

THIS SCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A TELEPHONE RECORDING, NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

*Corrected*

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GEORGE SCOTT: The whole of your broadcasting career has been spent in the field known as News and Current Affairs. How would you say the BBC -- as a Corporation -- regards that field?

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STEVE BONARJEE: Well it's difficult, George, for the outsider really to understand this I think, because naturally entertainment, drama, music and other significant parts of the output loom larger in the public mind very often, but inside the BBC, inside the BBC, policy and what flows from it has always been a sort of central preoccupation round which everything else inside the BBC revolves. And to that extent therefore, power and prestige and responsibility. By policy I mean relations with Parliament, Whitehall, with the Parties -- both government and opposition, Unions, the Press and so on. These are the relationships from which policy flows and they've always been a central preoccupation of senior management. And because Current Affairs programmes touch so closely on these relationships, Current Affairs programmes -- even more than News really -- are at the heart of policy, and a sort of constant battle-field, if you like.

GS: Is it possible to say simply who determines policy?

SB: Well, I mean this is one of the... one of the never-ending sagas. I mean, who should control Current Affairs output? And how should that control be exercised? And honestly, there's never been a... a simple answer to that. And constantly changes are made to try and find the right solution.

GS: It's often held by commentators and critics of the BBC that it is in fact impossible for the senior people in the Corporation to control the output of current affairs, and that it's left very much to the programme makers.

SB: Well, in practice that's... yes, I think that is true in practice; it's certainly not though true in theory, because senior management of course wouldn't abdicate to that extent. It's a ... it's a sort of battle-field, really, a constantly changing battlefield. First of all, you have Directors of the Spoken Word; then you have Directors of News and Current Affairs; then you have Editors-in-Chief and many a stop-gap in between. But nobody, even to this day, has really found a permanent solution that works wholly satisfactorily.

GS: Where you have an output which is being made almost by the hour, is it possible to have a satisfactory solution?

SB: Well, no I don't... I don't actually think it is. I think, if we may,... I'll try and illustrate that later in this recording with concrete examples, but no; I mean I think you're absolutely right, that power - this kind of power - really resides well down the hierarchical ladder, and seldom resides where constitutionally it should reside.

GS: Is this because of the size of the operation; that it cannot be compared to a newspaper, where the Editor can always be in charge; can know every word if he wishes of what is going in his paper?

SB: Yes; Well, certainly I mean the BBC is many newspapers rolled into one, isn't it? And therefore ... and of course there's no equivalent to having your page proofs brought to you and scrutinised. Very early on in the development of current affairs - and we shall come to



own staffs - producers and research assistants and all the rest of it - their prestige tends to depend on them being willing to take decisions themselves, and not to refer upwards. So there's a conflict really between the paper system of reference upwards and what actually happens in practice. And all too often of course, things do not get referred up. And senior management is then faced with post hoc situations, which it has to endeavour to resolve.

GS: And presumably, where we're dealing with live broadcasting - and even today a quite substantial amount of Current Affairs, News and Current Affairs, is live - there of course the question of reference upwards would apply solely to the selection of contributors.

SB: Yes. I'm not sure actually what/<sup>the</sup>proportion of live broadcasting is these days. I suspect it's rather less than you may think, George. I mean certainly most tape and video-tape I suppose is heard by somebody - probably not anybody very senior, - but heard by somebody before it actually goes on the air. It may only be in the viewing theatre or whatever. So that if there is some awful mistake or error of judgment or whatever, I mean it should become apparent. And it's only normally very often the presentation that is live, do you see, isn't it?

GS: Well some major political interviews I would say are still live, on, say PANORAMA.

SB: Yes. Well, you see, that... as a matter of fact another interesting point... I mean some politicians these days are insisting on going live, simply because they don't trust the way in which their material might otherwise be edited. And I believe the current Prime Minister is one of those.

GS: Going back to the position of News and Current Affairs

within the BBC, I think outsiders have never really been able to understand -- and indeed I've found it difficult from time to time myself -- to understand the... what seems to be the perpetual conflict between News and Current Affairs.

SB: Yes. Well to some extent of course, George, you find this in newspapers too, don't you, the conflict between the newsroom and the editorial people. I mean on THE GUARDIAN we used to call it the Corridor. The leader-writers, the feature-writers, the... if you like the more privileged members of the staff. In the BBC, you see, the news people are a kind of very special agency in a way. Most of them come from a sub-editorial background. They are news processors, very skilful news processors; certainly this was true, you know, when I first arrived after the war. News Division, which was extremely powerful, was almost entirely involved in news processing. There were of course correspondents as well, but they had a very limited role. There were relatively few voiced pieces as we know them today. Their work was mainly used in quotation: 'Our parliamentary correspondent says' and, you know, that sort of thing. Certainly they weren't encouraged to do analysis or interpretation. They were strictly reporters. Well, the great exemplar of this style of news, the agency style of news if you like, was of course Tahu Hole, who became Editor of News in October 1948. And he had extremely rigid concepts of what was news, and enforced them rigidly. Everything really had to be, quote, important, unquote. He'd no time for human interest material as such. And it was establishment stuff, mainly really: the Royal Family, the Government, Government Departments, anything that emanated from these sources was important and took precedence over everything else. And things like, you know, I mean, actually these days... I mean you'll actually hear news bulletins led with human interest stories which would have been quite inconceivable in Tahu Hole's day. Well, now of course there's something to be said for this, and he did achieve considerable prestige with the bulletins of the day. But what... where he, I think, failed to under... he certainly failed to understand television news when it came -- and perhaps we can come on to that later -- he certainly failed to understand the

significance and impact that television news was going to make. But he also - whether he didn't understand or simply wasn't interested, I can't be sure, but certainly he showed no interest in the early development of current affairs broadcasting as distinct from news bulletin broadcasting. And had he showed more interest in it, I daresay that most of the problems that have emerged since - the dichotomy between news and current affairs, would not actually have happened.

GS: This to me sounds somewhat unexpected in the sense that you talk about the rarity of voiced pieces by the correspondents, and yet this came after a war in which British broadcasting not only gained a tremendous reputation throughout the world, but included of course some most memorable despatches, voiced pieces if you like to call them that, by the correspondents in the field.

SB: Yes. Actually, George, I haven't checked on that period, because I wasn't myself here. I was still at the receiving end. But I think you'll find that a lot of that happened in a separate operation called War Report, which was a kind of RADIO NEWSREEL. Now the things I said about the bulletins at the time when Tahu Hole was Editor, did not apply to the parallel development of RADIO NEWSREEL, which was taken over in fact from the Overseas Services that introduced it into the domestic broadcasting in the late Forties, and did come under News. And the correspondents were doing voiced pieces in RADIO NEWSREEL. But RADIO NEWSREEL was always considered a kind of second eleven. It hadn't the prestige or the authority - nor was intended to have - of the main bulletins, and particularly so the Nine O'Clock, the old Nine O'Clock News. So I don't know that the point you raise is really as relevant as it might have seemed.

GS: So from what you say, Tahu Hole had this very strict, proper attitude towards the bulletins anyway.

SB: Yes. I mean, to some extent, I mean his style of bulletin...

The nearest approach to it today are the World Service bulletins, and they in the last year or two have suddenly become fashionable again, and it's quite the thing to try and tune into the World Service, which is now technically easy to do, and -- yes -- there was far more foreign news, say; the proportion of foreign news would be far higher in Hole's day, and undoubtedly... I mean they were a kind of classic news broadcast. But he did enforce his style very, very rigidly indeed. People were afraid of him in a kind of way. He was a <sup>very</sup> tall, immense man, who sort of loomed over you. He ruled his empire certainly, his news empire, with a rod of iron. But there it was; he certainly didn't for example encourage scoops. He wasn't interested in that kind of journalism. And there's a classic story of Charles ~~Gardiner~~ <sup>GARDNER</sup>, who was the Air Correspondent at the time, and Charles was down at the Farnborough Air Show and actually doing the local commentary, explaining to the spectators what was going on. And in this particular year, there was a terrible crash, and a plane dived into the crowd and -- speaking from memory -- lots of people were either killed or had very narrow escapes. Well, there was Charles on the spot doing a local commentary, and he actually saved a lot of lives -- so it's said -- by warning them over the Tannoy that a terrible accident was about to happen. So, having done that, he rushed off to the telephone and telephoned the Radio newsroom, gave them the story, as an eye-witness of the event, some half-an-hour before the bulletin -- the next bulletin -- was due. And there was an extraordinary rule at the time, that stories had to be checked from more than one source, especially foreign stories. Well, this was a domestic story, but they would not broadcast their own correspondent's eye-witness account until it had been confirmed by the Press Association, or some other agency. And as Charles had been so quick, he was 15 minutes... 20 minutes earlier than the tape, and actually the story did not get into the next bulletin, because it had not been checked out from another source. Well that was the kind of rigidity that Hole enforced, which of course, you know, the more adventurous journalists resented.

GS: What was his background? How did he get to hold this job?

SB: Well, he's a New Zealander, and he'd been in the Overseas Services during the War. I've not actually checked on the position he held before he became Editor, News; he may have been deputy under the chap who went to the TIMES. ~~Brierley~~. He may be... A.P. Ryan, who went to the TIMES was the previous Editor. Whether he'd been deputy I can't recall. But he was a journalist by background.

Well, he certainly showed when I arrived in 1946, he certainly showed no interest in the development of Current Affairs. So, almost by accident, the early developments happened within the Talks world. Now Talks had intellectual prestige, but little professional experience of journalism, and indeed rather despised journalism. But there it was, faut de mieux, the early developments of Current Affairs were on the Talks side, and not as in a way would have been more natural within the News Directorate.

GS: Now what form did this development take?

SB: Well, Asa Briggs, rightly I think although, you know, it's flattering to me because I was involved, - Asa Briggs does refer to a programme series which ran for seven or eight years, called TOPIC FOR TONIGHT; he calls it in his fourth volume the progenitor of all the AM and PM programmes that followed. Well I think certainly TOPIC was the birth of Current Affairs in any contemporary sense that we would understand now. May I describe perhaps briefly what used to go on otherwise at that period - this is 1948-49. Most of the Current Affairs output, such as it was - perhaps two or three <sup>talks</sup> ~~weeks~~ a week - were carefully commissioned stuff, quite often well in advance, fully scripted, generally fifteen minutes in length, and all of these would be carefully scrutinised before they were actually broadcast.

GS: Scrutinised by whom?

SB: Well, by a sort of middle management chap - an assistant head or a very senior producer perhaps - but normally by an assistant head or equivalent. So, I mean frankly, most of the material that went out in the Home Service almost exclusively... I mean if it was topical it was topical more by accident than by design. Well, the significance of TOPIC was that because it was five nights a week, and was deliberately designed to take up themes of the day, for the first time if you like journalistic considerations came into it. Light Programme took the initiative - not the Home Service, Light Programme - and the then-Controller, Tom Chalmers, and later Kenneth Adam; and the interesting thing is that the series was first offered to News. It seemed natural that News should do it. But the offer was actually turned down by Hole, and I've seen the documentations. He advanced staff shortages and all sorts of other reasons, but frankly I don't think he was interested. So, faut de mieux, they turned to Talks Department. (When I say 'they', I'm talking of Controller of the Light Programme.) And the interesting thing is - and again I've seen the note - the offer was made to Talks, and then the Talks management asked Charles Curran and myself (Curran had arrived about six months after me) Charles Curran and myself to take on this as a joint responsibility. This was at the turning of the year, 1948-49. So, interestingly in terms of later material, you know I've known Curran from - well before then of course, but we actually did work together, although as a matter of fact it was quite brief, early in 1949, because Curran was subsequently transferred. Or after about a month dropped out because some other work had cropped up which took him away. Well, the series was a break-through, I think, for three reasons. First, the <sup>OBJECTIVE</sup> opening was topicality. Secondly, the treatment was frankly journalistic. A lot of the material going out at the time on the Home Service - and indeed of course it's still true to this day to some extent - it was very much the time of the pundit. And a great many of the talks on world affairs and all the rest of it were done by people who would these days be called pundits, rather than journalist. Well from the start TOPIC concentrated on the professional journalist. And the third significant thing

really was that it was the first dent in the tyranny, if you like, of the scrutiny system. Now I have explained how with all the conventional output if you like, having got your script in, often commissioned a good time in advance, then the script had to be seen by a senior person, generally an assistant head or something like that, who would comment on it, ask for changes - even in the language, not simply for policy reasons - and it was then your duty as a producer to go to quite often a very distinguished sort of chap and say - Well, you know, would you be so kind, and - you know - We're a bit worried about this, or - The language there isn't perhaps as clear as we would wish it to be. And it was very delicate and difficult business, which we didn't like doing at all. However, with TOPIC, because it was five nights a week and because the script didn't normally arrive until 8.30 or even later, and senior staff of course had gone home by that time, for the first time, in a way, they had to trust us. Conventional scrutiny wasn't really feasible. Or rather, they weren't prepared to stay on until half past eight to nine o'clock to do it. They did do it the following morning. One had to deliver a p-as-b script first thing the following morning, which I think was then scrutinised post hoc and make their comments. But of course that's not the same thing.

So there were three rather important factors which marked TOPIC out from anything that had gone before.

