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Partner:	The Connected Histories of the BBC research project was led by the University of Sussex, 2017-2022, funded by the AHRC.
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File: **fia0e105 -- Interview_16 LR003258_-_Stanley_Williamson**
Duration: **01:27:25**
Date: **13/05/2019**
Typist: **883**

START AUDIO

Trevor Hill: - and the European Services. On overseas, Stanley was now a recorded programmes assistant when we first met, and he had the task of playing in those acetate BBC recordings.

00:00:12 What, I wonder, brought you in to the BBC in the first place though?

Stanley: Well in December 1939, when I was still at school, I won a scholarship to Cambridge for Modern Languages, French and German. So, I went up in October 1940, right in the middle of the Blitz, and sometime, the following year '41, about, I suppose, May, word got around that the Cambridge University Appointments Board were asking for volunteers to come and be trained in intelligence duties. They particularly wanted people who were doing German. They didn't say what the duties were, but I thought, "Well in due, course I suppose I'll be called up, so it would be rather a good idea if I had a label pinned on me already, intelligence."

So, I volunteered, and I was picked, and I was trained. I worked at a very hush hush establishment, that everybody now knows everything about, called Bletchley Park. In due course, I went for my medical and I was passed, to my intense disgust, as unfit for military service because I am so short-sighted. I suppose they thought I might kill my own side, or

something. So, they didn't take me. I thought it was rather silly because if I was doing intelligence duties, I could do those in uniform as well as being a civilian.

Anyway, my King and country didn't want me and, I suppose, at that point, I could have gone back to Cambridge and finished off my degree, but it was 1942, it was about the worst year of the war, if you remember. Terrible things were happening in the Far East at Singapore, things were going wrong in the Western desert, not that I could have put any of them right, but all my friends were in the forces somewhere, doing their bit. I couldn't face going back to Cambridge at that time and immersing myself in medieval French literature or whatever.

So, I looked around and I bummed around for a bit and eventually I me someone who said, "Well why don't you apply to the BBC for a job? They are obviously short staffed. All their chaps have gone off to the war." So, I didn't think much about it. I wrote and to my astonishment, I got an invitation to go and be interviewed by an elderly gentleman in Portland Place, who offered me not one job, but the choice of two. He said, “One of them was mucking about in,”- he didn't say that, he said, "Spending your time in stuffy basements and I'm sure you don't want to do that." The other one was research for programmes, which sounded ideal. He had asked me what I wanted to do, and I said, not really knowing what it meant, but I said, "I'd like to be a features producer." He just sort of laughed and brushed that one aside.

So, I went and did the job which was Research for Programmes which was, in fact, in a department called News Information, which is, of course, still there. It's fundamental to the whole news operation. What it consisted of for me was that there is a vast filing system in numerable headings, thousands

of headings, and every day all the newspapers and a lot of magazine things were marked up by a senior member of the department as to which particular envelope or file they had to go in to. We had to cut them up out of the papers and stick a label on and then stamp them with the name of the newspaper and then stamp them with the date and then take a pile of several thousands of these things round and shove them in the right holes or the right folders. If anybody wanted to consult them, we had to take to them out and when they had finished, we bunged them back. I believe nowadays that a lot of this stuff is on microfiche so it's all that much simpler.

Then one week out of four, one of us had to go in early and start at six o'clock in the morning. We were next door to the newsroom if any of the news sub-editors wanted to consult anything, we had to sit there and keep the shop. But that didn't take up much of the time, what we were principally doing was cross indexing the news bulletins of the previous day, so that the sub-editors could come and remind themselves what they had actually written. Getting to work at the BBC at six o'clock in the morning in the middle of the war when I lived 10 miles out was not on. Also, I got a little tired of the press cuttings. So, I went back to the Appointments epartment and said, "What was that job in stuffy basements?" They said, "Oh, Recorded programmes assistant." So, I said, "Well could I have a try at that?" I found out that that job paid 50% more per week than the one I had just had so I wondered why I hadn't taken it in the first place.

Well now, of course, Recorded programmes assistant, I'm sure that people have talked about this, but it is fundamental to the whole understanding of the BBC at that time, that there was no tape recording. I'm sure people today can't even believe that but in fact every recording was done on disk. Well, of course, as you know Trevor, you played the commercial ___[00:04:38]

music disks and the recorded programmes assistants handled these acetate disks. They were metal based. I think they were made out of sort of scrap battleships or something by the weight of them. They had some acetate on one side and the recording was made directly into the acetate and you played that directly on to the air. There was no question of processing them really.

They lasted about three and a half minutes. They were 78 rpm and about 12 inches across and for say a programme of quarter of an hour, you could have four of these things, three and a bit and you would play them one after another. For a half an hour programme you had eight and I can remember when going on duty on a nightshift with about 30 of these disks, one programme after another all on acetate disks.

The other thing about them, of course, was that whereas with tape today, editing is absolutely fundamental to the whole principle of the thing. If you wanted to cut a sentence out you would slice the tape up with a razor blade or a pair of nice scissors and then you would slice the bit that you wanted to take out and you would join up the two bits where you wanted them joined up with a bit of jointing tape and off you would go. Well you can't do that with a disk.

So, editing with disks was done on what was known as the jump cut principle. It's a bit difficult to explain this but if you imagine the ordinary record player, the arm swivels on a pivot, it pivots. Well on the old TD Mark 7, which I suppose was something disk Mark 7, anyway, the pick-up arm travelled along a bar behind the disk so that the arm was always at a tangent to the grooves. What happened was that you allowed the thing to play up to the point where you wanted it to stop or the producer wanted it to stop and then you had already previously marked up with a piece of yellow wax pencil where

you wanted to come back in and you physically lifted the pick-up off the disk and you put it down, you hoped on the spot where you wanted it to start up again.

If you had done it neatly and smoothly, nobody knew. Of course, you had to take out, you had to fade out the volume control while you did it, but it's not all that easy especially if where you want to come back in is sort of very near the centre of the disk because you've got to keep something fixed and firm by holding your little finger on the top of the disk and by that time, you're about four inches away from where you want to be and trying to find the exact groove to put the point of the needle back on. Steel needles by the way, it was rather like Flanders and Swann, the sharpish needle, it made a joyful sound. But it was not a job for those of a nervous disposition because there was a famous story of a man who played up to the first yellow mark and faded it out, picked up the pick-up and it then took him 25 seconds to find where he should have put it down again, which leaves the chaps at the transmitters wondering what's happened and it doesn't please the Producer.

However, we did a lot of that. Sometimes with plenty of time to rehearse it, sometimes not. This, of course, having opted to become a radio Recorded programmes assistant. As I think you said, I went down to 200 Oxford Street where we were broadcasting into the blue. I mean, we were knew we were being picked up at the other end, but we didn't get much feedback, certainly not at my level of the operation. After a bit of that I graduated to radio newsreel which went out something like four or five times round the clock. We had an African reel which was broadcast in the evening at our time because we are in the same time zone, and then two reels during the night for two different time zones of the North Americans and then a Pacific reel in the morning at sort of break of day.

These, certainly the North American ones, although they were broadcast in London, but they were picked up by American stations and they were rebroadcast live on the spot, right across the continent. This was, in fact, towards the end of the war particularly. This was one of the main sources of news and current affairs and actuality about the war which the Americans were able to listen to. We didn't treat it too seriously I'm afraid. I'm sure it was treated terribly seriously on the top floor where all the editing and the policy decisions were made, but one of the producers on the North American newsreel was George Inns, whom I think older viewers will remember as the man who created the Black and White Minstrels.

George had been a variety producer before the war and one night, about three or four in the morning, the second reel was going out and George and I were a bit bogeyed and we'd got some report from a battlefield somewhere. George said, "It doesn't sound much of a battle, does it?" I said, "No," and he said, "I think we'll just jolly it up a bit." So, we went and found some effects disks of a battle and we played these in at the same time and we got messages back from America saying, "What marvellous actuality. How did you get that battle?" That went on quite a bit. I don't know whether there is anything more you want to know about 200 Oxford Street. As you know it was the place to be during the war wasn't it?

Trevor Hill: It was indeed. One person we both met, of course, at 200 Oxford Street who, like ourselves, was to come North and become part of the story of North Regional Broadcasting was Philip Robinson. Philip, of course, was doing the announcing.

