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Tahu Hole interviewed by Frank Gillard, 1 June 1979, 7 September 1979, 28 March 1980

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ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC

Tahu Hole

GILLARD: We are recording the Oral History of the BBC and this is Mr Tahu Hole's contribution. The date is the 1st June 1979 we are doing it in Broadcasting House in London, and this is Tape One.

Mr Hole, let us begin by hearing how you came to join the BBC, you are a New Zealander of course?

HOLE: I began broadcasting commentaries on World Affairs in the Overseas Service in 1941. I wasn't on the staff. I was paid for each commentary.
Yes, I was born and educated in New Zealand but in 1937 I arrived in London as a journalist from Australia for the Coronation. I was to take charge of the editorial side of my newspaper's office in Fleet Street and at the time I began doing commentaries I was accredited at Westminster as a Lobby Correspondent in the Houses of Parliament and at the Foreign Office I was accredited as a Diplomatic Correspondent and besides I was accredited as a War Correspondent. I was too a member of the Advisory Council of the Empire Press Union, it's Chairman Colonel Aftra was proprietor of the Times. Also I was a member of the Press, Broadcasting and Armed Services Committee which dealt with Defence Notices. And at the request of General Sir Walter Kirk, I had given talks on the war effort to factory workers in various parts of the country.
Robert Fraser, who at that time was at the Ministry of Information and who later became Sir Robert Fraser Director of the Independent Television Authority, suggested to the BBC that I should be asked to comment on World Affairs. The BBC was looking for writers on World Affairs wh through the Ministry of Information and indeed through other Ministries and Universities. Bob Fraser was doing commentaries himself from time to time while doing his job at the Ministry of Information.
He knew the BBC's difficulty in getting suitable writers to contribute them.
For some years I had been writing on world affairs and I was writing about them then. Some of my articles had appeared in the National Review which was owned by Vicountess Milner. Lady Milner's first

husband was Lord Edward Cecil who was related to Lord Crandon the Secretary of State for Dominions and Colonies. I saw Lord Crandon frequently.

You will remember that J.B. Clarke who later became Sir ~~Berrisford~~ Bearsford Clarke was acting controller of the Overseas Services in 1942.

I didn't know until J.B. Clarke told me some time later that my name also had been mentioned by Lord Crandon, who became Lord Salisbury, and Colonel Aster, who became Lord Aster. I had worked with Colonel Aster for some years as a member of the Empire Press Union.

I'd always wanted to be a journalist, even at college.

I was fortunate in making journalistic history in New Zealand by being the first reporter to fly to an assignment. A plane was chartered to fly me to a shipwreck 100 miles north of Auckland it was an open, single engined Moth, which had an open to the sky seat with the pilot and one for me. It was raining and we were drenched to the skin when we got to the shipwreck.

I was luckier still I think to have won the New Zealand Journalist Association First Prize for the best piece of journalism in the Dominion for the year. And again in Australia, I was lucky too, I became the first News Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald which is the oldest morning paper there and the most respected. In more than 100 years the Sydney Morning Herald has never had a News Editor.

I was also a leader writer on the Sydney Morning Herald as I was on other journals, in Australia.

Only in the past month I have been asked to contribute my reminiscences of the days when I made a contribution to the modernisation of the Sydney Morning Herald and they will apear in a book which the proprietors will publish in 1981 to mark the 150th year of publication.

The Sydney Morning Herald had a tradition of selecting Editors from London. Among those surviving today is Mr Angus Maude, he is a Member of Mrs Thatcher's Government.

I'd been in Britain on earlier occasions and for two years I travelled throughout the Far East and most European Countries.

In that early, exciting period of the BBC's part in the War 1941/42 distinguished as it was by staff inventiveness, ingenuity, determination and adventurous makeshift, the BBC was trying as best it could with what little it had to give shape to a number of services to overseas regions. The need for that was clear enough, but it was very very hard to meet the need.

At first I broadcast to Australia and New Zealand, of course those broadcasts were picked up in a number of countries in the Southern Hemisphere and interestingly enough they were listened to on the Continent. They were attacked often by Dr. Goebbels and Lord Haw Haw

and the Nazi propaganda departments, and they were praised by our allies and by resistance groups in overrun territories. The BBC'S representative in South Africa reported that Field Marshal General Smuts invariably stopped whatever he was doing to listen to me. It was that sort of reaction that encouraged and hardened all of us who were doing commentaries and talks in those days.
Now what are we doing now, Frank, aré we going on.

GILLARD: Yes I was going to ask you how frequent were these commentaries. Were they part of the news?

HOLE: No they were separate from the news. They were.. is this going on..

GILLARD: Yes we are running.

HOLE: They were separate from the news they were hung on a peg of the news. They were a quarter of an hour, and one did them in the office amid all the noise and the racket and the shouting, one had to concentrate as best one could. They wandered in at all hours of the day and night because often I had to broadcast at night to North America or somewhere else. But these were, yes they were done like that.

GILLARD: And how many of you were there regular commentaries.

HOLE: Two. Three. Hamish MacGeeky, a Canadian from the Toronto Globe. And a Man named Partick Lacey and myself.
We were the three regulars. Later, Edgar Lustgarten came in and he did the sub-commentaries, but not regularly. We were the three that did them regularly.

GILLARD: And these were not heard by the home audience?

HOLE: They.. no. They could be heard by the home audience if you had a set which tuned into the overseas service, but they weren't broadcast at home, but they were rebroadcast for instance to the United States. And because my broadcasts, for instance, I'm talking about my own which originally were from Australia and New Zealand, my broadcasts because of the freak of broadcasting were picked up in the United States and as a result of that they were rebroadcast by some stations. So that eventually NBC and CBS asked

the BBC through its New York office, if I couldn't broadcast to America and that is how I came to broadcast to America at those very awkward hours. But it was that sort of life, somebody would listen to it, pick it up and say we like this chaps voice or something. The BBC then published a picture of me on the front page of their magazine and said that I had a Continental voice a cosmopolitan voice and that was why the Americans wanted that and because of the angle of the broadcasts and so on, it was that type of thing you see.
Quite interesting what little quirks produced quirkish results.

