The thin end of the wedge

Immortalised by McCartney

Days before the Doosra

A family at war...
Patrick’s tale of danger, death and glory
Page 6

The Pension deficit: send in your views and questions
See page 3
The day we went to Windsor

By Malcolm Garrett-Eynon

A summer outing was held recently for a group of TV Presentation staff spanning a full 50 years. Some 60 former and current announcers, network directors, trailer producers and other transmission staff had a day out on the two splendid Routemaster buses that are often talked about on the Wogan show.

This special event was open to all who joined TV Pres before the advent of computerised transmission. Many have now retired or moved to other jobs, while others are still in their posts, working for Red Bee Media which took over the TV ‘playout’ role in 2005.

Senior member on the day was Bruce Goddard, former Presentation Editor, who joined the department a full 50 years ago. As he travelled on the bus in June 2009, he explained that in June 1959 he had been on his initial training course at Lime Grove.

The Routemasters are owned by four bus enthusiasts best known on Radio 2 – but they have all worked for TV Pres over the years. Ken Bruce, Alan Dedicoat, Steve Madden and Charles Nove bought their first bus some four years ago, just for fun. Now they have a private hire business, called ThisBus.com. The fifth partner in the business is David Sheppard who worked until recently at BBC Radio Berkshire, but now has moved to BBC Radio Devon.

The idea for the outing came about in January, at the funeral of former television announcer Andy Cartledge. Andy’s death just before Christmas was completely unexpected. He was 67 years old. His colleagues decided that a reunion was long overdue, and a few days later, current announcer Matthew Jackson and myself (former continuity voice) put the wheels in motion. I had no problem contacting the bus owners; as their most regular driver I’m constantly in touch, taking the buses out for weddings and other outings on average twice a week.

The buses themselves thrive on it; 45 years old they may be, with literally millions of miles on the clock, but the Routemasters were built to last.

Charles, Steve and Ken also hold the bus driver’s PCV licence and drive when their busy lives allow.

On the day of the reunion, the buses made their first pick-up at London’s Broadcasting House, where they also took part in a photoshoot for the Wogan TOGS calendar. Then after a sprint along the A40 they swept majestically through the main gates of Television Centre where more climbed aboard, before setting off for the picturesque riverside settings of Rannymeade and Windsor – where some enjoyed a delicious cream tea and others headed for the nearest pub!

Design reunion

The 29th annual reunion lunch for members of TVP, television Design and Scenic Services Group, spouses, partners and friends will take place at noon on Friday, October 2 at Ealing Golf Club, Greenford, Middlesex. Contact Hilary Worrall (020 8677 3067) for information.

Children’s pioneer

Patrick Dowling, the former BBC producer/director whose credits included Vision On and The Adventure Game, has died in Australia, aged 89. He joined the BBC in 1955, rising to become a senior producer in children’s.

Hancock restored

Six lost episodes of Hancock’s Half Hour have been restored to the BBC archives after the Hancock Appreciation Society approached BBC Audiobooks with a recently discovered collection of home-recorded audiotapes.

Two, The Flight of the Red Shadow and The Wrong Man, will be published in August.
Deficit confirmed by interim valuation and Annual Report

BBC to back the scheme with assets

The gloomy picture of the state of the fund, painted by pensioner-elected trustee Geoff Jones in the May issue of Prospero, is underlined in the Scheme’s recent communication to retired staff.

The BBC Pension Scheme’s 2009 Summary Report includes figures from the Annual Report and the findings of last year’s interim valuation.

The interim valuation confirms that at April 1 last year the scheme was in deficit to the tune of £370 million – but as BBC Pension Trust Chair Jeremy Peat acknowledges, the fortunes of pension funds everywhere have plunged since then.

The Annual Report shows that the market value of the fund has fallen by £1.6 billion since April 1 2008.

In his communication, Pension Trust chairman Jeremy Peat reliishes from the fact that the fund is ‘cash positive’ – which means it doesn’t have to sell equities (e.g. shares) at depressed prices in order to pay pensions – and he reports that the BBC remains firmly behind the scheme.

“I know many of you may find this worrying,” he writes. “However, the trustees are discussing the position with the BBC, which has agreed to set aside additional funds to meet increased contributions this year and the expectation that these will be required in the future.

