On 8 and 9 September, 103 BBC pensioner visitors returned to Cardiff for the annual Volunteer Visiting Scheme Conference. The busy programme was spread over two days, with delegates hearing talks on subjects including adult social care, support for independent living, memory and dementia, inheritance tax and wills, along with a presentation from BBC Pension Scheme Trustee, Graham Ellis.

The conference was opened by Cheryl Miles, who spoke about the importance of the Volunteer Visiting Scheme, which was set up 20 years ago. Not all BBC pensioners wish to have visits, but the scheme and the volunteers are in place should they change their mind. It is a valuable scheme of which we are very proud.

**Day One – serious about social care and not forgetting...**

On the first day, the presentations focused on adult social care. The first speaker was Adrian Hughes, Deputy Chief Inspector of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for England. The role of the CQC is to monitor, inspect and report on services including adult social care, the NHS, independent health care, dental services and primary care. Adrian explained how the CQC aimed to encourage improvement in the quality of services and that while its regulatory powers could be called upon as necessary, these were balanced by the need to protect users. For example, a decision to close a care home must take into account the effect such closure might have on its residents.

The talk prompted a number of questions from the floor and was a sound start to the conference.

After a break, Sarah Rochira, Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, took to the stage and gave a passionate talk about her role fighting for the rights of older people in Wales. With legal powers over the Welsh Government, Sarah’s remit touches all aspects of growing old in Wales, from the protection of community services, such as buses, green spaces and libraries, to standing up for victims of abuse and tackling discrimination. Sarah is an ‘independent voice and champion for old people in Wales' and she came across as a forceful campaigner, her talk being received with much enthusiasm, judging by the large number of questions that followed.

The final session of the day was a fascinating talk on memory and dementia by psychotherapist Julie Devlin, which began with a brief description of the brain and how various types of memories are formed and consolidated. This provided the basis for discussing memory problems, memory health and dementia. The presentation featured quizzes and plenty of audience interaction, leaving delegates amused and inspired with ideas for maintaining and improving memory in old age.

With the close of the first day, delegates had a chance to enjoy some fresh air and sunshine before dinner was served in the conference room. It was a most enjoyable evening involving catching up with friends, stories and laughter.

**Day Two – practical help and support**

The second day began with a presentation by BBC Pension Scheme Trustee, Graham Ellis, who gave a very clear and informative talk about the pension scheme and the Trustee’s role in ensuring it meets its obligations in the future. Reduction of the deficit and investment performance are obvious priorities, but at the same time there is a need to be prudent (‘it’s not a casino’). Another key element is the strength of the relationship with the BBC, which underwrites the Scheme while the deficit is being reduced. This led to a discussion of factors affecting the BBC, such as the licence fee settlement (currently frozen since 2010) and the new BBC charter.

Graham also talked about the ideas recently raised by the director-general, Tony Hall, about the possibility of the BBC in-house television producers competing more generally in the television programme market with a consequent move away from the system of quotas which currently underpins in-house television production.

This point prompted questions from delegates about programme quality, staff cuts and the effect this might have on the pension scheme, all fair points to which Graham provided calm and pragmatic answers. More delegates became engaged and there followed many further questions covering such issues as production quality (particularly in speech programmes), scandals and whistleblowing, digital radio and unpaid licence fees (about 6%, which is low compared to other countries with similar schemes).

He may have been preaching to the converted, but Graham reminded us that the licence fee remains great value, particularly if compared with taking a daily newspaper.

Following coffee, the next talk was by Lisa Kenny, who gave a wonderful insight into the work of the Red Cross in Wales and the rest of the UK. Many delegates were left surprised by how much work the charity carries out domestically while often being regarded as largely a provider of aid overseas. The Red Cross, which celebrates its centenary this year, works to support independent living for older people in the UK, and its services in Wales have grown by 40% since 2010.

The charity provides practical help such as for those returning home from hospital (it is the main provider of short-term wheelchairs in the UK), but its work also stretches into countering the effects of loneliness and isolation, with early intervention becoming a particular focus. The two case stories were truly moving and helped to demonstrate how the Red Cross had helped real people.

In the afternoon, the delegates returned to the conference room for a presentation by Roger Hatherall of Lansdown Place, BBC-appointed independent financial adviser. The two-part talk discussed inheritance tax and will writing – serious subjects which Roger covered with authority and humour, with anecdotes helping to make this session both useful and entertaining.

The final session was a talk by Pauline Homeshaw, from the Soldiers’, Sailors’ and Airmen’s Families Association (SSAFA), who gave an engaging presentation (in 18 years with SSAFA). SSAFA provides lifelong support for our forces and their families. SSAFA’s long history, which has enjoyed royal patronage from the start, includes the important and fascinating work it carried out during the First World War when it helped to support the families of servicemen killed or wounded in the conflict. Today the charity also helps families cope with problems as diverse as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and, in its largest caseload, debt.

The conference was closed by Joy Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the BBC Pension Scheme, who thanked delegates for attending and hoped that everyone had received information that would be useful to them and to the pensioners they visit. She then thanked Cheryl and the team, not just for organising the conference but also for all the work they do throughout the year. And finally, she thanked the volunteer visitors without whom the scheme would not be possible.
Our oldest pensioner
Frank Simes is, at 109, the oldest person currently receiving a pension from the BBC Pension Scheme. Frank was recruited to the scheme in 1934, while in Turkey, and retired in 1970.

BBCPA on the road again
Committee members of the BBC Pensioners’ Association have planned three meetings during October in Edinburgh, Brighton and Bristol.

The meetings will take place as follows:

**Thursday 9 October: Edinburgh**
The Tun, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8JF (Telephone: 0131 557 5888)
The Tun is opposite Holyrood Park in Edinburgh city centre, within easy walking distance of up to 50 bus routes and less than 10 minutes walk from Waverley Station.

**Thursday 16 October: Brighton**
Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1 1AF (Telephone: 01273 770258)
Brighton Friends’ Meeting House is set in a lovely garden and stands in the very centre of Brighton, two minutes from the sea. It is easily accessible by public transport and there is car parking nearby.

**Thursday 23 October: Bristol**
BBC Broadcasting House Whiteadies Road, First Floor Room B (Telephone: 0117 974 1111)
We hope that many pensioners are able to come along to one of these meetings and look forward to welcoming you.

2014 BBC Pension Scheme Pensioners’ Liaison Meeting
This year’s PLM takes place on Thursday 20 November 2014, 11am-1pm, at The Radio Theatre, Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA. Call the pension service line on 020 30 322811 to book a place.

BBC club
Retired members’ newsletter
Thank you to all the BBC Club members who have asked to be sent this newsletter. We have also seen an increase in Prospero Society members, who can continue to get a copy posted to them. If you would like to add your email address to our database, please contact the Club on 0208 752 6666 or email bbc.club@bbc.co.uk

Lunch for a Fiver at Western House!
It is always a pleasure to welcome our retired members to our Western House club. Don’t forget Lunch for a Fiver: This is an offer for retired Club members to have a two-course lunch, including a hot drink, for £5 – available every Tuesday from 12 noon to 2.30pm. You can pick up your complimentary copy of the Radio Times here too.

