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File: **fib658c2 - - LR003245 – Don Mosey (interview 22)**
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START AUDIO

Interviewer: A history of north regional broadcasting, interview number 22 with Don Mosey.

Since the very early days, sport has played an important part in the history of north regional broadcasting. Post-war, it was in the hands of such names as Phillip Robinson, Alan Clark, Kenneth Wolsthenholme, Ray Lakeland, Alan Dixon, David Coleman, and other staff members. By the time we reached the mid-1950s the name of a freelance, Don Mosey, appears in the Radio Times credits, initially, as a reporter for the midland region.

I see that in February 1953, Don, you were covering the Lincolnshire floods for the BBC. Then there is a gap of some 10 years before you are taking part in 10 o'clock Comment for the BBC Home Service as it then was. The title of that particular contribution turned out to be more than a little prophetic. You broadcast a talk on the Lancashire League entitled 'Looking Forward to Cricket'.

00:01:08 What had occurred between the early 1950s and 1964?

Don Mosey: It all started by accident, in point of fact. As a reporter on the Nottingham Evening News, I was covering the opening of a new BBC studio, one of the old remote studios, in the city of

Nottingham. Gerry Nethercott, who at that time was the Midlands representative, was doing the opening ceremony.

Just in the normal course of a question, I asked, “Are you going to have a reporter here?” He said, “No, we shan’t have anybody based here, but that brings up an interesting point. We want to have some representation here, somebody feeding news items to the midland news, would be interested?” I really couldn’t believe this. As I said on my board when I first joined the BBC, I didn’t think people applied to join the corporation, I thought they came down from heaven or something like that. That was the extent of the awe which I felt about the BBC in point of fact.

I started supplying news items, which was a very welcome supplement to my income as a reporter there. After a couple of years of this, Peter Hardiman Scott, who was the deputy to Ted Parkinson the midland news editor, said, “How would you like to try doing a piece yourself?” I really was a bit overcome by this. It was a piece required for a programme called ‘Eyewitness’ which used to go out on the old Home Service at one o’clock on Wednesdays. It was about a new cave which had been discovered under Nottingham castle.

I knocked out a script, took it to Birmingham to show Peter. He then explained to me the considerable difference, which was a complete mystery to me at the time, between the written word and the spoken word. We knocked out the script eight times before it was even remotely satisfactory to him. I actually recorded it 13 times before it became even remotely acceptable. I still shudder with horror at the thought of how bad it was. That actually went out on the BBC Home Service at one o’clock on a Wednesday. That was my first broadcast.

I left Nottingham, I left the paper in Nottingham, and moved up to Leeds. Of course, there wasn’t the same opportunity for working on northern news bulletins. Because Nottingham was

the second city of any size in the Midlands, whereas Leeds was just one of a dozen, 20 or more, large towns and cities in the north. The BBC already had correspondents there.

I went through four years on the Yorkshire Evening Post without doing any more broadcasting. The Daily Express was then bought out from the Yorkshire Evening Post, and I went to Manchester. The Daily Mail then bought me out from the Daily Express. I still wasn't doing any broadcasting. I was still a news man.

Then the Mail asked me to move over to sport, this was a terrible blow to any self-respecting news man. We regarded sports writers as cliché-ridden hacks. My view, incidentally, has never changed. Ultimately, they discovered the only way to separate a Yorkshireman from his principles. They jingled coins in front of me. I gave up playing cricket and rugby, which were my hobbies, and started writing sport for the Daily Mail.

At that time two of my colleagues, Don Hardisty and Frank Taylor, went in once a week, on Wednesdays I think it was, to take part in a north region sports programme produced by Jack Harrison. The job was to forecast draws for the football coupons the following Saturday.

One day Frank Taylor couldn't do it because he was covering a match that evening. He said, "Would you like to stand in for me, would you like to go up and do this?" I went up. I hadn't the faintest idea which games might end in a draw, I wasn't even sure who were the good teams and who were the bad teams, but I did a little piece.

At the end of the programme, Jack Harrison said, "You've broadcast before, haven't you?" I said, "Yes." I explained my experience in the Midlands region. Nothing more was said until he rang me a couple of days later and asked me to do a feature,

go out with a recorder and interview somebody. I started broadcasting on a regular basis. It was just a matter of sheer accident of Frank Taylor not being available, just as doing the first broadcast had been an accident of being in the right place at the right time.

00:05:59

Interviewer: You joined the staff in 1964, was it, Don?

Don Mosey: December 1964, yes.

00:06:04

Interviewer: Who was running north's outside broadcast department when you joined the Manchester staff?

Don Mosey: The two people there were Jack Harrison and Alan Clark. Alan, of course, was primarily employed as a broadcaster not a producer. He did a certain amount of work but Jack did the bulk of it. Jack then moved over to television. I had just resigned, a rather quixotic gesture, from the Daily Mail. I was temporarily, I hoped, out of a job. Jack said, "Why don't you apply for my job?" I thought, "Well, I've no chance but I like the idea."

I had, while working for Jack over the previous 18 months or so, become interested in the production side of things. I'd gone in and watched him editing tapes and seen how he put the programme together. That was the Saturday night programme, 'Sport Spotlight'.