GILLARD: Can you tell us anything about how the topics were chosen?

HOLE: Yes, the topics were chosen by me. I would chose the topics for MacGeeky and for Patrick Lacey. I can explain that perhaps later on. But yes in answer to that that's what happened. I would have to come in sit down think up my own topics and then be asked by Barkway if I could think up another couple for the other two, because often they would come in and say well what are we talking about. And then Barkway would say well its up to you, tell me what you are talking about. And they couldn't tell him, or they might have an idea but they.. I must say I myself didn't like the idea of always having to scratch round and find something to say. Because the various ministries were imposing pressures on us, they would want their own public relations men to come round and give us ideas. And because we didn't want to depend on them, although in those days I was merely a casual commentator, even then because you were a casual commentator and not attached to any Ministry, not a public relations man, but an independent journalist, the BBC said well this is the sort of thing we want we don't want to get tied down with Ministry public relations men. Nicholas Monsarrat for instance was a public relations man for the Admiralty and later on I edited many of Nicholas Monsarrat talks, it wasn't a question of editing them for style because they were excellent, it was merely a question of casting the eye of a censor over them to see if there was anything that we were told by our censors not to let through, it was that sort of world we were in.

GILLARD: And I suppose the BBC had it in mind that if they had a limited number of commentators they would be known and recognised and identified?

HOLE: That's right. Identified by listeners abroad. And they were. And as I say, they had become so identified that they were attacked by the Goebbels and Lord Haw Haw who attacked me frequently. In fact when eventually when the war was getting on as we got into Berlin and Hitler had fallen the allied military in going through the Gestapo Headquarters files opened their red file box in which those who were regarded in England as being dangerous characters and should be dealt with summarily including Churchill and the rest of the Cabinet, they found an index file a red one with my name and biographical particulars on it and they gave it to Richard Dimbleby in Berlin to present it to me, which he did. But then Frank you've got one yourself.
We belong to the same red card club.

GILLARD: I got it in the same way.
Remembering how, what problems I had with censors in those days, were you much bothered by censorship in your wartime broadcasts?

HOLE: No, because we became our own censors. We had censorship delegated to us through Ryan, so I was a censor, Ryan was a censor in news, and there were one or two others I think. Frank Singleton I think was one, he was sort of on the night shift, and Frank was one, I was one, Patrick Ryan had us delegated from the Ministry. We were our own censors and that was why we were responsible for the, such talks as the Admiralty talk, or the Army talk which came along by their public relations officer they produced the material and obviously it didn't need censoring because their censors had been through it but formally we had to go through it, formally we took the responsibility because we were putting it out. So we had to read it formally to say yes it had been censored in the BBC, although it was quite preposterous to suggest that anything which would come, except some curious error from either of the Armed Services that hadn't been censored.
That's how it was done.

GILLARD: As you said these things went out all round the clock, were you not able to prerecord them, they had to be done live in the middle of the night?

HOLE: Yes they had to be done live in the middle of the night and the recording was taken from the live broadcast.
So I had to stay doing North America for instance, I remember

Wicken Steed who was former editor of the Times, J.B. Priestley and I in the basement of this very building in the war and also a basement in Oxford Street in the war, waiting about two or three in the morning to take our turn at the microphone. And there would be an air raid on perhaps at the time and the firemen would walk through we would hail him and ask whether if he felt we were safe enough down here, and he would look at the overhead pipes and say well at least you will die pretty quickly because the mains would burst and you wouldn't get out you'd just be drowned. LAUGHS.

GILLARD: Can you tell us anything else about 200 Oxford Street. I mean it is an epoch in the history of the BBC we don't know much about really. It is now Peter Robinson's store isn't it?

[Actually it is now C+A Pat Spencer]

HOLE: Yes and it was, it was before the war. And it was vacated and the BBC moved in. It was Peter Robinson's before and it has resumed Peter Robinson's.

GILLARD: So you were doing the commentary work as a freelance or on some sort of contract. What made you eventually come onto the staff?

[Not Sir Frederick while a BBC staff Pat Spencer]

HOLE: J.B. Clark, at lunch one day asked whether I would let him propose to (Si.) Frederick Ogilvie who was the Director General that I be asked to join the Corporation. He said he knew I appreciated the tremendous burden that the war had thrown so suddenly on the BBC and that I would understand the difficulty that it had in finding qualified and reliable staff to help with the job of broadcasting the allied war effort to the world at large. And I agreed and as I had no intention of leaving Britain until the war was ended and I said I would seek my newspapers agreement to his proposal. And that's how I joined the established staff.
Later I saw the Director General with J.B. Clark, I had met Sir Frederick Ogilvie on an earlier occasion and indeed the first occasion I met J.B. Clark was in the Director General's office.
And afterwards a few formalities had to be gone through, for instance I had to go before an appointments board which questioned me and examined my credentials, in those days one had to attend a board which included the Civil Service Commissioner who questioned one very closely.

GILLARD: So now you were on the staff and what difference did

this make, how did, what happened then?

HOLE: Well the first thing that happened was that I was asked to meet Tony Rendell who was J.B. Clark's assistant and Michael Barkway, who was in charge of news and current affairs broadcasts in the Empire Service. I had close links with the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, the India Office, the Dominions Office and the Ministry of Information, links which the Director General and J.B. Clark and Tony Rendell hoped would be of value to the service. One of the greatest difficulties at that time was posed by the simple question what are our journalistic standards going to be, how shall we co-ordinate them and so far as commentators and other speakers are concerned what are we going to ask them to talk about.

GILLARD: So what did they ask you to do?

HOLE: I was asked to assist Barkway, who had the title of Chief Editor of the Empire News Services and to assist Rendell, who as I have said was J.B. Clark's first assistant. Well at that time I used to contribute a commentary which usually I broadcast every day and to edit other peoples' talks and to produce them.

GILLARD: What were some of the themes you selected for these commentaries?

