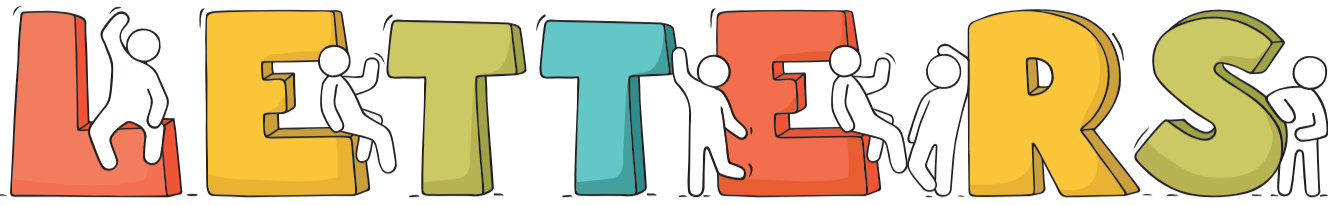


The newspaper for retired BBC Pension Scheme members

PROSPERO



April 2026



A vision of the future

Recent reports of the proposed closure of the Freeview television services which provide terrestrial coverage of the UK's domestic services, including those of the BBC, reminded me of events in the early 1990s when the government proposed privatising the BBC's Transmission Group.

Transmission was responsible for operating and maintaining the BBC's radio and television transmitting stations within the UK and overseas, for the capital projects associated with these transmitting stations, and for part of the BBC's communications networks. For those of us employed in Transmission Group, this was a huge shock. The Group was as old as the BBC; it had a long-term reputation for being a highly efficient operation and for introducing technical innovations that had, over the years, significantly reduced costs, and we were happy working for the BBC. We argued against the proposal and produced an analysis which clearly demonstrated that the BBC's costs would be significantly increased by privatisation.

The then Director-General, John Birt, agreed – but foresaw a future in which technological developments provided other means of distributing television programmes; he believed the BBC should be able to take advantage of this and not be involved in providing a distribution service that could eventually become redundant. I did not share his vision of the future at the time and, more importantly, neither did my esteemed senior engineering colleagues.

I retired, and the BBC's Transmission Group was subsequently privatised. Time passed and early experiments in using high-power satellites to distribute television signals across the UK were rejected because of the high costs, but satellite broadcasting did become a reality when developments in receiver technology enabled the signals to be transmitted at much lower costs via low-power satellites. High-quality sound and vision signals via the internet also became a reality with advances in digital technology and the replacement of copper wire by fibre cables, which facilitated the introduction of 'On Demand' services, including BBC iPlayer. They quickly became successful, and I became an early user of both, as the Freeview service at home was subject to interruption and interference from nearby tall trees, particularly during the summer months when they were in full leaf.

I was sad when BBC Transmission was privatised – it played an important part in my working life – and the closure of the Freeview services will mark the end of a key part of broadcasting history in the UK. It will also realise the final element of that early 1990s 'Vision of the Future'. The BBC will enjoy a considerable saving in operational costs, and it will have avoided the practical difficulties and considerable expense of closing down the transmitting stations that it ceased to own as a result of privatisation.

Bert Gallon
Former Chief Engineer, BBC Transmission



Tebrau transmitting station

Dismantling transmitting stations was a complicated and expensive task. The BBC had some experience of this, including at Daventry, where the BBC's Empire Service began in the early 1930s, and at Tebrau, Malaysia, shown here with Bert Gallon and Graham Smith, Regional Engineer, Far Eastern Relay Station, in the foreground. The Tebrau transmitting station was replaced by a new station located at Kranji on nearby Singapore.

Alice in Wonderland 40th anniversary

2026 marks the 40th anniversary of the BBC's production of *Alice in Wonderland*; a BAFTA award-winning, four-part mini-series.

I was asked to be the designer – Hair, Make-up and Prosthetics. It was an innovative, collaborative production, with a large television budget for its time. It was, of course, pre-digital, so all my work was handmade. It involved, on my part, numerous headcasts, prosthetics, dental make-ups, wigs and postiche.

I had a large team of in-house assistants, including Dave Myers (one half of the Hairy Bikers), and I collaborated with the costume designer, John Peacock. The director was Barry Letts.

It had a large cast of principals and many supporting actors. It was a lot to ask of the actors to perform under the hot studio lights.

The cast included: Kate Dornig (Alice), Jonathan Cecil (The White Rabbit), David Leonard (Lewis Carroll), Elizabeth Sladen (Dormouse), Pip Donaghy (Mad Hatter),

Neil Fitzwilliam (The March Hare) and Janet Henfry (The Queen of Hearts).

The production was mostly based in the BBC Television Centre studio, with some 'period' filming in Oxfordshire, staying faithful to the book.

Joan Stribling



Rikki Fulton

BBC Four recently repeated an excellent documentary celebrating the life of Scots comedian Rikki Fulton and the amazing UK-wide success of his sketch show, *Scotch and Wry*.

Strange that the independently-made programme's Executive Producer, John Archer, and its two Associate Producers, Colin Gilbert and Phil Differ – all three former stalwarts of the BBC – thought fit not to mention the unnamed television producer who sold the idea and masterminded each Hogmanay extravaganza.

That producer was Gordon Menzies – then Head of Educational Programmes and nothing to do with Light Entertainment.

As a long-time lover of golf, it was fitting that one of Gordon's other great successes was *Play Golf with Peter Alliss*.

I am sure he sold the series on the basis that it, too, was educational.

Tom Ross

Nationwide 1971 – can you help?

In late 1971, there was a TV broadcast from the Construction Industry Training Board (ex RAF Bircham Newton) about some ghostly phenomena that had been experienced there.

At about the same time, there was a radio show on the matter (hosted by Jack de Manio).

These two broadcasts are causing me some problems; and it is likely that they no longer exist. The existence of the second show is more or less determined, but the first is a huge headache. It has been suggested that this was *Nationwide*, probably broadcast in December 1971. The BBC Archive, who perused internal documentation, say that there is no record of such an item (and said that it might have been shown on another TV channel), but I have a few people who saw it and confirmed that it was shown on *Nationwide*.

Is there anyone reading this who worked on *Nationwide* (or perhaps just saw it) and could help with my research?

Paul Lee
paul.lee.1971@googlemail.com



BBC Appreciation Society

Here's a photo of Steve Pearce (left), a member of the Prospero Society, presenting a John Lewis voucher for £65 to Gayner Leach. She does so much work for the Society throughout the year, organising and administering our many visits and events. She does this on top of her regular BBC Club work and loves it! We felt she deserved a memento from the members.

Charles Runcie

Meet the Trustee



Richard Collings was elected as a Pensioner Trustee Director to the BBC Pension Trust Board for a five-year term beginning on 1 January 2026. Here, he answers some questions about his life in the BBC and why he wanted to become a pension trustee.

Prospero: How did you get into broadcasting?

My auntie Jenny bought me a reel-to-reel tape recorder when I was about seven years old. I used to sit in front of the TV – much to my parents’ annoyance as it was blocking their view – turn the sound right down, record my own continuity announcements and then turn the sound right up again as the programme started.

The key to a successful recording was all about the timing, working out just how long I had to fill the gap – something I would have to do every day later on in my working life when I had to talk to time on the BBC World Service.

Prospero: And your first proper broadcasting job?

That came after a couple of years in newspapers including *The Western Morning News* and the *Financial Times*. I had studied Spanish at uni and that had a big impact on my career. I started to offer the BBC reports from Latin America.

By the 1990s, there had been civil war in Colombia for five decades. And drug lord Pablo Escobar was at the height of his power, influencing every presidential campaign. It was an interview with one of the (corrupt) presidential candidates that got me my first big break on the BBC.

Back in London, I started presenting on the World Service, mainly nightshifts.

Prospero: What was that like?

Great because I was talking to the world from a small studio as the sun came up over London every morning, doing live inserts into programmes like *Newsdesk* and presenting *World Business Report*.

Prospero: Did you stay with the World Service?

Yes and no. By then, I was working across Business Programmes, so one week I could be working on Radio 4’s *Money Box* as a producer and reporter; the next it could be presenting *The Financial World Tonight* or *World Business Report* on the World Service. 5Live had just launched so, luckily, there was no shortage of work.

Prospero: So you were learning a lot about financial matters?

Yes, we would interview leading figures in the world of business, finance and technology. No-one was off limits. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Bank of England monetary policy board members – we doorstepped all of them.

