

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE INFLUENCE OF DOCUMENTARY METHODS  
UPON BBC TELEVISION DRAMA

With particular emphasis  
upon the years 1946-1962

Volume I

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covering the major years of his professional life for the purposes of my researches and to be placed thereafter in the Library of St. Luke's College, Exeter.

In a sense it is Robert Barr who has provided much of the inspiration for this thesis: what began as a very strong interest in the development of television documentary-drama under his direction, has since grown to incorporate a sincere admiration for the man and the artistic principles for which he stands.

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"The great themes of broadcasting history can be understood only if the attitudes and approaches of producers are understood - and the relations between producers, programme planners, controllers, critics, and the public. The BBC's philosophy owed an immense amount to one man:\* the BBC's programmes were the work of many men of extremely varied experience and outlook."

Asa Briggs.  
The Golden Age of Wireless  
Vol.II History of Broadcasting  
in the U.K.  
Page 57.

\* See Appendices 4, 5, 6, 7.



## PREFACE

This thesis is an investigation into the influence of documentary methods, both their principles and their practice upon BBC Television Drama between the years 1946-1962 with particular reference to the Dramatised-Documentary and its successor the Documentary-Drama.

The first of these, the Dramatised-Documentary was an original form of television writing and production pioneered in the 1940s by Robert Barr and Duncan Ross together with the Documentary Group which worked as a unit until 1955.

The second form, the Documentary-Drama was a development of the first, but was by the late 1950s 'fiction based on fact' and the concern of the BBC Television Drama Department.

The aims of this thesis - though not necessarily in this order - are to:-

1. Show the historical background of Documentary by tracing the origins of the idea and its development from the early 'realist' films; The British Documentary Movement of John Grierson (and in particular the 'dramatisations' of Harry Watt); to the BBC Sound 'Features' Department under Laurence Gilliam.
2. By descriptive analysis to consider the pioneer work of the Television Documentary Group, first under the leadership of Robert Barr (1946) and later Paul Rotha (1952) until its dissolution in 1955.

To illustrate the methods and output of that tiny group of writer-producers by an examination of a selection of their Dramatised-Documentaries from scripts, production records and BBC files, and to reveal an emerging form of television writing, supported and developed later by Colin Morris, which culminated in the rise of 'Series' to become the mainstay of the medium.

3. As an integral part of this creative side of

television, to show throughout, the major technical advances which made so much of the above possible, from the inception of the Service in 1936 to the commencement of Z-Cars in 1962.

The importance of the third aim advanced should not be minimised. It was, after all, largely due to the development of the lightweight 16 mm. film equipment coupled with the philosophy of the Free Cinema and the cinéma-vérité movements - films produced by first tape-recording interviews, conversations and opinions with visual images then shooting scenes to correspond with the words and later creating a film from this material in the cutting room - which revolutionised both writing and direction and permitted the earlier 'dramatisation' of documentary to return to fiction where it has since become as much a part of twentieth century Drama as The Caucasian Chalk Circle or Look Back in Anger. All these ingredients; theatre, film, radio and the novel contributed to, and were a necessary part of, that documentary movement of social expression which flowered during the 1940s and 1950s and which has since come to be known in a wider context as Theatre of Fact.

It is hoped to show in the following pages how in searching for a form in their writing and producing the technical facilities invariably defined the practical perimeters of the art, but never confined nor constrained the writers, who were continually looking for ways of over-coming these limitations of both studios and equipment and constantly stretching the bounds of possibility at every turn.

When dramatic performances were televised 'live' from



cramped studios equipped with relatively primitive cameras, great ingenuity had to be expended in the construction of settings and the deployment of cameras. Scripts needed to be specifically tailored so that the sequence of shots and scenes would flow naturally, with no breaks imposed by the difficulty of moving actors and cameras from one set to the next.

