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START AUDIO

Interviewer: A History of North Regional Broadcasting. Interview 23, Don Haworth.

There can be few of my regional colleagues in the BBC who have managed to master creative radio and creative television to the same degree as the man who's with me now. A few days ago, on 3rd July 1990, 'The Daily Telegraph' published a statement of fact when their critic wrote, 'A new Don Haworth play is always an occasion. He is a writer who uses radio to paint the present, and at the same time, to shade in the past, as if it were an aura around the action.'

0:00:39 I'd like to begin, Don, by talking about the past. You joined North Region as a News Assistant – television news – based in Manchester, in 1955. But there was a life, and indeed, a career before the BBC.

Don Haworth: Well, a brief one. I grew up in East Lancashire, and I had some time in the Air Force. Then, when I came out, I went into journalism; military journalism in the first place. But I worked up and down in Britain and North America for newspapers and news agencies. I was also a News Editor at the CBC in Toronto for about a year or so.

Then I came back to England, and I was working in Manchester for 'The Guardian', which was then 'The Manchester Guardian', a Liberal paper, read by respectable people. A job came up in the BBC for somebody to organise and develop television news coverage. There were then no regional bulletins, so it was entirely an intake operation. I had a desk in the regional news room, which was a different kind of place from anywhere that I ever worked at all, and anywhere that you would find now.

There were two or three pokey little offices over some shops, and there was a curious domestic kind of feel to it. More than half the people there were women: copy takers and typists. Birthdays were celebrated. There were also tears and aspirins from time to time. (Laughter)

Jim Bell was a News Editor there, and he had a habit, which I thought was peculiar to him. Whenever any kind of difficulty loomed outside, he would reorganise the office. The desks were moved round, and people were shifted from room to room. [Kathleen Burke 0:02:49], who was a sub-editor, complained that she'd been moved, I think, 15 times in 12 months. I thought, "Well, this is just a funny thing in this funny little newsroom here." But of course, I found that it's a general thing throughout the BBC and throughout large organisations. Whenever it looks as though the storm might be moved, the ants scuttle about. (Laughter)

Anyway, it gave the impression of very great activity, because of course, all the calls came through on the wrong extensions every time one of these moves had been made.

The place was really very jolly. I remember it particularly for the friendships that were formed, particularly with Hazel [Mackintosh 0:03:30] and with Jim Entwistle, who was, of course, Information Officer in Manchester for very many years.

Well, I did two years there. I don't think there's an awful lot to say about it. We had a contract cameraman, Cliff [Summers 0:03:46], and we did what we could to cover the news, which was not very much, poked down in one corner of this very large region. We developed news features, which were interesting to do, although they might not have been very interesting to watch.

I spent a lot of time on an operation, whose results were very short lived, of drumming up freelance people to shoot 16mm film. They, eventually, as the news operation rapidly expanded, were either drawn into the BBC or dropped. So that endeavour lasted for about three years, which was longer than I lasted. I was two years there.

Then I happened to meet Leonard Mile, who was head of a curiously named Television Talks Department in London, in Lime Grove. Curiously named because it was derived from sound broadcasting. They did documentaries and current affairs and all kinds of factual programmes, which were called 'talks'.

I had a conversation with Leonard. I'd not met him before, and it was one of these occasions in conversation that just sometimes happens and you absolutely hit it off with the chap, and you think, "This man is absolutely on my wavelength." Leonard remained a good friend, but we never had a conversation like that again.

Anyway, on the strength of it, Leonard said, "How would you like to come and work in our department? Because we've got a new programme coming up called 'Tonight', which is going to be a daily programme and needs all kinds of different abilities. Would you think of sticking in an application when the time comes?" I did, and I got the job, and went down to this

programme, which Donald Baverstock had originated, and for which he was given somebody from each department.

I, as it were, was given by News Division. Willy Cave came from OBs, and Ed [Sherrin 0:06:00] from Light Entertainment. But a whole lot of people from different parts of the BBC. It was then thought that they'd got 40 or 50 minutes to fill. You may remember there was something called 'The Toddlers' Truce'. Television broadcasting was suspended for an hour between 6:00 and 7:00 to allow people to get their children to bed.

Well, of course, when commercial television arrived, which it had done a year or two previously, and it was beginning to grow and had, in fact, spread into the North Region by then, they weren't going to waste an hour of advertising time for anybody's children. The BBC simply had the problem of how to fill this very large hole. Large in terms of programme budget. Large in terms of what effort was available to do this.

They had the thought of producers from each department coming and forming some kind of a pool, and each doing his own act within this programme. Now, of course, that didn't suit Donald Baverstock at all. Donald Baverstock later got onto the proposition that the whole of the evening's television ought to be 'Tonight', and that after every programme, you'd come back to Cliff Michelmore, who'd talk about the next play or news, or whatever it was.

Certainly, the idea of compartmentalised little contributions coming together, which was then a very bad BBC malady, didn't suit him at all. He gave the thing very, very great character, and it was soon a very different thing, as you well know, from anything that anybody had anticipated.

I think, probably, that its strongest characteristic was that it regarded broadcasting as fun and an adventure. There was an immense solemnity in the BBC at that time. It was, furthermore, on the side of the audience. It cut out the footman approach to interviewing. It didn't ask the questions the people expected to be asked. It asked the questions, as Baverstock saw it, that the audience would want asked.

It put itself on the side of the audience. It refused to be drawn into a conspiracy with the people who came into the studio. Because as he very rightly said, what interviews had amounted to, up to that time, was a conspiracy between the person interviewed and the BBC to put it across. The BBC was, therefore, by the fact of broadcasting views unchallenged, endorsing what somebody had said, simply by the fact that they stuck them on there unchallenged.