But there was another decisive factor which emerged subsequently, and that was that we were very fortunate in the quality of the journalists and we were able to recruit to the panel of speakers - we had a panel of a dozen or so people - and, looking back, one's perhaps entitled to take, you know, some modest pride in the quality of the people concerned. If I may name just a few: Graham Hutton who was perhaps the best economic broadcaster of his day; Chester Wilmoth, though sadly killed in the first Comet crash - a great broadcaster; Geoffrey Cox, who of course went on to become Editor of ITN; Andrew Shonfield, director of Chatham House; Honor Balfour, who I think was the first significant woman current affairs broadcaster; William Clark, now vice-President of the World Bank; Mark ~~Abrahams~~ <sup>ABRAMS</sup>, great social

survey figure; Cyril Ray - a beautiful light touch Cyril had - he did the more light-hearted output brilliantly for us; Robert MacKenzie, always the.. perhaps the most reliable broadcaster of the last thirty years; Sidney Jacobson, now Lord Jacobson; and many others in years to come; and of course later, including yourself, George. So it was the spawning ground of many of the best broadcasters of the Fifties and Sixties; and happily some are still broadcasting today.

GS: I think it would be worth just noting what that programme tried to do. It was four and a half minutes, if I remember rightly.

SB: Yes. Well, it normally it ran out about 4 forty with you know, the pretty short opening and closing announcements. Yes, we were given a pretty tight brief. There was no question of course of personal interpretation on the part of the contributors. But they were allowed considerable freedom to analyse an issue or a situation or a subject in a non-partisan way. They were basically informative, basically designed to inform, and inform at a popular level - because remember this was <sup>ON THE LIGHT</sup> ~~a light~~ Programme - but, you know, I mean if we were doing one now on Afghanistan, it would certainly look into the background of military implications, threats to stability, threats to the Gulf and so on and so forth, although not the speaker's personal view, but trying to summarize, if you like, informed comment and opinion whether in the Press or elsewhere.

But if I may... in case I were to forget, I ought just to say what the further relations with the newsroom were... news division. Well, having turned the series down, I have to say, I have to record that entirely because of the Editor, News were not really helpful about this new development. We asked for - Curran and I asked for, and we were backed by our own superiors, we asked for - access to the newsroom. Because if we were supposed to be reasonably topical we needed to know what the incoming news was. Well, I've seen the documentation of the time, and the fact is that Hole wrote a pretty

sharp note actually, refusing us access to the Newsroom, and the most he would concede was that not later than 9.30 p.m. - these talks went out at 10.15, after the Ten O'Clock bulletin in the Light Programme - not later than 9.30, we could check by 'phone with whoever the senior person on duty in the newsroom was. Well, that wasn't a very satisfactory situation for Charles Curran and I, and Elizabeth Rowley, who succeeded Curran, and this forced us and our contributors to be rather more cautious, rather less topical, than we would have liked in selecting and handling a subject. And so that was a considerable handicap.

All the same, the series happily was a .. was a success and ran for.. well, until September 1957 actually, and certainly in the late Forties, early Fifties, the average audience was quite often above the four million mark.

GS:                   And what about its reception by the people for whom it was devised?

SB:                   Well, it's very interesting, George. Remember, again, a Light Programme; the brief was to cater for a popular audience, and we were much exercised here, you know, - the Directorate just as much as we, the producers - in whether we were actually succeeding in this target. We knew the audience figures from Audience Research, and they were satisfactory, the Appreciation Indices as they were called in those days were good enough, but we wanted to know whether the material was actually getting through. So some time in 19... late 1951 I suppose it was, we set up - it's really unique in the BBC's history - an Intelligibility Enquiry. And a very distinguished Professor of Educational Psychology in London, Philip <sup>VERNON</sup>Turner, and his wife, were charged with conducting this enquiry, and groups of listeners, chosen, you know, in the best possible Gallup Poll kind of way, were brought into Broadcasting House and topics were played back to them,

and all sorts of tests were conducted, to see how much in fact they had taken in. Well in the pioneer bit of research, which in fact formed the basis of a paper to the British Association in 1952... and the results of this research - well in a way they were rather depressing, but certainly in my case they... they did me really a lot of good and forced me - and other producers - to think more realistically, because the... (this is only the main summary of a long report)...but the main conclusion was that if you took a cross-section of the population in terms of education, social scale and all the rest of it, with simple material such as TOPIC was designed to be, in the course of a four to a four and three-quarter minute talk, you could expect them to take in on average - on average - about 28% of the material on offer, so to say. In other words about a quarter of the ideas and information would be taken in by the average listener. Well, that was a pretty salutary lesson; and I think has had a good deal of imperceptible influence on broadcasting ever since, but nobody has dared to repeat this experiment. And actually I think be very interesting if another such experiment were undertaken today, although I doubt if the average score would be any higher. But it impressed on me in particular that broadcasting is probably better at attitude formation than it is in the actual communication of information. It's a rather crude instrument compared with the printed word say.

If you want to communicate information, strictly speaking, it's a very brilliant instrument if you're trying to convey attitudes, impressions. But it would be I think very valuable if another such experiment were done today.

GS: Perhaps with the television news broadcasts?

SB: Yes, yes, certainly. To analyse, if possible, what difference - if any - pictures make, one way or the other. Yes.

GS: Now you joined the BBC in 1946, and that meant you were working at Broadcasting House, a place which to this day still has a certain aura about it. What was it like then?

SB: Well, it certainly was then, and it really still is, the heart of the empire, so to say. All the other places remain outposts really, however important they are; the beating heart, so to say, is still here in Broadcasting House, and in theory at least on the third floor of Broadcasting House.

Well, I think it's myself one of the best examples of 1930s architecture in London. It's a pity they've destroyed what used to be a rather pleasant sky-line coming up Regent Street by building the transverse section of the new extension too high. But it's an impressive building as you say, and it's built like a fortress really, isn't it? I mean it almost gives the impression it's there to keep people out rather than to encourage them to come in. I think this was very much part, if you like, of Reith temperament perhaps. It's also a kind of inward-looking building; it's claustrophobic in a way, isn't it? It's a kind of... sort of temple. Certainly when you came to it for the first time - as I did straight out of the Army - you know, you were... it was all pretty impressive. And remember that in those days, the structure of the BBC was just as formal as it is today, and control even stricter. But it was much more intimate. The staff was much smaller and the extension hadn't been built. And therefore it was possible to know - well, pretty well everybody; certainly, you know, in your own department and beyond, in a way that is nowadays much more difficult.

No more than half a dozen people in 1946 - out of a talks staff of perhaps two dozen - were concerned with anything approaching Current Affairs, or Current Affairs in the contemporary sense of the word. One of course was the formidable Grace Wyndham Goldie; Archie Gordon, now the Marquis of Aberdeen; Charles Curran; Peter <sup>LASLETT</sup> ~~Lazelet~~, who went off to become a don at Cambridge. Myself. Not many more; one or two more; one or two other women: Anna <sup>KALLIN</sup> ~~Call-eeen~~ (ph.) I remember. So you had this very intimate atmosphere, if you like, within a rather formal setting. And, well, I've mentioned the scrutiny business, but that simply was part of our lives.

And there it was, everything we did had to be scrutinized by a superior. And well that from the start really, some of us at least, girded against. And I'll recall later perhaps, Charles Curran in particular.

But, there were relaxations. In those days there was a marvellous coffee-shop just outside Broadcasting House, on the corner of - is it Mortimer Street? - by the traffic lights: Yarners Coffee Shop. And it was absolutely taken for granted, and thought to be entirely proper, that talks producers should repair there at half-past ten, quarter to eleven, and sit for an hour, discussing programmes, meeting contributors, thrashing over ideas, and very agreeable that was.

Then, over the road in the... what had been the Langham Hotel, bombed during the War, the only bit of it left - now the BBC Club - had been the Grill Room - well, it still was the Langham Grill. And that remained open. It had a cocktail bar where the Club Bar now is, and beyond that, a very agreeable grill. Well, when we could afford it, you know, young producers would repair to the Langham Grill... or, if, legitimately, the BBC was paying. Because it wasn't easy to live on the starting salary in 1946 for a young producer was £690 a year. Well - even multiplied by four to account for inflation or whatever the figure is - it was still, you know, it wasn't generous. And so, you know, we had to keep a sharp eye on our pennies.

The general... the general feeling of the place, I certainly, you know, found it attractive. It was very public school; very Oxbridge. People dressed quite formally. There was a fair sprinkling of formidable lady producers, most of whom had come in during the War. I don't think many of them had been there before the War.

Inside the place, you didn't get a drink inside Broadcasting House in those days, except - the one exception was in the Duty Room, and the Duty Room was where you went after a broadcast, to deliver your programme- as-broadcast

script, which had to be absolutely exact. Remember most broadcasting - almost all broadcasting was live, and you had to copy down every conceivable little change that might be made in the course of transmission, on to the P-as-B, and then deliver that to the Duty Room, after the programme; partly of course you had to do this P-as-B for The Listener as well. And in the Duty Room, if your contributor was sufficiently distinguished - not if he was a humble journalist or something like that - but if he was sufficiently distinguished, he'd be asked to sign the Visitors' Book, if he hadn't signed it at some previous occasion. And the cabinet in the Duty Room might be opened and a glass of whisky or a gin and tonic offered to the guest, and thereby also of course they had to offer it to you. So with a bit of luck, you might get a drink that way.

The Visitors' Book: well, I ...I've no idea where it is. I should have asked. I expect it's over in Registry somewhere. It went on, I should think into the early Fifties, mid-Fifties. And then there was the Drawing Room. Well that's still there - it's still in the building of course - but it was very much more restricted. That again was really only for top people. It was furnished in rather sort of faded war-time Liberty style - allegedly, they all said, by the Dowager ~~Duchess...Marquis...~~ Marchioness of Reading, who'd been a governor; this had been her main contribution during her period - so they said - as a governor.

So, it was a combination, George, of high formality in structure and control, but a good deal of intimacy and friendly gossip and chatter and what you will, you know, at the working level.

GS: Quite wrong to think of Broadcasting House immediately after the War then as stuffy and excessively hierarchical?

SB: Well, I mean, I think it certainly was stuffy in a sense. I

mean you know, you didn't go along corridors and find bottles outside doors as you're inclined to find today. Nothing remotely like, say, the present canteen structure. I mean people mostly went out for... There was a little lounge. You certainly treated your superior; I don't... you didn't, I think, get on Christian name terms as rapidly - anything like as rapidly - as of course people do today. On the other hand, one didn't call people 'Sir' unless they were very senior. You tended to use their titles a bit; you'd say - Well, C.T., I can't agree about that, you know. You wouldn't say - Well, George, I think that's a... load of nonsense. You'd say - Well, C.T., or D.S.B., or whatever that title might be. There was more discipline, certainly, as we shall see from <sup>some</sup> subsequent material. More discipline, but I wouldn't have said unhealthily so really, and perhaps, you know, they could do with a little more discipline today really.

GS: Just one other point at this stage, would you say in those days, coming to do a broadcast at Broadcasting House was still something of a privilege, something of an occasion?

SB: Oh yes. Oh absolutely. Absolutely. There was no difficult really - Oh well into the Sixties - in getting people to come and do things live. And, increasingly of course, again one will know this later, one began to make it much more socially agreeable for people to come. And they liked coming anyway. But, you know, with the introduction of programme buffets and, you know, this kind of thing which came with... really with the programme, the series AT HOME AND ABROAD. And, you know, sending cards to people and so on. Yes, I mean all that <sup>be-</sup> came much more congenial if you like. Yes, perhaps in these early days it would be wrong to describe the atmosphere as congenial. But people liked coming because it was something to talk about, you know.

GS: Now of course you came to the BBC and worked in the Talks Department to begin with and became associated - certainly in my mind - wholly

with News and Current Affairs. Was that the total... (Sorry, I'll do that again)  
Did you ever do anything but Talks and Current Affairs?

SB: Yes. Even with, say, TOPIC... although TOPIC FOR TONIGHT was five nights a week, I didn't do five nights a week, because that would have, you know, totally destroyed one's social life, so I normally did about two nights a week. Another excellent current affairs producer who'd been a journalist, - Betty Rowley - she'd come from the DAILY MIRROR, I think; I've a feeling she died recently - she normally did two nights a week, and any of a number might do the fifth. Oh yes. No certainly our output; I mean I honestly do think our output in those days was probably higher than the average producer's today. And one would normally do at least another programme of a more general kind, at the <sup>same</sup> time as keeping this running series going. I mean I did a great series in 1948 on the Tenth Anniversary of Munich for example: a series of about six. You know, substantial talks in the Third Programme. And, you know, of course at the same time discussion programmes were beginning to take off. They were still rather inhibited by contemporary standards, but - and there weren't anything like as many of them - but every now and again one would mount a, you know, a fairly substantial discussion. I remember one on... that I did on the re-emergence of Germany. So - Oh yes, all the time one was involved in other things. One was encouraged to be involved in other things. And I think in my case... I mean, when you look back on a career you can see a few water-sheds. Well, certainly in the case of Current Affairs, TOPIC FOR TONIGHT was the first. But in my own personal progression I think really my break-through, if that's the right phrase, was with a programme in 1952 which is to this very day the only substantial programme that's ever been done by the BBC in the talks sphere, with Charles Chaplin. May I tell you about this, George?

GS: Most unexpected.

