The Written Archives Centre (WAC to all who know it!) is a treasure trove of documents telling the story of the BBC. Archives Collection Manager, Matthew Chipping, and the WAC team take *Prospero* on a nostalgic tour through the archives.

WAC, which is regularly visited by programme makers, historians, biographers and academics, is 50 this year, but sadly Covid-19 has put a damper on most of our celebratory activities.

Nevertheless, the occasion has been marked by reaching a significant milestone for the Centre, in joining the Archives Hub (https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/) – a service that brings together catalogue data from over 350 archives across the UK to promote cross-institutional searching.

Through the Archives Hub, anyone, anywhere, can now see how the archive is structured and how the documents have been maintained since the first filing system was set up in 1927.

This release marks the first step in a long-term plan to make the entire catalogue available online. The Archive contains over 4.5 miles of shelving and many millions of documents, so no small task!

So far, more than 170,000 entries have been created from scratch or migrated from an existing in-house system. Here are just a selection of our favourites from the collections:

**Publication A3066 – ‘BBC Variety Programmes Policy Guide’ 1948**

*Selected by Jeff Walden, Archivist*

This ‘little green book’ (photo below), which details taboo subjects for broadcast comedy, has become notorious for its censorship of such topics as honeymoon couples, fig leaves and the reproductive habits of rabbits. But those who deride the BBC for being behind the times should look further. The Guide also puts a firm ban on jokes about people with physical or mental disabilities, racial minorities, or non-Christian faiths. It would take the rest of the comedy world another 40 years to catch up.

**Radio Contributor File 1963-1970 ‘Cliff Bennett and the Rebel Rousers’**

*Selected by Jemma Singleton, Archives Assistant*

My favourite sequence of records exemplifies the work the team have been doing for the online catalogue. These are the radio contributor files for ‘Cliff Bennett and the Rebel Rousers’ who, following a radical rebrand, start appearing on contracts as ‘Toe Fat’ in 1970.

The files contain a mixture of audition reports, band correspondence and contracts; hinting at the frequent changes of name, personnel and genres associated with the life of music groups appearing on BBC platforms. They also demonstrate some of the challenges involved in cataloguing changes of name, so all related files can be retrieved from a single search.

**File L1/43 – Staff File for Eric Arthur Blair (George Orwell)**

*Selected by Matthew Chipping, Archive Collections Manager*

Orwell worked as a producer for the BBC’s Eastern Service from 1941 to 1942 and this staff file is a wonderful record of his journey through BBC bureaucracy. It’s impossible not to think of how BBC abbreviations and jargon contributed to the imagery of 1984.

**File T2/171 ‘Three Railway Engines’**

*Selected by Cate Allison, Archivist*

This file documents the production of an ill-fated 1953 television version of Thomas the Tank Engine – broadcast live using Hornby train sets. A series of correspondence illustrates how initial enthusiasm turned to horror as the broadcast failed disastrously, with derailing trains and frantically improvised narration.

Highlights include baffled letters from the Reverend W Awdry (author of the Thomas books) and an irate memo from the Controller of Programmes calling the whole effort ‘pathetic’. Sadly, no recording of the programme exists, but at least we have this hilarious file to bring the unfortunate debacle to life in our imaginations.

**Andy Pandy illustrated scripts from S567 – Alison Gassier collection**

*Selected by Louise Wingrove, Archives Assistant*

This collection is really special thanks to its wide variety of material for those interested in Children’s Television production. It contains programming proposals and memos, sheet music, correspondence and illustrated and annotated scripts for classics such as *Andy Pandy*, *The Flower Pot Men* and *Bizzy Lizzy*.

You get a real sense of the working methods of the programme creators, Freda Lingstrom and Maria Bird. The illustrated scripts are a gem of the collection, showing delicate, detailed line drawings of Andy Pandy’s positions and expressions during key programme points and songs, providing an insight into the directorial process.

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Prospero is provided free of charge to retired Scheme members or to their spouses and dependants. Prospero provides a source of news on former colleagues, developments at the BBC and pension issues, plus classified adverts. It is available online at bbc.com/mypension.

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Email: prospero@bbc.co.uk

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

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Time to Talk Day takes place on Thursday 4 February – just as this issue of Prospero lands on many of your doorsteps.

As we face the prospect of another lockdown that could last until the end of March, with the elderly and/or clinically vulnerable asked to shield yet again, many people might be feeling overwhelmed.

At times like this, it’s more important than ever to check in on your family and friends and be able to have open conversations with them about mental health.

Time to Talk is an initiative led by the charity Time to Change (time-to-change.org.uk), which aims to end mental health discrimination. You can sign up on their website to support the initiative and find out how you can help.

The winner gets a £10 voucher. Many thanks to Neil Somerville for providing this puzzle.
The winter of 62/63

I wonder how many retired engineers recall the chaos which occurred during the bitter winter of 1962/63, especially at some more remote transmitters?

At the Fixion transmitter, still in those days ‘classified’, in the far north of Northumberland, all the old multi-core power and control cables froze solid. The outer sheath of the transistorised VTN followed soon after. If the ameliorating bearings underneath had parted in the intense cold – remember the Kraken threads, at that time, were reciprocating – the ingenious A4/Z system would also have failed, with catastrophic consequences that experienced engineers will readily appreciate.

It was vital to ensure that those isotope bearings, so tiny and apparently inconsequential (multi-view orthographic projections can still be accessed online) were kept free of ice. So volunteers were called for to shin up the all-weather tungsten carbide ladders on the outer casing of the transmitter with every available container that would hold hot water, carried upwards via an endless chain ingeniously improvised on the spot by the splendid team of transmitter ‘boffins’, all volunteers, then operating from that isolated and somewhat secret location.

How I remember the cries of ‘More hot water’ emanating from the mists shrouding the higher reaches of the transmitter. And the cheery reply of ‘Coming, hen’, from the splendid Northumbrian canteen ladies heating up the water far below.

Delicacy precludes me mentioning the solution those dauntless BBC engineers water far below.

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Peter Harrison

BBC Holmes Service – an update

Many thanks for printing my article in the December issue of Prospero. It appears to be creating quite a lot of interest already.

I wrote the article at the end of October and naively thought that Covid would not set the print run back... With bookshops closed, the publication date has been pushed back to March, when hopefully the world will be in a much better place.