Another characteristic which was very important and which was probably least spoken about, and nothing to do with attitude or programme content, although, of course, that was its main apparent originality, but simply the very, very high degree of productivity, compared with anything that had gone before. The thought was that when 'Tonight' was started, they might go on for three months, and at the end of this, everybody would need a year's vacation.

Because television production had been done in this ponderous way, and 'Tonight' was done quick and with speed, and it was often crude, but it often had sparkle. This is true of any kind of broadcasting. I found this particularly true of radio plays. They are rough and crude. The time for them is very, very little. Often, I think, they lose a great deal in subtlety, but they gain a great deal in sparkle. You can't have it every way.

But simply, at one time, television programmes took ages and ages to do, and 'Tonight' increased the speed at which

television was done. That affected the whole of television forever.

When CBS were introducing colour, they had surveys done about how much extra time might be needed for colour production, as opposed to black and white. They did their arithmetic different ways and got different answers – a multiple of 2, 3, 5, 10. Then, in the light of 'Tonight', they said, "We'll multiply it by a factor of 0. We'll do it in the same time and let them run," and that's how television has been done since.

0:10:40

Interviewer: From the enthusiasm with which you describe all this, it was a very exciting time to be in on the start of something which, in terms of television, was completely new.

Don Haworth: There were habits that had grown up, which were of the earlier time; this excessive deference. Once Montgomery came back from Berlin – I think he was CIGS at that time. The Berlin airlift, that was the time – everybody wondered how long it was going to be before the Third World War broke out. He was interviewed as he came off the aircraft, by the BBC, by somebody who said, "How are things in Germany, Sir?" and he said, "The troops are all in very good heart." The man said, "Thank you. Thank you, sir." You'd thank people for nothing. This was what Baverstock was against.

My particular part in this... Baverstock said, "Look, we've got news. We've got studio. We've got film. What do you want to do?" So I said, "Film." He said, "Alright. Well, go and do film." Then, for 18 months, I did 4 or 5 10-minute films, of a sort,

every day. Then I got people to work with me, and we doubled the output.

We careered up and down the country, and eventually, up and down the world, and we really were looking for character, for rascality. We were looking for something that was about people, which was very, very different from the order of life which would be assumed from the style of BBC broadcasts. I think that was original with 'Tonight', and I think it died when 'Tonight' died.

We're back, again, now, to the sociological lectures. We then supported the Conservative establishment, and we now support the Liberal establishment in broadcasting. 'Tonight' had the virtue, at least, of thinking of itself against establishments of all sorts.

I've mentioned Baverstock. The curious chap... He was an endless, incessant talker, and he would put people to sleep. He would roll on and on and on, like Fred Dibnah in more recent years. Like Fred, it was simply like the tide rolling in: pound, pound, pound, pound, pound, and suddenly, there'd be a flash, an insight, an ___[0:13:21]. (Laughter)

I spoke to him on the telephone not very long ago, and he was talking about what he felt was wrong with modern broadcasting. He said, "Opinions presented as judgements." That is cryptic, and I find a very great deal of meaning in that. So he talked and came up with brilliant ideas, and created an absolute chaos, which Alasdair Milne tidied up and put into the shape of a programme.

0:13:55

Interviewer: What was Grace Wyndham Goldie's role in this? Had she one?

Don Haworth: Grace Wyndham Goldie's role in this was, first of all, to tame Baverstock by a similar kind of highly intelligent, incessant verbiage. They were like two hose pipes firing away at each other acrimoniously and crossly, you see. But I think that they loved each other very much.

Both of them had, in a way, a similar history. Donald had worked down in the boiler room in Bush House, and felt that he would never be anybody and never become known.

0:14:37

Interviewer: Do you mean literally in the boiler room?

Don Haworth: Well, no, not literally in the boiler room. Probably very close to the boiler room. Anyway, doing programmes which nobody he ever met would ever have heard. That was the essence of it. Obscure. Grace, I think, had had a life which, to say the least of it, didn't properly reflect her talent. Both of them then came into a situation where not only their talents were required, but where it was proved that they had the talent to cope with the situation. They had a great deal more talent than many around them.

Donald's talent was for a kind of creative chaos. Grace's talent, on the other hand, was an analytical one. She wasn't a television person. She had no interest in pictures, really, at all. She'd have done equally well in radio or newspaper or an academic life, or wherever she'd have gone where she'd have

been listened to. It merely was that she was listened to in television.

Grace was concerned with structure. She was concerned with meaning and the development of meaning. She was as concerned that factual programmes should develop in a way that was clear to the audience, and that they should have a clear aim. She thought that this was as important in factual programmes as in drama, and I think she's right, and she should be living at this hour.

Interviewer: Yes. Interesting you should refer to Donald Baverstock and the fact that there was all this verbiage, and out of it suddenly came something. 'Tonight', of course, did have its rest points; it came off the air. When they were looking for something to take over 'Tonight', Donald had the idea of doing a series about museums. I went to see him, because he decided the one thing he didn't want was the sort of normal BBC treatment, or even, indeed, the museum's own treatment, in the brochure, of their subject. He said, "So I'm going to call it 'Brush Off the Dust'."

He gave several of us from the regions a very clear and concise idea of exactly what this programme was to do, and how we were going to tackle it.

Don Haworth: You must have caught him at a very good moment if he gave you a concise idea.

Interviewer: No, I had a very concise idea. In fact, we kicked off the series and we did the Castle Museum, York.