Today, when plays and other performances are largely pre-recorded and when film inserts are widely used, these original difficulties, so easily forgotten, have been replaced by others. Given the high costs of capital equipment and the salaries of the many technical personnel needed, time spent by a programme production team actually in front of the camera is now at a premium. All but the final rehearsals will take place way from the studio and the time to be spent on the final recording must be planned for in meticulous detail. But whatever the problems raised by a shortage of studio time, or by working in studios less well equipped than they might be, it is important to realise that today they stem from economic factors rather than innate technical difficulties.

All through its history there has been a tremendous amount of co-operation and collaboration between Engineering and Production - a point that will be well illustrated in this thesis. So often it was to be Engineering which provided the technical breakthrough - 'Cutting', 'Zooming', 'Video Recording', 'Electronic Editing', etc. - which further enabled the production teams to devise new methods of presentation and the writers to go beyond the walls of the studio with greater

freedom and flexibility, and so widen the scope of their dramas.

In writing about the creative side of television it has been hard to be dogmatic about anything. There are of course certain dates and events in its history and achievements which are indisputable - Robert Barr certainly wrote the very first television documentary in the English speaking world - but to be able to attribute certain authors with 'firsts' in forms of writing when the influences on them were so many and varied and extended far beyond film and television to the early consciousness of novelist and theatre dramatist alike is not the purpose of this research.

It could be rightly claimed that television has made a unique contribution to Drama by its nurturing of writers committed to presenting plays with some serious social comment to make. In Britain we naturally tend to connect this with the BBC's Wednesday Play series, of which Cathy Come Home is the best remembered example. But similar developments took place in the United States in the 1950s, Paddy Chayevsky's Marty being a celebrated example of the genre. Besides stressing social and personal problems, plays of this kind are also frequently distinctive in their particular emphasis on realism, in their exactness of setting and acting. The very early days of television drama are often remembered for their flimsy sets and a look of 'stageyness' - though this was rarely true of the dramatised-documentaries of this time - but techniques were to change and a great deal has improved since then. Largely because British television evolved a style of writing and



production all of its own as will be shown later.

Today's naturalism has been aided enormously by the skill with which film and video material can be smoothly and unobtrusively integrated with scenes performed in the studio, a technique which was carried to a high level of perfection in the original Z-Cars series. And naturalism in technique and purposive social comment are complementary sides of the same coin.

The desire all along has been to see the development of the dramatised-documentary in television as the natural and likely inheritor of the long-established tradition of film documentary and to win for it the recognition it has not so far received, as the major contributor to the continuing Documentary Movement during the 1940s and 1950s. For without the support of television, as John Grierson admits, the documentary might well have sunk without trace bereft of sponsorship and distribution as it was by then.

It was due largely to the efforts of men like Barr, Ross and Colin Morris, who, though working with electronic rather than with film cameras, by using their instinctive talents as writers, were able to re-create documentary subjects and ideas in the studio and so keep the form alive until the time arrived when film techniques and improved equipment allowed the documentary to be made when and where it happened. This released their 'art' from the burden of fact, to find new life in the realms of fiction. Their brand of social realism remained however very much intact. Though this is not to say that it was not threatened in various ways.

At first when the staff at Alexandra Palace was small it was possible to keep everyone 'in the picture' - production rubbed shoulders with engineering. Ideas, comments, criticisms could all be exchanged in easy familiarity over coffee in the canteen. Everyone did a little of everything; for everyone in those days simply worked for the Television Service - not for a department - though from the start each producer had his personal interest, be it drama, variety, documentary or current affairs.

As the national network expanded, as the number of hours of broadcasting increased, as the organisation grew and grew so that the chain of command became longer and longer and the word in the ear became the memo on the desk; so administration got further and further from the studio floor - the very heart of the operation - and bureaucracy had arrived. Then the arrival of Commercial Television and the battle for 'ratings' brought further problems.

In London alone the BBC employs somewhere in the region of 24,000 staff. Small chance of their ever being able to chat over coffee! After starting life as the poor relation of Sound Radio, Television now disposes of an annual budget of many millions of pounds.