Offers
The BBC Club website has loads of offers available for our members, including theatre ticket deals, gifts, cooking ideas, articles on health and therapies and a lot more. Much of the content is members only; in order to register you will need a NEW style BBC Club card which has an 8-digit number on the back starting with 100. To obtain a new card, call the Club on 0208 752 6666 or email bbc.club@bbc.co.uk

Events
Our events calendar is growing and growing. There are now trips scheduled on a regular basis, with lunches and theatre tours proving very popular. October has a tour of the Globe Theatre, while in November we have secured a speaker on Technology for Wrinklies. There will be a retired members’ Christmas lunch on 13 December; see the newsletter for details. For 2015 we have some interesting trips planned, including the Poppy Museum in Richmond, and we will repeat this year’s popular ‘Tea and Tour’ of New Technology for Wrinklies. There will be a regular basis, with lunches and theatre tours proving very popular. October has a tour of the Globe Theatre, while in November we have secured a speaker on Technology for Wrinklies. There will be a retired members’ Christmas lunch on 13 December; see the newsletter for details. For 2015 we have some interesting trips planned, including the Poppy Museum in Richmond, and we will repeat this year’s popular ‘Tea and Tour’ of New Broadcasting House in the Spring.

Prospero Society
Prospero Society members have an extended range of activities as well as subsidised prices, early notification and priority booking to all retired members events. To join only costs £10 per year and the Society is a great way to meet up with friends old and new! For details or to join, contact the Club.

Lottery
Don’t forget the BBC Club runs its own lottery with 15 monthly prizes of £50, £100 and £1,000, plus a quarterly jackpot – so to be in with a chance, add the lottery today! Call the Club on 0208 8752 6666. Minimum entry is £5 per month.

Got a question or comment? Email us at bbc.club@bbc.co.uk or call 020 8752 6666.

CROSPERO 181
devised and compiled by Jim Palm

Complete the square by using the clues; these apply only to words running across. Then take these words in numerical order and extract the letters indicated by a dot. If your answers are correct, these letters will spell out the name of a TV programme and its presenter.

**CLUES**
1. Part of flower (4); 2. Instrument (5); 3. Quickly (5); 4. Eastern Ruler (3); 5. Directed (3); 6. Oxfordshire town (5); 7. Riddle (3); 8. Mr Loss (3); 9. Northern river (3); 10. Go fast (3); 11. In a lying way (11); 12. Male cat (3); 13. Aviator Johnson (3); 14. Very cold (3); 15. Cut off (3); 16. With wings (5); 17. In favour of (3); 18. Supplement (3); 19. Stir from sleep (5); 20. Eat away (5); 21. Headland (4).

Solutions to Crospero 180: Estop; Mess; Acre; Avast; Spain; Deter; Tampa; Ode; Straw; Think; Emis; Camel; Ostale; Unite; Never; Bets; Rear; Essay.
The answer was Escape to the Country, and the winner was Mrs H Wishart of Dundee.
Making the Beeb feel better

You may have seen John Tusá’s Media piece on charter renewal in the Guardian on 21 July. It’s no less than a timely and powerful plea for the BBC to remember what makes (or made) it tick and if you saw fit to quote it from – as I hope you will – it would certainly raise eyebrows among fellow Proggers readers. As a statement of the Corporation’s philosophy it’s hard to beat. In fact, in his closing paragraphs he asks if charter renewal can actually be won without major restatements of the values that drive it.

There are still signs that it is an anxious organisation internally, bent by processes, mired in meetings, laden with permissions. How might it be freed to be and appear the hugely innovate culture organisation it really is that will win and deserve charter renewal?

Such a liberation would involve a transformation of attitudes the BBC expects of itself and its stuff. It would include restoring the notion of trust in its working relations rather than the demands of accountability. It would insist on programmes as programmes, not products, or ‘units of resource’ bundled up as programmes. It would rely on ideas as the yardstick for accepting programmes instead of judging them by genres, categories or quotas. It would replace replication and formula – however successful – as the impulse for programmes with plain ‘idea’.

It would demand ‘originality’ in programmes, replacing the humdrum notion of ‘innovations’. It would retain belief in audiences as listeners, viewers, even participants, and stop regarding them as customers and consumers, the concepts of marketing. The BBC would have ambitions not targets, a sense of purpose not a list of objectives. The BBC should seek staff to take responsibility not take refuge in compliance, use judgment in decision-making rather than risk analysis, and cling to quality over benchmarking.

Hall is trying to make the BBC more effective as a major national institution. If it is successful the BBC will do things better. But he must make those who work in the BBC feel better.

Dan Zenón

City high-flier to chair BBC Trust

After a limited number of options have been mulled over to meet the criteria of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it’s not surprising that public service and broadcasting experience played no part in the selection process. However, someone who is currently on the boards of PepsiCo and of HSBC, was previously the CEO of Pearson and who has been a director of BBC Trust and the mother of three children.

Sebastian Coe would have won through had he been more successful in his wider responsibilities. But as I see it, he has wider responsibilities. But as I see it, he has wider responsibilities. But as I see it, he has wider responsibilities.

In response to Bryan Bayliss’s letter in Progpero regarding Valerie Pitts, I don’t recall seeing her reading the News but I do remember her expressing ‘What’s on in London’ (I think it was called ‘The Theatre Spot’) for Twee and Found in the early 60s. I recall that she presented from St John’s Palaces and I may well have been vision mixing or sound mixing the programme at the time.

Garth Jeffery

A dancing Victor Poole

As his secretary, I remember Victor as the producer of Cinema Today, a series dealing with the latest foreign films, particularly the French Nouvelle Vague.

And so say all of us.

Mike Broadbent

Dialogue of Television Drama (again)

Chris Cherry and Roger Fleming were right on the button about James Inn and Quirk (Proper, August) but may I add three little points?

Firstly, the relationship between the director and the sound people is crucial here. On a shooting day, the director is primarily concerned with the acting and the shots and can’t also be the arbiter of sound as well. Similarly (Cherry’s point) by the time that major director is in sound post he knows all the lines and can no longer discern whether he can hear them! But part of the sound mixer’s job is to speak up when the sound is not intelligible or is noisy because of extraneous noise or the actors muttering their lines or, in some other way, was unacceptable.

This is easy enough to do if you know the director well and there is a bond of trust from working together over several productions. It also helps if the sound person is a staffer, because (s)he will not be too concerned about where his/her next job is coming from. Directors need to listen to this advice.

Secondly, there is a limit to the dynamic range that can be produced in a domestic drawing room. A director may want his loud bits to be very loud and his quiet bits to be very quiet, but there are limits. No soundman can beat the laws of physics and the limitations of the system.

Finally, I don’t know where these particular programmes were dubbed, but dubbing a television drama in a large film dubbing theatre with a big screen is a very different experience to that of the final viewer and it usually misleads – especially so if the job is done by a cheap film dubbing mixer. I once had to send a highly prestigious drama back to a very respected Wardour Street dubbing mixer because the dynamic range was far too wide for TV and the music was louder than the dialogue! To his great credit he took the point very readily and his second mix was excellent, but if the job had been done in house, there would have been right first time and cheaper.

Trevor Webster

Renewed faith in BBC documentaries

Thank you Kate Adie, David Vincent and the History Production Team for your documentary about women and their part in the First World War.

Thank you for making a production that was worthy of being 59 minutes long and not one that would fit into a 30-minute slot but was padded out to 59 minutes.