‘Consideration is also being given to other means of supporting the scheme e.g. providing security over assets.’

Quite what those assets will be is not known – but the model adopted elsewhere has seen parent companies signing over buildings and corresponding rental income to bolster schemes through the current trough.

The chairmain’s message is that:

• These are unprecedented times and the scheme, like many other pension schemes, has not been immune from the turbulence that has affected markets around the world.
• The Trustees are monitoring the position closely so they can respond to developments promptly.
• They recognise that the scheme’s investments are long term in nature.
• Investment strategy has been reviewed during the year and efforts made to reduce risks (e.g. by reducing holdings in equities).
• The BBC’s covenant and support for the scheme remains strong.

Trustee nominations

Geoff Jones’s term of office as pensioner-elected trustee ends in December – and nominations to fill the vacancy are being sought.

Nominations – who can nominate themselves – must be resident in the UK, and must be former contributors to the BBC Pension Scheme.

The office has a term of four years, and carries an honorarium of £6,000 pa. It involves some 15 days work per year, preparing for and attending meetings in London, plus extra time for travel.

Trustees receive training and support to help them carry out their duties. They are expected to apply common sense, personal experience and integrity to the care of other people’s pension and money, and requirements include an ability to understand complex issues.

For more information contact the secretary to the trustees, Sandra Phillips, via the Pension Service Line 020 7032 2811 or visit the scheme’s website bbc.co.uk/mpension.

You can request a nomination form from Ruth Dunlop, Electoral Reform Services, 33 Clarendon Road, London N8 0NW – call 020 8365 8909.

Nominations (proposed and seconded by two former contributing members) must reach Electoral Reform Services by 5pm Friday July 24.

Digital switchover: Elderly urged to ask for help

Elderly viewers, and those who come into contact with them are being urged to ask for help ahead of the digital switchover.

Chief executive Peter White says the BBC run Switchover Help Scheme writes to elderly viewers up to three times before analogue transmitters in their area are switched off, but many still overlook the fact that they can get assistance.

Since spring two transmitter groups have switched within the ITV West Country region and more switches are imminent. From July 8 West Cornwall and the Scillies will be affected, and switchover will begin in Plymouth, parts of Devon and east Cornwall on August 12.

The scheme has so far helped tens of thousands of eligible people to switch to digital,’ says Peter. “We have just passed the milestone of mailing over a million eligible people.’

Now the scheme is doing more to help carers ensure that the people in their charge don’t miss out.

“We understand how important it is to reassure older and disabled people about security in their homes. We therefore offer fixed appointment times so that carers, friends or relatives can accompany the eligible person and we can also provide a chaperone upon request. Help Scheme installers are CRB checked, carry ID cards and wear recognisable uniforms.

In addition the scheme has produced a leaflet for carers following feedback suggesting that some people find digital equipment choices confusing. There is also a ‘picture-book explanation of the scheme for people suffering from dementia.

Museum appeal to Good Life veterans

This Autumn the Garden Museum in London is planning a ‘Good Life’ exhibition, and is asking for help from former BBC staff. Curator Mary Guyatt says the theme is ‘growing your own’; past and present. We would be very interested in talking to people who worked on the 1970s sitcom and we are keen to borrow artefacts related to the programme, and to growing your own more generally.

If you think you can help, contact Mary at mary@gardenmuseum.org.uk. You can find out more about the museum at http://www.com pulink.co.uk/~m useum gh/
Ed Harris has turned his energies to the medieval City of London – and the bricks and mortar that once contained it.

On the face of it, BBC complaints, local history and Robert Preston don’t have an obvious association. Unless, that is, you are looking for a tenuous broadcasting link with which to impress the Editor of Prospero. I’ve always had a passion for history and found it invaluable when fielding complaints about the BBC and its output. Watching Points of View nothing much is new, and so it is with all history. Unless sanitary ramblings or a study of cohort persistence and mobility floats your boat, the search for an original historical theme can be a nightmare. Such was the case on taking a Masters degree in local history on leaving the BBC, as you do.

Looking out of my window one day towards Twickenham rugby ground looming large above the trees on the far horizon, I wondered how it had got there – an unlikely place. That idle thought led to my dissertation and eventually the publication of my first ‘proper’ book.