The advantages that all the new wealth and technology were to bring were far outweighed by the loss of that personal intimate contact that made television so exciting a place to work in immediately after the war.

Soon the new Departments took up defensive positions and the talk was of budgets, facilities, studios and viewing figures,



but rarely of people. Broadcasting was now a game for players, the gentlemen had left the field long ago!

The thinking at the top, which was soon to permeate all levels of production was largely political and the in-fighting of the sixties was typified in the struggle between the Broadcasters and the Establishment. In place of the 'social' service, the BBC offered a 'satirical' service preferring to challenge and unseat traditional beliefs and views in a sneer campaign which made it more enemies than friends.

In the new light of the sixties the work of the early pioneer writer-producers of documentary seemed stale, conventional and formularised. When ten years previously it had seemed bold, challenging and experimental. The fault, if there was one, was partly due to a change in climate, so that where writers had once sought to entertain the trend now was to shock, where they had suggested, the new writers sought to reveal. Now everything was explicit rather than implicit.

So from the single documentary play, so often the highlight of the week for viewers, the documentary writers moved in the end to developing 'series'. From being television's most sought after and original talent they turned their hand to providing the weekly fodder for millions of viewers hooked on Z-Cars, Softly, Softly, Spy Trap and the like.

Splendid though the majority of these scripts are and respectable though the living is, one cannot help but feel that it is a sad decline for the doyens of television drama. The one encouraging aspect of all this is, however, that the form of writing which they evolved during that golden period of the

fifties is still very much alive and in evidence today.

That is why as a postscript at the end of the thesis there is included an account of a recent Play for Today, Stocker's Copper by Tom Clarke, based on a documentary programme The White Country - because it not only illustrates so perfectly the fusion of documentary and drama but because it seems to justify so triumphantly the efforts of those early days. Only television with its mixture of 'live' and 'recorded' imagery, its use of film and videotape could hope to achieve this end so successfully.

But for all this, television drama generally tends not to be taken very seriously; and there are, in the event, several factors which make it difficult for materials presented on television to establish themselves as works of art. In the first place, television is a highly ephemeral medium. Although many programmes are now recorded onto videotape, rather than transmitted 'live' and so are available for re-broadcasting, the majority of material is seen only once. True, the summer season now witnesses re-runs of the more popular series first screened during the previous winter, but this re-presentation of material seems less common with 'one-off' plays and special productions. And even two or three showings of the same material can hardly succeed in establishing a particular production in the public memory in the same way that a novel becomes established. Perhaps in time it will be possible to supply this deficiency, and developments have indeed already taken place which should make it possible. The National Film Archive has acquired a number of programmes from both the BBC



and ITV companies, while published versions of the scripts of some television plays are becoming more common, though they are still very few compared with the output each year, and commonly lack adequate illustration with 'stills' from the production.

For this reason, research on the subject under review has had to rely mainly on personal interviews with former documentary writers, producers and directors; on the examination of Production files, records and papers; on copies of scripts still available; and on newspaper accounts, articles and photographic records. Finally there were the published memoirs, library sources and the very thorough documentation of Professor Asa Briggs's official history of the BBC. However, for obvious reasons, it was only in the closing section of this thesis that it was possible to compare and contrast a Drama and a Documentary by using the contemporary research tools of videotape recording and cassette and the printed text to obtain a more detailed and complete analysis of form and content.

If social realism as pioneered by Robert Barr, Duncan Ross and later Colin Morris came to fruition in the documentary police series their particular style of dramatisation found its rightful place with actors in fictional dramas based on factual evidence. Their work led to a whole series of brilliant productions in the 1960s including Culloden, The War Game, (never shown on BBC-TV) Up the Junction, The Big Flame, and The Lump. These documentary-dramas and many more besides are arguably a good deal closer to the real truth of things by reason of their being written and performed than documentary

alone is ever likely to be as edited actuality.

