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'A History Of North Regional Broadcasting' - DAVID HATCH.

(Interview 36 - Notes)

**Trevor**

**Hill** In 1974, on the retirement of **Grahame Miller**, the BBC appointed a new **Network Editor, Radio** for the North Region.

By common consent, that appointment which co-incided with other managerial appointments in the mid 1970's and with the later move into the Region's first custom-built Headquarters, heralded a complete change of atmosphere for those engaged in making radio programmes. It was for many of us older hands, a 'golden' period. I speak as the person who, at that time, was privileged to be assistant to our new Network Radio Editor, **David Hatch**.

David was born near Congleton Cheshire in 1939, the son of a parson, and currently holds the post of **Managing Director, Network Radio** - but more about that later. Having taken a history degree and won a distinction in the diploma of education on the one hand, David managed to find time to become a very active member of the Cambridge Footlights, co-starring in 1963 with some other 'unknown's' such as **John Cleese, Graham Chapman, Bill Oddie** and **Tim Brook Taylor** in the Footlights Revue, '**Cambridge Circus**'. This transferred to the West End and then to Broadway. An auspicious entry into the world of entertainment by any standards. But what, I wonder, first attracted a young David Hatch to the medium of radio ?

**David**

**Hatch** (Replies - mentions any boyhood aspirations; how he first worked for the BBC as an actor/writer for '**I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again**', co-producing several series, and then how he got free-lance work on the '**Radio Times**' and as a researcher for '**In Town Tonight**').

**Trevor** And then March 1965, - and you are appointed as a Production Assistant and Script writer in London's Light Entertainment Department.

**David** (May like to mention who was the then Head; some of his fellow BBC producers, and talk a little about some of the shows he originated and produced; '**Hello Cheeky**', '**Just A Minute**', '**Week Ending**', '**I'm Sorry I Havent A Clue**')

**Trevor** Some six years later, you had the title, 'Executive Producer, programme Development'. What did that entail ?

**David** (Briefly mentions the sort of work he was doing; the writers/actors he was encouraging during that period)

**Trevor** 1974, as I've already said, saw a period of change in the radio fortunes of the BBC's North Region with your appointment as Network Editor. What were your first impressions on taking up that appointment?

**David** (Gives them)

**Trevor** You had first-hand experience of Light Entertainment - but little in the field of News and Current Affairs, as had your predecessor. And yet you managed to prise out of London one of radio's Flagships. I'm referring to '**Today**', which you brought to Manchester.

**David** (To explain, please, how he managed to achieve this and something about those whom he had to persuade to part with such a strand).

**Trevor** By the time you arrived in North Region, we'd already appointed several talented young producers from BBC Local Radio in the region. I'm thinking in particular of **Michael Green**, now your Controller of Radio 4, **Max Easterman**, and of **Colin Adams** who was to advantage the television output from the North with '**Brass Tacks**'.

But in Michael's case, '**File On 4**' was, perhaps, the principle landmark during your editorship since this was the first Network radio 'journalism' to be made entirely outside of 'Head Office' - that started in October 1977 and, in fact, pre-dated '**Brass Tacks**'.

**David** (to now talk, please, about 'keeping the Editorial remit wide and appreciated in London, stopping Baverstock from pinching my stall'; - besides a word on the importance he attached to his personal working relationships with the Radio Controllers of that time, **Anthony Whitby**, **Claire Lawson-Dick**, **Howard Newby**, and **Douglas Muggerridge**)

**Trevor** (comments ...) The 'lines of command', if I may call them as such after the introduction of 'Broadcasting In the Seventies', seemed somewhat blurred. To whom were you responsible ? To Head of Centre, **Derek Burrell-Davis**, in Manchester, to **Pat Beach** as Controller English Regions in Birmingham, or to **Aubrey Singer** as M.D. Radio in London ?

