really had to be very careful how we dealt with this. And we did some things where we had to say at the beginning, you know "You can write to us..." I mean when we were collecting jokes for the

Saturday morning MULTICOLOURED SWOP SHOP, we had to say, you know "We can't acknowledge it if you send it to us we'll read it, but we won't be able to.. we might use it on the programme..." We had to explain that, but it depended very much on the programme what we did. PLAYSCHOOL was for ever encouraging little children to make collage and paintings and send them in and to do it on brown paper or newspaper or whatever and sometimes the children would send these in and the pictures would be put on the board in the studio, and one year some very enthusiastic presenter suggested that they should make a collage with autumn leaves, because they'd done an item about the trees and the changing colours and the different patterns of the leaves and so on, and into the office came hundreds and hundreds of envelopes and you opened them and a shower of withering leaves fell out because they weren't too well-glued on to the newspaper or.. but one learnt by... it was still nevertheless a very good trend, because it showed the involvement, it also showed in PLAYSCHOOL'S terms how closely geared the programme always was to the time of year that it was going out and to the child's one immediate surroundings. Um, but in other programmes, we had to think very carefully if we could actually have enough staff to manage to run a competition, because unless we had we couldn't do it.

GILLARD: You covered the whole age range. Where did you begin and where you reckon to end?

SIMS: Well, we reckoned really to begin at about 3. I mean we knew perfectly well that 2-year-olds would be watching because that flickering light and the music and movement is very attractive to a

child, but on the whole the small childrens' programmes were really designed for the coming on to 3-year-old. I remember going to a public meeting once and a woman got up and was very cross and said why didn't the BBC do more programmes for 1-year-olds. Well I was astonished, because I think at that age it's a kind of hypnotic thing. I mean we start.. we wanted to catch the child's attention from the time when a child can understand really what's going on, which I suppose begins at.. well you know from 2 onwards. But we were particularly concerned with the age range just before the child goes to school. It's interesting, I mean the BBC.. we thought like Freida Lingstrom, we agreed that if the Television was there that audience was a very important one and should have programmes specially designed. It was very different in some other countries. I think in France they thought that Television was bad for children anyway, and so you shouldn't make any programmes for children, it might stop them watching and it was not important. And there are these two attitudes. We've always taken the other, that they're going to watch anyway, and I think they are, and you might as well have a few things that are suitable for them and helpful to them.

GILLARD: And at what age as it were did you hand them over to general programmes?

SIMS: We tended not to make teenage programmes. We felt that most teenagers wanted in fact to get away from childhood things and to be part of a general audience. We recognised that you know teenagers as a group were very much segregated by the pop world, and that they wanted a lot of pop programmes of their own, but more general programmes

we thought they would find, as I think they do, from the more general output. In fact I think there are a lot of series and dramas which from about 12 onwards really, or 11/12, children will find from the whole range of output, so it didn't seem to us that we should particularly concentrate on that age group, although we did think perhaps there was a need for some teenage drama involving that age group and their own particular concerns, but we didn't think the right place for it was in the Childrens' slot, which we thought.. this before 6 o'clock in the evening time, should be for children before they went really to their secondary schools. We were thinking largely of the under.. the pre-school children up to the age of 5, then there was a group of programmes which we were really making for the 5 to 8-year-olds - the one's who've gone to school. And then the ones who really regarded themselves as pretty grown-up anyway, once they'd reached 8 or 9, and up until about 11 or 12. I mean some children would go on watching much longer out of a sense of nostalgia, and because they enjoyed some particular kinds of programmes, but we weren't too worried if when they felt a bit grown-up they switched off and didn't join Television until later in the evening.

END OF TAPE 4

IDENTIFICATION

Miss Monica Sims, and we're now on TAPE 5 and we're still talking about her period.. 10 or 11, 12 years in..as Head of.. 11 years as Head of Childrens' Programmes in Television. You had a remarkable penetration as they say into your potential audience. I mean...

SIMS: Yes, I think people in the BBC tended to think that Childrens' Programmes going out at an off-peak time need not be taken too seriously, but when one looks at the proportions of children of different age groups in the audience, they were reaching much higher proportions than most evening programmes were. I mean I can remember pointing out that even um.. a quite difficult programme like JACKANORY, which was simply actors really reading straight stories, telling stories straight to camera - a very simple programme - would be getting as big an audience as PANORAMA but with nothing like the resources and the budget of PANORAMA, and certainly the popular programmes for the wider age range, like BLUE PETER, were regularly getting 8 million at one time. I mean audiences go up and down partly according to the opposition on ITV, and very much according to the time of year. Childrens' audiences are seasonal and a lot more children are out of doors at that time of the afternoon in the summer than in the winter, and the large audiences were always in the winter. But GRANGE HILL, which became tremendously popular, the school story dealing with childrens' contemporary problems, reached 9 million and continues to get very.. to pull in very large audiences, in spite of really strong composition.. competition from the commercial channel. (Mmm) So, and even um..

something like PLAYSCHOOL would be watched by more than half of all under 5s in the country. So the influence and the familiarity with these programmes amongst children and their mothers, often families watching with them, really was immense, and one was conscious of the responsibility really that if we were getting so many children looking to the BBC to provide them with good programmes, we really did have to try and set standards of quality which would make them come to expect high quality programmes as they grew older, and we couldn't get away with just feeding them sort of easy kind of rubbish. We were always rather against some of the.. you know the cute little puppets with singing and dancing that one saw on so many other country's screens, and we tried to buy from abroad - because we wanted very much to get an international perspective into the programmes as well as a purely national one. We tried to buy the best quality programmes we could from America and from Europe, indeed from all round the world, and then to put them into English versions if they were in a foreign language. And we did in fact in the days when I was first there in the 60s, have some really very good films from Eastern Europe for instance, made to terrifically high standards, because in those days they had a subsidised film industry for childrens' film, or very, very high quality animation. Unfortunately, it's much harder to get those now but it's not quite so crucial now that the Department has more money and resources to make programmes of its own, although animation continues to be something that is very expensive to do. From America we tried very hard to buy the best cartoons we could get and afford, and it was the only place where cartoons really were mass produced, and they seemed to be an essential ingredient of popular programmes for children, but we were selective in

the ones we took. We didn't just buy any old thing to fill the space at the cheapest price we could get it, and some of them became quite expensive even to buy.

GILLARD: A very important development of course was interesting children in the news of the day.

SIMS: Yes, Childrens' Hour in the past of course had had Stephen Kinghall talking about current affairs, and we had always introduced a certain element of current affairs into magazine programmes, but no.. we hadn't got any kind of News Bulletin for children and we were rather dismayed to find in an Audience Research Survey that we did in.. the late 60s, that children liked most forms of Television, except programmes that just had people talking and the News. And there was a really strong feeling again.. that the News was boring and they didn't like it and they didn't want it. Yet it was also clear from the evidence that children were actually sometimes very disturbed and bothered by what they saw in News Bulletins. And as our programmes were followed by the early evening News, which sometimes did contain world shattering events, which did worry children, we thought perhaps part of our service in trying to do a complete Television Service for children, which we were attempting, was to include a daily News Bulletin, which would help to put some of these world events into a context that children could understand. I mean a lot of it is so very puzzling. It's.. however, it is a very hard thing to do, to try and explain to children of 8 or 9 the background to the Arab/Israeli conflict in 2 minutes, when none of the words are familiar, the geography is

unfamiliar, is a very... is very difficult. And I think that JOHN CRAVEN'S NEWSROUND has made a valiant effort to make comprehensible to a child audience world events, and we now.. we know that JOHN CRAVEN'S NEWSROUND is for a lot of children their main source of.. of News, because they like.. they watch it in preference to the adult News Bulletins. Mind you, we didn't only want to do News Bulletins. We thought it was important to do it looking like a News, because of this an.. this reaction of children against News programmes, and so we had to persuade our colleagues in News to allow us to use a News Studio, we also had to persuade correspondents and reporters around the world to file reports for JOHN CRAVEN'S NEWSROUND separately from the ones they were sending in to the main News Room. That turned out to be one of the easiest things because of them had children of their own and were very pleased to do things for JOHN CRAVEN'S NEWSROUND, because they knew their own children would be watching and would then see their fathers on the screen. Convincing the News.. our main News Department actually I think was something of a surprise to them, because I think when they let us do it at the beginning as an experiment they thought it would fold within a few weeks and that we weren't really being serious about it. And they were quite surprised when they saw that children were interested and that we had managed to make a properly professional News Bulletin, and we were very lucky I think to have John Craven at the beginning to.. to work on this. (Mmm) We... I mean it wasn't only JOHN CRAVEN'S NEWSROUND that we introduced. We introduced various other kinds of programmes where we felt they didn't exist for children. We did some religious programmes for children. There hadn't really been any for quite a long time. In fact we attempted really to do the whole of

the New.. the Old Testament "IN THE BEGINNING..." with specially drawn graphics to illustrate the Bible stories. We started Saturday morning programmes on the basis really of a 'phone-in, which had not been done before, and MULTICOLOURED SWOP SHOP showed that children would enjoy lifting the 'phone and talking to Noel Edmonds in the studio, and we were able to do something which was partly to do with pop music and pop stars, but had also quite a lot of more serious elements embedded within it and to do a kind of rolling programme that went on for 3 hours live on a Saturday morning. We started some quite interesting drama for .. in particular I suppose GRANGE HILL, because there had been no school stories for quite a long time, and the ones that used to be were old P ublic School type things, and here we were trying to reflect the sort of school most children do nowadays go to, which is a Comprehensive School. And so it was very, very carefully designed and it was interesting the response we had, because some parents I think were worried that we were setting a bad example in the way that children talked and behaved and however most of the children themselves didn't feel this, and in fact a lot of them wrote in and said their own schools were far worse than the one that was portrayed on the screen, and they had far worse difficulties. The stories were always really very carefully worked out so that bad behaviour was seen to be bad behaviour and the child usually got its comeuppance in the end. But it has tackled quite tricky subjects like - oh well, bullying for one and drug taking for another, and has done so I think on the whole responsibly. And in spite of what people say about the language it hasn't ever used a four-letter-word, and the language has been really quite carefully controlled. I do sometimes wonder whether the behaviour is setting a bad example, but on

the other hand it seems to be the way a lot of children do behave these days, and anyway GRANGE HILL is not the only drama going out within childrens' time. It happens to be at the moment the most popular one.