Stanley: Oh yes. Well Philip was on the North American Service and the North American Service went on the air from what was known as red continuity throughout the night. I think it started up possibly- it would depend, of course, on the time of year and whether we were in British Summer Time or double British Summer Time or what. Both of us, I think, spent many a long night in red continuity with Phillip Robinson doing all the and intervening announces and so on.

There used to be, as I recall, a sort of a bit of a club in the middle of the night because there wasn't much else to do. I remember that you, I think Trevor, were over on Philip's side just behind him with [a grand bank 00:10:32] playing the commercial disks.

Trevor Hill: Table, desk 7.

Stanley: Table, desk 7, that's right. Well I was at table, desk 7 on the other side of the studio, with all my [Watts 00:10:39] disks and Philip was between us. He had a microphone key which would put him on the air, a very small up and down and it was hidden from me behind the box that it was in. There was a scrum of people in one night and, of course, we had to quieten everybody down while he was making his announcements. I heard an announcement that went roughly like this, "This is the British Broadcasting Corporation. Will you get out of my bloody studio? We present Freedom Forum." (Laughter)

00:11:12

Trevor Hill: Do you remember an announcer named Albert Moore?

Stanley: I do remember Albert Moore.

Trevor Hill: Now Albert got so fed up with, do you remember the frequency band announcements and you suddenly had to say for about 92 different stations, "This is the North American Service broadcasting on so and so, so and so, and so and so, metre band." Albert got so fed up with this, with the [Kellogg Key 00:11:32] he just got slightly out of sync and what the listeners heard was, "This is the North American Service of the BBC broadcasting on elastic bands, brass bands."

Stanley: Well I could tell you a story about Albert because if we had a half hour programme on disk and I was there playing my eight watts disks, not unnaturally the announcer went out of the studio up to the canteen for a cup of coffee. Again, it was the middle of the night and one did get a bit bogeyed. He did the opening the announcement for whatever programme it was, let's say it was Freedom Forum and I started to work, and I played the disks one after another. I put the last disk on, which only had about a minute of a half on it and I looked across to Albert to say, "Coming up Albert." There was no Albert. So, of course, I waved frantically to the chaps outside, the engineers. They tried to get a message through to the canteen to Albert, but he hadn't arrived. The programme ended and this was my very first broadcast. I thought, "What am I going to do?"

So, I went round to his side of the desk and pressed his key down and I gave the closing announcement. In the middle of it Albert tore back into the studio, but, of course, he couldn't do anything. He had to let me finish it. I don't think he went out quite as often after that. But that was the very first time and

right in the middle of it, I suddenly got, I don't know if you ever had this experience, this totally strange situation of me actually doing the talking, my voice just disappeared. Not for the last time, I may say.

Trevor Hill: We mentioned Philip Robinson. He did exactly the same thing. He went to the canteen and thought it was a 35 minute programme or whatever and it wasn't.

00:13:09 At what point did you leave 200 Oxford Street, Stanley, and come North?

Stanley: Well, as with being in news information, I felt really, I'd done my stint in recorded programmes. What happened was that there was a colleague of ours, Charles Farmer, who had also been a radio newsreel buff and he had come to Manchester to take up a job in the recorded programmes department in Manchester. He got in touch with me one day, I think probably round about August or September 1945. He said, "There's a chap up here who is going to leave. There is going to be a vacancy. Why don't you apply for it?" I thought this was splendid because I'd been cooped up in London throughout the war. Everybody else had been going to foreign places. I was a bit fed up with London and I was bit fed up with the Overseas Services. I thought it would be nice to work in the Home Services for once.

So, I applied for the job and I got it. My first official day on duty was probably New Year's Eve 1945, but for practical purposes I started on 1 January 1946. I wasn't just a Recorded programmes assistant I was a mobile Recorded programmes assistant. This was one of the attractions of the job, this meant that although you did all the usual disk playing jobs in the

studio, you also went out on the recording cars, ostensibly or principally to look after producers who were doing shows or recordings away from base. Of course, again, we still had no tape. We only had recording on disk and it takes a lot of apparatus to record a disk. The recording car was simply loaded down with amplifiers and turntable mechanism and huge batteries, which I could barely lift, which always ran out in the middle of recordings.

You had to go out, of course, with a Recording Engineer and the two engineers in my day were Bill Payne and Jimmy Brett, dear Jimmy. My job, again, there were no personal microphones, there were no radio microphones, there was only basically the old moving coil job which had a copper surround and weighed about five pounds, or there was the little apple and biscuit thing which looked a bit odd. Everything had to be linked up wherever you were by a cable with the recording car.

So, the engineer drove to the location and did all the actual recording bit and the mobile Recorded programmes assistant ran out the cable and stuck the microphone on the end and held it up if necessary, became a sort of portable mike stand, on behalf of producers. But, from my point of view, the great advantage of this system was, and here we are going back into history, that in 1946 regional broadcasting had only just started up again, after the war. They had producers, for example, Philip Robinson, we were talking about. Philip had been drafted up back to his home territory in the North to be a producer. Dick Gregson a very well-known playwright who had been writing the script of radio newsreader during the war. Dick was drafted back to Leeds to be the drama producer. Bob Reid eventually came back from his illustrious career as a war correspondent to take up his newsroom again.

There was a man called Eric Jolly who was in charge of recorded programmes. There were, of course, the basic departments. There was music, obviously, for the Northern Orchestra. There was religious broadcasting with the Reverend Eric Saxon who became Canon Saxon and that sort of thing. But there were not very many people who could actually do programmes of a sort of light kind or features kind or an actuality kind. There weren't, at that stage, very many budding freelancers. Very soon there were a lot of budding freelancers, chaps who had come back from the war, been demobbed and hadn't got a job to come back but had perhaps, dare I say it, worked in Forces Broadcasting during the war and thought broadcasting might be rather a good thing. They were coming in gradually, picking up the trade. But in the beginning, there wasn't anybody.

Now, Bob Reid, in addition to doing his nightly 10 minute news thing, used to run a 15 minute programme on Saturdays, Northern Newsreel, out and about on both sides of the Pennines or something or other. He was needing freelancers and he sent me out on a job somewhere and I did some interviews for it and I brought them back. Five days after taking up my duties in the North of England, I was broadcasting. I had a four minute item in this programme. Eric Jolly, he was officially head of our department, but he had a 15 minute programme called Roundabout for which he did a lot of items. He needed people to help him out, do the odd item. So, I used to do that.

Gradually in the first year after I came to Manchester, although I was technically only the chap who ran out the mike cables, I was getting a lot of jolly good broadcasting in. So, I was very pleased I'd transferred to Manchester.

Trevor Hill: Your desire to be a features producer, which you say originally was sort of cast aside, was about to bear fruit because I see from the Radio Times for March 1946 that within only a few weeks of your arrival in Manchester, you have a production credit on a new series for Northern Children's Hour, under Eric Jolly's banner, How's it done?

Stanley: Well you surprise me with that because I do remember that there was something called How's it Done, but how it happened I don't know, except that I suspect that it was the same thing. You see Nan MacDonald was running Children's Hour from the North and as you probably remember I don't think a great deal of love was lost between Nan MacDonald in Manchester and Uncle Mac in London.

Trevor Hill: Not a lot.

Stanley: Nan's object in life was to fill as much of her time as possible with Northern programmes, so that she didn't have to take the programmes from London. I can only suppose that I had, I think the thing was I see here from your records that this was a programme called Getting Ready for the Circus. Well, this is the first time I've thought about this since I saw it in your notes here, but I think what had happened was that in the course of some other exercise on behalf of somebody else, I had come across this funny little circus somewhere in the North in its winter quarters. It was one of those little family circuses, a man and his wife and a couple of kids and a rather mangey looking lion possibly and a few horses, and they were just getting ready for the season. I must have been taken by this and

come back and said to Nan, "Would you like a little programme about this funny little circus?" and she must have said, "Yes."

What I remember chiefly about it was that the man who owned it, the father, was a little man. He did the tightrope walking but sometime early in his career as a tightrope walker, he had fallen off and he had broken his leg. It had bent, it had set permanently bent. This was not going to stop him, and he went on doing his tightrope walking with a gammy leg.

After that, of course, now that you're refreshed my memory, I think we did a programme about the Royal Mail. We loaded all the gear out of a recording car into the Royal Mail at Carlisle and unloaded it all at Crewe. When I was thinking about this what I wondered was with all the way the trains swayed about over the points, how on earth we kept the pick-up on the disk. Anyway, we did. I did another one about a tannery in Nantwich; Tanning Your Hide, it was called.