SB: Many people - well, to this day - will remember his last great film,

LIMELIGHT. One still hears the theme of it... the theme tune from LIMELIGHT is frequently played. Well, Kenneth Adam was encouraging Current Affairs people like myself to offer special programmes of one kind or another, with a topical edge to them, in the Light Programme, and of course there was enormous interest in Charlie Chaplin at the time - not simply because of his past work - but because he'd come under suspicion in America, in the States, you remember, of Communistic leadings - there'd been a bit of a witch-hunt - and Charlie had been one of the victims. And there was a great deal of sympathy for him on this side of the Atlantic, and now, so it seemed, he was coming home. The premiere of LIMELIGHT was to be in London. So I got Kenneth Adam's re-agreement to have a go and see if we could pin him down before the First Night, and I pursued him - he was still in the States when I started off - by letter and cable and everything else; tried to pin him down to agreeing to do a special programme. No response. I don't know that we even got a reply. However, when he got to this country, he was staying at the Savoy, and I bearded him there, and - to my delight - he said - Yes, he would. He wasn't enthusiastic about it, but anyway he said he would. And anyway, he'd done nothing for the BBC of any magnitude anyway, before; there was an enormous amount of public interest in his films of course and now in this political situation. So, it became a great event, the front cover of the RADIO TIMES was given over to it, and we lined up the most prestigious team of - well, to call them interviewers would be quite wrong - we didn't think the conventional interviewer was really quite the right thing. So the team that were to meet Charlie Chaplin and discuss things with him was composed of John Mills, Michael Balcon, - Sir Michael as he became, the great film producer, - Dilys Powell, the most distinguished film critic of the time - and perhaps still is, and the film critic, now dead, Paul Holt. Now we scratched our heads mightily over who should be chairman for this great occasion, and it really is part of the reason why Robert Mackenzie has had such amazing and great survival value in broadcasting, because thrashing around with all... over all the available names - remember that Bob was quite young at the time, but he'd already made his mark -

we decided, although of course films was quite outside his normal territory, we decided to ask Robert Mackenzie to take the chair.

So, then came the great night. And there was quite a ... of course this was to be live I need hardly say; there was quite a little crowd outside Broadcasting House waiting for Charlie to arrive, and the BBC was going to do this in pretty splendid style by those days; a dinner was laid; drinks, dinner, and so on and so forth. Kenneth Adam took the chair. Harman Grisewood was there, representing top management. Myself of course and the contributors. And Charlie arrived - he really wasn't in a giving mood when he arrived; he didn't seem to be looking forward to it particularly. He wasn't talking all that much, and drank very little. So the dinner was dragging, frankly, and I was a bit worried, as the producer. And then came one of those sort of pauses in the conversation, when somebody has to make a sort of effort to fill the gap. And Kenneth Adam who was in the chair as Controller of the Light Programme, said at lunchtime that day he'd found himself sitting next to the Dean of Canterbury. Well, if you remember the Dean of Canterbury at the time was the so-called Red Dean, Dr. Hewlett Johnson, and that Charlie himself had been under fire for supposed Communist leadings in the States, this was hardly, you know, a happy choice of subject, and so there was another terrible gap after Kenneth finished, and he didn't I think realise what he'd done. Anyway, there was an awful gap and the rest of us sat back and thought Oh God, Charlie won't like that. And well, this further gap was then filled by Charlie turning to Adam and saying -- Well, Mr. Adam, I suppose that's what you'd call a Red Letter Day, isn't it? Well, you know, it was such a perfect riposte that it broke the tension and everybody laughed, except poor old Kenneth Adam of course. And curiously, that seemed to break the tension and from that moment onwards, everything began to flow much more happily. Well, poor old Kenneth, one felt sorry for him about it, but it did the trick so far as breaking the tension was concerned. And then off we went up to the studio, and in those days - remember it was live - you know, you went quite a while ahead, and did balance and did a little dummy run and all the rest of it. So off we went to the studio, which was the large - the then large studio on the Sixth Floor - 6A I think it was

called - which happily had a piano. So, seeing the piano, Charlie went over to the piano and began playing the theme tune from LIMELIGHT, now so well-known to us all, then quite fresh of course. And it is an enchanting tune and we all enjoyed him playing it. In the middle of this, or rather when he'd finished, he suddenly said - I think we ought to have some champagne. Well, it was perhaps no more than a quarter of an hour to go to time, and I wasn't quite certain whether the BBC actually had any champagne. So I scurried down to the room where we'd had dinner, where they were still clearing away, fortunately, found the person in charge of drink and said - Look, Chaplin wants some champagne. Have you got any? Oh yes, they said, Oh yes. So up came the champagne - of course it wasn't properly chilled, but never mind. And we all drank champagne, and that completed, if you like, the transformation of the situation. In we went to the programme. It wasn't a brilliant programme. Chaplin - I re-read the script - had some interesting things to say, but curiously again John Mills and Balcon and co. were rather muted; they really were a bit in awe of the little man, and they didn't take off quite as one would have hoped. Anyway, it was reckoned to be, subsequently, a great success, and after the programme down we went to the Drawing Room which I've mentioned earlier - this rather privileged place where distinguished people could be entertained. We came off the air at ten, and I'm quite certain that Charles didn't leave the building till after midnight, and he held us entranced with one reminiscence after another. Certainly I think in, you know, all my 25, 27 years in broadcasting, looking back, I don't think there's been a more memorable occasion for me. And certainly I don't think Chaplin has ever done such a programme for anybody else ever. So that, I hope, I'm sure, is securely somewhere in the Archives.

GS:                   And did that programme lead on for you to similar programmes in the future?

SB:                   Well, it gave me a... it gave me a great boost inside the

place, yes. And so people began enquiring more about me, and this I think probably explains the reason why the next year I had my first spell in television, because the television people had been after Chaplin as well and failed to get him. Perhaps, they thought that I was the sort of chap with the kind of temperament that would fit into the early days of television.

GS: Well now, let's look at television in those days, Steve. 1953 you went there for your first spell. That was just before ITN came on the air, and I've always held, and I don't think you would disagree, that the advent of ITN was itself instrumental in radically changing BBC television's treatment of news.

SB: Certainly, certainly.

GS: Now what was it like before ITN, when you first went there, in terms of the actual news coverage?

SB: Well, remember that - I think in 1953 - there was no news at all. There may have been - I haven't checked on this - there may have been the early television newsreels, but certainly nothing that passed as news in the formal, journalistic sense. That... I think the first attempts at that were next in 1954.

GS: No bulletins?

SB: No bulletins, no. Oh they used to repeat a sound.. a sound-only bulletin - in sound only of course - at the end of television transmissions. But there was certainly no television news department in 1953. And I went, I was ... or rather I went on a training course first, and then to what was then the television talks department, which was headed by a remarkable

woman I don't think myself has ever perhaps received the recognition she deserves, Mary Adams. She was the Head of Television Talks, and of course there were formidable producers around: Grace Wyndham Goldie by that time of course was in television; Andrew Miller Jones; Norman Swallow, still a top-flight producer with Granada; Paul Johnstone; and it was about this time that the first of the Young Turks were beginning to arrive: people like Michael Peacock; Geoffrey Johnson Smith - now of course an MP; James Bredin, who's now the Controller of Border Television. These young people were coming in - nearly all I think, from memory, on contract, during the course of 1953. Donald Baverstock was much later, let it be noted.

GS: What was television talks?

SB: Well, there wasn't all that much by way of Current Affairs. The main series were IN THE NEWS, which was fortnightly, and PRESS CONFERENCE which was fortnightly. They used to alternate. But - Oh there were the beginnings of, you know, sort of documentary programming. Was IT'S YOUR LINE? around at the time? I think it probably was. That kind of show. Paul Johnstone did a lot of archaeology, natural history, this kind of thing.

GS: ANIMAL, VEGETABLE AND MINERAL.

SB: That's right, that's right. But of course the Talks output wasn't large. I mean most of it was obviously Light Entertainment and variety and drama and so on. But it was a very heady atmosphere. I do remember this very well. I.e. we were all up at Alexandra Palace - this was a year in which the first move to Lime Grove took place. Then News of course came in to Alexandra Palace. It was a very heady atmosphere, because remember, almost everything was being done for the first time. Almost everything was an

experiment, so there was immense interest and curiosity on the part of the viewing public, and indeed even the non-viewing public. One felt it was all terribly important, as indeed I suppose in a way it was. And this made it easier in a way. It was easy to get people to do it, because most of them had never done it, and wanted to try their hand at it, etcetera. There was a strong - I must say this - there was a strong anti-BH and anti-radio feeling. They all felt that radio was pretty well a dead duck, if not at the time, you know, would rapidly become one. No future in sound. And it was pretty meretricious some of this. It was almost, you know, sort of 'see the pictures, never mind the sound'. All the prestige really attached to one's skill in visual manipulation if you like. Not as much concern for content as there should have been, and of course subsequently developed. Cecil McGivern was the presiding genius as Controller. A great man, McGivern, to my mind: one of the very few Controllers I've known in the BBC who's really understood producers, knows what makes them tick. And conversely, won their respect and even their affection. He stood no nonsense; it wasn't that he was soft. But he understood them: he'd been one himself, of course. But that doesn't always follow, that an ex-producer makes a... you know, a good Controller. But in McGivern's case, it certainly was so. Although he too had this rigid, rather biassed, anti-radio, anti-BH attitude, and I don't think the people at BH ever really quite understood him.

GS: Did the people at BH at that time understand television anyway?

SB: No. No. I don't think they did. I suppose by this time they were getting frightened of it. But, no. I think... I wouldn't include Jacob - Jacob was by that time Director General. I wouldn't...no... They were fighting a kind of a rearguard action, or beginning so to do, and basically they were rather frightened and didn't want to understand, perhaps.

GS: Do you think they regarded television as the junior wing of the Corporation?

SB: Oh yes, they still did. Oh yes, certainly. Certainly they did. But I had... I had a very good run during my period there, which I think partly stemmed from this Charlie Chaplin programme. I had acquired a sort of... bit of a reputation if you like as somebody who could persuade people to do things that other people hadn't. And I certainly did have a good run, mainly in the PRESS CONFERENCE series. And in the course of about three to four months I was able to give first television broadcasts to people like Aneurin Bevan, Mr. Nehru, Dag Hammarskoeld, who was on his way to become Secretary-General of the United Nations. They were all 'firsts' in television for each of them I think. And also Adlai Stephenson, although in his case it was a first in this country, but not his first ever. And these were all tremendous experiences. And to this day I think of all the Liberal statesmen, or politicians, I met, and partly because of my own in... personal inclinations, you know I've known a lot of Liberal politicians. I think Adlai Stephenson stands out in my memory as quite the most distinguished and brilliant and the sort of person, you know, that had he been an English politician - and indeed I think this was said of him - that he'd have been much more successful in Britain than in the United States. Had he been a British politician, it might have transformed Liberal politics in this country.

As it happens, I was to meet Adlai Stephenson once more and, tragically, on the day of his death, which if you recall took place in London in 1965. And he'd come to Broadcasting House to record another - and as it transpired - his very final interview for the TEN O'CLOCK programme as it then was - and we shall come to that later. And, having recorded this interview, he left Broadcasting House, and within half an hour collapsed on his way, I think, to the American Embassy and died. So it was very sad. A great loss.

GS: When you went to television for the first time in 1953, had any of what we would now call the Current Affairs magazine programmes started - like TONIGHT, PANORAMA, any of those?

SB: Well, certainly TONIGHT hadn't. PANORAMA began just at the end of my first spell, and I was there for the very first night, and was involved in the preparation of the programme. It first went on the air on the 11th of November 1953 and the RADIO TIMES billing runs: that it was to be a fortnightly magazine, reflecting the contemporary scene. And as this was interpreted, it was to choose its subjects from across the board. I mean there might be one of current affairs nature; there'd be another concerned perhaps with the Arts; a third perhaps with an interesting personality. It was to cover the whole water-front so to say, because at the time there was nothing else doing that. So it was only partially a Current Affairs programme in the sense we now use the phrase, but there was a current affairs ingredient. And in this early, very early, planning stage, I was involved in that. The editor was Andrew Miller Jones, or if he wasn't called Editor, the chap in charge was Andrew Miller Jones. And Andrew was very concerned that it should have a journalistic feel to it, that it should be topical to the extent that you can be once a fortnight. And he was very keen that the first presenter should be a Fleet Street type. Now Andrew himself wasn't a journalist, and perhaps didn't quite understand some of the hazards of Fleet Street. And despite what a number of us said - and I certainly did - he became very convinced that a man called Patrick Murphy, who was then the news editor of the DAILY MAIL and certainly well enough known in Fleet Street as a tough journalist, that Murphy was the right man to present PANORAMA. Well, I fear it was a disastrous choice, and came the first day, Murphy I think must have been drinking pretty heavily before he arrived, and of course in those days one used to rehearse for about three hours before transmission; he was paralysed with fear; he'd never done any television at all. And I think it's the most disastrous single production with which I've ever been associated. Literally everything went wrong. And Murphy missed every conceivable cue; never in the right place at the right time and all the rest of it. It was a total shambles. Others involved in the programme... certainly Lionel Hale was, and I'm pretty certain Marghanita Laski was. Can't remember what the Current Affairs subject was,

although I was looking after it. But the overall memory is of this terrible shambles. Well, this is the sort of thing that McGivern's reputation to some extent rested on. He used to stay most nights in his office viewing and making immediate comment after a programme to the people concerned. His comment to us - and it's the only time I've ever know this happen in the BBC - his comment to us - well he didn't make any comment. What he did was to give orders: that none of us were to be admitted to the Hospitality Room after the programme and the sooner we all cleared off the better. Well, you know, in BBC terms that's a pretty dire punishment, and goodness knows, we all needed a drink, although we didn't deserve it. And so we all had to repair to the pub. at the end of Lime Grove and drown our sorrows there. But it was absolutely the right response for... He didn't say a word. Not that night. He had plenty to say later. And of course the unfortunate Murphy was fired immediately; it must be shortest run in television presentation. And Robertson - what's his first name?

GS: Max Robertson.

SB: Max Robertson. Max Robertson took over for the second programme and certainly it ran for some months thereafter, and of course it was quite a deal later, quite a deal later, before Richard Dimpleby arrived on the scene, when it became totally concerned with Current Affairs and not, as it had been up until that time, perhaps 30% current affairs and the rest general interest.

GS: But even when Richard Dimpleby came it was some... it was even years before it became all Current Affairs.

SB: Was it?

GS: Mm. It still remained for some years - even when I joined it in '57, for the two and a half years I was it, we were still doing items about the Arts, and little social....