Don Haworth: In talking about 'Tonight', I ought, really, to say, although we felt ourselves to be in the vanguard, and probably we were because of the way that things worked out, the whole of the television Talks Department there was in a very great creative ferment. People felt immensely privileged, as I did myself, to be able to play this game. They felt that they were at the beginning of something. They were also very, very well aware of how little they knew; a kind of modesty one no longer finds.

It was as though everybody was doing something that was immensely exciting, and everybody very, very greatly wanted to learn. We'd sit round in the canteen at the Thursday morning meeting, which, incidentally, lasted an hour, and then it finished, unlike some meetings in the BBC. At the Thursday morning meeting, anybody who'd done anything that was slightly unusual was asked to tell everybody how they'd done it.

When another department did something – 'Grandstand', for instance – people would ask and go off and watch it. People spent their leave trotting round television stations in America. It was the central thing in everybody's life, which was very ruinous for very many people, in many ways.

Huw Wheldon was at the centre of things, or he tried to get into the centre. 'Panorama' was running reasonably well. 'Tonight' had started. Huw had been there a long time, and as he said himself, had done a lot of very bad programmes – the stodgy programmes. He'd get [Horrox 0:18:57] to work with a pointer and tell you how they nearly won the battle at Arnhem.

At this stage, I think he was in some danger of being displaced. People remember Huw as being a garrulous kind of man, which he was. His best thing was his personal

performance. He didn't like other people to talk much. I remember him and Orson Welles desperately trying to upstage each other talking about the ghost in 'Hamlet' on a faulty recording that came and went as they talked. Both these chaps ready to talk all night, and the recording unfit to be seen.

But he was an extremely good editor. He could put his finger on the thing that was wrong. He could make a constructive suggestion. He knew the point to say, "This is fine," when it wasn't, but it was as right as it was ever going to be. He was sure in his editorial judgement. He was very strong in his encouragement of people, and he created an atmosphere of pleasure in the work. You felt, with Huw, what is true about broadcasting: like the old Habsburg Empire, it's desperate, but not serious.

So you could work and feel that there was somebody on your side, and people wanted to go to work when Huw was there, which is a fairly rare thing.

When he started 'Monitor', the idea that Grace and Leonard Mile had was to get somebody else in to present it. Huw was determined to present it himself. He'd come to that stage in his career when he wasn't going to do all the work and get somebody from 'The Sunday Times' to do the presentation.

There was a BBC policy against producers presenting their own material, which came from the requirement that the BBC, and therefore the producer, shouldn't have a point of view. In current affairs programmes, it wouldn't have been right and was never done.

He insisted on doing this, and at every Thursday morning meeting, Grace brought out the figures of how the programmes were doing. 'Tonight' always spent the least money and had the greatest audience. 'Monitor' always spent

the most money and had the smallest audience. She read this, and Huw persisted and he persisted.

0:21:28

Interviewer: He was a pleasure to produce. He did 'All Your Own', as you know, for us, for Children's Television. There was this one occasion when I had a really brilliant young pianist that Fanny Waterman had sent. On this one occasion, Huw was carrying on and looking at the palm of his hand, as he had a habit of doing, and was just rabbiting on, and the clock was going on and on. This poor youngster, I thought, "We're never going to hear him."

Huw, at last, finished, and in desperation, I said, "Run the credits and turn them flat out." They went zooming through. I just turned round in the gallery, and I said, "Oh, that lovely old, Welsh gasbag, if only he'd have shut up sooner, we'd have heard more of this boy." At that moment, a hand fell on my shoulder, and it was Huw. He said, "Hold your own credit, Trevor. You deserve it."

When I thanked him very much for coming and presenting the programme, he said, "I'm sorry that your pianist didn't get much of a showing. The presenter got a little too much of a showing, didn't he?" I said, "Yes, Huw, he did."

As a performer, he was a delight, I think, to work with, and as a boss, he was such an encouraging person.

Don Haworth: We've all got to say this: in broadcasting, I think perfectionism is absolutely the right spirit in which to start. But at some stage, we've got to say, "That's enough," and we give it the chop, even when it is amenable to more improvement.

Because there is a law of diminishing returns, and there is, in television, a financial imperative, which, if it had been understood in the North Region sufficiently, there might have been more success in the development of television there.

0:23:18

Interviewer: Well, fortunately, for the history of North Regional broadcasting, you didn't stay in London for the rest of your BBC career. You returned to Manchester – was it in 1961? – and you were then called 'The Senior Talks Producer'.

Don Haworth: Yes. I left 'Tonight' after 2½ years and something like 500 little films, and went to 'Panorama', where not very much happened. I covered the Cuban revolution and kept the Algerian war going. I can't remember very much besides that. I got a phone call from Bryan Cave-Browne-Cave, who was Head of Programmes in Manchester, and indeed, became a lifelong friend both of yours and of mine.

He knew what had happened in Lime Grove, and he felt that the North Region was really on the point of a great creative burst. Did I want to come and be part of it, or help to stimulate it, or whatever? Well, of course, I did. What was thought was that I would make some sort of northern impact on the television network in the factual programmes. There were already OBs and news, and they were doing well, in their own spheres, in the north. Nothing else really got going.

Denis Mitchell couldn't work there, and left, and there was no one who followed him. Brian's idea was that I should start a kind of documentary department, so that I'd be responsible, in the first place, for the films that I made myself, and then for two

or three people who would be doing efforts of their own, and take a kind of friendly interest in it and supervise it.

Well, this was several months before I actually got there, and when I did arrive, I found that the job had expanded somewhat, and that I was in charge of God knows how many producers. It was an impossible situation. There simply were not enough hours of the day. I'd be out, trying to shoot some film, and then back, seeing what had dropped in the in tray.