I applied and, in due course, I got the job. London had decided to reorganise the north office at that time. Alan became in fact, as well as on paper, simply a broadcaster, a staff commentator. Jack moved out, so they needed two producers.

A young man called Tony Preston had recently come out of the army, he was in the Glorious Glosters and had a magnificent record as a soldier. He'd done a little bit of work in the London OB department. He was dispatched to the north. He made it very clear, from the first, that he was the boss. Nothing had been said about this to me. Suddenly Tony was designated, by himself if by nobody else, as the senior producer. I was just the producer. I must say I resented this.

Tony knew a great deal about horse racing. He came from Cheltenham. He didn't know anything about any other sport. He didn't know the north, and he most certainly didn't know northern people. I found myself doing about 99.9% of the work. Tony followed the old army custom of wandering around with a bit of paper in his hand, looking important. He did it magnificently.

00:08:34

Interviewer: When I wrote to you first of all, Don, about this interview for the oral archive, you talked about coming into broadcasting and how marvellous you thought it was. You said to me, "Where I was able to create rather than just reflect, as I had done in journalism."

Don Mosey: That was the great thing about production, Trevor. On a newspaper, as a reporter, you necessarily have to reflect what is happening. You can simply report. Unless you're in a certain position, you can't comment on anything. You can't enrich it or

improve it. Whereas I found, as a producer, all these marvellous outlets on north regional broadcasting… Of course, if it was good enough, the chance of getting it onto network by being sent to London. The thought of being able to sit down with a blank sheet of paper and what I knew, and from that create a programme, 40 minutes, half an hour, an hour, a series of programmes, 8 programmes, 13… I did all that, and I absolutely loved it. I'm still in love with the memory of doing it.

00:09:49

Interviewer: You certainly went straight in at the deep end, didn't you? I was looking at 'Radio Times', you said you came in in December '64. In those first three days of joining you did a report on the prospect of a new cricket captain for Warwickshire, that was on December the 15th. You covered the Association Football European Cup on the 16th. I presume you had a day off on the 17th. Then you did one of the Home Service 10 o'clock comments, which involved a row over the Lancashire County Cricket Cup, on December the 18th. So you didn't waste much time, did you?

Don Mosey: Of course, it didn't take the corporation very long to find that in appointing an OB producer north region they got two for the price of one. I'd been broadcasting for 12 years on and off, mostly off but I had done some. I had been trained by a man I regarded as an expert, Peter Hardiman Scott. I shall never cease to be grateful for the trouble he took to try to make me even remotely competent in broadcasting.

Tony hadn't arrived. I had complete autonomy. London were ringing up and saying, "Who is doing this, who is doing what?" I didn't even know the freelancers we used at that time. Because

I've always considered myself a reasonably good all-rounder, I was doing most of these things myself until Tony arrived. He didn't come until late January.

00:11:18

Interviewer: For you and your new BBC career, 1965 appeared to begin with the Rugby League test match Great Britain vs France. Next you were introducing and linking coverage of the FA Cup replays. Then, Don, from the spring of that year your name is to be found at intervals as a regular commentator on cricket. That's always struck me as being something of a broadcasters' club, extremely exclusive, am I right?

Don Mosey: Yes. It is at test match level. Of course, I had to start in the north region doing the opt-out periods. May I just go back to that Rugby League test match for a moment? I'd been a matter of 10 minutes or so on the staff of the corporation. I knew that timing was of the essence. That Rugby League test match was spectacular in that the French captain was sent off and refused to go off. There was a 10 minute delay while the referee argued with him.

A member of the French Board of Control, who was actually sitting next to me and broadcasting to France, [Raymond Forge 00:12:33]. I shall never forget the man. He went on the field to try to persuade this French captain that he really must leave, despite the fact that he felt affronted and martyred. By this time 15 minutes had gone by, so we're going to go 15 minutes over the end of the time for the programme. I was in an absolute blue funk. Did we hand back to the studio? Would somebody take us out, pick it up? I didn't know any of these things at all.

Alan Dixon, Keith Macklin, and myself carried on broadcasting to the end of the game, and just hoped somebody was listening to the last 15 minutes when we were off the end.

To cricket. Cricket was my great love. Rugby Union is my winter game, and cricket my summer game. We had these lovely 40-minute slots in the north. Round would come the bit of paper, which you remember offers these slots. Right, we've got Yorkshire vs Middlesex and we've got Lancashire vs Essex.

If I did the commentary then we didn't have to pay out anything for a commentator, and that appealed to our head of programmes as you will remember. I didn't have a scorer and I didn't have a summariser. I had to hope the scoreboard was right and up to date, and talk for 20 minutes without a break. I reckon I had a glorious opportunity to serve a marvellous apprenticeship there.

I shall never forget one game at Southport. A 40 minute spell in which not a wicket fell and not a run was scored. In three consecutive overs, from one end, the same batsman hit the ball to the same fieldsman six balls and over for three overs. I was praying for a train to pass the ground at Southport, just anything to break it up. I came off at the end of that, and I thought, "Well, if you can do that… If you can get through that, you can get through anything." That was one of the most salutary experiences I had.