SB: Yes. Oh well the tradition... yes.

GS: Was Michael <sup>BARSLEY</sup>~~Bardsley~~ associated with the programme when you were there?

SB: Yea, I can't remember whether he was there absolutely at the start. I think he probably was. He was not on the staff, I think. There were one or two contract people of which I suspect he was - yes I think he was one. Andrew Miller Jones I think remained in charge - certainly for the first year, and may have handed straight on to Peacock when he took over.

GS: And was it wholly a studio programme at that time? Or were there film inserts?

SB: Ah, well certainly at the very beginning it... yes, I think it was... I have looked at some of the early p-as-bs and - yes, I think it was all studio based.

GS: Live studio, with every potential for disaster.

SB: Yes, pretty well. Yes.

GS: We heard of the development of TOPIC FOR TONIGHT as a new departure in radio. Now I met you doing TOPIC and also doing interviews for AT HOME AND ABROAD. Now how did that get off the ground, that programme - a very important one indeed?

SB: Well, this was a kind of another watershed for me, because

I suppose I could have stayed on in television talks. But at the end of 1953 - or towards the end - partly <sup>I think</sup> the impetus of TOPIC FOR TONIGHT accounted for this; you know the senior management, and Sir Ian Jacob as Director-General was also behind it - I felt that perhaps the Home Service ought to venture a little further into, if you like, radio journalism than it had done so far. And there ought to be a regular topical series devoted to Current Affairs. Well, I was offered this job at the end of 1953 and - I don't think I hesitated at all, although I was, you know, I was enjoying my spell in television - but, and even in the BBC one has to take account of these things, they offered me more money to return to Broadcasting House and assume responsibility for a new series, and they also for the first time gave me a modest title: Topical Talks Organiser, and I was then charged with the task of bringing to the Home Service a larger element of topicality in a regular series which we entitled AT HOME AND ABROAD. Well this came early in 1954 - twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays - and well, I was very fortunate in some of the producers that were in what was called the Topical Talks Unit - some of them specially recruited; but they included people like Jack Ashley, now of course MP; Robin Day; Kenneth Lamb - who became Director of Public Affairs; Sandy Hope, who retired recently as Chief Assistant in News and Current Affairs; Toby Clark, Peggy Barker. A very good team and we were charged really with producing a kind of top people's programme in Current Affairs. It was to maintain the traditional quality of Home Service comment, but to combine that with immediacy - or greater immediacy. Well, it was an exciting challenge, and we got off to a pretty good start, pretty early on. The need was obviously there and top people in politics and public affairs generally began to respond very readily. Visiting Prime Ministers to London - I remember the Prime Minister of France, Pakistan, India - all readily came. Most of our own politicians. People from wider spheres like Christian Dior and Danny Kaye and many others were all happy to come - and again, remember that most of this was live broadcasting - and I think one of the significant things, George, was, that it was in AT HOME AND ABROAD that the interview

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GS: When we got to AT HOME AND ABROAD, as I remember it, interviews would last eight, nine, maybe ten minutes, exceptionally. And for my money, retrospectively, I would say the interviews on that programme -- certainly at their best -- were the best interviews I've ever heard in broadcasting. They were more... much more rigorous. They were certainly conducted by specialist journalists for the most part.

SB: (over) Yes. Well, it's nice of you to say that, George, and I agree with you actually. I think the top three interviewers at the time -- Robert Madenzie, William Clark, and Andrew Shonfield. I don't know whether you'd... Others of course were... Did you do interviews for AT HOME AND ABROAD?

GS: Yes, I did. Later on.

SB: Yes. They were all superb. And we began to... we began to get into the scoop business for the first time really -- well I suppose you would say things like, say, the Charlie Chaplin thing that I mentioned was a scoop. But in... in the pure field of politics and current affairs, we .. with AT HOME AND ABROAD we began to get into the scoop business. The BBC on the whole hadn't been in the business of getting scoops really before, and certainly not in News Division. Television had done a bit of it, but AT HOME AND ABROAD certainly did achieve a number of rather remarkable ones, and the thing that first brought the programme to world attention was in July 1954, when -- and again I think this may be the only one he's ever done for the BBC, or indeed for the West -- when Chou En Lai, who was then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of China -- gave an exclusive interview to TEN O'CLOCK in Geneva...

GS: To AT HOME AND ABROAD?

SB: I beg your pardon, yes yes. May I correct that? Thank you, George. Yes, ... to the AT HOME AND ABROAD programme, at the conclusion of the Geneva conference on Indo-China. Now one of the most remarkable aspects

of this interview was that it was conducted, not by Bob Mackenzie or William Clark or Andrew Shonfield or one of the regulars, but by the General Secretary of the Labour Party, Morgan Phillips. And what lay behind this was that when we approached Chou En Lai, when he finally gave consent, that consent was conditional on the interview being conducted by Morgan Phillips, whom he'd met on a Labour Party delegation to China, and had evidently got to like. Well, I mean this was a quite exceptional situation which was discussed at the highest levels in the BBC, but there it was, in order to get it - this very remarkable interview - the concession was made, and Morgan Phillips, who was a regular broadcaster, and a good broadcaster, agreed to do it. So off they went to Geneva, and the interview was recorded on the day the Conference finished. It wasn't transmitted by line; it was flown back and transmitted here the following day. As it happened, Chou En Lai speaks quite good English, but it's English with a strong American accent - he'd spent some time in America early in his life - and he didn't want this to be revealed, or to become evident. And so it had to be conducted through an interviewer... through an interpreter, and this was one of the first times, I should guess, where you know, we learnt the tricks of how to do this. And to fade the voice of the respondent and bring up the interpreter when we got the tape back, which was one reason of course for not doing it live - or the main reason for not doing it live. Well, I didn't actually go for this occasion. A senior producer called Toby Clark went, and it was a pretty marvellous occasion by all accounts. Chinese champagne was served after the event. And I did say to Toby later what a pity... because Toby had said how Chou had had plenty of notes, why he hadn't brought these notes back with him, because, you know, they would have been fascinating historical material. Anyway, it went out the following night and created a great impression, widely reproduced in the press and so on. And it was about this time I suppose, and subsequently, that we all became much more aware of the... well, of the value, if you like, of broadcast material that was picked up by the

Press, was given wider circulation which was said to be good for the programme - certainly good for our morale - and ... in other words, radio - and television of course - making news... making news in its own right. Which reminds me that perhaps I'd better just recall that News Division - and Tahu Hole was still the Editor - while they'd softened a little in their attitude towards the Current Affairs people, relations with News was still pretty formal during this period, and - well, I don't think we actually tried this time, you know, to gain access to the newsroom for purposes of checking up and all the rest of it. I don't <sup>we</sup> even tried, and certainly it wasn't offered. So relations were still, you know, on a very formal plane.

GS: What was the attitude of senior management, because here you have, again, what we were talking about before: a live programme for the most part; no possibility of referring upwards at the time of the broadcast.

SB: No.

GS: You were <sup>entering</sup> also/the field, interviewing people who potentially are controversial figures, and being interviewed by some very vigorous journalists.

SB: Yes. Well, I can't remember precisely when the scrutiny system finally died the death, but certainly there was no question of scrutiny with AT HOME AND ABROAD. Every morning, our little group of producers - perhaps at most ten of us (and we also had to look after TOPIC FOR TONIGHT and other things) - we met every morning, and after that morning meeting, I would go on to see the then Chief Assistant to the Controller of Talks, John Green; I would tell him what our considered judgment was - not si... not only for AT HOME AND ABROAD, but across the range of programmes for which we were responsible. I'd discuss it with him. He'd make points. But he was, without doubt, you know, liberally minded, and certainly not oppressive. And say... I mean while, say, with a thing like the Choe En Lai interview and the use of Morgan Phillips, this would certainly go...

probably went to the Director-General. The Director-General himself, Ian Jacob, was... I shall hope to say later... took a great interest and was a very positive force in the liberalisation of Current Affairs - and News, subsequently - and was helpful in every respect. Indeed, it's jumping the gun just a bit, but to illustrate that, perhaps I could recall the occasion - and I think it may be the only occasion again in BBC history - where a Director-General has actually appeared live in the studio with his opponent in the course of an industrial dispute.

Now the circumstances of this were... arose in 1956 and the BBC was in dispute with the Musicians' Union, over the remuneration for casual musicians. Well, I remember myself going, or asking if I could see the Director-General, and he was a very approachable man - one of his strong points - and Jacob saw me, and I said that we felt, as a group, that this was an issue that ought to be examined on the air, and clearly the only person who could answer with the utmost authority for the BBC was he, the Director-General, and was it possible that he would agree to broadcast a discussion with ~~Hardy~~ <sup>HARDIE</sup> Ratcliffe, the Secretary of the Musicians' Union, in AT HOME AND ABROAD. Well, as in a good many other cases I recall, Sir Ian took a courageous and liberal decision, and he said Yes, he would, but he felt it would be better (this was the only thing he asked) if, instead of taking part in the discussion, there were two interviews: one with him; one with ~~Hardy~~ <sup>HARDIE</sup> Ratcliffe, in the same programme, live. Well this duly took place, on the 17th of February 1956, and ~~Hardy~~ <sup>HARDIE</sup> Ratcliffe batted first, Bob Mackenzie interviewed both of them, ~~Hardy~~ <sup>HARDIE</sup> Ratcliffe batted first, and the Director-General follows. I've examined the scripts and it's pretty forthright stuff and Mackenzie certainly didn't pull his punches when it came to the Director-General. But the interesting thing is that - I suppose that was indicative of BBC industrial relations at the time - and may still be for all I know, though perhaps it's better now. But Hardy Ratcliffe had never met the Director-General. And Ratcliffe was undoubtedly greatly flattered by the presence of the D.G. and his willingness to take part in the programme with him. After the programme, instead of joining with the rest of us for a nightcap, they went off together to Jacob's room. What took

place there I can't tell you, but what I can say is that the dispute was settled within 48 hours, and I suspect that get-together in the Director-General's room explained the speedy conclusion. Well that was the kind of liberal support, if you like, that Jacob was prepared to give personally, you know, to the development of lively programming, and I was deeply grateful to him.

GS: You say Bob Mackenzie conducted those interviews without pulling any punches, and indeed that was true as I remember it of the programme as a whole. Although of course the interviews were always conducted civilly.

SB: Yes. Yes.

GS: Nevertheless, I would have guessed that there were times when the interviewing would bring the BBC into conflict with authorities. On those occasions, did Jacob give you his backing?

SB: Yes, I can quote you a significant example of that. But may I first agree with you that courtesy, certainly... we would not have countenanced discourtesy of any kind, however probing and difficult the situation might be, discourtesy we would have not tolerated. And personally I think it's sometimes tolerated a little too readily in contemporary broadcasting.

Well, if I may give you the example then... another example of Jacob standing up for Current Affairs, this occurred quite early on in the life of AT HOME AND ABROAD, in October 1954. And what occasioned it was the first interview that Archbishop Makarios gave in this country on his first visit, as the Cyprus situation was beginning to take, you know, a very tense form. Anyway, we felt, and I must have had the agreement of John Green to this, we felt that it was important that the British public should hear Makarios, and so I went round personally, as it happens, to a hotel in Oxford Street and - this is a bit beside the point - this hotel is a converted block of flats...

GS: The Stratford, I think.

SB: The Stratford, actually, yes. So I was shown up to the Archbishop's room, which proved to be what had clearly been a bed-sitter, with a recess, an alcove, for the bed, in the block of flats. Well, the door was opened, and there was the Archbishop, standing up, in formal dress, with a couple of aides. And I walked over to him, and as I did so, my vision took in the bedroom recess - or the recess for the bed. Well, to my amazement, I saw a youngish woman, half-reclining. Well, obviously I made no comment, introduced myself. I don't think they did introduce the girl. Anyway, I conducted my business, and he agreed to appear. So I was curious about the girl, and - as I was going out - I said - I don't suppose you're leaving now; perhaps you'd like a drink? And she said - Yes. She would. So we went off, had our drink, and it was a woman called Manuela Sykes, who subsequently achieved modest.. she never got into the House of Commons, but she fought one or two fairly prominent by-elections and elections, first with the Liberals and then for Labour. And she was one of these (English women are rather prone to this) who attach themselves to what they think is a good cause and remain devoted to it thereafter. And she thrust herself on the Makarios delegation and still is, I think, Secretary of the Anglo-Cypriot Association, or some such body. Well that was quite by the way.

Anyway, the next night Makarios broadcast - William Clark did him. And Makarios's English was just good enough to carry it. But it was some days later, some days later, that - remember Winston was Prime Minister still - that Churchill himself wrote to Sir Alexander Cadogan, as Chairman, and - I find it mildly flattering, because in this

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BONARJEE:

.....mildly flattering because in this letter he actually

referred to me by name and ex...and I've seen the files and I quote now 'A Mr. Bonarjee', the Prime Minister wrote, 'a Mr. Bonarjee of the BBC Home and Abroad programme telephoned to the Colonial Office to say that he had invited the Archbishop to broadcast.'