It was least satisfactory, it's fair to say, to the producers who were put into this umbrageous command. I really thought I'd done well not to be given more to transport and the canteen as well. Obviously, it wasn't a thing they could go on with, and I was all set to go. Kenneth Adam, who was, I think, Director of Television then, had a bit of a talk with me and said, "Well, hang on. There are some changes coming up."

What had happened was that this very long guttering row between the North Region and the BBC in London – the Television Service – was at one stage. I think there was the Pilkington Committee – one of the many committees that had enquired into broadcasting. The North Regional Council threatened the Director General, Hugh Greene, I think, with – you'll know the details from other people – going to the Pilkington Committee and complaining about the lack of North Regional contributions to network television.

I think Hugh Greene persuaded them not to take this step with a promise of holding an internal enquiry, which then did a kind of judo throw and said to the North Region, "Well, why is it you're getting so few contributions on network television?"

Anyway, I don't know the ins and outs, but the effect on my job was that it did revert to what Brian had originally discussed with me, and I became a documentary producer. My post was

in Manchester, but it was a London post. I got my budgets from London, and I put up my ideas and worked, in the first place, to Baverstock, who was then Assistant Controller of Television Programmes, and later, the Documentary Department in London.

It was an odd kind of arrangement, but it worked very well, I think. You'll have to ask other people about this, but I think it worked well, thanks to the tact and support of Graham Miller, who was Head of Programmes in Manchester, fitted into this uncomfortable situation. We did occasional things together. We did them as regional projects, and I remember them with very, very great pleasure.

0:28:14

Interviewer: You started with North Regional Film Unit in doing your documentaries. Who were the people you were working with at that time, Don?

Don Haworth: [Jerry Pullen 0:28:24] shot the first 'Time on Our Hands', which was done while I was still running all the departments. I found it impossible to get it edited in Manchester, and eventually, it had to be edited in Ealing. There were great problems with the Film Unit. We, on 'Tonight', had the use of regional film units several days a month. It was a question, then – it's hard to understand now – simply, of scraping resources together, and the regional film units each gave us a few days. We gave up the North Region, because they just simply could not work at the pace and it was always difficult.

0:29:06

Interviewer: Was it Roy Harris who was running Manchester in those days?

Don Haworth: Yes, Roy Harris was running the unit.

Interviewer: And then John Lanchester.

Don Haworth: John Lanchester. There wasn't then, and hasn't been ever since, any kind of depth of talent. This is the thing about Manchester: there are highly talented people few in number, but there is a poor average, and has been over very many years. This is the English problem, isn't it, in every way? We can produce people who do immensely well, but we find it very hard to produce at an even level, and we didn't do this over a long period of time.

But I always had the good fortune of having somebody that I could work with. John Buttery edited my films, and Arthur Smith shot them. Now, Arthur quit because he couldn't stick it anymore in the North Regional Film Unit. But fortunately, as kind of not belonging to the region, but as a London outpatient living in the region, I was able to get funds to use Arthur as a freelance, and he has shot most of my films since 1963 – about 100 of them, I think.

Then Peter Gibbs edited 'Sunset Pot', which was a cave rescue thing, which Graham started and pushed and which we did together. Peter Gibbs was an Assistant Editor, and he was given to us, again, scratching resources together, to stick the film together as we went along, because it was done over a period of time. Peter worked with me for a long, long time, and then Roy Newton, who was a protégé of mine.

So I've always had excellent people to work with on the technical side. The organisation has always been lamentable, and Jean Thompson, my assistant, has done the progress-chasing jobs that the film unit ought to have done.

Interviewer: That has been a very successful partnership.

Don Haworth: Well, that was a very successful partnership. Jean has done very much of the research. She's found all the best people that we've found. She's much more amiable than I am, so she's a good person to send first, you see. They think, "Well, this is a very disagreeable chap, but that lady will turn up again."

0:31:29

Interviewer: Well, that's not the impression I've had from people who've seen the two of you, Don. But working relationships within the BBC are very important. John Buttery, he says that he learnt an enormous amount from you and the way that you worked, and realised that this is the sort of discipline you have to set yourself, if, indeed, you want to make programmes and succeed in making them.

Now, one of the series – and I'm talking about series, as opposed to individual programmes – which I recall with great pleasure was your 'Living on the Land'.

Don Haworth: Yes.

0:32:04

Interviewer: Now, you're not just going to say, "Yes;" you're going to tell me something about that, I hope.

Don Haworth: Yes. When I got into Documentary Department, I found it difficult to get off doing 50-minute films on themes. The problem was that many people could make 30-minute films in series, and not every newcomer we had was equally happy with 50-minute themes.

Now, there was a bit of a history to this. Stuart Hood, who became Controller Television, having been Editor Television News, said he'd had enough of the half-hour series on factual programmes. I can see the reason why: there would be some kind of subject, which would be a bad one to begin with, and it was multiplied by six. I can remember six that were done – I don't know by whom – on the decline of British ship building. They did six, all in different yards, so they got the same moaning story in six different accents, and I'm sure there was nobody watching by the end.

Stuart said, "Let us have programmes of 50-minutes, and then let us be finished with it." So that was the party line for a long time, and there was every reason for doing it when it began, as there is with most things. And as with most things, as time goes on, you begin to find that you're really looking for themes. I was beginning to feel that, first of all, this was wrong, in that the thing was not springing, organically, from what we did.

We would go off on a film, and then, when we came back, we would tell people all sorts of funny stories about what happened. Then I thought, "If we have all these funny stories to tell, they ought to be on the screen, and not what we're sticking up there." So this was one strand in it.

Another thing: I hated the expense of the thing. I tried, always, to say to trainees, "If you're making a film, run the camera, not the vehicles. When you're making a 50-minute film on a theme, you can hop and down everywhere." They do now; they go all over the world to get a talking head here, there and everywhere.

