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'A History Of North Regional Broadcasting' - PEGGY WALKER

(Interview 47 Notes)

**Trevor**

**Hill** Television screen credits for directors nowadays include the names of many women. That was something of a rarity in the 1950's and 60's. But one person in the North of England who had that distinction on many occasions is **PEGGY WALKER**

And I'd like to begin by asking what brought you into the BBC. Was it in order to get away from a cold Canadian winter ?

**Peggy**

**Walker** (Replies - explains why she'd been working there and how she was taken on in 1949 by the BBC at the Woodhouse Lane studios in Leeds as a temporary Secretary working to **Barney Colehan** on 'Have A Go')

**Trevor** A show which still holds the record for drawing the biggest Radio audiences ever when totalled up in terms of being on the Home Service, repeated on the Light and also heard Overseas - five broadcasts including Repeats within a week. Tell me something about the show in those days.

**Peggy** (does so, please - also how she got on with Wilfred, Mabel, - and with Vi Carson if Vi had taken over from the original orchestra in your day. Also a mention of Barney)

**Trevor** And from there ?

**Peggy** (talks about becoming secretary to **Kenneth Severs** who was Talks producer - later to take over from **Philip Fox** as the Leeds Representative. A little, please, on the types of programmes you worked on in those days)

**Trevor** But one day, you saw something which 'really took your fancy' as they say in Northern parts !

**Peggy** (explains 'It was the day I saw a television set as I passed a house in Leeds and on it, my first sight of a boxing match - despite all the line-interference on the tiny black and white screen, I realised the exciting possibilities')

**Trevor** Did that mean a move across from Leeds to Manchester where North Regional Television was only just beginning after the 1951 opening of the Holme Moss transmitter ?

**Peggy** (Replies - talks about working for the only Television Producer who'd come to the Region; of some resentment she encountered from Manchester staff at the arrival of a 'newcomer' to work on such a new venture for the Region - also the fact that, but for Overtime pay and Meal Allowances, ...'I'd have been both tired and hungry at the end of a day')

**Trevor** Do you recall some of those early programmes ? Mainly Outside Broadcasts I imagine.

**Peggy** (Please pick a selection - "Sport, Religion, 'Come Dancing', - Ship launches, down Mines, et cetera. Almost every programme was a First !").

Please include a story or two, also the names of some of the Television 'Crew' with whom you worked at that time, - especially the ones who stayed on. "We lived dangerously in those days - Zoom Lens had not been invented and cameras frequently broke down on air")

**Trevor** And what point did you first begin to Direct the cameras yourself, Peggy - and of more importance, perhaps, when did they let you have your very first screen credit for having done the job ?

**Peggy** (Replies - ~~and there you might like to mention the battle you had with the producer who tried to get you the sack because you refused to give him a screen 'credit' when you'd done the work).~~

**Trevor** All my early Television experience stemmed from working with 'Children's Television' at Lime Grove - and there of course it was **Freda Lingstrom** as head, **Ursula Eason** as assistant - and other women directors/producers of the calibre of **Dorothea Brooking** and **Naomi Capon**. Tough women, perhaps but they had to be. More importantly, they knew their job. I never saw you as being 'weak at the knees'.

**Peggy** (May like to touch on the attitude of some of her colleagues - male and female, towards her and her work in those days)

**Trevor** I can only think of three of you literally 'calling the shots' for North Regional Television in those days; you, **Hazel Lewthwaite**, a little later, and **Olive Shapley** with her Book programmes from Dickinson Road. But back to **Peggy Walker**. By 1965 were you being paid as a director, working to producers who were in overall charge of the programme ?

**Peggy** (a word here, please, of the division of responsibilities - how you also directed for visiting producers up from London covering everything from Current Affair discussions, 'Shall We Go Decimal'; 'Should We Join Europe', ... to Panel Games)

**Trevor** Hence your nick-name, 'The Panel Game Queen'. Tell me about a slightly 'tougher' assignment which came your way over in the Isle of Man.

**Peggy** (Talks about going over to film the 'Manx T.T. Races'. "Several producers had done it before and got it wrong. My appearance nearly began a revolt on the Island - a woman doing a man's job . I had to get it right ".)

**Trevor** (comments - tells the Denness Roylance story). I always associate you with being a part of that Northern 'First-Aid' team who managed to resurrect an ailing '**Call My Bluff**' London series and give it a new look when it was taken on in Manchester.

Then there was the highly successful Network series you did with the man who first worked with some of us as an assistant cameraman and film editor and who, later, went on to help put Manchester 'on the map' with '**Personal Cinema**'. The one and only **John Buttery**.

**Peggy** (To talk about John's idea of a series based on 'Desert Island Disks' but using Film clips, and of the success it enjoyed)

**Trevor** Two others whose names are linked with yours; **Nick Hunter** and **John Ecclestone** who had become our Head of Network Production Centre.

**Peggy** (Talks about them and the Hospital request O.B. series, '**A Spoonful Of Sugar**')

**Trevor** Once we'd moved into it, did you find **New Broadcasting House**, with all its up-to-date technical facilities, a great improvement on the old Dickinson Road studio ?

**Peggy** (Replies <sup>reason for leaving</sup> - saying that she was very pleased when **Ray Colley**, then running the North West's Regional Television operation, invited her to produce for him; how you did '**The Cat Show**' and put '**Look North West**', presented by Stuart Hall, on the air several times each week.)

**Trevor** You managed to work on some 80 programmes in a given year as a Secretary, - and roughly the same number when you'd become a fully-fledged Director. That is more than many did in two years !

**Peggy** (Replies ..... " But then I had no home of my own and no ties. What's more, I loved my work !").

**Trevor** (signs off the Interview)

(Interview 47 - PEGGY WALKER)

Jan. 1992.