Memories of Bush and Maida Vale

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Better news as share markets turn a corner

It may not be orange, but the future certainly isn’t as grey as it was. At March 31 the FTSE 100 was 1926. At the end of September it stood at 5133.

The figures, as Pension Investments manager David Shaw explained at the pensioner liaison meeting on October 1, add up to good news for the BBC fund.

He shared them with around 90 retired staff at the meeting in London, and he also produced a graph showing share movements over recent decades.

The purpose was to illustrate points the Trustees have been making ever since shares plummeted last year.

Namely, that markets fluctuate and bounce back, and that pension investments are for the long term.

‘As you can see,’ he said, pointing to the graph, ‘the market recovered from both the 1987 and 1993 crashes. It also recovered from the crash after the technology bubble in 2003.’

Looking at more recent movements, the figures from March to September 30 – the day before the liaison meeting – equity markets showed a 50% improvement.

‘So don’t get too depressed,’ he said. ‘These figures significantly increase the value of the assets held by the scheme.’

And it wasn’t a one-day wonder. As Prospero went to press, the FTSE 100 was fluctuating around 5000.

But no one is counting any chickens. Jan Killick, head of Pensions, stressed that the true picture of assets against liabilities won’t be known until a full valuation of the scheme as at next April. It won’t depend entirely on share values, and even if the markets continue to make a recovery, the valuation is still likely to show a shortfall.

‘One of the things the actuary will look at is how long pensioners are living,’ she cautioned. ‘And every time they do a valuation, they find that pensioners are living longer.’

While that’s good news in one sense, it means that new assumptions will have to be made about longevity.

‘It means the scheme will need more money to pay those pensions over that longer period.’

Discussions about that will continue after the valuation, she said, but it’s likely to mean bigger contributions from the BBC, and additional securities – which could take the form of BBC assets signed over to the Fund – to bolster the asset base.

BPA to test best month for pension calculations

The BBC Pensioners’ Association is conducting tests of its own to prove or disprove the BBC Pension Trust’s assertion that in a typical year the December RPI is no better or worse than the RPI for any other month for the purpose of calculating pension increases.

The move, shared with pensioners at three regional BPA meetings in October, follows last year’s 0.9% pension increase. The increase was based on the RPI rise from December 2007 to December 2008. But as many pensioners pointed out, had the increase been based on September-to-September figures, they would have benefited to the tune of 5%.

The Trust argued that it’s swings and roundabouts.

‘Over time,’ Trustee Geoff Jones told the association AGM, ‘experience has shown that there is no great merit in choosing one month over another.’

Was he right? Alan Bilyard, association treasurer and former director of business affairs for BBC Worldwide, will be going back over past RPI figures, month by month, and hopes to produce a definitive answer.

‘The records go back to 1947,’ he told Prospero. ‘But I’ll probably just go back over the last 20 years. And I will be very interested in the result.’

It was among a number of issues covered in discussions at BPA meetings in Glasgow, Cardiff and Norwich. Some were perennial – notably the pension levelling option, which is a continuing grievance for some.

Others were new – including a feeling that August 14 to September 4 offered insufficient time for pensioners to vote in the recent trustee ballot.

Sandra Phillips, secretary to the trustees, said they had following the recommendation of Electoral Reform Services, who ran the election on behalf of the trustees – but added that they could look at allowing more time in future.

And at the meeting in Scotland there was a big what if. What if, as nationalists have suggested, the BBC in Scotland were to become the Scottish Broadcasting Corporation? The association pointed out that, whatever happens to the BBC, the fund is ringfenced.

BPPA is an independent organisation which operates to support the interests of BBC Pensioners

November • 2009 • PROSPERO • 3

Tributes to an old campaigner

Panorama reporter, author and campaigner Sir Ludovic Kennedy has died aged 89.

Obituaries paid tribute to his style and his pursuit of justice.

‘Ludo added much to the stock of public life, education and gaiety,’ said The Guardian.

Duncan Campbell wrote: ‘He frequently challenged the establishment notion that reopening [historic] cases undermined faith in the judicial system.’

And The Times said: ‘With his trademark look of wry bemusement, Kennedy laced his incisive questioning with an idiosyncratic charm that became the blueprint for a generation of journalists and a huge hit with viewers.’