HOLE: I suggested to J.B. Clark that the only way in which Overseas Services as a whole could co-ordinate and control and account for the talks and the commentaries it was broadcasting would be regularly to set themes. Themes that might stand say four or five days and be applied to all the various overseas regions and to brief speakers rather than to let speakers suggest their own subjects. So if listeners in one area were able to overhear, as it were, what was being said in another area of the world in talks broadcast by the BBC there would be no risk of contradictions. Contradictions of course would play into the hands of the enemy. The enemy would pick them up, attack them in their own broadcasts as illustrations of alleged double-talk by the BBC and the British Government.

GILLARD: Because now you were a kind of poacher turned game keeper weren't you. I mean you had been a freelance chosing your now you were a staff man and you were saying this must all be

properly organised and co-ordinated?

HOLE: Quite right, that is true.

GILLARD: And how do you line this up with your basic principles that the the BBC staff people should not in fact be expressing views and comments?

HOLE: Well of course it was wartime. The problem then wasn't the problem as it was after the war. Remember the United States had to be a target for our broadcasts and while I said that the theme shouldn't be aimed solely at the target of America, nevertheless they could usefully illustrate those qualities most admired by Americans.

GILLARD: Did you know America yourself?

HOLE: Yes on my way to London I had travelled through America and Canada. I met President Roosevelt at the White House and he said to me, when you get to London and talk to those in Westminster and Whitehall remind them that New Zealand and Australia and South Africa and Canada for that matter are much nearer to the plough than they are and that that is why it is easier for us to understand each other's point of view. Actually of course the problem of what to say wasn't exclusively a BBC problem, it was common to those whose job it was in Whitehall to brief the British and International journalists at daily press conferences and to say, and I would think also to the Overseas Planning Committee at the Ministry of Information, the principle themes were partnership, freedom, success, bravery, courage, scientific and technical progress, the Empire as an expanding source of great benefit to mankind, Britain's morale, the fusion of rights, responsibilities and duties and so on. And we looked beyond the war beyond the day of victory to the post war era.

GILLARD: Wasn't that a bit optimistic after all this was in the very darkest days surely?

HOLE: Quite right. You see it was 1942 and in fact in December 1943 the Royal Institute of International Affairs, or Chatham House as it was more popularly known, was preparing to do the same thing. Lord Aster wrote me inviting me to become a

member of an advisory group which was being set up at Chatham House in London to assist in preparing an unofficial conference of Commonwelath relations. The purpose was to consider the practical problems to be faced by Britain at the end of the war in her relations with other members of the Commonwealth and the BBC urged me to accept and of course I became a member. Actually a Committee of representatives appointed by each of the Commonwealth Institutes met a few weeks later in New York to help draw up an agenda for the Conference which was to be held in London a few months later.

GILLARD: That must have given you a whole range of very valuable contacts meeting such people in such circumstances, I'm sure?

HOLE: It did, and they were very valuable to us, but it was I think an expression of national confidence, no one in the BBC thought we would lose the war. No one in Whitehall thought we would lose the war. .. No one in Westminster thought we would lose the war, we had lots of dark days, but we didn't give up hope.

GILLARD: Overseas Broadcasting in those days was of course getting to become organised by now, wasn't it, how many services were there?

HOLE: About six, six principal services. There was the North American Service under Maurice Gorham. Closely associated as he was with two Canadians, Warren MacAlpine and ~~Rumeny Peltier~~ Romney Pelletier. Warren MacAlpine later took over from Maurice Gorham.
The African Service was under John Grenfell-Williams.
And the Pacific Service was under George Ivan Smith with help from me.
The Eastern Service was under Rushbrook Williams, and the Empire New Service was under Michael Barkway, with Peter Pooley who was in charge of Radio Newsreel.
Norman Collins was Manager of the General Overseas Service, later Collins went to the Light Programme then to Television.
Besides ~~Rumeny Peltier~~ Romney Pelletier there was Joanna Spicer as Programme Organiser a job which later she did extremely well for the Television Service.

GILLARD: Sounds like a very complicated set up, these six services. Were they integrated, were they co-ordinated?

HOLE: They were co-ordinated. Their talks were co-ordinated

by a person who was known as the overseas talks manager and I became overseas talks manager and the themes that I was writing before I became overseas talks manager were applied to all these services. The co-ordination was completed at two meetings, one was held about 11 o'clock in the morning and the other was held at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. At that, those meetings we co-ordinated the output, that is to say we had an idea of what was going in Radio Newsreel and what the talks of the day were and what the theme was.

GILLARD: So this was an operation going on right round the clock, 24 hours, how did it all work together then ?

HOLE: Well the driving force was J.B. Clark and Tony Rendell. I doubt there was ever anything in the Corporation's archives that fully acknowledges the debt the Corporation owes those two executives. They were inspired by the challenge with which the war presented the nation and they dedicated themselves to the task of informing the world of what Britain and the British people and their allies were doing to achieve victory. The handicaps that faced both of them were obvious, enormous and daunting. Many a night I didn't go to sleep on an office bunk for 24 hours and I know they did the same.

GILLARD: You had a bunk in your office did you ?

HOLE: In the basement, we had to go downstairs to sleep we slept on bunks in the basement when we were on duty. We used to be on duty for ten or eleven days at a stretch then take a day off, perhaps two. Weekdays and weekends it was all the same. Work was the hourly diet, one of the problems facing J.B. Clark and Tony Rendell for instance was how to link the British broadcasting system with those of the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand all of which in their own particular ways were anxiously concerned with their own efforts. What Clark and Rendell wanted by way of co-operation between themselves and the U.S. and the dominions of course was to persuade the respective broadcasting systems to clear part of their time schedule to rebroadcast BBC talks and news and so on. And apart altogether from the makeshift accommodation in London and the equipment, the so called offices in which we all worked in mostly

half partitioned cubicles so that if one bothered to listen one could overhear all that was being said on either side, that was the staff problem. Where was staff to be accommodated, let alone ~~little own~~ to be collected, Clark and Rendell did it by refusing to give up.