But the aim was always to cut through the jargon and make sense of complicated terminology. This is rife in the pensions industry.

So it was about this time, in the mid-1990s, that I started to grapple with trying to understand how pensions work.

I had to find case studies, real people who could tell compelling stories and then condense all this into four or five minutes, something which was listener-friendly.

Prospero: What’s been your greatest achievement?

One was chasing after the notorious General Pinochet in Chile for an interview when he stepped down as head of the armed forces in 1998.

I also really enjoyed working at *Newsnight*. Back in 2007, *Newsnight* was much better resourced and had its own investigative film unit. I pitched a story about a Colombian artist who had not been able to return to his country in years because of kidnap and death threats.

The production was not without its twists and turns. I was determined to get funding for a longer version documentary but that meant sometimes going with a begging bowl like *Oliver Twist* to other BBC departments, who I offered different length versions in return for cash injections into the project.

We ended up making a 15-minute film for *Newsnight*, a one-hour documentary for TV, shorter versions for news outlets, and a cinema version which was shown at the Odeon in Leicester Square and Covent Garden. It was also shown at the Cannes Film Festival. So, short of winning an Oscar, this is probably the closest I’ve come to experiencing any of the glitz of Hollywood.

Prospero: That sounds fascinating. So, in comparison, what is it about being a pensioner trustee that interests you and what made you apply?

All our futures are linked in some way to our pension. If anything happens to its viability, this could have a real impact on how we live, on our standard of living.

Trustee directors are in place to act in the interests of the Scheme as a whole and to help safeguard retirement income for Scheme members. So it’s a responsibility I don’t take lightly. I wanted to be a part of the decision-making process.

During the recent election, there was a huge interest in this role, with 61 candidates applying. I think this shows just how important pensions have become for all of us. It’s a subject that’s at the forefront of our minds every day.

Prospero: What experience and skills do you bring to the role?

An inquisitive mind, my experience putting people on the spot at all levels of management. Trying to ask the questions that matter but with empathy too.

And an understanding of the financial management controls involved.

There’s a lot I still have to learn, but it’s building on the basics really that I’ve acquired over the years when reporting and producing reports for the BBC’s business and finance output.

I know I share this great expectation we all have when the annual pension increase comes around. How much will it be? Will it be enough just to make up for the rise in the cost of living?

Prospero: What do you expect to be getting involved in?

As much as I can. I have lots of questions, like as the Scheme moves into surplus, could some of this potentially be shared with members? And, what will happen to the Scheme five, 10 or 15 years down the road?

I hope to be able to play an active role in helping the Trustee Board to reach the right decisions on these questions.

And there are all the wider questions, too, about what the BBC will look like following Charter Review, which, no doubt, could have an impact on the BBC’s ties and relationship with the pension scheme.

I think it’s going to be a really busy few years.

PROSPERO

Prospero is provided free of charge to retired Scheme members or to their spouses and dependants.

Prospero provides a source of news on former colleagues, developments at the BBC and pension issues. It is published twice a year, in April and October.

Please send your editorial contributions, comments or feedback to:

Prospero, BBC Pension and Benefits Centre, Central Square, Cardiff CF10 1FT

Email: prospero@bbc.co.uk

Please make sure that any digital pictures you send are scanned at 300dpi. Please also note that the maximum word count for obituaries is 350 words.

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Prospero April 2026

The next printed issue of *Prospero* will appear in October 2026. The copy deadline is Tuesday 1 September 2026.



BBC Scotland reunion lunch

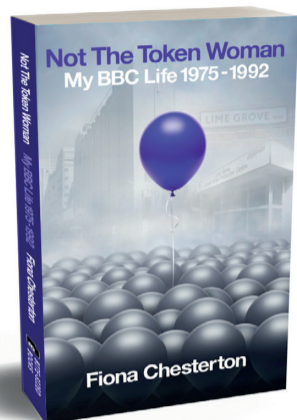
The annual BBC Scotland retired staff lunchtime reunion will take place this year on Friday 23 October at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Glasgow, just across the River Clyde from BBC Scotland’s headquarters at Pacific Quay.

If you haven’t already received an email notification of this, then you’re missing from our list – so please contact exbbcreunion@googlemail.com or andrew.longbottom@outlook.com for further details.



Not the token woman

Fiona Chesterton worked as a producer, news editor, commissioning editor and finally a controller in Factual and Learning division, at the BBC. She started



as a News Trainee, the only woman in a group of eight, in 1975. Now 50 years on, she has published a memoir of her early years, when there were relatively few women working as journalists in the BBC's newsrooms.



She describes her own varied experiences in national, regional and local newsrooms, in London, Southampton and Sheffield. She became a producer in Television Current Affairs in Lime Grove, and then Editor of Newsroom South East in Elstree. This short extract from her book tells how she was featured in *Ariel* as one of the first women to stay on a staff contract while working part-time after she had a baby.

Extract

In March 1985, there was a two-page feature in the staff newspaper, *Ariel*, about working mothers. I was one of five women interviewed for this piece. They included Jenny Abramsky, later to be Director of Radio, but then the Editor of the Radio 4 programme, *The World at One*. Anna Carragher, later Controller of Northern Ireland, who like me was also working part-time in Lime Grove, also featured. There was also a Lime Grove graphics designer and a personnel officer who had to give up her job as she couldn't find affordable childcare, plus a librarian in the BBC's Photographic Library, who had the additional barrier to progress of being black as well as a mother of two children.

I was seen posing with a clipboard by monitors with teletext on them and tapping away at a typewriter surrounded by desks chaotically covered with papers.

Three of us are photographed with our children. In my case there is a lovely photo of my then seven-month-old daughter and me taken at home, before the photographer, David Graeme-Baker, who was based in Lime Grove, accompanied me into the old *Nationwide* office on the seventh floor, now used for the production of *London Plus*.

I was seen posing with a clipboard by monitors with teletext on them and tapping away at a typewriter surrounded by desks chaotically covered with papers. The photographer also captures me with colleagues, including a young assistant producer putting something into a filing cabinet behind me. That young man, then one of the team, was Mark Thompson, at the time of writing the executive editor of CNN as well as former Director-General of the BBC.

Not seen in this photo was the programme's then main presenter, Jeremy Paxman. It was he, I think, who in later years was wont to call *London Plus* by its wicked Lime Grove moniker of *Sod Off Kent*. While the programme could now respond faster to news stories with ENG, electronic news gathering, traffic in London and the sheer

logistics of getting crews to Kent, Essex, Oxfordshire and Berkshire could still effectively be impossible on the day.

I loved being back in the swing but even though I was only in the office for 30 hours or so, I was still working at home too.

As I say in the *Ariel* article: 'In practical terms my job takes up a lot of time out of hours, doing background reading, keeping generally well-informed, commissioning stories etc. As a young mum, I now find it hard to find time even to read a newspaper.'

'It has worked out quite well for me, but I feel there are still men at senior levels in the BBC who can't understand why a woman wants to return to work after having a child.'

I loved being back in the swing but even though I was only in the office for 30 hours or so, I was still working at home too.

'I love my baby and I love spending time with her, but there's another side of my personality, my working life. It is important to me, and it is a darn sight harder to get back into it if you break off for a few years. And there's an awful long time in life before retirement.'

Extract from *Not the Token Woman: My BBC Life 1975-1992*, published by Bite-Sized Books.



HAVE YOU EVER WORKED FOR THE BBC?

If you have you are probably reading this.

YOU COULD JOIN US! IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY JOINED

If you are a BBC pensioner, a deferred pensioner or have a pension into which the BBC has contributed, you can now join the BBC Pensioners Association

£20 individual membership £30 joint membership (if both have worked for the BBC)

Name:

Tel. Number

Address:

Mobile Number

DOB:

Email:

BBC Pension Number
or staff number if you are a deferred pensioner

Send this form to:

Membership BBCPA PO BOX 5314 CARDIFF, CF11 1EB

Our Email: membership@bbcpa.org.uk More details on the website: bbcpa.org.uk

Please note that your BBC Pension number is in format like this: (M12345A)

Sail into new horizons with the BBC Yacht Club



Are you looking for great new sights, new experiences and new adventures? It's easier than you might think to explore the wonders of sailing on the Solent and beyond.

The venture begins with the BBC Yacht Club (BBCYC), whose two sturdy vessels – Ariel, a most civilised 40-footer, and Prospero, a lively 33-ft craft of spirited temperament – stand ready to carry ex BBC hands into this world of wind, tide and wide horizons.