Ernie’s anguish

Ernie Wise wanted to break up his double act with Eric Morecambe. Eric’s son Garry has revealed in a book, You’ll Miss Me When I’m Gone, marking the 25th anniversary of his father’s death.

His father’s papers include a letter from Ernie, written around 1950, before the pair had made their mark in television. Ernie made it clear how much he valued his friendship with Morecambe, but feared he was losing his ‘zip’.

Garry says his father told Ernie: ‘Rubbish!’

‘Mud’ singer dies

Opera singer and long-running radio panelist Ian Wallace has died aged 90.

To the post-war generation he was known for his signature tune The Hippopotamus Song, otherwise known as Mud, Glorious Mud.

But to Radio 4 listeners he was best-known for his appearances on My Music, never missing an appearance in 27 years from 1967 to 1994.

Carols at Bush

This year’s Bush House Carol Service is on Monday December 7, 1.10 to 2pm in St Mary le Strand church (opposite Bush House). The speaker is Mark Wakefield of the BBC Trust.

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BBCPA is an independent organisation which operates to support the interests of BBC Pensioners

The BPA recent meetings in Norwich (top) and Cardiff
Memories

The school of hard knocks

I think I can claim to be one of the very early members.

It was during my time working as a news typist in Foreign Services News Division (FSND) at Bush House that I saw the invitation to join the newly formed Riding Club.

It was arranged that we should receive our instruction at Knightsbridge Barracks. Having acquired a secondhand pair of jodhpurs and some very unyielding leather riding boots, I rather self-consciously caught the bus to Knightsbridge.

Arriving at the barracks, I was rather unsure of where to find the riding instructor. I dressed immaculately in black riding gear, hair greased back and looking, to me, rather menacing.

He had been borrowed from the police force for our weekly training. His first command was to mount our horses.

Mine appeared to be the biggest one there. I raised my foot shoulder high, but could not reach the stirrup. With an exasperated sigh the instructed strode over to me and hoisted me up into the saddle. We did some limbering up exercises, sitting back to front in the saddle and so on.

Then came the order to ‘walk on’, and soon I was enjoying the experience of sedately circuiting the arena.

There was a command to ‘trot on’, and all the other horses did – except mine. Impatiently, the instructor strode over with his crop and struck my horse on the buttocks.

The next thing I remembered was waking up on the floor with the anxious face of the instructor looking down at me.

‘Are you alright,’ he enquired.

‘I think so, I said.

‘Well, get back on that horse then.’

It was afterwards that the other riders told me the horse had bucked me off straight over his head. Lucky there was plenty of sawdust on the floor – and a lot of it on my face.

How Philip opened the gate for BBC trekkers

How lucky I was, aged 18, to get my first job in the BBC Club Office in Langham Place working for the late Margaret Castle, a stalwart member of the Riding Club.

As a very keen rider, by the end of that first day I had joined the Riding Club – and that started a wonderful time with the Riding Club which gave me great friends with whom I am still in touch.

The three horses were stabled at Summer Mews, Hyde Park, firstly looked after by the terrifying Mrs Bruce, and then by an Australian, Ross Nye.

Weekly riding lessons took place on Monday and Thursday evenings at the Royal Mews, Knightsbridge Barracks and then Wellington Barracks, under the direction of Geoff Dawson [could this be the Mr Dawson mentioned below? – ed] who taught the Mounted Police.

One evening at the Royal Mews a palace Equerry turned up with a key having been instructed by Prince Philip to let us into Windsor Park, so that we could ride there whenever we wanted.

Perhaps he felt sorry for our horses always in London. Whatever the reason, this generous gesture was much used, and we would take the horses down each weekend for a good gallop which was greatly enjoyed by horses and humans alike.

After the demolition of Hyde Park Mews the horses moved out of London to Park Farm, Northwood. This was a long journey for us all but the club continued to thrive and we had the benefit of an indoor school.

The annual Trek was always looked forward to. One, over the downs to Marlborough in 1966, provided great hilarity when the farmer would only let us camp there if the boys went in one field and the girls in another with the horse between us!

We ran our own BBC Horse Show in Balloon Meadow, Windsor. Big equestrian names such as Alan Oliver used to participate. Windsor Barracks used to lend us ‘squaddies’ to build the jumps, and it caused great amusement when their CO asked whether we wanted them ‘dressed or undressed’.