This latest venture comes courtesy of author, journalist and broadcaster Hunter Davies, who back in 1974 spent a year tracking Hadrian’s Wall across the neck of England from WallSEND, near Newcastle, to the Solway. The result was the highly successful book A Walk Along the Wall. Today there are hundreds of books on the subject, but not a single one written about the second largest construction project in Roman Britain, London Wall.

So it was in January 2008 that I began to put that matter right, swapping the rugged windswept landscape of the north of England for the slick, urbane setting of the City of London. The three mile walk from Blackfriars to the Tower of London is itself a new departure from the few incomplete guides to London Wall that have been written in the past that all start at the Tower and peter out after Newgate.

As well as boasting much of the City’s quirky meanders and secret passages, the start from Blackfriars is a dramatic affair. While there is little to see of the City Wall in the physical sense until after Ludgate, so much of London history is covered in this rich corner and what lies underneath is just as potent as the physical remains to be unravelled at later. Like any good production, the route shifts seamlessly from the prologue to the main body of the work, saving the best until last as we return to the Thames and the grand finale, the Tower of London.

A Walk Along London Wall is a book of two unequal parts, designed for both the armchair rambler and the field explorer. But any contemporary guide to it loses some of its credibility in a matter of months. Enter Robert Preston. For just as he had anticipated the credit crunch, so did I pre-empt that ever-changing landscape.

‘Always consider the wider perspectives’, was the watchword of my BBC accountability days. Following that cautionary note, I determined not to offer the names of banks and businesses en route because of the impermanence of the City of London and its institutions over time. Indeed, the mighty Merrill Lynch, the bank that grants entry to an especially fine piece of London Wall, has gone into turmoil. The lack of customers in a normally bustling City nightclub meant grabbing an uninterrupted picture of its stretch of Wall was a breeze. And no sooner was the book in its final stages of production than Blackfriars station closed until late 2011 to provide for a new upgraded station.

As the bottom has fallen out of the economy, so the City has changed down a gear or ten. Allowing access to those parts of the Wall less well known has perhaps not been a priority for its guardians. Permission to enter one location I have dubbed ‘The Secret Chamber’ took three months. I have been asked by the City of London to provide for a new nightclub meant grabbing an uninterrupted picture of its stretch of Wall was a breeze. And no sooner was the book in its final stages of production than Blackfriars station closed until late 2011 to provide for a new upgraded station.

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I was very interested to read your article in Prospero about schools radio. Charles Armour and Geoff Sherlock mentioned that I know—my father, Arthur Vialls, worked with both of them in schools radio.

My father is now dead, and although he has just gone into an old people’s home. As part of clearing out their house I have found a substantial amount of material from the schools science radio series my father produced, Discovery. In particular, as well as numerous leaflets and pamphlets we also have three boxes of reel to reel tapes which we believe are some of the programmes themselves. I have been wondering what I should do with this material—any thoughts would be gratefully received.

I don’t think I have any claim to fame where schools radio is concerned, but I believe my younger brother, Richard, can claim to be the person broadcasting at the youngest age certainly on schools radio. As I recall it, one of my father’s colleagues needed the sound of an unborn baby’s heartbeat—my mother was pregnant with Richard at the time, and he was thus broadcast before he was even born!

Peter Vialls

The right time

In the May Prospero, Pension Trustee Geoffrey Jones stated that the settlement month for the annual revision of pensions is not important, as over time it equalises whatever month is chosen. Unfortunately this is not true. A look at last summer’s National Disability Insurance Scheme reveals a figure of 5.0% in September, 4.2% in October, 3.0% in November and 0.9% in December, (data from the Department of Social Security, 2001–2002, and 2002–2003). The sudden and dramatic drop in the December figure was caused largely by the 2.5% reduction in VAT, which began on December 1st 2008. However, the VAT rate is not due to return to its previous level of 17.5% until January 1st 2010—around 13 months. So BBC pensioners (and any other group who use the December RPI figure to calculate increases in their pensions) are not, as a result of December being used as the basis of our annual increase. We lost out in December 2008 and are due to lose out again in December 2009, just before the expected jump in the RPI in January 2010 due to VAT returning to its previous value.