Ashore, one may speak of 'going sailing' as though it were a single activity. But step aboard Ariel and the truth becomes clear: sailing is a tapestry of sensations. There is the soft creak of rigging as she leans into a breeze; the long, unbroken line of the horizon; the curious pleasure of watching weather approach from miles away, as though the sky itself were performing for your benefit.

Ariel moves with the serene confidence of a sturdy ship, making her ideal for those who wish to savour the Solent at a measured pace – gliding past the chalk stacks of the Needles, anchoring off the quiet charm of Newtown Creek or tying up in Yarmouth for a plate of fresh seafood and a stroll along the harbour wall. Other ports of call may include Cowes – the beating heart of yachting, where a sailor may take a pint at a waterside inn and watch the regattas from the Parade. Lymington – a haven of salt marshes and a lively quay, and where cobbled streets lead up to a Georgian market town full of charm. Beaulieu River – a place of deep tranquillity, where the river winds through ancient woodland to the tiny hamlet of Buckler's Hard, where ships of Nelson's fleet were once built. Or Portsmouth Harbour – home of the British Navy, where HMS Victory and more modern ships attract your eyes in wonder.

Prospero, by contrast, is a creature of energy and dash. She is the club's racing yacht, and to join her crew on a Solent starting line is to feel the pulse of true nautical excitement.

A dozen boats converge upon an invisible line, sails straining, helmsmen calling orders, the wind singing in the rigging. For those who seek a touch more vigour – without compromising safety – Prospero offers a taste of the sea's more exhilarating moods.

Both vessels are sailed predominantly by both current and former BBC staff, whose camaraderie and good humour are as much a part of the experience as the sailing itself. The club is an RYA training centre, meaning that those who find themselves unexpectedly smitten



may learn the arts of seamanship properly: helming, navigation, sail trim and the quiet satisfaction of mastering tide and wind.

For the uninitiated, a day afloat with the BBCYC costs no more than a modest meal for two ashore, yet offers something infinitely rarer: the chance to step beyond the familiar world of pavements and schedules, and into a realm where time stretches, the air has the faint tang of salt, and you become at one with the elements. So if you've never sailed before, the BBCYC can offer you the chance to try it for a day or a weekend. And you never know, should you find it something that you unexpectedly love, then we would be happy to welcome you as a member. Have a look at our website bbcyc.wildapricot.org or contact our Membership Secretary, Ian Holden (ian.holden@gmx.com).

BBC

Club



Focus on Connect groups

BBC Club has a range of Connect groups, which are run for and by members connecting people with similar hobbies or interests. This issue, we thought we would highlight a few...

Canal Cruising

Canal cruising is fun and easy to learn. Narrowboat life is friendly too – we like to think of the canal network as a linear village surrounded by flowers and trees, wildlife and of course plenty of pretty pubs along the way! 'It's as if your whole life slows down and you forget all about the city life!'

Why not hire the narrowboat during the year and take friends and family as crew? This year, the boat is moored at Whitchurch, just 300 meters away from the spectacular canal 'breach' of December 2025. You can marvel at the power of nature while still finding plenty to explore in the other direction, including the Pontcysyllte aqueduct. Training is given at the start of your week! Bookings now open. See the website for details:

bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/canal-cruising

Golf Society

One of the oldest Connect groups is the Golf Society, and the first event of the new season will be on 30 April. The Golf Society plays on some great courses, usually in the Home Counties, and all events are catered and have prizes. Now is the time to renew your membership or enquire about joining! See the website for more details:

bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/golf or contact steven.letham@gmail.com with any queries.

Ariel Rambling Club

The Ariel Rambling Club organises rambles (usually circular) of between six and 12 miles every month at the weekend in the Home Counties. Lunch will be at a local pub, or bring your own. All abilities welcome, bring your friends! See the website for more details: bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/rambling or contact arielramblers@gmail.com

Prospero Society events

The second quarter finds Prospero Society members enjoying a diverse range of outings. We have a history walk, an art walk, a tour of Shakespeare's Globe theatre and a visit to Apothecaries' Hall among the highlights. There is also the Prospero Society AGM, where Prospero members can have their say regarding trips. Details can be found in the next newsletter being sent out in March.

bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/prospero

BBC Club members with an email address can get a copy of the newsletter via email. For a postal copy, you must be a member of the Prospero Society.

BBC Yacht Club

The BBC Yacht Club Start of Season Party was in March and now is the time to sail! Whether that is a leisurely cruise, racing or working towards skipper qualifications, the BBC Yacht Club has it all, including your chance to join the summer cruises to Normandy! bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/yacht

BBC.CLUB@BBC.CO.UK



Celebrating David Attenborough's 100th birthday across the BBC

The BBC has commissioned a slate of new shows to mark Sir David Attenborough's 100th birthday, on Friday 8 May, and will be showcasing some of the finest programmes from his extraordinary seven-decade career in a week-long celebration of his work and legacy.



Making Life on Earth: Attenborough's Greatest Adventure

In 1976, production began on David Attenborough's *Life on Earth*. No-one had ever attempted a natural history series on this scale before. This is the remarkable story behind one of the BBC's most famous wildlife blockbusters. A three-year, hair-raising odyssey around the world, travelling to 40 countries, across a million miles, and filming over 600 species.

Making Life on Earth: Attenborough's Greatest Adventure goes behind-the-scenes on this ground-breaking landmark series, featuring exclusive interviews with David Attenborough and other members of the original crew. With fascinating insights, they reveal the highs and lows of filming the series during a truly exciting moment in television history, when global jet travel and colour filming were still in their infancy.

Along the way, the crew encountered multiple challenges, including a coup in the Comoros, being shot at in Rwanda and threats from Saddam Hussein's army in Iraq. Broadcast in 1979 and watched by 500 million people worldwide, it confirmed David's reputation as the most successful and influential wildlife filmmaker of our time. His astonishing encounter with gorillas in the mountains of Rwanda for this series is frequently voted one of the top TV moments of all time.

Secret Garden



In *Wild Isles* and *Wild London*, David showed us the remarkable wildlife dramas playing out in the British countryside and on the streets of our capital city. Now, in *Secret Garden*, he's turning his attention to Britain's backyards.

Over five episodes – set in five very different gardens across the UK – David reveals the lives of the often charming, occasionally daring, always secretive animals that inhabit the hidden world right on our doorsteps. There is no cosy existence – even in these beautiful and seemingly genteel surroundings, the rules of the wild still operate.

From pine martens in the Western Highlands to dormice in South Wales, swallows in the Lake District to otters in Oxfordshire and blue tits in Bristol, the series reveals not just a rich and surprising diversity of life but also how each species finds its own way to live alongside us.

Through meeting the gardeners that have created these wild oases, we discover how our nation of animal lovers and gardeners can do their bit to save struggling species. Eighty per cent of Britons have access to a garden, and together they cover an area greater than all of our national nature reserves combined – so what we do in our own backyards has an impact not only on the animals that live there, but also on whole populations. You'll never look at your garden in the same way again.

“ **Britain's gardens cover an area greater than all of our national nature reserves combined.** ”



New programmes

- *Making Life on Earth: Attenborough's Greatest Adventure* – featuring new interviews with David and the original production team as they reflect on the making of the ground-breaking series *Life on Earth* for BBC One and iPlayer.
- *Secret Garden* – a new primetime series for BBC One and iPlayer, in which Attenborough reveals the hidden worlds and remarkable wildlife thriving within Britain's gardens.
- *David Attenborough's 100 Years on Planet Earth* – a celebratory live event for BBC One and iPlayer from the Royal Albert Hall, featuring the BBC Concert Orchestra and special guests.

From the archive

- Special episodes from some of Attenborough's most beloved landmark series, airing on BBC One in the week leading up to his birthday.
- A dedicated BBC iPlayer collection showcasing more than 40 series presented by David, celebrating one of the most remarkable bodies of work in broadcasting history.



Jack Bootle, Head of Commissioning, Specialist Factual, says: 'It's impossible to overstate what Sir David Attenborough has given us. His programmes have not only defined Science and Natural History broadcasting, but they have also changed how we see our planet and our place within it. This special week is a celebration of an extraordinary milestone, and of a body of work that continues to inspire awe, curiosity and care for the natural world. It's also a moment for all of us at the BBC to say thank you to David – for his generosity, for his brilliance, and for a lifetime spent bringing the wonders of nature into our homes.'