GILLARD: You were saying that you.. that you were very selective in bringing in cartoon programmes from the United States, of course you were selective over the whole range of the United States possibilities, and there was the great SESAME STREET thing, SESAME STREET being a massive Childrens' Television Workshop production in the United States, funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, no less, which was puppet-based learning, in a way, wasn't it? I mean very much pressed up you I know to take for the BBC.

SIMS: Yes, well we very much admired SESAME STREET and the enterprise that went into making it and the funding that they managed to get for it and the fact that it was so carefully designed by educationalists and sociologists to suit the particularly disadvantaged groups of children in the United States, in particular black children in the ghettos who were through SESAME STREET actually getting the rudiments anyway of learning the alphabet and so on. And we.. when we saw it we were bowled over by the glossiness of the production, and how well the animation was done and so on and we asked if we could buy segments of the programme to put into our own linking format. We thought the programme as a whole was so well-designed for the American audience that it was not entirely appropriate here for very young children who weren't familiar even with some of the vocabulary. I mean you know you talked about sidewalks not pavements, the milk came in

cartons from the supermarket rather than from the milkman in bottles on the doorstep, and it had an American feel to it, which I.. we all thought was fine for children a little bit older, and SESAME STREET actually was designed for 6-year-olds, whereas we were making programmes for 3 to 5-year-olds, because in this country they go to school a year earlier, on the whole, than in the States, and it was very much a teaching programme which we admired. It however was not in tune with the educational theories of Nursery Education in this country. SESAME STREET is a didactic programme where there are right answers and wrong answers. Nursery Education in this country attempts to lead children to find out for themselves and discover things that they need to know without there necessarily always being a right answer. I mean there may be a number of different answers, but it's up to the child to find out. And WATCH WITH MOTHER and PLAYSCHOOL have rather been based on that theory, that the child is encouraged to explore for himself or herself rather than told a series of answers to things. Now if.. the other thing is that we have always done programmes for small children live, or nearly live, in order to reflect the changing seasons and what's happening in the world around the child. SESAME STREET is built and has to be built on a pattern of repeats, so that you would never have anything that specifically related to the child's own experience during the summer in this country - you might be getting pretty films of snow (LAUGH) in Connecticut or somewhere. So I mean there were a lot of things about it that we liked very much, and there were some that we didn't think were entirely right for our particular audience. So we said could we buy some parts of the programme to.. to present ourselves, and at that time because SESAME STREET was in English the Childrens'

Television Workshop felt that it ought to be bought in its entirety. And anyway it was very carefully designed as a whole programme, and they weren't interested in letting us do that. I mean it's interesting that more recently they have sold segments to other countries, they had to of course for foreign language versions in some countries, and in others where the culture is very different - I mean in Africa or India for instance, it isn't necessarily appropriate to have it in such an American context, so they.. they have now.. they do foreign language versions for other countries and that might have worked for us, but as it happened.. but we didn't feel we could take the whole thing. And particularly also one has to remember that it was very expensive and had we bought it we wouldn't of had enough money to make our own programmes as well. We would have been doing that instead of PLAYSCHOOL and other programmes that we were making ourselves which would have been hard on the people we would of had to have got rid of as a result, and also not doing always the kind of programmes we thought were necessary for that age group. It was a very difficult decision to take and it was hard for most people in the BBC to understand why we didn't just latch on to it and say, "This wonderful programme, let's buy it!" But in the end I think they recognised that there were fairly good reasons why we didn't at the time.

GILLARD: I always felt that there was a fundamental flaw in SESAME STREET, that I myself was a teacher for some years and I know that learning has to be a difficult process at some stage, and SESAME STREET presents it always as being a sort of happy-go-lucky cartoony

kind of exercise that you don't have to slave over, and that's misleading children.

SIMS: SESAME STREET certainly tried to pretend that learning was easy and always fun, and of course it isn't. And it had the other disadvantage that it was based on the belief that a child's attention span is no more than 2 minutes, because American Television is so geared to commercial interruptions anyway, and commercial messages have to be given very briefly, that it was rather designed like an extended commercial or a succession of commercials. And we recognising the pressures on children had always felt that one of our jobs was to try and increase childrens' powers of concentration. It requires an awful lot to listen to a 15 minute story, just to watch and listen to what somebody is saying to you for that length of time, but I think with good JACKANORYS we often did succeed in that - not everything has to have funny animals being animated and jumping up and down all the time with pop music. And also we felt another thing, we in PLAYSCHOOL have always had presenters talking directly to the child at home, SESAME STREET doesn't do that, there are usually... there is a narrator talking to a group of children, so the children at home are over hearing really what is being said, but in our programmes the direct contact with the one or two children at home alone has always seemed to us particularly important for children who don't get much contact with other people.
I...

END OF TAPE 5

IDENTIFICATION

TAPE 6 and we're just going to finish off now one or two points about Childrens' Television.

SIMS: Childrens' Programmes in the BBC have always been aware of a lot of deprived children who may really have very little contact with grown-ups. I mean we know that quite a lot of children in the audience live in homes of one sort or another, or are perhaps neglected by their parents, are put in front of the Television as a way of being looked after and given some kind of stimulus, and we've always really felt that it was our job to try and provide that stimulus. We also.. always felt it was very important that there would be one or two people who would be talking to those children and trying to get some sort of response from them. And I, when I first went to Childrens' Programmes, went to one or two playgroups and nurseries where I saw groups of children actually watching - I mean I simply looked at them looking at PLAYSCHOOL. And what was very interesting was to see particularly the Asian and West Indian children dumped with child minders but put in groups in front of the Television as a way of keeping them quiet, and the way they responded, particularly of course if they saw some one who looked a bit like them or their own parents, and the way they responded to them, and that was very noticeable in programmes like PLAYSCHOOL where the presenter talked to them. It also was one of the things that influenced our thinking on BLUE PETER where it's very easy for adults to be irritated and sceptical about the programme's suggestions to children to make things out of waste materials and

collect washing-up liquid bottles in order to make Christmas presents or something, and yet when you actually read the letters or met some of the children who were involved in this, you realised that quite a lot of the children who watched that programme came from really very deprived backgrounds, had difficulty even in getting hold of scrap materials, but depended on the presenters and certainly the animals in the programme - the dog and the cat and other pets brought into the programme - to give them a kind of family feeling, and they were surrogate pets in a way and the presenters were very important to them as personalities to whom they could relate particularly if they didn't have their own families taking very much notice of them. And remembering this, when BLUE PETER began to encourage children to help raise money to help others who were less fortunate than themselves, it was a significant decision never to ask the children in the audience for money, this was a difference from the ITV programmes where the comparable magazine called MAGPIE used to ask for money. BLUE PETER, on the other hand, always said "Well a lot of these children can't get hold of any money." I mean the parents may be out of work, they may only have one parent anyway and it's the one thing they can't get. On the other hand, a lot of children can with a bit of ingenuity, get hold of scrap materials of one sort or another, which is how the idea of the appeals came about. And the other idea behind it really was not just we ought to be raising money for charitable causes, but we ought to provide an opportunity for children who feel themselves to be rather helpless members of society to play an active part in doing something that they know can be of benefit to other people, and make the children themselves feel they're doing something useful. We had a lot of arguments about it because we were sometimes accused of being a drop

in the ocean, what good is it encouraging children to collect scrap metal or cotton or something, when what is really needed is political action? But if you don't start somewhere, and if you're talking to a child you must start in a context which they understand, you will.. it's the only way you will begin to help them to realise what the problems are in the world, both in their own country and overseas. And we quite deliberately used to alternate appeals for people at home, handicapped children, old people whatever, with appeals for people in other countries, and it was a good way of introducing children to difficulties in Africa if you lived in a drought region, for instance or earthquake disasters and the victims there. And the.. all those programmes and BLUE PETER has sometimes been accused of too much do-gooding and trying to raise money for good causes and so on, they were actually very good programme material. They were making it accessible to children by allowing the children themselves to do some work. Because it was quite hard work in collecting things which could be turned into money to help all sorts of people in all sorts of.. and also for them to see that even though they themselves may have lived in fairly poor circumstances, that there were a lot of other people around the world who were even worse off than they were. And so I .. I think that the tradition of the BLUE PETER appeals is one that the BBC should be pleased was started, and it has now been extended, and other appeals like the Bob Geldof one and so on, but for years before that the audience was being invited to consider other peoples' problems and see if there was some way they could help, and I think the foundations laid in BLUE PETER were very sensibly considered, though rather difficult to organise sometimes. Sometimes the charities concerned were overwhelmed hby the response and found it

very difficult to cope with it, and it is in fact quite salutary to realise that BLUE PETER's inshore life boats which were an appeal... children collected old paperback books in order to raise money for them, and did, and have now.. there are life boats all over the country with BLUE PETER's name of them, have now saved more than 200 lives as a direct result of the childrens' efforts. So there is a tangible end product as well as a general educational one in telling children about the world around them, but not easy to organise...

GILLARD: No...

SIMS: ...and something that BLUE PETER may find that it's impossible to go on doing in the future. I hope not, I hope they will manage to keep going.,

GILLARD: You've certainly started a big institution there in public life, there's no doubt about that. I think we ought to move on now to your next.. the next chapter of your career, which of course was Controller Radio 4, which you.. which was your job from 1978 to '83 I think. Of course, up to now, how can I put it, up to now you had been in your broadcasting career you'd been ministering to very clearly defined audiences, to..in WOMAN'S HOUR to women, in Childrens' Programmes, Television for children. Now you were in charge of a Network which addressed itself to a broad audience, not a specifically defined one. Did you find that a problem?