## INTRODUCTION

"Unless we understand the distinction between documentary and drama in terms of past attempts by one or the other to escape its independent form, we cannot fully comprehend the immense possibilities of documentary work in television. In no other medium in history have the two forms been forced into such close and immediate relationship with each other within a single social and aesthetic context - a framework which suggests the existence of an entirely independent television form."

A William Bluem,  
Documentary in American Television  
 Hastings House, 1965, p.85.

Television may be defined as a method of visual and aural communication by which moving or still pictures, accompanied by appropriate sound, are received at a point remote from the place of their origination. The production of television programmes are intended to instruct, inform and entertain, each programme when possible combining the three requirements - though not necessarily in that order.

In the pre-war Television Service, the maximum effort was put into the production of drama programmes,<sup>1</sup> and it is fair to say that here were evolved the techniques which were later copied by producers of other types of programme.

A drama, whether presented to an audience in the theatre, in a cinema, or on a television screen, is basically the interesting display of interesting human behaviour expressed in the words and actions of people and their reactions to one another and their environment, heightened and given rhythmical form by the manipulation of tension.



For years it has been fashionable in television and in film circles to talk at length about something called 'a visual medium', to expatiate on the necessity of carrying on the story 'visually', and to illustrate a doubtful premise by moving back to the silent film or on to the possible excitements resulting from setting-up a television camera to watch the crowds at Piccadilly Circus, or from allowing it to photograph the unrestrained performances of animals. This attitude arises partly from an over-enthusiasm which tries to pretend that television is more important than it is, and partly from a confusion between programmes where television lets us see life 'as it is lived' and programmes which instead gain their interest from art and not from life.

Drama is fiction, and if it is successful, its success is an artistic success. In other words, television drama is art, and it will succeed or fail by the ideas it puts forward, as well as by the skill with which the dramatic situations are developed and the way in which the actors play their parts.

In all serious drama, words cannot be neglected. It is true that in the film the writer may be regarded as an amateur, and there are always plenty of so-called 'script-doctors' - experts in the craft of camera angles and editing - who will pretend to tell the author how to carry on his story in 'visuals'. Nine times out of ten, however, all they do is reduce a thing of subtlety to a formula and make all films they touch look like a copy of a copy. This does not of course, mean that an author cannot get good advice from the members of a script department - particularly in television - but it must always be



remembered that it is advice to be taken or left at the writer's discretion. There is no mystique about writing for television any more than there is about writing for the theatre or for the cinema. What is important is the realisation - which was slow to dawn - that the playwright is the sine qua non, and that in the final event a dramatic programme will stand or fall by the actual construction and writing of the play and the importance and impact of the idea behind it. Brilliant acting and production and brilliant dramatic presentational technique still cannot overcome an initially weak script. This realisation is really the starting point for any investigation into the history and development of television Drama and in particular of the Dramatised-Documentary, which came to epitomise the true dramatic art of the medium.

It was on 14 July 1930 that the first television play, an adaptation of The Man with a Flower in his Mouth by Luigi Pirandello, was broadcast by the BBC from the roof of the Baird Studios in Long Acre, London. The play was produced by Sydney Moseley of Bairds and Lance Sieveking, a BBC Radio Producer.<sup>2</sup> This milestone in broadcasting history captured the imagination of the Press, and it was given plenty of space in the columns of the day.

The production was found to mark a notable advance in television from the presentation of the head and shoulders of a single artiste singing or a single lecturer talking.

"In this play.... not only will the faces of the actors be seen, but there will also be images of their hands, the gestures they make, the glasses

they drink from, and other objects illustrating the dialogue. Fading boards have been made to enable one character to disappear and the next to make his appearance without any unnatural delay." 3

The actors were to continue to be made up like contemporary cinema actors, yellow grease-paint being used for the face and blue or dark green for touching up the lips and the eyes and providing modelling - since it had been discovered that red paint could not be used because it looked white when presented on television. One commentator found that in these early experiments

"The images are marred not only by vertical lines but by a swaying motion which gives one the feeling of looking through a cabin keyhole on a rather rough day at sea",

and felt that, to day, television was to be "judged not as an achievement so much as a possibility in the process of being fulfilled." 4

At the time, some fifty dealers in various parts of the country were offering special facilities for seeing this play, and such was the interest aroused that the correspondent of the Manchester Guardian found himself in a queue of over 100 people at the store where he elected to do his viewing and in the event arrived at the 'televisor' screen at the instant of fade-out!