David Attenborough's 100 Years on Planet Earth

In celebration of David's 100th birthday on Friday 8 May, BBC One will bring the nation together for a live event honouring his ground-breaking career at the forefront of natural history storytelling.

Held on his birthday at London's Royal Albert Hall, the event will take audiences on a journey through a century of exploration and discovery in the natural world, seen through the prism of David's extraordinary life. It will feature dramatic wildlife stories, accompanied by live music from his programmes, alongside spoken reflections from public figures and leading advocates for the natural world.

Accompanied by the BBC Concert Orchestra, it will feature original compositions from some of David's best-known landmark series. Alongside the music, guests will include some of those he has collaborated with from the world of conservation and wildlife filmmaking.

BBC One will also pay tribute to David's phenomenal body of work by screening episodes from some of the viewers' favourite series, including *Planet Earth II*; *Seven Worlds, One Planet*; *Blue Planet II*; *Planet Earth III*; *Frozen Planet II*; and his most recent film *Wild London*.

BBC iPlayer will add a special rail to the homepage where viewers can choose to stream from over 40 of David's best-loved programmes, from *Zoo Quest* to his most recent series, including *Kingdom*, *Parenthood* and *Attenborough and the Giant Sea Monster*.

BBC Radio will also be marking David's birthday with special content across its networks. More details will be announced in due course.



BBC News is on a mission

BBC News is on a mission – to become the world's #1 brand in English on social media – including YouTube.

Audiences are spending more time on platforms like YouTube than ever before, and our colleagues in News have new plans and formats to meet them where they are with our distinctive journalism that fights disinformation and cuts through the noise.



Following the announcement of a new BBC and YouTube partnership, the News division have updated their social strategy to strengthen our main BBC News accounts, shaping stories into formats that work on each platform. This doesn't always mean making more content – it means making smarter content.

AI, Innovation and Growth News Director Anjali Kapoor, who is leading this work with her team said: 'We are excited to launch this new partnership with YouTube and expand our social strategy to focus on off-platform growth – meeting audiences where they are and amplifying our trusted BBC News journalism.'

'We will continue to collaborate and develop the YouTube and social strategy with our colleagues in Nations, Local and World Service languages in the coming months.'

There'll be no new small programme-based channels. Instead, topical hubs will take centre stage, beginning with BBC Politics on YouTube ([youtube.com/@BBCpolitics](https://www.youtube.com/@BBCpolitics)) which has just launched, arriving well in time ahead of elections in the UK.

Obituaries

Trevor Noakes – Plays Department manager

Trevor Noakes, who sadly passed away on 5 October 2025, was one of a select band of departmental managers who facilitated the golden age of television.

He had a unique understanding of how to manipulate the complex internal structures of the BBC in such a way as to achieve the money and resources necessary to enable all the talented programme makers to make the staggering number of programmes they did.

Looking back at the Plays departmental archive, I noticed that for the year starting April 1973, the Department produced 66 single dramas for BBC Two alone, plus another 35 for BBC One, over 100 in all. Trevor put together the teams and found the budgets and resources for the producers who worked there. He was a father figure to us all, and I'm very grateful to have known him and worked for him.

Living near him, west of London, I frequently shared a car with him on our way into work, and those journeys were some of the most enjoyable hours of my working life.

He and people like him were the backbone of the golden age of television.

Christopher Cameron

Charles (Charlie) John Clusker

Charlie Clusker died peacefully in his 89th year, following a bravely fought illness, at Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow, on 5 February 2026.

Charlie worked as a Senior Radio Officer in the Merchant Navy and the BBC, where he built lifelong friendships.

He is predeceased by his wife Angela and will be sadly missed by his many relatives and friends in Navan, Co. Meath and by his wide circle of wonderful neighbours and friends in Harrow. Following a funeral mass and cremation in Harrow, Charlie's remains were buried in the family grave in Ardmulchan Graveyard, Co. Meath.

Karen Duffy Keegan

Sandra Coombs

I was sorry to learn that **Sandra Coombs** has died at the age of 90.

When I joined the Programme Contracts Department in 1978, Sandra took me under her wing, as she did all new arrivals. With a precise manner, and cut-glass diction, she showed us how things should be done.

Sandra valued good order. Woe betide a broadcaster, however celebrated, who failed to complete their Next of Kin Form. Her kindness and consideration, as well as her ready laugh, made Sandra a pleasure to work with.

Away from the office she was an Hispanophile. A Spanish speaker, who regularly visited Spain, Sandra was on the committee of the Anglo-Spanish Society and contributed to its journal. Prior to joining Programme Contracts, she had assisted Latin American broadcasters during the 1966 World Cup and worked on the Eurovision Song Contest.

After her retirement, Sandra took a degree in Art, Architecture and Design History from Kingston University. In 2016, Kingston University honoured Sandra 'with the award of Doctor of Arts honoris causa in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the communities of Kingston and Surbiton, and for her unwavering support of Kingston University.'

Late in life, Sandra achieved social media celebrity as 'Surbiton Scooter Gran'. Sightings of her zipping around her local streets on a foot-driven silver scooter were eagerly reported on Facebook.

During her working life, Sandra was a devoted carer to her ailing parents and later to her brother, Adrian. Her funeral was held at St Raphael's Roman Catholic Church, Surbiton, where she was a parishioner and volunteer, on 15 December 2025.

Stephen O'Hanlon

Continued on next page.



Biddy Baxter – Blue Peter producer



Biddy Baxter was probably the most famous behind-the-scenes name in British television, her celebrity greater than many of the stars of *Blue Peter*, which she ran for over 25 years.

Born Joan Maureen Baxter in Leicester in 1933, she was an only child. On her first day at school, five girls in her class were all called Joan. ‘Do you have another name?’ the teacher asked her. ‘Yes. Biddy,’ came the unhesitating response. No one had ever called her that before but the name stuck.

A fan of the author Enid Blyton, she wrote an effusive letter and was thrilled to receive a personal reply. She wrote again and received exactly the same response. The sense of betrayal never left her. It became a guiding principle of *Blue Peter* that every child who wrote in was sent an individual, hand-signed reply.

Biddy joined the BBC after reading social sciences at the University of Durham, working in schools and children’s radio. In 1962, she was appointed producer on *Blue Peter*. Together with close colleagues Edward Barnes and Rosemary Gill, Biddy redefined the show with a rich mix of animals, action, ‘makes’, gardening, history, summer expeditions and annual appeals for charity. The coveted Blue Peter badge was awarded to children who sent in ideas and pictures. In 1965, the programme went twice-weekly; Biddy became Editor and one of the most powerful women within the BBC.

The immense popularity of the show gave her direct access to the hearts and minds of millions of children. She wrote or rewrote every camera script and presided in the studio gallery. It was the sound of Biddy, armed with cuts and changes, that her crews remembered most: the machine gun clatter of her stilettos rat-a-tat-tatting down the metal stairs from the gallery. These notes were tough for presenters not permitted autocue; they either found the knack or left the show. To Biddy, it was the audience who mattered most.

Edged out by an incoming head of department intent on change, she left in the summer of 1988 and went on to work for the Director-General.

In 2000, she married her long-term partner, the eminent musicologist John Hosier. After his death, she established a music trust in his name, dedicated to giving opportunities to young musical talent.

In 2013, Sir David Attenborough presented her with a lifetime BAFTA award. In her final years, Biddy faced the trials of cancer and dementia with customary courage and brio, dying in London on 10 August 2025, aged 92.

Richard Marson

Peter O’Kill – News Editor



It was with great sadness that BBC colleagues and friends learned of the death of **Peter O’Kill** at the age of 79 after a long illness, Progressive Supranuclear Palsy. He fought it with great courage and with the loving care of his wife of 55 years, Jane, and their sons Daniel and Thomas.

Peter began his career in print journalism – notably at the *London Evening News* in the days when the capital had three evening papers.