He went on a little later ' I do not consider that the BBC should be used for the publicising of people (Paper rustle)... people hostile to this country and the gratuitous advertisement of their cause'- end of the quotes. Well, I suppose, I dare say this may have been one

of the first cases of its kind, you know, in the BBC's records and of course Northern Ireland has produced more cases recently, where a Prime Minister actually challenges

the choice of a contributor by the BBC. But, and this is one of the many reasons why

I greatly respected Sir Ian Jacob's judgment, Sir Alexander ~~Cadogan~~<sup>CADOGAN</sup> passed the letter on to Sir Ian. Sir Ian summoned me, now to him it was quite important, because he didn't

summon the Director of Sound Broadcasting and Controller of Talks or whoever, he summoned the person personally responsible, which was me. He summoned me and he said, he showed me

the letter and he said - Bonarjee what's your answer to that. Well, I speak from memory

of course, but I'm sure I said, Director General, Archbishop Makarios without a doubt is the spiritual leader of his people, this was at the time when <sup>(partition)</sup> ENOSIS was gathering,

gathering pace and I said he's, he's also politically important on the island, this is his first visit, or was his first visit to London and we thought, and I sought the

judgment of my superiors at the time and that it was important that the British people should judge the Archbishop for themselves, and so we put him on. And certainly the

context of the broadcast which I've reexamined, you know, was in no way inflammatory. And

I said to Sir Ian, you know this is what we feel in Current Affairs, what responsible

broadcasting is about, leaving the British public to make their own judgments. Well he said, well I accept that and and leave it to me and several days later he summoned me

again and he had written a draft obviously for Sir Ian <sup>(Alec) CADOGAN</sup> ~~Cadogan~~ who replied to Churchill and he showed me <sup>CADOGAN'S</sup> ~~Cadogan's~~ reply which I've re-examined in the files and it was a very

firm assertion of the BBC's responsibility in issues of this kind, situations of this kind and certainly totally rejected the Prime Minister's implication that somehow the

BBC was publicising the enemies of this country and giving them gratuitous advertisement and that this was quite wrong. Well that was one of many occasions on which I had

personal reason to deeply respect the Director General's judgment and remember that

Jacob had actually been on Churchill's staff, he'd been his assistant Military Secretary

BONARJEE/CONT:

.....and Churchill may well have thought, may well have

thought that Jacob, you know, would respond to whatever he might have cared to say.

SCOTT:

To be invited to do an interview on At Home and Abroad was certainly as far as I was concerned something very much to be privileged and at the same time something to look forward to as a social occasion (Yes) because the hospitality was good, before and after the programme and I just wonder whether the hospitality wasn't so good that on occasions (Laugh) some people might have suffered from it.

BONARJEE:

Well, (not the interviewers of course) No, no indeed. Er, one of the things that Jacob did without a question was to make Broadcasting House a much more friendly place. He himself was much more accessible in one or two ways I've already described to the staff and not simply the most senior staff, but people he knew were responsible for whatever it was. But he also relaxed what had been a rather puritan atmosphere that ~~Hailey~~<sup>HALEY</sup> inherited from Jacob, that ~~Hailey~~<sup>Hailey</sup> inherited from Reith, and Jacob certainly humanised the place in a way that I think the staff appreciated. We were allowed at Home and Abroad and remember the broadcasting was mostly live and this was at 9.15 so it was quite possible that most people might miss their dinners or whatever it was, or come straight from their offices and so we were allowed to have a modest but agreeable buffet before the programme and to entertain afterwards. This in the cause or partly in the convenience of the contributors but also what Jacob reckoned and I think rightly was good public relations. He was the first Director General who virtually introduced a suite if you like, for entertainment on the building, in the building on the third floor, it was called the Governors Suite, or was in those days but I think still is where the Governors actually met, but I mean there was also a reception area where buffets or dinners could be given, well Jacob initiated that. He also, he liked style, perhaps I don't know, you know a bit of the if you like the sort of senior mess kind of feel about things but he also introduced a butler for the first time in the BBC. His name was ~~Gus~~<sup>Goss</sup> and ~~Gus~~<sup>Goss</sup>'s function was to service lunches or dinners in the Governors Suite and Governors didn't have to be present, the Director General or whoever he authorised, but also the butler acted as valet and Jacob had a little pied a terre, a BBC pied a terre just round the corner behind Egton House and ~~Gus~~<sup>Goss</sup> would look after him overnight there. Well of course as ever Sir Ian being from a great soldiering family, you know hierarchy entered into it and it was all slightly amusing with At Home and Abroad say. If we had a contributor who was of Cabinet rank or above, the Archbishop let's say, then we could ask and did ask whether we could use the Governors Suite/.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

... and permission would invariably be granted. But for anybody below Cabinet rank then we had to put up with one of the BBC's more normal committee rooms turned into a buffet for the occasion and slightly slum it. But, yes, Jacob humanised Broadcasting House and I think we all appreciated the ways in which he did so.

SCOTT: I think, Steve, anyone who has performed in front of the cameras or the microphone is conscious of the dangers of drink (Yes). I remember talking to John Freeman many years ago about this when we were doing a programme called Frankly Speaking and John said you had to know just how many or how few drinks were necessary to bring you up to the right level (Yes) and never to go beyond. Now in your experience you must have seen those who have gone beyond and with disastrous results.

BONARJEE: Yes, um. I mean it's a question of striking a balance isn't it, I mean, certainly under ~~Hailey~~<sup>HALEY</sup>, I mean Broadcasting House and I suppose other BBC centres were pretty puritan. I mean, you know, apart from the Duty Room, that was the only place where you could offer a contributor a drink. Well Jacob having humanised Broadcasting House and regarded you know er, a bit of hospitality as part of the civilised process of broadcasting and we were expecting them to do it live and to come at our convenience not at their convenience and so on, but um, no certainly circumstances did arise from time to time when you were faced with difficult decisions and one was um, when for At Home and Abroad we'd invited Aristotle Onassis to be interviewed and the issue was there had been some trouble off the coast of Chile I think it was where Onassis's ships had gone in.....gone into the territorial waters, I think they were whalers, anyway they'd gone inside territorial waters and the Chilean Navy had fired on them and there had been a lot of stuff in the press and the argument was where did territorial waters actually lie off the coast of Chile. So we invited Onassis who was normally quite often in London or was at the time and the issue really was insurance in this case and Onassis said Oh yes well, yes I'll do the interview but who do you suggest as interviewer and I don't know who we suggested but he said well I'd liked to be interviewed by Randolph Churchill. Well we used Randolph as a contributor more than once and so we said alright, well, that's fair enough, so they turned up about half past eight prior to transmission at 9.15 live again and Randolph was clearly, which was not particularly uncommon in his case, I mean he was intoxicated. And Onassis was obviously deeply worried so at some point I said to Onassis you know are you quite sure you still wish to be interviewed by Randolph Churchill and he said Good God no, he said, how do I get out of it, I said well you know.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

....we'll do our best and of course we'd got Bob McKenzie or Andrew Shonfield or somebody there to interview somebody else and I said well we'll do our best and would it be alright if one of the others....yes, yes he said, so Randolph having arrived intoxicated then took a couple more I dare say quite large Scotch or whatever and at some point I said to this dear butler at the time <sup>Goss</sup> Gus, I said, well now we're going up to the studio and see if you,...give Rand....Mr. Churchill another drink and see if you know, keep him from coming into the studio if you can. So off we went up to the studio ostensibly for a bit of rehearsal, balance and so on and Randolph stayed downstairs, having another drink, and then I said to somebody else, a Commissionaire or whatever, don't let Mr. Churchill near the studio. Well he never got near the studio and Onassis was interviewed by whoever it was and Randolph subsequently wrote to the Director General complaining about this and again Sir Ian you know, was marvellous about this sort of situation, he knew Randolph's reputation, I explained the circumstances and the question then was, how much did we pay Randolph Churchill, because he had turned up. He'd been willing to do the interview. We'd stopped him from doing the interview. How much should he be paid - 50%, 20%, 70% what? Eventually after a lot of argument we offered him, I think it was about 50% and he took it and that was <sup>the end of</sup> that particular story. I think, you know, it can be exaggerated the dangers of drink in the studio so to say but yes, it does arise, you're quite right it does arise and sometimes rather critically.

SCOTT:

Now although we've talked so far about the development of Current Affairs in both Radio and Television and of course as part of that the interviewing of politicians, we haven't yet come on to the specific subject of <sup>the</sup> coverage of politics and in particular of elections. How did that develop in your experience?

BONARJEE:

Well I think 1955 was the definitive year. You have to remember that, even in 1955, let alone earlier the BBC gave no coverage at all to election campaigns. What was called the closed period descended on us all and any programme which might be thought to remotely effect the outcome of an election, during the period of the campaign was cancelled. And nothing else was put in its place, so that in effect the BBC totally ignored what was going on during an election campaign, both in News, Current Affairs and indeed anything else. Well, that was the position in 1955 and indeed until 1959, except that once the polls were closed on Election Day for the first time in 1951 and Television to its credit, although, I hope they will forgive me.....

an election results project which was more than just more than the bare reading of results. But in Radio that did not happen in 1951, but in 1955 and here again I think it's evidence of Sir Ian Jacob's innovating spirit, in Radio which was still the predominant medium remember, we were asked to devise and put out an election results project and I was put in charge of it. This was only to happen once the polls were closed. Until the polls were closed, nothing could be done. Well, it was exciting and we set about planning it as effectively as we could, we engaged, it's interesting to recall now in terms of the last broadcasting enquiry, we asked Noel Annan (?) who was then a political don at Cambridge to be our political analyst and we engaged a great computer fan under, or rather the programme was devised by Professor Maurice Kendall, later Sir Maurice Kendall, Professor of Statistics at London and this as a matter of fact Television didn't do in

( 1955. We had this great Computer project to analyse the results as they came in, we had appointed representatives at each of the party headquarters. Geoffrey Johnson Smith for example, looking back now and knowing his subsequent career was represented us at Conservative Headquarters, Honor Balfour at Labour Headquarters and Walter James, of the Times Educational Supplement, editor was at Liberal Headquarters, he being an ex-Liberal candidate. So it was all set up, well marvellously, but certainly we thought rather skilfully, but the problem remained how were we to get the results on which we could work. And News Division had a monopoly of the incoming results. And they took the view and ~~Tarhew~~ <sup>Tahn</sup> Hole was still editor, they took the view that we couldn't possibly be allowed access to the actual incoming tape service of results. We'd asked for a feed from the teleprinters and that was quite impossible because you know we might make some ghastly mistake and we weren't responsible journalists and fully trained and so on and so forth or some of us weren't. Well I mean this obviously made the whole of what <sup>we</sup> were planning to a large extent a nonsense, especially the computer service. So at some point I reported this to my Controller Mary Somerville, marvellous woman Mary, first time I've mentioned her but I hope not the last, as she reported to then Director of Sound Broadcasting Lindsay Wellington and he must have reported to the Director General that the whole project was held up for lack of cooperation from News Division. Anyway the Friday before the Election which is always on a Thursday as you know, the Friday before the Election Jacob summoned a meeting himself. I was present at it, I was taken by Mary Somerville as my Controller, Director of Sound Broadcasting, Lindsay Wellington was there and Jacob had equally summoned News Division to be there. ....cont.

BONARJEE/CONT:

.....Well, personally I think this was rather typical of

Hole, he didn't actually, he found some reason for not being there himself and he said he had sent his deputy Arthur Barker, his side-kick as we all called him at the time.

Arthur Barker was there representing News and Jacob said at this meeting, what's the <sup>straightforward</sup> problem in his typically/military style, what's the problem, tell me what it's all about.

I was called on to explain what we needed and why you know we felt this was sabotaging the whole enterprise. Jacob turned to Barker and said well why shouldn't they have a supply of News results as they come in and of course Barker hadn't really got an answer, it wasn't his fault anyway. He hadn't made the decision and the meeting ended with Jacob giving a very absolutely clear cut decision that before the day was out, before the day was out he said, this absurd departmental divisional rivalry was to cease and results were to be supplied to the Election Results project. Well before the afternoon was out lo and behold emissaries came from News Division which in those days was over in Egton House which is only 50 yards from Broadcasting House but in a way a great divide, emissaries came from News Division....came to me. Well rightly or wrongly they said it was too late now to lay on a full tape service or rather split feeds from the incoming teleprinters and one thing and another but they said they would lay on a relay of messengers carrying copies of all incoming taped results from Egton House just over the road into Broadcasting House to where we were based on the second floor. So throughout the night of that Election, May 1955, relays of messengers panted through and there is an underground passage between Egton House and Broadcasting House, relays of messengers panted through carrying copies of all the incoming tape to enable us to get on with the job we'd been instructed to do. Well I knew and I, I...really think that Lindsay Wellington and Mary Somerville and everybody present on the occasion that Jacob made this decision, I certainly felt that this was the beginning of the end of the <sup>HOLE</sup> ~~whole~~ Empire as it had survived and flourished indeed up until that point. And well, it wasn't a complete success, that operation because it was a handicap, not having direct feeds and so on, but we made quite a good show and curiously it was the first time that a computer had been used, because Television didn't have a computer, they, David Butler did it all on his slide rule if you remember in 1955 and we made a prediction (Paper rustle) we made a prediction at 4 a.m. on the basis of the computer, it wasn't all that good but it wasn't bad, our prediction at 4 a.m..... at the May election of '55 the computer's first forecast in broadcasting was a Conservative majority of 87. Well as it happened and of course computers get upset by...just as well as everybody...

BONARJEE/CONT:

... else, it didn't work quite like that the next day when the next day's results came in and the actual overall Conservative majority in '55 was 58 as against our prediction at 4 a.m. of 87, but it wasn't bad and you know we felt quite pleased with it all and well, I do remember there were most perceptive and interesting interviews late at night 4 a.m. or whatever, more particularly from Labour Headquarters where Honor Balfour was our correspondent so to say with Morgan Phillips and Mr. Atlee the outgoing Prime....no Morgan Phillips and Mr. Atlee, no no leader of the Opposition of course about the reasons why Labour had not won, which were of the kind at the time you know significant and interesting.

SCOTT: Because it was the first time a computer had been used for this purpose, it's worth putting on record why you waited as late as 4 a.m. which these days would seem astonishingly late when we .....two results and.....