The Riding Club entered many horse shows, usually those specialising in riding club events. The most memorable was the Royal International Horse Show at Wembley the year it was held in the Wembley Football Stadium (the White City stadium was being demolished to build BBC White City). Our team of three led the riding clubs onto the ‘hallowed turf’, and riding through the tunnel into the stadium had an electrifying effect on the horses.

To the horses who made all the fun times possible – Henry, Kildare, Spotty and Giles to name but four – thank you.

Helen Faircliff (nee Wiensholt) (ex OBs)

Whatever happened to Shirley?

Between 1953 and 1956 whilst working as the junior secretary to Tahu Hole at Egton House I was a member of the BBC Riding Club.

In those days we had the use of the Knightsbridge Barracks indoor riding school for an evening every week.

Our instructors were two members of the London Mounted Police Force – a
Audio options through the set-top

Peter Hodges complains (Prospero, October) about the premature switch-off of FM radio transmissions (proposed for 2015) and protests that ‘if we want to continue listening to radio we must buy DAB radios’. But, surely, lots of people already have digital radio in their homes without appreciating the fact. Anyone with a digital TV set-top box can use the radio, either through their TV set or by taking the audio output through their hi-fi system. Some Freeview TVs have the ability to switch off the picture while listening to the internet. In fact, 90 per cent of homes now have digital TV. And, of course, yet more people listen to radio over the internet: by 2015 this number will likely have grown substantially.

I agree that the problem of secondary radios – in bedrooms, kitchens and bathrooms – might still lead to unnecessary scrappage, but don’t we have to wait and see how much of a problem that is nearer the time? (But, no, I don’t have an answer to the issue of car radios.)

As for the question of sound quality, I wonder if too much isn’t being made of DAB’s deficiencies. Few of us listen to the radio in ideal audio conditions. And there’s a generation growing up that listens to everything digitally compressed to 128 kbs via the iPod. To them a DAB station broadcasting at 160 kbs or 192 kbs (such as Radio 3) will seem like an extravagance!

I found this photo on Ebay. On the back it claims to be a still of the first BBC north drama Tomorrow May Be Fine, with a date on the print of 1991. It appears to be part of a commemoration of Television in the North 1951-1991.

By the cameras I’d guess it’s about early 60s-ish but as I didn’t join the sets when they were clapped into, I think it could be a bit early.

Alesha diction

Well, the departure of Arlene Phillips has certainly caused a stir (Prospero, October). Argument and counter argument for and against agenés. Even being included in the order paper in the House of Commons and here was me thinking that the inclusion of Alesha Dixon was just to provide ‘eye-candy’ for the chaps, if her vacuous statements are anything to go by. We are also told that Strictly Come Dancing goes to 35 countries! For one, hope that means in format only, otherwise I hate to think what English students abroad make of the fragrant Alesha’s pronouncements to the dancers when she tells them they ‘weren’t doing this or that on the dance floor.’

Matt Conway

According to BBC Worldwide, the Strictly format is now seen in 75 countries - ed

D-Day appeal

I wonder whether anyone reading Prospero can help a friend of mine with some sound effects.

He was in the Royal Navy during World War II and has been asked by a school to give a talk about D-Day. He would very much like to be able to demonstrate what the multi-launch rockets sounded like when they were fired at the beaches from the boats prior to the troops landing. Can anyone help?

Helen Grierson

Visitor discrimination

Why are volunteers for the BBC Visitor Scheme rejected as I was because of age? I might be over 80 but took part in a stationmaster/guard on a preserved railway tour and for a guide for the Forest of Dean, or read the request for volunteers. G Purrier

Christine Geen, who manages the Visitor Scheme, replies:

I’m sorry I was told you that. Recruitment of volunteer visitors normally takes place among those pensioners newly retired. That said, we do have visitors who have joined us several years after retirement. But we have no upper age limit and in fact have three visitors at this time who will turn 80 next year.

WATC origins

May I add to the tributes to the late Alastair Osbourne. To be in his company in the 60s and 70s was to be in an oasis of calm in a frenetic world. However there is some slight confusion about the origins of The World at One. It was started in 1964, possibly with a different title, presented by a very young Winston Churchill, grandson of the great man. He was not a success, and the show was at least one other presenter before the arrival of William Hardcastle in 1965. His dominating personality has apparently eclipsed memories of his predecessors.

