

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/

'A History of North Regional Broadcasting' - DAVID PORTER

(INTERVIEW 7 - Notes).

1) What brought you into the BBC. ?

(Any link with his Mother's interest in radio in Northern Ireland?)

2) You met quite a talented Regional Team in Manchester:-

Edward Liveing, - he'd been the Regional Director for 10 years when you joined; **Archie Harding** ... North's Programme Director (banished to a 'Northern Siberia', by Sir John Reith, because of Harding's left-wing views)

It was Harding who greatly encouraged **Joan Littlewood**, .. **Ewan Macoll** when they came in to do highly critical Radio features with **Geoffrey Bridson**, and, later, with **Olive Shapley**, who left the more 'gentle slopes' of running **Northern Children's Hour** in order to tackle a truer-to-life picture of the North Region in the depression years before the war, through hard-hitting 'Radio Journalism'.

Donald Boyd, who like **Kenneth Adam** and **E.R.Thompson**, had come to the BBC from the 'Manchester Guardian'. **Donald** was running the Talks department.

Music Department was run by the stylish **Hubert Foster Clark** - the 'custard powder King' who had the BBC Northern Orchestra under his command - all 35 players !

10-days, BBC Philharmonic - Principal cond: Edward Downes (93 players)

The young Tynside ex-schoolteacher, **Cecil McGivern**, who, like Kenneth Adam was to become a Director of the BBC's **Television Service**, ...

was running Regional Drama, .. with original plays by Bridson, ..Harold Brighthouse; and others providing radio drama bearing such Regionalised titles as **'Famine In Lancashire'**, .. **'There Goes The Buzzer'**, **'The Lamplighter's Daughter'**.

And the man who later joined the Manchester staff in order to publicise the programmes was **Godfrey Talbot'**, - a household name in the war years as a 'Radio Newsreel' reporter - and who became one of the BBC's leading 'Outside Broadcast Commentators'.

Would David mention such 'characters' as **Francis Dillon**- ex Manchester Tax Inspector; ... **Eric Fogg** ...and **Victor Smythe** - two famous names from the very early days in Manchester, and of course, - **Richard North!** (Any others who spring to mind, David?)

- 2) What were your very first impressions of 'the BBC' :-
- a) The studios in Piccadilly Gardens
 - b) The sort of people who worked there ?

3) Had you a trained musical background because you pioneered a new and far more sophisticated style of musical Light Entertainment.

You joined the staff in the summer of 1935 - yet, by the December of that year, you had what was to be a long-running series with the 'Review Orchestra' conducted by **Thomas Matthews**.

(Started as **'Swing Low, Sweet Music'**; became **'Swift Serenade'**)

These programmes run up until the war. Were they 'Regional' or, sometimes, heard on the 'National' wavelength ?

4) You started the '**AFTER DINNER**' Reviews. As the 'Radio Times' stated in July, 1937:-

'It is an entertainment to accompany the nuts and wine, goodnight coffee - or during a last laze with a cigarette before turning in'

It rather sounds as if you produced 'After Dinner' in evening dress! Tell me about that series - and about your vocal 'Trio'.

(David explains how he and **John Salt**- who, by now, had returned North as the the Head of Programmes, auditioned '**Violet Carson**).

Both **Doris Gambell** and **Muriel Levy** were already working in Manchester in Children's Hour for Olive Shapley, having moved across when the **Liverpool Studio** closed down .Vi's very first broadcast was '**Songs At The Piano**', with you announcing it. She sang 'Love Is Everywhere', ... 'All Round My Hat', - and one of those Folk songs she became famous for, 'The Riddle Song'.

Not long after this, you brought a Quintet into broadcasting; (**Johnny Rosen and his Four Chaps**) , - and then you took on a young pianist who'd been with Henry Hall's orchestra at the Midland Hotel, Manchester. His name was **Henry Reed**.

Whilst waiting for an earlier programme to go on the air, after rehearsals were over, Henry scribbled out a three part song in close harmony, for the vocal talents of Vi, Doris and Muriel - and so were formed **The Three Semis**. They were to be heard regularly from Manchester until the late 1950's.