BONARJEE: Ah .....oh.....oh yes, no we had made much earlier predictions, oh yes yes, no I've only checked up, or checked back with what we said at 4 a.m. because this is much more likely even today what they're likely to remember, bearing in mind there are still two or three hundred, two hundred results to come the next day, people tend to remember when they go to bed... what you've last forecast and compare it...Oh no, we'd started making predictions (quite early) oh yes, oh certainly yes.

SCOTT: Now you said when that decision was made by Jacob at that particular meeting that you, Mary Somerville, Lindsay Wellington and others there were conscious that this was the beginning of the end of.....<sup>Talks</sup> ~~who holds empire~~(Yes) now what was the effect ultimately of that meeting, what pro.....

BONARJEE: Well it's very interesting George and (Paper rustle) one thing that did happen and I haven't got the exact date of this, but some time after the Election and this must have been the first time that Jacob really became aware of how difficult <sup>How</sup> ~~Here~~ was I think, sometime after the election he actually went over to Egton House and addressed an assembled News Division Staff and in effect implied or perhaps a bit more than implied, maybe there wasn't quite as much cooperation between News Division and the rest of Broadcasting as was desirable, asked for more cooperation and well I have checked with one person who was present on that occasion, he was then quite junior although he's now quite senior, and you know that made a profound impression that he also set up, under the Controller of Talks as he'd then become, John Green an enquiry into relations between News and Current Affairs, both in Radio and Television, the Green Enquiry we all referred to it at the time, and the members, John Green, Controller, Talks was the chairman.....

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BONARJEE/CONT:

Cecil McGivern as Controller of Television Programmes was

another member, ~~Tarlow~~ <sup>Talbot</sup> Hole was himself a member and the secretary and fourth member was Richmond Postgate who was in Educational Broadcasting and was there basically I suppose in the role of secretary. Well everybody was asked to give evidence to this Enquiry, I personally was asked to give evidence, although as a matter of fact by the time the enquiry finished I was up at Television News and not at BH anymore. But in fact it didn't reach any well certainly not unanimous conclusions, the papers are confidential in the sense that, well I haven't actually asked to see them.....

I entirely appreciate why, had I asked, which I haven't done, I would not have <sup>been</sup> given access to those particular papers because I think it's absolutely certain that there was so much disagreement within the enquiry, whether Hole was blocking McGivern, or McGivern was blocking Hole or which way round it went, one doesn't know but certainly no firm outcome emerged from the enquiry and I think that may have been the reason, and this would now, by this time we would be into 1957 I think, I think that may have been one reason why a year later and we'll come to that if we may a little later, why a year later Sir Ian Jacob in effect made up his own mind and decided that for the first time in the BBC's history he would appoint a Director of News and Current Affairs, but that came a year later and in the meantime my life have been changed because curiously ~~Tarlow~~ <sup>Talbot</sup> Hole invited me to go to Alexandra Palace as Assistant Editor or Assistant Head of Television News, and that was early in 1957. So perhaps I'd better....dwell on that a little.

SCOTT:

Well could we dwell on the state of BBC Television News

(Paper rustle) and indeed BBC News in general. At the time when you moved over to Alexandra Palace would you say there was within the BBC a consciousness that ITN had stolen the ..... which was really out in front in terms of News coverage, techniques and so forth, was the BBC way behind?

BONARJEE:

Well I don't think that would have been recognised in News Division as such, but then that was really part of the weakness of their position. It was certainly recognised in the Television Service and yes, I think it was at the highest level in Broadcasting House. The TV News, BBC TV News was in a mess and way behind ITN. Now I think the basic reason for this was that ~~Tarlow~~ <sup>Talbot</sup> Hole was, I mean he quite clearly did not understand the challenge that Television News presented and he continued really right up until the time when he finally fell from power to regard Television News as an offshoot of Radio News and wholly subordinate to it, and when to my amazement and I think he may have, I don't know, he may have perhaps had some sneaking regard for me....

BONARJEE/CONT:

.....after the 1955 Election situation, anyway to my amazement

when he invited me to become Assistant Head of Television News and in those days there were no Deputy Heads and that sort of thing and so it was a number 2 position, when he invited me early in 1957 to take this post and an increase in salary and all the rest of it, I think I...because it was very unusual for a job in News Division, certainly a senior job to go outside the Division, it may have been a kind of.... admission, private admission that something new was needed. Well certainly when one arrived there in 1957 I mean....looking back on it the whole thing was quite extraordinary... it was a complete sort of subordinate medium to Radio News, whereas of course ITN and ITN made lots of mistakes, but I mean of course it started off as a new enterprise, wholly conditioned by the requirements of Television and not worried remotely about wider implications, because there weren't any wider implications. So TV News was just an offshoot of Radio News and now in <sup>early</sup> 1957, I mean it's amazing when you think back to it, I mean newsreaders appearing in Television News were not even named.

SCOTT

They did exist by that time?

BONARJEE:

They, well I mean they appeared, were visible, but they were not named. They came up on a kind of rota.... the basic Radio News 9 o'clock readers, nine of them I think, were to come up on rota to Alexandra Palace, do their stuff unnamed, disappear back to... to Broadcasting House and quite often having done last transmission from Alexandra Palace would read the midnight news on Radio 4 and sleep overnight and do the 6 a.m. on Radio 4.

SCOTT:

And they did this on rota irrespective presumably from what you're saying of their qualities as Television..performers....

BONARJEE:

Absolutely none, absolutely none, absolutely none. There were no agency tapes at Alexandra Palace, we were entirely dependent on a service supplied to us from Egton House where the main Radio News was done, where there was a Television News Unit which determined what was good for Television and what wasn't good for Television. The Assistant Head of Television News on duty, the chap who shared with me at that time, his name was Tom Winter, we would do four days on and three days off, overlapping one day, we would come down in the late afternoon by car from Alexandra Palace to Egton House to their regular late afternoon conference where we would have the tablets of Zion laid down so to say for the rest of the day, then we'd journey back in our car and of course it was what 25, 30 minutes each way to report to Alexandra Palace these...great judgments down at Egton House.

.....cont.

SCOTT:

This at a time Steve when, certainly haven't got the figures with

but Television was by now already something the majority of people looked to, certainly.

BONARJEE:

....certainly getting near it, yes. There were no special

Television reporters available at Alexandra Palace, if we needed a reporter we just had to find out who was available in the pool, down at Egton House, so you can tell how very primitive it was and this wasn't because there weren't sturdy spirits who felt that this was very restrictive, but because this was the way that <sup>Talw</sup>~~Talw~~ Hole had laid down the line.

So all sorts of very primitive battles had to be fought, and really the first of these battles was simply getting newsreaders named. Of course on ITN they'd been named from the beginning, I mean already people already began to know Robin Day and.....Chris Chatfaway they were becoming national names, whereas ours were just sort of figures, mysterious anonymous figures, well known by sight and of course the Press, what made it even more absurd was of course the Press used to say <sup>well</sup> of course it's Bob Dougal or whoever it was,

so this was the first battle that I felt had to be won and it was won and the first time that Television Newsreaders on the BBC were named was on 16th December 1957 and I personally give a good deal of...well all the credit for this to a lady who was then a Governor of the BBC, Thelma Cazalet-Keir, Mrs. Thelma Cazalet-Keir, and happily I'd known her socially and through her husband who was an old friend, long before she became a Governor and every now and again she would ask one, you know, was there anything that ought to be done and she could raise and this sort of thing and she did raise this issue and I think she must have been the one without having seen Boardroom Governors Minutes, but I certainly myself

re the credit for this little triumph to Mrs. Cazalet-Keir and it happened very quickly. Once the Board of Governors had said you know really this is absurd, something must be done it happened very quickly and we got the instruction from Egton House from <sup>Talw</sup>~~Talw~~ Hole that newsreaders were to be named late in an afternoon to start with that evening's first transmission, probably around 6 o'clock. And of course we hadn't got any name plates or you know anything of the kind ready, everything had to be improvised and then to the amazement of the wider public, you know these wellknown faces suddenly had names attached to them. Well you know that was indicative if you like and I...really ought to say that Mr. Hole was never unkind or unpleasant to me personally, but it was indicative I think of the kind of resistance he put up really almost to the end of his BBC career to the development of Television News as an independent source of news and if you like his failure to understand that really his personal career and the future of News was bound up with the way you handled the admittedly difficult problems of translating News....

BONARJEE/CONT:

...effectively and responsibly into Television.

SCOTT:

Let me just push you further before we return to Mr. Hole.

During the time that you were at Alexandra Palace, did you get to the stage in Television News where you had your own Television reporters and you chose newsreaders newscasters on the basis of their competence, likeability (Yes) in front of the camera?

BONARJEE:

Well this was the second great battle, George, and I don't think there was any question ever of our going outside, and I think the number was nine the number of registered Radio Home Service newsreaders...who were allowed to do the Nine o'Clock News. I personally never actually raised that, I mean I was personally was quite content if we could only select the best of them and there was a great deal of toing and froing over this, but eventually we did decide and looking back on it even you know from 1980 it wasn't a bad choice, but we did eventually decide that Robert Dougall, Richard Baker and Kenneth Kendall out of the nine then available were the best, for Television purposes. Well now if you look back, that would be 19 - early 1958 perhaps it wasn't a bad choice, and the indestructibility of that trio until Bob Dougall, dear man you know, finally reached retirement point, although as a matter of fact he's done better in some respects after his retirement than he ever did inside the BBC, I mean I think and I'm not claiming credit, but I mean we did in fact at last make a pretty wise choice. There was a chap who was reckoned to be very unlucky at the time who was a kind of runner-up and his name was Wallace Greenslade and he was a most engaging, rather affable fattish chap, you know, a jovial chap and I suppose I don't know, well I don't know on the ITN side I don't know, but on the BBC side he introduced if you like almost the first gimmick in Television News history, but at the end of a bulletin which he read quite well, he had spectacles, rather heavy spectacles and he'd take them off with a bit of a flourish as he said goodnight or whatever he did say, and curiously this endeared him to the populous who really thought Wallace was, you know, the cat's whiskers, and he was in fact a good reader, a good reader and the only feeling we had at the time was and I'm sure the poor chap is dead long since but.... whether we'd been a little harsh in not perhaps preferring Wallace Greenslade to one of the three we did did...appoint, but I think some credit is due to us, having made the initial selection we did.

SCOTT:

So long as <sup>Talw</sup>~~Parke~~ Hole was there, did his ideas of what is News and what is not News change in terms of what should be put out on the Television compared with Radio?

...cont.

BONARJEE:

Certainly not publicly or you know in terms of... I feel

any certain of anything you'd find in the documentation, but we did begin to experiment with bolder forms of presentation, not with the content of the news which we had to stick pretty rigidly to whatever Egton House had laid down, but we did begin to experiment with the actual presentation and we would be allowed to invite some of the specialists on News Division staff like say Teddy Thompson, E.R. Thompson, the Parliamentary correspondent or Bertram Mycock the Industrial Correspondent, we'd been invit....we'd be allowed to invite them to give straight pieces straight to camera, but one of the things that one remembers from that day was a kind of puritan hangover that the use of teleprompters which were of course... there were in a very primitive state but never mind, that somehow it wasn't decent to use, teleprompters and therefore you had to learn the stuff off and deliver it straight to camera. Well I think I'm right in saying that while the bastions of this puritan orthodoxy although not in Television News but at Alexandra Palace, at Lime Grove was Grace Wyndham Goldie and she was one of the last to succumb to the lure of the teleprompter and chaps like Christopher Mayhew and so on I think would confirm this, that you really had to learn the stuff almost as though you were an actor. Well that was you know, it's, it's a formidable business, learning a, say a 70 second script on Industrial Relations or Parliamentary Debate or whatever, and so they weren't, you know, at that time particularly good and I can't actually put a date on when in Television News, it was before I returned to Broadcasting House in 1960, perhaps therefore it was late '58, early '59, but most reluctantly you know the teleprompter was introduced and the first teleprompter used in Television News was one you know that had actually been invented by an engineer in Television News, and so the teleprompter revolution in a way, a minor one of course, but, you know, was quite important and made the life of specialist correspondents of all kinds you know infinitely easier.

SCOTT:

ITN of course had been using it for some years

BONARJEE:

.... from the beginning?

SCOTT:

Well certainly I know from going into their studios in '55 or '56 they were using it.

BONARJEE:

Yes, well I'm sure we made some use of that probably in trying to win this battle, but I don't think it was actually won while <sup>Taker</sup> ~~Taker~~ Hole was Editor of News, I think that was part of the revolution, one aspect of the revolution that stemmed from the takeover of Hugh Greene in 1958. Now if I may I must recall that you were part of it, oh no that comes after the revolution, I was going to say the arrival of regional

BONARJEE/CONT:

...news and so on, yes, no that again, no I would, I really

to think that before the departure of Hole as Editor News, while there was, there was slow liberalisation, it was a very very difficult and cautious process which hadn't really gathered speed..... prior to 1958, it was better but not much better.

SCOTT: Well how and when did Hole lose his empire.

BONARJEE:

Well.... as I mentioned earlier I think the writing was on the

wall as early as 1955 with that row over the Election results project at the General

Election. I suspect that Sir Ian Jacob had hoped for more from the Green enquiry into

the relations between News and Current Affairs than actually emerged because in practical terms nothing emerged. But certainly the impression I think of staff in a position to

know anything was that the writing was on the wall. But it took a long time and of course

the relative success of ITN and.... you know helped it all, but the question as it often is

in the BBC is how do you actually get rid of anybody or move X from this position to that

position, and Hole after all had been there for, since 1948. Well one enters a point now

where you know in my terms because obviously I haven't access to assuming it was all

minuted, which is perhaps doubtful, I haven't access to all that may have been minuted or

happened on the third floor of Broadcasting House at the time, I can only report from

memory what impression of relatively senior people at the time was. The weakness of Hole's

position, vis a vis the Corporation as a whole was, that as Editor of News he was not a

member of the Board of Management. Now all ambitious people in the BBC of course hoped to

be members of Board of Management and if course beyond that to be Director Generals, but

certainly to be members of the Board of Management, and Hole as Editor of News was not a

member of Board of Management. Well I personally give credit to Sir Ian Jacob again for

this because what appears to have happened, or appeared to us at the time to have happened

is that in 1958 a very skilful bait was dangled for the Editor of News, would he like to

be Director of Administration, which did in fact have a seat on the Board of Management.

