



Challenging news

I counted them out, and I counted them all back.
Brian Hanrahan, commentary from the Falklands War



As they traditionally do in times of national trouble, audiences turned to the BBC during the war-torn Eighties. This was a challenging decade for BBC correspondents who reported in depth on dramatic and often dangerous events from Northern Ireland, Tiananmen Square, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In Ethiopia Michael Buerk alerted the world to a famine of biblical proportions. It led to Bob Geldof's Live Aid phenomenon in 1985 which raised more than £60 million.

This was the decade of the miners' strike (1984), the wedding of the Prince of Wales to Lady Diana Spencer (1981), the arrival of EastEnders (February 1985) and Neighbours (October 1986). Frank Bough and Selina Scott launched Breakfast Television (January 1983). Television coverage of the House of Lords began with a six-month experiment in 1985 and four years' later cameras were allowed in the House of Commons for an experimental period. In 1990 the Commons voted in favour of allowing the cameras to stay.

Other important new television programmes included Newsnight (1980), Rough Justice, Timewatch (1982), Crimewatch (1984) and Watchdog (1985). In 1985 the BBC responded to Granada's Coronation Street with EastEnders. This quickly became the most watched BBC programme on television. A new venture for the BBC, breakfast television, began in 1983 and this was followed three years later by daytime television. In 1988, the BBC launched RDS (Radio Data System) on FM in 1988, bringing automatic tuning, programme identification and travel news to car radios.

Populist and cutting-edge programming

New drama included Bergerac and Tenko (1981), Alan Bleasdale's The Boys from the Blackstuff (1982), Miss Marple (1984), Edge of Darkness and Howards' Way (1985), Casualty (1986) and Dennis Potter's The Singing Detective (1986). Keeping the country laughing were Yes Minister (1980), Only Fools and Horses, Bread (1986) and Hi-de-Hi! (1981), Rowan Atkinson in Blackadder (1983), Alias Smith and Jones, 'Allo 'Allo (1984) and Birds of a Feather (1989). Radio highlights ranged from the dramatisation of Lord of the Rings to In the Psychiatrist's Chair.



Change and competition

Video recorders arrived in the Eighties. At the start of the decade just 5% of households had a video: by the early Nineties that figure had increased to 64%. BBC Television and Radio faced the challenge of growing competition in this period. Channel 4 went on air in 1982, more commercial radio stations opened and satellite television services began. The BBC and the IBA agreed to the Government's proposal for a 25% quota of independent programming in 1987.

The end of the previous decade saw the BBC bring together all its commercial activities under a single organisation, BBC Enterprises Ltd. This was the forerunner of BBC Worldwide which, by selling BBC programmes around the world as well as videos, records, books and magazines, returns significant funds back to the BBC to invest in new enterprises.

BBC under siege

Hard-hitting dramas such as *Tumbledown* and *The Monocled Mutineer* led to criticism of the BBC in some quarters. But in 1985 there was one of the most serious crises in the BBC's history since the General Strike over plans to broadcast a documentary on BBC One in the *Real Lives* series called *At the Edge of the Union*. The programme focused on two men at opposite ends of the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, concerned that the programme could "boost the morale of terrorists", requested the BBC Chairman to stop the broadcast. The Governors, quite exceptionally, viewed the programme before the planned transmission and agreed to postpone the broadcast until small changes were made. It was finally broadcast in October 1985.

DIRECT BROADCAST BY SATELLITE

In 1983 the Government authorised the BBC to begin a satellite broadcasting service. It was clear that pioneering DBS would be a high risk, high cost venture - and the Government said no licence fee money could be used for satellite. It was reluctantly accepted that DBS was not viable for the BBC - and British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB) was licensed to go on air in 1990.

PEACOCK COMMITTEE REPORT

The Peacock Report called for a fundamental re-think of the long term funding of the BBC and discussed sell-off of Radios 1 & 2. Advertising was rejected - but subscription was suggested, in line with the marketing of satellite and cable. The licence fee was to be pegged to the Retail Price Index and a proportion of programmes were to be made by independents.

OBITUARIES**SIR HUW WHELDON Television presenter, producer and executive 1916-1986**

Huw Wheldon was at the heart of the BBC's success in television's 'golden age'. An enthusiastic, larger-than-life presence, he presented children's programmes before breaking into factual production. In Monitor, the first television arts programme, he made his mark both as a mainstream presenter and, inside the BBC, as an inspiring creative leader. He held a number of key programme posts before becoming director of television in 1965. An eloquent advocate of public service television, he summed up the BBC's programme mission: 'to make the good popular, and the popular good'.

STUART HIBBERD Radio Announcer 1893-1983

The BBC's Chief Announcer for over 25 years. Hibberd was the "Voice of the BBC" - the voice that conducted Britain through the General Strike of 1926, and informed the world that "The King's life is moving peacefully to its close", in 1935. After Churchill, his was the best-known voice in wartime Britain. Retired in 1951 with his trademark close-down, "Goodnight everybody... goodnight".

GRACE WYNNDHAM GOLDIE Television Producer 1900-1986

"The first lady of television" and pioneer of BBC current affairs. Moved from radio production to television in 1948 and became the first woman to head a television production department. As well as Tonight, Monitor and Panorama, she masterminded the first party political broadcasts, the first Budget coverage and the first General Election broadcasts. Retired in 1965, but continued as Special Advisor to the Director of Television.

**WYNFORD VAUGHAN THOMAS Radio Commentator and Author 1908-1987**

A Welshman who thrived in radio's "new kingdom of talk". Joined the BBC in 1937 and rose to fame with his wartime reports. Covered a Lancaster bomber's night raid on Berlin, the Allied entry into Rome and Montgomery's crossing of the Rhine. Awarded the Croix de Guerre in 1945. Turned freelance, but continued to broadcast extensively in a wide range of BBC programmes.