Reg Turnill


cut

Prospero: What is modern HD and how does it match up (e.g. vs cinema quality)?

Danielle Nagler: HD pictures contain five times as much information as a normal TV picture. This means they can show more detail in faces, action, and landscapes or other backgrounds, and the colours can look richer. HD is used for television but it is similar to 35mm film which is used for most cinema releases.

P: What programmes are the BBC making in HD?

DN: The BBC makes programmes from all BBC channels and onestyles in HD. In total we’ll be making over 1500 hours of programming this year. The world atlas of programme series like Nature’s Great Events, and Yellowstone, through sport including Six Nations Rugby can use it to listen in to teams in the UK. Children’s programmes, comedy, entertainment and drama. Familiar titles which are already available in HD include Strictly Come Dancing, Friday Night with Jonathan Ross, Antiques Roadshow, Doctors, In the Night Garden, Doctor Who, Do You Think You Are?, Hustle, and Dragon’s Den. The range of programmes and the absolute volume of HD programmes made for and by the BBC is growing steadily, broadcast on BBC HD which is the BBC’s HD service.

P: What are the constraints for HD (e.g. bandwidth)?

DN: Because of the amount of information in HD pictures, an HD channel requires more capacity than one broadcasting in standard definition. This is not an issue on satellite or cable but means that the DTT Freeview platform is challenged in terms of the number of HD services it can carry. Freeview HD will launch with three HD channels (including the BBC’s) next month, and by Summer 2010 HD services through Freeview will be available to around half of the UK population. HD also requires reasonably high bandwidth, and a good graphics card and processor when it is delivered over the internet.

P: Are there extra costs in HD production (e.g. closer attention to detail in set and costume design)?

DN: HD is more expensive on the whole than standard definition for three main reasons. Firstly, as a new technology prices for equipment and for production services can still be higher than SD, although prices are falling. Secondly, some aspects of production can be more complex in HD, for example delivery of 5.1 sound mix which sometimes accompany HD programmes, or the rendering of CGI (computer-generated images). Thirdly, HD can be harsher than SD in highlighting bumbs on sets, or flaws in make-up and costumes which can mean that some of the standard ‘short-cuts’ which look fine in SD don’t work as well.

P: What is an ‘HD ready’ television set?

DN: Most flat screen TV sets now offered for sale are HD ready. This means that they are suitable for showing HD, and have an HDMI port which can take the leads required to connect to an HD set top box or Blu-ray player. But in order to get an HD television service you need not only an HD-ready set, but also an HD service provider (currently Sky, Virgin or Freesat) and an appropriate set-top box, connected with an HDMI lead.

You can find more information at these websites, or on the BBC’s own HD site:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/hd

P: What’s the future for HD?

DN: The number of HD channels in the UK is likely to increase, and the amount of programming that they offer in HD (rather than upscaled SD) is also likely to increase. The numbers of HD boxes and TVs – which have already fallen significantly – are likely to come down further, and HD will become available on Freeview. HD DVDs – blu-ray – will become increasingly widely available. And as average broadband speeds increase, HD content on the internet will increase.

AT THE FRONTIER

The bigger picture

Prospero interviews Danielle Nagler, the BBC’s head of High Definition

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http://www.bbc.co.uk/hd

P: What’s the future for HD?

DN: The number of HD channels in the UK is likely to increase, and the amount of programming that they offer in HD (rather than upscaled SD) is also likely to increase. The numbers of HD boxes and TVs – which have already fallen significantly – are likely to come down further, and HD will become available on Freeview. HD DVDs – blu-ray – will become increasingly widely available. And as average broadband speeds increase, HD content on the internet will increase.
It’s all gold in
Ivor’s orchards

Country life is a far cry from Aberdeen and Andy Pandy for a film director

By Matthew Barnett

Aberdeen and Mullareen are nearly back to back in the case of Andy Pandy, who is from Aberdeen and has made a career as a BBC television producer to become a film director. Andy started working in film as a prop boy and went on to become a producer at the BBC, before moving on to become a film director.