SIMS: I thought I would to begin with, but came to realise that the Radio 4 audience really was almost as clearly defined as all the others - a different one and perhaps with more varied groups of people within it, because it.. it soon became clear to me reading listeners' reactions to programmes and proposals to change the Networks and so on, that you could in fact identify the audience. The.. I.. the way you could identify it really was what became clear from Audience Research, was that most of the people in the Radio 4 audience had had some sort of Further Education, or at least had stayed on at school until about the age of 18. And that the people who listened to Radio 4 tended to be in some way leaders of local opinion, people who had made their way in the world and who actually required from Radio intelligent information and stimulation - not background listening which could be provided by other kinds of Radio. So that, although they are a very wide cross section, the Radio 4 audience, and of all ages, I think their interest and powers of concentration are probably rather different from listeners to Radios 1 and 2, Local Radio and commercial radio. Not as highly-educated as some Radio 3 listeners, nor as specialised in their interests in.. particularly in music, but nevertheless the leaders of society at different walks of life, both politically in the national sphere, in Local Government, but also in neighbourhood projects and so on. And with a very, very catholic interest in all sorts of subjects and kinds of Radio. And although it was very different from working in Childrens' Programmes, the actual variety of output was rather similar in that we tried to do a bit of everything on Radio 4, even music in the day.. days when I was there, which doesn't happen now. So it wasn't such a shock to the system, and also I had always all my life been a

listener to Radio 4 or the Home Service as it had been before that, even though I'd worked for the Light Programme on WOMAN'S HOUR, and I had remembered from my childhood listening to CHILDRENS' HOUR first and then very often to Radio Plays, so it didn't seem strange. I was familiar with the output. I was only shocked when I arrived to find almost.. well first of all the wave lengths has been changed, which caused pandemonium amongst the listeners. And secondly, in the discussions about Radio in the future, the proposal that the nature of Radio 4 should be changed, and almost from the word go I was involved in discussions about the future of broadcasting.

GILLARD: Well, we'll come on to that, but Radio 4.. you've told us already that when you took over Childrens' Programmes in Television the organisation was in rather a messy state, now you came to Radio 4 and that too wasn't very happy, was it?

SIMS: It wasn't a very happy operation because there had been a good deal of conflict really between the News & Current Affairs output and the Controller, and also Radio I think itself was in a slightly depressed state of declining audiences, feeling very much that Television had taken all the lime light away from it - not all D epartments were unhappy. I mean there were a lot of good production units which were functioning well. But there was undoubtedly a tension between the organisation of the Network and some of the Production Departments.

GILLARD: Were you given any special writ about that to clear it all up?

SIMS: No, I really wasn't given any brief at all, except I was just asked to come and try make people feel a bit happier. I wasn't actually given any direction at all about the way the Network should go. None at all, I had to find that out for myself. The way.. I mean we were.. the people in Radio at the time, not me because I hadn't been there, I think were quite surprised at what difficulties the audience had with the change of wave lengths. I'd been told before I came that it would be an advantage to Radio 4 to be on the long wave because it would be heard nationally. I don't think any one had realised how difficult reception was in certain areas, which meant that people who had been used to hearing Radio 4 on the medium wave suddenly couldn't find it because there was too much interference on long wave, and there were some parts of the country where the duplicate VHF was not audible either. So my first few months were very much involved in trying to answer letters from listeners and talks with the engineers about how it would be possible to make Radio 4 more accessible to people who actually wanted to be able to get it.

GILLARD: What actually was the role of Radio 4 at this stage in the 4 Network system?

SIMS: It was to be the mainly speech Network, carrying the important News & Current Affairs output of the BBC, but also to provide a mixed service of information and entertainment, which included light

entertainment and drama, magazine programmes, quiz shows and so on. But at that time it had and while I was there continued to have a certain amount of music, but not the pop music of Radio 1 nor the highbrow classical music of Radio 3, nor the light music of Radio 2. It was.. it was a still a mixed broadcasting channel. There were a lot of people in the BBC who thought it was not generic enough. In fact the News & Current Affairs people thought that it should be a Rolling News Network. And as soon as I came the very important spine of Current Affairs Programmes which ran through the day from the TODAY programme to PM at lunchtime.. to.. I mean the WORLD AT ONE at lunchtime and PM at teatime and the WORLD TONIGHT were all... were trying to expand and to take over more of the Network, and as soon as I arrived thought that this was the moment when they would be able to take in another hour or two, and I was the person who really had to try and work out a sensible balance, because had we actually stopped doing a lot of the other kinds of programming, there was really nowhere else for it to go. It also became clear, I think from audience research and from the letters we had from listeners, that most of the listeners liked it because it was a mixed channel. They didn't want an undiluted diet of one kind of programme, however strong the generic system may be in other countries where there may be more channels, in the BBC there was still and still is I think a lot of audience loyalty to the idea of the Home, Light and Third, even though we now have 4 Networks. And I don't think most people who choose to listen to Radio 4 want the same thing all through the day, or variations of the same thing all through the day.

GILLARD: While we're on this theme, perhaps it came a bit later, but wasn't there talk at one time of a 5th Network, and pushing a lot of your material on to a sort of Network of Local Stations?

SIMS: The..

GILLARD: Wasn't this all very unsettling to people who worked for Radio 4?

SIMS: Yes, it was very unsettling. I mean it wasn't unsettling for a lot of the programme producers who just went on making their programmes and didn't think very much about it.

END OF TAPE 6

Under copyright

IDENTIFICATION

..BBC, Miss Monica Sims. TAPE 7

GILLARD: Once you got things settled down and re-organised and re-arranged according to your own ideas, Radio 4 managed to achieve a very respectable kind of audience penetration and set of audience figures, surely?

SIMS: Yes, I mean I think it's remarkable that a programme that does actually require some attention, is not simply background reading, did reach, oh and still does I think, read about.. reach about 25% of the population in this country every week, and certain times of the day, particularly in the early mornings, has very considerable audiences, particularly the TODAY programme, which gets around 3 million listeners every morning, which for Radio these days is quite a high audience and comparable with the sorts of audiences that the pop music network is getting. But there are other times in the day when the audience drops very considerably and then comes up again depending on what it is. I think the thing one has to remember about Radio 4 is has never.. it has never been any kind of sequence broadcasting Network. It has always contained distinct and discrete programmes. It has its News & Current Affairs Sequences at the crucial times of the day, and inbetween it has a wide mixture of programmes and the audience has never been expected to stay listening for hours at a time. It is expected to switch on for the particular interests, whether they are gardening or politics or medicine or science or whatever - here we have a half hour

programme or a 45 minute programme or an hour's programme on a special subject, which is carefully researched and produced and is not the um.. vox pop disc jockey chat of a great many Radio Stations. It's... when I went to Radio 4 I felt that the most important quality that had to be preserved in broadcasting at that time, and still is it seems to me, is the intellectual edge that the programme had in many of its kinds of output, though not all. And I felt it should apply across the board to whatever sort of subject it was attempting. There is a terrible problem though when you are running a Network which is basically News & Current Affairs oriented, because you want to be able to take breaking news as it happens, or important events in Parliament as they happen, and once we were allowed permission to broadcast Parliament live it was clearly necessary to be able, when something was happening, to go over to Parliament to take it, which is very hard to do when you have fixed programmes in timeslots which the audience is expecting. I mean we had established in Radio 4 an afternoon play every afternoon at 3 o'clock, and if you decided that what.. the debate in Parliament was so important that you should cancel the play, you were in great trouble if the debate didn't live up to expectations, and it turned out not to get interesting until the evening, by which time you weren't there any more. So there is a tension for air, the Controller of Radio 4, always, between what is necessary to carry live and the fixed programming, which has created expectations among the audience, and that was a problem all the time I was there. We solved the Parliamentary problem by putting Parliament on to VHF. We were only able to do that when we had actually cleared the SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES off VHF in the afternoons, and we did eventually manage to put them into the mornings so that we could do that. But it

still.. it left a problem, because not everybody throughout the country can receive either VHF or the long wave, and so you were always depriving a few people if you weren't able to duplicate the output, and I'm afraid that's a fact of life which we are still living with. There was some criticism that with fixed built programmes on Radio 4 it really wasn't flexible enough for something carrying the main News & Current Affairs of BBC Radio, and there was a lot of argument really at the time of the.. discussing the future of broadcasting, that Radio 2 as a disc jockey sequence Network would be in a better position really to take breaking news, because you could always interrupt it - at least you could interrupt it more easily than you could Radio 4. However, I think when the Falkland's Crisis broke upon us and the nation was so interested in what was happening and wanting the first news of whatever was happening in the Falklands, Radio 4 showed that it actually was possible because of the public interest if necessary to remove a programme to put in a report from the South Atlantic, or to carry a debate in Parliament, without the people feeling they'd been deprived of their favourite programmes. I mean the one that I remember most vividly was an ANY QUESTIONS? which... one of the most popular programmes still on Radio 4, which was normally broadcast on a Saturday lunchtime. On that particular Saturday there was an Emergency Debate in the Commons about the Falklands, and we cancelled ANY QUESTIONS? in favour of carrying the debate from the morning right across lunchtime into the afternoon - and we didn't have a single complaint, because the audience were so keen to know what was happening in Parliament. And I think during the time of that Emergency, partly because Radio was getting a lot of the News long before Television, because there weren't television

cameras in that particular theatre of war, we actually made over 600 alterations to the schedule to carry events as they were happening. And although, I mean administratively it was a nightmare because you were constantly changing and updating things, as far as the audience was concerned it was fine and nobody complained. However, they complained in their hundreds if we cancelled an afternoon play for a debate in Parliament which looked as if it was going to be interesting and in the event turned out to be very turgid and boring and people said they'd much rather have the play and wait for a report of proceedings in Parliament later in the evening. So I don't think having a mixed broadcasting Network containing built programmes is necessarily impossible to fit in Current Affairs as they are happening - I think the Falklands showed that that was possible. I felt from the Audience Research and the letters we got from listeners, that the general audience for Radio 4 didn't want an entirely News & Current Affairs Network. There we..are indeed a few people in the audience who only listen to that output and nothing else, but a great many of the listeners to the Network listen also .. listen to those Sequences, but they also listen whatever their particular interests are to perhaps WOMAN'S HOUR in the afternoon may be, to a programme about music in the evening, to one of the quizzes, to a play, to a light entertainment series whatever it is - and very hard to divide the audience up so much that you have a News & Current Affairs man and a Drama man, or more likely woman, because people aren't like that. A lot of people still like to hang on to a mixture. And we're unusual in the world, I think, in keeping this mixed broadcasting, but it seemed to me that that's what

a Radio 4 audience was looking for and it was the sort of Network that I was keen to um.. extend as far as I could. Um..