Thank you for just the right amount of incidental music that did not drown the dialogue but added an accent when needed and finally thank you for pictures and narration that worked together as opposed to someone speaking and the pictures bearing no relation to the words so having no lasting effect on the viewer.

All in all thank you for having renewed my faith in the BBC documentary.

Elizabeth Veysey

Female newreaders

It was part of her preparation to announce an orbital programme that she met Sir Georg Solti.

The story is told that with her first husband she was Mrs Valerie Sargeant and they were once introduced as ‘Valerie Pitts and Mr Sargeant’. Now, she said, ‘it’s Sargeant’. ‘I beg your pardon,’ said the introducer, ‘I should have said ‘Valerie Pitts and Sargeant Pitts’.

Willy Cave

Disappointing TV News 60th

I was surprised and disappointed to read the headline ‘TV News celebrates its 60th birthday’. A more accurate headline would have been ‘TV News ignores its 60th birthday’. A more accurate headline would have been ‘TV News ignores its 60th birthday’. Previous anniversaries were celebrated – 25 years (Alan Prothorpe), 40 years (Tony Hall), and 50 years (Richard Sambrook).

All attempts to persuade the current BBC to mark the 60 years appear to have fallen upon deaf ears, though the editor of the Radio Times referred to the ‘overdue’ in a domestic drawing room. A director may want his loud bits to be very loud and his quiet bits to be very quiet, but there are limits. No soundman can beat the laws of physics and the limitations of the system.

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Trevor Webster

Female newreaders

On the issue of female newreaders, your August issue has a brief postscript from Bryan Bayliss to David Morris Jones’ article in June’s Prosporo which mentions Valerie Pitts, later Lady Solti.

One further thought. I believe I am right in saying that Nini Winston was actually reading the News as early as 1960 and subsequently Angela Rippon also read the News regularly. Of course in earlier times there were well-established female ‘presenters’ such as Sylvia Peters at the time of the Coronation and even further back Mary Malcolm, who was the daughter of Jeanie-Marie Langtry and the granddaughter of Edward VII and Lily Langtry.

Douglas Cooksey

SURELY IT WAS not David Morris Jones who was mistaken but rather the claimed ‘certain knowledge’ of Bryan Bayliss which should be corrected.

Valerie Pitts was a TV presentation announcer in 1965, not a newsreader.

Hugh Sheppard

Newspapers

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Valerie Pitts was a TV presentation announcer in 1965, not a newsreader.
Memories of Alexandra Palace

I read with interest the article published in Prospero recently. I think I was on duty when the newreader did not turn up to read the luncheon News in June 1965. I particularly remember the sub-editor chosen to act as a stand-in for them, he was called Denis Woodall and I remember him trying on other people’s jackets in order to find the most suitable one for television.

I worked in Television News for 25 years and spent many a happy time in Alexandra Palace (teleprompting).

I do remember going to a party at which Corbet Woodall was there, and there was a story going around during a hot summer that Corbet Woodall was only wearing swimming trunks below the desk. He actually took his trousers off at the party and I jokingly tried to toss them out of the window.

Another memory I have is when I was training to become a teleprompter operator and the person (Joyce) who was teaching me was pregnant at the time. She came round my house and told me about her husband who had a set of sharp knives (cook by profession). She didn’t turn up for work the next time she was on duty and although I had only had a couple of days’ training, I was asked to prompt the news.

I subsequently got the job, Joyce having been murdered by her husband with the set of knives. In addition to stabbing Joyce 14 times, the unborn child was also killed. The husband got 14 years in prison for manslaughter.

When I first arrived in Belfast Control Room as a new Technical Operator in 1968, I was only too aware for the first few days that the Third Programme (now Radio 3) was constantly playing on a large speaker suspended from the ceiling. I was told that the theory was that if the signal for the prestige programme survived the London-Birmingham-Manchester-Glasgow-Belfast chain without degradation, then all was satisfactory.

One day, within a very short while the esoteric music and speech soon became just part of the background – but it was uncanny how the slightest click, pop or even silence would instantly galvanise us into action, with the speaker turned up to full blast. If more was observed, we would be straight on to Glasgow for them to listen and report, and they would follow down to Manchester and so on… this is the origin of the traditional BBC phrase ‘it’s alright leaving me’.

We would get warning messages from London when a programme was scheduled to include something unusually long pauses. Any kind of anomaly was recorded in the log – I remember it being instilled into me that although curing faults was paramount, getting the log right came a very close second.

On a technical note, the single speaker hanging from the ceiling – ‘wireless’ was still mono then – was an LS3. This unit, ruggedised for OB use, was an engineers’ favourite for its audio quality – as good as the LSU10 used in the studios, but only a third of the size. In the two years that I was in Belfast the Control Room was refurbished, and the LS3 didn’t fit the designer’s plan. It went.

When I later took the BBC’s leather shilling and turned freelance, I needed kit for my own studio. I went to M&K Radio in Leeds to source second-hand loudspeakers, and was thrilled to find a pair of LS3s available at £35 each. I could have spent four times as much on something a fourth of the size, but I was so pleased to find LS3s that I packed them into the back seat of the Triumph Vitesse. I still use them nearly 30 years on.

One of them has the serial number LS3/1/BD Research Department? Is this the prototype? I’d love to know.

Graeme Aldous
Sleafburn, Yorkshire

Strictly stays put

Well, well, well. So BBC staff were moved to Salford like it or not, to hired shared premises at the cost of some £1.5 billion. Television Centre, owned by the BBC since the 1950s, the most well equipped television studios and offices in Britain or Europe, were sold for some £200 million on the pretext that this was cost effective and cost efficient.

Few people who were programme makers thought it was either of these things. No surprise then that three studios at Television Centre 1, 2 and 3 now need to be hired back on a 15-year lease, no one is saying what the cost will be.

Womans Hour is also relocating back to London. Why? Because it is less costly! No doubt there will be more.

BBC Worldwide are also moving into Television Centre. I do not know from where, they also had premises owned by the BBC but will now be renting their offices.

I assume Mark Thompson was mostly responsible for the move. I hope he is better handling his own finances.

It has taken lots of licence payers’ money to finance the Salford vanity project that should have been used to make programmes and save some of the BBC’s heritage.

OCTOBER 2014

PROSPERO OCTOBER 2014

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BBC PA
For details of how to join the Pensioners’ Association, see the panel on the left.

Visiting Scheme
If you would like a visit or information on how to become a volunteer visitor, please ring the Service Line on 020 2032 2811.

queries
For benefit and pension payroll queries, call the Service Line on 020 2032 2811 or email pension@bbc.co.uk

Prospero
To add or delete a name from the distribution list, ring the Service Line on 020 2032 2811. Prosopros are provided free of charge to retired BBC employees. On request, we will also send it to spouses or dependents who want to keep in touch with the BBC. Prospero is also available on audio disc for those with sight impairment. To register, please ring the Service Line. Alternatively, it is also available online at www.bbc.co.uk/my pension, under ‘documents’.

BBC Club
The BBC Club in London has a retired category membership costing £30 a year or £23 a year for family membership. Pre-1987 life members are not affected. Regional clubs may have different arrangements. Please call BBC Club London administration on 020 7852 0769 or email bbc.club@bbc.co.uk

Benevolent Fund
This is funded by voluntary contributions from the BBC and its purpose is to protect the welfare of staff, pensioners and their families. Grants are made at the discretion of the Trustees. They offer financial assistance in cases of unforeseen financial hardship, for which help from other sources is not available. Telephone: 020 2032 2811.