Trevor Hill: Yes, you did eight of the How's it Done programmes in that first year. Also, from 6 May until the end of 1947 you compiled for Nan, of course, Children's Newsreel.

Stanley: Well that was a spin off really from Bob Reid's Northern Newsreel because he had a lot of stringers round and about the North of England who sent him items for his main Northern programme and his Northern newsreel. I said, "If they come across anything about children," not about children, but it was specifically things which children were doing. It wasn't about education or something like that, it was simply to reflect the way children were entertaining themselves or doing good here and there. Nan, obviously, bought it. I suppose she wanted to fill up the programmes. I think it was finally axed because Bob

realised that he was paying the stringers for my Children's Newsreel and he hadn't got all that much money to spare.

Trevor Hill: The Newsreel went on, for course, for many, many years after on Children's Hour.

Stanley: Did it?

Trevor Hill: Yes. After you, well I can recall Michael Barton editing it for me, when I was running Children's Hour. John Musgrave was running it for me.

Stanley: Was that continuous?

Trevor Hill: Yes.

Stanley: I thought that there was a gap that I said-

Trevor Hill: Children's Newsreel I think, and here I have to refer to Mr Wallace Grevatt who was the fount of all information on Children's Hour. I think it went on until about 1961.

Stanley: Good heavens.

Trevor Hill: Within three years of the demise of Children's Hour entirely.

You were getting out and about I see. You were at Chester Zoo with Nan and with the one and only George Mottershead.

00:22:39

Stanley: Were you there that day?

Trevor Hill: No, I wasn't there that day. I was there in later times, but I was interested to see that you were on one of those visits. They were another regular ingredient.

Stanley: They were live, of course.

Trevor Hill: Yes, oh very much.

Stanley: With, of course, the whole of Chester Zoo festooned with microphone cable. The only thing I remember, I don't know what I was required to do, but all I remember was that an elephant trod on one of the cables and took us off the air. Presumably we recovered from that little crisis as we recovered from so many.

Trevor Hill: George had a giraffe named after him, George, and this giraffe found that the telephone cables had a slightly metallic taste to them, and he would lick them and on one or two occasions he brought down our cables.

Whilst you were producing all these programmes, you also, I think, developed another interest. You met a young lady also in broadcasting in the North of England, Mr Williamson.

Stanley: When I came to take up my post in recorded programmes, well, in fact I came up for an interview, but let us say that we will start it from the date of 1 January 1946, there were in the recorded programmes department, two lady members. One of the lady members was Mrs Grindrod, known universally, of course, as Grinny. Grinny was the great authority on bookings and who was where and how you got a studio and how you got lines. She got the MBE. She was awarded the MBE later for her skills.

The other lady member of the department was known as Bettie Emerson. She was the secretary. Now Bettie Emerson had joined the BBC straight from school at the age of 14 in 1936. So, she was absolutely top drawer, John Reith vintage. In fact, she was absolutely top drawer Harry Fitch vintage and Harry Fitch, of course, Commander Fitch, the BBC in those days had a habit of sweeping in various elderly naval gentlemen and dear old Harry Fitch was in charge of administration. Harry Fitch chose his secretarial staff with the greatest possible care. They were known as Mr Fitch's young ladies.

Well, in 1948, a marriage was announced between Stanley Williamson of recorded programmes department and Bettie Emerson. This was lovely from most points of view, but it had one drawback which was, that according to the BBC rules, which were fairly strictly carried out, you couldn't have husband and wife working in the same department. It was, I suppose, a fairly male chauvinistic sort of society. All one can say in defence of this is that you could be a secretary in most departments, but you could only be a Recorded programmes

assistant in recorded programmes department. So, to comply with the BBC rules Mrs Williamson, nee Emerson, had to move out.

Just at that time it had been agreed that the three announcers, who had never had a secretary of their own, really did need some secretarial assistant. So, a post was created for secretary to the announcers, which Bettie was able to take. But then what does her stupid husband do a year later, but he gets a job as an announcer. So, Mrs Williamson has to move on once again. This time, she found a niche in Children's Hour with Nan MacDonald, but Nan was, and possibly still is for all I know, a hard task mistress and she wanted someone who would work seven days a week. Bettie, having recently married, didn't want to work seven days a week.

So once again she moved on and this time, she found a niche with [Bowker 00:26:07] Andrews in light entertainment department, where the principle thing that she did, I think, was to arrange and sit in on all the auditions for the Northern Variety Orchestra, which Ray Martin was forming. That I think was her principle job there, and then, of course, our daughter was born. So, Bettie left the BBC for the time being. She terminated her full time contract.

Some years later when Olive Shapley was producing the Northern edition, the monthly edition of Woman's Hours, she asked Bettie to introduce it for her. So, Bettie did that for some years. Then there was a new producer in that department and new producers liked to sweep a new broom, so Bettie was thanked for all her work, whereupon she found herself another niche in local radio. She had been very much interested in amateur drama and she did a half hour programme a week for Alan Sykes about local amateur drama in the area. When that came to an end, there was a series of crises, there always

appeared to crises in news department and so she used to go in there and help out there occasionally.

Finally, we reached the stage where I retired from duty, from work with the BBC in 1981. My wife who had started out in 1936 was still coming in to work here. The situations were reversed. I was at home doing the shopping, the cleaning and drumming my fingers on the table because they'd kept her late at work once again and the meal was spoiling. (Laughter) I think that finally we did wrap it up in about 1986.

So that's the story of-

Trevor Hill: Interestingly though Stanley, because you became a presentation announcer in the North of England along with Tom Naseby and Philip Dobson in 1949. A little later, I remember very well your brother Roy started to announce for the BBC. So, with Bettie that is three bearing the name Williamson all BBC announcers. That must be a record.

Stanley: I should think it must be. If you add up my spell of duty which was a few days short of 40 years, Roy who has retired now, he did well over 30. I don't know how long Bettie's would actually total up if you put it all together. But the three of us together, we must be getting on for something like a hundred years.

Of course, it had its advantages. If I was in, as I usually seemed to be, some sort of crisis or some sort of row, or some sort of trouble going on, I didn't have to explain to Bettie what it was all about because she knew. She was there. On the other hand, it was a bit like living over the shop. It was very difficult to avoid talking about the BBC, especially if Roy joined in. We were in Manchester and he was in London, but if we all got

together, anybody else in the company must have been bored stiff because the conversation was all BBC, BBC, and how things ain't what they used to be.

00:29:01

Trevor Hill: No, it was never thus. You enjoyed the announcing side?

Stanley: No. The whole thing was a great mistake. I never wanted to be an announcer. I never thought I would be. I still wanted to be a producer but I was stuck in recorded programmes as it seemed to me, and, of course, by 1948 the process which I was describing had progressed a long way. There were now masses of people around who could do recordings and interviews and commentaries and help out in Children's Hour. I was just stuck back where I had been four years ago, playing the records.

So when one of the announcers, Rosemary Horstmann, I think it was, retired or to get married or to take up another job or both, there was a vacancy and Tom Naseby- I'd been doing a little bit, amongst all the other odds and bits and pieces I did, I had been doing a little bit of announcing because if you remember in those days, there was a five minute news bulletin which was prepared in Manchester and broadcast over the wavelength for the North East of the North region, Newcastle, Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland and Westmoreland, because they didn't have a newsroom up there. When this thing went out about 6:20, 6:25 in the evening, the three regular announcers were all otherwise engaged. One would be doing the Northern bulletin from Manchester, one would probably be down in the Milton Hall doing a concert with the

orchestra, the third one would be off duty having started out at seven in the morning.

So they had to find somebody to read this five minute bulletin and sometimes the sub-editor who had written it would do it and sometimes the sub-editor who had written it probably wasn't a microphone voice. So if I was around, they'd rope me in. So I had a bit of experience and when Tom Naseby was looking for somebody to fill the gap on Rosemary's departure, he was very keen that I should put in for the job. So I did because it was any port in a storm, or rather any door out of the prison and I got the job. But I was not cut out to be an announcer, shall we put it that way.

Trevor Hill: During that period, I also note that you were writing for us for Children's Hour in the North of England. You did a play called, King Midas has Ass's Ears, which Herbert Smith produced. Then in August 1951 you gave up announcing and became the North Regions Overseas Production Assistant.