The first BBC Television drama to be transmitted live from the newly opened Television Service at Alexandra Palace, was Marigold on 6 November, 1936 - and it was probably little more than a photographed version of the stage production, with the camera positioned well back to preserve the picture-frame convention of the contemporary theatre.



This was the pattern of all pre-war and much of the post-war television drama - an extension of the theatre art, a presentation of it in two dimensions. Drama output in 1936 was four productions; the next year it leapt to 122 (including repeats) and they were practically all stage successes, or even just scenes from them. The output included School for Scandal, Night Must Fall, Murder in the Cathedral, Anna Christie, Jane Eyre, Journey's End and fourteen Shakespeare productions. The Radio correspondent of the Daily Telegraph<sup>5</sup> found the most interesting feature of Journey's End to be an ingenious welding together of film and studio presentation.

"Viewers can see the realism of flesh and blood acting allied with the spectacular effects of the film. In this case the main scene was, as in the play, the officers' dugout. This was constructed in the studio, but viewers also saw the raiding party leaving the trench and going over the top besides pictures of no-man's-land and the inside of the German trenches. Only the most practised eye could tell where reality ended and celluloid began."

Another critic of the day congratulated the producer George More O'Ferrall for his "frequent use of close-ups of faces and objects on which it was intended to focus attention."

It is interesting to note that in a letter to the playwright,<sup>6</sup> George Bernard Shaw said of this work:

"This play is properly speaking, a document not a drama.... Having read (it) and found it as interesting as any other vivid description of a horrible experience, I could give the author a testimonial as a journalist; but I am as completely in the dark as before concerning his qualification for the ordinary professional work of a playwright, which does not admit of burning the house to roast the pig."

The television dramatist's 'credentials' for the future

were to include more than a fair slice of both 'realism' and 'journalism'!

In the few years left to television before the start of the Second World War, out of the surprisingly high total of 650 dramas, there were only five original scripts, the first, a 10-minute play called The Underground Murder Mystery<sup>7</sup> by Mrs. Bissell Thomas, who had previously provided material for the BBC's Children's Hour. Her play was described as a 'thumb nail thriller'<sup>8</sup> and was written in a technique which Mrs. Thomas thought would suit television, after she had seen a demonstration of the new medium in a shop.

Original television drama scarcely existed yet. Dramatists wrote exclusively for the theatre or the cinema.

The coming of war stopped all television: the medium shut down in September 1939, and did not return for nearly seven years. The other drama media were luckier. Apart from a few weeks compulsory closure theatres were soon in business again.

When television eventually returned on 7 June, 1946, drama remained solidly theatrical, with Shakespeare and Shaw going round and round, interrupted by the occasional Rookery Nook. However, alongside these offerings there were now also the first social Dramatised-Documentaries pioneered by Robert Barr, Michael Barry and later Duncan Ross. These works did more than anything else at that time to establish a school of television writing and production. By 1950 more than 50 such plays were presented all of them over 90 minutes in length; marathon performances when one considers that it was all done 'live'.



This was also the period when Nigel Kneale's science fiction thriller Quatermass brought people hurrying home to keep a regular date with a television programme. His adaptation of George Orwell's 1984 was similarly to become a landmark in television history.

Indeed, from the middle 1950s television drama began to find its form. Each year saw more original writing, and less and less adaptation of stage successes. Blazing a path were the classic Dramatised-Documentaries of Robert Barr, Duncan Ross, Caryl Doncaster and the writer-director team of Colin Morris and Gilchrist Calder. There were also the first twice-weeklies - The Grove Family and Starr and Co.