However, the good news is that the books have been printed and I’m very keen to mail out ‘advance’ copies to Prospero readers, at a cost of £20. If anyone would like a copy, please contact me at: kjholmes@ntlworld.com

Cheques made payable to: John Holmes, 116 Selby Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7BA, or contact me for bank transfer details.

Apologies for not keeping you up to date with these details.

John Holmes

Ceefax – ‘goodbye cruel world’

Last year, when the BBC was considering scrapping the Red Button service, my grandson was curious about its forerunner, Ceefax, as he was a bit young to use the service when it was around. He went hunting around the internet and found the attached. A friend of his works in server infrastructure and told him they have to go into old servers a lot. When a server gets shut down, the developers usually put a ‘goodbye cruel world’ message up in case anyone goes into it again. Indiana Jones for computers!

Anon

RCA TR22 VTRs

Further to Garth Jeffery’s letter in the December issue, with the very splendid picture, I too have memories of RCA TR22 VTRs.

My first work in the videotape area at TVC was not until 1972, when everything was colour of course, so I never used one of those machines in anger, but there were still three of them, if I recall correctly, lined up in the Tape Servicing room, where used 2” videotapes were assessed for possible reuse.

By that time we had ‘Recortec’ machines, which automatically assessed tapes for splices, scratches and damage, and the TR22s were generally used just as very expensive tape winding machines. However, I was told that before we had the Recortecs, people had to record a test signal on the machines and then watch it back all the way through the tape, which could be as long as 90 minutes, to visually look for defects. I have never ever known whether my leg was being pulled there or not, but remembering how things were back then, I can easily believe it!

After I moved from the videotape area back to telecine, where I spent most of my career, I didn’t see a TR22 again for another 21 years, when I visited the American Museum of the Moving Image in New York, in 1994. There, sadly ignored in a corner of one of the display rooms, was a TR22. Sadly, photography was strictly prohibited in the museum, so I have no record of the encounter, but it certainly brought back memories!

I’m not actually certain if it’s completely accurate to describe the TR22 as ‘the first all-transistorised VTR’.

We had a few of the TR22s’ successors, the colour TR70s, at TVC amongst all the Ampex machines, and they contained devices called ‘nuistors’. Although they can superficially resemble transistors, nuistors are technically thermionic valves, so if the TR22s had them as well, they were not actually ‘all-transistorised’. I’m sure others with more knowledge in this field can perhaps confirm whether that’s correct, or correct me if I’m wrong of course. I am being pedantic I realise!

Dave Hawley

We all love a good story

If you have one, why not share it with us in Prospero? We’re interested in all sorts – reminiscing about times past, sharing your exciting travel stories, or telling us about new skills you’ve picked up since retiring.

Don’t be shy – pick up your pen and paper, or start tapping that keyboard, and drop us a line.

Please send your stories to: prospero@bbc.co.uk or write to us at:

BBC Pension and Benefits Centre
Central Square
Cardiff CF10 1FT.
Short skirts at the BBC

The advert in Prospero for Sarah Shaw’s book, Short Skirts and Shorthand – about life in the 70s – took me back a decade earlier.

I joined the BBC at Carpenter Road, Birmingham in 1957. It was just after the rules had been relaxed so that the female staff could sit at the same tables in the canteen as the male staff, and I believe there was a member of staff, let’s call her Miss X, who was responsible for the welfare of those female staff.

The premises on Carpenter Road were a former school for the blind which you entered by a main hallway that led to a corridor leading left and right. Part way along each side corridor was an attractive wrought-iron staircase, you know the sort with intricate filigree, leading to the floor above. There was a craze for a while for the young women to wear hooped skirts, that is until Miss X walked under the staircase and realised she could see more than she felt she should, when she looked up, so the hooped skirts were banned.

A year or two later, one of the slightly older secretaries arrived in hot pants well before most of us had heard of them. All was well for a while until Miss X saw her bending over the counter in the canteen and again saw more than she felt fit. Suitably reprimanded, the secretary had to change her ways. not long after, she arrived at work in a skirt that was practically trailing on the floor. Definitely a trip hazard, so more discussions with Miss X.

Mind you, we male staff weren’t left out. Ties were expected to be worn, so when one chap arrived on a motorbike wearing a rollneck sweater, he had to prove he was wearing a tie.

At another time, a racing broadcast at Newmarket almost didn’t go ahead because the cameramen, who had to go up onto the roof of the grandstand wearing their outdoor rigging clothes, had to pass through the Members’ Bar, where ties were considered essential. The same thing also applied when we were working on a golf course and lunch was in the Club Restaurant. Once again, ties were required, otherwise we would not be served. Eventually common sense prevailed in both cases, but not before some considerable discussion with those in charge.

Several years later, at least one woman turned the tables. At this time, women were not allowed to be part of a TVOB engineering crew, but in the regions the members of the sound staff were expected to work both in radio and television. Women had been working in radio studios for years, so one enterprising young lady, who wanted work in TVOBs, asked to be transferred from London to Manchester, where she became part of the integrated system and was soon working as part of the TVOB crew. As we were expected to work in all weathers, we were supplied with ‘rigging clothes’ and so at a glance all looked the same. We were setting up to cover a test match at Lords, which meant having to make it happen behind the scenes?

If you have a memory of the programme, especially from the early days from the 40s to 60s, Pat would love to hear from you. Did you help make it happen behind the scenes? Do you remember listening to it in a far-flung venue or situation? Have you a recording of one of the early shows?

If you have a tale to tell, please email Pat at patrickmurphy777@aol.com

He’s particularly keen to hear from anyone who remembers John Webster, who famously read the football results (and killed many a Pools coupon) each Saturday from 1948-1974.

Play for Today – can you help?

I am a postgraduate researcher conducting a funded three-year PhD research project which is a history and analysis of the BBC’s Play for Today (1970-84) drama anthology strand.

As part of this project, I am conducting a series of interviews to discover unique oral histories from people who worked on the strand, enabling them to tell their stories for posterity and to inform my research into what Play for Today was.

I would love to talk to anyone who worked in any of the following or other areas of production: cameras, make-up, acting, costumes, lighting, sound, music, production design, set design, writing, directing, producing, editing, floor manager, production assistant, video effects, art direction and cinematography.