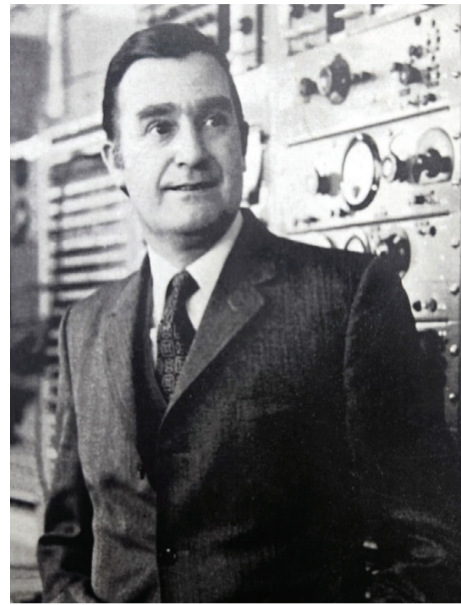
His transfer to Television News was remarkably smooth. He was quick to grasp the complexities of TV technology, and his contribution to the new *Breakfast News* was particularly outstanding because this was a challenging time.

He moved on to edit the *One O’Clock News*, where he soon gained the respect of his colleagues as an editor, and he then enjoyed a successful period as the editor of the BBC’s weekend news programmes, gaining the loyalty and affection of a dedicated but relatively small team.

On retirement, he devoted much of his time not only to his family but also to supporting events in his local community of Sunningdale. He loved his golf and visits to the Oval and the races at Epsom, but nothing could match his commitment to Crystal Palace FC, whom he supported for nearly 70 years. He was a season ticket holder almost to the end and, happily, lived long enough to rejoice in his team’s greatest triumph – winning the FA Cup at Wembley last May.

Mike Woolard and Chris Lowe

Geoff Salter – television engineer



Geoffrey Salter (1926–2025) joined the BBC in 1943, aged 17, at the Wrexham ‘H Group’ transmitter. He also worked at Penketh wartime studio, the Manchester control room and, later, Radio Outside Broadcasts.

Called up in 1945, he joined the Royal Signals and became a sergeant and second-in-charge of a transmitter station at Pirbright, Surrey. He was demobbed in 1948 and rejoined the BBC at Broadcasting House London, taking on control room and studio duties.

Geoff moved to TV at Alexandra Palace in January 1950 and a year later transferred to Telecine Maintenance. He went on to Lime Grove on its opening, as Head of Telecine and Recording Maintenance, and was later transferred to head up Film Maintenance in March 1955.

He was on the working party to buy Ealing Studios in 1958 and became its first engineer-in-charge. In 1961, he became assistant planning and then senior assistant (1963) to South East Tele-Recording, responsible for Telecine and Film Recording developments at Television Centre.

He acted as engineer-in-charge in Tele-Recording in Dickie Meakin’s absence, but was mainly involved with the new Studio and Telecine areas at Television Centre.

He was promoted to Television Project Engineer in 1965 and involved in the design and commissioning of TC6, TC8 and TC1, the move of News from Alexandra Palace and the start of the colour service. This included the outline design of the first six colour Outside Broadcast units.

He moved to Wales as Head of Engineering in 1967 and later became Head of Program Services and Engineering in 1970. In this period, the building of Television Centre at Llandaff was completed.

He retired from the BBC in 1981 and went on to become the Studio Technical Systems adviser to the IBA near Winchester, supervising the opening of some 20 independent local radio stations and advising on the creation of S4C, Channel 4 and Breakfast Television.

In 1986, he finally retired and took up a smallholding in the New Forest, but eventually moved back to Wales, to be nearer his children.

He leaves his wife Shirley, four children and six grandchildren.

Ben Salter

.....
‘Dad has written a fascinating book about his life behind the scenes at the BBC; if anyone is interested in a copy, they can contact me at ben.salter@ntlworld.com’

Henry Farrar – Cameraman

Born in 1931, **Henry Farrar** was the youngest of six children. At school, he loved history, and this remained with him for the rest of his life.

After leaving school, he worked at the Hippodrome cinema in Selby as a projectionist. It was here he quite literally ‘developed’ his love for photography – using one of the old dressing rooms as a dark room.

He was called up for National Service in 1954 and served with the Army in The Royal Signals.

In 1958, working as a projectionist at the Empire Cinema in Leicester Square, a friend suggested he apply for a job at the BBC. He was appointed Film Assistant Class II and in 1960 transferred to Ealing Studios as Trainee Assistant Cameraman.

In 1963, he filmed with the team for the *Tonight* programme with presenter Alan Whicker around Central America for three months. He also worked on location in the UK on programmes like *Z Cars*.

Henry was promoted to Cameraman in 1967 and worked with *Blue Peter* on many trips over the next 13 years. He was a pure delight to be with: calm, thoughtful, modest and unassuming. Above all, he was the master of his craft.

He met his wife, Elizabeth, when they were both working on the same programme. Elizabeth was a BBC research assistant who specialised in gardening programmes. They married in 1969 and moved to the village of Hurst, near Reading, where they lived for the rest of their lives together.

Henry devoted himself to preserving and celebrating the history of the village. He wrote *The Book of Hurst*, a comprehensive history of the village. It proved so popular with residents that it was reprinted in 1988.

Henry retired from the BBC in 1989 when he was in his late 50s to devote more time to research and writing about local and family history. He generously devoted his skills to recording village events in Hurst and created his own YouTube channel.

When Elizabeth died, he made the difficult decision to leave Hurst and move back to Yorkshire in 2016, to be closer to his relatives.

Emily Stead and Alex Leger

Michael Barton – Controller, BBC Local Radio 1974–1986



Grief and gratitude were the emotions felt by Local Radio folk on learning that their one and only Controller of Local Radio had passed away at Christmas aged 94.

Michael Barton was a towering but never intimidating figure, much loved by his managers and staff, who kept to his vision of the role and importance of Local Radio during changing and turbulent times in the BBC.

Before Local Radio, Michael had a successful career as a Studio Manager and then Senior Producer Current Affairs, but the seminal moment in his BBC career was being chosen to lead the closed circuit Local Radio operation in his home town, Hull, in 1961/2 under the tutelage of Frank Gillard. Gillard, who became Director of Radio in 1963, was an enthusiast for Local Radio and used the recordings from Hull and other cities to convince the BBC and government leaders to back a service that would be truly local and democratise the microphone. The argument won, eight local stations were established as a two-year live experiment beginning in 1967/68.

Sheffield was the second station on air, and it was no surprise that its first Manager was Michael Barton.

The experiment was judged to be successful in 1970, and a further 12 stations were authorised.

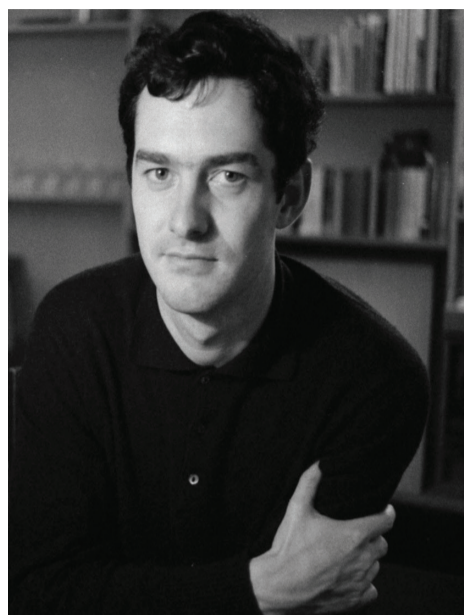
In 1974, Michael moved to London to head the HQ Unit as Controller Local Radio. He realised that Local Radio would never be secure until it could claim to cover most of England and gained approval for a further 20 stations. Though compromises had to be made, with stations covering counties rather than cities, his new managers were still given considerable autonomy in fashioning their service to the community.

In 1986, in yet another managerial shake-up, it was proposed that Local Radio should be absorbed by the Regional Directorate. Michael strongly opposed the dispersal of control to regional centres but lost the argument – and his job.

He undertook a number of tasks before leaving the BBC, but his interest and enthusiasm for his brand of Local Radio never flagged in all the years of his long retirement.

Owen Bentley

Michael Macintyre – from engineer to director



We met on a cool, grey day in April 1961. I had taken an early train from Oxford to London for an interview that could be a turning point in my life: a position as a Trainee Television Engineer with the BBC.

At the Langham, I was directed to a room on the fourth floor. There was another candidate already there, and after a few moments of awkward silence, we struck up a conversation. He told me his name was **Michael Macintyre** and that he'd also taken the train up from Oxford that morning. What was more surprising was that we'd been 'reading' the same Physics course for almost three years and had never met or even seen each other. He was at Magdalen, about a 10-minute walk from my college, Brasenose. We'd not been chatting for long when he was called in to be interviewed, but by then we'd already agreed to meet again. It was the start of a friendship that lasted throughout our lives.