Stanley: Well, yes, this was another step on the way. I think I'd still got my eyes on this business of being a features producer, but the Overseas Services were even more strapped for cash than anybody else. If they wanted to carry a programme about some aspect of life outside London, they hadn't the money. They couldn't afford the train fare in many cases to come up and they certainly couldn't afford to put people up in hotels while they did the job. So in each of the major regions, I think Birmingham and Bristol were the same, there was an overseas producer, who was really basically a fixer. If somebody did come up from London, well you laid on whatever it was they asked you to lay on and looked after the microphone end of it

for them. Just occasionally, I suppose, I must have done an item or two for them. I don't remember.

The great attraction of the job was that you weren't wholly an overseas producer. Half of your time, perhaps two-thirds you were, but the other bit you were a North of England Home Service Producer, Talks Producer. So I was attached really, I was part of Graham Millers' outfit. Well, of course the overseas department didn't use up all the time they were entitled to get from me, all of which I could employ doing programmes in the North of England Home Service which, of course, I did.

00:32:45

Trevor Hill: Was it at that period you started forging some links between this country and Holland, the North of England and Holland? I remember one or two of those programmes you did.

Stanley: I know it happened. I think it was perhaps a bit later. It was a very odd business because around that time, you couldn't get abroad very much for the BBC. They hadn't got very much money. But you could always, I suppose, one shouldn't admit it, but there is always what is known nowadays as a freebie. If you could find somebody who could sponsor you, dreadful word in BBC terms. I think what happened here was that I did a programme for somebody, perhaps myself, I don't know, from the Lincolnshire bulb fields.

I went down early in Spring to Spalding and there I learned that there were links between the Lincolnshire bulb industry and, of course, the Dutch bulb industry. So I said to somebody, I think it was Donald Stephenson at the time, why don't we do a programme about the links between the Lincolnshire bulb

industry and Holland? Of course, once you've got yourself into that position where you can go abroad, they want you to make the best possible use of your time. So I did various other programmes. Obviously, working in Manchester in those days, Manchester was still a shade of its former self as Cottonopolis and there was quite a good textile industry in Holland, right over on the far side at a place called Enschede if I've said it right. So I said, "Well, can we do something about the tie up between the two cotton industries," and they said, "Yes."

I remember that when I was recce'ing this, I came across an English footballer who was living in Enschede, he had come from Barnsley and he was managing the local Enschede football team. So then we had three programmes for the price of one. Of course, it was fairly easy in those days, it still is, one of the earliest links, air links between Manchester and Europe was KLM, Manchester to Amsterdam. There was a period when I couldn't get anywhere else, but I could always go to Amsterdam.

Trevor Hill: Now around about that time, you began to produce a series that became dear to the hearts, of not only many, many listeners, but many of those of us who were working in broadcasting. I mean, of course, The Northcountryman.

Stanley: Well, as I said, I was only an overseas producer part of the time, the rest of the time I was available to do things for the North of England Home Service. We didn't have a magazine programme as such at that time. So I put forward the idea that we would have one and it was not to be just the usual thing with the sort of stage army of BBC broadcasters doing things. I said, "There are very few opportunities for listeners, freelance

writers to broadcast, why don't we have a programme in which they can send in their scripts? We don't require them to become professionals but if they've got something nice to say about something in their part of the world, or a bit of local history or something of that kind, or they have written a dialect poem or whatever it might be, why don't we bring all this together and put it on the air and make a specific Manchester programme of it?"

I pinched the title, really, I mean the word Northcountryman is standard, but I did, in fact, consciously copy the title from the magazine. There is a quarterly called The Countryman, which is published down in the Cotswolds. It has just celebrated its sixtieth birthday. We wanted a North countryman to present it and if you thought of the word Northcountryman, there was only one man and that was Philip Robinson. Philip, what can one say about him? He was the kindest, he was the wittiest, he was the hardest working and he had that tremendous warmth, that great charisma as he spoke into the microphone and, of course, he loved the idea of being The Northcountryman. I think he thought of himself as The Northcountryman for a long time.

I did the programme. I think I ran it for about 18 months and then I moved on to other things and I handed the programme on. There was an extraordinary sort of apostolic succession of the Northcountryman. Everybody who came in, quite a lot of people came into the North of England to Manchester to be overseas producers and they edited the Northcountryman as part of their stint. Ken Brown produced it, Jack Harrison produced it, Steve Murphy produced it, Bert Parnaby produced it, and it went on and on and on. We published three little anthologies of the best work from The Northcountryman which I still come across from time to time.

Trevor Hill: I will say that in your time it was your finger upon it that gave the programme, I think, the position that it deserves in the history of regional broadcasting. It was never quite the same after the leader left and went to other things.

Stanley: It was a bit cheeky really for a man who was born within the sound of Millwall football ground to come North and produce a programme called The Northcountryman, but we got away with it.

00:38:31

Trevor Hill: Now you've mentioned leaving the series. The North of England, of course, has an absolutely unbeaten record in the annals of British Broadcasting when it comes to the features field. If I mention the names of D G Bridson, Olive Shapley, Dennis Mitchell, the North nurtured, brought on, certainly those three names. At what point, Stanley, in your career, did you actually manage to fulfil the wish and you thought to yourself, right now I am a features producer?

Stanley: If we go back to 1946, the first features producer in Manchester was Norman Swallow, [of whom no doubt more anon 00:38:54]. I used to go around a lot with Norman in my capacity as recorded programmes assistant, stringing up mikes for him. I was desperately envious of Norman, because he was the man in charge, because he, again, was a man with tremendous persona, charisma and great panache. I thought, "I want to do this one day."

Then Norman went to London, rather too soon, I think, from our point of view and he became the very first talks producer in television under the great Grace Wyndham Goldie. Then I think there were various sort of fill ups for a bit. People were seconded from London, Joe Burrows was a name I think you've mentioned.

Trevor Hill: Yes.

Stanley: Joe came and various others, whose names I don't remember. Then eventually it was decided to appoint somebody and the man who got the job was Dennis Mitchell. I applied for that job and I was number two, I was the runner up. Then it wasn't very much later about six months late, they decided to have another features producer. As they had been through all the tedious process of picking people the last time around and I had become number two and I think there was a fair gap between the next candidates, they must have got permission not to hold a board and they just gave me the job.

Nine years on I was at last there. I think I served my apprenticeship in various ways before I actually got there. I had, in fact, written a programme for Dennis during those six months, I think probably my first feature programme of that kind which was called Dickens Goes to Yorkshire. It was the old, old story of Dickens going up to Greta Bridge and finding the original of Dotheboys Hall. That was, I think, probably the first thing of that kind that I wrote.

Trevor Hill: You were working with people like Graham Sutton, father of the equally talented Shaun Sutton who was to become the Head of BBC Television Drama.

Stanley: Yes, well soon after- can I tell you about my first programme, the very first thing I ever did. It wasn't one that I wrote because when I arrived in the office, one of the most chaotic offices ever seen in the BBC was Dennis Mitchell, who was a marvellous talker and myself and two very talkative secretaries. We never did any work. I mean if either of us had a visitor, one of us had to go out and let the other one do it. They eventually split us up. They put me in the office next-door.

The first thing they gave me to do, I got this job, I think in 1950- was it '51 do your records say? Anyway, I started in about '52 and, of course, if you remember, round about that period, His Majesty George VI had died and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was taking over and everybody was doing programmes for the coronation. The North's contribution to this great mass of programmes was one about the Duchy of Lancaster because, of course, the Queen is Duke of Lancaster. So somebody had the bright idea that we would do a programme about the Duchy of Lancaster. This was handed to a scriptwriter who has since made a very great name for himself in another sphere, I won't mention him. But nobody was on hand actually to produce it. So they got a news features producer and they said, "Right you produce it."

I took the script over and looked at it and it was in the rather old-fashioned style where we had voice one, voice two, voice three, narrator voice, voice four. I looked at the script and it had 52 speaking parts and however I worked and fiddled it I could not get the number of actors in it lower than 26. I had

never handled an actor in the studio before. I had 26 actors in the old studio one in Broadcasting House. I took care not to be nobbled that way again.

Very shortly after that they had a letter in from a man living in Cumberland, a rock climber, a gentleman one gathered from the way he spoke of some years. He was about as old as I am now. He was getting worried because the Lake District was becoming once again, very, very popular with visitors and particularly in winter people were going up there and swanning around on Helvellyn and Skiddaw and Great Gable and whatnot, totally ill equipped. No proper clothing, going up in their high heeled shoes and whatnot and this had happened so much that this man, Rusty Westmorland, Colonel Westmorland had formed a mountain rescue team from good climbers round and about who could be sent for when somebody came a cropper on the fells.