If you are a former BBC employee who worked on Play for Today, please contact me at t.may@northumbria.ac.uk

Tom May, Northumbria University

Pebble Mill OB scanner

I took this photo to mark the last outing of a Pebble Mill OB scanner at Blackpool. It was for Pot Black. John G Smith requested everyone attend to honour the vehicle’s last outing. He is sadly cropped bottom left as he insisted he be photographed among the BBC crew. The players were all up for being part of the celebration. Spot them clutching their cues.

Eamonn Holmes was the presenter. It was either 1991 or 1992 (’92 is more likely).

Graham Percy

Sports Report - can you help?

Ex-BBC sports staffer Pat Murphy (pictured right), who specialised in Midlands football as well as cricket, is currently writing a book about Sports Report, the world’s longest-running sports programme.

Still broadcast at 5pm every Saturday with its distinctive signature tune ‘Out of the Blue’, it’s been presented by a roll call of legendary sports presenters like Eamonn Andrews, Peter Jones and Desmond Lynam, and celebrates its 75th anniversary on 3 January 2023.

Pat’s already interviewed over 100 people about the programme – how it started, how it developed, and how it’s put together behind the scenes.

If you have a memory of the programme, especially from the early days from the 40s to 60s, Pat would love to hear from you. Did you help make it happen behind the scenes? Do you remember listening to it in a far-flung venue or situation? Have you a recording of one of the early shows?

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LGBTQ+ HISTORY IN THE BBC

LGBT History Month, founded in 1994, is an annual month-long observance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, and the history of the gay rights and related civil rights movements. Here, we explore a few television and radio LGBTQ+ ‘firsts’.

1938
Douglas Byng was the first female impersonator on television. He later had his own shows, Byng-Ho! and Queue for a Song. In 1977, at the age of 90, he appeared on Parkinson and Radio 4. Within his own theatrical world, Byng was openly gay, but very discreet outside it.

1955
Tucked away on the BBC Third programme, at 7.30 on a Tuesday evening in 1955, Homosexuality and Christianity appears to be the first programme on BBC Radio to directly address what was then generally thought of as the ‘problem’ of homosexuality. The programme no longer exists in BBC Archives, but featured Dr Robert Casey, Dean of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, giving his views following a reading Dr Sherwin Bailey’s book Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition.

6 August 1970
The first same-sex kiss on British television was during the broadcast, on BBC Two, of Edward II by Christopher Marlowe, in which Gaveston (James Laurenson) and Edward (Ian McKellen) kiss.

4 June 1973
The UK trans community gets its own programme, Open Door. The male-to-female trans community is given full editorial control over the issues that affect them, and there is a sense of celebration in this all-trans presented programme. The female-to-male trans community is completely absent however.

1974
The first lesbian kiss on TV is not the famous Brookside (Channel 4) kiss of 1994. It is in Girl, a 35-minute drama set in the army, by James Robson. Jackie (Alison Steadman) is leaving the army and encounters Corporal Harvey (Myra Frances), her ex-lover.

1978
Tom Robinson’s ‘Glad to be Gay’ is released, reaching 18 in the Top 40 within a week. Identifying as gay, Robinson is unique in chart music at the time, when record companies expect artists to be in the closet for fear of affecting sales. ‘Glad to be Gay’ is banned by Radio 1’s Top 40 Shaw and is not performed on Top of the Pops, but John Peel continues to play it.

1987
1987 sees the first same-sex kiss in a UK television soap when Eastenders’ Colin gives boyfriend Barry a light peck on the forehead. The Sun newspaper reports, ‘IT’S EASTBENDERS ... a homosexual love scene between yuppie poofs...when millions of children were watching.’

1995
Gaytime TV begins on BBC Two, the first BBC TV programme aimed at an LGBTQ+ audience. It is presented by Rhona Cameron, Bert Tyler-Moore and Richard Fairbrass. The programme ran until 1999. Editor Neil Crombie bills the show as ‘so glamorous and exciting straight people will love it too!’

Independent production company Planet 24, which makes Gaytime TV, was founded by boyfriends Charlie Parsons and Waheed Alli.

In 1998, LGBTQ+ activist Ali becomes the youngest, and first openly gay member of the House of Lords. He is also the most prominent gay politician from a Muslim background.

2015
In 2015, Rebecca Root is the first trans woman cast in a comedy. Boy Meets Girl is developed from a winner of the BBC’s 2013 Trans Comedy Award. Also in 2015, Riley Carter Millington joins EastEnders as Kyle Slater, the first trans man to play a trans character in a UK soap.

2018
An established radio DJ at BBC Manchester in their former identity, Stephanie Hirst comes out as trans on BBC 5 Live.

In 2018, she becomes the first trans DJ with a daily radio show in the UK.

The full timeline from the 1920s to date is available through the ‘History of the BBC’ page at bbc.com/historyofthebbc/lgbtq/lgbtq-timeline#thesbreakthrough.

Stephanie Hirst, BBC Radio, 2018.

Waheed Alli, pictured in 2010.

Rebecca Root, Boy Meets Girl, 2015.


Colin (Michael Cashman) and Barry (Gary Hailes), Eastenders, pictured in 1987.
Notable BBC anniversaries in 2021

70 years
The Archers, the longest running daily serial in the world, began its national run on 1 January 1951.

It started life the previous year on the Midlands Home Service, specifically intended for the farming community, but it soon became clear there was a large general audience for the ‘serial play of country life’, as the Radio Times described it on its national launch.

According to creator Godfrey Baseley, the idea for The Archers was hatched at a meeting with farmers in Birmingham. One farmer said, ‘What we really want is a farming Dick Barton!’
The writers of Dick Barton were brought in to write the scripts, but there was also an insistence that real-life rural affairs and the latest developments in farming were depicted in the programme.

In one major event in the first year, Dan Archer retired his working horses, Boxer and Blossom – reflecting the increased mechanisation of agriculture.

In 1962, the first producer of The Archers, Godfrey Baseley, spoke to Brian Vaughton about the origins of the serial. He recalled a conference, chaired by a senior figure in the BBC’s management, a Mr HJ Dunkerley, who allowed a pilot of the programme to go ahead.

The Archers continues to reflect changes in country life, though it is no longer overtly educational. Its presence on the airwaves for 70 years makes it in many ways the kennin of BBC Radio output, and it is a genuine national institution.

The theme tune, ‘Barwick Green’ by Arthur Wood, is instantly recognisable, and it remains the most popular non-news programme on Radio 4.