Prospero Society
Prospero Society is the only section of the BBC Club run by and for retired BBC staff and their spouses. Its aim is to enable BBC pensioners to meet on a social basis for theatre visits, luncheons, coach outings etc. The Prospero Society is supported by BBC Club funds so as to make events affordable. The only conditions (apart from paying a small annual subscription) are that you must be a BBC pensioner and a member of the BBC Club.

BBC Pensioners Association

Sharp eyed

I realise that Prosopros is intended for retired staff but to describe readers who are able to tell the difference between a photo of Beibe Daniels and Ben Lyon and one of Eric Sykes and Sid James in the caption competition as ‘sharp eyed’ is taking flattery to extremes. Mind you, before now I have been known to eat half my bath sponge before realising it was not a Gruyere cheese.

Paul Cole

It’s alright leaving me!

Barry Rossindale is right to say (Prospero, August) that the (manned) transmitters were the perfect place for quality monitoring, but it went on at other points too.

When I first arrived in Belfast Control Room as a new Technical Operator in 1968, I was only too aware for the first few days that the Third Programme (now Radio 3) was constantly playing on a large speaker suspended from the ceiling. I was told that the theory was that if the signal for the prestige programme survived the London-Birmingham-Manchester-Glasgow-Belfast chain without degradation, then all was satisfactory.

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Graeme Aldous
Sleafburn, Yorkshire
Two hours of absolute joy

Remembering the ‘natural sounds’ of Bing Crosby

Brian Willey’s article in the August 2014 edition of Prospero prompted John F Burton (ex BBC Natural History Unit, Bristol) to offer up his own ‘happy memories’ of making a radio programme with the late Bing Crosby in 1975.

Bing was the first singer of whom, when a very small boy in the 1930s, I became aware and I was soon a great admirer of his. My parents had several 78 rpm gramophone records of songs he had recorded in those years Two of them, ‘Home on the Range’ and ‘The Last Round-up’, have been favourites of mine ever since. So, having heard in the 1970s that he was very interested in wildlife, it was not surprising that I invited him at that period to participate as a guest in a series of radio programmes called Sounds Natural that I had devised and produced for Radio 4 and which featured celebrities with a keen interest in wildlife.

An enthusiastic golfer, Bing had already agreed to participate in one of the Sounds Natural programmes. I mentioned to him that I would like to invite Bing and he informed me that he would shortly be coming to Britain to play golf at St Andrews and to record a couple of albums in London. Henry said that Bing was a very early riser and advised me to telephone him at his St Andrews hotel early in the morning before he went out for a round of golf before breakfast.

It was with some trepidation at phoning anyone as early as 7am, that I picked up the telephone in my office at BH Bristol. I had not woken Bing up and about and very amiable. He said he would be glad to take part in the programme and could fit it in one day when he came down to London. As he couldn’t be sure of a possible date at that stage, he told me he would telephone me as soon as he knew. I mentioned to him that I would like to invite Bing and he informed me that he would shortly be coming to Britain to play golf at St Andrews and to record a couple of albums in London. Henry said that Bing was a very early riser and advised me to telephone him at his St Andrews hotel early in the morning before he went out for a round of golf before breakfast.

I had previously discovered that he was a very good mimic of those American wild birds with which he was familiar. In discussing these with him, I mentioned that one would be an extract from ‘My Blue Heaven’, where Bing gives a whistled ‘bob-bob-white’, also mimicked onomatopoeic: its typical call sounding like a whistled ‘bob-bob-white’, also mimicked perfectly by Bing.

To demonstrate just how good his imitations were, in the final programme as transmitted, I subsequently added actual sound recordings of these birds for comparison.

Provided by me with a series of questions in addition to his own that I knew would launch Bing on a string of his wildlife memories, Derek, a masterly interviewer, evoked a delightedly chatty conversation that pleased me immensely. Bing had been a keen wildfowler, hunting within United States laws, but his concern for the conservation of water birds and other wildlife was sincere. After the interview had finished, Bing, Derek, the recording engineer and I continued to chat for another hour about birds, fishing, colour blindness (from which Bing suffered) and other topics.

Derek and I both felt that Bing genuinely enjoyed chatting about his interests in wildlife and its conservation as a change from being asked about his show business career. To my delight I learned after we had finished and took our leave of Bing and his son Gary that, who had joined us meanwhile, that the engineer, whose name I regret to say I’ve forgotten, had let the tape run during this informal chat. I was able to have an edited version of it put on a CD, a copy of which is now deposited with Wildscreen in Bristol.

The programme itself was not, as far as I am aware, selected for preservation in the BBC Sound Archives, but recently, as a result of an appeal, I was kindly sent a CD copy by a member of the Wildlife Sound Recording Society who had recorded it off air at the time. It is my intention to offer this to BBC Heritage.

All together, as Derek Jones wrote in his account of the occasion (Memories and Muddy Boots, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, Devon, 1987), it was ‘two hours of absolute joy’.

Like Derek, I am happy that we were able to meet and talk with Bing, a charming man whose distinctive singing voice we had both greatly admired. A couple of years after our meeting, Bing passed away, appropriately enough, on a golf course. To both of us life wasn’t the same without him.

By the time this issue of Prospero went to print, John was preparing for a unique celebration of the Goons at the Komedia in Brighton. Jane and Sarah were due to join him on stage for an evening in aid of local charities.
Although based at Ealing, I worked for Film Maintenance at Lime Grove in the mid-1960s. At that time Richard Dimbleby presented Panorama and film shot by BBC crews in Vietnam was a regular item. Nationwide was the early evening magazine programme with Mike Barratt.

The old dubbing theatre consisted of a studio with a projection gallery above and an adjacent transfer suite, which was where the location sound, recorded on Nagra or Perfectone portable tape recorders, was transferred to 16 or 35mm sprocket hole magnetic media. After editing, it was then replayed with the picture projected onto the screen in the studio for the presenter to add commentary and the dubbing mixer to add effects and music for the finished soundtrack. The ancient projectors were of the carbon arc type and a motor generator device called a Selwyn was used to maintain picture and sound synchronisation. The big disadvantage of this arrangement was if there was a mistake during dubbing, everything had to be stopped rework and reset to the start marks before starting again from the beginning, as sync would have been lost.

Later, a new dubbing theatre was built using two German-made Keller dubbing machines. These provided three sound and one telecine transport on each machine, which could be changed between 16 and 35mm. The great advantage of this system was that all the transports could be locked together with toothed belts and electrically operated clutches. This meant that all of those linked in this way would stay in sync, even after a stop, rewind and start again, thus saving much time and frustration. As shown in the photograph, the decks could be raised for maintenance with hydraulic jacks. One problem was understanding the German maintenance manuals.

Nick Jennings

My role in Eisenhower’s D-Day announcement

I am grateful to Cheryl Miles of the BBC Pension Scheme who, at the request of Dutch Public Broadcasting, very kindly put me in touch with a Melvyn Ingleby who had seen the article in The Times regarding my part in the broadcast of General Eisenhower’s D-Day announcement. I had been on duty as shift leader and studio manager at 200 Oxford Street – rather than ‘a BBC runner’ as the paper stated. Such, I had told them, was for the BBC Home Guard.