GILLARD: There is this gibe that it's an elderly and dying audience; is that true?

SIMS; Oh I don't think so at all. The aud.. I mean the profile of the audience does show that indeed there are a lot of elderly people who are retired and have the time and inclination to listen to Radio 4, and people who have reached a stage in life where they want the sort of information they can get from Radio 4 do listen to it. But there's a very large middle aged audience, and quite a lot of young people, particularly young people in Higher Education, who want to be able to combine Radio 4 for the information they get from it with perhaps Radio 1 for the pop music that they also want. And the largest section of the audience for Radio 4 is in the 34 to 49 age group, which compares with a much more elderly audience for Local Radio and for Radio 2, and it was one of the reasons why I was not in favour of a combination of Radio 4 with Local Radio, because I thought the age profile and actually the education of the listeners was different, whereas there is much more in common between the Local Radio audience and the Radio 2 audience. If you really think of the consequences of combining Local Radio with Radio 4 you'll see that you would lose from Radio 4 an awful lot of the programmes which are the backbone of it, because if you said you wanted to have your local programme in the mornings because it gave you information about local traffic and weather and conditions at home, that would mean you couldn't also have the TODAY

programme, if that happened to be your interest, and you would be deprived.. be deprived of a lot of things that Radio.. that are the strengths, one of the strengths anyway of Radio 4.

GILLARD: Mmm I remember you told me at this time when you were Controller Radio 4 that you had a lot of difficulty with producers who couldn't adjust to the fact that the audience had swung over to Television and that if you placed a production at 3 o'clock in the afternoon they felt upset because they felt it ought to be 8 o'clock in the evening. Tell us a bit more about that.

SIMS: Yes, I think when I went there was still a hang over that the main peak listening times were in the evenings, and the research showed the absolute opposite - the main listening time to Radio is daytime. And I was keen that whatever we did in the evenings would be repeated in the daytime or visa versa because the evening audience is really a minute one, very, very small. That doesn't mean to say that it's not important because there are some people who can only listen to Radio in the evenings, and it became clear too that the people listening in cars was a growing audience, and some of them were on the move both daytime and evening, but as far as I'm concerned the peak Radio time listening is daytime listening with repeats in the evenings. Though I think there is an audience late night, for people turning away from Television and starting to get ready for bed.

GILLARD: Organisationally, you were answering to a Director of Programmes and then to an MDR.

SIMS: Oh not there wasn't a Director of Programmes at that time. I mean Directors of Programmes come and go and they're invented when thought to be necessary. (LAUGH) At the time there was a Managing Director and that was it, and 4 Network Controllers and a Controller of Local Radio, so I was working to the Managing Director.

GILLARD: But you had a fairly free hand?

SIMS: Very, yes.

GILLARD: Now what about your relations then with the Controllers of the other 3 Networks. Did you get together a great deal? Did you have cordial relations, or what?

SIMS: Yes, we had very cordial relations. At the beginning we were still trying to make certain economies which meant we shared certain programmes, and at that time Radios 3 and 4 were combined on occasions for particular kinds of output, which is how we actually came to take one of the Proms during the PROM and had a concert every Thursday evening, that was shared with Radio 3 and I thought it was an enrichment to Radio 4 and liked.. I liked having music on Radio 4. I mean not too much, but I thought it was enriched by having a certain amount of music. We also occasionally combined with Radio 2, not very often, we had perfectly cordial relations but we all recognised that we were in fact doing very different jobs so we didn't have a great many meetings. We met together with the Managing Director and talked about some of our difficulties, which were nearly always difficulties over the

Networks and reception problems, and who was going to be able to hear certain kinds of programmes on which frequency. And our real problem in.. with Radio 4 came with the National Regions where they didn't have a VHF, so couldn't carry any programmes that we put only on to VHF, they could only get the long wave, and in some places the long wave was subject to very bad interference indeed and very difficult to hear. (Mmm) And anyway it was in competition with their own local Regional Programming.

GILLARD: Yes, yes. And what about the production departments? I mean how did you get on with those and where were they strong and where were they weak? Drama was obviously strong, were there any weaknesses?

SIMS: Oh yes, of course. And um.. I felt when I went to Radio 4 to begin with that it was very much a south-eastern-based entity, partly because of the dominance of News & Current Affairs, and I thought as a National Network it was very important to increase the Regional Spread, and I spent quite a lot of time talking to producers in the National Regions and the Network Production Centres to get more input to the Network from them, and they were delighted really and responded with I think some excellent ideas and series. Within the production departments in London, I found it very different from Television because the whole budgeting system was different. They didn't have total costing for one thing and their budgets seemed to be entirely arrived at on the basis of what they had produced the year before, which meant if one wanted to adjust the balance at all it was actually very difficult to make those adjustments. But I did try very hard to

encourage some Departments which hadn't had many outlets to produce more for the Networks in order to increase the variety of output. And during the time I was there we actually did introduce a great many different sorts of strands, most of which simply hadn't.. hadn't been available before, partly because the Departments who offered them hadn't had enough money or resources to do them. I was slightly.. I was conscious of that fact that the programmes themselves were perhaps in danger of getting into a rut and reproducing themselves, and that we were hearing the same voices over and over again and we weren't introducing enough fresh blood, particularly we weren't introducing enough younger broadcasters, so we invented strands at different times where we particularly went out of our ways to bring in new younger broadcasters - many of them now perfectly well-established, we started on the whole doing them late at night, where if they caused a lot of upset they wouldn't be too much.. they wouldn't be offending too many people. I was also.. I didn't think we were doing enough anything like about international affairs, and encouraged as many series as I could to be made in other countries, all over the place. We had a lot of new.. new series on... in areas that really hadn't been touched on before, like the whole world of business. We had a new strand called IN BUSINESS, which came out of consultations with businessmen and trade unionists and so on. We certainly increased the whole idea of small business ENTERPRISE with that series. We did far.. we did the first programme on the air about computers and computer skills, it was called CHIP SHOP. And we did things like the FOOD PROGRAMME and MEDICINE NOW and the MONEY PROGRAMME, and a whole series about the Police, which was not a

confrontational political series, but simply about the every day jobs
that Policemen had to encounter.

END TAPE 7

Under copyright

IDENTIFICATION

TAPE 8

GILLARD: You were telling us about some of the.. the programmes that.. that featured in Radio 4 in your time.

SIMS: Well, I think I was concerned to broaden the brief, having got a strong spine of News & Current Affairs I wanted as much variety in the rest of the output as possible. We had various.. for instance, we had various established religious spots, like PRAYER FOR THE DAY and THOUGHT FOR THE DAY and a SERVICE on Sundays, but we really didn't have anything much about comparative religion, or exploration of peoples' faiths. It was something that we'd done a bit in WOMAN'S HOUR, and I knew actually was of great interest and concern to the audience. And one of the.. the people who embarked on really a very major series, and which turned into a thought provoking one for the Network, was the one Gerrald Priestland did called PRIESTLAND'S PROGRESS, where he talked to a great many different people about their own beliefs, and we followed that with one about world religions, and both these series were taken up and use in discussion groups in local churches around the country, and re-broadcast by Local Radio Stations. So they had a considerable follow up and proved to be something that people were clearly quite glad to hear. We had er.. we try.. we tried to vary the sound of the Network. We tried to get regional speech as well as standard south-eastern English, and we did it through putting in quite a lot of very short programmes, breaking up the longer ones, and we did it

with some programmes about the English language itself, like **LOCALLY SPEAKING**, where Brian Redhead explored regional accents, and others about the development of English and the way people spoke. And we did it through quite short sharp things, like **POETRY PLEASE**, where listeners simply wrote in with their own requests or **NATURAL BREAK**, which was naturalists talking about particular animals or birds or experiences they'd had. And it was all an attempt to make the Network less standard and less predictable, because surprise.. fixed points and surprise seemed to me necessary in any general mixed broadcasting Network. We also tried to encourage more feedback from listeners, which I'd been used to in the past and thought was missing. So we started a programme called **FEEDBACK** in which listeners gave their complaints and criticisms, and we had other 'phone in programmes where listeners had a chance of talking to people in the BBC who had made decisions, and made policy and so on. We tried to bring back some of the Features that had been rather lost from Radio broadcasting. I mean Radio is such a wonderfully evocative medium, and people were well aware of this in terms of drama, but the wonderful Features of the past had largely been lost through lack of resources, the Features Department had disappeared. And so one of the things we did was to encourage, particularly the Regions, to try and do the atmospheric kind of Feature where you went to a place, perhaps, Ray Gosling for instance travelled in Priestley's footsteps and went through Britain. In Scotland, they recreated the life of a country house and so on, using all the Radio techniques at their disposal, which were a good contrast with a lot of the very instant News broadcasting that also featured on the Networks. We tried very hard indeed to extend the range of comedy, which is by far the most difficult exercise both I

think in Radio and Television. One of our great successes was HITCH HIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, which I still think was more effective on Radio than on Television. And we experimented with the placing of it because we discovered that it had a very mixed audience, and a lot of very young people wanted to hear it, it became a cult. So when we repeated it, instead of repeating it once a week, we stripped it through the week and had it every evening so that it got an even greater following. We did exactly the same when we did the dramatisation of Tolkien's LORD OF THE RINGS, which we also stripped for quite a long.. which again reached a particular cult audience of a lot of young people who were particularly keen on this kind of fantasy. We tried, as a result of good deal of pressure from the audience, to bring back childrens' programmes - Childrens Hour having been defunct for a long time, because the place where it had happened at 5 o'clock had been completely out gunned by Television - there were very very few children who were available to listen at that time of day, they were all looking at Television. We tried to find other times when children might be glad to listen to the Radio, because we were keen to get them back as listeners. We knew that quite a lot of the children listened to the Schools Programmes on Radio and so had a taste of good Radio Features and Drama, and so we experimented with story telling and Childrens' Programmes during the school holidays, when they might be available in the daytime. And that has been developed and I hope will go on being developed, because it was very odd for me, having been Head of Childrens' Programmes, to come back to Radio 4 and then be accused of not having any childrens' programmes on Radio 4, but really it was because there wasn't anywhere to put them, or of the right kind to

appeal to the Radio audience, because some earlier experiments had proved to be fairly disastrous.