Antony Carter

Donations at source

Whilst employed by the BBC, I was able to donate to charity direct from my pre-tax salary. Now I am retired I donate by standing order but this is from my taxed income. Is there any way I can arrange to donate pre-tax money every month from my occupational pension? A win-win situation?

Clive Coston
Phil Weinberg, senior administrator, pension payroll, replies: BBC pensioners can contribute to charities through their BBC pension. The donation amount deducted before tax is calculated so there is tax relief on the donation.

The total amount deducted is sent each month to Charities Trust, who distribute the donations to each charity. As the Charities Trust charge an administration fee of 25p per donor each month it is advised that a minimum of £1 is donated. There is no maximum donation for this purpose.

Several charities can be selected, all of which must be registered charities. If preferred, vouchers can be arranged by the Charities Trust to be presented by the donor to the charity directly.

Charity selection forms can be obtained from Pension and Benefits Centre, Querries should be directed to Pension and Benefits Centre Helpdesk.

I write in response to your letter from Paul, ‘On an echo of early radio, June issue’.

May I recommend the excellent book ‘Radio’ by Jonnie Micklethwaite, from which most of this information is taken. Paul’s father’s crystal set would appear to be the one shown on page 71, which Hill describes as follows: ‘Edison Bell Type B, by Edison Bell Ltd. 1923. BBC/MkG stamp, GPO Reg. No. 615. Crystal set for headphone use, double glass-enclosed cat’s whisker/galena detector with crystal selection switch, plug-in coils for various wave ranges, black ebonite control panel, oak cabinet with lift-up lid.’ The fact that this set displays a BBC logo is due to what we would nowadays describe as a ‘protectionist measure’ brought into effect in December 1924, in the early days of radio broadcasting.

As many will know, the BBC was originally a private company, formed by a group of radio manufacturers to provide programmes for their customers to listen to. It was partly financed by the broadsheet licence fee, and partly by a royalty paid on the sale of radio receivers. This BBC logo indicated that the set so marked had been made in Britain by one of the companies who were members of the BBC, that the royalty had been paid, and also that it had been tested and type-approved by the Post Office, who gave each model a registration number.

In theory, only sets sealed as such could be used to determine the fashion of the licence, but in practice, it’s difficult to see how this law would have applied here, so BBC logos were also marked. I hope this is what you were looking for.

Tony Farquhar

Resistance series

Soapbox Fighters is a co-production by Cineteve and the French-German cultural channel Arte in partnership with the Belgian Public Television RTBF. The series will shed light on the creation of Resistance organisations in Europe in World War II, which greatly influenced the post-war period in Europe.

The psychological battle led by the BBC was crucial and pivotal in the course of the war. We are trying to contact BBC veterans who might have worked with Darsie Gillie, Peter Pople, Mr Ritchie-Calder (who coordinated the V campaign) and with national radio services operating under Foreign Office and PWE cover. We also would like to contact BBC members who worked at the tapping service which was the most efficient at that time.

If you are able to help, please contact me by email (shadowlighter06@bt.com) or telephone 033 14804300.

Christiane Rathey

Default to silence

Re the ‘noises off’ campaign, I agree with John Dixon. It’s all perfectly normal! All of our programmes are marked ‘noises off’, whether in the recording or the studio. It’s just that we have to get used to the new reality.

John Baker

Sounds normal

Ray Burgess talks of those us with some hearing loss (Destructive music, Prospero, June).

I believe the very term ‘hearing loss’ can in itself be destructive. My eyesight is perfectly normal for a chap of my age, so is the thickening of my waistline; my creeping baldness is normal for a man of my years, as is the inability to run upstairs. My hearing is also perfectly normal for a man approaching his eighties. It’s all perfectly normal! The main thing is that these BBC logos are that much looser in a 20-year-old and that too is perfectly normal. By saying we have hearing loss implies we are ‘not quite right’, and handicapped—and therefore there is nothing producers or directors can do about it, other than say something to the actor, but unfortunately we have hearing loss.

There is nothing abnormal in being iritated by loud, intrusive or inappropriate music.

Tony McFarlane

Digital delay

I have upgraded my television reception in July 2009. It was partly financed by the line-out money that was being used in my TV studio, which would be more than suitable.