GILLARD: And when you were asked to join by making the effort to get the BBC heard all over the world the whole organisation was still trying to get itself into shape then for this job ?

HOLE: Exactly so, let us take news as an example. Even in 1942 the BBC's news services were still in a state of growing pains. The problem of editorial co-ordination and of common professional standards for the home and overseas services remained unresolved, strange as that may seem. At the best of times it's never easy even today to select an ideal team of journalists, that is to say a well balanced team or reporters, writers, sub editors, chief sub editors, heads of specialist departments, editors, men with a national and an international outlook rather than with a narrow provincial outlook. In 1942 it was extremely difficult to get the right ones. This meant that a very large share of the important editing rewriting and supervising work had to be done by the few.

GILLARD: Now of whom you were one of course.

HOLE: That's so. The same applied to home news, the home news bulletins, commentaries, talks were produced in Broadcasting House, the overseas services ones were produced in Peter Robinson's in, on the corner of Upper Regent Street and Oxford Street, it's worth remembering that it had been no more than 20 years earlier in 1922 in fact that John Reith as Manager of the British Broadcasting Company had first sought to broadcast news and as you know it was a commercial company in those days, not a corporation. It couldn't set up a broadcasting news organisation for the good reasons that it didn't have the money and it didn't have the experience.

GILLARD: Hence the agencies.

HOLE: Hence the agencies. They turned to the four British news agencies and they were Reuters, the Press Association, the Exchange Telegraph and the Central News Agency. These news agencies of course depended upon the newspaper proprietors' good will

they were the principal customers. Without their goodwill the news agencies would have had a very thin time of it. Naturally enough the press looked askance at the aspirations of the new broadcasting company because since it was hoping to broadcast news it could become a competitor, so the newspaper proprietors very sensibly determined to protect themsleves in any agreement they might let the agencies make with the BBC. So the upshot was that the agreement eventually negotiated in 1922 stipulated that the BBC's news bulletins would have to be edited and put into bulletin form by Reuters from the combined services of the four agencies. And when the news was broadcast it had to be prefaced with the announcement that that was being done by arrangement with those four agencies which also held the copyright. And another feature of that agreement was that no bulletin should be broadcast before seven o'clock in the evening. This meant that the evening newspapers were protected against news being broadcast while they were on the streets and also the morning journals. The consequence of course was that there was no inducement for experienced, mature journalists on national newspapers to think about joining the BBC with the idea of having a career in journalism in the BBC. It is perhaps its own commentary on that aspect of the matter that on occasions the BBC instead of broadcasting a bulletin of news would say there is no news today.

The reason for this was that newspapers then, as now, observe certain public holidays, Christmas day for example, the news agencies did also so the agencies merely said to the BBC typist at the other end of the telephone, there's no news today.

Of course the audience for news bulletins in those days was very small, not much attention was paid to them by the general public indeed one could say that as far the general public was concerned it was unaware of them. Lord Reith told me that relatively they made very little impact at all except that here and there they aroused some curiosity. What brought home to the public the value of broadcast news was the general strike of 1926. It did that because suddenly there was no newspapers and only a few newssheets. Overnight the nation was dependent upon what it heard on the radio. Because of the strike the restrictions imposed by the agreement with the four newsagencies were lifted a little for the period of the emergency. The bulletins were broadcast at 10 a.m., 1 p.m., 4 p.m., 7 p.m., and 9.30 p.m.

Some of them lasted for three quarters of an hour, others for an hour. Some items in the bulletin were reproduced on sheets of paper which were stuck up in public places up and down the country.

This remarkable and memorable industrial dispute jolted the government, jolted the country and jolted the BBC into appreciating for the first time the power of broadcasting information to the public. Psychologically speaking it was a significant turning point. Actually there is some historical significance in the fact that the word information wasn't included among the purposes of the broadcasting service in the preamble of the original charter. That charter was granted in 1926 and it recorded that the BBC's purposes were education and entertainment. Even so that first charter also listed as the fifth of the 14 objects for which the Corporation was established, the collection of news and news relating to current events and also to subscribe to news agencies. Ten years later in 1936 the second charter came to be written, the Ullswater Committee had made its historical report a year earlier in 1935. The charter of 1936 gave the Ullswater Report its due weight. The committee had expressed the importance of news in broadcasting so the second charter declared that the BBC's purposes were to include the provision of information, so it read information, education and entertainment. The Ullswater Committee's views became of immense constitutional significance for the BBC's news services, the committee believed that the influence of broadcasting on the political life of the country was brought to bear not only by speeches, talks and reports but also by the provision of news. The committee considered that it was of the utmost importance that the news distributed by the BBC should be a fair selection of items, impartially presented as impersonally as possible.

GILLARD: And that came really relatively late in the reign of John Reith, now you knew Reith and I wonder if you could comment on something that has always mystified me about Reith, I knew him too of course, but it's always puzzled me and I never got a satisfactory answer from him about this, that while he was prepared to surround himself by experts on drama and music and entertainment

and religious broadcasting and all these other things, schools and education he never seemed to bother about journalism, he never brought in a big Fleet Street man to advise him or help him, he didn't seem to bother about news, he seemed to have a blind spot for information and news. Would you comment on that ?

HOLE: I think you're right. I think he did have a blind spot, I don't think news occurred to him as being of importance, I think he was living in an age of newspapers, the nation was well-served by them, there were many more then than there are now and I don't think it occurred to John Reith that news was essential. I think that he thought that as it was to be aiming the company then was aiming and appealing to a wide section of the nation it would be sensible to include news if he could as an item but it was not thought of by Reith as being an essential element in broadcasting. It was something he thought should be there because it was a form of information that would perhaps be a suggest that ....

GILLARD: Don't you think it's doubly curious that having in 1926 had the experience of the General Strike which so clearly demonstrated the role that broadcasting could play in the determination, dissemination of information that he let things slide back again after that ? Or do you think that he had no option that the grip of the newspaper industry was so hard and determined that he could make no progress no matter how much he wanted to ?