50 years
The first episode of Elizabeth R was shown on 17 February 1971. After the success of The Six Wives of Henry VIII, the BBC was quick to produce another lavish colour drama set in the same period.

Elizabeth R starred Glenda Jackson as the Tudor queen and proved so popular that a hurried repeat showing was scheduled the week after its first run ended.

Queen Elizabeth’s life story was told in six, 90-minute episodes, each by a different writer. Over the course of the series, Jackson had to age from teenage princess to elderly queen. She achieved the transformation by shaving her hairline back to the crown to accommodate a succession of wigs, and by wearing a prosthetic nose, which became bonier and thinner as she aged.

Interviewed in the Radio Times, Jackson said ‘developing a character over this enormous width of canvas was a challenge I just couldn’t resist’.

Elizabeth R was seen around the world, and won several awards, including an Emmy for Jackson. The costumes from the show – designed by Elizabeth Waller, went on tour, due to public demand.

Glenda Jackson has since become a politician, but her portrayal of Elizabeth I remains a landmark performance.

30 years
BBC World Service Television News began at 7pm GMT on 11 March 1991. It was launched to complement World Service Radio, at a time when demand for impartial 24-hour global news television was growing.

It started in Europe but by the end of the year had expanded into Asia and the Middle East.

BBC Chairman Marmaduke Hussey introduced the service: ‘The BBC brand is a world leader. The more widely it is known the more credit it brings to our country.’

The service was established as a wholly owned subsidiary of the BBC, funded by subscriptions and advertising. It proved its value in times of conflict, such as the Kosovo crisis of 1999, when viewers and contributors – including US government officials and the Albanian Prime Minister – praised its coverage.

World Service Television News changed its name as its reputation grew, first to BBC World and then – in 1998 – to BBC World News.

Today BBC World News is available around the clock in over 200 countries with an estimated weekly audience of 76 million. It is available in homes and can be seen in three million hotel rooms, on cruise ships, airliners and mobile phones.

Lockdown!
So the country is once again in a national lockdown and we are all told to stay at home. It’s wonderful to hear the creative ways that Club members are using to pass the time.

I am sure sales of jumpers will plummet as knitting seems to be gripping the nation, and daily rituals such as the 6pm gin and tonic are treats to be looked forward to and savoured. It is lovely to read your stories!

There is definitely a theme of some who considered themselves too old for social media, jumping in with both feet and embracing technology. This is a great way for old friends and colleagues to reconnect and of course to keep up with our nearest and dearest. Zoom calls have become normal for many of our members, who are using this medium not only to keep in touch but also to help with home schooling of their grandchildren!

Of course, along with the positive stories, we also have received news of loss and loneliness. Our sincere condolences go to all who have lost loved ones. As BBC Club is an independent company, we are not notified by the BBC of any changes in circumstances and consequently often are not aware of the death of one of our members. Loneliness has also affected members, cut off from any social interaction during this lockdown.

Let us all hope that the strict measures we find ourselves in will have the desired effect, and that combined with vaccinations the end is in sight.

BBC Club EXTRa
BBC Club EXTRA has a New Year theme at the moment, with the monthly competition prizes for January and February being detox kits. Kick-start your year and email in your entry!

We have additional offers along the same lines on our online offers page, as well as 50% off sportswear at online retailer Sundried. Perfect for the permissible outdoor exercise!

BBC Club Lottery
The lottery wins for retired members continue! Please note, it is so important to update BBC Club if your contact details change, especially if you have lottery shares. We are still waiting for a November-winning retired member to contact us and have emailed, written and left phone messages with no response. As mentioned above, we are not informed of any changes sent to either the BBC or Pensioners’ Association. Indeed, in these times of data protection, it would be illegal for those details to be shared, so please do remember to inform BBC Club of a change of address, email or telephone number. Our contact details are below.

Once again in this unprecedented time, BBC Club would like to thank all our fantastic members for their support. As an independent, not-for-profit and unsubsidised company, it is the support of our members that has kept us going.

Please note, correspondence by post or email only as staff are continuing to work from home.
DEATH AND DISEASE AROUND PORTLAND PLACE AND HOW BROADCASTING HOUSE KEPT ITS COOL

by Ken Wright

The year is 1988 and a virulent disease strikes the area around Broadcasting House. Of those infected, 70 become very ill, and three die. The infection is confirmed as Legionnaires’ disease, named after an outbreak at an American Legion Convention in the USA in 1976.

The mode of infection was inhalation of contaminated water droplets, the source of which was traced to a plume from a cooling tower on the roof of Broadcasting House (BH).

Forced draught water-cooling towers, a very prominent feature of power stations, are an efficient, quiet means for providing cold water for air-conditioning systems. Water is pumped to the top of the tower from a pool at the base and, in cascading down through an updraught, some of the water evaporates and is cooled by a mechanism known as 'The Latent Heat of Evaporation'. The interior of the tower is lined with slats to catch and so prevent any errant water droplets escaping. Regular maintenance is vital. The water pool must be kept sterile by dosing with chemicals and any missing slats replaced.

A slight problem here, I can find no mention of a cooling tower in the original plans and building of BH, but there was an installation which removed soot and other contaminants by drawing air in through a 'cascade of water'. The Clear Air Acts of 1956 and 1968 effectively made this plant redundant, so I assume that the opportunity was taken to convert it into an efficient, quiet water-cooling tower.

Seventy people had become very ill and three had died. To prevent another outbreak, it was decided to replace the air-conditioning system and the tower with industrial air-cooled refrigeration units - chillers. These are about the size of a Mini, generate lots of vibration and noise and, required, I believe, the installation of a new electricity sub-station.

Not easy to find a suitable site in a steel-framed building, but a location was found on a section of flat roof near the front of BH, adjacent to the upper part of Studio B. The chillers were installed and powered up. BH was cool and all was well.

Not quite yet

A further enforcement notice was issued, pointing out that BH is a Grade 2* Listed Building, and alterations to the external appearance of BH require planning permission, which had not been applied for. Retrospective permission was granted and BH was at last legally cool.

Questions?

• Am I correct in my assumption that the air-cleaning plant was converted to a cooling tower, or was a completely new tower built?

• The refurbishment of BH included the removal and replacement of most of the roof of BH. Are the chillers still there?