Around 5am on 6 June 1944, I had been ordered to get the News studio ready and to await the arrival of a despatch rider from Bushley Heath. He arrived with a package which contained a 12-inch acetate recording marked ‘AFRS’. Such, I was later to discover, stood for American Forces Radio Service.

I was also informed that John Snagge, my present department store to make a copy for John Snagge. I still can’t find mine!

Thanks to Prosper, I had a splendid time with a young Melvyn and his reporter here at my home. They are sending me a recording of the interview which they broadcast on 6 June, whilst in recent times this boy in shorts – as he recently wrote to – is now in touch with a then Marguerite Lee who, in 1944, was also at 200 Oxford Street and with our War Report Unit. She is now 90 – but doesn’t sound it.

It was as a result of a telephone call from London on 27 June 1948 that Sgt Hill, now of British Forces Network Radio, Hamburg, would be asked by the BBC to record a radio feature on the start of the Berlin Airlift.

For ‘Operation Plainfare I’ I now had the assistance of a small German magnetic tape recorder: Having completed the Hamburg end, I was now on my airborne way to Berlin. Their Traffic Control Tower declared us ‘Clear to land on Runway 3’. I then had words with our wireless operator I’d been recording. ‘Then please get out a garden hose! We happen to be a heavily laden Sunderland flying boat! Or how about Berlin’s Havel Lake?’

Trevor Hill

Power of Attorney

In our busy everyday lives we tend to look after ourselves and our day-to-day finances without necessarily giving it too much thought. If we suddenly became incapacitated or if we went into care, who would make the decisions relating to our care and manage our finances on our behalf?

A Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) can provide the solution, allowing us to decide, whilst we are still able, who we would like to make those decisions for us if it becomes necessary.

There are two different types of LPA:

- Health and Welfare
- Property and Financial Affairs

Health and wellbeing

The Health and Welfare LPA gives an appointed attorney the power to make decisions over health and welfare issues. These powers will only begin if an individual becomes ‘incapable’, for example incapable of being able to follow a daily routine such as eating, washing and dressing, or being able to discuss and understand medical treatment. The LPA should outline precisely how incapacity should be determined.

When a Health and Welfare LPA is drawn up it is important to discuss the powers granted with those appointed as attorney(s). This may relate to decisions on suitable accommodation, personal medical information or medical consent for treatment.

Managing your financial affairs

The Property and Financial Affairs LPA has one main difference in that it can come into place either as soon as it is executed and registered by the Office of the Public Guardian, or alternatively at a pre-determined date in the future, such as incapacity. This does not mean that the attorney(s) have to take full financial control immediately – both parties can divide the financial responsibility to best suit you.

A Property and Financial Affairs LPA should include detail on the purchase or sale of heritable property, land or buildings, especially in the result of funds being required to fund care, as well as other investments including bank and building society accounts and pensions. Lasting Powers of Attorney may seem a daunting exercise and something you would rather not think about. However they are an extremely valuable means of protecting your health and wealth and ensure that your lifetime wishes are met fully.

Iain Miller
Origen Financial Services Limited
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PROSPERO OCTOBER 2014
A passion for piers

Former Radio 2 producer Anthony Wills was commissioned by English Heritage to write a book marking the 200th anniversary of the first seaside pier in 1814.

By some miracle 60 of the 100 built between 1814 and 1905 survive and add character and colour to thousands of seaside towns and resorts. But the pier was also a symbol of the early Romantic Enlightenment – a place where people of different classes came together.

To order yours, call the BBC Shop customer services line on 01788 846 1417 or go online to: www.bbcshop.com/cat/bbc

Can it be true?

Susan Hill

Heard by the fox slipping up to the hens in the dark
And the wolf prowling near to the sheep, by the dog as it snarled at
The cat as it snarfed for the mouse in a hole in the wall of the house.
Heard by the owl with blood on its beak And the shrew to the ditch.
Heard by the weasel, the ferret, the stoat. The terrified rabbit
And the whale and the whale which above in his boat.
Christmas Eve

And twelve chimed the clock when the message was heard.
And can it be true?

Said the fox to the hen to the wolf to the sheelp to the dog to the cat to the mouse
to the owl to the shrew.
‘And can it be true?’

They said to the weasel and ferret and stoat.
And the whale to the man in his boat.
And can it be true?

‘Come and see for yourself.’

So they went.
The fox with the hen with the wolf with the sheep with the dog with the cat with the mouse with the owl with the weasel and ferret and stoat.
And the whale towed the boat.

Christmas Eve

Twelve of the clock
When they came to the stable and saw, ‘It is true! It is true!’
And kneeled down.

Radio 3 Breakfast has got off the blocks by launching a competition inviting listeners to compose music for a brand new Christmas carol.

The winning entry will be a poem called Can it be True?, written for the station by The Woman in Black author Susan Hill.

Six carols will be shortlisted and performed live on Radio 3’s Breakfast show on 16 December between 8am and 9am. Listeners will then be asked to vote on their favourite carol.

The carol receiving the largest number of votes will be performed again live on Radio 3’s Breakfast programme on 23 December and played on Christmas Day on Radio 3. It will be performed by the professional BBC Singers, who mark their 90th birthday this year.

The closing date for entries is 10 November 2014. More details about the carol competition can be found on the Radio 3 website.

Get your exclusive BBC gear

The BBC Shop has just taken delivery of some exciting new BBC and BBC Sport branded products which make great gifts or souvenirs.

The items include a black hoodie, T-shirts (ladies and men’s sizes), mug, pin badge and key ring.

Don’t forget you get 10% off your order by entering code BBCSHOP01 on the order summary page at checkout. FREE UK delivery with all orders.

Terms & Conditions: Discount code entitles you to 10% off at BBCSHOP.COM. Offer is not valid with any other promotional discount or offer and subject to availability. BBC Shop reserves the right to change, amend or discontinue the offer at any time without prior notice. Non-transferable and no cash alternative. Standard BBC Shop Terms & Conditions apply. Promoter: BBC Worldwide Ltd. Contact UK: 01788 822107. Offer is not valid with any other promotional discount or offer and subject to availability. BBC Shop reserves the right to change, amend or discontinue the offer at any time without prior notice. Non-transferable and no cash alternative. Standard BBC Shop Terms & Conditions apply. Promoter: BBC Worldwide Ltd. Contact UK: 01788 822107. Charged at basic rate with any queries. See website for full Terms & Conditions.
Match of the Day: 50 years of broadcasting celebration

As the BBC’s iconic football television programme celebrates its 50th anniversary, we look at some of the highlights from the past five decades:

1. The first Match of the Day – on 22 August 1964 – featured Liverpool’s 3-2 win over Arsenal, with the crowd inside Anfield outnumbering the audience on BBC Two – only available in London at the time – two to one.

2. With ‘She Loves You’, the hit song from The Beatles, bursting out of the Anfield PA system, presenter Kenneth Wolstenholme told viewers: ‘Welcome to Match of the Day, the first of a weekly series coming to you every Saturday on BBC Two. As you can hear, we’re in Beatleville.’

3. The first programme celebrates its 50th anniversary.

4. In 1965, several clubs tried to block the programme’s move to BBC One, which was available to many more viewers, for fear it would hit ground receipts. A compromise was reached and the BBC agreed not to reveal the televised Saturday match until all games had ended.