That was the great thing about regional broadcasting, we could get the experience. Would-be commentators today just don't have that opportunity. Of course, I looked at the operation of 'Test Match Special' in London and I produced it when it came to Headingley and Old Trafford. There were John Arlott, Brian Johnston, Bob Hudson. [Per one from 00:15:09]… Peter Cranmer, Alan Gibson, all kinds of odds and sods came in from time to time.

I used to think this would be the quintessence of cricket broadcasting if I could make it. I gently broached the subject. Tony Preston informed me I had no chance whatsoever, and that I was lucky to be doing the broadcasting I was doing myself at that time in the north. Charles Max-Muller, the head of outside broadcasts, did not approve of his producers being broadcasters as well.

Nevertheless, I tried it out on London, I auditioned myself and sent it down for the listening panel just as I had done on soccer, Rugby Union, and Rugby League. I was accepted as a network commentator on all those three.

Cricket, no. I was told this was a job for public schoolmen with public school voices, and never would I be allowed near 'Test Match Special'. I gently mentioned the case of John Arlott, and I was told that he was a special case. All the rest, of course, were public schoolboys. There was no way, with the old Etonian head of outside broadcasts forming the block in front of me, that I was ever going to get into 'Test Match Special', which is the most exclusive club in the world.

00:16:37

Interviewer: We'll come back to that, if we may, a little later. Sunday mornings, as you remember, on the north of England Home Service gave many producers the opportunity to try out new ideas in the 'Talk About' series, Don, devised by our then assistant head of programmes Colin Shaw. You, I think, were responsible for a series which you called 'Sporting Prints'. P-R-I-N-T-S.

Don Mosey: Yes, the first one I did in that series was Geoffrey Boycott. I called that 'Portrait of a Test Cricketer'. I think it was the first thing that had ever been done about Boycott. I got, from him, a letter saying thank you when he got back from the Australian tour, his first tour that winter. That is, to the best of my knowledge, the only thank you letter Boycott has ever sent to anybody in his entire life. I treasured it for many years, until we lost it in a move of house. I thought that was a unique document.

I did a series of those but of course… Again, going back to the non-sporting things, I was far more proud and far more interested in things I did like 'A Day in the Life of a Country Village'. I went out and did the village of Austwick and found 27 different means of self-entertainment in the village. I remember my secretary, [Cathy Crabtree 00:17:55] who was a real townie, complaining that she couldn't sleep. It was too quiet, in the hotel, outside.

I did one called, 'A Day in the Dales, in Verse and Music' which was perhaps a bit ambitious for my capabilities. I loved doing it, choosing the verse and choosing the music and putting it all together.

You mentioned Colin Shaw. We mustn't forget my angling programme, 'Fisherman's Inn'. A £5 budget. I got a man called Hal Mount, who was a genius. We used to catch fish in studio five in Broadcasting House. This man could act anything. He brought a reel in and we used that one of the effects. I played in a disc of birdsong. Gradually we become more ambitious, we had cattle lowing and sheep in the distance.

Colin Shaw sent me a note one day saying it had come to his notice that this was not an actual catching of fish out in the country, but was all a subterfuge carried out in studio five in Broadcasting House. I replied, "Yes, that is quite true. I'm merely seeking to attach a little artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise

bald and unconvincing narrative." I didn't even say with apologies to W S Gilbert. I got a very pompous note back Colin saying this was debasing the coinage and it must cease forthwith.

00:19:36

Interviewer: How very strange because the very first natural history programme that was broadcast by the BBC that had any impact at all was 'Out with Romany'. That came from studio three Broadcasting House, exactly the same thing happened. He wasn't actually out with Raq and Muriel and Doris, it was all done in the studio. This was dishonest and, "How can you pull the wool over the eyes of young children? Tut tut tut."

Don Mosey: This is the very point I put to Colin. "Have you ever heard of a programme called 'Out with Romany'?" He said, "Why do you ask that?" I said, "Vis a vis your note to me this morning, please go away and check in the archives and learn all about a programme called 'Out with Romany' which I used to love as a kid." Yes, quite extraordinary that.

However, we had to call it off at least temporarily. Then Hal and I used to go out to a pond that he knew, which he stocked himself. We'd catch fish there and record the whole thing on a Ficord, effects and all and the dialogue. There was just no way that you could do anything feasible for £5, for the budget. Then Hal moved down to live in the Isle of Wight. We longed to continue somehow, but we couldn't.

I got him to contribute notes, along with other people. £5 worth, I think we paid them all a guinea a piece to send in what the prospects were for fishing in various parts of the north on Friday.

I got a staff announcer to help me. I scripted him and scripted myself, with lots of ad-libbing.

That was the first broadcasting, other than a news bulletin, that Ray Moore had ever done. He'd never done any ad-libbing in his life. He got a bit carried away one day. I remember him saying, "Hal Mount reports that roach are rising well in the…" Somewhere or other. That's what he should have said. He said, "Hal Roach reports that cod are rising well in the Bradford Lakes." I thought, "We've got to get out of this somehow." I said, "Well that indicates that the Bradford reservoirs have suddenly found an outlet to and from the sea or my secretary is in love."