His idea was that we should do a little programme in which we should draw attention to some of the hazards of going up into the Lake District ill equipped. They said, “Well, would you like to take this over?” So I did. I went up and I met Rusty. One of the members of his team, no I don’t think it could have been a member of his team, but he took me to a pub in Borrowdale, and he introduced me to this friend of his, Graham Sutton, who was about the same age as himself. Graham was a writer, a very good writer too.

Graham had the misfortune, I think, to be writing at his best in the great days of Hugh Walpole and, of course, Walpole had done the Judith Paris series and all that. Graham had done a series of very good historical novels, set on the other side of the Lake District.

Trevor Hill: Smoke Across the Fell.

Stanley: Smoke Across the Fell, Northern Star and all that sort of thing. The irony of it is that it was all based on a farm called Yottenfews and Yottenfews is immediately under the Calder Hall Power Station nowadays. But Graham also wrote one of the very best short stories, climbing short stories ever called The Man Who Broke the Needle. I think what happened was that simply Rusty and I, I think we went out walking one day, we went on Glaramara, I think. Graham was a very big man, a very clumsy man in many ways, but he had a lovely house that he converted from an old school room, right on the banks of Skiddaw, looking right up into the jaws or Borrowdale. Yes, that was very amusing.

From that period really I think dated a lot of my- well it was the seed of a great many programmes I did about climbing the open air mountains and whatnot. I cottoned on to the fact that if you could get out of the studios and get up into the Lake District or North Wales or somewhere, it was much nicer than being in Broadcasting House.

Trevor Hill: Another name that you were closely associated with and you were to form a celebrated partnership together, I'm thinking of Ronald Lloyd.

Stanley: When I was an overseas producer I received a note one day that Radio ___[00:45:44] had accepted a script from a priest and he was to come into Manchester and record it and would I look after him? I'd laid on the studios and all that and so I sat back to await the arrival of Father Ronald Lloyd. In came this

tall, beaming, extraordinarily lively man in civvies and the least Father Ronald Lloyd you could imagine. He was a minister but he was in the Moravian Church which was the oldest of the nonconformist churches. In fact, they claim to have really been really the forerunners of the Methodist church.

This script was about a holiday that he'd had in Galway but it was a very good script and he read it very well and he was an extraordinarily likeable man. I said, "Would you like to do some more programmes for me?" I think I'd probably started The Northcountryman and I think he did a talk for that. He did a few talks and then he said he'd like to do some interviewing. I thought, "Aha," because you know everybody thinks they can do interviewing but it doesn't always work.

Anyway, I said, "What would you like to do a programme about?" He said, "Educationally subnormal children." I thought well that sounded a bit of a switch off really but, he said, "No," because as part of his duties as a priest, he was not only an extremely good parson, minister, or whatever you call it, he was a brilliant psychiatrist and he had been told he could have made his fortune in Wimpole Street or somewhere if he gone that way, but no he was absolutely dedicated to his job.

In the course of that he visited educationally subnormal schools and there was a good one where they had some nice people running it and some nice kids. I said, "Alright, we'll lay it on and we'll book a recording car and go." We went and he did his interviews and they were absolutely perfect. He laid them on. He told the people what he had wanted. He got his questions nice and crisp. He didn't waffle and he didn't lose his place. We did that part but then he wanted to put some children in to it and I said, "Well now that's a bit different isn't it? I mean they are educationally subnormal children. They're

not mentally handicapped but by definition, they're not bright." He said, "Well I'd like to try."

So they set a room apart for us and we left the staff of the school to bring in six, eight, ten children they thought might have something to say. Ronald had never met them in his life. He didn't even know their names and he just had to sit there and interview them. Well, of course, quite a lot of them really didn't have nothing much to say but there was one child who was 10 or 12 years old I think, lovely girl, living the most terrible life. She wasn't subnormal. She was simply handicapped by her surroundings and Ronald's interview with that girl, the first of its kind almost that he'd ever done still makes me weep when I hear it, it was so beautiful. I hope if ever there are programmes, I've got a recording of it, I hope they will dig this out. It's only three and a half minutes but it simply encapsulates that child's life. Then, of course, having discovered that I had this genius on my hands we went ahead and, I don't know, we must have done 20 or 30 programmes together.

00:49:13

Trevor Hill: Yes. Coming back to your own programmes, your own features, two that I certainly remember, Born to Trouble, which was broadcast many times, including overseas and also, Stanley, the radio feature you did on the Munich air crash. Now on the Munich air crash, you then did a book didn't you? Did the BBC give you the time and encourage you to develop this side of your talent?

Stanley: No and no. They didn't want me to. There is somewhere in the rulebook, something that says, "You have to get permission to

do these things." Well I got permission but what I didn't realise was that the BBC took the line that the material, some of the material in the book was based on the programme, drawn from the programme. They said, "Since this material was collected in the course of your duties, we, the BBC, demand a slice of the profits." Well, it wasn't my material really because- and we haven't talked about the Munich air disaster. Do you want me to say something about it?

I did, with another very great friend, who like Ronald Lloyd, died prematurely, Arthur Swinson, a lovely man, great writer. One of the founders of Dr Finlay's Casebook. We had done a series of programmes called Trial By Inquiry the basis of which was, if you had been involved in some terrible disaster and there was an inquiry afterwards, although you hadn't actually been charged with any particular crime, you could, in fact, be treated much more harshly than if you had been and if you'd got a prison sentence out of it.

Most of the things we did, of course, were historical, the Tay Bridge disaster and the Titanic and the Amritsar Massacre and so on, but here was this story right under our nose, the Munich air Disaster. The pilot of the plane, Jim Thain, accused as it were by an inquiry conducted in Germany of having caused the accident by not having taken sufficient care. Well, it's too long a story to go into here now but the inquiry which produced this result, I wouldn't say it was a fix, but it was appallingly badly handled and Jim Thain was fighting to re-establish his name, to clear himself. It took him 11 years and he didn't succeed even then.

I said, "Here is a classic case of a man who has been tried by inquiry. Let's do a programme about it." Well, of course, the thing about it of course, was the thing was going on. The whole case was going on. Every few months something new

happened. So it took us ages to get the programme together and even at the end when we finally finished it, Jim was still fighting some aspect of the case. But he had signed himself up with an agent, a literary agent, a very well-known man, who had on his books I should think half of the outside broadcasting department of the BBC. He was known as Mr Ten Per Cent and that will identify him for people who know him, but I don't think that ought to be-

This man had said, "Why don't we make a book out of this?" and he had signed up a very prestigious writer, a man whose name you will see every Sunday, if you pick up the right Sunday newspaper. But, of course, it's a long business writing a book and the Munich air disaster was an immensely complex topic. It involved a great deal of aerodynamics about which I didn't know very much. This chap never gone on with the book and Jim was getting a bit peeved about this. I said, "Well I've done a lot of work on it. I've followed the thing closely under your care. If you like I will have a try at writing the book." I don't think he was all that keen but nobody else was going to take it on. So I took it on.

It took about three years and most of the material in it was Jim's own archives, which I was using and he certainly wasn't going to let the BBC take a slice out of the profit. It was in the top ten in Manchester for about 10 weeks but, of course, outside Manchester it wasn't all that picked up as you might say.

00:53:18

Trevor Hill: Now at what point did you first venture into television?

Stanley: In the 1950s one could be attached to television to be taught the trade. Well, television as you know, after the war it started up in London, where else, then like a weed, it gradually spread out through the rest of the country. When it got up here, we hadn't got a studio as you will remember. We did have an outside broadcast unit of which you will no doubt hear from those involved. It was a sensible place to put it because it was primarily intended for sport and things of that kind and we had Manchester United, Manchester City, Everton, Liverpool, Leeds United, Sheffield Wednesday, you name it and all the Birmingham clubs which were much easier to get at than Newcastle if we started out in Manchester. Plus all the rugby league, plus all the racing and, of course, Blackpool where you might hope to get a few shows.

But we didn't have a studio and people wanted to do something more in the lines of features, a bit more of pop type material. So the decision was taken to use the outside broadcast unit with these three enormous vans and all the cables and whatnot. The scheme thought up was to go to stately homes. As always having taken all the gubbins out you wanted to get the maximum use out of it. So the idea was to do about three of four programmes all based on the stately home. The first one we picked, inevitably, was Chatsworth. It's probably the most famous and it's not all that far away.