Make Way for Music

‘Ladies and gentlemen, whoever you are and wherever you are, Make Way for Music!’

These words were Roger Moffat’s introduction to a weekly broadcast by the BBC Northern Dance Orchestra, better known as the NDO.

Make Way for Music began life when the NDO was formed in 1956 and was a regular Friday feature on the Light Programme, with vocalist Les Howard and Sheila Buxton. It became a very popular programme with the listeners and ran from 1956 until the 1960s.

The programme transferred to television in the late 1950s, and producer Peter Pilbeam (who had worked as the sound supervisor on some of the TV broadcasts) revived it as a series of public concerts for radio in the 1970s.

The concerts were a great success and enabled many fans of the orchestra to see and hear the NDO performing at what they did best - playing to a live audience. The band played to full houses in almost all of the concerts.

Make Way for Music was unique and ground-breaking – there wasn’t just great music on offer, but it included somewhat eccentric announcements from Roger Moffat, not to mention his interactions with the band and Barney Colehan, sometimes tongue in cheek, sometimes downright rude, and dotted about with mini sketches he had dreamed up the night before! The band was a ‘bunch of comedians’, and there were many laughs during sessions.

There was the time when Roger Fleetwood was about to play a clarinet solo, when for a laugh, Johnny Roadhouse had pushed a soft bread roll into the bell of his clarinet, resulting in no sound at all when played, and a very confused look on Roger’s face.

Japes were also played on visiting artistes, and there was the time when members of the orchestra put sticky tape over several groups of keys on Mrs Mills’ piano.

The resulting sound was quite original - she was a very jolly lady and took it all in good fun.

When Make Way for Music transferred to TV, the band appeared against a simple black backdrop, and in their normal clothes. This was very much against the wishes of its original conductor, Alyn Ainsworth, who tried to insist that the band appeared in their ‘uniforms’.

It is to the credit of TV producer Barney Colehan that their informal dress was kept, and as a result the show and its novel format became a huge success. Even though its broadcast times were varied, the loyal listeners still found them.

The content of the show featured the excellent playing of the band, but also would include soloists, and occasionally vocal groups.

Alyn Ainsworth was the original conductor of the early shows, and when he left the BBC in 1961, various conductors were tried, with Bernard Herrmann taking over the baton the same year.

The NDO project has celebrated Make Way for Music by producing a two-hour double CD set and a book telling the unique story of the NDO, which played with much the same musicians throughout its 25-year history. If you are interested in any of our double albums, which are available at a 15% discount to all BBC employees and pensioners, please look at our website, northerndanceorchestra.org.uk or email us on ndoinfo@virginmedia.com for more information.

Ian C Reed
KINGSWOOD WARREN REMEMBERED

Just 10 years after the BBC vacated Kingswood Warren, home to its Research Department, Mike Croll has written a memoir of his 40-year career as a broadcast technologist based at the R&D HQ in Surrey.

The book, One Last Beer, gives an insight into the BBC’s world-leading projects and its international work to establish new broadcast technologies and standards. A limited number of first-print copies are available free in return for a £15 contribution to Macmillan Cancer Support. To secure your copy, please email: onelastbeer@btinternet.com

Mike describes his work on an early standards converter, the digitisation of audio and the Ceefax system. He also presents the work of internationally recognised engineers, scientists and mathematicians who led in developing studio stores, an electronic animation system and digital video recorders for standard definition and high-definition (HD) television.

At Kingswood, we became heavily involved in broadcast archive technology:

'A fundamental difficulty with archiving magnetic tapes is that with every new format, enough equipment and spares need to be provided to replay every tape stored using that format. It is also necessary to transfer recordings from older formats before all means of replaying them vanishes. In this way, the number of recordings needing to be transferred accumulates all the time.'

'The introduction of digital formats immediately removed the deterioration between generations since the content can be copied, digit for digit, and checks run to confirm the accuracy of the copy.'

'The introduction of optical CD recording for audio introduced the first format to have the potential to be used for decades or possibly hundreds of years. It also had the benefit of being smaller than the reel of tape it replaced and could be mounted in automated library systems to give online access without people needing to handle the discs. Research Department offered its involvement in assessing the potential lifetime of optical recordings using accelerated-aging techniques. Twenty discs of different formats were subjected to temperature and humidity cycling and tested every month. Each month was probably the equivalent of several years if the discs were stored at a controlled temperature and humidity.'

A team at Kingswood developed digital video-tape recording: 'To help research teams with their studies, Sony made available one-inch tape transports fitted with head-clusters suitable for digital recording. We were allotted one of these which made our work more relevant. As well as having error patterns closer to those of the expected DVTR, it gave us insight into how data could be organised on the tape. We applied some different channel processing arrangements and were able to make recommendations. My experience with multi-channel digital audio communication came in handy since I had tested block-based systems where data is formed up in a two-dimensional block of rows and columns and two orthogonal error checks are applied. This is particularly effective if the data is pseudo-randomised such that it is unlikely that there will be many errors in the same row or column and it has a very small overhead if the block is large.'

'The European Broadcasting Union had set up a committee called Magnum under the leadership of Aleksander Todorovic. This discussed the requirements and technical parameters that could be standardised. A similar committee was established by the SMPTE for potential manufacturers worldwide and non-European broadcasters. I attended some meetings in Europe where we compared notes, but the most important meetings involved both committees. An early point of agreement was that the new recorder would be called the D1.'

Because of our early work on digital video studios, we devised and used solutions examples of logic circuits to instrument the system and showed how simply they could be incorporated into arithmetic processes they were already using.'

This resulted in the team being awarded an Emmy, which Mike was proud to collect in New York.

'As soon as we started working with HD, in 1990, it became a challenge to be able to convert standard definition TV into HD. This was not only needed so that archived programmes could be inserted into HD programmes, but there were many visual effects that were not available when HD programmes started to be made. We also found that specialist cameras that photographed wildlife, the human body and engineering processes would not be available in HD for some time.'

'The problem was the basic interlace operation of standard definition television. Historically, this was a way of getting clearer pictures on tube displays and better resolution from camera tubes. Basically, alternate fields were shot with a raster that was displaced vertically to come midway between the other fields. In this way, the resolution of a single field was enhanced by the next field which also presented the picture at a slightly later time, giving better movement portrayal. Both Martin Weston and I had ideas as to how to design a multi-field filter for up-conversion. The importance of this project focused our minds and drew ideas from other engineers who had designed complex filters for television. There was a regular meeting of minds first thing each Monday morning.