Sunday 9

September 13 – 13 September

Club W ish is a 13 September

Children in Need

BBC will be supporting the annual

River Cruise

Enjoy a 40 minute sightseeing cruise on the Thames.

Tennis offer

The Aegon Masters Tennis at the Royal Albert Hall 11-15 August

Give and Take

Enjoy the gift giving portal for web users, where you earn cash-back on all your purchases over £20.

Cider

Down but not out – a vintage scroller rolls again

C9, one of the BBC’s early colour OB trucks, is back from the dead. Former audio supervisor Jerry Clegg tells the story.

The shot you didn’t see

The camera are so much better, and communications are no longer a brick wall – that these days the viewer tends to not even notice.

Grace Wyndham Goldie

Trust Fund

Applications are invited for grants from the Grace Wyndham Goldie Trust Fund, which is intended to assist in the costs of broadcasting on an associated activity, more particularly for the benefit of children and dependents.

Life after Auntie

November 2009
Ten million adults in the UK, representing a fifth of the population of the country — and perhaps not surprisingly, a significant number of those who do actually read it. What’s more, 81 percent of non-readers say they are unlikely to start using it in any new way, with a similar percentage knowing little or nothing about the magazine.

Sixty-four percent of these questioned in a survey, commissioned by the BBC from the company, said that they did not know if they had any influence on the sort of content that appeared in it. A similar number said there was no point in writing to the BBC to protest about something in the magazine that they thought they did not like.

The story goes on in another, but internet access is not confined to the golden age of print. A significant minority (10 percent) are between 15 and 24.

‘It’s great, you’ve got a copy, but what do you want to do with it?’

He said magazine publishers were beginning to see a new audience, and that the BBC’s new strategy was to focus on improving the experience of reading.

‘But if you look at the number of people who read magazines, it’s not huge.’

He added that the BBC had been experimenting with different formats, and that it had been experimenting with a new format, which was also a ‘school for djs’ with the BBC opening up the offer to anyone.

‘It’s not about making money, it’s about making a difference. The BBC is trying to make a difference.’

The BBC believes that much of the money is being spent on marketing, and that this is the right thing to do.

‘We’re trying to make sure that the money goes to the right places. The BBC is trying to be more transparent about how it’s spending its money.’

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Energetic ‘time lord’ and remarkable broadcaster

Barry was born and educated in Reading and spent many years doing various jobs with an apprenticeship with a company who made radio valves. He spent three years at Fort Office before working for a time in Caterham. On call-up he joined R.E.M.E and saw service in the Far East.

On demobilisation he joined the BBC as a Datestore transmitter as a technical assistant. He moved to Broadcasting on the BBC Engineering School at Elstree where he transferred to Slough and joined the Air Radio department.

Here he served as an efficient and conscientious engineer playing a full part in the technical team in Cwmbran. He clicked with his contemporaries and the technical education at the University of Wales. We extended our sympathy to Kath and her family and to her son Michael. Ken Stephenson.

Transmission veteran and OBs man

Tony Flack, affectionately known as ‘Flutch’, joined the BBC in the mid 1960s and worked in Birmingham and London. He rose to be in charge of OBs and OB support and was the first to work on the two old monochrome OBs and has asked that their deep gratitude for his guidance and support. Without a doubt, radio OBs was Tony’s niche and against the last of his career.

He was very closely associated with his BBC colleagues and made many hours installing new mains wiring and sound reinforcement. He was from a strong Christian background and always showed in his work and relationships with colleagues.

Finally the expected result of Tony’s years in his work and dedication is a long last in service as an associate of Birmingham radio OBs. I was telephoned at 9pm on a Friday evening by my colleague for Norman specifier. He was going down with HIV and could not do full football coverage from Norwich. I told Tony and he simply replied: ‘I’ll be on my way in twenty minutes.’

Sounds easy? He set off before 1am on a 160 mile trip on a blitzy, winter’s right hand and reached Norwich by 7am. He took an honours Oxford Cambridge education, but the antibodys of his HIV prevented him from playing sport in the ribcage and combined with a big four-wheel-drive mode, going largely stationary, took its toll on Norvich.

He retired in the mid 1970s, a mid doctor – and to the surprise of many colleagues he went on to become a very busy farming and livestock business, and also did a BBC OB with the Gloucestershire Constabulary, and also used his OBs.

