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'A History of North Regional Broadcasting' - ALFRED BRADLEY

(Interview I4 - Notes)

Trevor Hill Radio's very first play was broadcast from Station 2LO London, on 15th November 1922, - the day after Broadcasting in England first began. It was heard in the Children's programme.

But the North Region can probably boast the first adult play written for 'the wireless'. L. du Garde Peach was the author. It came from the British Broadcasting Company's Metro Vicks' studio and was broadcast by Station 2ZY.

By the start of the 1930's, far more Northerners were hearing plays than seeing them in the theatre. They were produced by the likes of Jan Bussell, Cecil McGivern, and by Edward Wilkinson.

The radio 'dramatic feature' became the invention and hallmark of Geoffrey Bridson, Francis Dillon, Olive Shapley, and Joan Littlewood all working from North region.

By the 1940's, James R. Gregson had started a school for radio playwrights at the Leeds studios.

But no 'History Of North Regional Broadcasting' would be anywhere near complete without BBC Regional drama's most distinguished name - that of Alfred Bradley who's with me now. You joined in 1959 ?

Alfred Bradley (May like to tell me about his 'life before the BBC'; how he went after the job, what were his first impressions of the BBC, et cetera.)

Trevor Do you recall your very first play production ?

Alfred (Replies)

Trevor I mentioned James R Gregson and L. du Garde Peach; both writers as well as producers, particularly the latter. You've probably 'discovered' - and by that, I mean encouraged at the very outset, more distinguished writers than the rest of us put together in BBC radio drama. Tell me about some of them.

Alfred (Does so, please - and no modesty. 'The Northern Drift', as a separate programme, edited by Alan Plater and produced by you, began on 22nd March, 1964. It went into the 'Talkabout series, started by Colin Shaw, from January, 1965 and was then heard monthly. At the end of that year, 'Radio Times' shows Alan Ayckbourne as an occasional producer of the series.

From April, 1967, until 1974, 'The Northern Drift', produced by you, was heard regularly on Radio 3 - compiled by Alan Plater and occasionally edited by Ian Watson, Roger Chapman and Brian Thompson. In the latter years, Peter de Rosa occasionally produced the Drift for Radio 3 and Radio 4.

Alan Ayckbourne - started with you sometime in 1963. He certainly 'sat in' during his training period on my production of 'Under The Red Robe' that year, Alfred.)

Trevor Going back to the early 1960's, it was our BBC Newcastle colleague Gillian Hush who persuaded the BBC's then head of Talks that the word 'bugger' could be classed as a term of endearment. Was it she who encouraged you to introduce even shorter words on Radio drama ?

Alfred (Replies - talks about Val Gielgud and 'A Taste Of Honey' et cetera, and how you battled to get the BBC to alter some of its more entrenched attitudes)

Trevor Language apart, you also fought, as I recall, to get the old Leeds Drama Studio equipped for Stereophonic play productions.

Alfred (To talk, please, about Geoff Wilkinson and the 'string and wax' job he did on the Studio since no money or equipment was forthcoming)

Trevor I think you'll agree that the success of any of us as producers rests to a large degree on our working relationships not only with the local bosses, but also with our London Lords and Masters.

Alfred (to talk, please, about the encouragement and backing he received from **Grahame Miller**, from **Donald McWhinnie**, **Douglas Cleverdon** and from two heads of BBC Radio Drama - **Martin Esslin** and **Ronald Mason**)

Trevor Selling programmes and programme ideas is one thing; getting the necessary Programme Allowances and production facilities is quite another

Alfred (Replies to this - mentions the battle to have the Control Cubicle of Leeds Studio I refurbished in the late 1960's , and how he felt when the Leeds drama production facilities came to an end with the opening of **New Broadcasting House, Manchester** in 1976.)

Trevor (Recalls the first Production from the new building - and the Ken Whitmore Radio 3 play production which Alfred did the day that the Prime Minister came to declare Manchester's new Headquarters officially open).

Alfred (replies - remembering he is still being recorded for posterity!)

Trevor (asks Alfred about his attitude towards 'the BBC' over the years)

Alfred (Replies)

Trevor We've talked about your stable of 'thoroughbred' writers; you also gathered around you a band of actors. I'm thinking in particular of the Brian Thompson serial you produced for '**4th Dimension**'- the strand which replaced '**Children's Hour**' after it had been axed.

Alfred (To talk about his 'Rep' in Leeds and those actors and actresses he has worked most closely with over the years)

Trevor What about Alfred Bradley, the author of Children's stage plays?

Alfred (Tell me about your 'Paddington Bear' stage adaptation and your work for Children's Theatre since those early theatre days. You have a new play now )

Trevor Now we are in the 1990's and you're living in the City of York - but not exactly 'in retirement' judging by the number of time's I've seen you around Broadcasting House.

Alfred (To mention his current production situation - also 'helping out' as occasional producer for 'The Archers').

Trevor You've never been one to sit back; to 'freewheel' within the BBC.

Alfred (To be quite frank about 'some lazy beggars around, but you hardly ever met anybody really unpleasant').

Trevor I get the impression that you derive just as much excitement from being a producer today as you did when you first joined us in North region.

Alfred (Comments please)

Trevor (Sings off the Interview)

..... (End - Interview I4)