The next few years into the early 1960s saw Who, Me? and Jacks and Knaves (the <sup>midwives</sup> in one way of Z-Cars), Spycatcher and Maigret and An Age of Kings. In 1962 the astonishingly popular twice-weekly Compact, Dr. Finlay's Casebook and - a landmark indeed - the first Z-Cars. Overnight, this programme suggested a new kind of drama series, a new pace of story telling, a new speed in cutting, a television shorthand.

The new approach was imitated and developed in the following years, not only in television, but in the cinema, and 1963 saw the arrival of another marathon runner on the small screen - Dr. Who.

The arrival of BBC-2 in 1964 brought expansion and width to the drama schedules. There was Theatre 625, Thirty-Minute Theatre, regular classic adaptations and thrillers, and exciting new writers for television - like John Hopkins, Giles Cooper, David Mercer, David Turner and others.

The second half of that decade brought The Wednesday Play which included Talking to a Stranger and Cathy Come Home and an explosion of new writers and directors, men who saw and moulded television drama as an entirely new art. These were exciting years in the studios, a time of growth and expansion and new blood under the stimulus of Sydney Newman as Head of Drama.

In 1967 there was a different landmark - The Forsyte Saga. With the arrival of Independent Television in 1955 the serial form had become suspect. The belief was that if you missed one episode, you did not bother with the rest. The Saga demolished this theory; it did more than that - it proved a favourite the world over and, most important of all, it spearheaded the BBC invasion of the American markets.

Colour - first on BBC-2 then on BBC-1 - crowned the new achievements. The first colour drama (from the viewer's point of view) was The Tape Recorder, closely followed by the first colour serials Vanity Fair and Portrait of a Lady. The next years saw an astonishing leap forward in technical quality and presentation - plus the first beginnings of a new drama arm based in Birmingham - producing its own regional drama.

Drama never stands still for long, least of all in television where the turnover and exposure is so great. Today it exists in its own right, and top directors and writers are willing to contribute. But it was not always so....

"For the past week",  
writes Henry Raynor in The Times 2 November, 1972,

"since I watched Tony Parker's A Life is for Ever,



I understand what life imprisonment means. Before I could only try to imagine the effect of numbing routines and a compulsory amputation of the will.

In the same way, the homelessness of nice, silly, feckless Cathy, the vagrancy of the inebriate Edna, the tramps of Clive Exton's No Fixed Abode and, a long time ago, the petty criminals of Colin Morris and Gilchrist Calder's seminal classic Who, Me? taught me that it was no longer necessary to use my imagination. They represent the essential didactic television experience of drama. The more convinced I become that the television screen is a peep-hole - through which I spy on actuality - the more effective it seems to be."

The successful television play - successful that is, as a serious attempt to create drama - remembers and makes artistic capital from the realisation that television is different in its basic aesthetics from both the cinema and the live theatre. These differences spring essentially from the size of the television screen - at least at its present stage of technical development; the conditions under which television programmes are broadcast; and the conditions under which they reach the audience. The small size and the low definition of television pictures reduce the impact of 'long shots' (whole landscapes, rooms filled with many people, etc.) so that, effectively, the director is forced to rely mainly on 'medium shots' and 'close-ups'. It is difficult to get more than two characters into a medium shot effectively; hence television drama, on the whole is most telling when dealing with conflicts between few people. The closeness of the audience to the performers, and of the performers to each other, in turn, favours muted dialogue: one cannot shout at a person only a foot away. Much of the best television drama, therefore, falls into the category which

Strindberg termed 'chamber play'. Moreover, because television is a photographic medium, television drama, in the programme schedules, tends to be preceded and followed by a mass of documentary material. Hence the tendency among some television writers and producers to get television drama as close as possible to the documentary itself.