5. Wolstenholme was a former RAF bomber pilot, flying 100 missions in World War Two by the age of 23. He commented on 23 consecutive FA Cup finals and five World Cups, coinining the immortal phrase ‘they think it’s all over... it is now’.

6. The first colour broadcast – on 15 November 1969 – featured Liverpool’s 2-0 win over West Ham.

7. In 1969, the programme became live and studio based, rather than being pre-recorded at the ground of the featured match, and there were two games shown each week.

8. Barry Stoller’s classic theme tune ‘Match of the Day’ was commissioned in 1970 to replace the original theme ‘Drum Majorette’ by Major Leslie Statham, a former Director of Music for the Welsh Guards. In 2010, a survey by the Performing Rights Society for Music placed it as the most recognisable British TV theme tune.

9. On 19 August 1995, Alan Hansen uttered the now famous remark ‘you can’t win anything with kids’ after Aston Villa had beaten Manchester United 3-1. As Hansen would be constantly reminded, United went on to win the double that season and countless other trophies with that group of young players.

10. On 21 April 2007, Jacqui Oatley became the first female presenter in February 2005 and Gabby Logan has since become a regular replacement for Gary Lineker.

Mottly’s magnificent run

John Motson joined the BBC as a Radio 2 sports presenter in 1968 and is the longest serving commentator on Match of the Day, still going strong after 43 years and approximately 2,000 games.

Iggy Pop to deliver John Peel Lecture

Iggy Pop, dubbed the godfather of punk, will deliver this year’s John Peel lecture at the Radio Festival. His speech, ‘Free Music in a Capitalist Society’, will be broadcast live on Radio 6 Music on 13 October and will air on BBC 4 on 19 October.

The singer, known for his unpredictable stage antics and shirtless performances, said: ‘I’ve never given a lecture in my life, but on the day I’m going to attempt a discussion on the subject of free music in a capitalist society. This is a struggle which never ends.’

Born as James Newell Osterberg Jr, the American musician has performed with the band The Stooges since the 1960s, and also as a soloist. The David Bowie collaborator, whose hits include ‘Lust for Life’ and ‘Real Wild Child’, is considered one of the pioneers of punk rock.

John Peel, who died a decade ago, was the first DJ to play Iggy Pop on British radio on his Radio 1 show in 1969. Since March, Iggy Pop has also hosted a Sunday show for Radio 6 Music.

He will be the fourth person to deliver the annual John Peel Lecture in Salford. Previous speakers include the musician Billy Bragg and singer Charlotte Church, who spoke last year about women’s representation in the music industry.

The three-day Radio Festival will start on 13 October at the Lowry Theatre in Salford.

Another 50th celebration

BBC Bristol celebrated turning 80 in September by opening its doors to the public.

As part of Bristol’s Doors Open Day, the fully-booked event saw 240 people get a sneak peak at the Whiteladies Road base.

Cameras hidden in a mock penguin and Siobhan Sharpe from the Bafta-winning W1A to return for more antics at the Beeb

Written by John Morton, the in-house comedy following BBC Two’s recommissioning of the series.

W1A will return for more antics at the Beeb following BBC Two’s recommission of the comedy.

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Written by John Morton, the in-house comedy following BBC Two’s recommissioning of the series.
Andrew Mango arrived in London to join the BBC in 1947. Born and raised a British national in Istanbul, he was a strong candidate for the BBC, with fluent Russian, Greek and French (all three languages were spoken at home) as well as Turkish.

He quickly gravitated to the Turkish Service (while studying Persian and Arabic and gaining a PhD), and by 1958 he was its Programme Organiser, in charge at a time of tension and censorship in Turkey. The Turkish Service told listeners what was happening, provoking repeated complaints from Ankara. The BBC – and Andrew personally – gained a lasting reputation in Turkey, demonstrated by the extraordinary number of tributes that appeared in Turkish after his death on 7 July.

In 1971 he conducted an analysis of broadcasts in Russian, Bulgarian, Serbo-Croat and Slovene – “all of them languages with which I am fortunately familiar”, as he wrote, and the following year he became Assistant Head and later Head of the South European department, responsible for Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish and Portuguese, but the government’s 1979 decision to close seven language services including Turkish, Greek, Spanish and Italian was a bitter blow.

The campaign to save them was successful, but in 1981 Andrew was asked to head the BBC’s new Special Broadcasts (now BBC Media Action). A military coup in Turkey in 1980 had ensured that Turkish and Greek survived. Andrew secured the expansion of Turkish broadcasts by 50%.

Before he retired in 1986, the French Service was added to his responsibilities, and he was briefly acting Head of the Arabic Service. As a BBC manager, he aimed to run a happy department. That he achieved: he was extraordinarily generous in supporting and encouraging young journalists and broadcasters.

Andrew published extensively on Turkey, becoming respected internationally as Britain’s leading authority on Turkey and appearing frequently on World Service English programmes such as Tony Four Hours, The World Today and later Newshour. After retirement, his magisterial biography Atatürk (1999) appeared.

He continued to broadcast on Turkey – in English and Turkish, but also in Russian, French and other languages.

Katharine Digby Worsley MBE, former head of audience research at External Services, now World Service, 1969-74, died in July at the age of 100.

Born just weeks before the outbreak of WW1, one of her first memories was travelling with her mother from home in Kirkcaldy to Westport, County Mayo, to see her injured soldier father in hospital. She could also recall being at Waverley station in Edinburgh when he was brought home. After finishing her education at St George’s School for Girls in Edinburgh, she got a job at the transmitter department, working successively at Droitwich, Maid Vale and Daventry before being posted to Scarborough H station during WW2, one of a network of regional stations, to which broadcasting would have been devoted in the event of invasion.

Learning how BBC programmes went to other parts of the world helped when she later successfully applied for a post in audience research at Bush House. She advanced steadily in the following three decades and took great pride in becoming one of the first women heads of department when she succeeded Asher Lee in the top job. Former department member, Alison John, remembers her as one of the kindest and most thoughtful of bosses, always encouraging women to strive for promotion, in the days when the upper echelons of the BBC were rather male dominated. Shortly after her retirement Katharine was awarded an MBE for her services to broadcasting.

She met Bruce Digby Worsley during WW2 when he was serving with the RAF Dig’g, as she called him, became the love of her life and they married in 1948. Bruce became general manager of the Savoy Theatre and the world famous D’Oyly Carte Opera Company, which toured for 35 weeks of each year. Sometimes Katharine escaped from BBC duties to accompany them. After both had retired, they decided to settle in Winchelsea in Sussex. Bruce died in 1980.

Despite her great age, Katharine lived most of her remaining years in her own home and enjoyed the company of colleagues, friends and generations of relatives up to and beyond her 100th birthday. Not long ago she jotted some memories of her time at the BBC on which some of this account is based.

Graham Mytton

Clive Lawrence remembered

Recounting a BBC career spanning 23 years does little justice to the achievements of Clive Lawrence, who has died aged 69 from cancer.

He joined Radio London in 1972, was a producer on Today, became News Editor at Sheffield and retired as Programme Organiser at Kent in 1995.

Clive’s imagination and inexhaustible creativity was staggering. He brimmed with ideas and it always struck me that he would have flourished even more in the zanier world of commercial, rather than public service programming. He discovered and nurtured new talent. His management style combined authority, kindness and patient encouragement. He had a rich, distinctive, welcoming voice marking him out among broadcasters and as a dynamic public speaker.