'The converter was successful and was marketed by Snell & Wilcox. It helped in the making of important landmark programmes like Blue Planet, where unique shots of sealife very deep in the oceans were processed and looked spectacular on big screens. In 2001, the BBC was awarded another Emmy for the work.'

By the time I retired from the BBC in 2005, HD was firmly established for production and was to be introduced for the Olympic Games. We had demonstrated that HD terrestrial broadcasting was feasible. Internal briefing documents had been sent up the line to the Director General, explaining how the BBC could distribute HD in various ways, including use of terrestrial channels that would become unused when the changeover to digital television was completed. It had also been shown possible that HD would be available for online services.

The team that built an HD OB truck.
Active Union rep & Film Department editor

Arthur Bennett passed away peacefully after a long illness on 25 September. He had returned to Scotland in 2009, reconnecting with the countryside that he enjoyed before he left for his big adventure in London in 1965. That began at Ealing Film Studios as a trainee assistant editor. The editing career that followed took him through BBC Sport, including the Montreal 1976 Olympic Games and the Argentinian World Cup of 1978. Current Affairs: Apollo space mission 15-17 and the first flight of the Space Shuttle. Many single documentaries for Music and Arts and series including Omnibus and a particular favourite, The Magic of Dance, with Margot Fonteyn.

His long list of editing credits could be his lasting legacy but for many fellow employees of the 1970s and 80s, it was his time spent teaching and mentoring new trainees and assistants across all sections of the Film Department that will be remembered.

As we moved from film to tape, all previous professional practices and standards were about to change. Crews were reduced and the essence of all crafts seemed to be at risk.

Never a Luddite, Arthur had been at the forefront of developing working practices to embrace new technology. Arthur became actively involved in BECTU as a Union representative, challenging management thinking, proposed new ways of working and the impact on staff and programme making. He left the BBC in 1985 for freelance life. He was the first editor I knew who offered two female assistant editors the chance to job share so they could get back to work after maternity leave, something we had tried to fight for at the BBC but failed because of the complexity of HR arrangements. Arthur was a champion of his craft and of outstanding young and up-and-coming talented individuals. Since he passed away, I have received many messages from people who start by writing 'If it wasn’t for Arthur, I wouldn’t be...'

His legacy lives on and we are grateful for his dedication, friendship and enduring humour.

Denise Perrin

Former EastEnders publicist

Fenella Skuse (née Mantle) died suddenly at home in London aged 56. She was much loved by her BBC colleagues and her passing came as a great shock.

‘I can see her now laughing and chatting away. A lovely lady,’ said one.

And another: ‘Why are the ‘good ones’ taken young? I’m always so grateful for the people I had the great good fortune to work with at the BBC. Special people and special times.’

Fenella Ann Mantle was born at midnight on 2 March 1964 at North Middlesex Hospital. Her mother, allowed by the midwife to decide her official birth date, chose 3 March.

On leaving school in 1981, Fenella worked as a hotel receptionist near Marble Arch. In 1982 she joined the staff of Nationwide Building Society’s Palmers Green branch, where she was confronted with a shotgun during an armed robbery; she remained calm, strong and unharmed.

Fenella joined the BBC in 1986 in the World Service press office. Colleague and close friend Sue Young remembers being the victim of Fenella’s pranks, such as tapping the phone handset to its base or hiding under the desk to pull the plug out of the electric typewriter mid-sentence.

But Fenella was known more for her hard work, quick mind and organisational ability and moved to the BBC’s Corporate Press Office in Cavendish Square before joining the EastEnders publicity team at Elstree.

She made many good friends and was a smoking buddy with Ross Kemp. Her job was a delicate balance: both looking after the show’s actors, sometimes even as a minder at events, and keeping Fleet Street’s showbiz journalists happy.

After a break during which she gave birth to her son, Fenella did shifts in the BBC’s duty Press Office and later worked at Hazelwood Children’s Centre, Enfield.

Fenella was known for her love of baking, served to friends using her favourite Portmeiron pottery.

A funeral mass was held at St Monica’s, Palmers Green. Fenella leaves a son, Jack, sister, Charlotte and close cousins Hilary and Shiv. Thank you to Charlotte’s husband Colin Leggett for permission to use extracts from his funeral eulogy.

Graham Brown

In memory of Ant Astley

Ant was born in 1943 near Wolverhampton. He and Mary met in 1968 and married in 1970 at Solihull Registry Office. They have two children, Matthew and Katherine.

Ant joined the BBC in 1961, training at Wood Norton, and retired on pension in 1993, aged 50.

Initially he worked at the Audio Unit in Broad Street, Birmingham, moving to the new Pebble Mill in 1971. At that opening ceremony, he and Mary met Princess Anne.

On completion of his training, he arrived at the Midland Broad Street Studios in the Control Room as a technical assistant/operator, working there until the ‘Broadcasting in the 70s’ review, moving to the new Audio Unit. He always preferred radio work to television.

His outside broadcast activities included organ recitals, Radio 1 Club, cricket/football/rugby/golf matches, the visit of the Pope to Cardiff, Royal Show Stoneleigh, snooker at The Crucible, Oxford Farming Conference, racing at Cheltenham and recording CBBSO concerts.

After retiring, he was renowned at home for spotting broadcast-editing ‘slip-ups’, saying, ‘You just can’t get the staff these days.’ When Ant retired, the family were living at Clavendon, Warwickschire on a smallholding keeping poultry and sheep. They had a share in a narrow boat, often inviting friends along for a cruise. The family moved to near Penybontfawr in Pows for 11 years, then to Ellesmere for 14 years.

Ant joined Oswestry Probus Club where he became President, then moving to the Ellesmere Club. He was a keen member of Wrexham and Oswestry radio clubs and had a passion for classical music.

Ant developed Ataxia several years ago and sadly caught Covid-19 in hospital after a fall, passing away on 14 July 2020. He is much missed by family and friends.

Ant and Mary celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary earlier in 2020.

Thanks for the memories to Mary, Matthew, Frank Bailey, John Pierce (ex-BBC) and John (Ted) Walford (ex-BBC).

From secretary to studio manager

Our mother, Ann Sinclair Fell (née Graham) joined BBC radio in 1950, aged 17.