Then the next thing was who is going to write the script? So Derek was an outside broadcast producer and Derek was the sort of man whose adrenalin only starts to flow when he's actually sitting at the controls and something is happening out there. If it's a football match, he's in his element. I think he had made his name in London by cornering the market in circuses.

Trevor Hill: Yes.

Stanley: Perhaps you remember the famous staff party where he shattered everybody by doing a very neat solo turn with the Indian clubs. (Laughter)

Trevor Hill: And assumed his nickname Circus Boy. (Laughter)

Stanley: I didn't know about that.

Trevor Hill: Yes.

Stanley: Anyway, you can't do a ___[00:55:34] from a stately home off the cuff. You've got to plan it. If you're going to pilot all these cameras and all these booms and the lights and miles and miles of cables around, the chaps want to know where they are going have to push them. The point was, there was no-one else to write the script. We did have a features producer Radio. So the features producer radio would write the script. I had a terrible job getting a script out of Derek and I think it was completely changed when we got there.

The second thing was, who was going to present this programme? Well, we didn't have anybody in Manchester at the time and all the standard chaps from London it appeared who might have come up and done it, were all otherwise engaged. So, I found myself as the presenter of this thing. Scriptwriting, arguing with Derek and on the night doing the show. Fortunately, they put me in one room and if you know Chatsworth, all the public rooms, which the visitors go to, all open off a huge, long corridor. So we started at one end and I

appeared in vision speaking there and then the cameras gradually sidled away and left me down there and I did the rest with a microphone and off a monitor. That was probably my first actual encounter with television

Then it was thought that perhaps we had better have people who knew more about it than what they had picked up as they went along. Dennis Mitchell, who was my mate in Radio Features, he had been to London with Norman Swallow as his mentor and learned how to do films, make documentary films. Then the next year they said, “Would I like to go on an attachment?” I said, “Yes, I’ll go to London on attachment, if Norman Swallow will take me on too and teach me what he’s just taught Dennis.” Dear Norman, said, “Yes, he would." So I went on and did an attachment.

00:57:23 Did you ever do an attachment?

Trevor Hill: Yes.

Stanley: Yes, well you’ll know that what tended to be the great complaint was that people would go from somewhere in radio to do an attachment on television. They would be attached to a particular office and for six months they became the tea boy. They might do a bit of research and they might do a bit of leg work, but the chap in charge wasn’t going to let some oaf from out in the sticks get his hands on his precious programmes. So chaps were being returned to base having done nothing.

It was a bit better than that in talks, television talks, under the great Grace Wyndham Goldie. You did one programme and the programme that everybody did as your test piece was Press Conference, which was, as the name implies, they got

three journalists in and some speaker on some topic of the day and the journalists quizzed him about it. You had the advantage from the point of view of beginners that it was a fairly static setup. Except that in my case, I was always accident prone, the week I did it, they didn't just have one expert in from outside, they had two. It was all about nuclear energy and the effect it had on the- I called it the highly esteemed gonad show. (Laughter) But it complicated the camera work considerably. But I did that.

Also, Norman collared for me from Grace Wyndham Goldie a half hour in which I could do a programme of my own, think it up myself, do it myself. It was a test. It was like what they call them at school, it was an assignment. But I got a half hour programme. It was called Hail Cricket.

I had always loathed cricket at school. You're either very pro cricket or you're very anti. But at the same time there was something about the sort of romance of cricket. Something about the great names of cricket. The Jack Hobbs and the Bradmans and so on, did appeal to me. So I did a sort of gentle mickey take of cricket. But I thought as it was a test piece I'd better do as many things as I could so I dug out some old archives, some lovely old archive cricket material from all over the place. I did a bit of filming of cricket at ___[00:59:42] Park, the BBC club ground. It was the first time I had ever handled film. No, not quite, but we won't go into that.

I had Peter West who was just making his name as a commentator in those days to present it and I got Robertson Glasgow, who was a cricket writer with one of the newspapers, to come in and be interviewed. We had this nice sort of mish mash and it went quite well.

Everybody was going to do programmes like that afterwards. I called it an essay and everybody was going to do essay

programmes, these sort of slightly poetic documentaries. But, unfortunately, a man called Donald Baverstock swanned into Grace Wyndham Goldie's ken after that and that was the start of Tonight. If you went to Grace with an idea for a documentary, a 30 minute documentary, she would say, “Yes, good subject, but Tonight could do it in six minutes.” (Laughter)

Trevor Hill: Yes. But in the days when the television documentary was going out, I mean obviously, Dennis learnt the finer points of television, came back and he did In Prison, Morning in the Streets.

Stanley: Morning in the Streets was the one that won the Italia Prize, of course.

Trevor Hill: Yes.

Stanley: Then there was Night in the City.

Yes, Dennis was one of the great innovators. Dennis was the man who shattered the entire television service by saying, “I don’t want to see people talking and their lips moving. They can be doing interesting things and I will record them on tape and we’ll just play the sound.” Everybody said, “You can’t do that.” He said, “Why not?” They said, “Well you can’t have a man on the screen talking and his lips aren’t moving.” Dennis said, “Well I’m going to try.” Out came Morning in the Streets and the rest.

1:01:18

Trevor Hill: You contributed, I think you both wrote and directed The Water of Irwell.

Stanley: Yes, that was my attempt at the poetic documentary. It was a series, I think, called Eye to Eye. I'm not sure about this. I did one on climbing inevitably.

01:01:40

Trevor Hill: Safety in the Fells was it?

Stanley: No, not Safety in the Fells. There was just the half hour programme called Climbing because in those days, where are we? Back in the 1950s. Mountaineering, rock climbing, it wasn't the thing it later became. It was still very much the prerogative, the preserve of the upper middle classes, the clergyman, the lawyers and the people who had founded the sport in the middle of the nineteenth century.

There was just a new school coming along of the gritstone chaps, you know the working class lads, of whom the great man was the great Joe Brown. But nobody in the BBC knew anything about these things or was interested. So I said, "Well let's have a documentary on climbing," and we did. We had Rusty in it and we had Joe Brown in it. The first time Joe ever was seen on a television camera. I'm not sure whether that was Eye to Eye but I think The Water of Irwell may have been.

I said, "Here we have this ghastly river, the most overworked river in the world. An open sewer. It's holy in Lancashire. It's on our patch. And the people who live along its banks are

delightful people. How the hell do they put up with this appalling river flowing through their midst? Let's see what it looks like." So we did. I suppose you could call it a travel log but I said, "It's not going to be a travel log. We're not going to have now that over there is the Agecroft Power Station and we are now passing Castle Irwell Racecourse. We will just show what happens."

We didn't have a commentary. We didn't have any music, not background music, you know Vaughan Williams and all that.

Trevor Hill: That was a relief. (Laughter)

Stanley: Well there was indigenous music you see because right at the start of the Irwell in Bacup, we had the Bacup Coco-Nutters, a famous Morris dance team for whom the brother of one of our studio managers here today was the accordionist. In fact, the brother himself has been known to play the accordion. Well they had certain tunes which was nice and I could bring the Coco-Nutters in fairly soon, so I made that a theme tune. But then, of course, halfway down the Irwell, at Rawtenstall, you had the Rossendale Male Voice Choir who were the absolute tops in those days. They were winning the male voice class at the Llangollen Eisteddfod year after year and so on.

So I had a big session in which they sang a song. An old eighteenth century hymn written by an inhabitant of Rossendale in those days and we just sort of drifted away from time to time while they were singing and we saw one of the workers, members of the choir, doing his normal daily job, making slippers or working in a cotton mill or whatever. I remember that when we showed this thing to Grace Wyndham Goldie and an American visitor that she had, it started up very

quietly with no commentary and no music. This chap turned round and stared at the box, the projection box and said, “What’s happened to the sound? Where’s the sound?” and, of course, the sound came along.

Further down we had a man, an old gentleman who came out of his front door and he walked down the road and along and David Porter was watching this. He said, “Who is he? What does he do? I want to know what he is.” I said, “Hold on a minute David, you’ll find out.” In the next shot, of course, he was the conductor of the male voice choir. But it was extraordinary how, I suppose it still happens in a way, that if people aren’t told exactly what it is, they won’t wait until they see it or hear it.

Trevor Hill: Well we’re in to signposting now aren’t we unfortunately now, all the time, signposting, signposting.