I dare say at this time he was getting to the point where he might have been thinking about

his pension a bit and this sort of thing, and well what is certain is that he accepted

the appointment as Director of Administration, although to weaken his position, they

actually split Administration at that time into two sections with Hole as Director of

Administration and a new figure on the scene John Arkell as Director of Staff Administration

so what had been a unified Administrative empire in fact was split into two and in fact

Hole was left with the less interesting and perhaps less important of the two halves.

Anyway he accepted. Well that left the way open for fundamental change.....

.... and in August, it all happened in July/August 1958, Hugh Greene was appointed, the first Director of News and Current Affairs in the BBC's history, with a task of co-ordinating both wings and both in Radio and Television, and Donald Edwards was made Editor News. Now, because I haven't mentioned this earlier there had, much earlier in Sir William Haley's day been an experiment with a post called the Director of the Spoken Word, which George Barnes, later Sir George Barnes and Harman Grisewood occupied but frankly it hadn't worked for reasons we needn't go into now. But the first Director of News and Current Affairs clearly specified with his joint responsibility, was Hugh Greene and that was in August 1958. Well you know all I can say is, not having access to the .....very private documentation of the period, was that at the time all the staffs concerned assumed that you know this was the way in which finally the Director General and the Board of Management had bought out Hole. So that was that and Hugh Greene arrived, Donald Edwards arrived and new, a new atmosphere and new initiatives very very rapidly became apparent, I was still up at Alexandra Palace and the rigidities of the Hole regime began to disappear, and the first evidence of this and of course you know as a journalist George you know as much about this if not more than I do, was that they promoted Hugh Greene and Donald Edwards, promoted quite active discussion I mean at meetings and this sort of thing about the nature of News, what was News. Now up to this point the BBC concept of news was basically you know, what was quote - important - quote in, if you like establishment terms both at home and abroad, if anything I think there was a bias towards foreign rather than domestic news, certainly there was a great deal more foreign news than you normally now get on BBC bulletins, but it was if you like from established sources. There was very little of what would now, or I suppose even then, but you know lobby journalism interpretive stuff, informed circles or whatever. And what Greene and Donald Edwards did rightly so to my judgment was to re-examine the nature of News in what was of course now a competitive situation, let's face it 'cos ITN from the start had taken a more liberal view of what constituted news and well, while I think there was a good deal of if you like sort of resistance from the older staff, we did begin to move over to the concept that News was what, what would interest people, that human interest certainly began to be admissable and the abstract of you know conceptions of what was important became less important and the whole business, I mean it really was <sup>so</sup> rigid you know that you had to have nine headline subjects, the order in which these nine headline subjects was run was a subject of almost sort of biblical . The actual sort of structure of bulletins became more fluid and this was much more important in Television....

BONARJEE:

.....than in Radio, because whether you like it or not

In some respects one doesn't really like it, the fact of the matter is that Television News is a different kind of animal. And there it is, one wants pictures, one wants to illustrate the News and again rightly or wrongly and I'm not too sure where the weight of the argument finally comes down, of course you know the presence of pictures or the absence of pictures is a factor in Television News values. They would deny it I suppose to this very day but, having you know, actually done it for four years I mean I know it to be true. Anyway Greene and Edwards certainly gave Television News for the first time the go ahead to think out the ethos and meaning and professional standards of Television News regardless of what was being done in Radio News. They gave us for the first time feeds from the agencies, they allowed us to start recruiting our own reporters, all the things that Hole had forbidden. And I think the first really definitive sign of the new regime was the General Election in 1959, an Autumn Election and I was much involved in this too because Greene, and he must obviously have had Jacob's support and approval, decided that for the first time the BBC both in Radio and Television would cover the actual Election Campaign. And I was charged with responsibility for the coverage in Television News. Well that really was you know quite an enormous step forward and it wasn't easy. I mean all the problems which you know they'd avoided up till that point became instantly apparent, once you had to try and do it, and we had to achieve, or rather we set ourselves the target of achieving and I think did, because we didn't have any rows over it, we set out to achieve absolute balance between the parties in each of the bulletins and in doing this one of the difficulties we found was that the party machines, and you can't in a way blame them, because after all the BBC hadn't actually done this before, the party machines were not actually geared up to coverage of Election Campaigns in Radio and Television News, you know it hadn't happened before and one of the things that became apparent very early and indeed we never managed to really get it right at that election, though now of course it's taken for granted, that meetings or campaign tours or whatever it is must take place early enough to enable film or now video tape to be got back for transmission in the main bulletins and that main events must take place in centres near you know, to transmission points for Radio and Television. It's no use making a great speech you know at half past seven at night in the middle of Wales because the film and tape won't get anywhere before the next day. And now of course I mean Election Campaigns are all geared basically to the requirements of Radio and Television but more particularly Television News. In those

51 days it was all film of course and getting the film back and processed in time.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

.....was a real problem, very often with meetings starting at half past seven or eight o'clock and really to some extent this has changed the whole nature of political campaigning at an Election and another thing that's done so and I fear has undermined if you like the traditional oratory that one used to enjoy about election campaigns is that as Radio and Television really can't, well they could but I mean it would be very expensive and extremely wasteful, record film or video tape the whole of election speeches, election speeches these days are really designed to provide two or three <sup>key</sup> passages which you know on the press copies are quite often actually marked and on which Television and Radio can concentrate, having really been tipped off in advance that these are the key passages and that's all they film or video tape or record and that is got back to the nearest transmission centre as quickly as possible. So I think it is true to say that the whole nature of election campaigns has <sup>been</sup> changed by Television and Radio coverage, all of which really started as recently as 1959.

SCOTT:

You've been describing the development of Television News in particular and one small detail question I'd like to put to you is this. From the beginning ITN used people as newscasters who were also seen to be reporters in the field. This was particularly true of course of Chris Chatfaway and Robin Day at the beginning, but it continued largely to be true, although these days it's more rare. Now did the BBC ever consider using as newscasters people who were active reporters. I know one or two turned into newscasters (mmn) and left the field of reporting, but they never as far as I know actually use people one day as reporters, the next day in the studio.

BONARJEE:

George, you I suspect will disagree with me about this, but there was a great deal of argument in you know '57, '58 this sort of thing about the nature of news reading or as ITN prefer to call it newscasting and this was very important at the time when we were trying to boil down the nine radio sound newsreaders to three for Television purposes and I always took a conservative view about this and I still do. The basic task and the most important task is to present the News as a newsreader as effectively and authoratively as possible. If you have other gifts well O.K. that's a plus, but the important and essential task is the actual presentation of the News, which is difficult enough goodness knows. Well now the pretence, of course really I believe to this day that it is a pretence, that the ITN newscasters somehow take a definitive role in the actual decision making process within the ITN newsroom and so on, leading up to transmission, that I believe is a fiction. I don't believe that, of course they may say as indeed Richard Baker might very well say, this is very difficult to say.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

...and I, you know, I think it might be better to say it another way. But the idea that the newsreader or newscaster is a kind of senior editorial animal, personally I believe is a fiction. What I think you need and certainly I think Baker, Kendall and Dougal have demonstrated is absolutely first rate front man who demands the respect and indeed hopefully is liked by the public as a front man and nobody cares, you know what he's done beforehand, it's the actual impact at the time. Well now in the case of BBC News, certainly from the time Baker, Kendall and Dougal were appointed <sup>they</sup> sat in on the two or three editorial conferences of the day and if they wanted to say anything they could say what they wanted. But there was no pretence that they were in any sort of senior sort of way, a voice in the editorial process. Well on the ITN side they might deny that but frankly I personally continue to think that it's more of a fiction than a fact.

SCOTT:

Yes I think you would find there were particular individuals who really were integrated into the editorial process, but putting that aside, one other distinction remains, that is that on occasion any of the ITN newscasters will conduct an interview in the studio within the context of the bulletin. <sup>BONARJEE:</sup> Yes - they do very little of that now. I suppose it was at its height when Robin Day was most prominent, no, curiously I mean this is a bit later in the sequence of my story, I personally brought Richard Baker because I believe Baker is a newsreader, first, absolutely first rate Television newsreader, of course he had been a radio newsreader before, but I personally did feel that he had more in him than the actual business of presenting Television News, and I brought him back as a presenter in 10 o'clock in which he did do interviews and subsequently things like Start the Week with Richard Baker and so on. I certainly don't myself feel that newsreaders can do nothing else and I think it's a very good thing for their image as newsreaders if they can do other things well. But in terms of Television News, what I want is an absolutely first rate performance as a newsreader, call him a newscaster if you like, but it's the actual skill at the time of transmission that to me matters. So I always took, it was argued a lot and indeed we did try out of course they were hopeless choices but we did in fact try out a number of middle rank kind of senior sub editor types as newscasters, all of whom were a total failure, predictably so to my mind, although they were technically journalists whereas of course Baker Kendall and Dougal are not journalists.

cont/..

SCOTT: As we've come on to this area Steve, let me ask you about the relative failure of the BBC but also of ITN despite two notable exceptions, find good women newsreaders.

BONARJEE: Well yes and that comes into this period George, as you personally recall because it was during this period at Alexandra Palace after the disapp... or rather Hole had been made Director of Administration, one of the earlier things that Hugh Greene and Donald Edwards did was to call for the introduction of regional television news and this was early 1959 and I was charged with the task of producing something for London and the South East which in fact of course is the least easy one to do, easy enough to do in the North of England or Wales or Scotland whatever, but damned difficult for London and the South East. So we did in fact create a programme called Town and Around which you remember because you were in it and from the earliest days right from the start of Town and Around we introduced as one of the team a dear woman.... and happily still to be heard from time to time on Radio, Nan Winton.....

SCOTT: and worked briefly for Panorama.

BONARJEE: She's done a bit for Panorama, that's quite right, and I was certainly convinced from the beginning that Nan had potentialities beyond this regional news task which was a little wider than the national news because if you remember we were permitted to include magazine items and this sort of thing. Other people involved, people like John Tidmarsh, John Arlott did the sport for us, but Nan was the, she was in a way the most successful product of this regional programme and later and before I returned to Broadcasting House in 1960 we introduced her to the National News. I, there was absolutely no evidence at the time, of course, you know, there was a lot in the Press, the first woman and all the rest of it, and there was no evidence that, from Audience Research or whatever that this was anything other than very acceptable, she was a good reader, personable, likeable, she had that kind of rare quality which I.....not sure that the two ladies at the moment..... she was attractive without being.... too obviously sexually attractive, which personally I feel Anna Ford for example is just a bit too attractive, but Nan had the balance absolutely right, but the old school, you know, didn't really like this and remember by this time it was post <sup>Taken</sup> ~~Turner~~ Hole, but there was still an old school who were very doubtful about this experiment, they didn't mind on the regional side, but you know ....occasional national appearances and it was after I'd returned to Radio, Broadcasting House that in fact somebody made the decision, I personally think it was Michael Peacock...

BONARJEE:

.... when he became Editor of Television News to dispense with her and personally I think it was a wrong decision, that Nan could have become, well indeed did become, but could have maintained and extended you know a splendid reputation. You remember her.....

SCOTT:

I remember her very well, liked her very much, very much, I thought she did that job very well indeed. I was going to take you back now to the point at which Ian Jacob appointed Hugh Greene (yes) as Director of News and Current Affairs, the first such Director of News and Current Affairs and stress that it was News and Current Affairs (Yes) What difference did it make?

BONARJEE:

Well certainly this liberalisation became very very rapidly apparent .... the important thing was did the title live up to the facts, in other words when you say a person is Director of News and Current Affairs, you know, are all the staffs in both Radio and Television, whether News or Current Affairs, responsible to the Director in a meaningful way. Well Hugh Greene's time certainly both Radio and Television News were (cough) and Radio Current Affairs, I think his hold over Television Current Affairs was more tenuous, I don't think it ever became formal, they used to come to his meetings but there's this....curious business in the BBC of whose establishment are you on, because ultimately whose establishment you may be on may determine your next promotion prospects. And Television Current Affairs at that time is '58, '59, remained on the establishment of the Director of Television and not of the Director of News and Current Affairs. Now of course he was only DNCA for a matter of eighteen months before he came Director General. If he had in fact remained DNCA for longer whether he would have been able to achieve this final sort of absorption if you like into one Directorate, well that's speculation, one suspects he might well have done it, but of course after only eighteen months during which you know great changes were in fact made, he took over from Ian Jacob as Director General and so a different situation arose and I don't know if you would wish me to go on at this point because.....

SCOTT:

.... in fact just before we go on to him as Director General (Yes) to ask you what his day to day working relationship was like when he was DNCA (Yes) with the likes of Wyndham Goldie, Grace Wyndham Goldie who was such a power in Television Current Affairs.