Many of the lyrics for '**After Dinner**' were provided by **Joyce and Edgar Lustgarten**. (Joyce -Edgar's wife/sister ?), and David had such Guest Artists as **Charlie Kunz** and the **Alan Holmes Swing Sextette**.

Amongst a host of Light Entertainment shows you did were, '**Lancashire Round-Up**', ... new Variety Acts supported by the Three Semis and Henry Reed with his Orchestra (June 1937), ... '**Never Too Young**' .. two Children's Variety shows - for Grown-ups; ... Radio Revues with **Frank Nichols**, Joan Littlewood ,Richard North, Leslie Moorhouse and others, and A.P. Herbert's musical, '**Plain Jane**' , this time with the BBC Northern orchestra. By this time, **Hugh Morton** and **Wilfred Pickles** were now appearing in your cast lists.

Frank Nichols was the radio actor of his day. In private life, a jeweller; but to radio, he was a character of his own devising - **Harry Hopeful**. In the years of the Depression, 'Hopeful' went to all parts of the North region, ostensibly looking for work. And that was the excuse for Frank Nicholls to interview local people. A job he did brilliantly. He died in February, 1938 - and the **BBC Year Book** said of him, ... 'He won the confidence and the friendship of the North Country people that the BBC wanted to bring to the microphone naturally and as they really were! He can claim in a sense to have projected the Northern character to the world !'

Geoffrey Bridson was to create '**Billy Welcome**' for Nicholls natural 'successor', **Wilfred Pickles**, who really came into prominence during Wartime.)

5) Can we talk about something else from the 1930's which was very much your own again; the **Aesop Fables**, re-told in Words and Music, - the music by **Henry Reed**. These programmes were also re-broadcast in Childrens Hour. They began in May, 1938 with '**Frog Fable**'.

6) The '**Once Upon A Time**' series of fairy tale fantasies from Grimm and Hans Anderson - again, with lyrics and music from the pen of Henry Reed. Radio was the ideal medium for these 'musicals'. They were later used in the single Wartime Childrens Hour, with **Nan Macdonald** contributing to the London programme.

7) The last occasion we met was some years ago; you brought **Jimmy Edwards** to visit us at our home in Cheshire. He said you'd taught him to fly!

(David to talk briefly about his wartime experiences - and of being a prisoner of war)

8) Trevor mentions the first occasion on which he and David met - at Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk in 1946. **Hugh Greene** was the Director general; David his 2 i/c. Did David learn to speak fluent German whilst a P.O.W.?

9) David to talk about returning to the BBC again, and to North Region as the **BBC Leeds Representative**. Didn't he want to get his hands onto active Production work, again, in view of his pre-war success in this field ?

IO) Had the war years changed the BBC as he's known it during the time he'd been away?

II) David's work as the **Assistant Head of North Regional Programmes**?

I2) What made him leave the BBC in 1956 in order to take up the post of **Federal Director of Light Entertainment** in Australia.?

In this post did he produce himself - or supervise the work of others?

I4) Who were the BBC staff you most admired during your time in the North.

I5) You returned to the BBC in 1959 as the **Chief Instructor, Staff Training**.

Was **J.Pennythorne Hughes** the Head at that time?

Miss McCloud i/c Announcer Training ??

I6) What did you consider to be the main job in hand when you were later appointed as the **Head of Midland Programmes** after you spell at Staff Training?

I7) What were your working relationships like with your Midlands Controllers and with your support staff during the ten years you were in Birmingham?

I8) Was working in a Regional Management team a rewarding experience for you in your BBC career ?

I9) Looking back, what do you consider to have been your main contribution to Broadcasting ?

I10) Those of the Manchester Staff who are still with us from pre-war days remember you with affection - for your debonair disposition, marvellous, though sometimes rather 'wicked' sense of humour, highly professional and exciting programmes, and, according to Olive Shapley, 'for his stunning looks as a young man' ! You all enjoyed being a part of the BBC in those days. (Cecil McGiven comment about Olive made postwar) Were they really 'The Good Old Days' - or does nostalgia have a hand in making them appear to have been so ?