**David** (To reply - and to explain the way in which he played it)

**Trevor** Your relations with Howard Newby as Controller, Radio 3 at the time must have been good because both Michael Green and I recall with great pleasure the two occasions on which you enabled North region to take over the entire programme content of Radio 3 on two weekends. Michael was executive producer for the '**Austrian Weekend**' on April, 24th and 25th in 1976, whilst I had that role the following month with '**Northern Weekend**' when, as you will recall, we also chose our own regional people to present our selection of programmes, beginning on the Friday evening and ending on the Sunday at close down.

**David** (Comments - and may like to mention here that in 'Northern Weekend', the BBC's very first broadcast in '**bi-aural**' sound came from Manchester with '**The Sound Of The City**', a portrait of pre-war sights and sounds of Salford and Manchester as recalled by the artist, **Harold Riley**, heard in stereophonic sound, whilst those of the 1970's were recorded in the new bi-aural technique)

**Trevor** (To mention the pioneer work done by Dr James Crabb and by Manchester Audio Unit members, **David Fleming-Williams** and **Chris Webb** - and the BBC's attitude to any pre-publicity; how German and Danish radio then borrowed the BBC tapes and used them with their own commentaries).

It was a very creative time under your leadership. Looking back, were they some of the happiest in your BBC career ?

**David** (To reply, please)

**Trevor** I remember you applied for the post of Controller Radio 4 whilst you were still Network Editor in Manchester.

**David** (Recounts Howard Newby saying he felt he was too young and, if appointed at the time, what would the future hold for him ?)

**Trevor** (Mentions **Ian Trethowan's** view of this - and of David's future career advancement within the BBC - all of which came about)

A highlight for all of us in Manchester was the opening of **New Broadcasting House** on Oxford Road.

(David and Trevor to talk about this; the very first production from the most up-to-date radio drama studio in Europe, in September 1975, with **William Kennan's 'Saturday Night Theatre'** play, '**The Dark Windows Of A Room**' - and then, in the June of the following year, the official opening by the then Prime Minister, the **Rt Hon. James Callaghan**. To mention **Alfred Bradley** and his production of a **Ken Whitmore** play for Radio 3, with the P.M. watching part of the rehearsal)

We've mentioned **Today** - that returned to London after a period, but **File On 4** continued, and on the **Radio 1** front, Manchester started the first regular programmes to be produced outside the metropolis with '**The Mike Read Show**'. As I recall, you also had **Stuart Hall** bringing his own brand of humour and expertise to **Radio 2** on Friday evenings.

**David** (to comment on his efforts - and successes in getting some regular strands away from London)

**Trevor** Regretfully for the Region - and for those who worked with you, you were to return to London as **Head of Radio Light Entertainment** in the February of 1978, becoming **Controller, Radio 2** in November, 1980. Can we talk now about your first Controllorship ? Every Captain wants to run the ship his way. On taking the helm, what did you do for the listeners to Radio 2 ? . I say 'the listeners' because on joining the BBC you are reported as saying, "programmes seemed to be made for internal applause rather than listeners' pleasure" !

**David** (Replies)

**Trevor** In your position as Controller, did you remain faithful to your former region.

**David** (will doubtless answer that he took the best on offer from whatever quarter - but may like to mention anything he particular encouraged from the North at that time)

**Trevor** A step nearer Ian Trethowan's predicted future for you came with your appointment in June 1983 as **Controller, Radio 4**, succeeding my former head of Children's Television programmes, **Monica Simms**.

**David** (to reflect, if he will, on the problems he faced on taking up this post ; of those who helped - and those who hindered in the task of 'up-dating' the output, and what, upon reflection, he now feels he was able to achieve in the three years he held that post).

**Trevor** For a period of a year, from July 1986, your title was that of **Director of Programmes**. Were you still able to play a role in programme-making, even at a distance, or was it now a case of policy-making?.

**David** (Replies)

**Trevor** We both served under some pretty impressive personalities in the world of radio. Would you care to reflect on some of them now.?

**David** (Does so - **Tony Whitby, Claire** (Radio's first woman Controller), **Stephen Hearst, Aubrey Singer, Ian Trethowan** et cetera).