He was a pride to have seen the BBC vet who had grown up to be a farmer. Tony has gone with his family and friends.

A veteran of Hollywood and the BBC

Paula Leonard, who died on July 4, was a great BBC station. She joined the corporation in 1971 working first in London’s Maida Vale and then moved to the BBC’s Pebble Mill in Birmingham.

In 1973 she moved to music and arts, where she stayed until she left the BBC.

After Paula was a PA and then as a unit manager, she became a brilliant and highly professional production manager.

She worked in Hollywood with Gavin Pecker and Bob Hill at the height of the shoestring, of the shoestring. Tony Flack w as her wing when learning about radio OBs.

She is remembered as a professional. She was there to teach and guide, offering a great many of the efforts of those who tried to emulate his brilliant career.

She w as a time when coming into the studio and welcoming the others. She w as invaluable, and in 2004 moved to Crimson Ltd, where she worked as a coordinating assistant.

Her great subject knowledge, orchestration and production principles enabled her to make pieces that are all airworthy. Among her career highlights was the work she did on the BBC’s ‘Here is London’ series.

She will be very sadly missed.

Organisational skills

Her first love was the BBC, where she made a great contribution she made as unit manager and production manager. She w as a highly skilled sound professional, yet he was there to teach and guide, offering a great many of the efforts of those who tried to emulate his brilliant career.

Penny joined the BBC in 1975 as a clerk in the Personnel Department and then went on to work in the Personnel Department and then went on to work as a Personnel Officer.

Her prior experience as an excellent union representative was invaluable, and in 2004 moved to Crimson Ltd, where she worked as a coordinating assistant.

She w as a highly-valued enabler and supporter of the Radio and Television Division.

Penny blossom ed in this role and really cam e into her own.

All of those who had the pleasure of working with her will be very sadly missed.

Assistance

The BBC is only as good as the people who work for it. Paula w as there when needed, and she will be remembered for her flair for display and organising public events, and in 2004 moved to Crimson Ltd, where she worked as a coordinating assistant.

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 Trials of life behind the news

Every so often, along comes a little gem of a read. It's Alright Leaving Me (Travels of a BBC Editor) by Geoff Hale and published by Bright Pen is just such a gem. The title is the comment made by a technician in some far flung place when those sitting in comfort back at the Television Centre are critical of the picture quality they are receiving.

This book is not only a biography but a history of BBC TV news gathering from 1963 to 1998, and covers some of the most momentous and memorable events, foreign and national, of the period.

Underlying the timeline and the crisp anecdotes are descriptions of the extraordinary changes in technology and equipment that have taken place within the media and how the crews coped with them.

The author has a flair for the understatement and treats his reminiscences as a mere passage of time in situations that must have been nerve jangling and in some cases downright terrifying.

Such as: naively walking into a fracas between the Shah of Iran's police and student demonstrators and its consequences; trying to generate small talk with Her Majesty the Queen that led to a senior Naval Officer having to do some explaining; and being bought lunch by King Hussein of Jordan.

The anecdotes give us an insight into royal tours, conflicts, political summits, the do's and don'ts of world leaders, all related from a personal and highly involved point of view. News media celebrities of today appear as 'apprentice' journalists cutting their teeth in TV reporting in remote locations.

This book is a must for media historians as it relates to life at the coal face by the very people who bring us the news but never stand in front of the camera.

It is the stuff of history, up close and personal, the very heart of news gathering. Paul Kite

It's Alright Leaving Me... Travels of a BBC Editor, Geoff Hale
Published by Bright Pen.

What's it all about?

8.00 Announcement re Wavelength and News
8.06 Records
9.30 Religious service
10.00 Announcement from Downing St re Prime Minister's speech
10.02 Records
10.40 Announcement re Prime Minister's speech & records
10.45 Talk: Making the most of tinned foods (Anne Beaton)
11.15 Announcement re Prime Minister's speech, followed by speech by the Prime Minister
11.23 Government announcements
11.26 National anthem
11.31 Records
12.01 News
12.08 Records
12.40 Announcement & records
1.18 Recording of the speech by the Prime Minister
1.30 News
1.50 Records
2.00 News
2.25 Special Admiralty announcement
2.29 Recording of Prime Minister's speech

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