I managed to find the name and address of the manufacturer who supplied the material and obtained some.

I now need to obtain some more and have midlisted the name of the original supplier. Is there anyone who would recall the name and address of the manufacturer. If so they please contact me at 01949 520978 or at my wife’s emial address jackie.palm er@btinternet.com.

Chris Phillips

Aerial upgrades

I was surprised to read that ‘conventional aerials will pick up digital terrestrial signals’ (Prospero, June)

Whilst that is generally true of domestic TV ariel, it is not necessarily the case for commercial aerials of the kind described by the original enquirer.

Commercial aerial TV systems frequently have ‘channel filters’ which can mean that even if good analogue TV reception is obtained, there may be no digital reception. Such systems need to be upgraded for Freeview, and may also require modification for digital switchover.

Richard Russell

The confusion was mine. Digital UK confirms what you say—that many communal aerial systems will need to be upgraded or replaced—ed.

Remember Ronnie? I’m writing a biography about Ronnie Barker, celebrating his life and career. The book has been commissioned by a leading publisher.

I’ve spoken to several people who have worked with him, including Sydney Lotterby, Harold Snart, David Renwick, Barry Cryer and Richard Briers. I would like to hear from others who worked with him, in whatever capacity.

Richard Webber 01643 708990, email at rwebber@virgin.net

WHERE are you now?

TV artists bookings Does anyone know the whereabouts of one Bob McNab who worked in the above department in TV Centre before moving to Kensington House back in the 80s? tony.burrows@localic.co.uk Tony Burrows (07810862006)

Dads Army Does any one know the whereabouts of Judy Allen (.camera) or James Babcock (camera), who worked on Dads Army series 3-5? Please would you contact me on 0131 316 8166.

David Menzies, The British Film Designers Guild – phone 01344 622489 or email davidmimtman@btinternet.com

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Letters

Ante-natal claim to broadcasting fame

I have a Geocope crystal set detector no.1. It is the same vintage as the set owned by Paul Brodie. It also has BBC written on it, also the words ‘Type approved by Post Master General’ and regd. No. 102. It suggests to me that the early days of radio were under close scrutiny!

My father bought me mine just before the war. I used to talk to the red button and listen to the Home Service when it came on the air about 6.30am as I used to remember, with a medley of traditional airs.

Charles Lacaille

Chapter and verse on that crystal set

This issue … Giving via payroll; ‘normal’ hearing loss; studio flooring; and supporting the Resistance

While after this as a mark of prestige. Richard Davis

Similar point also made by Bob Taylor and M.G. Bendall

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Charles Lacaille
Grace Wyndham Goldie (BBC)
Trust Fund
Applications are invited from graduates of the Grace Wyndham Goldie (BBC) Trust Fund, to help people in this country in educational or community projects, with a particular emphasis on those who are financially disadvantaged.

For more information about how to apply, visit the BBC website or call 020 7336 6000.

Annual General Meeting
The AGM of the Club will be held on Wednesday 7th November at 6.30pm, at the Club.

Court Yard Bar
The White City Court Yard Bar is now open to members only.

Give or Take
Give or Take is a shopping portal where members can buy and sell their unwanted items.

CSMA Club membership
CSMA Club membership is now available for just £15 a year. Belonging to the CSMA Club can save you on everything from car insurance to car hire, home insurance to home phone cover, life insurance to life insurance plus, and much more. Call 0800 389 6699 for more information.

Life after Auntie
Life after Auntie is a project for people who used to work for Auntie.

Gone but not forgotten – the heroism of Howard’s family
Lingering mystery of Gone With The Wind star’s death stirs distant memories for a French Service broadcaster

Carer’s film aims to lighten the burden of dementia
Producer shares skills and personal experience in Millenium Fund project
Top-slicing proposal slammed by Lyons and Thompson

The BBC is on the defensive as it prepares to fight Government's recommendations to 'top-slice' the licence fee fund and use the money to prop up regional news. Sir Michael Lyons, chairman of the BBC Trust, said the corporation would 'fight it...'

Mike Thompson and the BBC enjoy a strong intellectual overlap. Both are advocates of plurality, and both have called for the BBC to have a monopoly on these services.

