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'A History Of North Regional Broadcasting' - RICHARD ('Dick') KELLY.

(Interview 26 - Notes)

Trevor

Hill In any 'History Of North Regional Broadcasting', the one name which for a period of some forty years, became synonymous with the BBC in the North East of England - and with Newcastle in particular, is that of **Richard Kelly**.

What, I wonder, brought this legend-in-his-own-lifetime into the BBC in the first place, and what had he done in a life before his introduction to the world of broadcasting.? That's question One for you, Dick.

Dick

Kelly (To talk, please, about your childhood; the time you spent in teaching and in the Army, and what brought you into the BBC in 1946)

Trevor You joined a BBC Centre working, as with Leeds, to a Headquarters in Manchester. But the BBC in Newcastle had its own transmitters and therefore, I imagine, a little more autonomy. What was **New Bridge Street** like when you joined - and what were your first impressions of the firm ?

Dick (To reply, please).

Trevor As a 'Geordie', born and bred, perhaps it isn't surprising that the BBC in the North East, in its wisdom, very soon put you in charge of a programme which began during the war years. On 21st May, 1942 to be precise.

It was broadcast in those wartime days at only irregular intervals, with **Esther McCracken** introducing the various items, and **John Polworth** as the producer until April, 1947. From May of that year, you and John are billed as joint producers, but from December, 1947, the 'Radio Times' gives the name of **Richard Kelly** as the producer of '**Wot Cher, Geordie**'. And that particular edition, Number 27, came I am told, from Seaburn Hall, Sunderland.

Dick (To talk and at some length about this, and how the series expanded from some nine programmes in 1948, to 24 Editions a year by 1951. Please also mention that the series was later heard (?) throughout the whole of the North Region when it was also relayed by the Moorside Edge transmitter)

Trevor And that series was to run until 1958 when, on the 12th August, the last '**Wot Cher Geordie**' programme came from the BBC's VHF Exhibition at the City Hall, Newcastle, and featured the Barry Sisters, and the Consett Citizens Choir, with **Archie Hunter** introducing the items.

A series which, by the time we get to the late 1950's, I have to thank both **John Polworth** and you for, is '**Barn Dance**', started by John in August, 1945 and broadcast in the North of England and the Northern Ireland Home Services, before you took over as producer, and the series was later to be heard on the Light Programme. Then, with the advent of Television, '**Children's Barn Dance**' from such venues as Alnwick Castle became part of my own output.

Later programmes were to revert to adult editions of '**Barn Dance**' for BBC Television, introduced, as I recall, from our Manchester Dickenson Road Tv studios by a fair-haired lad in open shirt and dungarees, by the name of **Brian Redhead**.

But to revert to your arrival at the BBC, Newcastle, you seem to have started broadcasting and producing. The title, '**General Programme Producer**' seemed to cover both sides of the microphone.

Dick (Talks about his early work on contributing to '**Northern Newsreel**', a regional programme series, and to '**Sports Special**'. Then, on the Outside Broadcast you did from the colliery district of Ashington, on 1st January, 1947, covering '**The Nationalisation of the Coal Mines**'. Later that same month, you were introducing '**Gramophone Album**' and then, by April of that year, you did the first of many Interviews.

At the start of 1948, your Topicality series, '**Bringing It Home**', covered such things as Salvage Collection, Juvenile Delinquency, Fish, Catering, Transport and Social Insurance).

Trevor I see that you did occasional series for the North East including, '**Newcastle Storytellers' Club**' with yourself billed as 'Secretary'; donned the proverbial top-hat-and-tails for, '**Up And Doing**' which featured voices and personalities in North Eastern Variety, and then several series which dealt almost entirely with music and song, - '**A Date With Yesterday**' being a fairly long-running series of yours. I also see from the 'Radio Times' that, in 1952, you were one of the judges for the very successful '**Top Town**' series which **Barney Colehan** did.

Dick (To talk, please, about your interest in Variety, ballads and songs of the day involving **Fred Lawson, Al Flush and his Orchestra, Nora Summerson, Clive Wayne**, et cetera, and the coverage you did on Folk Dance and Song Festivals - **Edinburgh, Hexham, Isle of Man**)

Trevor Did you manage to get the sort of programmes you wanted to do onto the air - or were you bound by a Management structure which often made this difficult.?