HOLE: Well I think it's only fair to Reith to say that. I think that the newspaper proprietors, after all in his day they were indeed barons. The news agencies had no life if the newspaper barons decided to withdraw their patronage, the news agencies depended, as I've said, on the newspapers. The newspapers weren't blind even then to the power of broadcasting to provide a competitor. I think that the agreement they forced the company to accept because that's what happened, the news agencies had to refer obviously to the newspaper proprietors, the agreement that was negotiated was the best to be had and what did it amount to ? It should be recorded that it amounted to this. That the news

broadcast by the British Broadcasting Company was not prepared by it, it had no control over it, it was prepared by what Ullswater would call extraneous body and that carried on for quite a long time. And it was from that ultimately that the situation that the BBC freed itself and became an independent news distributor.

GILLARD: But then there was an extraordinary incident because when that freedom came and there was the opportunity to appoint a news editor what an extraordinary appointment it was ?

HOLE: Yes you see it wasn't appreciated how it should be run and the man who was appointed was .. just ran ordinary office hours, he knew nothing of journalism, had a small staff, but I can tell you about that, I can tell you something about that in those early days.

RECORDING PAUSE

GILLARD: I am now going to ask a different question. When did the BBC then get the freedom to compile its own news bulletins and not to have to accept the bulletin contributed by the agencies ?

HOLE: That was in 1928. It was just two years after the General Strike. A new agreement, because that's what it came to, a new agreement transferred the compilation of the news from Reuters to members of the BBC's own staff on the BBC's own premises. At the same time the hours open for news broadcasting were extended slightly. The pattern of pre war home bulletins underwent fairly frequent changes, yet there was nothing so established in that pattern of news broadcasting or so clearly recognised as a main bulletin, as the Nine O'clock News, although a bulletin at six o'clock signalled the opening of the permitted hours. The bulletins were distributed between the national and regional programmes during the Munich Affair in 1938 for instance the bulletins were broadcast on weekdays, 6.30, 7.30, and at 10 minutes to 10 and at 10 minutes to midnight. On sundays they were put out at 10 minutes to nine o'clock and by special dispensation during the crisis additional bulletins were broadcast at at half past ten in the morning and 1 o'clock in the afternoon on weekdays and four o'clock on sunday afternoons.

GILLARD: Of course the war changed all this ?

HOLE: Yes the wartime schedule of home news broadcasts became established in 1940 with bulletins at 7 and 8 on weekdays on sundays the bulletin was at 9 o'clock. For the rest of the day the times were 1 p.m., 6 p.m., 9 p.m. and midnight. And from the summer of 1941 all these bulletins except the midnight one were relayed into the forces programme. In February 1944 the general overseas service was renamed the general forces programme and it took the place of the forces programme as an alternative for listeners in the U.K. on the medium waves and so they were able to hear what the BBC was broadcasting to their kin abroad. For the next year or more bulletins edited by the overseas newsroom were available to home listeners on medium wave.

GILLARD: Well how was the job of fixing standards and co-ordinating editorial policy done during this period, we're now talking about the wartime years.

HOLE: Well as a step towards achieving co-ordination a news division was created in August 1942 and Patrick Ryan, he was then in charge of home news was appointed controller. In October Ryan and J.B. Clark announced the reorganisation of home and overseas news services.

Ryan and Clark issued a memorandum on the 6th October 1942, the subject was news reorganisation and this is what it said, because here I have it in front of me. "In accordance with the general premises of the director general's memo of the 18th August the following arrangements consequent on news reorganisation are promulgated for the information of those concerned.

A: Mr. Tahu Hole transfers to news division establishment but remains directly responsible to the general overseas services division for special duties in relation to the Pacific Service and in assisting Mr. Barkway and those aspects of the latters work that relate to the general policy of the Empire Service in particular.

B: Mr. Barkway retains, at least for the time being, the title of chief editor Empire Services, he also transfers to News Division Establishment but will continue to carry out with direct responsibility to the overseas services division attendance at appropriate Empire Service meetings and the drafting of policy directives for the Empire Service as a whole. The latter will be

issued on behalf of acting controller Overseas Service."
That was the basis of the organisation

GILLARD: Well from the outbreak of the war there was a considerable change in all this wasn't there, how would you describe it ?

HOLE: Well the character and the quality of the news bulletins changed sometime soon after the outbreak of war, sometime early in 1940. Mr. Chamberlain told the nation in a broadcast in September 1939 that a state of war existed between Britain and Germany, that was the beginning of what came to be known as the phoney war period. It was really a period of relative quiet and determined preparation, it extended well into 1940.

GILLARD: What were the editorial standards like then up to the outbreak of war, indeed were there any standards at all, was there anything laid down ?

HOLE: Well as I've said for years the BBC had no say either in the style or in the contents of the bulletins it was to broadcast and which were prepared for broadcast, a thing by Reuters from the four news agencies and when eventually the BBC was allowed to compile its own bulletins on its own premises the handful of intelligent men who were saddled with the responsibility of producing new bulletins from the news tapes that rattled out of the agencies machines which were then in the BBC's office, well they were left to do the best they could. The scale of hard news values didn't exist. It was most important that there should be a scale of values of course especially as the BBC had to assume full responsibility for its news, but it didn't have one. Patrick Ryan who formally had been on the editorial staff of the Manchester Guardian began the job of creating a scale of values.

RECORDING PAUSE.

GILLARD: We're doing the contribution of Mr. Tahu Hole to the Oral History of the BBC, tape four continuing straight on from tape three.

HOLE: When Haley was brought in by the director general, Mr. Foot, Haley was brought in as editor in chief, he knew Ryan very well because Haley had been with the Manchester Guardian, Manchester Evening News which is part of the Manchester Guardian organisation.

GILLARD: I've only a dim recollection of those pre war bulletins, did you ever see any of them, I don't suppose you heard them because you weren't in this country but do they exist now ?