The playwrights of the generation which came to the fore after the breakthrough of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court Theatre in May 1956 have, almost without exception, also written television drama: Osborne an historical documentary A Subject of Scandal and Concern; John Arden, Soldier, Soldier and Wet Fish; Harold Pinter The Collection, The Lover, Night School, The Tea Party, The Basement; John Mortimer Call me a Liar, The Head Waiter, and a number of other plays; Arnold Wesker Menace; and Alun Owen, Bernard Kops, Bill Naughton, Willis Hall, Charles Wood, Tom Stoppard have also contributed their share.

Any viewer who looks back to the early plays of Alun Owen<sup>e</sup> would recall that their lyrical atmosphere grew from precise observation and an acute ear for Liverpudlian speech, yet never overstepped the bounds of naturalism or allowed us to feel, even for a moment, that they were far-fetched.

Dennis Potter who started with the Nigel Barton plays, preaching a bitterly impassioned social moral, disguised it as a mere slice of everyday life. Colin Welland another highly successful playwright who has made his appearance in the last five years, is an expert in dressing what is deeper, more significant and more moving than the mere reflection of actuality



in the most precisely naturalistic garments available.

But what must never be forgotten is that naturalism is really an artistic convention like Elizabethan blank verse, Jacobean mass murder or Shavian rhetoric, and what matters is how it is used. Oddly enough it often seems least satisfying when it is dealing with what is essentially everyday and ordinary, not when it is looking through actuality at the realities of character and experience behind the mirror. If this were not so, Coronation Street and Peyton Place would be the masterpieces all of us crave for.

The doctrine of the essentially naturalistic requirements of television could be supported by almost every successful piece of writing for the medium and by almost every attempt to bring Shakespearian or other classic drama to the screen.

We have our classic radio drama, from D.G.Bridson, Giles Cooper, Louis MacNeice to writers like Don Hawarth, but it may be that we have been slower in exploring the artistic resources of television because the writers who use the medium most effectively to make the most interesting statements simply think most powerfully in naturalistic terms.

This is hardly surprising when one considers the long tradition of the Dramatised-Documentary as one of the earliest and most original forms of television writing, and the importance to the medium of that special brand of social realism which was so much in evidence through the late 1940s and 50s.

"The social realist writer",  
wrote W.H.Auden,<sup>9</sup>

must exclude himself from his narrative; he must never pass judgement on his characters, but leave them to judge one another; he must restrict his account of human nature to external signs. His heroes and villains must lie within real-life limits (so that their bravery, for instance, has to have an element of cowardice), and their speech has to be in more or less natural terms.... It follows from this that prose is the natural and proper medium, and a prose, moreover, which is free as possible from all rhetorical schematization and metaphysical elaboration."

'Concrete and fastidious' is his phrase for this kind of writing, though he takes care not to put it forward as the only recipe for the modern writer, or necessarily the best. He sees it simply as the latest type of literature to evolve, 'and in some ways, perhaps.... the most grown-up'.

It is to this period of social realist writing in television drama that we must return constantly if we are to fully understand and appreciate both the 'distinction' between documentary and drama, and the eventual fusion of the two, which was to come about so successfully by the 1960s.



### Notes

1. Readers are referred to Appendix 92 'Some Trends in BBC-TV Drama 1937-1971' for a more detailed outline of major productions.

There are four forms in which television Drama is most commonly presented today. The first is the 60 or 90 minute 'single or one-shot play'. The second is the anthology in which a number of single plays by different authors are loosely grouped round a common theme. The third is the drama series - self-contained episodes using the same central character/s. Fourth is the serial - continuing stories in instalments. The single play is among the most difficult forms of television to sustain. It is perhaps not surprising that it should have virtually disappeared from the output of the American networks - NBC, CBS, ABC.

The difficulties are obvious. The single play must tell its story, develop its characters, convey its ideas and establish its style with the audience on the one fleeting occasion. Yet its survival is essential if the life-blood of new writing is to be pumped into television.