That's necessary. In factual programmes like science or politics, or whatever it might be, it is very necessary to get opinions in different places. It wasn't so in the kinds of documentaries that we were doing, but we were following this method. It was very hard to see in what way it was different from some current affairs programmes, except that documentaries took much longer and were much more expensive.

I wanted to return to what I did on 'Tonight', which would be about character, which would be about people the way they were, and which would not have any preconceptions of the way that they were going to turn out. I wanted, also, to try to make something out of the money that we'd got. I wanted to make more film and create more screen time. If what we did wasn't terribly good, at least it was cheap. Because over 10 years, I produced 50% more in screen time than we had the money for once we went back to this method, of which 'Living on the Land' was, as it were, a trial run.

We did actually make 3 series, and what we looked for, first, was character. This meant that we spent a lot of time on research, because we were not looking for somebody to illustrate a particular theme; we were going to look for somebody who was interesting, and it can take a long, long time to find them. But research costs nothing. What costs money is having a crew on location and shooting things that you're going to leave in the cutting room.

We had a shooting race, though, eventually, or a shooting time, with Fred Dibnah. We got 10 cut minutes out of every day on location, so we shot a half-hour film in 3 days.

0:36:18

Interviewer: Did you ever shoot on 35?

Don Haworth: Oh, yes. When I first went to 'Tonight', all we have was 35mm cameras, which were immensely unsuitable. Indeed, when I first went away with 'Panorama', it was a 16mm Auricon that we had. It was equally- No, not quite as ponderous, but it was very, very difficult to operate. We shot 'Time on Our Hands' on 35. That's all we had.

The change from 35 to 16 didn't affect us operationally, because we were still on tripod cameras with the Auricon. But we then went on to the BL Arriflexes. That, of course, completely changes the nature of filming. The cameraman is virtually in charge of how the film will develop. For this reason, you want a cameraman who knows what you want, without being interrupted at the time, when he's supposed to be shooting it.

0:37:19

Interviewer: The other great, of course, step forward, was Colortran lighting, wasn't it?

Don Haworth: Yes.

0:37:26

Interviewer: The mobility of that, instead of having to hump around these enormous arc lamps and stuff. And the cost of lighting, the bills suddenly went right down, didn't they? We had a little more to spend on the content and on the people.

Don Haworth: Yes. Lighting was always a trade union job. There were always too many of them. There was always the problem that you had them sitting about all day, perhaps, to use for an hour in the evening. When it was cold, they'd get their sandwiches out, and they'd be revving their vehicle when you were trying to record sound. It was an unsatisfactory job for chaps to do to be hanging about like that. They still do, but not to the same degree.

We used this new quartz halogen lighting when we did the film at Sunset Pot. This was a project that Aubrey Singer started off as an OB. Aubrey was a gadgets chap. You'd get them.

People-

Interviewer: He was a film man, originally, too.

Don Haworth: Yes. Well, he was a film man. He came out of feature films, yes. Well, then he became very fond of electronic gadgets and gadgets of all sorts. He had this idea to go down a pothole. I know they thought of going down Alum Pot, and the engineers wouldn't risk the scanners. This went on for years. They'd have got nothing. They'd be shooting from the top, and the people that had disappeared into a waterfall, until they came back, they'd just have to go on talking.

Well, Aubrey had the idea of brightening this up by doing a cave rescue. He got in with a cave rescue organisation at Ingleton, and he then started pressing people from the BBC to develop all kinds of things. He got over keen on it himself and broke his shoulder, and Mike Peacock, who was then the Controller of BBC One, suggested he should refrain and hand it over to me, or hand it over to the North Region.

This was how I came to do this, with Graham, as a regional project. We had no real money, and what we had, we gave to the cave rescue people, because they were at the very centre of this.

Gordon Entwistle was a marvellous chap. He was an assistant cameraman at Manchester. He'd been a circus performer.

Interviewer: Riding round the Wall of Death on a motorbike, yes.

Don Haworth: Yes, a circus performer and a coal miner. So he was ready to do this. We got a chap called Sid Perou, who was an assistant sound recordist from Ealing; a man who lived in the clouds. They were very glad to let us have Sid for a period of time. So they gave us the cameras that they'd developed for Aubrey, and this light, which was how we came to start talking about this. Gordon was at Morecambe most of the time, and Sid Perou we made our central chap. He was a caver. That's why we got him. We made him our central chap at Horton in Ribblesdale and installed him in the pub there.

Well, Sid's intention was to come out of this thing wealthier than he went in. And indeed, he succeeded, because as soon as the thing was finished, four or five months later, he resigned from the BBC and lived on his earnings for quite some time,

and became and is well known as a caving and mountain cameraman.

Graham's great value in this – and this is something like the Huw Wheldon experience – he was a bit fraught and nervous, because he didn't know what he or the region was being drawn into. He really could not afford another thing where money had gone down the drain, and at the end, we say, "There's no programme. We're unlucky."

But when we got there for the weekend, he had immense enthusiasm. We looked at it afterwards and we calculated, from the past statistics, what the chances were of getting a rescue in our time, given that we'd said, "We'll give ourselves three months, four months," or whatever it was. We calculated that the chance was four to one against succeeding.

But by this time, he had the enthusiasm behind it, and he said, "Well, let's do it." He said to me, "Can you put the steam behind this?" I said, "Graham, what we need is not steam, but luck." This actually amused him. I think if Graham could only have worked with a smaller group of people, he had the spirit and the sense of humour, and above all, this immensely high intelligence, really, to have developed something fine. But he was bogged down, as I had been on a smaller scale, with all these efforts which were-

On the radio side, they were going to be okay in any case, because Manchester was always marvellous for radio. And on the television side, it was going to lead to a lot more trouble and a lot more things that would end in the sand.