GILLARD: What about your dealings with News & Current Affairs? News was not under your control but Current Affairs was, I suppose?

SIMS: Well, there were two Departments. There was the News Department putting out quite a lot of News programmes as well as the News Bulletins, and running the News Sequences like TODAY and PM and so on. There was also a Talks & Current Affairs Department making programmes like ANALYSIS and also doing programmes like SCIENCE NOW and MEDICINE NOW, but a totally separate Department from the News one. And then other News programmes came from the Regions, like FILE ON FOUR from Manchester. And it seemed to me actually rather good that there were different sources for those programmes, because you were not then always getting the same Fleet Street-based attitudes, because you were using people from a lot of different disciplines. My relations with um... News & Current Affairs people was I think reasonably good, and particularly so at the time of the Falklands when there was.. or at other times when there was a real crisis. But they always wanted more programme time, and so we were always.. I was always the person who was saying that I think that an hour-and-a-half sequence is actually long enough, and you don't really need two hours. Or we don't have to carry that live, we could take recorded highlights later in the day. So we had our differences of opinion, and I was certainly opposed to a totally News & Current Affairs Network, which is what most News & Current Affairs people wanted, but I didn't think the audience did. But the

other sort of Current Affairs-type output, I think I certainly encouraged to the best of my ability, including THE REITH LECTURES, though I still wonder whether THE REITH LECTURES now are not better read than listened too. I think it's a terribly difficult form for modern Radio to be successful at, and sometimes they are and sometimes not always in.. in my view. But the straight forward lecture on Radio is really very difficult to do, we've got so used to a much greater mixture. No I don't think we were.. I don't think we were at loggerheads all the time, although we certainly were some of the time particularly over whether or not we took Parliament, because the audience simply hated it when they heard MPs shouting at each other. I mean it did Parliament a dis-service to do it too often, and I was responsible for actually shortening the broadcast of YESTERDAY IN PARLIAMENT, which I thought did not help the TODAY programme in which.. it had followed it. I thought if it were shorter and carried within the TODAY programme it would actually get a bigger and more interested audience than going on at the length it had been. So we kept the longer version at night for TODAY IN PARLIAMENT, we shortened, and there was a great deal of dismay among MPs who were very anxious to be heard by their own constituents and thought the chances were shorter.. there was less... less chance. But it actually I think certainly did succeed in increasing the audience and covered it sensibly. And we also at the same time realising how much the public was getting disillusioned by what they had heard from live broadcasts from Parliament, not carefully edited and so on, we thought that it was important to try and show what was happening in committees in Parliament. We actually started a whole series called INSIDE PARLIAMENT, about the work of committees, which for

those people who were interested in the workings... in Westminster, was something extra, and interesting for them to hear about. so I was never against it, I just thought that we had to be very careful the way we presented it so as not to alienate the audience from an interest in the proceedings at Westminster.

GILLARD: During the whole of this period when you were Controller Radio 4 did you feel that Radio was still a vibrant medium and one with a future and one that would go on being creative and satisfying?

SIMS: I certainly felt that it could be if it was allowed to be, but the pressures on it were so great, and the discussions we had in the Future of Broadcasting Working Party made me realise that there was a danger that Radio could be submerged either by Yelelevision taking all the resources from it - not thinking that it was of any importance and that Television could do everything that Radio could do and better - which it can't. It can do some things better and other things Radio can do better. Or by the people who wanted all of Radio to consist of background listening of one sort or another, with Sequence broadcasting and Rolling News and that's all. I still thought that Radio had a contribution and was in itself an art form, and I think the drama illustrates that. I mean the fact that Radio 4 carries three or four hundred new plays every year, is perhaps the greatest patron of writers of.. any.. any one, much more than Television which doesn't do nearly as many, as an opportunity for new writers of all sorts to try their hand and to get experience. For the health of the Arts in this country, both in encouraging original writing and in the reviewing of books and

writing and other Arts, it seems to me it's necessary for the culture of the nation, and should be preserved at all costs. I do think that Radio is a vibrant form in itself or can be if it has some resources and enough dedicated people, and there are some very good Radio producers who actually only want to work in Radio. It is the most evocative thing. I mean think of readings and story telling on Radio, it cannot be bettered if you have the right people doing it and you choose the right books - it also brings a lot of things to peoples' attention. Who would have heard of Adrien Mole, without the readings when Parliament didn't happen to be there in the summer break? I mean that was another thing, we introduced readings at other times of the day when you...and so people heard of and counted other peoples' minds in a way they wouldn't have done before. No, I think... I also think from the point of view of professional broadcasters starting and training in Radio is a very valuable beginning for people, even if they do eventually move to Television, because having to concentrate on the subject matter and before you get too embroiled in the technicalities of Television, which are very beguiling and great fun, but really easier to do than having to do the rather hard slog of working out how the programme is going to finish up.

GILLARD: Well, all these thoughts must have been in your mind when you were promoted to become Director of Programmes in 1983 in Radio. Did you find that the top hierarchy in the BBC at that stage took the view that you did of Radio, that it was a medium that the BBC could be proud of and really should stand by it?

SIMS: Well, I'm not sure (LAUGH) who you mean by the top hierarchy. I think...

GILLARD: I meant the DG and Co.

SIMS: Well, I'm not sure because the preoccupations of Television are so great for any one running the BBC, I mean the money is so much greater, the problems, the backlash you get from the Press and the public if you make a mistake in Television is so much more visible than Radio. Although Radio can make waves as well, but they haven't really got very much time to think about Radio, and I actually don't think that the Board of Management really thought about it more than once in a blue moon. I also think the Board of Management is badly tilted in favour of Television, and it really is shameful that the only Radio representative on Board of Management is Managing Director Radio. Now there are two because Director of Programmes is now on Board of Management, but to have only one person representing such an enormous output, all those hours of Radio, all the Networks and Local Radio and the National Regions. I mean it uses a lot of resources of the BBC and reaches nearly the whole population, and so it does seem to me that Radio - because it didn't spend too much money - was a poor relation. I don't think that was true of the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors actually had a lot of members who really heard quite a lot of the output, and also were in touch with the public who also listened to Radio and felt that Radio's contribution was important. Whether it was you know the sort of Drugs Campaign on Radio 1 or Light Music on Radio 2 or the Orchestras on Radio 3 or the News & Current Affairs on Radio 4 or

the Plays on Radio 4 - neither here nor there. I mean to them Radio still seemed to be an important arm of the BBC's output, and as DP, Director of Programmes in Radio, I certainly felt that it was my job to try and increase Radio's profile if I could. I also was quite anxious to understand myself more about the workings of Local Radio and the place it held within the Radio output, because from Broadcasting House Local Radio tended to be put on one side as a different animal, and yet from the listeners' point of view it was just part of the whole spectrum.

GILLARD: Yes. I remember Aubrey Singer pointing out that there were 4 Television representatives on Board of Management and only 1 Radio.

SIMS: Yes, well there were in my time.

GILLARD: That's a disgraceful balance.

SIMS: It's not disgraceful if you think of the amount of money Television spends and the amount of hassle it causes with the Government, because Radio rarely got into quite such severe controversy as Television, because Governments always assumed that the public is only influenced by Television. I would debate that because Television certainly is.. it can be influential, but so can Radio. And Radio actually I think by its nature can perhaps.....

END OF TAPE 8

IDENTIFICATION

MONICA SIMS TAPE 9

SIMS: It was while I was Controller of Radio 4 that the problems of the attitudes of different generations to certain kinds of language became more apparent I think than had been in the past. Radio 4 having always been thought of as a rather middle-brow, middle-of-the-road kind of Network, went out of its way to encourage new writing of all sorts and included quite a lot of plays from among the best of new contemporary writers - and indeed Radio is a wonderful outlet for them. So some of these writers having experience in the theatre were very indignant if they were asked in any way to measure the language that they used in the mouths of people who would normally in the course of ordinary conversation perhaps be using four-letter-words, for instance. And we had some difficulty with the writers and also with the audience, among the people who were very shocked at the.. certain of the language that was used and the writers who wanted the freedom. And it mirrors what's been going on in Television actually with some of the contemporary plays. But it's more difficult in Radio, I believe, because of the concentration on the language. In Television you can take the edge off it by way you shoot it and the visuals you're using - of course the pictures may upset but the language doesn't so much. In Radio with that concentration, and it's beginning to pose much more of a problem because there is such a difference now in what is acceptable to people under say 40 and people over 40 who have not been used to hearing in mixed company the sort of language that young people seem now to use

all the time, very much influenced by language that appears to be used across the Atlantic. And I don't know how that's going to be resolved, it will be interesting to see, because unle.. I mean it is important for Radio to use er.. young contemporary writers as well as established ones. (YES) And there's always going to be some kind of tension there.

GILLARD: Lord Hill as Chairman used to say that of all the letters of complaint he had to deal with, language was the subject which outnumbered everything else.

SIMS: It's certainly so in the way the English language is used and the grammar and changing pronunciation and so on really does bother people. But it's part of our lives so it's inevitable that it will.

GILLARD: Tell us now what this Director of Programmes job involved.