00:22:07

Interviewer: Hal Roach, a nice comic touch. Were you surprised, Don, at the amount of freedom that you found existed for producers in the BBC? You'd put up an idea, if somebody said yes you just went ahead and did it.

Don Mosey: Oh yes. That was one of the great bonuses. It was quite staggering to me, frankly, in the initial stages. You either reacted to it well or not at all. It was a privilege which could be abused so easily. One took the view that people were listening, one hoped that the executives were listening, so that you'd know whether you'd done a decent job or not.

The freedom was something I'd never enjoyed on newspapers. I felt we were very free on newspapers. Occasionally I went over the top, and I was conscious of it. Somebody would gently wrap my knuckles, usually a benign one from Graham Miller. I don't think I did it too often. I loved it.

We had the Saturday night programme of course, 'Sports Corner', which was a great joy. I inherited it. I worked into it for four or five years and found myself, now, the producer, with all the chaps I'd worked alongside as my reporters. We had some exceedingly pleasant Saturday night programmes there.

Norman Turner was originally the presenter. Very quickly Tony Preston got rid of him, for reasons I never understood, and brought in Peter Wheeler who, of course, was a better broadcaster but didn't know any sport. He had to be scripted very carefully, but he was such a good broadcaster that he could give credibility to a script he didn't even understand.

He just had one bad Saturday night when Michael Betts, the Rugby League man… Instead of just doing his piece in the studio, as he normally did, he'd been required to talk to Bill Fallowfield, the Rugby League secretary, in Leeds. Therefore, he had to wear cans. Forgetting that he was wearing cans, he got up from the table and almost decapitated himself. Which had the effect of knocking the jug of water over onto Peter Wheeler's script, which was liberally festooned with ball-point markings. The ball-point ran over the remainder of the script.

I was having to dictate a script to him through his cans. He was good enough to pick that up and do that as well. A great pro, it's always marvellous to work with pros isn't it?

00:24:44

Interviewer: It certainly is. You were also covering racing from York, and other venues, for the Light Programme in those days, Don. Surely that means knowing, not only, the rules of various games, but keeping apace with the participants? Was it your journalistic training that helped you there?

Don Mosey: Yes. As I say, I've always been a good all-rounder. Starting work on a weekly paper where you had to do everything, turn your hand to anything. Then on provincial evenings and mornings, again, you've really got to be versatile if you're going to enjoy your job.

The racing, of course, I was only number two-ing. We were talking, a moment ago, about the delight of working with pros. One of my great delights was working with the most brilliant of pros, Peter Bromley. I've always admired race readers looking at their little cigarette cards and, from those, getting fixed in their mind the colours of the jockeys to pick them out of the bunch and note which is making progress. That, to me, is the ultimate manifestation of genius as far as commentary is concerned.

I remember him at Chester, where the horses have to pass over the River Dee. Rhythm, of course, is the most important ingredient of any commentary. Rhythm in race reading commentary is absolutely vital, because unless you've got it just right you're going to get the finish all out of sync. There he was talking away about so-and-so coming through, coming through. One of the horses pulled away to the left, just corrected himself in time. If he'd pulled over any further, he would've fallen over into the River Dee. I thought, "How can he pick up after that?" He did without batting an eyelid, straight back into rhythm. That is expertise, and I loved it.

00:26:37

Interviewer: How did you get on with your bosses in Manchester and, particularly, in London, the head of sport?

Don Mosey: We had the twin set-up in London of course. I was OBs, and I insisted I was OBs. On Saturday afternoon we were responsible for 'Sports Report' or contributions to 'Sports Report'. I got on with individual producers in London in different ways. My closest friend, from the moment I joined the staff of the BBC, has been John Fenton who was the golf and racing producer. He and I are still very close friends, both retired and both doing a bit of freelancing work, still, for the old corp.

I did not like Charles Max-Muller. I did not like him one little bit. He was blocking my way to the thing I wanted to do most, therefore I had a built-in dislike of him to begin with. At the same time, he was the sort of head of outside broadcast I wish we'd had, certainly, at some later stages. He just sat back and listened to the output and knew whether he liked it or not, and was not slow to tell us if he didn't like it. That's fair enough, I'll accept that from anybody in authority. Other aspects of his benevolent dictatorship, you might say, left, in my view, a great deal to be desired.

The individual producers… If we didn't particularly like each other personally we respected each other professionally, and we got along on that basis, as I hope one always does.

In Manchester, I loved Graham Miller as a paternal figure. I chafed at his rejection of some of my ideas, as every one of us has done at one time or another. In terms of looking after his staff, I couldn't fault him. I had reason to be most grateful to him, on many occasions, for his personal kindness to me. I liked him a great deal.

Colin Shaw I most certainly did not like, because of the 'debasing the coinage' episode. I sensed in him something of Tony Preston. The two were great friends. They were occupying a job for a certain length of time while setting their stall out to move onto the next one.