Stanley: Yes, we are.

Trevor Hill: Another of your documentaries, television documentaries Stanley, that stands out for many of us and was enjoyed greatly by the press and, indeed, by many of the people in the business, was your film which went out on the Easter Monday of 1961, Pastures in High Places.

Stanley: Ah, yes. I’d always been interested, certainly once I came to the North, it occurred to me how much the imagery of sheep and shepherds and sheep farm is part of the language. It’s not only in the Bible and I am the good shepherd and I know my

sheep, you might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb or a wolf in sheep's clothing and all that. I also knew that, of course, we had Bradford and the West Riding of Yorkshire, the great woollen industry, but the foundation of the woollen industry goes back into the Middle Ages and the great monasteries and their huge sheep trading.

So I wanted to do a programme about that and I remembered that there had been a radio programme about 1948, done in Bristol, I think, or possibly Plymouth, about a Cornish village, Bolventor, which is on the main road down to Lands' End. I'm not sure if it isn't the village of Jamaica Inn. You'd have to check that.

Anyway, I didn't hear this programme but this chap had gone there with a microphone every time something interesting was happening throughout the year and saved it all up and done a 60 minute programme at the end. There was probably more of interest happening in Bolventor in 1948 than you'd find today. It's just a string of cars I think. But I put these two ideas together and we did a programme about The Three Peaks, a radio programme, Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough. I thought this is the sort of country where you could do a film. I'm trying to remember the name of the man who was the presenter of that programme. He presented the nightly half hour show for Mike Barton for a long time. He lived in Idle or somewhere round there. (Laughter)

Anyway, he said he thought he knew a good farmer. I'm not sure we didn't actually have him in The Three Peaks programme. So we had a drink with this farmer. I didn't let on what I was thinking of but he seemed a very nice man and he was one of the leading sheep farmers of the whole area. So I made an excuse to go up and look at his farm, which was absolutely ideal for the purpose; it was right under the shelter

of Pen-y-ghent, the Fountains Fell on the other side. It's practically on the Pennine Way in fact. The farmyard itself was ideally arranged. It was on three sides of a square with lots of galleries and balconies and things. So you could get lots of shots.

So I asked John Coates whether he would come in and let me do a film about his year's work on the sheep farm and whenever anything interesting happened we would take a camera up and film it. Well, in fact, it took two years for all sorts of reasons, which are not relevant. I had to fight my way through all this and when I'd finished it to my horror, the Controller of Television, there wasn't a BBC2, the Controller of Television didn't like it. In fact, he hated it. He wouldn't take it.

Admittedly the first version that I put together did have some things in which he wasn't all that pleased with. So I took it away and I removed those things and I shortened it, showed it to him again and he still didn't like it. But by that time, he or I, on his behalf had spent rather a lot of money on it, so he said, "Alright, I'll put it out." He picked what I'm sure he thought was the most unlikely time of day, day and time of day that he could possibly find when nobody would take the slightest notice of it. I'm interested to find you say it was Easter Day, I thought it was Good Friday.

Trevor Hill: I was going to say, I made a mistake you know, it was Good Friday.

Stanley: It was.

Trevor Hill: While you were talking, I suddenly thought, no it wasn't Easter Monday, it was Good Friday. It was even more poignant.

Stanley: Well it was a good day in some points to put it out but I'm sure he felt that nobody would be listening, but he got it wrong. It didn't have a mass audience. It wasn't like Dennis Taylor and Steve Davis thrashing out the snooker final or anything like that, but it had a few million. By the other standard of measurement of listener research, audience research, the appreciation index, it sort of romped very high.

I will say for the gentleman, it comes hard for me to say anything in favour of the gentleman, but he did have the grace afterwards to write me a note saying, "I was wrong." In fact, we put it out again some years later.

1:09:53

Trevor Hill: Yes. But about this time, the television documentary, the death knell was sounding wasn't it? I mean they wanted to get rid of it in London.

Stanley: Yes, well they did. The BBC had, and I wouldn't be surprised if it still doesn't have, a strange way of changing course. When it wanted to get rid of a gentleman who was running the Radio features department, they didn't just sack him, it abolished the department. Those who were doing one kind of programme were put in radio drama and those who did the other kind were put in radio talks. Although I was a features producer, I was forbidden from then on to call myself a features producer. After a lot of arguments and memos flying to and fro, I was instructed to call myself Producer Talks (Documentaries). So I went on signing myself, features department.

Similarly when the BBC wanted to get rid of its Head of Documentaries, it didn't just sack him, it broke up the department. It didn't, in fact, I think, stop documentary. You can't stop documentary. Documentary and features are a basic ingredient of any broadcasting organisation, but what I think did happen was that the emphasis switched very, very much, almost entirely, to factual current affairs type documentary. This was the time when they started up the Tonight programme, the famous one with Cliff Mitchelmore, Alan Whicker, Polly Elwes and Fyfe Robertson and you name them.

Panorama was started about this time by dear Michael Barsley as a sort of rather jolly weekly programme and it was collared by Grace Wyndham Goldie and turned into the "flagship" of the current affairs output. So there wasn't much room anywhere for people like Dennis Mitchell and me. In fact, there was none at all with our poetic documentaries.

1:11:55

Trevor Hill: Not only documentaries, can we just touch on music? This has been something near and dear to your heart on programme making.

Stanley: There was, and is, a man called Colin Shaw. I don't have to say much about Colin I'm sure. Colin joined the BBC, I think straight from university, as a General Programme Producer in Leeds. Then, he wandered away from that into all sorts of highways and byways of the BBC, advancing a little each time. But at some stage during all this, he started writing biographies of composers, hour long biographies, for which he received a fee because he wasn't a producer by that time. They were joint exercises between himself as the writer and music department, because in those high and far off times, we could

actually in a feature of that kind, we could have live musicians. We were allowed one session with the BBC Northern Orchestra with conductors. We could hire artists, singers, violinists, guitarists, you name it and choose our own music.

I can't remember what happened. Yes, I do remember what happened. Colin, eventually, in the course of his perambulations, he came back to Manchester as Assistant Head of Programmes and as Assistant Head of Programmes, he couldn't very well write programmes. So he said to me, "Would I take over this chore from him?" I said, "Yes. Will I be paid?" He said, "Yes, of course, you'll be paid." He was in the middle of a programme on César Franck, about whom I knew nothing. However, if you're offered a bit of money. So I took it over and, of course, I wasn't paid. But once you get into something of that kind, your job is to find programmes and here was a rich seam that could be mined. I enjoyed it greatly, especially as I was working those days with Arthur Spencer.

I'm sure people will have told you about Arthur, a delightful man. When he was young he had a great career before him as a pianist, as a solo pianist but then he was overtaken by multiple sclerosis and by the time I knew him, he had become a producer, but he was already beginning to find it very difficult to move around. He was still able to drive a car and one of the experiences those days was to be driven about the region by Arthur Spencer in his pre-war Austin 7.

We took on these things. I wrote them for a bit and then I thought, "Well, this is really rather silly. Why should I write these programmes when I can get other people to do them?" So I cast around and said, "Was there anybody locally in Manchester who would make a good scriptwriter on musical biographies?" Somebody said, "Well there's a young chap, he's a music critic of the Daily Telegraph and he's writing a

history of The Hallé Orchestra." I said, "What's his name?" And they said, "Michael Kennedy."

Well, of course, Michael went on to become Northern Editor of the Telegraph. He's written goodness knows how many books. He's an OBE, but we had a long and happy association with him writing the words and me providing the music, although by that time, of course, the BBC could no longer afford to hire artists, so we had to use grammar phone records for the music. But still it went on. We had a lovely sequence of things.

Trevor Hill: Your television career went out on a very high musical note as I recall.

Stanley: Well I don't know how high it was. We had done a number of radio programmes about Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose music I like and I had met Ursula Ralph Vaughan Williams in Parentheses, [her programme goes out tomorrow 01:15:31].

I had had a series of disasters in television terms, Pastures in High Places was one of them. Graham Miller said to me one day, "You must face up to the fact that you are never going to hit the big time again." By which he meant that I could have little programmes on the North of England, or opt out television programmes, but I would never be back on the network. Foolishly I did not believe him and I thought, "I will demonstrate to you that I can and I will."

So it eventually occurred to me that we might do a programme about Vaughan William because I knew a lot of people who had known him and were still around. People like, for example, Maud Karpeles who was then knocking on 90 but she worked with Cecil Sharp going back to the beginning of the century

collecting folk songs. A lovely lady she was. Imogen Holst was still around, Herbert Howells was still around. You name it they were all there.