Known to friends and colleagues most often as Annie, her career spanned firstly secretarial work followed by her being secretary to the producers of programmes as Woman’s Hour, where she remembered her bosses were thrown into their roles without much experience, so it was very much a case of all of them learning the ropes of radio producing together.

Working for the BBC was great, she recalled, ‘as you were constantly encouraged to look at the noticeboard for other jobs in radio that were available to train for...’. So she decided to train as a studio manager herself.

After a break of a year and a half away in Canada (1955-56), she returned to the BBC as a studio manager.

She married Alan Fell in 1971 and had two children, David (born in 1972) and Rachel (born in 1974). At that time, she moved roles into broadcasting the letters that listeners had sent in to some of the radio programmes of that time, particularly Woman’s Hour.

I remember well, as a child, listening to her voice from the radio, together with her mother, Florence, who was childminder to us at that time. Her good friends also recall enjoying hearing her distinct clear voice on the radio as they went about their daily chores, giving them a smile.

Her career in BBC radio spanned 25 years. She was proud of her career at the BBC, and it had been an ambition of hers to do it ever since she was a young child when she so enjoyed listening to children’s radio programmes at bedtime.

She loved people, and made many good friends through her working life and through her many chairs. She sang in concert halls throughout Europe over many years, with the Philharmonia chorus and also in the BBC Proms chorus at the Royal Albert Hall.

She is survived by her children, Rachel and David Fell.

Rachel Fell

An appreciation of Mark Dodd

Mark Dodd, former Controller Overseas Services (1981-88) and Head of Eastern Service (1987-61), died on 29 November 2020 aged 90.

Mark had worked as an archaeologist before joining the BBC as a general trainee in 1956.

After a spell in television, he was made to his career in the World Service, initially as a talks writer and producer in the African Service.

His involvement with Asia began in 1965 with his appointment as BBC Representative in Delhi. His active time in India was shorter than planned as he fell ill, and shortly after his recovery he was summoned to be Head of the Eastern Service in Bush House. These were the years when the radio transistor revolution reached its peak, providing huge new audiences for the Hindi and other BBC south Asian language services.

A lasting legacy of Mark’s time at the Eastern Service was the negotiation of a new basis for BBC news coverage of India. In 1970, the BBC correspondent Ronald Robson had been expelled over the airing by BBC television of a series of documentaries by the
French director Louis Malle. Robson had nothing to do with them. But the episode led to the effective suspension of BBC programme operations in India. In early 1972, after India’s war with Pakistan over Bangladesh, Mark and the then Managing Director of External Services, Oliver Whitley, negotiated the reopening of the Delhi office, with Mark Tully, who had been his number two, returning to Delhi as BBC representative ‘with a news-watching brief’. Mark’s aptitude for quiet diplomacy paid off. He was ‘the most civilised of colleagues’, as one former senior colleague says. But he was effective in promoting and defending the Asian language services, notably in justifying the BBC Persian service against the strictures of the British ambassador in Iran, who wanted the service abolished. He was proud that one of his sons, Daniel, followed him into the BBC.

Mark will be greatly missed by his many friends and our sympathies go to his wife Shirley, to Daniel and his brothers and their families.

William Crawley

**Dave Hider, VT shift supervisor**

It is with enormous sadness that I have to report that my brother, ‘The Wider Hider’, died from brain cancer in September aged 83.

Dave grew up in Chislehurst and won a scholarship to St Olave’s Grammar School. On leaving, he started work at Brimar Valves from where, in 1957, he applied to become a BBC engineer. After his initial training course at Evesham, he joined Telearc at Lime Grove. In the 1960s, he ran many of the experimental colour transmissions of feature films to which the BBC had transmission rights. Because of their scarcity, they were interfered with on television! A lifelong football fan, he naturally supported Sunderland.

During retirement, a group from the Department met regularly, with our wives, sampling afternoon teas at various splendid hotels, these later becoming venues for lunch. Duncan enjoyed a long retirement, with a close and loving family. Until health problems interfered, Duncan and Pauline enjoyed ballroom dancing and had many friends.

Duncan was a friend who was always there when needed, possessed a wicked sense of humour and was always good company. Our sympathies go to Pauline, his wife for over 60 years, Julia and Nicola, his daughters, and William, his grandson.

A true gentleman, he will be greatly missed.

Colin Bowler

**Pioneering programme executive**

Marion Jenkins told friends that it was at the BBC that the fun began!

Marion, who has died at the age of 97, worked for BBC Wales between 1946 and 1983, rising from the typing pool to programme executive, via Programme Planning and the Music Department.

Her early years included encounters with a young man called Dylan Thomas, who would appear in the office the worse for wear. She would ply him with coffee, order him a taxi and send him on his way.

As programme executive, she negotiated contracts with performers and producers. A negotiation with the opera singer Sir Gerard Evans ended when she reminded him: ‘This is BBC Wales you are talking to, we don’t have that sort of money.’ Sir Gerard conceded: ‘Oh, all right Marion then, but don’t tell my agent!’

Martin Liscombe, producer of *How Green Was My Valley*, praised Marion’s ‘invaluable contribution’ to the 1975 TV serial, which starred Stanley Baker and Sian Phillips.

Marion was born in January 1923 in the Carmarthenshire village of Pontyberem and moved to Cardiff when she joined the BBC. She was a pioneer, the first woman to hold the ‘prog ex’ role in Wales and also the first woman on the BBC Wales staff to obtain a mortgage in her own right.

During her long retirement, she continued to take a keen interest in life at the BBC. At the age of 93, she made her last visit to Cardiff’s Broadcasting House, taking the chance to sit in the news presenter’s chair, read the weather – and meet a dalek.

Friends, family and former colleagues remember her as kind, generous and well-organised – with a great sense of fun. She died peacefully in her sleep at Morol Court care home in Penarth, where she spent the last seven years of her long and fulfilling life.

David Cornock

Musicologist and senior music producer, Radio 3

Robert Layton, who has died aged 90, was a musicologist, music critic, practical joker and part of the triumvirate responsible for the Penguin Guides to classical recordings; he was also a senior music producer at Radio 3 and an authority on Nordic composers, notably Jean Sibelius, about whom he produced a fine biography.

He was born at Chadwell Heath, East London, on 2 May 1930, the younger of two children of a stockbroker and his wife. Layton recalled that by the age of 14 he had a substantial collection of 78s, adding: ‘My mother used to say, “There’s no point in giving him money, he’ll only spend it on records.”’