HOLE: Well I made a point of it, which rather startled Registry at the time because apparently noone else had ever asked to see them. Well it proved a most interesting exercise, most of the copies of the news bulletins broadcast before the war were destroyed during the war but registry had those for 1939, at least Registry did when I asked them to look them up in 1950 when I was in charge of News Division There were also some that were broadcast in 1938 and 1937.

GILLARD: How did they compare ?

HOLE: Well there was no real comparison between them and the bulletins of 1950, no comparison was possible anymore than it would be ....

would be today. Before the war there was no Today in Parliament or Radio Newsreel and only three of the six regions, broadcast regional news bulletins. At 9 o'clock an attempt was made to produce a cross between Today in Parliament, a slice of a kind of Radio Newsreel and a national and regional news programme.

GILLARD: And I suppose the staff was very small ?

HOLE: Well it was so small about .. fewer than half a dozen that it was impossible for anyone to devote time to a study of say parliamentary practice, industrial questions, diplomacy or of foreign affairs generally. There were no parliamentary diplomatic or industrial correspondents to help, none at all.

GILLARD: So how would you describe the pre war bulletins ?

HOLE: Well it wasn't uncommon for about half the bulletin to be taken up with parliamentary matters. I remember that in one bulletin it was stated that the prime minister had spoken on the refugee problem which parliament was then debating but also in the same bulletin about three minutes was devoted to the government's appeal against share pushing and according to the bulletin report the debate about it was still going on, yet quite obviously two debates couldn't be carried out simultaneously in one House.

GILLARD: Then foreign affairs ?

HOLE: Well they were treated as satisfactorily as possible in the circumstances, there were no foreign correspondents, Radio Times published a letter in April 1939 from a listener, this listener said - "Might I suggest that the depression over Europe is of more importance than that over Iceland and should be given precedence in the news".

GILLARD: Did they go in for factual reporting or did they carry rumours, speculations ?

HOLE: Oh yes yes rumours were reported and also reports of rumours. At the end of one bulletin a story was based on rumours

from Paris, it was stated, there is no confirmation of any of these rumours. It was a practice criticised by listeners of course, the Radio Times published a letter from one of these listeners who said, one of the worst features of the BBC was to broadcast a report and then to qualify it by saying that this shouldn't be accepted with reservation. I do think you oughn't to broadcast nothing that is not a fact and cannot in some way be verified the listener said. Well none of this is at all surprising when it is realised that at times one man was obliged to write a whole bulletin and not more than two or three at most were ever engaged in producing only one bulletin. I think the wonder is that they did as well as they did.

GILLARD: And was any sort of record or history of those early days ever made, did anybody ever write it up ?

HOLE: No....no I don't know whether anyone ever did, I've never heard of it. I would say that none was ever written. At one time, about 1950 it was suggested by the publicity department of the BBC that the BBC should publish a book about its news. I discussed it with the staff, Michael Balkwill and Tony Wigan had been handling news for some years before 1939 and they knew all about it. I asked Tony Wigan to write what he remembered, he did and I have it still, nothing came of the idea of a book being published about news because we couldn't free a man to do the job. Wigan told me to keep his record of those days in case I myself wrote a book about news and if I did he thought I might find it useful.

GILLARD: Well it certainly ought to have a place in the Archives I think we might get it in Tony Wigan's own voice I think, one of these days, might be a good thing to do.

HOLE: Yes I've got it here, I've got what Tony wrote.

GILLARD: Is it very lengthy ?

HOLE: It's quite interesting.

GILLARD: Perhaps we might look at it later.

GILLARD: What about the Asa Briggs reports and comments on the development of the BBC news ?

HOLE: Well I think his documentation is impeccable, noone could complain, no future historian using his volumes as sources for whatever then he might be writing could complain of any lack of detail. Asa Briggs has marshalled scores of office memos, articles, statements, speeches and so on however relevant or irrelevant the reader of another generation may find them. But I think a reader who knew that it was between 1940 say and 1958 that the BBC made its national and international reputation for the impartiality, for the accuracy and the objectivity of its news could be a bit puzzled as to how it was done. He might even be tempted to conclude that the BBC news achieved its high reputation in spite of the seemingly endless discussion and expressions of views by various people in the Corporation about editorial principles, absolute news values and the like, rather than because of them.

GILLARD: What do you mean by being puzzled exactly ?

HOLE: Well while all this writing of memos and arguing, bickering, debating, discussing and so on was proceeding in various parts of the Corporation the only two persons responsible for maintaining and applying the standards and the policy that produced the news which day in and day out was fed into the Home & Overseas bulletins were Ryan and myself. Ryan for about six years, me for ten. The basic standards and the scale of values were evolved during the war and in the first few years after it. The circumstances of war imposed certain editorial restrictions naturally but nevertheless the principles were acknowledged and understood and between 1945 and 1947 with the war behind us they were consolidated, yet as Asa Briggs notes ...RECORDING PAUSE.

GILLARD: Proceeding from the word consolidated...

HOLE: The same policy was being applied consistently until at least 1958 when I ceased to be editor and became a member of the Board of Management. Yet as Asa Briggs notes even in 1955 there were those in the Corporation who couldn't recognise that any news policy existed. Indeed they seemed to

pooh pooh the notion that there ever had been such a policy. Attitudes of that sort of course couldn't be concealed from the news staff who in fact understood the policy and had worked in accordance with it for years to the great credit of the BBC. What future historians say 50 years hence will make of the obvious conflict between the statements about news policy made by the director general Sir Ian Jacob and his chief assistant Harman Grisewood in 1955, can only be a matter for conjecture. Asa Briggs for instance, states that and I quote "Grisewood had stated bluntly that it is hardly true to say that the BBC possesses a news policy. There are various cannons, variously understood but there is little that can be disengaged as a firm policy from the mass of tradition, folklore or myth it maybe called that has grown up round news and the BBC's handling of news" well that's the end of the quotation. Asa Briggs puts that quotation as a footnote to his recording of the fact that on June 22nd 1955 Sir Ian thought it necessary to address the whole of news division staff. Sir Ian said that he believed that many of them felt that because they were news people they were unpopular with some of their colleagues inside the BBC and he was anxious to raise their morale. He was, he said, equally anxious to explain that the BBC had a news policy, you provide a central service, he told them, like the engineers, and it was this special quality of news as a central service which led to the placing of news division directly under the director general.