And he had the effulgent character to match.

But Clive’s greatest professional gift was instinctive understanding of audience needs. He gave listeners entertaining surprises, hit the right mood at times of tragedy with poignancy but unsentimental music and developed valuable tools – his ‘Snowline’ initiative was a saving grace for commuters, parents, teachers and the vulnerable, in times of weather chaos.

Clive ventured beyond the studios and mentored his on-air colleagues. He was the embodiment of the BBC in Kent. On retiring from radio Clive ran a successful public relations business with a diverse range of clients – from bowtie retailers to cosmetic dentistry – and, most recently, built a high media profile campaigning for the controversial ‘Boris Island’ Thames airport plan.

His reputation for devising bizarre yet plausible entrepreneurial get-rich schemes turned Clive into a legend among his vast orbit of business associates, Rotary Club colleagues and friends. But that reputation masked the reality that Clive was indeed very rich in the truly consequential substance of life that outstrips the value of monetary wealth.

It is not true but true to say of Clive Lawrence, that the conspicuous love, respect and devoted nature of his wife and three daughters, in addition to the genuine affection he earned from literally thousands of contacts he sustained in business, charity work and through family friendships, made Clive among the richest and rarest of men.

Gerry Selfridge

Sally Blenkinsop’s BBC career started as a junior secretary in radio and ended almost 30 years later as a television film producer.

Her first television job was with Huw Wheldon’s Monitor but she soon moved to current affairs programmes at Lime Grove where through the rest of her career she progressed from production assistant to researcher and on to assistant producer and producer. Tributes received by her twin sister Sue since her death from her colleagues at all these stages have repeatedly emphasised what fun she was to work with.

She worked for Gallery and 24 Hours and the Special Projects Team which produced extensive coverage of the Apollo moon missions and which took her to the USA for the 1972 Democratic and Republican Party Conventions in Miami. The following year she spent some time in Washington for coverage of the Senate Watergate hearings which led to President Nixon’s resignation.

As a producer in the early 80s she produced numerous films for Nationwide, Breakfast Time and Childline, winning many compliments both from her programme bosses and the subjects of her films for her treatment of sensitive personal issues such as bereavement, deafness and the consequences of serious injuries.

In 1986 she resigned from the BBC to pursue her long held love of art. She gained a degree at the City and Guilds Art School and exhibited her paintings and drawings on Open Days at her home, at various London Galleries and at the Mall Galleries’ prestigious New English Art Club and Discerning Eye annual exhibitions. Many of her pictures are displayed today in the homes of her former BBC colleagues.

To the astonishment of her friends her other enthusiasm was for cricket which took her and Sue to the West Indies and on her own to Australia in her support of England’s Test teams.

In July, 19 months after being diagnosed with motor neurone disease which she bore with great courage and without complaint Sally died peacefully with her sister Sue, who had so ably and nobly supported her throughout her illness, at her side.

Christopher Capron
Music Hall aficionado
Edward Hayward, who died peacefully in his sleep on 5 December 2013, started his career in television as a researcher for Rediffusion Television and joined the BBC in 1949.
Edward had won a scholarship to study at Dulwich College and a major scholarship to read History and Art History at Jesus College, Oxford.
He then went on to gain the Certificate of Education at the brand new University of Sussex. While still at Sussex, in 1966 he was also employed writing/researching for Groucho Marx who was fronting a quiz show.
He joined the BBC training scheme in 1969 and became an assistant producer, then producer with The Open University Arts Faculty for the first ten years of its existence. He was based at Alty Pally working closely with the academic staff mainly on history and art history, but also religion, English literature, 20th century design and philosophy. He especially enjoyed making three programmes on the Victorian Music Hall, the Early Music Hall and Bartholomew Fair.
Edward’s greatest passion perhaps was for the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall. We met when he was performing on stage at The Green Man pub in Blackheath, which he enjoyed almost every weekend, sometimes producing and sometimes performing.
He went on to help raise money to build the Greenwich Theatre.
Over 30 years Edward created a Music Hall card index detailing every music hall song, who sang them, in which halls and where the halls were. This index now has about 350,000 cards and I have inherited the job of maintaining it. He also sang a lot of the songs himself and broke new ground on the subjects joining the BBC in 1961 as a reporter.
By the late 1960s he was Europe correspondent on the News and Current Affairs programmes before becoming editor TV News, head of publicity and then the BBC representative in the United States.
As editor TV News, he dispensed with professional newsmen and appointed the first journalists to that role with John Humphreys and John Simpson who had both served as overseas correspondents. This is again now the norm with Huw Edwards etc.
On retirement he enjoyed extensive travel, watching cricket at Lord’s, although his first love was Gloucestershire as he was born in Bristol, and dining with one or two colleagues from both radio and television.
His motto might have been ‘work hard, but enjoy yourself and above all have fun’. It was a privilege and a pleasure to have known and worked with him. Our sympathies go out to his son Peter, his former wife Diana and stepson Mark.

Influential figure in News
One of the most influential figures in BBC News, both radio and television, Peter Woon, has died in hospital in Germany after suffering a fall while on a river cruise. He was 82.
Peter Woon was a reporter and then aviation correspondent on the Daily Express before joining the BBC in 1961 as a reporter. By 1966 he had ‘come inside’ and set up the first half-hour News programme, Newsam, on the new BBC 2 channel. He brought on to the programme Fleet Street trained reporters like himself and broke new ground on the subjects covered and the way they were treated.
His biggest change, however, came a few years later when he was appointed editor of Radio News where the bulletins were almost exclusively ‘straight read’ by trained newsmen. He insisted on fistash reports from reporters and correspondents in the field who hitherto had been restricted to Radio News and From Our Own Correspondent. This move was opposed both inside and outside the BBC especially when the report was on a scrathy telephone line in a distant country.
But Peter, aided and abetted by his number two, Stan Taylor – they were nicknamed Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid – stuck to his guns and the reception for the new style bulletins became, and still is, the norm.
He went on to become head of both Radio News and Current Affairs programmes before becoming editor TV News, head of publicity and then the BBC representative in the United States.
As editor TV News, he dispensed with professional newsmen and appointed the first journalists to that role with John Humphreys and John Simpson who had both served as overseas correspondents. This is again now the norm with Huw Edwards etc.
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A passion for steam
I was one of a number of us in broadcasting fortunate to have worked with Anthony Smith, though not in one of those faraway places like the Serengeti or the Rift valley but in the recording studios of BBC Bristol. Anthony narrated with great expertise the television series marking the demise of steam locomotion, The Thin Now Departing, which I was lucky enough to co-produce with my colleague, Andrew Johnston who originated that memorable and fascinating series back in the 1980s.
Smith’s passion for steam and his unique and skilful use of words contributed greatly to the success of the series, making it compelling viewing for a wider audience, rather than just for the ‘anorak brigade’ of railway enthusiasts.
Anthony’s warm, distinctive voice and his gift for using words made him the ideal choice as a narrator. He had a natural ability to engage with his subject and was profoundly touched by one remarkable piece of audience response to the series. While watching a sequence filmed on the Bluebell Railway in Sussex, a young man left without speech or movement after a road accident, recognised the location and uttered the word ‘Bluebell’. It was the first time he had spoken in three years and his mother wrote to thank the BBC, calling it ‘the best Christmas present ever’.
Following that initial trigger, her son’s speech gradually returned and Anthony described the event as one of the most moving and rewarding moments he could remember in his long broadcasting career.
Some years later Anthony and I found we had a common interest, that of the history to be discovered along the route of Roman roads. This time for Radio 4 we got together and we traced the history of Stane Street.
The project meant spending a couple of months retracing the route staying in pre-booked accommodation. It was on this trip that I observed his incredible ability to travel light. We met at Chichester station. He was wearing a light sports shirt and slacks. On his shoulder hung a smallish bag, decorated with the Acropolis, just large enough for a ‘tube of sun cream and one’s shades’ for an excursion on a Greek beach – nothing else!
Since those days, I enjoyed visiting him in his comfortable, book-lined study at the end of the garden of his Shepherd’s Bush house. We discussed areas of mine for a show on the ‘History of Time’. But his mind was on other things, namely filming a project for which he’d fly and hover with a power unit linked to a propeller strapped to his back, so giving him the opportunity to drop in to observe and film life in a sleepy English hamlet, or the activity at a service station on a motorway! All rather dangerous was my reaction, but his enthusiasm was not dampened in the least.