BONARJEE:

Well, what Hugh Greene did as DNCA was to start a weekly meeting of News and Current Affairs staff from both Radio and Television at a fairly senior level and what I remember most clearly is the period during a run up to the '59 Election.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

.....and more particularly the campaign period, when there'd be quite sizeable meetings, certainly with the senior people from the Newsroom in both Radio and Television and Current Affairs people from Radio and from Television, certainly Leonard Miall but I think much more often than not if not all the time Grace Wyndham Goldie would be present and the procedure roughly was that Greenewald call on those present to report on what they had in mind for the following week. I think during the election campaign these meetings were probably daily and we would report to a greater or lesser degree what we had in our minds and he would comment on it and then we'd almost certainly <sup>turn</sup> to what had happened you know in the last week or perhaps during the campaign even yesterday. Now Greene at the time you know, there it was, he had nothing else to worry about but News and Current Affairs output and my memory is that he kept a sharp and vigilant eye on it, but of course every meeting of that kind is really dependent on how completely people actually report or indeed are able to report on what they have in mind or indeed other people, junior to them may have in mind and the whole business of reporting upwards and reference upwards becomes crucial. But I don't think at that stage anything particularly went wrong. I mean I think it was working pretty satisfactorily and certainly I've no memory and I don't think the records say, there were any sort of major disasters or public controversies actually associated with that eighteen month period when Hugh Greene was operating solely as Director of News and Current Affairs.

SCOTT:

Well it was in fact during this period that Tonight began to kick up its heels and Alan Whicker in particular did cause considerable rumpus here and there throughout Britain as Leonard Miall as Head of Television Talks was well aware because more than once he referred to the great pile of complaints which piled onto his desk after Whicker had been to Town X or Town Y and done one of his cheeky pieces (Yes) Now was that with Hugh Greene's knowledge and consent as it were?

BONARJEE:

Well assuming this happened during this eighteen month period I've no memory of it but then you see the whole business of reference upwards which I've referred to before is involved in that isn't it and I mean certainly at these meetings Greene would not have expected say Leonard Miall to run through the schedule for Tonight for the whole of next week saying what everybody was in fact going to do. It may well have been, although I've no memory of it actually, that post hoc you know there were inquests of one kind and another into that kind of situation, but you see I think one of the things that was beginning to happen at this time was a great escalation in the actual output of Current Affairs. We're coming on shortly to the arrival.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

..... of Ten o'Clock on the scene, and of course the greater the output, the more difficult it becomes for anybody sitting at a pretty elevated position to be kept in detailed touch with what is going on or indeed for that matter even Heads of Department necessarily to be kept in touch, that is even if the people who are doing the programmes actually want to keep them in touch, which is another controversial you know aspect to that kind of situation. But I've no memory of great public rows of that time, but you have George, yes, well that's why I'm fallible, I wouldn't mind actually checking up on that a bit, yes, it was Alan Whicker mainly involved.

SCOTT:

It was the Tonight programme yes and Whicker in particular. Yes. Well let's then consider the position of you say the difficulty of somebody in an exalted position keeping an eye on everything. How much more true was that when Hugh Greene became Director General (Yes) and no longer appointed a successor to himself as Director of News and Current Affairs but considered himself and called himself Editor in Chief.

BONARJEE:

Yes.. Well I'm sure this was a crucial decision..... I can understand you know the reasons why he did so, after all he was a journalist, he obviously from his period of DNCA which I remember clearly enough was enjoying the work, he'd only done it eighteen months, therefore you know I entirely understand the dec... the temptation if you like which led him to decide when he became Director General that he would continue to do this work and of course what he did was then to promote Donald Edwards from Editor News to Editor News and Current Affairs, but not to put him on the Board of Management. Well... how clearly we felt <sup>that</sup> this at the time if we did feel it I'm not sure but I mean in retrospect I'm quite sure it was an error, that... and an error that actually Charles Curran continued with less justification than perhaps Hugh Greene because Curran wasn't a journalist, but before we perhaps at some later point examine the consequences of that decision, perhaps we ought to just examine some of the things he... quite rapidly initiated in his new role as Editor in Chief and of course the most important really was the decision for the first time to start a combined News and Current Affairs programme in Radio which in fact was to be called Ten o'Clock. The decision to do so, to make, to launch this programme was made perhaps six months before...the programme went on the air in September 1960 and quite early on after the decision had been made I was invited, then being <sup>still</sup> Assistant Head of Television News to return to Broadcasting House as the Editor to launch this new programme and I was a bit reluctant about <sup>it</sup> to tell you the truth because well I'd had a bonus for the '59 General Election and you know I thought I was doing quite well and I could foresee there might be changes in the top job in Television News.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

... which in fact there were, so I was a bit reluctant, but anyway I was given an assurance by Donald Edwards that moving back to Broadcasting House would not prejudice any future in Television so I accepted and...well one of the early controversies before the programme was launched was to scrap the old nine o'clock News. Well I mean, the Nine o'clock News had been the great sort of lynch pin of BBC News and indeed of the Home Service and this in itself was very controversial to decide to ...to shift the News to 10 p.m. I think the reasons were entirely professionally correct first that, and ITN of course have subsequently followed this...followed this pattern, that 10 p.m. is a very much better news time than 9 p.m. Parliament is complete for one thing but North American News in particular is much more complete at 10 than 9 and so professionally I thought that decision was dead right and that's how the title Ten o'Clock now The World Tonight was chosen, but the whole situation was bedevilled by Big Ben, the almost sacred nature of Big Ben, and what was called the Big Ben Minute. You may just be old enough to remember this George, but it went back to the War and the chimes and nine strokes of Big Ben take about a minute and during the War there grew up the custom, I suppose on a fairly limited scale, but never mind quite significant, of people praying for the safety of the nation and its survival and success and so on and so forth, all of which happened while Big Ben was booming away. So this continued although obviously on a more and more limited scale but it was still there in 1960 and in the Radio Times they actually billed the Big Ben Minute between whatever the preceding programme was and the Nine o'Clock News, right up until September 1960 they billed Big Ben Minute. So in abolishing the Nine o'clock News, the issue also arose of what you did about the Big Ben Minute and should it be there you know before the new Ten o'clock programme. And the decision was made to drop it, you know not to bill it any more and also, and again, we argued about this interminably, how we should use Big Ben at Ten o'clock because at 10 o'clock you had yet another stroke you see and so you're getting up to about a minute and ten seconds or so, and I was certainly amongst those who argued that this was the equivalent of perhaps something like 130, 140 words and time was precious and one would rather have it within the programme, so a decision was made that when Ten o'clock was to be launched, Big Ben would be sharply curtailed after the first stroke. Well this led to a terrible uproar, there were two uproars really, first over the transfer from 9 to 10 but secondly over how we were handling Big Ben itself by truncating it in this sacriligious way. Vast mail poured in and curiously leading the campaign for the.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

.....restitution of the Big Ben Minute and Big Ben in full was none other than Hugh Greene's elder brother Herbert, one of <sup>the</sup> I think four Greene brothers, the most obscure of the brothers. But he was the leader of the Big Ben lobby and wrote to The Times, plagued his brother and so on and so forth, so after about, it was about a month of this Greene summoned me and said look here Steve we're you know, don't know how we're going to get out of this, but you know, we've got to do something, you must broadcast an explanation, says the DG to me, what we're doing and what the various options are, and I've got the script here.....although I won't bother you with it... anyway it was one of the few broadcasts I've ever done in my life, so I went in within the Ten o'Clock programme, the last item on the night in question October 10th and I explained why we were doing it as we were, which was really basically to save time for bulletin and Current Affairs material, something like a minute's worth, but there were various options we could either revert to playing it in full or we could have a kind of compromise and fade Big Ben gently instead of cutting it abruptly. And again on DG's orders I invited correspondence on this subject. Oh and it flooded in. Certainly it was well over 3,000 and we <sup>had</sup> prepared a little tape showing this third alternative of fading it gently and something like 40% said they thought the right course was to adopt this gentle fade, so we knew that was enough and so we went over to the gentle fade and I would think it's one of the few sort of programme polls of its kind the BBC has ever had and there it is we decided to go over to this gentle fade of Big Ben which is still in use whenever they use Big Ben, although <sup>of course</sup> much less frequently now and that settled that and Ten o'Clock settled down to what happily became an increasingly successful, successful service, but if I may I'll just recall that it was the first joint cooperative venture between Radio News and Radio Current Affairs and if one casts one's mind back to those earlier days you know of Topic for Tonight and At Home and Abroad and the difficulties of the relationships between News and Current Affairs I think it can be said that in 1960 Current Affairs came of age so to say and was accepted perhaps with a certain amount of duress from Hugh Greene, <sup>and</sup> earlier Ian Jacob, was accepted as a full partner in relationship to News and the system we set up for daily operation was that every day Current Affairs would send a senior representative to the three news meetings of the day at which he was a full and equal partner and could say whatever he felt was necessary to say, and from that time onwards, of course there have been problems of one kind and another but I think from that time onwards it can fairly be said that on the Radio side anyway harmonious relationships were established and continued to flourish.....

BONARJEE/CONT:

...the story on the Television side with which I wasn't

at that time directly concerned, I think has not been quite so fruitful perhaps but Hugh Greene, but I still would give a great deal of credit myself to the earlier efforts of Sir Ian Jacob, I think basically the structure was got right within Radio.

SCOTT:

Could I ask you just one question about the programme as such, Steve, the Ten o'Clock Programme. On At Home and Abroad, we did interviews of eight, nine or ten minutes and perhaps <sup>at</sup> most in the course of the programme there were three exceptionally four items. In Ten o'Clock the actual current affairs part of it was twenty minutes, out of the thirty minutes which included a ten minute bulletin, very rarely indeed was any interview over four minutes long. Do you think in terms of quality that it can be compared with At Home and Abroad? Or did you see it as a different product for a different time?

BONARJEE:

Well, I have to say, although you know I actually launched At Home and Abroad, when I returned back from Alexandra Palace to start ~~Television News~~ <sup>Ten o'clock</sup> I found some resentment amongst the At Home and Abroad staff about what they regarded although I think wrongly as a kind of take-over by News Division in the new structure but also on the very point you raised, that inevitably the quality of what they'd been doing would suffer. Well I think it's awfully difficult, I mean obviously there comes a point where length is a determinant of quality and one often feels that more particularly today when, you know, minute and a quarter interviews are quite often regarded as rather long. There obviously is a point below which you can't examine a situation or a person in any depth, but I don't know what the average, I suppose you're right, the average in Ten o'Clock was between four and five minutes. I personally didn't feel that we lost quality and certainly the level of contributors in the earlier days at least, before Television supremacy became so absolute, but certainly say between 1960 and 1964 or 5, the level of contributors in Ten o'Clock was as distinguished as it had been in At Home and Abroad and we still continued, as far as we could and we were successful most of the time to preserve live broadcasting.

SCOTT:

Yes, this declined of course perhaps inevitably as the years went by....

BONARJEE:

Yes I mean one of the factors was of course in that was the growth of Television Current Affairs where the same person couldn't be in both places at roughly the same time and if he was going into Tonight, you know, he might very well appear live in Tonight and record for Ten o'Clock on his way to Lime Grove.....

BONARJEE/CONT: ... we didn't really... we didn't really resent that, what we wanted was ... because we you know if you remember, I mean quite often people would be coming in and out of Broadcasting House, having a bit to eat and a quick drink, doing their recording, a car would whisk them on to Lime Grove or whatever, but the, if you like, the general ambiance was still of live broadcasting. It wasn't you know, just going to the Minister's Office, surrounded by Civil Servants and Public Relations Officers and all the rest of it, or Press Conference situations, we never never never in the earlier days would go to Press Conferences. Either the Minister or whoever it was would do us a courtesy or the listener the courtesy of coming to the studio, and that was it.

SCOTT: Yes and on the whole we did record pretty near to the length we wished to put out.

BONARJEE: Yes, yes certainly, a, a very important point that. Over recording which I think rightly people in public life are now very wary of, no we would try to get it as near, as near to the transmission length first time round, in other words 'recording for live' / I think we used to call it. Yes. Again at this stage just as with the earlier projects I was very fortunate to be joined in this new enterprise of Ten o'Clock by a team of very skilful producers and presenters and this was the time when Tony Whitby now alas dead and a great loss, Tony Whitby had come over from At Home and Abroad and remained with Ten o'Clock until he went off to Television. Arthur Hutchinson, again unhappily dead who joined me from Television News as Deputy Editor, Sandy Hope, again who'd been there in the At Home and Abroad days and went on to higher things, Terry Boston, now Lord Boston of Faversham left us actually, the Ten o'Clock unit to win a Bye-Election at Faversham and subsequently of course..... went to the House of Lords. Peter Redhouse the first Editor of..... Station Manager of Radio London. I was very very fortunate in some of the gifted people who helped with Ten o'Clock and equally on the presentation side dear old war horses like Robert McKenzie continued in harness, new people arrived, oh well not necessarily new to broadcasting but in this context my interviewer tonight George Scott, James Mossman, Colin Jackson, he got into the House, John Thompson who's now Director of Radio for the IBA, Richard Gould-Adams, a very skilful team of presenters and I think I'm right in saying that the term presenter was first used in a Ten o'Clock context. I mean we'd long since passed beyond the use of announcers, so what were these, this new kind of beast to be called, and there was quite a lot of argument about it and I think I'm right in saying that the first regular use of the word presenter was with Ten o'Clock. We preserved also the At Home and Abroad tradition of trying to make....

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BONARVILLE/CONT:

... Ten o'Clock an agreeable social occasion as well as

refully a good programme in itself. We were disturbing people, we wanted them live in the middle of the evening very often, they were coming out of the House of Commons and perhaps hadn't eaten, so we provided them with a modest but pleasant buffet and something to drink and I think this was all part of the if you like, the best side of BBC Public Relations, bearing in mind that from memory, and George could correct me here, nobody was paid more than about £15 (I won't correct you - Laugh) for an item so contributors often at great inconvenience to themselves were certainly not handsomely rewarded in terms of money but we did endeavour, and I think it was a good BBC tradition, kept within proper limits, to make<sup>it</sup> an agreeable and pleasant occasion.