GILLARD: So on the positive side then what were, how would you state the policy, the news policy ?

HOLE: Well the policy's aims were accuracy, objectivity and impartiality, to guard against any form of editorialising, just to tell the unvarnished facts as far as they could be ascertained. To reflect the opinions, the comments and the judgements of others including those of the press. Successive boards of governors underwrote these aims as did successive advisory councils and directors general. They underwrote too the scales of value and that scale provided that news provided must be of national or international significance.

GILLARD: Was this ever made public ?

HOLE: Oh yes often. In its annual handbook the BBC puts great emphasis on the fact that constitutionally there is no more important obligation on the BBC then, I quote "To refrain from expressing a point of view of its own on any matter of public controversy or public policy". The BBC always recognised that certain editorial functions that rightly belonged to the press shouldn't have a place in so all pervasive and influential a force as public service broadcasting. The traditional newspaper practice of treating news, a staff member's personal comments for instance or his assessments or his interpretation of events, wasn't permitted.

GILLARD: And you were supported in this by Haley, by Jacob...

HOLE: By both they supported us. Sir William in the course of his Lewis Fry memorial lectures which he delivered in the University of Bristol as early as 1948 said of the prohibition of BBC news staff expressing their own comments and views that this was a very wise prohibition, it had always be enjoyed, enjoined, he said, on the Corporation and he said it would be wrong for anybody of men and women to have so powerful an instrument at their disposal to propogate their own view. And as you know Asa Briggs records that in 1952 Sir Ian Jacob also emphasised that the BBC has no views of its own on current affairs and that it sought only to reflect British views. (And yet)...and that was 14 years after Haley spoke.

GILLARD: Yes... but yet there is certainly from Asa Briggs the impression that all this was a Hole policy, it was something that you evolved and was attached to you.

HOLE: True, but of course they're mistaken. They would be correct if they said I had a hand in shaping the news policy which the corporation endorsed and which was applied rigorously by Ryan and myself. We had to be firm in the face of much internal criticism, that's always inevitable when in a news operation it's important to keep to a high standard of accuracy, objectivity and impartiality and remember in most of that time the BBC was a monopoly. Most journalists have views of their own, some would like very much to work them into their stories and the dangers are obvious.

After I'd been the editor in charge of news division for a decade and was made Director of Administration and given a seat on the board of management in 1958 Haley was editor of the Times. When the announcement of my being a member of the board of management was made he wrote me a letter about my part in the Corporation's news service which covered 16 or more years. He said that I may use it in anyway I wish should I ever want to for the Corporation's own private archives perhaps Haley's assessment of my contribution should be recorded especially as he joined the BBC as its first editor in chief and helped develop the news services until he resigned in 1954. Actually Haley wrote me two such letters of appreciation, the first as I've said when I ceased to be editor in 1958 and the second when I left the Corporation two years later.

[Haley left in 1952]
Pat Hynes

TAPE FIVE - ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC

GILLARD: Mr. Hole is now going to read two personal letters which he received from Sir William Haley which I have asked him to read because they show very clearly the principles behind the news service and the degree of support that the... that the policies that Mr. Hole set up and introduced and always insisted upon had the full backing of the top executive of the BBC.

HOLE: "June 17th 1958.

My dear Mr. Hole. I do not know what all this means for you and for BBC news but I want to send my good wishes to both. Whatever it does mean it is the end of a long road. I cannot help recalling most vividly the circumstances in which you were appointed to succeed Ryan. Onslaughts on the independence and the professionalism of BBC news were increasing both inside and outside the Corporation and it was necessary to have someone who would not only uphold the faith but would be able to do so because he understood what it meant. This you did magnificently. The BBC has always taken great credit for the world prestige of its news but the Corporation as a whole had nothing to do with it, it was Ryan's and your creation and my job was to keep the rest of the BBC and the whole outside world off you. So you are closing a chapter of which you can be immensely proud and for which this nation and many others should be grateful.

As I've said I do not know what is to happen now but I am concerned that you should know how deeply all you have done and stood for is appreciated by one who can fairly claim some right to judge.

With all good wishes, yours sincerely, W.J. Haley."

GILLARD: And that was a letter you received when you ceased to be editor news and moved to board of management ?

HOLE: That's right, I became director of administration and a member of the board of management and when I left the board of management and left the BBC Sir William wrote me another letter. He wrote it on March 16th 1960.

My dear Mr. Hole:

This morning's Times tells me that friday will be your last day in the BBC. Things have happened so swiftly that I do not know whether there is going to be any time for farewell speeches. In any case it would probably be embarrassing if I were asked along to make one and it is not likely to happen. All the same I would not wish you to leave the BBC without putting on record, even if it's only between us, my admiration for all you have done for the Corporation in a number of fields but overwhelmingly in that of news. By its very nature the BBC is an institution that will always be nagged, criticised and found fault with, even those who are going to come down most whole-heartedly on its side witness the Beveridge Committee, feel that before they do so they must find some fault with it. That kind of thing never worried me. I regarded it as an occupational, institutional hazard, in a curious way a tribute to the Corporation. All the same one couldn't ignore the fact that one thing with which noone ever found any fault was the news. Its judgement, its values, its accuracy, its detachment, its austere adherance to things that mattered have commanded admiration everywhere. The BBC's news bulletins reached their apex in the war and post war years were the creation of two men, Ryan and yourself. The director general could hold the ring for you and interpose a broad back between all you did and the whole of the rest of the Corporation from programme heads to governors and also hold off the whole of the rest of the world from petty vested interest to prime ministers. But in the ring itself, first Ryan and then yourself were in absolute command.

To have created the service you did in the times that you did, had to do it in, was a remarkable achievement. It is one that all of us that have the interests of the BBC at heart will always look back on with satisfaction and pride. If ever there was a purely professional job done with news, this was it.