Our careers ran almost parallel courses. Michael started in Videotape, I was in Telecine. We were both formally trained twice by the BBC, first as engineers, later as directors. We both made the leap from engineering to production, starting in Presentation. After a couple of years of making trailers and manning Pres A and Network Control, Michael became a director and segment producer in Music and Arts, starting with a riveting report from Florence on the devastating floods that ruined many of the city's masterpieces.

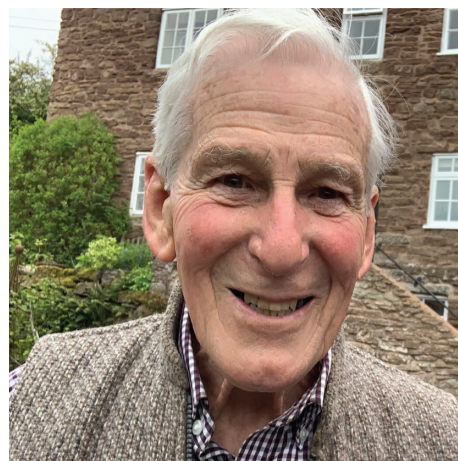
Shortly after I left the BBC to move to New York, Michael decided to explore South East Asia. It's a part of the world he fell in love with and where he eventually made a number of his finest programmes.

Michael passed away peacefully on 22 October 2025, having been cared for and loved by his partner Stephanie and their daughter Natasha.

We had shared a flat in London that was just a 20-minute walk from Television Centre, and after that always stayed in touch, even though we were frequently oceans apart. I will miss him deeply.

David Heeley

(William) Neil Wilkieson – Head of Operations



Neil Wilkieson was born in Skelmorlie, North Ayrshire, in 1935 and educated locally. He trained as an engineer with Post Office Engineering and after National Service joined the BBC at Daventry in 1959.

He married Eileen in 1960, and they moved to Woofferton in 1961. Ludlow became their base for the rest of their lives.

Neil's career progressed to Station Manager at Woofferton; however, this followed two overseas appointments of two years at Ascension Island, the later one as Resident Engineer. This experience made a great impression on Neil and Eileen and left them with a lifelong affection for the Island.

They enjoyed two further overseas tours, firstly at the Caribbean Relay Company in Antigua, where Neil held the position of Company Manager, and finally, in 1987, when Neil was Station Manager at Masirah, a remote island off the coast of Oman, where a multinational team operated the transmitting and a power station. Neil's final BBC appointment in 1989 was Head of Operations with responsibility for all eight of the BBC World Service overseas relay stations until he retired in 1993. It was a job that fitted him like a glove, given his extensive experience of HF broadcast equipment and of managing stations in the UK and overseas.

Away from work, Neil loved sport, and tennis was his favourite. He captained Ludlow's Burway Tennis Club for many years, led the BBC Woofferton tennis team to some memorable victories, and he was part of the Shropshire County Men's and Veterans teams. Bert Gallon, a former Chief Engineer, BBC Transmission, had known Neil from the early 1960s when they were both working at Woofferton. He described Neil as 'a first-rate engineer and manager, thorough and dependable, a manager who was always approachable and available to staff for help and advice, and whose enthusiasm for getting things done was highly infectious. Neil was a man with wide interests, and he was great company, inside and outside of work.'

Eileen predeceased him by three years following a period of nursing care. During these final years, Neil remained content and died in October 2025 aged 90.

Derek Thomas

Nick Cutmore – Design Group engineer



Nick Cutmore joined the BBC straight from the Electrical Sciences course at Cambridge in September 1976 and was assigned to Bush House Day Maintenance Test Room as a DE (direct entry engineer).

Nick, in common with many creative engineers, could only put up with Maintenance for so long, so in 1980 he made the move to Designs Department. Here, he successfully designed a Band II distribution amplifier AM4/20 for FM relay stations – protesting vigorously that he didn't really understand RF as it was a 'black art'.

He then moved onto HF Transmitter automation in Control Section, followed by a stint in Video Section designing the wipe pattern generator for the first digital video mixer (1984?).

Promoted to Senior Design Engineer in Audio Section, Nick took charge of developing the second-generation NICAM-3 equipment for radio sound distribution. This design continued to feed the radio network with high-quality digital sound for the next 25 years.

In 1994, he moved, along with the rest of Design Group, to the newly-created R&D at Kingswood Warren, working on multi-channel studio, and accepted redundancy in 2006.

Nick had a strong hobby interest in electronics – especially audio, video and measuring equipment. Only occasionally, and with typical modesty, did he hint at the sheer quantity of top-notch equipment he'd designed and built at home; that collection provides us with an object lesson in meticulous engineering and craftsmanship.

Nick dedicated many hours to scanning thousands of BBC technical documents for **BBCeng.info**. Without such initiatives, much valuable BBC engineering history would likely have been lost. Nick handed his archive of hard copies to the Broadcast Engineering Conservation Group: **becg.org.uk**

Away from the workshop, Nick enjoyed walking and camping – preferably within reach of some good pubs. In recent years, he co-ordinated a meet-up every July at the Ealing Beer Festival; despite his ailing health, he made it to the 2024 event, and we're sure his friends will keep up the tradition and raise a glass in his honour in future years.

Nick tragically died from cancer a few days from his 70th birthday: he leaves Sue, his wife.

**Arthur Waters, John Robinson,
Martin Ellen, John Sykes**

Barbara Gibson



I first met **Barbara Gibson** (05.06.1952–17.12.2025) in the mid-1970s while working in the TV Science Unit, which was then located in Kensington House. A consummate organiser and problem solver, Barbara was a go-to colleague who became a lifelong friend.

Barbara originally started her career in 1973 in radio, where she met her husband, Bob Oliver Rogers. They moved to Manchester in 1978, where Barbara joined the TV Sports Department as a Production Assistant, working on live coverage of rugby league, cricket, horse racing, darts and snooker.

Barbara Brown, a colleague at the time, remembers Barbara as unflappable, funny and charming. Despite not having a background in sports, Barbara gained the full respect and confidence of producers and presenters. In 1979, Barbara Brown was with her at a snooker event when Bob suddenly died, aged 29. Aged only 26, Barbara was completely devastated by the loss.

During her time at Manchester, Barbara worked in the Features Department on programmes including *Brass Tacks* and *Great Railway Journeys*. Beverley Lamb, a colleague at Manchester, remembers Barbara as someone who stood out from the rest, with her trendy, coloured glasses and distinctive, multi-coloured designer jumpers.

Barbara's flexibility enabled her to move from sports to drama with ease, including a short stint in the Manchester Design Department and the BBC office in New York.

In the early 1980s, Barbara moved back to London as a Production Manager in the TV Features Department.

Barbara's ill health resulted in her taking early retirement in 2003.

Matthew, a close friend, was a great support to her in her final years. Barbara was transferred from Hammersmith Hospital to St John and Elizabeth Hospice at St John's Wood two weeks before she died. This allowed her friends to visit and say their final goodbyes. Her friends and family met at Heysham in February to scatter her ashes at the same place as her parents. We will all miss her.

Herta Weigkricht

Angela Frederica Carte – English by Radio



Angela Carte (02.09.1941–20.11.2025) was born and went to school in London. As a young girl, she attended ballet classes with passion, but her interest in foreign languages led her to France, where she immersed herself in the rich European multilingual culture.

On her return, her command of French, Spanish and Portuguese enabled her to get a job with the World Service in 1961, working first for the Spanish Department and later for English by Radio, from where she retired in 2001.

From manual typewriters and stencilled scripts to the digital era, Angela both adapted to the changes and kept up old guard standards.

She produced many series with World Service colleagues, particularly those from the former Soviet Union with the New European Initiative in the early 1990s (part of the Marshall Plan of the Mind, a pioneering educational, charitable trust using radio, TV and training to teach business skills, including English).

No wonder that on her retirement there were lovely memories from those who knew her:

'Siempre celebramos y celebraremos ser tus amigos' – 'The Spanish loss was the English by Radio and the World's gain.'

Angela was both serious and fun. She was at her best at the annual BBC English Summer School – a chance for listeners and learners to come face to face with programme makers and teachers. Here, she combined her love for the job with her natural ability as an organiser, particularly helping students with special needs, like the blind students sponsored by RNIB. She is also remembered for her contagious disposition for fun, teaching barn dancing and pirouetting across the stage.

'The memory of you dancing a pas de deux with that gorgeous Turkish student (he must be a film star by now) will stay with me forever.'