**Trevor** Since August, 1987, you've been sitting here in the office of **Managing Director, Network Radio**. Putting the same question which Howard Newby posed in the late 1970's when you were a candidate for Controller Radio 4, and he said you were then too young, you are now in your early 50's. You hold other offices; Vice Chairman of that growing concern, 'BBC Enterprises Ltd', Vice President of the European Broadcasting Union's Radio Programme Committee; but what about the remaining years. Are you the next Director General ?

**David** (to be as frank and open as he wishes. Here he might mention his views of the BBC's Television Service - and why, as it appears, he never wished to become a part of that side of broadcasting)

**Trevor** From your current position, do you see the role of the BBC regions growing or diminishing in terms of providing for Network Radio?

**David** (Replies)

**Trevor** If you were coming down from Cambridge today, would you still go into broadcasting - and would it be the BBC a second time around?

**David** (Replies - and please mention here how you see the immediate future of Radio in the United Kingdom and then, what the challenges may be for those who will be involved in Radio up to the end of this century)

**Trevor** (Quotes **Anthony Whitby**, and then Signs off)

(Interview 36 - DAVID HATCH, January, 1991)

**TH (For Page 17)** Time, I think, for a pertinent question. In a nutshell, why did the Director General dismiss the English Regional Management in Birmingham ?

**TH (For Page 21)** You mentioned Michael Green and Ian Trethowan wanting to get him away from Manchester and into London.

As I recall, whilst you were our Manchester Network Editor, you were invited to attend a Board for a Radio Controllorship !

**TH (for Page 22)** Didn't Howard Newby tell you he felt you were too young to be a Controller ?

A matter of weeks after you'd been seen, I mentioned that remark to Ian Trethowan who'd come to attend one of our seminars on Broadcasting at Manchester University. He said to me, "David's time will come, never fear. He'll go back to London as Head of a department, then a Controllorship and I also predict he'll have my job one day. And you hold that post now.

**TH (For Page 24)** You touched on the subject of management attitudes. Do you remember that shortly after we'd taken up residence in New Broadcasting House, we had a certain Donald Baverstock thrust upon us ? At least, that's the impression I got from Head of Centre who told me to find him an office at the farthest end of the building.

**TH (Re-do Page 26 Link).**'We mentioned TODAY ..'

**TH (For Page 28)** Regretfully for North region - and for those of us who'd worked with you, you were to return to London as Head of Radio Light Entertainment in February, 1978. You had a wife and young family to cart all the way back to the Big City. How do BBC wives cope with their husband's careers. How did Ann cope ?

But only a move of Office Location, I imagine, when you were appointed as Controller of Radio 2 in November 1980. What did <sup>you do</sup> for the patronage of that channel ? I ask that because <sup>h</sup> on joining the BBC, you are reported as saying, "Programmes seem to be made for internal applause rather than for listeners' pleasure".

**TH (for Page 36)** Why were Dick Francis, as Radio's Managing Director, and Charles McLennan as his deputy shown the door ?

**TH (for Page 38 - ADDITION)** In talking to various BBC colleagues in the course of this Oral Archive, it has become clear that if ever the BBC gets itself into financial difficulties, then the first thing to do is to set up a Committee and, on past form, that Committee appears to target the BBC Regions. Will you tell me something about the 'Black Spot' Committee; I don't know if that was your title.

**David** (to talk, please about it's members, Geriant Stanley Jones, Geoff Buck, then still with the BBC, a chap named Michael Checkland, and David himself; their brief - their recommendations - and the overriding political decision to divide the North into 'North West' and 'North East' - despite the committee's recommendation of their being only one North region again.

How this had to wait until February 1990 - and what such actions do to staff morale and the loss of jobs .)

**TH** We had the formation of 'The English Regions' as a direct result of the McKinsey Report.

David (May like to comment on any Lessons which have now been learned)

(Back to original - Page 36. TH 'You hold other offices now .....'  
et cetera)

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