SAMUEL BECKETT Novelist, Poet, Playwright 1906-1989

Associated with radio for over 30 years. Wrote 'All That Fall' as a special commission for the BBC. Broadcast in 1957, the play's array of sound effects led to the creation of BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Over two dozen radio works followed, including poems, prose readings and plays. Some plays were also adapted for television, although Beckett believed this to be the wrong medium for his work.

RADIO DATA SYSTEM

BBC engineers were at the forefront of the development of RDS, an inaudible data signal added to FM transmissions. Dubbed "the intelligent radio", the system was hailed as the most significant development since stereo or the transistor. Launched in 1988, it provides automatic tuning to the strongest available signal and immediate access to relevant travel news from the nearest BBC local radio station.

**HIGH DEFINITION TELEVISION**

High Definition Television - providing a wide screen picture four times sharper than conventional television and with digital sound equal to compact disc – was developed during the Eighties. The BBC's first full-scale HDTV production was in 1989. But HDTV was ahead of its time and didn't take off in Europe. As part of their digital programme, BBC engineers are now developing a digital HDTV system.

NICAM

Near Instantaneous Companded Audio Multiplex (NICAM) was developed by BBC engineers. It was accepted in 1986 by the Government as the standard for all UK stereo broadcasts. The EBU subsequently recommended it for terrestrial television broadcasts in Europe. The system has attracted widespread public support as ever increasing numbers of Nicam-equipped TVs and VCRs are delivering high quality digital sound into viewers' homes.

1980

- 30 January - *Newsnight* (TV).
- 25 February – *Yes, Minister* (TV).
- 1 April - *Medicine Now* (Radio).
- 30 August - *Juliet Bravo* (TV).
- 1 November - *Did you See?* (TV).
- 21 November - *Children In Need*, the BBC's annual fund-raising appeal first held as a telethon.
- 2 December - *Ireland: A Television History* (TV).

1981

- 26 February - *Hi-de-Hi!* (TV).
- 8 March - *The Lord of the Rings* (Radio).
- 1 June - Broadcasting Complaints Commission established.
- 29 July - The wedding of the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer which featured the first Buckingham Palace 'balcony kiss'.
- 8 September - *Only Fools and Horses* (TV).
- 1 October - *Forty Minutes* (TV).
- 14 October - *Bergerac* (TV).
- 22 October - *Tenko* (TV).

1982

- 7 April - *Rough Justice* (TV).
- 14 May - The Open University Production Centre officially opened by the Prince of Wales.
- 31 July - *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* (TV).
- 29 September - *Timewatch* (TV).
- 10 October - *The Boys from the Blackstuff* (TV).
- 1 November - All BBC Welsh language programmes transferred to Siandel Pedwar Cymru (S4C).

1983

- 17 January - Frank Bough and Selina Scott launch BBC breakfast television.
- 15 June - Rowan Atkinson in *Blackadder* (TV)
- 28 September - *Bookmark* (Radio).
- 29 November - *An Englishman Abroad* (TV).

1984

- 19 January - *The Living Planet* (TV).
- 13 April - *All Our Working Lives* (TV).
- 7 June - *Crimewatch* (TV).
- 4 September - *The Lenny Henry Show* (TV).
- 7 September - *'Allo 'Allo* (TV).
- 26 December - *Miss Marple* (TV).

1985

- 11 January - Victoria Wood *As Seen on TV* (TV).
- 23 January - Start of six-month experiment in televising House of Lords.
- 18 February - *Wogan* (TV).
- 19 February - *Eastenders* (TV).
- 13 July - Live Aid: BBC correspondent, Michael Buerk, alerted the world to a famine of biblical proportions in Ethiopia. It led to Bob Geldof's Live Aid phenomenon which raised more than £60 million.
- 14 July - *Watchdog* (TV).
- 1 September - *Howards' Way* (TV).

1986

- 4 January - *Loose Ends* (Radio).
- 10 January - *Lovejoy* (TV).
- 1 April - All BBC commercial activities brought together in BBC Enterprises Ltd.
- 1 May - *Bread* (TV).
- 3 July - Peacock Report on financing the BBC published.
- 6 September - *Casualty* (TV).
- 13 October - *The Clothes Show* (TV).
- 27 October - Daytime television service launched on BBC 1.
- 27 October - *Neighbours* (TV).
- 16 November - *The Singing Detective* (TV)

1987

- 9 March - *French and Saunders* (TV).
- 6 August - Government proposal for 25% independent programming agreed by BBC and IBA.
- 11 October - *Fortunes of War* (TV).
- 12 October - *Kilroy* (TV).

1988

- 3 January - *See For Yourself* (TV).
- 1 April - Licence fee increase pegged to Retail Price Index.
- 19 April - *Talking Heads* (TV).
- 16 May - Setting up of Broadcasting Standards Council announced by Home Secretary.
- 31 May - *Tumbledown* (TV).
- 1 September - BBC External Services renamed World Service.
- 18 September - *On the Record* (TV).
- 20 September - Official launch of RDS (Radio Data System) on FM, bringing automatic tuning, programme identification and travel news to car radios

1989

- 16 January - *The Late Show* first transmitted (TV).
- 1 March - BBC issued comprehensive new guidelines for producers.
- 16 October - *Birds of a Feather* (TV).
- 20 October - *Public Eye* (TV).
- 21 November - Start of experimental televising of House of Commons proceedings begins.