Angela's enthusiasm and desire to travel was unstoppable. After retiring, she not only visited her brother David's family in New Zealand but also booked the voyage of her dreams – 'to the end of the world' – a cruise to the Arctic.

Angela is well remembered and dearly missed by friends and colleagues all over the world.

Rodica Mager

George Bennett – Head of BBC African Service



Born in New Zealand in 1934 to a British naval officer and his Kiwi wife, **George Bennett** (15.09.1934–18.12.2025) won a state scholarship to St Catherine's College, Oxford, to read English and did his National Service with the Royal West African Frontier Force in Nigeria.

He saw an advertisement for a talks writer in the African Section, BBC External Services, beginning a 26-year career in broadcasting, the last 13 as Head of the BBC's output to Africa, in English, Swahili, Hausa and Somali.

In 1989, he retired early and spent the next 20+ years working on media projects in Africa, including UN press operations in Somalia in 1992 and post-civil war radio stations in Liberia and Sierra Leone; and training for the Red Cross/Crescent in East and West Africa.

George had many skills. Probably the best of all was his ability to find talented people to make interesting programmes. Production staff in the African Service at the time, from 1970 to 1985, were much dissatisfied with Bush House news reporting of Africa. The African Service's two English language daily news programmes, *Focus on Africa* and *Network Africa*, began to recruit their own stringers in most African nations. This transformed the output. The African Service also led the way for the rest of the BBC, which nowadays uses mostly African journalists to report Africa. In this and other ways, George's influence lives on.

Programme content during those years also made a big difference to what was achieved in audience numbers. I had the responsibility, during George's leadership, to measure BBC audiences. Our surveys showed the African Service had the greatest reach when we compared audience size to the populations. Looking outside the UK at the reach of BBC Radio, we find that in Africa, a greater proportion of the population listened to the BBC in an average week than on any other continent.

In 1966, he married Ghanaian GP, Georgina Codjoe. They had one son, Jeremy. They divorced. George married Pramila Ramgulum, a Mauritian sociologist, in 1977. They had three children, Indrani, Kieran and Jonathan. Pramila, the four children and eight grandchildren survive him.

Graham Mytton

Gillian Ford – Studio Manager, BBC Birmingham



Gillian Ford neé Reeves graduated with a degree in mathematical physics, joining BBC Birmingham around 1957 as temporary assistant to formidable 'Auntie' Peggy Bacon on *Children's Hour*. She made her own programming, despite minimal training, in a male-dominated environment.

'An assistant programme head, David Gretton, lovely chap, asked if I intended to get married, and said, "Well, you'll find the Corporation is full of eligible but worthless young men". I always quoted that back to them.'

Some of these eligible men took exception to a graduate being advanced through the Corporation rather than those working their way up.

'Some Studio Managers thought I was too big for my boots,' she remembered. 'Michael [Ford] went to the head of managers and said "If that girl comes into this department, I'm leaving".'

Michael did eventually get Gillian out of the BBC, but only by marrying her and having two children. They had bonded over local radio 'closed circuit' experiments: Radio Norwich, which broadcast internally for one day on 20 June 1961, then Radio Stoke in October 1961. By the April 1962 test in Evesham they were observers only, as Gillian was pregnant, subsequently leaving the Corporation.

The highlight of Gillian's BBC career was undoubtedly Charles Parker's *Radio Ballads* featuring Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger, including the Prix Italia-winning 'Singing The Fishing'. In her later years, Gillian spoke to media students about these now legendary programmes. On one occasion, her Bromsgrove friends were amazed when Peggy Seeger stopped a local concert to point out Gillian as 'the best grams operator the BBC ever had'. Seeger's autobiography says of Gillian: 'She can drop a needle on any groove, on any disc, on any cue, at any time.'

Gillian died on Boxing Day 2025, spending some of her last days with her daughter listening to Michael's radio shows, including a World Service barbershop series which saw them 'go native' to become barbershoppers for a number of years. She leaves two children, Wendy and Jeremy, who love that their parents' lives in BBC Radio have left behind so many audio recordings through which they can be remembered.

Jez Ford

Roger Laughton, CBE – BBC; Meridian; Bournemouth University



Roger Laughton (1942–2025), who died in August 2025 at the age of 83, had a broadcasting career which was preordained from the start. At Oxford, he gained a First Class in History, and in America he studied film and television at Stanford University.

From the BBC General Trainee scheme, he went on to *Nationwide*, to *Pebble Mill at One*, and then to BBC Manchester, where he gave Michael Palin a railway documentary which led to his career as a globetrotting adventurer. Roger knew how to make programmes but was also good at inspiring others to excel.

At Network Features in London, he picked up BAFTAs for *Great River Journeys* and *Live Aid*, the most ambitious and complex music satellite broadcast ever undertaken at that time. Bob Geldof was the inspiration, but he needed Roger to get the all-day concert live on BBC One.

Launching BBC TV daytime in 1986, he spotted an Australian daily soap which he thought would resonate with viewers. Within three years, *Neighbours* was attracting 16 million viewers – so it was Roger who introduced Kylie Minogue to British viewers.

His final job at the BBC was Head of Co-Productions at BBC Enterprises. He resigned after 25 years, leaving him free to bid for an ITV franchise in 1991 as CEO of Meridian. It won, broadcasting from January 1993 across Southern England. Meridian prospered and attracted takeovers. Roger ended his broadcasting career as MD of the television and entertainment division of one of the world's major media companies, a rare example of a public service broadcaster also succeeding in the commercial world.

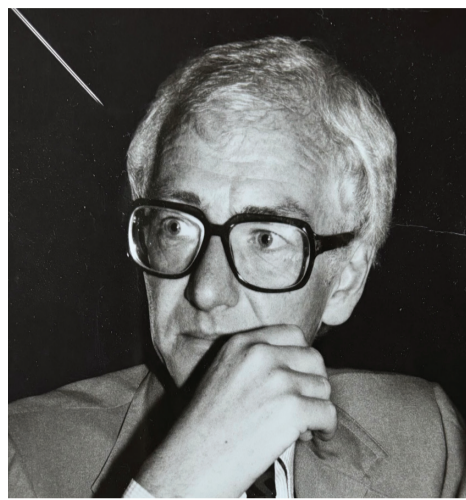
Roger's final job was to set up a new Media Department at Bournemouth University, now the largest of its kind in the UK.

Roger is survived by his wife Sue, daughter Cathy and grandchildren Teo, Freya and Joe – and Cathy should have the last word, saying:

'I just had a great Dad, who I loved dearly. Colleagues have emphasised – He had a great mind He was determined to do the right thing He had a twinkly sense of humour.'

Keith Clement

John Shaw Murray – Radio London



John Murray died of a stroke on 1 January 2026. He was 90 and had had Alzheimer's for about four years.

John was born in Tolworth on 28 March 1935. He went to school at Charterhouse in Godalming and read history at University College, Oxford.

Following a stint on the *Yorkshire Post*, most of John's working life was at the BBC, first as a producer on Radio 4's *Today Programme* in the 1960s, working for Stephen Bonarjee (a name that was often mentioned with great fondness in the Murray household). It was there that John met my mother, Susan Erlbeck, who was also a producer. (Although Bonarjee – as he was always known – was said to frown upon office romances, he approved of this one.)

After *Today*, my father went to help set up Radio London, from the early 1970s and into the 1980s. He was the deputy manager there and also presented his own two shows – a gardening programme (he would eventually admit that he hated gardening) and a sailing programme.

Every Christmas Day, he would drive up from Esher with me to the studios at 35A Marylebone High Street to share a bottle of champagne with whoever was putting out programmes that day. It was always a treat to go with him, and it became our tradition. It seemed there was rarely a dull moment at Radio London, and I believe he thoroughly enjoyed himself there.

When he wasn't working, John was probably happiest sailing, cooking, reading and tending to his pet chickens.

A memorial service will be held in late April.

Clare Murray

Geoff Beech – Lighting Director



Geoff Beech joined the BBC in 1963, beginning his career as a trainee cameraman in the still-under-construction TV Centre.

Over the following decade he worked on hundreds of studio shows including *That Was The Week That Was*, *Doctor Who*, *Z Cars* and *Porridge*.

In 1973, Geoff enjoyed more independence and creativity by moving to the Lighting Department and spent 12 years as a Vision Operator, then Vision Supervisor. This period saw the BBC in its heyday, and he loved the huge variety of projects such as *Only Fools & Horses*, *Blackadder*, *The Two Ronnies*, *Blake 7* and the Alan Bennett monologues, to name but a few.