Dick (In answering, please mention the names of those you were working to both in Newcastle and in Manchester; how you went about 'selling' your programme ideas, et cetera; how often you went down to London to discuss ideas with the heads of Output departments at Portland Place; of the main difficulties you faced in programme-making in the 1950's and 1960's)

Trevor You will recall those famous 'Programme Review Boards' held in Manchester; in the 1940's, we assembled in the Boardroom at Piccadilly; later, in Peter House whilst the BBC made up its mind about a proper headquarters building for North region. Then our head or assistant head of programmes of the day - **Bob Stead, Ted Wilkinson, David Porter, Bryan Cave-Brown-Cave, Grahame Miller**, would go through a list of recent programmes. If the producer happened to be present, those of us who were the cowards were either guarded in our comments about a bad bit of radio - or said nothing. As I very clearly recall, these Review Boards were very often only made bearable by the presence of the chap from Newcastle who could be relied upon to say things none of us would dare to say. Did you work at being something of a 'rebel' - or did that come easy as far as you and the BBC's North Regional Management were concerned ?

Dick (The floor is yours)

Trevor What were your working relationships like with your Newcastle colleagues. I'm thinking now particularly in terms of the Programme Engineers, those on Recording; the Outside Broadcast unit for the North East.

Dick (Please mention the names of some of the above with whom you worked. My own experience and view is that they, unlike others, served us very well on the radio side).

Trevor I'd like to turn now to another programme strand which will always be associated with you. On December 20th, 1957, I see for the first time the title, '**Voice Of The People**'. Earlier in that year there was a 'Voice Of Cumberland'. But the 'Voice Of The People' begins to be clearly and regularly heard as from the end of 1960. That, '**Topics North**', and the occasional 'Voice Of Cumberland' continue right through to 1964.

Dick (To talk at some length about his series, please; something of the range you covered, i.e. 'New Type of Hair Restorer', .. 'Strike By Northumberland Miners', 'Lung Cancer and Cigarette Smoking', 'As went to Blaydon Races', 'The Labour Common Market Campaign', 'Bookies on the Dole'. Any 'stories' here would be appropriate).

Trevor What sort of a boss were you to those younger producers working under you ? I'm thinking of **Gillian Hush**, **John Mapplebeck**. Both, by the way, smile at the mention of Dick Kelly !

Dick (to give his own evaluation. And please say something about the standards you set yourself. Those certainly influenced others who worked to you)

Trevor There was a period when Manchester sent another producer to take over a series. Would you like to mention that ?

Dick (To do as he pleases on this one. The question can be deleted)

Trevor What decided you to turn from Network radio to **Local Radio** ?

Richard (Answers - and in detail, please, since few with your experience opted to do so. If Local Radio was, as I believe, a happy and worthwhile period in your estimation, then you may care to make that point).

Trevor In the 1980's, you return to Radio 4 - and to a series of features produced by Gillian Hush. First, you set out to do a little family 'detective work', in tracing 'the curious career of Inspector Kelly'. And he happened to be your father.

Dick (Talks about this; 'In Search of Garibaldi's Head', and 'Teetotal Now'.)

Trevor I'm not sure that you either wrote or produced for Television - but you certainly appeared on BBCI in the North East when **Eric Robson** interviewed you about your own 'Heroes and Heroines'. The producer, **John Mapplebeck** gives you as his 'hero' - as far as the BBC is concerned.

Dick (To comment about television and his own feelings about working in this media)

Trevor Finally, and without fear or favour, I am reliably informed that you, Richard Kelly, are unique as regards BBC staff. (Gives the reason for this statement)

Dick (Either confirms or denies - I hope 'Confirms')

Trevor I can say without fear of contradiction that from the time I arrived in the North in 1949 until the time you left, Broadcasting in the Region would not have been the same for your colleagues and, of far more importance, for several generations of listeners, had you decided to stick to teaching.

..... (Interview 26 - August, 1990)