SIMS: Er.. I wasn't at all sure whether it was a possible job. I'm not still sure whether one person can keep a watching eye on four National Networks, Local Radio, National Regions and so on. And I didn't know quite what my function would be. I think whoever does the job will find certain priorities and there will always be certain problems that fall outside the net of the individual Controllers. In my case I mean there were perfectly practical things like having to decide who should use the VHF Network, which was shared between Radios 1 and 2, and sometimes those decisions were impossible. On one occasion Radio 2

had a concert at the Albert Hall for either mixed choirs or massed bands, or something like that, the climax of a whole year's competition, and on exactly the same time Radio 1 had a very starry pop concert with wonderful groups and singers and both of them needed the VHF, they both needed stereo sound, and somebody had to make that decision, and the poor pig in the middle of course was the Director of Programmes, because they were just fighting between themselves, and somebody had to toss a coin or make a decision. So there was that kind of who has what in the way of facilities thing, which was not a very happy task but somebody had to do it. The other task really was to try and look at the overall output of all the Networks and to see where some things were missing, falling through the net, or where the whole mix needed to be altered. And that was very difficult to keep up with what actually was happening in Local Radio and around the country, and during the time that I was doing the job I tried very hard to find out and to raise standards a bit in some of those outposts of BBC Radio where very few critical assessments had been made. I mean because they had very small staffs who were very busy, they hardly ever had time to stop and listen to what was going on, and to see whether it was as good as it ought to be. And I did try to help them to make some assessments. It was a very difficult and thankless job and I wasn't there long enough, I don't think, to make as much difference as I would have liked to have seen made. I mean one of my jobs of course was to Chair Programme Review Board and I tried in that to have some quite critical and wide ranging discussions about all sorts of output, not just the London-based programmes, and invited people up to discuss their own programmes. And we had some good.. we had some good examples of programmes from all over

the place which people were required to listen to before going to the meeting. I mean I can remember at the time of the miners' strike and dispute, we had a lot of discussion about the programmes we were putting out from Radio 4 particularly and whether or not the BBC was biased in its coverage. We also listened to some of the coverage from around the country which included not only BREAKFAST PROGRAMMES in miners' houses where the whole local situation was discussed, but also plays written on the spur of the moment almost to demonstrate the difficulties of the situation. And we listened to some of those as well to the national coverage, and it interests me when the BBC is accused of bias and being on the side of the miners or on the side of the Coal Board, which ever way you look at it, to think how much we did in fact discuss whether we were giving a fair unbiased treatment of the subject. And some days I thought it was, other days I didn't. But it was.. it didn't go by default, and it certainly go by any assumption of attitudes on the part of the BBC, because these programmes were being made by such a mixture of people - we had 'phone ins and.. as well as Features, Documentaries. All sorts of programmes, all putting rather different points of view, and the only real problem that I remember at that time was the difficulty of getting enough good speakers from the Coal Board, because they were not as willing always to put up a spokesman as.. the other side was. But I mean we did.. we battled with that and we tried very hard to keep a sensible balance.

GILLARD: This Review Board, was it a weekly thing?

SIMS: Yes.

GILLARD: Who was there?

SIMS: Most Heads of Departments, representatives from the National Regions and so on on a rotating basis, producers of programmes that were going to be discussed - which was the main difference with Television Programme Review which I had gone too for many years as a Head of Department and at which I was usually or often the only woman present. In Radio there were always a few more women because there were always a few programme producers, and there were quite a number of very good women producers in Radio who sometimes attended and it was a more.. more movable feast. And because people were required to listen to the cassettes of programmes in advance it could lead to quite.. to actually more sensible discussion of programmes sometimes than in Television where you may get a programme which nobody really had heard on the basis of going through the RADIO TIMES - but I think they've now changed that slightly in order to have some required viewing in the way that Radio had some required listening.

GILLARD: As DPTel were you concerned at all about recruitment to Radio and where there people coming forward, talented people, creative people...?

SIMS: Well yes I mean there is a terrific endeavour to enter the BBC from.. particularly graduate training schemes, and other training schemes, and I think there is a lot of talent. The difficulty is in a declining situation rather than an expanding one, to be able to take on enough of these talented people and to make sure they have

proper experience and training, and clearly Local Radio is a very good training ground and so are things like the Journalists' Training Scheme or coming in.. people who come in as Studio Managers. Yes, I was concerned with that. I don't think there was any lack of talent in people coming in. I think there was a problem in Radio in that a lot of talented people had moved to Television, and some of the people who were left were very, very good keen Radio producers, but some had become tired of Radio and tired of the sorts of programmes they were doing and had really no opportunity to go elsewhere. And I think there's a real difficulty with Local Radio because where do Local Radio Managers go when they've been in the job 7 or 8 years, unless they move to another Station on the same level, there are very few opportunities for them to move elsewhere in Radio, and I was very much concerned in trying to increase the number of attachments to different parts of the BBC, and I'm very much in favour of more movement between Radio and Television both ways, because I noticed that when somebody came from Television to Radio, which occasionally they did on attachment, they usually brought a whole lot of different assumptions with them, just as they did the other way round. I think there.. I mean there is a problem in Radio with... for some producers who have got really bored with what they're doing, and so I mean any Head of Department or Editor of a strand, I think has a duty to try and think of new ventures for those people who are often very experienced and very good but just need to go and do something else for a bit. So as much movement as possible (YES) should.. within the.. the difficulties when you have a reduced number of people running the actual programmes - you've got to have enough people to keep up the output. No, I was much more concerned I think about a general decline

in standards and a general falling off of proper intellectual standards of programmes and I see that as part of the change in technology where it's much easier to do instant Radio without much thought, and then perhaps edit it afterwards. And I was particularly struck with this in some of.. not all, but some of the Local Radio Stations I went to where nobody seemed to have put much thought into the programmes, though indeed they didn't have much time too - it wasn't always their fault, although sometimes I think they could have with half an hour's judicious planning have made a very much better sort of programme than they had. And I think there's a terrible danger that with more Radio, more of everything, that there will be fewer people who are concerned to keep up the standards of what they're doing, and I do think that we have a tremendous privilege in having the air time we do and we have an aud.. an interested audience that takes the trouble to listen to us and to concentrate on what we're saying and doing, and they deserve the best we can give them. And there have to be a few people who are running around saying, "That's not quite good enough" and "Why didn't you do this or that?" And I think that any Director of Programmes has that responsibility, because if he doesn't do.. or she doesn't do it, who else will?

GILLARD: Yes.

SIMS: And you need somebody just outside of the actual production departments to do it (YES) who is listening and giving feedback to the output. I mean the real difficulty as Director of Programmes was listening to enough of the output. There was just so

much, I mean I used to be listening from dawn till dusk and my car was filled with cassettes of things to listen to on journeys, and that was very hard, but without listening you don't know really... you can't keep your fingers on what's going on, even though I believe and always have in my life in the BBC, if you have the right people you can delegate a tremendous amount of responsibility. It's not that, I don't think one needs to be interfering all the time, but how can you delegate unless you know the quality of the people you're delegating to? And you can only tell that by listening to their output.

GILLARD: Yes. Well you actually took early retirement, didn't you?

SIMS: Yes, I did. I mean I either knew that I would have to stay quite a bit longer... I in fact took it for purely personal reasons, because I'd been 31 years in the BBC, I was working really all the hours of the day and night, and I had an elderly mother who needed much more attention than I had been able to give her and I mean I found it was impossible really to get down to stay with her every weekend because things happened at weekends, and I just thought I needed to have more time to spend with her, and also to do some of the things that I just had no chance to do while I was on this treadmill really of constant listening, constant meetings, constant battles really.

GILLARD: Mmm yes, but before you went of course, and we're back tracking a little bit now, you Chaired some very important Enquiries and

Committees in the BBC. What about the one on violence in Television, now that was in 1978 I think. Why was that one necessary?

SIMS: Well, that came at a time when there was a lot of criticism of the increasing violence in Television programmes, and I was asked to Chair it because in Childrens' Programmes we had always been very conscious of the effects of what we were doing, possible effects of what we were doing on the childrens' audience. And in the light of that I had at some... from time to time at Programme Review criticised evening programmes, sometimes early in the evening where children were likely to be viewing, as being unnecessarily violent, perhaps putting ideas into peoples' heads. I had read some of the research that had been done both in the United States and in Europe and had been involved in discussions about it a good deal at the Prix Jeunesse which is the Childrens' Television Festival where a lot of childrens' programmes are shown. So I already had an interest in the subject. The BBC was a bit on the defensive I think from the criticism from Mary Whitehouse and others that it was not being sufficiently responsible in what it showed in family viewing time. And so I think it was Huw Wheldon who decided that the BBC needed to look over all at the standards of its programmes, and particularly whether some of them were becoming too violent. And it wasn't quite a Committee. I actually took advice and evidence from a lot of different programme heads and programme makers with the help of Roger Caryl from Secretariat, and we went round and interviewed people, and as a result of that and some of our own research, we wrote a Report which laid down some guide lines on the subject of violence really, and those are the first BBC guide lines on violence, and they turned out in

the end to be very similar to the ones that the IBA also brought out at much the same time. I mean it was a matter of public concern, as it was in America, following the Surgeon General's Report. It was a.. a fascinating study to do because I found that attitudes within the BBC were so very varied, and they went from some people in the Documentaries Department, for instance, because you must remember this was the time of the 'fly on the wall' Television Documentaries, who thought that everything was permissible, and it was unfaithful to the reality to censor anything that people said or did, and that you should show life as it was and there should be no attempt whatsoever to spare the feelings of the audience.

END TAPE 9

Under copyright

IDENTIFICATION

MONICA SIMS TAPE 10 - Now we were talking about your Committee on violence.