00:29:23

Interviewer: Again, looking back through the 'Radio Times', you did radio features on sailing, talks for 'Woman's Hour'. In 1972, Don, you took a ride on a narrow gauge railway in Cumbria. I mention this particular event since it was your first association with a series which I know was dear to your heart. It was certainly dear to the hearts of many, many, listeners. I refer to the countryside series you did, 'The Countryside in Spring' summer, autumn, winter. All done entirely by means of speech and sound.

Don Mosey: That's right. I coveted that for many years. When Arthur Phillips retired… He was the chief producer in the OB department, and that had been his pet. I put in a bid for it. Lots of people threw up their hands in horror. Charles Max-Muller had retired and Bob Hudson had become head of outside broadcasts. Bob, in a gesture which for him can only be described as greatly daring, gave me half the programme, and the other half to John Haslam.

First of all, it was presented by Gordon Glover. C Gordon Glover.

Interviewer: Gordon Glover, yes. 'As I Beside my Cottage Door', another programme-

Don Mosey: Well I was going back to 'Kentucky Minstrels' with C Gordon Glover and Harry S Pepper and Doris Arnold. Gordon was in love with his own prose, it was vastly purple prose. It was contrived, to my ear. Nevertheless, there was no question of

replacing him. Then poor old Gordon died. By this time Cliff Morgan had become head of outside broadcasts, which was one of the greatest things to happen to me in my life. Perhaps we may talk about Cliff in due course.

Cliff rang me and said, “Can you think of anybody to present this? Can you think of the right man?” I put forward two or three ideas. One of which was John Arlott in point of fact, thinking he had the right sort of poetic mind to deal with this. Cliff, as ever, gave this thought, and the other ideas, and then came up with his own idea, Wynford Vaughan-Thomas.

00:31:41

Interviewer: Wasn’t that a winner?

Don Mosey: That was a masterpiece, masterpiece. Previously, in editing ‘The Countryside’, I had cut big chunks out of Gordon Glover’s script to make way for the inserts from six contributors. Now I cut the contributors to get more of Wynford. He did it all so effortlessly. I’d send him a note of who the contributors were, what they were talking about, in cues, out cues, and how much I wanted, roughly, between each insert.

He’d come in and sit down and write it in the studio. It was beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful. He had such a rich and full life. I think Wynford was probably the most complete human being, in intellectual terms, I’ve ever met in my life. He had an experience and an anecdote to slot in, no matter what you thought up for an insert he had one.

One day he got so absolutely carried away. I didn’t look at his script, we just recorded it and played in the inserts. Suddenly, between two pieces, he burst into fluent Welsh. I sat and

listened, and he did a three-minute link in Welsh. I had to stop the recording. I said, “Well, that was fascinating Wynford. When we have a pint at lunchtime you must tell me what it was about. Now, may we do it in English?” “God bless my soul,” he said, “I don’t know what I was thinking about. Well I do know what I was thinking about. I was thinking in Welsh, of course, and I just wrote it in Welsh.” Oh what a marvellous man.

As you know, Wynford had been everywhere and done everything. Anzio, on the ocean bottom with Jacques Cousteau, down potholes under the Pyrenees, up mountains. Then, of course, his wartime experiences were a legend in themselves. My secretary, who shared my love of music, used to fix our recording sessions, if she possibly could, to coincide with a performance of the Welsh National Opera. We went one day, outside the theatre is “‘[Office in the Underworld 00:34:07]’ in a new translation, by Wynford Vaughan-Thomas.” I thought, “What is he going to do next?”

Interviewer: There is no end to the man’s talent.

Don Mosey: We were talking about this the following day. We’d done the recording, we always got that out of the way for opening time in the club in Llanarth. He was leaning against the bar. The trouble was everybody, but everybody, came and congregated around him, from points to producers. All wanted to talk to Wynford.

We had a moment. Suddenly he said, “My dear chap, do you remember those leaflets we used to drop during the war?” I said, “Well Wynford, I’m a bit younger than you, we didn’t drop leaflets at my time. It was more business as usual later in the war.”

He said, “I’m going to walk over the tops of all the mountains of Wales next year, for my 70th year. I thought, just in case, I’d better put my affairs in order. I was looking through some papers at my home, at Fishguard, I found this.” He pulled out a poem which started very correctly, and all the stanzas were in order, and the writing was fairly good. Gradually it started getting wavy and going off the end of the line. It was entitled, ‘Saturday Night in Newport Cardigan’. I said, “What is it Wynford?” He read it out in that beautiful lilting Welsh voice of his. It was a very bawdy poem.

He said, “I remember coming back, now, from- We’d been over Berlin, the first raid on Berlin. I was in the studio, getting my recording ready, disc and all that. The phone rang, “It’s for you Mr Vaughan-Thomas.” A voice said, “Hello [you 00:36:10], I’m in the last pub on the left down the King’s Road in Chelsea and I want to borrow a fiver as usual.” “Aye, right Dylan, I’ll be down as soon as I’ve finished my work.” I went down and gave him the fiver, which was the umpteenth fiver he’d borrowed from me. I never expected to get any of them back.” He said, “I suppose he was thinking in terms of a quid pro quo. He said, “I’ve written this for you.””