A great Scot
James Alexander Gordon (1936-2014) died on 18 August aged 78. I first met him 30 years ago at the BBC’s Paris Theatre in Regent Street.
He was there as a Radio 2 announcer introducing a comedy quiz show called Funny You Should Ask. After the recording we had drinks in the Green Room where James had a discussion with his anecdotist.
James was born in Edinburgh in 1936 and was brought up by adoptive parents who owned a pub in the city. When he was six months old he contracted polio and said later it was during the months he spent in a hospital bed that his appreciation of radio began.
He joined the BBC in 1973 as news and continuity announcer after Jimmy Kingsbury, the head of Radio 2, heard him speaking. For several years he shared the reading of the Football results with others while continuing to deliver the news on Radio 2. But gradually James made the results spot all his own, becoming a key part of the Saturday team.
‘Jag’ as he was affectionately known, honed a style which a generation of football fans had come to expect from reporters and correspondents in the field who hitherto had been restricted to Radio News and From Our Own Correspondent.
From Our Own Correspondent and the ‘History of Time’. But his mind was on other things, namely filming a project for which he’d fly and hover with a power unit linked to a propeller strapped to his back, so giving him the opportunity to drop in to observe and film life in a sleepy English hamlet, or the activity at a service station on a motorway! All rather dangerous was my reaction, but his enthusiasm was not dampened in the least.

In the tone of the many messages sent to his family was about the gratitude they felt for what he taught them – he was an inspiration.
Roger Clark, now Senior Director of International Coverage at CNN, started running errands for him. He was an up-and-coming young journalist, still working in the BBC and he assured me nothing would testify – but they all came to realise that no matter how many re-writes Charlie demanded, no matter how loudly he made his feelings known, they were learning invaluable lessons.

Legendsary in the newroom
Charlie Levitt, one of the best known names in BBC regional and national journalism for the last 40 years, has died at the age of 83.
His funeral in Hull was attended by more than 30 former colleagues, with messages from many more sent from around the world.
Charlie joined BBC Radio Humberside in 1970 after a career in regional press and was at the centre of many stories from the area which made international headlines.
His contacts and the trust in which he was held by fellow journalists and the public of news were legendary. When we’d ring the London newroom with yet another breaking story from travelers in trouble in the Arctic Circle, they’d ask ‘How on earth did you pick that up?’ Little did they know of our relationship with Moorgabladet, the daily newspaper in Reykjavik, and that we could radio virtually any traveler and talk to the skipper standing on his bridge.
Charlie was a tough task-master, as many up-and-coming young journalists, still working in the BBC and he assured me nothing would testify – but they all came to realise that no matter how many re-writes Charlie demanded, no matter how loudly he made his feelings known, they were learning invaluable lessons.

The tone of the many messages sent to his family was about the gratitude they felt for what he taught them – he was an inspiration.
Doug Holden emailed from Australia. ‘As I started thinking about the years I worked with him, I found myself smiling and chuckling to myself – he was truly one of a kind and when the going got tough in the newroom, he was a delight to watch – an absolute master.’
Just Now and Then

Peter Udell, former controller of the Overseas Services based at Bush House, has just published his first novel – described by one reviewer as ‘a highly emotive love story’.

I couldn’t have worked with more remarkable broadcasters. In the Bulgarian Section, with Georgi Markov a few years before his murder. In the Russian Service, with Sylva Rubashova and Leonid Finkelstein, two of Stalin’s victims, whom I still recall. And with the unforgettable Anatol Goldberg.

You worked in Bush House for 30 years. How did you feel about its closing down? I was hugely sad. When I was last there – being interviewed for a TV programme about Markov – I couldn’t believe I’d never be in Bush again. But I have so many memories of that golden age. And most of the friends I meet today are colleagues I worked with 50, 40, 30 years ago.

Have you previously written or published a book – or had any inkling that you might one day? Forty or so years ago a short story of mine was published – but in the Evening Standard, not in a book. I’d sometimes wondered before I retired – and more afterwards – if I could write something a bit longer. I had no inkling, though, that the story I started on years ago would finish up at the length it did. Not, until a year or so ago, did I think about trying to publish it.

What were the seeds of the story that you have told in your novel, Just Now and Then? One of the starting points was my interest in how some of us are, or want to be, or need to be, independent, and how others are the opposite. Almost at the end of the story, the woman has to decide whether to end her decades of dependence and live on her own. The man has to decide whether to remain independent as he has been for many years. The alternative for both: to decide to be together.

Despite being a love story, the subject matter is quite dark – looking at violence against both main characters. Why did you decide to write about this? How we react to violence has been another of my interests. In this story, the man has experienced his wife’s unpredictable violence. The woman has experienced – not always unwillingly – the ritualised violence of some of her men friends. Towards the end of the story, the man experiences premeditated violence. Both discover these are much worse than the violence they have known.

What advice would you give to anyone wanting to write and publish a novel? Most publishers won’t, I guess, be too interested in a first novel by someone who’s long retired. Today, though, this isn’t the end of the road. Despite my technical incompetence, I uploaded my story onto Kindle. My son uploaded it – and the cover he’d designed – onto CreateSpace. So now it’s available through Amazon as an e-book and a paperback.

If we’re thinking of writing a book, should we ask ourselves not why but why not? There are, after all, many worse ways of using our imaginations. And, by creating a story and its characters, we may get a better understanding of people around us – and of ourselves.

Are you working on any more books? I’m thinking of a story about a couple starting their retirement who are walking Spain’s Camino de Santiago. At the beginning, the man is the outgoing and assertive partner. By the end, their roles are reversed.

But before I start to write, I need to understand better the many shortcomings of my first attempt that friends have told me about – and that I’ve recognised myself. I have to think much more about the two characters. I have to walk at least some of the Camino. And, of course, time isn’t exactly on my side.

Just Now and Then (ISBN: 13: 978-1495273216) is available through Amazon – on Kindle at £2.99, and in paperback at £5.94.

Tell us about your career with the BBC.

In the early 60s, after I’d begun as a General Trainee, I had several Bush attachments, including scripting and producing. My first job: Bush’s producer in West Region. My second: back as a scriptwriter.

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