He was educated at Barking Abbey Grammar School and read music under Edmund Rubbra and Egon Wellesz at Worcester College, Oxford, while continuing his piano studies.

In 1953 he won a Swedish government scholarship to undertake research at the universities of Uppsala and Stockholm on Franz Berwald (1796-1868), the first Swedish symphonist, which he also turned into a biography.

Layton not only mastered the language but also supplemented his finances by working in the Swedish film industry’s musical archives and taking small roles in Swedish films.

On his return to Britain in 1956, he spent three desultory years as a teacher, describing the experience as ‘standing in front of a class while English, music and maths were on the timetable’.

He joined the BBC in 1959 and the following year was appointed music talks producer, where he was responsible for the long-running series Interpretations on Record. He retired in 1990, and in 1998 published an illustrated life of Greg.

At times, Layton could be critical of the major classical record labels, accusing them of lacking a clear artistic objective.

‘Everyone talks about outreach’, he told the journalist Jessica Duchen. ‘But in my view, there’s no reason music should be accessible. When Beethoven wrote his string quartet Op 127, he wasn’t thinking about the market. He was reporting on his inner experience.’

Robert Layton, who was awarded the Sibelius medal, is survived by his civil partner, Chuan Cham.
Just over 400 years ago, the Mayflower Pilgrims were anchored off what is today known as Cape Cod taking their first tentative steps into what Europeans then considered to be a New World. I was reminded by David Edwards in his account of his ancestral association with several passengers aboard the Mayflower. As far as David can tell, he is the second only Brit to claim Mayflower ancestry. Well, I may have news for him.

P

art of my time at the BBC was as the Information Officer within Corporate Affairs and with the often-unevitable task of carefully, dutifully and scrupulously relaying to the viewer and listener the true value of the TV licence. In this, I was drilled rigorously in the precepts of dissecting the facts from the fiction perpetrated by the corporation's many detractors. This stood me in good stead for life after Auntie as a full-time historian and historical researcher. Twenty years on and I’ve made a good stab at it, with a number of books covering an assortment of people and places disagreed, under-reported or lost to history. And it was after a conversation with Robert Elms on his BBC Radio London show that an American listener living in France contacted me through my publisher with the offer of an historical archive he wanted rid of. It concerned a British Tommy who died in France in 1917 and who left behind a family history linking his family to a passenger aboard the Mayflower. I wasn’t particularly interested and said so. I had no knowledge of the Mayflower nor any great interest in American history, but the archive was emailed to me nevertheless.

Two years later and my son, then living in the States, moved from New York to Boston. On our first trip to see him there, we visited the Pilmoth Plantation Living Museum, which showcases early life in New England and then on to the Mayflower II docked in Plymouth Harbour and other associated Pilgrim attractions. I came away with more questions than answers, which is always a sign there’s work to be done. Thus, a new project was born, and subsequent trips to visit my son allowed for some deep research both sides of the pond over several years, covering the early settlement of America; the ‘Indian Wars’; the Revolution; slavery, the civil war and the industrial revolution in both the USA and here at home. This was to be Dan Brown meets Who Do You Think You Are. Sadfly, the best piece of advice I received was from a Boston bookseller who told me: ‘Mayflower descendants are a richly complex group devoted to themselves. A general industry expects nor wants.’ Ouch.

First off, the voyage of the Mayflower is not American history but part of Britain’s colonial past. The passengers were a group of English migrants that managed to hold out long enough for support to arrive that saved the colony. Boston soon took the lead in New England governance, leaving the peevved-off Plymouth to create a legend that has grown into the social industry it has become. The Mayflower episode was not a founding event in American history. My mistake was to write a book along these lines, leaving a representative of the General Society of Mayflower Descendants to point out in no uncertain terms that ‘the Mayflower community rarely reads for a challenge; they want their story told as they expect it to be told. A genre expects nor wants.’ Ouch.

It’s great that David is confident he can trace his family back to passengers aboard the Mayflower, and I really hope he does manage to convince those whose job it is to sanction such changes to the agreed script. Meanwhile, his own humble beginnings shouldn’t enter into the equation. Many a Mayflower passenger escaped far worse conditions. The grandmother eight times removed from the British Tommy killed in France, for example, was a 12-year-old street urchin forcibly cleared from the streets of London by royal decree. Her only crime was poverty. But such discomfitures have no place in the Mayflower story and so are best forgotten, disregarded and airbrushed from what passes as history.

Ed Harris

I ODDS ‘N’ ENDS

THE FIRST RULE OF MARKETING (OR WRITING A BOOK): KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The first rule of marketing or writing a book is to know your audience. It’s great that David is confident he can trace his family back to passengers aboard the Mayflower, and I really hope he does manage to convince those whose job it is to sanction such changes to the agreed script. Meanwhile, his own humble beginnings shouldn’t enter into the equation. Many a Mayflower passenger escaped far worse conditions. The grandmother eight times removed from the British Tommy killed in France, for example, was a 12-year-old street urchin forcibly cleared from the streets of London by royal decree. Her only crime was poverty. But such discomfitures have no place in the Mayflower story and so are best forgotten, disregarded and airbrushed from what passes as history.

Ed Harris

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Caption competition

The winner of a £10 shopping voucher will be Mr I Williams with the caption ‘Surplus beer jettisoned due to lockdown drain’. The image was submitted by Robin Cherry, who found it in Country Magazine 1950. The actual caption was: ‘Harry Roger, of Ironbridge on the River Severn, demonstrates for Country Magazine television, the handling of a coracle. ‘For generations, coracles have been our family job and we still make ’em. We use them still for lots of things, and some I’ll tell you about and some I won’t. They’re the only craft that will stand up to the Severn when she’s in flood. It’s a west wind does it – it doesn’t matter about us having rain, but a west wind raises Severn just as a wind out of the south raises Tame. Severn’s always up to one of her tricks, but she’s like a woman: you can read her if you study her aright.’ For our latest competition, please post your entry to Prospero by Monday, 1 March 2021. Or, you can email your entry to prospero@bbc.co.uk with ‘caption competition 1’ in the subject line. Please include your BBC pension number. Good luck!

Please note, vouchers will be issued once the latest lockdown restrictions have been lifted.

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