I said, “Wynford, are you telling me that we’re standing here in a BBC club in Cardiff and you are holding out in front of me an unpublished poem by Dylan Thomas in his own hand?” He said, “Yes, my dear chap, I suppose I ought to do something about it.” I said, “You most certainly should.” I went straight to the phone and I rang the poetry chap, Fraser…

00:37:05

Interviewer: Steel?

Don Mosey: Fraser Steel, in Manchester. I told him this story. He started working on the telephone. The next thing I knew a girl reporter from the Sunday Times was flying down to Haverfordwest, the nearest airport to his home, to pick up this poem. There he was carrying it about in his pocket. He just brought it out casually because he thought it would interest me as a wartime story. Marvellous man, absolutely marvellous.

00:37:34

Interviewer: Apart from the countryside series, Don, I always associate you with another series which, again, gave a lot of pleasure to many of us, listeners and staff alike. That was the seaside series, was that your idea?

Don Mosey: Yes. It was after I came to live in Morecambe, once the M61 had opened it became feasible to live away from the city. I hate cities, loath them, and I'd been 17 years in Manchester. Both my wife and I had a great fondness for Morecambe. It's a bit like a village here. We came up and we had a seafront flat, I used to spend hours sitting watching the changing tides and the curlews and the oystercatchers and the other waders, and watching the tide come in. I thought, "The seaside changes seasonally and, almost, daily really, no less than the countryside." So I put this up to the controller of Radio 4, it was accepted.

Then I had to start getting correspondents on the countryside lines. Some were able to duplicate, but not too many. I discovered one or two new people on that, and thoroughly enjoyed doing it.

The most difficult thing was getting the right signature tune. I mucked about with all kinds of music. Finally I went to David

Ellis, who at that time was head of music, and I said, “Tell me something like… Somebody had a masterstroke in using Spartacus for ‘The Onedin Line’. Give me something similar, which is not specifically of the sea but which sounds like the sea.” He said, “Ah, ‘The Wasps’. Part of ‘The Wasps’” I could just see the sunlight glinting on an ocean there. I thought, “That’s marvellous, great.” That’s how we got the signature tune, that was the most difficult part.

Then came a presenter. The first one I had was Brian Thompson, who narrated those great railways of the world things, a very talented writer. He couldn’t do it for any great length of time. He put me onto a chap in the town where he lived, Harrogate, called Ken Blakeson. He was a scriptwriter of all kinds of television programmes, ‘Emmerdale Farm’ was one of his. Ken did a very good job until I retired. He also came up with other ideas too, good ideas.

00:40:09

Interviewer: That series began in, what was it, 1980, Don? Can we go back in time now, Don, to 1974? That’s a year that I think you will very clearly recall.

Don Mosey: Indeed. That was when the great call came at last, Charles Max-Muller retired, Bob Hudson had taken early retirement. He, of course, carried on Charles Max-Muller’s traditions. In came Cliff Morgan. In that winter, of ’73 ’74, he summoned me. He said, “What would you do to improve ‘Test Match Special’?” I said, “Well I’ve got two ideas, Cliff, which I’d like to see put into operation. One is, I would like Fred Trueman to be included as a summariser.”

We'd just established Trevor Bailey as a regular summariser after years of using all kinds of different people, none of whom was particularly good. I'd been broadcasting with Fred, in one-offs in the north, for long enough. I knew that, given the right stimulation, he could be very good indeed. Bob had always said, "No." I think he thought Fred was too 'eeh by gum' for 'Test Match Special', as Charles thought I was. Also, I believe Bob was terrified that Fred would come out with a flow of Anglo-Saxon on the air, or something like… It was a very real fear with Bob Hudson, that.

Cliff said, "Why isn't Fred on already? Why has he never been used?" I told him this, they laughed uproariously. "Right, buck, he's in, What else?" I said, "One thing I've always wanted to see is not slavishly going back to the studio for music when rain stops play. If we get Fred in there with Trevor, and we've got John Arlott and Brian Johnston, we have the most marvellous untapped source of cricket anecdote it would be possible to get together under one roof. Let's use it." Cliff said, "Right, that will be done this season.

As I was leaving he said, "There's just one more thing. I'd like you to join the team as well." I felt very strongly that I could do it, not without a certain nervousness and not without realising what a privilege it was.

The very first time I was up there I remember thinking to myself, "What the hell are you doing up here, a little lad from Keighley, between John Arlott and Brian Johnston?" I still think that, not with John these days but with, Brian. Brian and I are very good friends, I suppose we're the two old soldiers now. That was the start of, probably, the happiest time of my life. I'm one of those lucky people. To a greater or lesser extent, I've enjoyed going to work every day of my life. 'Test Match Special' is something that I enjoy in a very special way. It's marvellous stuff.

Within three years, with this new formula, we had taken off. We'd become cult broadcasting. I had set out, quite deliberately but I hope unobtrusively, to change the programme from the inside. It had been good, sound, clinical, pure broadcasting under Bob Hudson's auspices so to speak.

The one element that I saw as being lacking was humour, there was never a laugh, there was never a smile. I thought, "It's important, it's vitally important." Nobody could tell me how important test cricket was, but it's still not war, it's still not life and death. It is sport, let's treat it as sport. So I just started, gradually, pushing things out in various directions, particularly with Fred. Trevor reacted, Brian reacted uproariously.