The only trouble was there was no archive film of Vaughan Williams himself and I had to use vast numbers of still photographs. Of course I wanted [Love of Music 01:16:48] in this film, it was an omnibus film, and one of his most famous early works was the Fantastia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis, which is marvellous music and it was played for the first time at a Three Choirs Festival concert in Gloucester Cathedral.

Well, I had been allocated a film unit and I wanted to try and get them round to places where I could show them what I wanted to film and I could never get them. They were always otherwise too busy. Eventually I got the cameraman, I think it was John Baker, down to Gloucester and I took him into the cathedral and I said, "John, if we come here, how much can you light of all this?" He looked round for a bit and he said, "Well if I have about three days, I can just light that bit up there." (Laughter) So, of course, that went.

We had to get more stills of- who is the famous rostrum cameraman, Ken Moss. I'm not sure it wasn't Ken Moss who did this for me. It all turned out to be stills and the music was alright and the interviews were alright, but I got it out. It went out on the air and I had proved Graham wrong but that was appropriately my swansong as a Television Producer. I fell ill after that.

I was required to do it in London. I thought having put up this idea from Manchester I would be able to use the North of England Film Unit, but, this is off the record, I was sent down to Kensington House. I was given an office with a table, a chair and a telephone. My secretary wasn't allowed to come and I was bidden to produce my 45 minute documentary. I didn't

have a programme assistant. I didn't have a researcher. I didn't have anybody.

I spent my time coming up and down the M1 or what there was of it in those days. Doing work down there, bringing all the paperwork back to Manchester to be dealt with and nipping back overnight down to London again. At the end of all that lot, I had to have three months off.

Trevor Hill: But there was certainly life after that in regional programmes for you Stanley.

01:18:50 Tell me something about the work that you did after you finished with the television service, as it were, and you came back to the bosom of radio because, I mean, they were fruitful years.

01:19:00

Stanley: Do you want that now or would you rather talk about-

Trevor Hill: So after omnibus on the subject of Ralph Vaughan Williams you returned once again to radio in Manchester.

Stanley: Well I decided that there was no point in tying myself in knots any more trying to do television and I wasn't getting any younger. It was the period after the ghastly sixties but there had been a wind of change, which I think I would associate with the name of Tony Whitby. Up to that time, throughout the sixties, as you will remember, there was always a financial crisis of some sort of another and there had been practically

no opportunity for anybody other than a news correspondent to go abroad. I think Tony felt, perhaps, I may have got this all wrong, but it was about time the BBC opened a few windows and sent a few people out and around.

What I remember most of all, of course, Tony died unfortunately, terribly early but other people took on from him. What I remember most of all about the seventies, was the amount of foreign travel I managed to fit in one way or another.

Trevor Hill: Yes, tell me about some of those programmes.

Stanley: Well I suppose the Swiss Evening, that was Stephen Hirst-

Trevor Hill: For Radio Three.

Stanley: For Radio Three. Stephen initiated that. There had been an Austrian Weekend done by Michael Green, who was a colleague of ours here at the time and who subsequently became our boss. I'd done a programme for that, a documentary with Nigel Douglas, the opera singer. This was all based on Vienna and Stephen had got a lot of music from Vienna and he wanted to put it out one weekend and he thought he'd have some talks programmes in between. Nigel had been trained as a singer in Vienna and spoke fluent German. So he was signed up to present all of these programmes throughout the weekend and I signed him up to do a documentary on Vienna, which was great fun.

Then I heard that there was to be a Swiss Evening, and I thought well I don't know who is going to do it. But I went down

to see George Fisher or I was talking to him one day, George being the Head of Talks and Docs, and I said, “I don’t know who is going to do the Swiss Evening, but I’d like to offer a documentary for it with Nigel Douglas,” because I knew Nigel had also spent a long time in Switzerland as the principal tenor at the Zurich Opera House. George stunned me by saying, “Well, I think you should do the whole thing.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “You should write a memo to Stephen Hirst volunteering to organise a Swiss Evening.”

That was a bit of a blow. I mean I hadn’t really thought about that, but I thought about it and I thought, “Well I do know Switzerland quite well.” I’d been there quite a bit and it would mean lots of nice trips to Switzerland. So I agreed to do it. The drawback to it was, that when Michael did his Austrian weekend with all these programmes, he had been able to draw upon all of us. I don’t know whether you did anything but I did a programme for him, Gillian did one, Fraser Steel did one and so on. I thought I’d get a lot of my mates up here, like you and the other, to help me with my Swiss Evening, but George said, “Oh, no, I can’t spare any of these people. You’ll have to do it yourself.”

So we did. We took over Radio 3, from half past four on a Sunday until midnight with a Swiss Evening. I also had some nice trips to Stockholm and I did some rather upmarket disc jockey programmes with Elisabeth Söderström, the great Swedish Soprano. I did a huge long swan down Italy. I was doing a programme about the Italian language with Jonathan Steinberg of Trinity Hall. That’s still around and about. We did a programme about Simone de Beauvoir in which we actually got into that strange studio of hers in the 15th arrondissement, I think it was, and recorded the lady. That was a thing in itself.

Then, of course, there was the famous swan round Japan with your mate Louis Allen.

Trevor Hill: Ah, yes.

Stanley: Michael Green said to me one day, just after he had taken over here, that he had been asked by London to do a series, not a Japanese Weekend god forbid or even a Japanese Evening but a series of programmes. He hauled me in and said, “What do you think about doing some programmes on Japan?” I quote, I said, “Never in a million years,” because I knew how difficult it had been to do the Swiss Evening and I do speak a bit of French and German, but when it comes to Japanese, who speaks Japanese? You can’t read Japanese. I knew no Japanese. I knew nothing about Japan.

Then I remembered, of course, that Louis, although by trade he was a lecturer in French at Durham, he is part of what we laughingly call the Japanese Mafia. He’s one of the great authorities in this country. He speaks Japanese, writes it and he’s written Japanese history. I said, “Very well. I will go to Japan and I will try to make these programmes if Louis is able and willing to come.” Well, of course, Louis would go to Japan at the drop of a hat. So we had to fit it in to his Easter vacation, but we went. We had some time in Tokyo, we went to Kyoto, we went to Nagasaki and I stood, eerie moments standing exactly under the point where the bomb had burst.

It wasn’t a frightfully rich exercise in programmes because the boys in London, bless them, had said they wanted, “Only Japanese who spoke English.” Well you know it’s like looking for needles in haystacks. We did find some people but the programmes were a bit dodgy so that was not really a great

thing to go out on, but the month we spent in Japan was enjoyable shall we say.

01:24:37

Trevor Hill: There was a great glint in your eye while you're describing this period, Stanley. Looking back, were these the best years?

Stanley: I think probably 1946 when I really found my feet and was having all this unsolicited fun as a broadcaster. Then the 1970s, yes, I think probably, because I always had the feeling in the 1970s, most of the time really, but particularly in the last 10 years, that I had all the advantages and freedom of being a freelance and none of the anxieties.

01:25:19

Trevor Hill: Well now we're in the 1990s. We're back it seems to the old regional scheme of things, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, coming once again under the banner of North Region. Tell me, did broadcasting in the 70s' advantage the North Regional listener and viewers, never mind the staff concerned?

Stanley: I suppose the answer must be no because we lost a lot of the opportunity to broadcast about the region. But, of course, you have to remember that it coincided with the arrival of local radio and local radio was supposed to do the job that we'd been doing, only more so. Well, of course, whether you think it did or not, is up to you. For myself I think we would have done better to stay with a much beefed up regional system, but others thought differently.

It helped us in Manchester, I think, because by the strange way these things turn out, what ought to have killed us off, the end of broadcasting, regional broadcasting acted as a tremendous shot in the arm and we were suddenly broadcasting much more to the nation than we'd ever done to the region. At least I was. Michael Green came from Radio Sheffield and Gillian Hush came down from Newcastle and various other people came in. I'm only talking about my own area of work. I can't speak for Children's Hour or general programmes producers or anything, but we were suddenly getting much more material on the Home Service or Radio 4 than we ever were before. So, I suppose, from that point of view it was better. Whether it was regional work I don't know, but it was a different sort of voice. It was a non-metropolitan voice in British broadcasting of which there is by no means enough.

END AUDIO