Perhaps I could appreciate it more than any of my predecessors or successors because my whole life has been spent in the news world and now that you're going off to new adventures I hope you'll completely forget the recent months of what must have been a good deal of uncongenial work and frustration and remember only what was your true work in the BBC.

(when) The definitive history of broadcasting in this country comes to be written, one of the most significant aspects of it will

be the way in which for a time the spoken word ousted the word in the confidence of the people. Now the battle is joined again it will swing the other way if programme values are ever allowed to contaminate news values. Ryan fortunately never had this particular battle to fight, I am afraid the burden has fallen on you more than on him. You can now go off with your flag unlowered knowing that you held the fort to the very end.

I am afraid this is rather a long letter and yet it still does not say all that I would like to say. But I am sure it's enough for you to know what is really in my mind, I think friday will be a sad day for the Corporation, may it be the beginning of a new life of fulfillment and satisfaction for you.

With all good wishes, yours sincerely, W.J. Haley.

GILLARD: That's one of the finest letters of its kind that has ever been written I should say, you must be very proud of it.

HOLE: Thankyou Frank, I am. I think it especially because it is heartfelt and he was a professional.

GILLARD: Well at this point we have come to the end of the part that Mr. Hole has prepared for today so we're going now to go into a little ad lib discussion about one or two things to amplify, they will be, they won't be in any chronological order but I think they will help very much to illuminate what's been said already. I'd like to hear anything you can tell us about some of those early people that you dealt with who are not much more than names to most of us, people like Tallents, like Rendall, like even J.B. Clarke if there's anything more to be said about him. They would, we would like to hear much more about them in the archives, what can you tell us about those three for example ?

HOLE: Well ~~Steven~~ Stephen Tallents was the titular head, let us say of the old empire services. He came into the BBC as .. from the Empire Marketing Board. He...he was .. classified by the BBC as in charge of public relations at one time. He had an office next to J.B. Clarke's and J.B. Clarke's was his assistant. But the broadcasting practitioner really was J.B. Clarke. And in the early days in the forties when J.B. Clarke in the empire services because of the war had the responsibility of developing the

empire service into a general overseas service so that it would affect countries other than the colonies and the dominions, for instance America the United States although there was no United States service there was a North American service and the target really in the North American service wasn't Canada it was the United States and J.B. Clarke had as his first assistant Tony Rendall.

Now these two had come straight from university into the BBC. They had known nothing else and that is why they were dedicated. I remember Tony Rendall's uncle who was the endearing head for many many years of Winchester. I remember sitting with him in his house, I stayed with him several weekends and I remember particularly one winter's day when he was wrapped rather like a cold indian on a reservation, wrapped in rug after rug and looking more charming than ever because of it with his tousled hair and slightly unshaven face, recalling with great delight the enthusiasm of young Tony when he joined the BBC, that he really had, he told his uncle, found his vocation and he did. And Tony was devoted to the BBC until the day he died. And I saw Tony as a close friend for many many years.

J.B. Clarke was exactly the same. They were different tempraments. J.B. Clarke was more practical, Tony was a philosopher. J.B. Clarke was a carpenter, he also was an electrician, amateur carpenter, amateur electrician but passionately fond of both, very good with his hands. He made very good furniture, I've eaten off tables he's made. His flat he had very good broadcasting equipment, receiving sets and transmitters, he was great at that. It was another, in a sense a domestic expression of the pleasure he had in broadcasting. He would work round the clock, he did work round the clock. I think that Tony Rendall killed himself in the service of the BBC. I think that his illness that crept up on him gradually, in part anyhow, was probably accountable for the .. his inability ultimately to summon up the strength to combat his illness. But he would be the first to have no criticism of that it was the way he wanted to live, he lived it well and he died young. But he didn't die before he'd made what I considered to be one of the finest contributions to the BBC's overseas services. I would always salute him and J.B. Clarke for being the original architects of the general overseas service of the BBC. I think Maurice Gorham would agree with me, Michael Barkway certainly would. John Grenville Williams would agree, always did, great devotion,

the teams that those two gathered around them, Peter Pooley, young Peter Pooley who eventually went to Paris to UNESCO, Peter Pooley was the one who under the guidance of J.B. Clarke and Rendall began Radio Newsreel, the wartime version of it and he collected a number of good chaps round him and good women. Peter Pooley was very inventive, he too had a whimsical side it was because of their personalities, all different, all distinctive that helped to give such variety and I believe strength to the Corporation. There was not a, it was because it was so young, it was because there was no grooves in which anybody could find himself, you had to cut your own groove and what they were doing really was cutting several grooves and it was the men like Rendell and J.B. Clarke who marshalled these grooves, brought it together and produced out of nothing really, nothing, with no help from anybody .. the Corporation couldn't help what is the Corporation ? Constitutionally the Corporation is the board of governors, that's what the Corporation is when we're talking of the Corporation in legalistic terms, it is the board of governors. But the Corporation had nothing whatsoever to do with the formation of this, that or the other service anymore than it did in Talks, Mary Somerville's contribution was not a Corporation one it was distinctive, it was Mary Somerville, like Donald Boyd in Talks, Donald Boyd as you well know was responsible for a great deal. Bonnargee, came from news into news-talks, five minute things, new thing on the Home Service but a very old thing on the Overseas Service. Five minute talks was quite common, topical talks in the Overseas Service, a great deal that originated on the Overseas Service was eventually found its way into the Home Service and that isn't surprising because before the war the Home Service was .. not restricted but it was conforming to a set pattern. It wasn't that it couldn't have done something else but there was no need at that time to do something else.

But the war shifted all that and the inventive side of the BBC wasn't peculiar to one part of it or the other. The Overseas side was very inventive so was the Home Service. But when I was Overseas Talks manager I had to have weekly exchanges twice weekly, with George Barnes who was Head of Home Talks. He had to come to Oxford Street, my office, with a bundle of talks from the Home Service to see whether they were worthwhile for us.

And I had to go to him with a bundle much as they do now on....

RECORDING PAUSE.