What I enjoyed about that and what I've put my money on since time and again is a situation whose outcome we don't know at the beginning of filming. As you gather, I'm against faking of any kind; either faking people or being untruthful

about situations, or of having retrospect in which people stand there and tell you what's happened. I want to see it happen as it happens.

We've done any number of films where we haven't known what the outcome would be, and where we might have come badly unstuck if there hadn't been an outcome. But we've never said, "Aim it towards this outcome to suit us;" we've said, "We're making the film, and whatever it is, we'll stick with it."

We did one about a man who'd inherited a horse, which turned out to be a champion. That was intended as a 30-minute programme in the 'Living on the Land' series. We got 50 out of it, and we shot it in 4 days, including the day on the race track. This horse didn't win, and I thought, "That is marvellous," because I really believe this now: if the horse had have won, the thought would've been, "They've started with a horse winning, and they've come back and done the film."

0:43:51

Interviewer: So now, I have to ask you the question: with your potholing, did you have to do a rescue? Was there a rescue for you to film?

Don Haworth: Yes, there was. It turned out differently to what we'd expected. Sid was there. Gordon was there. We'd finished our work in the morning. We'd gone our separate ways, all within call. I got up, and then Sid arrived, and we sent Sid down, straight away, with a small camera. It was not a frightfully difficult pothole. It had three pitches, the last of which was about 36 feet.

It was down that that this big young man, without previous experience, had fallen, and they managed to get him out, but it

took a long, long, long time. We didn't know, but by the time he came out, he was dead. So this made the whole operation very, very dubious. Again, it was a good thing to have Graham there, because we'd got to think, "Are we going to show this film? What are we going to show of it? What is anybody going to feel about this?"

Peacock had moved on and Paul Fox had become Controller of BBC One, so we exposed this difficulty to him. What we didn't say was that both Graham and I felt, really, that it ought not to be shown, but we also felt that it would be a great misfortune if one more North Regional venture had bitten the dust. So we submitted it to Paul and said, "What do you think?" He said, "Well, go and see the mother of this chap and see what she thinks, but give it time."

And we did – it was a most painful thing to do – and she agreed, and the thing was put on. But what Graham and I didn't stipulate, and what the BBC did accept, was that the thing would be shown once and no more. We changed the actual title in the 'Radio Times' from the title on the film, so that nobody would associate it with his death.

I don't know, now, about the morality of it. What I mean is, it's like operation successful, patient dead, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Don Haworth: I suspect this is what John Buttery said to you: the ruthless thing, when you're making television programmes, you think, "This chap is a frightful bloody fascist. Let's have a lot more of this," you see. Or you think, "This is a terrible thing to be happening." If you pitched up to film starving children and

none turned up, and they said, "Well, there are no more starving children. They're all well fed," you'd pack your gear up. You'd have a sort of feeling in your heart, "Christ, why didn't I come sooner?" It's not very admirable, but it's really how you work in television.

0:46:58

Interviewer: You are, in my opinion, one of the most self-effacing of colleagues, which, in several areas of the BBC, must still rank as something of a rarity. So allow me, now, to mention that in your case, it's not only been quantity of output on a fairly regular basis, but also of quality of work. And that, for your achievements, in both television and in radio, has been properly recognised by others in the industry.

If I may, I'll mention the BAFTA award, in 1980, for a film documentary, the John Grierson award for the best short film, and as the author of radio plays, three Giles Cooper awards. Another from the Society of Authors, and a fifth award from the German Academy of Arts.

Since you're still writing, let me quote, 'A wordsmith who paints the present.' That's how 'The Daily Telegraph' described you. There is time for further recognition, because you haven't retired. You're still making films. But I'd now like to talk to you, if I may, about the radio side of you. Not, of course, in any way, as a producer, but certainly as a writer.

Now, you mentioned, but only briefly- You said, "While I was in the RAF." What exactly were you doing in the RAF?

Don Haworth: I was flying.

0:48:18

Interviewer: Yes. I mention this because in going through the 'Radio Times', your association with Richard Walkley as producer and yourself as author appears to have begun in 1981, with your play, 'Talk of Love and War', which dealt with young pilots in the 1940s. Did you draw your plots and characters from your own experiences, which were a little later than that?

Don Haworth: Do I normally draw-

0:48:44

Interviewer: No, did you in this case?

Don Haworth: Yes, I did. That is probably the most closely autobiographical play that I've written. The situation inside the play is one that was real. I don't normally write anything that I recognise as being part of my past. Most of my things are not in any way autobiographical.

'Daybreak', that's another RAF thing, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes, that was Kay Patrick producing.

Don Haworth: With Kay Patrick. That was putting together several elements which I recognise. I once met a chap, walking back to the RAF station, at 4:00 in the morning, in Lincolnshire. He was a big chap, like the chap who became central to this. When I was

writing the dialogue, it didn't seem right. It didn't seem to be anybody. But I detected in it certain intonations, certain idioms that were remotely like a farmer with whom I'd made a film; a man in Staffordshire.

This solved a problem, because I wanted the person to be rural. I didn't want it to be Northumbrian or Cumbrian, because nobody can understand it. I didn't want it to be Lancashire or Yorkshire, because it sounds urban to a southern audience. This man had this marvellous Staffordshire accent. When I got the accent and the theme and the man, thinking of him back as this young man, I also got a lot of his philosophy and a lot of his life. That was something hauled up from the bottom of the river, but it's rare that I've dredged anything up like that.