I thought nobody had noticed what was happening until it was the end of 1976. John Arlott took me on one side at the Oval and said, "Some people, who have a very high regard for your capabilities, don't like the way your commentary is tending." I said, "What do you mean John?" knowing perfectly well what he meant. "Too much of this buffoonery is creeping in," he said, "that's the Johnston syndrome, leave it to him." I said, "Well I'm sorry, I don't think you're right. You know I have the most immense, possible, respect for you and your broadcasting but I think 'Test Match Special' is better this way. Without going overboard, and making it a clown job, let's just keep on and see what we can do this way.

Within three to four years of that 1974 innovation we had every magazine and every newspaper in the country doing features about the programme, which nobody would ever have dreamed of doing before that time. It was Cliff's foresight which was responsible for that. He had a marvellous instinct for radio broadcasting.

00:45:59

Interviewer: And of slightly more importance, considering that the BBC is there to provide a service to listeners, the patronage of the programme, of course, increased enormously. It was an exclusive listeners club for those who were devotees of cricket. It became an entertaining programme in itself, didn't it?

Don Mosey: Most of all, it appealed to the housewives who liked the friendly voices around the house as they were doing their chores. The mailbag expanded. I counted up in 1980, because all the post comes to one box. Which one it is doesn't matter. I was bundling up the ones for television. I counted out seven for us to every one of theirs. I thought, "This is interesting." So I did a sort of spot check periodically over the next five years, it's still seven to one in our favour. I haven't done it since 1985, since I retired.

The one thing that intrigues them in television is the number of people who write and say, "We have the television on with the sound turned off, and listen to 'Test Match Special'" Which, of course, places an extra responsibility on us because the television gives a closer view than we see with the naked eye.

I think, probably, alone among my colleagues in the box… Perhaps Brian is the same as me, I'm not sure. I flatly refuse to look at the television monitor for any expression or description of the cricket. I say, "If we are doing it from a radio point of view, we just call it as we see it." That doesn't mean to say that I insist that the expert comments man, Fred, Trevor, or whoever it is, should not look at it to have a second-guessing session on whether the ball pitched in line or not.

What I will not have under any circumstances, and I deplore this on television, is criticism, even by implication, of an umpire's decision, any more than I like criticism of referees on a rugby

field. I think, once we start undermining the established authority of any game we're going to be in a state of anarchy. I've been violently battling, in all my books, since retirement against television's slow-motion replays which hold umpire's up to ridicule.

In England, at least, we keep a certain dignity and we leave it to the viewer to decide whether he thinks the umpire is right or not. Of course, in Australia they put it up on a massive screen in the ground. You see 50,000 heads turn to look at this screen. Just one head remaining still, that of the umpire whose decisions are being questions. I think that's terrible.

Sorry, I'm digressing there. The response from the public has been absolutely marvellous. I suppose it's pretty near unique, in any branch of the communications medium, that 99% of the letters which come are friendly and interested or inquiring. The chap who saves himself up and writes to newspapers, and/or the BBC, for something to snarl about is almost absent from our mailing list.

So we now devote a whole session, lunchtime session, to listener's letters, talking about them. I mostly bring mine home. Everybody who takes the trouble to write gets a personal reply. In a way, that's helped enlarge my circle of friends. I have correspondence with people all over the country, but all over the world as well, as a result of that.

00:49:57

Interviewer: We had got to 1980, the start of the seaside series, Don, then I said, "Let's go back for 'Test Match Special' as rephrased and re-presented through your auspices." 1980 was also an important year for you. Wasn't it in that year that you were appointed as the BBC's chief cricket correspondent? You were

based in Manchester, how did that go down with some of our London colleagues?

Don Mosey: Interestingly, I was never appointed. Chris Martin-Jenkins, who didn't like the regime at that time, decided to leave and edit 'The Cricketer' magazine while retaining a freelance connection with 'Test Match Special' and doing the commentary, which is the only bit he liked you see. He didn't like doing all the lobbying around Lords and the news bulletins, and being subject to the authority of the sports room in London. He was the only staff man, you see. Brian Johnston having long since retired, he was the only staff man doing cricket apart from me. It just sort of…

I drifted into it, really. All the lobbying at Lord's had to be done, all the prognostication about the composition of test teams had to be done, all the comment on the test teams when picked had to be done by somebody. They just looked at me. I spent the next two years commuting up and down between Manchester and London on the train to Lord's and wherever else meetings were being held, doing overseas tours, and still doing my job as senior producer outside broadcasts in the north.

At one stage I was editing a countryside tape over the phone from a cricket match at Lord's, a test match at Lord's, to my secretary in a recording channel in Manchester. We were working on that sort of hit and miss basis. Finally, I said, "That programme means too much to me for me to treat it in this way. If I can't do it properly I must give it up, or give up doing the cricket correspondent job.