SIMS: Yes, it was interesting to find out how attitudes varied so much within the BBC, and also how attitudes varied among the general public writing in. I mean what to a whole section of the audience would be perfectly normal behaviour, to another part of the audience would be absolutely shocking. And I think it's a particular difficulty for the BBC at a time when the nation is no longer united, and society is breaking up in all sorts of ways, and when there is a good deal more violence apparent, anyway, on the streets, and certainly also in films and plays. The BBC has anyway always believed that writers and creators should be allowed to speak freely and to express their ideas on Television or on Radio, because really the Enquiry was about Television but quite a lot of it in fact applied to Radio as well. And some me.. some people in the BBC felt very strongly about the iniquities of censorship, and the stupidities very often of censorship, when in a few years the climate of opinion had changed and something would be seen to be unnecessarily censored. However, I think there was at that time, and still is actually, a very real concern about what children were seeing on Television at a time when they were not mature enough actually to be able to.. not to be badly influenced by what they saw. Which is why in Childrens' Programmes it was something we had always been fairly.. well very careful about. I mean there were a lot of things we had deliberately not shown, because we didn't want to put ideas into

childrens' heads or to be seen to be endorsing certain things which they might take for granted as being OK. I mean I can remember in Childrens' Programmes turning down a very good Polish film simply because the youngsters in it were seen to be smoking - all the time they were going behind the bicycle sheds and having a smoke, and it was taken for granted in the film that that was OK, it was grown-up sort of behaviour. We didn't show the film because of it. We also cut out scenes which showed children using knives or putting ropes round peoples' necks, and that sort of thing. And we did remove quite a lot of the out and out violent behaviour in some films that we bought in. But it's rather different when you're thinking not of children but of adults who enjoy after all cops and robbers, westerns, detective series, where as certain amount of violence is essential. I mean look at the JAMES BOND movies, which are of course shown on Television now. We were very much aware of the changing patterns of audience behaviour in the times they viewed and so on, and we had a lot of discussion about whether or not it was sensible to keep a 9 o'clock watershed, after which time one might assume the programmes to be adult viewing, and before which the programmes would not be particularly harmful to children if watching. They were never thought always to be suitable for children, but we didn't... I mean the idea of the watershed that before 9 if a child was watching with the family, as they might well be in the middle of the evening, it wouldn't actually do them any damage. But that if you said you must continue this until childrens' real bedtime - and we all knew that a lot of children didn't go to bed until 11 or midnight or even later - or at least some children didn't. It was fair.. it was on the whole a minority, but it tended to be the most vulnerable mino.. and

neglected minority. If you said that everything must be suitable for them up until midnight, you would not be able to show a lot of the most important films and dramas and features and documentaries that were being made for that time. So one absolutely has to have an adult time, and so the watershed seemed to us a sensible division to make, and although some people argued in favour of putting it at 10 rather than 9 as being more realistic, it didn't really leave enough of the evening for the adult population. So we actually thought that 9 o'clock was all right, as long as it was explained carefully to the viewing public. That after 9 o'clock, if you were a responsible parent, you might just want to make sure whether you really wished your programmes.. your children to see the programmes that were put on at that time. I mean it could be anything including News Bulletins containing violent sorts of pictures. But before that we did think that the 6 o'clock News, because of the large numbers of children in the audience should be particularly careful of the images that it used on the screen. Not to say you shouldn't and couldn't report what was going on, but it was how you handled it and what you showed that we thought had to be rather carefully monitored. It's a much more complicated subject than the critics of the BBC often suggest, and a lot of people who are horrified by certain scenes I think don't recognise how normal it is for certain other parts of the audience and that people do actually like a bit of blood and guts. Look at the popularity of horror films, for instance, which a lot of people really seek out. And I was always very influenced by a study that was done in America by Lyle Shrame and Parker which impressed me greatly when I was worried about some of the programmes children were seeing, and they described an experiment where they

monitored childrens' behaviour to see how they reacted to certain kinds of films. And they took a group of children who were in a sort of Borstal institution for delinquent boys, and they showed them a lot of different programmes and then saw how they behaved, and they showed them police series, westerns, horror films and the boys of assorted ages showed almost no different behaviour after seeing these - they just took them in their stride. However, they also showed them one episode of THE WALTONS, which was a sentimental family drama, and after that all the children nearly showed signs of very disturbed behaviour and were much more aggressive to each other, because for them that was un.. that was the sort of life they'd never had themselves, and it disturbed them much more than the rest which they took for granted. So it actually illustrates for me the idea that very often violence, as bias is too, is in the eye of the viewer, and the way that people make use of Television, whether they seek out these particular kinds of programmes, or whether they.. they react themselves violently to seeing something depends on their own circumstances and their own upbringing, and it is very, very dangerous to generalise about it. We did, however, try and work out sensible guide lines for producers of programmes, and they are enshrined in the original Report we did. Also very similar ones in the IBA guide lines on violence. And there has recently been another Committee under Will Wyatt convened to look at.. to see whether things have changed much since that particular Report was done, and they have really endorsed all the guide lines. They've simply used up to date examples of scenes of violence which they thought either went on too long or were not necessary to tell the story. And I mean there are fashions in this. It's interesting that violence against the person,

between you know two men fighting, or gang of people fighting, it much less common now than violence against property or objects, and look at all those cars that gets.. get crashed and nobody gets hurt. I think one of the real dangers of a..the.. the films where there's a great deal of violent behaviour and nobody gets hurt and the hero always gets up without even a bruise, and the other problem which seems to me much greater than the possible effects of individual acts of violence in individual programmes, is the gradual drip effect of accepting a violent life as being a natural one, accepting street crime as something that happens on every street corner - when we all know it can happen, but it doesn't happen in a great many streets in lots of towns in the country, of accepting that the only way to resolve any problem is by some sort of fighting, and by different methods and using weapons of all sorts. And it was to try and get producers to stop and think before they embarked on either filming what could be seen to be violent in real life or in inventing violence for the sake of pepping up a film and making it a bit more exciting or glamorous that we were trying to guard against, and to make people think - which is why we also proposed that the guide lines should be up dated every 3 years, which is why there was another Committee formed to look at the present output. No doubt in my mind that the amount of violence however, is increasing, has increased steadily.

GILLARD: On the screen?

SIMS: I think it has, yes. I think it is taken for granted in so many programmes now. Though um.. not so much in certain areas, and again it goes in cycles and in fashions.

GILLARD: Well I.. I mean from my perception your Report was widely welcomed. I mean I think you put into words the thoughts of many people, and I think you guided a great many people in their thinking, and it did seem to me to have a remarkable degree of acceptance in the BBC.

SIMS: Yes, it did. The difficulty is that what you write for one generation is totally forgotten in a few years by the next one that comes in which probably hasn't even read it or thought about it (YES) and is anxious to make its mark in doing..

GILLARD: Well hence the up dating which you've recommended.

SIMS; Yes. Which is why we thought so. We also thought that it was.. I was worried that quite a lot of producers didn't seem to have enough contact with their audience. It's very easy in Television to get into your own particular world, it is so absorbing and fascinating, and you work with your colleagues and you are working towards a goal, and you do meet a few people who tell you that the programme was lovely or not, but you don't very often very reactions from the.. the great mass of the public who.. and I think that's a danger, particularly for drama producers who live in a particular theatrical world.

GILLARD: Oh yes and are inclined to self indulgence let's...

SIMS: Oh sometimes, yes.

GILLARD: Let's go on to another of your great Enquiries, and this was the Radiovision one. (YES) This was of 1980. Tell us what Radiovision was intended to imply.

SIMS: Oh it came about really because the Television Service was anxious that ITV in starting a Breakfast Television programme would out gun the BBC in its News coverage throughout the day. I mean there was a great feeling that.. if they were going to be there at breakfast time, the BBC ought to be there, and there should be a largely News-based programme early in the morning on Television. However, it was at a time when as usual the BBC was making economies, and most people realised that Breakfast Television would be a great strain on the BBC's resources, there really wasn't enough money with the current li.. licence fee at that time to do it, and it would also need a lot of technical resources that weren't really available, and various people wondered whether instead of doing out and out Television there would be some way of using some of the Radio resources that were already available at that time of the morning - because one of the problems with Television at that time in the morning is having to have the place manned overnight and in the early hours, which pushes up the costs because of paying people for the unsocial hours they're working, whereas with Radio as a more or less 24-hour operation there were always people, and there was a News gathering system at Bush House and at Broadcasting

House working all through the night, and in the early morning. And the TODAY programme existed, sequences existed on Local Radio, on Radio 2 and so on. And I was.. I remember going up to Castle Howard, where the Chairman was burying a capsule of (LAUGH) Radio programmes to be found at some time in the future, and there was a great celebration of this particular collection of programmes and objects to celebrate the 20th century. And on the train going up I met Bill Cotton, and he said, "I wonder whether there's a way of combining Radio and Television in the early mornings? You are now running Radio 4 and that has the TODAY programme, would you like to look into it?". And I thought it was an interesting idea and later this was formalised and the Director General asked me to look and see whether it was a feasible idea. So in order to do this I was asked to form a Committee, and the other people who did take part in these discussions were Alan Protheroe, who was the Assistant Director of News & Current Affairs, or whatever he was called at the time, Derek Amore, who was then Head of Radio London and had a lot of News background, Phil Gilbert, who knew about resources in Television and was very much involved in the equipping of the new Lime Grove studios, John Dutot who had been in Television Planning and was in charge of resources in Radio, and the Chief Assistant in Radio 4, Head of Radio 4, Richard Wade, working with me. And we got together for a whole series of meetings among ourselves and with other people up and down the BBC. I mean we went to the various Regions and we consulted a lot of people both in Radio and Television to see whether there was some sort of hybrid form that would be a new kind of broadcasting which could combine the elements of Radio and Television in a way that would be a good service to the public at that time of day. And our little

Committee in the end, after a great deal of argument, came to the conclusion that it would be possible if we could start something afresh, that would not be Television, that would not be Radio, but would be specially conceived to be always comprehensible on Radio with... through Radio or a Television set, with the appropriate visuals. And so we proposed that there should be something called Radiovision, and we went to a lot of trouble to see how it could be done and how it could be costed, and we thought that it would actually be more economical than a Television only breakfast service, if it could be done using the combined resources of Television and Radio but made in a place separate from both, because we thought it needed that to be created in its own right without being just a pale copy of either. We called it Radiovision because we hadn't thought of a better term for it, even though the word had been used by SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES before that, and I think the title, the name may have put some people off it, because they thought all it would be would be a Radio programme with a few stills, which is what we hadn't.....

CASSETTE ENDS

.... really envisaged. We thought of it as something that would work perfectly well on Television. However, cost wasn't the only consideration, I mean that was how it began, it was thought that it might be cheaper to do that than to do a pure Television Service. The more we talked about it, the more we realised that it could in fact be a very useful Service to the public, because we recognised that Radio listening and Television viewing at that time in the morning would always be spasmodic and people would always be moving about.

END TAPE 10

Under copyright

IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC, Miss Monica Sims, and this is TAPE 11 we were talking about Miss Sims' Report on the possibility of Radiovision.