0:50:34

Interviewer: 'The Navigator's Log', that was your play about the morality of war, also produced by Kay. Obviously, you're expressing, very much, your own feelings, or were at the time of writing. Or were you?

Don Haworth: Yes. What I was expressing, or what I hoped I was expressing, was the ambivalence of what is strategically right, whether or not it is morally right. I was saying, "I don't know what anybody else would get from it." These are irreconcilable questions, and one does not actually preclude the other. The argument would go a lot, lot further than that.

There's the background experience. None of the characters are anybody that I knew.

0:51:23

Interviewer: No. A person who produced some of your early plays is himself, perhaps, the best known author in this country now, certainly for stage plays, who was then – he started with us a Programme Assistant – Alan Ayckbourn.

Don Haworth: Yes, the lad. The lad, I've called him. Well, I had an idea for a funny story when I was working on a documentary about the 1963 Gambling Act, called 'Casino Society', shot in Manchester, which was then the sort of Monte Carlo of Britain, or Las Vegas.

I had this funny story, and I had a lovely chap called Colin Thomas, who was a trainee of mine, who, like very many talented people, was immediately lost. I told him this story, really, to think, "Is there anything we could do with this story on the telly?" He very rightly said, "It's not telly. Why don't you make it into a radio play?" I had no idea how to write radio plays. I wasn't interested in the theatre, and I'm still not. I didn't listen to radio plays. I didn't watch drama on television very much.

I thought, "Well, as I've got two nights free-" Because this research only really started at 1:00. This is when these guys- They only get up at 10:00 at night, and they're there, at 1:00, to start their gambling, or they were. It's stopped now; they've all lost their money.

I wrote the thing in two nights, and sent it to Alfred, who said, "Well, yes, it's alright. I'll give it to the lad." So he gave it to the lad, and the lad did his best with it, and it was nominated for the Italia Prize. I did another with the lad the next year, and that was nominated for the Italia Prize. Of course, that was the

influence of the lad on these things, because I've won nothing very much since, and he's gone on from strength to strength.

It's an odd thing that Alan never speaks, or if he does, with a kind of, "Ho, ho, ho," about his time at the BBC. He admits he did graceful things like being the writer in residence at Stoke Workshop Theatre, but the BBC, no, no, he won't have anything to do with it.

One lovely thing that happened to Alan: he lived, I think, in the Seacroft Estate in Leeds; a notorious place where, even in those peaceful days, the milk was pinched. God knows what happens now. They'd set him on fire. Through the night, when he wasn't ghosting for London Weekend, he wrote plays. He wrote 12 that were no good, and they were all sent back to him.

As a producer, he never said anything about his aspirations to write, and he always treated radio writers with immense respect, as though this was a talent clearly beyond him. Well, he wrote his 12 useless plays, and then he wrote 'Relatively Speaking'. He had as much income in a day as he'd earned in his previous life. He's the only man I know who learned to drive in an Aston Martin.

Interviewer: (Laughter)

Don Haworth: He was at Leeds, and there was this little cell, and cells worked well, like 'Tonight', and Leeds was one of them. They have a life of limited duration, and nobody knows why they die. 'Panorama' was such a cell. It hasn't dropped, but it's been dead on its feet for years, and it could've gone and come back. This is why there's the later 'Tonight' and then 'Newsnight'.

Programmes, I don't know why it should be, but they're like human beings: they've got an organic life, and they grow old and they perish.

Leeds prospered, and it prospered, really, because of Alfred Bradley. Alfred Bradley, in a way, is a kind of Huw Wheldon. He plays a part, and his part is Alfred Bradley. But he has this kind of thing to jolly people along. He does make people feel that they're glad to come to work. I think he overshadows actors a little bit, but he loves actors, and this is an important thing, because I don't. They're totally different people from what I am, and it's very important to have somebody to have Alfred who is entirely on their side.

Now, at Leeds, Alfred generated something and he kept Leeds going as a centre very, very much longer. He resisted, like Barney did, coming into Manchester. I just wonder whether it's going to be possible for these cells to exist within the BBC, or whether independent producers are not going to create them. At the moment, they can't, because they simply don't have the funds.

I'm not sure, you see, that these entrepreneurial cells, rather paradoxically, don't need a civil service structure to support them. That is, the rebels remain within the nest. The cell that – I suppose I operated a bit like this, on a small scale – says, "Really, I want nothing to do with the rest of the operation. Don't drag me into [these 0:57:04] things," in a way, is dependant on an organisation that does behave in this way.

It has always puzzled me why radio has worked so tremendously well in Manchester, and television so very badly. I think it's because it grew up at an earlier stage, and without the squeeze upon it, and without the pressures. Probably, radio grew up with people who were radio people, and they were compatible with the people who were radio people in

London, and the people within television are not compatible. We found it very difficult to recruit and retain good people.

It's not been possible to get anybody here who has been remotely good, apart from John Ecclestone, since Graham went, as a kind of Head of Programmes. You may remember, when John Ecclestone came, John was an ideal appointment. He'd been Assistant Head of Programmes in Manchester. He'd worked in planning in London. His expertise was to know where the holes were in the schedule, and what was vulnerable, and he went through the whole lot.

He was hours, at a meeting, going through, from Monday morning until Sunday night, really saying, "If you want to make a pitch, this is the place to make it, and it will be that kind of a budget, and it is within these limits, that kind of a programme." He finished and sat down, and there was a silence for a couple of minutes. Then everybody was up, saying, "You know, we can't get in anywhere properly, because of the London barons. We're getting the crumbs from the rich man's table."