The proposals are subject to consultation through the autumn, but at things stand legislation will be introduced in the second half of 2009. In an interview on Radio 4, Mr Thompson said the idea was being pushed by a small group that was 'ideologically focused'. He also said the proposals were going to be 'good news' for the public, with the money for BBC services. It's more important than the money for newspapers. The BBC is the corporate entity, the public-leafed, public-service corporation. We never think about TV or Sky or any aspect of the BBC as the BBC. The BBC, as an organisation, is the purpose of the licence fee for that.

The BBC should be able to use the licence fee in its own way, according to Mr Thompson. We never think about TV or Sky or any aspect of the BBC as the BBC. The BBC, as an organisation, is the purpose of the licence fee for that.

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A character who came to be called for 66 years –

**SM with a talent for friendship**

Mansell MacCuish died on February 25 after a three-week battle with bone cancer. She would have been 70 in October, and she succumbed to a year and a half were action projected.

When speaking of Pierre Le Seve, who died in 1999, his friends spontaneously mention his kindness and his warmth. He was someone who could go into a room full of people with knowledge of Britain, in history and geography, and cut the French service for which he worked for 40 years. He was a peaceful man, living the occasion of France, and was one of the many who listened weekly to the BBC French service, the news of Hope from Europe. He had a background in the news.

Four Films

Everyone, who knew Pam Ralston in picture-perfect publicist of great integrity!

Pam, sometimes known as Audrey, died at the age of 75.

She worked for the BBC for 42 years. For 20 of those years, she ran the foreign news agency in Brussels.

Pam had a reputation for the strictest of news procedures and was determined to pride over the BBC newsroom.

The picture-perfect publicist of great integrity!

She somehow always managed to be friendly but also could be, when necessary, quite strict. Her approach to the news was always spot on.

She was born in 1934, near Waldorf in south-east England, and attended Willingdon School in Brighton until she was 13. Then, in 1948, she moved to London and worked for a time as a trainee at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), then known as the BBC.

She then took the job and the contact that it gave him with the Community Network Awards for the excitement of his performances and being up for the next big thing.

He was the son of the late Jean and the late Henry, who both died in the 1980s.

In 1970, he married his wife, Emily, and they had two children, Daniel and Sarah. They were married for 38 years until his death in 2009.

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**SM with a talent for friendship**

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Four Films

Everyone, who knew Pam Ralston in picture-perfect publicist of great integrity!

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The picture-perfect publicist of great integrity!

She somehow always managed to be friendly but also could be, when necessary, quite strict. Her approach to the news was always spot on.

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Recollecting the regulars – on and off the pitch

My husband, Eric Holmes, played in the BBC first team from the mid-50s until we moved to Birmingham in 1971.

The captain in those days was Leo Bennett, a former Northants player. Bertie Clarke, Ernie Eytle and Rodney Norville were all talented West Indian players, with close connections to the national West Indies touring team. I remember Wesley Hall (fast bowler) turning out for the BBC one Sunday as a guest player – but he elected to keep wicket in deference to the opposing team!

The photo is of the team in the Sixties, taken at Motspur Park. Who, I wonder, remembers Joe Filliston, our 100-year-old umpire of the second team? Still behind the wicket and moving sprightly at 100! The photo (right) shows him holding our daughter Gillian – she was six weeks old (born 1962), he 100 years old (born 1862). Again it was taken at Motspur Park when Joe was just leaving the field of play.

In those days – the Fifties and Sixties – there was also an annual match against a side at Daventry, in addition to the London/Regions matches.

The last Regions match I remember was played in Birmingham in the 1970s, when the prize was the Fred Hale Trophy. My husband Eric won a bottle of champagne for taking a hat-trick.

Above: Joe and Gillian

In the last issue, Prospero asked: Do you have memories of BBC cricket – London vs the Regions, or the West Indian Test player Bertie Clarke, who was still turning out for the BBC in his 70s? It brought back memories for Pat Holmes and Joy Jolly.

In the autumn the [programme] will probably move to a weekday night. Although some of our audience may not care for the change at first, I think they will soon realise that the best time for conversation is after dinner rather than after lunch, and that many more people will be able to watch without interruptions from the children queuing for Children’s Television.

But what will Enid Harvard and I do with ourselves on Sundays?

Pat Holmes

Joy Jolly