SIMS: We thought it would be a great Service to the audience to.. for them to be able to listen on their transistors in the bedroom, go down to the living room or the kitchen have.. where the Television was on, so that they could carry on the same story, and perhaps if they then went out to the car to go to work, continue listening on Radio, and I still think that the convenience of having both would be good for Television because it would take some of the Radio listeners to look at the Television when there were going to be interesting pictures, where they might not otherwise bother to switch on. There was a fear of course from the Television Service that having anything that was intended for radio would adulterate the pictures and there is no doubt that you would have to be very careful in the way you designed the programme and wrote it, so that it was comprehensible to Radio listeners as well as to those people who could see the pictures, and of course there would be some things that would work better in one medium than the other. However, simply thinking about the habits of the audience I am sure that it would be a good public Service to provide something that would work in both sound and vision. And to begin with it looked as if the BBC would accept this as an idea. We had proposed that it should be made in a place separate from both Radio and Television so that it could start life as its own, as a new Service, rather than being a sort of pale copy of one or the other, with people seconded from both the Television Service and Radio to do it, and with a pooling of technical

resources. And to begin with I think both Board of Management and Board of Governors were sympathetic to the idea, and however.. there was a sudden reversal of this when I think the Television Service, and Television News in particular, thought that it would be stronger if it was a complete Television programme, and as they were at the time converting Lime Grove into a News & Current Affairs Centre, I think they also thought that it might be possible to make special agreements with the Unions for News & Current Affairs technical staff in that Centre, which would make it not quite so expensive as they had first thought, and in the end the proposals were simply abandoned at a rather late stage and rather to our surprise without really very much argument. And I still think that the BBC missed doing something that would have been quite different from what ITV was doing, because it was quite clear to me that if you did it as a purely Television programme you would in the end be forced to go down market in order to attract a big enough audience to compete with ITV, and it seemed more sensible to me to be doing something quite separate and different from ITV, its own thing which was a good Service to the listeners. It didn't mean to say that it had to be particularly elitest, I mean we always thought of it as quite a popular programme, but one that was capable of being developed and also going on after the first News & Current Affairs Sequence into the early hours of the morning - I mean from.. there would be a 9 to 10 strand where you would have simultaneous broadcasting, and in fact a few programmes were tried of that nature which worked very well in both. However, for the moment that's gone by the board and I'm sorry, and I'm sorry too that I was busy doing at the time.. doing Radio 4 and didn't have as much time as I think was needed really to talk to enough people

in Television to allay their suspicions, because they clearly remembering the early days of Television when Television News was ruled from Broadcasting House, were afraid that something like that might happen again, which wasn't the idea. The idea really was to start something new and fresh, and I'm sorry we didn't bring it off.

GILLARD: I understand your disappointment. Now, since you've retired, you've been Chairing this Committee on the employment of women in the BBC.

SIMS: Well immediately I (LAUGH) said that I thought it was time that I left, I was asked by the Board of Governors this time to look at the position of women in the BBC, but in particular, not at the employment of women throughout the whole of the BBC, but really why there were so few women applying for the more senior jobs in the BBC. So it was really women in top jobs in the BBC that I was supposed to be looking at, to see why there weren't more of them. And so the minute I'd left I started on a part time basis interviewing people throughout the BBC, again in different parts of the country as well as in London, to try and discover their attitudes, and also why some of them though obviously immensely capable and talented had actually got stuck at some point in their careers and not made it in the way that some of their contemporaries had who happened to be male, and so I wrote my Report largely on their views and made some proposals to try and see if there were ways of making it more possible for women to be considered at different stages of their careers in the BBC for promotion, because it does seem to me unbalanced to have at the producer level a lot of women

working along side men and doing very good and responsible work, but very few women Heads of Departments, almost no women in the National Regions or Local Radio or the Network Production Centres actually running things. I mean OK producers and editors but very few heads of anything, and it seemed to me that it was unbalanced for the BBC to be broadcasting to half the population always with policy decided by an entirely male Board of Management for instance - very few women helping to form BBC policy which I think is the danger. Not that I think women would necessarily be putting forward a militant feminist view, and in fact I found very few signs of that in the people I talked to, but I do think there is a lot of talent that is perhaps being under used in the BBC, and at a time when a lot of the talented men are being tempted to go elsewhere, it would be good for the BBC to use some of those women who might be prepared to take on the additional responsibilities. Mind you, in many cases they weren't. In many cases they had family responsibilities which simply didn't allow them the time, and that was one of the stumbling blocks. However, though I mean nevertheless there are some, and there are some who clearly wanted more training for Management, and more opportunities to be considered at Selection Boards and so on. And I tried to make a lot of quite practical er.. proposals, some of which I'm glad to say have... or most of which have actually been implemented. Um..

GILLARD: What sort of things?

SIMS: Well, I mean just simply things like more women on Management Training Courses and a few courses especially for women,

because at a more junior level quite a lot of women find themselves out numbered on courses and actually are not willing perhaps to er.. discuss and argue and so on with such a preponderance of men, and needed to be given rather more confidence. I mean that kind of thing. I suggested a staff audit for everybody on above Band 3, which is the Radio producer level and above, actually to see what had happened to women and why more of them were not applying for things. I wasn't arguing at all, and nor were any of the women I spoke to, for positive discrimination, but I was arguing for positive encouragement to get more women actually to apply for jobs and to put themselves forward to go on courses. I suggested also there should be much more careful examination of the possibilities of job sharing, because a lot of women who leave for a few years when their children are young do want to come back, but unless they can come back on some kind of part time basis often can't manage it for a few years, and so lose touch and lose their... the skills they've acquired, and I don't actually think the BBC can afford to waste the resources it's put into training a lot of these people not to keep tabs on them while they are away and encourage them to come back. But I think also you know there has been a great fashion for promoting young men, because it's thought that youth is in itself an attribute and it.. certainly the energy of youth is if the person concerned also has the judgement and experience to make the best use of it. And observing what has happened in some areas of the BBC I think the most difficult quality to find is judgement and good judgement. And I've met women as well as men who are capable of exercising it, and who have a good understanding also of the needs of the audience because they are part of that half of it which is sometimes not considered as much as it should be. So encouragement is

really the key note of all the proposals. Things like job sharing, things like making maternity leave and paternity leave and so on more accessible. I suggested the appointment of an Equal Opportunities Officer who would be particularly looking after the problems that women have, and who would perhaps help women themselves in their own self help groups if they needed to, to run child care facilities and so on, because there's been the great argument about whether the BBC should run creches or not - most of the women I talked to were prepared to run them themselves, or at least to pay themselves, if they could find a room somewhere. And what has been very interesting I think since the Report is that there has been some response from Management, I mean quite a lot. I mean there has been an Equal Opportunities Officer appointed, there have been talks with the Unions about job sharing and part time work, and that's all now possible. There are more Management Courses that women are taking part in. I mean all.. a lot of these practical things have happened, but the most important thing is that in nearly every BBC Centre there is now a Womens' Committee or Network themselves putting forward proposals, joining together to see how they can manage if they need to, to go on working or to come back after they've had an absence. And it's acted as a catalyst really among the women in the BBC as much as it has been a kind of reminder to people in Management. When I went to Board of Management with the Report, they all looked at me in sheer in astonishment, and they said, "But we're terribly nice to women. We want more women in all these jobs. It's not our fault you know if women don't apply for things." And they couldn't believe that women had said some of the things that they did say in their interviews, where they felt, some of them, that they were being very much... some felt

very encouraged by their male bosses, some felt they had not been given the opportunities that they deserved because they were found to be too useful doing what they did. Some of them admitted that it was their own faults, they didn't want.. they liked what they were doing and they didn't want to do anything else. Quite a lot of them had pricks of conscience about how they occ.. they thought perhaps they should be taking on some of the administrative chores. I made one much more far reaching suggestion which was not approved. I thought that one of the problems that the BBC's had is in having too many people who are stuck in top jobs and who won't move until they retire, and who may after about 7 years have had enough of it, and I suggested that everybody given a Senior Management position should be given it on a limited term basis, so that you got more movement at the top, which would give other people, men as well as women - I mean a lot of the things I proposed were good for men as well as for women, it wasn't only really geared to women. And I thought that if as happens in some Departments, where you now sometimes will have somebody as Head of Department on a 3-year contract or a 5-year contract, if it became accepted that in taking that sort of position you only did it for a fixed term, and the term would vary according to the job because some things you would need longer than others, that there would be no loss of face when somebody moved away to do something else and you could then re-deploy people. But that was thought to be administratively very difficult, because what would you do with their cars, for instance? If you'd reached the stage where you were allowed a Corporation car and you then went back to being a producer, could you keep your car or not? And all that. And you couldn't promote somebody and then take away part of their salary, you

would have to keep them on that level, so it would actually be quite expensive. But if it could be afforded it would be a way of getting more movement. Just as I think in Radio unlike Television there's a need for more people on contract and fewer people on the staff, because then you get more movement. In Television they've always had it, in Radio everybody's tended to be a staff appointment, and for a healthy organisation you need both stability and the opportunity to change people around more, so this was really carrying on that idea which didn't get.. didn't find favour. But everything else did, and everything else in one way or another is actually being implemented. And all over the country women hold meetings and get together and say, "Well, you know what we need, we don't need a creche, but we do actually need a room where children can come after school in the evenings until we're ready to go home." That kind of thing. Or "Why in our Department has no woman been considered to be editor of a strand and all these people have been appointed without a proper advertisement?" I did suggest that all appointments actually should be properly advertised and boarded, and that is something that is more general than it used to be. There are fewer of these behind the scenes appointments. I don't think they'll be allowed to get away with it nearly so much now because the women won't let them.

GILLARD: I think you started something there. I think...

SIMS: I'm afraid I did!

GILLARD: ..think...

SIMS: It would never have occurred to me when I was looking for other jobs to make any sort of fuss about it because I actually really came into the BBC and always had the innocent belief that if I was doing something well enough I would have a chance like everybody else of being promoted. It was only much later in life that I did see some really very good people who'd never had a chance, and perhaps one has to make a bit of noise for their sakes.

GILLARD: Well this is your final memorial I should think in the BBC, but long may you flourish outside it.

SIMS: Hope not.

GILLARD: Thank you very much for a fascinating day and I suppose 25 thousand words of real wisdom and memory. Thank you very much, Monica.

END TAPE 11 END PART ONE OF RECORDING