They thought that you must do something, and it doesn't matter what you do. If you get five minutes... Alf did this thing in Leeds out of no more resources than many regional drama departments have had and disappeared. We had, when I came back to Manchester, television drama. The television drama producer, not without support from the management, went around saying, "This studio is not fit to produce television drama in," and the television service said, "Okay." They struck off the studio and they struck off the post, and there's been no television drama in Manchester since.

I do except radio from this, and I'm always very clear that I'm not talking about radio, which has worked, to the best of my knowledge, in the most admirable way. But in television, I think that the concept which Bob Stead had, and which had

inherited, not unreasonably, from all the people who'd gone before from a previous time, was that the North Region was a kind of fiefdom, rival and equal with the fiefdoms in London. This is a wrong way to think about it.

The North Region was a supplier, and London was the customer. The right way to succeed is not to quarrel with the customers, however neurotic they are, however awkward they are. They will put obstacles in your way. It's hard and it's difficult, and that's the nature of life. But you can't say, "Give us this building and we will then do the thing."

I remember Baverstock coming up, at the time, with one of the many plans embroiled with Manchester City Corporation, and he had heard all this. He came down to my office and said, "£1m to consolidate nothing." That's another [mole 1:00:51]. It's extreme, but it needed to be thought about. "Should we have this building in Manchester at all?" I think that, probably, the energy of many years went into this, and it became obsessional.

It was going to be a kind of fortress. As people became more and more nervous, it was a fortress in which they were going to shelter. Did have the feeling, at times, that the enemy at the gate was the BBC.

1:01:22

Interviewer: When did you leave the staff?

Don Haworth: '84, when I was 60. I then worked on contract for 3 years. That was the end of an ongoing association with the BBC.

1:01:39

Interviewer: Yes. Well, you're making films now. In 1986, Methuen published your book, 'Figures in a Bygone Landscape', or excerpts from it, as it were, broadcast on Radio 4. It deals with a Lancashire childhood. It is entirely true, or is this part of Don Haworth, the creative writer?

Don Haworth: Well, it's very difficult to say, Trevor. I've wondered about this. I think what purports to be memory probably arose from what I was told, later, by other people. I think that this would then be distinguishable from immediate memory. There will have been the intervening stages of times when I've told the story, which probably, has coloured it in some way. Of course, one can't, at 60-plus, recreate the feeling, because there is a retrospect in it. There's a retrospect of views I speak of thinking, oddly, of my own parents as being young people. There's a kind of time warp about that.

I tried to make it accurate. I tried to make nothing up. What I've done is to sharpen stories, which is that if one told the whole story, it would tend to lose poign- One cuts it off a little bit. So I would say that it's heightened, but not untrue in any detail; that I've written something which, at least, I believe never happened.

Interviewer: Yes. I didn't mention this when I was listing awards. You won an award for this book.

Don Haworth: Yes, I won the Portico Prize, which is an annual award, I think, given to works about the northwest of England.

Interviewer: Yes. And you have a sequel coming out.

Don Haworth: I have a sequel, which is going to be published in October. I don't know whether I should've done it or not. It's the old thing: if you do a good programme on television, they say, "Let's have 39." We've done 14 with Fred Dibnah, actually. This thing went down rather well in its own modest terms. I think, very probably, I ought to have left it at that. But I did have material left over. I had enjoyed the business of writing it.

The publishers pressed me, and my agent pressed me, and I thought, "Well, I'll take a holiday. I'll take four months out and do this." We shall see whether I should've done.

The other thing, of course, the second time through, the critics do their, "Ah, but..." thing. They do it week by week. If you get good daily reviews, they're going to bad on Sunday, or vice versa. I suspect this might be so with a second one, but it might be that they're right.

It's pleasant, really, to do something very simple, which is simply to sit down and write something which it doesn't matter whether it comes off. If you're making television, it does matter whether it comes off, because you can't waste the money. You've got to have something. I've never had a play refused, but there are very many that have gone into the wastepaper basket that I didn't get to an end of. So to this extent, it's a relaxation.

Now, there is this other funny thing, and I talked about this once with Huw Wheldon. He asked me, when I wrote the plays, very much, the thought that I had for many people in the television service, "Ha, ha, what are you doing writing plays?"

They wouldn't ask me if I was playing golf or womanising, or doing something of that sort. But the idea that if I'm writing plays, I'm not doing everything that I might do for the television service.

We went on to talk about the creative process. I said to him, "It isn't quite true that I only write these in the intervals." Because when I'm working hard on a film – when I'm editing the thing the thing and I don't know what to do next – when I come home, and I feel I can't do anything, except, perhaps, watch the telly, which I don't want to do, because I've been looking at a screen all day, ideas seem to pop up then. They don't pop up at times if I- So I said, "If I was to take six months off, I'd be very doubtful whether anything would come of it."

Well, I found that that isn't so. First of all, one has got to think, "Well, what is there in the future?" As I say, we made 14 films with Fred Dibnah, but by the end, it got further to the top of the chimney, for all of us, before we finished. (Laughter) You do have this a little bit in mind, that I can go on with writing until I'm so obviously out of touch that nobody can understand a word of what I've said. There are physical limitations to how long I can do films, so that the proportion has changed, and I write first, and I will do films afterwards.

I don't spend very long in a day writing. I reckon about three hours is long enough. I live in the country, and I then go and walk. Quite often, the thing will go through my mind, and I'll know what to write the next day; a sort of gift, which you can't have if you're living in a kind of bustling world, which I didn't have when I was doing the two things at the same time.

I've spoken about the need simply to get things finished. I must confess, I'm very aware of the many imperfections I left, both in my films and in my plays. But I don't think they're going to be eradicated now. I'm too old.

[1:07:44]

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