In 1987, he became Lighting Director and designed the lighting for *EastEnders*, *TOTP*, *Jools Holland*, *Only Fools & Horses*, *Wogan* and *Blue Peter*, while receiving a BAFTA nomination for Best Lighting on *The French & Saunders Christmas Special*.

Having always succeeded in remaining out of shot, Geoff was very surprised during one Saturday morning transmission of *Going Live* when the presenters made him sit with opera singer Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, so that she could sing 'Happy Birthday' to him live on air.

He had a brilliant sense of humour, which, combined with his great talent and relaxed demeanour (he was fondly known around the studios as 'Perry Como') afforded him a very enjoyable and productive career indeed.

Along with being exceptionally practical and a gifted engineer, Geoff was a wonderfully kind and devoted husband, father, grandad and member of the local community.

After retiring in 1998, he moved to Devon, where he spent a very happy time sailing, travelling, building radio-controlled models of various forms and mending the clocks, gadgets and general apparatus of the retired folk of Exmouth.

Geoffery Turner Beech died at the age of 81 on 9 November 2025, after a short illness. He is survived by his loving wife Eileen, three children and six grandchildren.

Al Beech

Denis O'Keeffe – BBC Radio 2 producer



Denis O'Keeffe sadly passed away on 19 September 2025 after a short illness, surrounded by his family.

Denis spent his early days at St Aloysius' College in Highgate. He left school at 17 and went to work in the accounts department at a company at Kings Cross, but he soon moved on to a new job at the BBC Finance Department.

He wanted to get into broadcasting but doing so without experience was difficult, so he joined a BBC-run evening course at the BBC Club. It was a very basic course, but he was nonetheless successful when he applied for a job as a studio manager. It was exactly what Denis was looking for.

Attachments followed at Bush House, World Service in the Strand and then at Broadcasting House, covering a range of specialisms from news to music programmes.

Denis was a drummer and musician at heart and followed his passion into the BBC Music Department, working alongside fellow musicians to record and balance programmes for Radio 2. Denis found his chosen career path, which he loved, and he successfully applied for a role as a Music Radio producer. Denis went on to produce the likes of Terry Wogan, Jimmy Young, Gloria Hunniford, Derek Jamison, John Dunn, Ray Moore and many more. Denis produced concerts from the Royal Albert Hall with the James Last Orchestra, Johnny Mathis in concert and the Syd Lawrence Orchestra. The role afforded international travel opportunities, including the USA with special radio programmes with Perry Como, The Carpenters, Ray Conniff, Tom Jones, Cliff Richard and many more legendary names.

Denis also led the famous/infamous BBC charity radio releases for *Children in Need* in the mid-80s and appeared on *Top Of The Pops* as a backing drummer to Ray Moore's 'Oh my father had a rabbit, and I thought it was a duck' successful 7-inch vinyl release.

Denis was very proud of his BBC career and sustained many friendships after his retirement in the early 90s.

He is dearly missed by his wife, two children and four grandchildren.

Steve O'Keeffe

Obituaries

Geoffrey Klinton-Parker



Geoff Parker, 'GKP' on the Studio Manager schedules, grew up in Yorkshire playing tennis and chess, cycling and swimming. But life really revolved around music from the age of four. He was soon highly successful in piano festivals and competitions, but discovered the organ was his true calling aged eight, and moved to London at 17 to study at the Royal College of Music.

A professional playing career did not appeal to his modest and unassuming temperament, and his curiosity about broadcasting and recorded sound led to a traineeship as a BBC Studio Manager in 1956.

Over the next nine years, he learnt his craft doing News, Home Service, disc and light music shows, all the while trying to break into 'serious music'. The advent of Radio 3 made that possible, and he spent the next 24 years balancing music programmes in hundreds of studio and concert venues, recording instrumental, orchestral, opera and vocal music.

Although the Proms season was always a highlight, from the mid-70s onwards, his mainstay was with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and organ recordings.

The orchestra programmes brought substantial responsibility; the SM collaborating directly with conductors and no on-site producer. Artists of the stature of Pierre Boulez, Günter Wand and Gennadi Rozhdestvensky, among many others, greatly appreciated his advice and balancing skills, combined with musical understanding. This was all the more challenging on tour with the orchestra to European and Far Eastern locations, where unfamiliar broadcasting equipment and locations tested his 'cool under pressure' renown.

Simultaneously, he collaborated on extensive tours throughout Europe, recording a huge variety of organs from different schools of design and sound. Memorable also was Washington DC, recording the complete Messiaen organ works with Dame Gillian Weir, who remained a loyal friend and, like others, appreciated his kindness, empathy, humour and brilliance at utilising equipment, instrument and acoustic to best effect.

His surprise early retirement in 1989 enabled more travel with Jean, his wife of 70 years, as well as a few recitals and time to play the organ at home for his own amusement, until his death in February aged 93.

Michael Parker

Joy Boatman – Senior Producer, World Service Features and Arts



Joy Boatman joined the BBC in 1961 as a secretary/clerk, coming from two years working for Hoffmann-La Roche in Switzerland.

A brief spell as a compilation clerk with the BBC's Arabic Service led on to four years as secretary to Martin Esslin, the distinguished Head of Radio Drama. Here, she had the opportunity to develop her interest in drama, and it was here she got to know actor Timothy Harley, who later would become her husband.

Impressed by Joy's enquiring mind and breadth of vision, Martin Esslin encouraged her to think ahead ('You should go for a producer's job'). Before that happened, there were four years as a Programme Reporter for the 24-hour a day World Service – she was one of the three who processed domestic radio programmes for transmission.

By 1970, Joy had made the leap into radio production. Working for World Service Productions, she was responsible for *Letterbox*, which each week responded to listeners' comments with wit and flair, for *World Radio Club*, aimed particularly at shortwave listeners worldwide and for the introduction of *Theatre Call*, a weekly programme dealing with all aspects of drama.

Joy led the team that launched *Meridian* in the early 1980s for the World Service – a 30-minute programme, sometimes live, covering all the arts in three editions a week, with a variety of presenters. The programme quickly built a reputation for lively and searching arts coverage and proved popular with listeners. Joy felt strongly that *Meridian* should cover the arts from an international standpoint, so the Ouagadougou International Film Festival would be featured, as well as the Edinburgh Festival, and there would be a view of the arts in South Korea as well as in London.

Joy was regarded by many of her presenters as the ideal radio producer – full of ideas, unflappable, well organised, supportive of her presenters and contributors, adept at nurturing new talent while tactfully handling the egos of the famous. She was aptly named, being a joy to so many colleagues and friends, who will sadly miss her.

Maureen Bebb

Roy Haynes – World Service newsroom



Roy Haynes, who has died at the age of 81, was a stalwart of the World Service newsroom for the best part of 30 years until his retirement in 2000. For much of this time he was a Chief Sub-Editor and Duty Editor. A large man, always immaculately dressed, he was among the most trusted and well-liked of colleagues.

Roy was an elegant and clear writer with a light touch and a strong gut instinct for what would interest the listeners. He was renowned for his ability to discover off-beat and quirky stories, on one occasion insisting the newsroom run a story about a Spanish man who had devoted his whole life to growing a quince tree!

Roy was also an accomplished broadcaster who had stints as British Affairs Correspondent and a short attachment – much to the envy of his colleagues – as a special reporter in the Caribbean. He was also regularly employed as a newsroom trainer and, following his death, there have been many tributes from foreign language service staff for the help Roy gave them when they came on attachments to the newsroom.

Roy was a Londoner, born in Muswell Hill in October 1944, shortly after his father had been invalided out of the Royal Navy due to wartime injuries. He was the youngest of four. After attending grammar school, he joined the *Hornsey Journal* and later moved to the *Islington Gazette*. His interest in politics – he was a lifelong socialist – and foreign affairs led him to broaden his experience in Canada for six years from the mid-1960s. He worked for a paper in Montreal, returning to join the World Service newsroom in 1973.

Shortly before retiring, Roy moved from London to Bexhill-on-Sea. He lived there, in a seafront flat formerly part of a prestigious hotel, for the next 20 years. He produced a newsletter focussing on the building's history.

Following a stroke in 2021, Roy moved into a nursing home in Horsham, close to family. He died after suffering another stroke in January. His funeral, in Eastbourne, was attended by several World Service colleagues.

Paul Legg

Contacts

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