Slim Wilkinson, the then head of outside broadcasts, would not officially designate me cricket correspondent. That only came when Pat Ewing took over. She said she'd had representations from all her senior producers, and senior sports assistants in the

room, saying it was disgraceful that I was doing the job without the title. Would I like it, would it mean anything to me so close to retirement? I said, “One minute before retirement, Pat, I would be honoured to be designated the BBC cricket correspondent.” In fact, I did it for five years but only for the last year did I have the title. I had the official MCC medallion, which meant I was a cricket correspondent, and I did all the cricket correspondent’s work but without the title until that last year.

00:53:07

Interviewer: Did they pay you any more?

Don Mosey: No, of course not.

00:53:11

Interviewer: The good old BBC, yes?

Don Mosey: I would’ve paid them to let me do that.

00:53:14

Interviewer: I know, I was waiting for that, yes. Well you let the staff after 20 years, I won’t say retired because that’s something you’ll never do. I have a feeling that Don Mosey will fall at the wicket.

Don Mosey: Well it would be a nice way to go, wouldn’t it? I do a certain amount of broadcasting just to keep in touch with ‘Test Match

Special'. Brian Johnston and I are currently debating whether to carry on when 'Test Match Special' goes onto Radio 5. With the best will in the world, neither of us can see that it's going to be the same. It simply cannot be the same as we see it. Brian is more or less determined to pull out at the end of this year. I think, if he goes, I shall go too. It won't be the same for me without him. It won't be the same operation at all. It certainly won't be the same for the listeners without him because, to me, he is 'Test Match Special'.

00:54:13

Interviewer: Your partnership with him has been a very successful one, hasn't it?

Don Mosey: We get along pretty well. I'm learning all the time, I'm still learning. I reckon any day when you don't learn something is a day wasted in your life. It might be a cliché, but I happen to believe that very strongly. I learned from Arlott extensively.

I keep learning from Brian because he is the greatest natural broadcaster I have ever heard in my life. He could interview a gatepost and get intelligible answers and make a good piece of broadcasting out of it. He's absolutely magnificent.

Those 'View from the Boundary' things we do on Saturday lunchtimes in a test match, I listen fascinated. If I ever mention this to him, first of all he gets embarrassed and then he says the first words of advice he was ever given by… Stewart MacPherson and Wynford Vaughan-Thomas were the two people who introduced him to broadcasting. He said, "Wynford said to me, on that occasion, "When you are interviewing, always listen to the answers. Don't be thinking about your next

question."" That is the hardest discipline, I think you might agree Trevor, to observe as an interviewer. Brian obviously mastered it right from the beginning. He's the most brilliant interviewer.

I've got my writing of course, I churn out two books a year. Mercifully, people still seem to want them. I've got commissions for the next two years to keep me busy, it all keeps me in touch with the game I love. In winter I've got my rugby which I love just as much.

00:55:50

Interviewer: We just met at your golf club, before we came home here.

Don Mosey: Yes. I can't play myself anymore, unfortunately, because of duff legs. I did play up till two years ago. I have the interest, there, of my son who is a tournament professional.

00:56:04

Interviewer: And your other son, he is abroad?

Don Mosey: He's in Australia. I sent him off around the world for a year in 1979, and he hasn't got past Sydney yet. So we have to go to Australia every year to see him.

00:56:16

Interviewer: He's with?

Don Mosey: A customs and excise officer on his beloved Sydney Harbour. He adores Sydney Harbour. He tears up and down there on his high-speed launch checking the incoming cargos on ships and enjoying a little tradition, I think he may well have started it but he denies it, that the first officer of every ship donates a case of beer to the customs and excise officer boarding his ship. So he gets along very nicely [anyway 00:56:42].

00:56:43

Interviewer: Talking of beer, as I recall, Don, you always had a band of colleagues around you in the BBC Manchester club, myself included. In those days your moustache, which you no longer carry, would bristle as you told us tales about various, have I got the word correctly, pillocks. Do you still encounter those, or did they only exist within the confines of the British Broadcasting Corporation?

Don Mosey: Oh no, they're to be found all over the world, all over life. I don't find them to the same extent now because, believe it or not, I've become mellow in my old age.

Interviewer: I've noticed this today.

Don Mosey: There are two facets of this. The radio sports unit, who for years drove me stark raving mad when I was operating in Manchester on staff, now is a transit camp. People who, in my conception of what the BBC is about, would've never been allowed within a million miles of broadcasting now come flooding in from local radio stations. They spend three weeks there and, suddenly, are

taken up by BSB television. They just go through in hoards, so I never know to whom I'm speaking at the other end. I don't know a single name from one week to the next.

I'm sure that generations of them have gone in there, been warned about this irascible, nasty, snarling, unpleasant swine up in the north. "Be careful how you handle him on the talkback." They're still waiting to meet him. Now I am a freelance, and they have to pay me to be there. I tell them blithely, "Don't apologise that I haven't been on too much. I don't care if I don't get on at all, all afternoon, so long as I get the contract in the post and, subsequently, the cheque, I'm perfectly happy." That is true.

Interviewer: Obviously, I have been talking to a happy man. Don Mosey, thank you very much indeed for doing this oral archive.

Don Mosey: Thank you Trevor, it's been a pleasure.

[Break in conversation 00:58:56 - 00:59:24]

END AUDIO