2. Radio Times: 24 July, 1959: See also Appendix 41 A. In a footnote to his book The Stuff of Radio (1934) Lance Sieveking writes: 'I know already something about play-producing for television. It is tremendously interesting. I only hope that the vessels of my brain won't harden up by the time it comes. With plenty of mental elasticity it will be the most exciting business'.
3. From The Manchester Guardian: July, 1930: Quoted in Television Jubilee: Gordon Ross: W.H.Allen, 1961.
4. From The Manchester Guardian: July, 1930: Quoted in Television Jubilee: Gordon Ross: On this occasion the Correspondent was in fact viewing a different transmission a few days later, at the Coliseum.
5. L. Marsland Gander (Radio Correspondent) 'Television as a New Art': Daily Telegraph: 12 November, 1937.
6. George Bernard Shaw: Letter to R.C.Sherriff: Geneva, 16 September, 1928.
7. See Appendix 41 B: Play quoted in part.
8. Evening News: 15 January, 1937: (Wireless Correspondent) 'Woman as First Television Dramatist'. The Correspondent also mentions that 'A replica of a London Underground Station will be built in the television studio'.

9. W.H.Auden 'The Social Realist Writer' quoted by John Willett in The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: Methuen (1959) p.217.



PART ONE

THE ORIGINS OF TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY

## CHAPTER ONE

### Documentary Film

"The democratic form of society demands of its members an active and intelligent participation in the affairs of the community, whether local or national. It assumes that they are sufficiently well informed about the issues of the day to be able to form the broad judgements required by an election, and to maintain between elections the vigilance necessary in those whose governors are their servants and not their masters. More and more it demands also an alert and informed participation not only in purely political processes but also in the efforts of the community to adjust its social and economic life to increasingly complex circumstances. Democratic society, therefore, needs a clear and truthful account of events, of their background and their causes; a forum for discussion and informed criticism; and a means whereby individuals and groups can express a point of view or advocate a cause." <sup>1</sup>

### Report of the Royal Commission on the Press 1947-9.

What has come to be called 'documentary' developed slowly over a period of almost thirty years, from 1894 to 1922, emerging finally as an original model distinct from all other types of motion picture. The documentary film came to be identifiable as a special kind of picture with a clear social purpose, dealing with real people and real events, as opposed to the staged scenes with imaginary characters and fictional stories of studio-made pictures.

The cinema has always had a potential for realism because though film projection is a process of illusion, relying on a defect of the eye - the inability to differentiate images which follow one another at a rate of sixteen or twenty-four



frames a second - the camera itself does not cheat. The images it gives are those which record the successive stages of movement as they occur in real life.

From its inception the cinema can be seen as divided into two main categories which remain essentially the same even today: the realistic (or documentary) film of fact as represented by Lumière, and the fiction film as represented by Méliès.

Lumière's films, called actualités or documentaires, like other films of this kind from other countries, lasted less than a minute and consisted of footage of everyday events shot from a fixed camera position. In 1895 contemporary audiences found them new and exciting: it was the shock of seeing moving reality reproduced upon a screen for the first time. Typical titles include: Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory, Baby at the Breakfast Table, Demolition of a Wall, Arrival of a Train at Ciotat Station, A Boat leaving the Harbour.

By contrast, the beginnings of the fiction-film tradition can be seen in the work of Méliès, a magician turned film-maker who made fantasy films in his own studio in Paris and who discovered many of the basic film techniques. In spite of their age many of these films remain fascinating and humorous today. Some of the best-known titles are: The Conjuror (1899), A Trip to the Moon (1902), and The Palace of the Arabian Nights (1905).

Films similar to those of Lumière were being produced in other countries at the same time. In the United States they were made principally by Edison; typical titles are: Chinese

Laundry (1894), The Irwin-Rice Kiss (1896), New York Steam Elevated Railway (1897), and President McKinley's Inauguration (1898). Some of these, such as The Irwin-Rice Kiss, were staged in Edison's studio in West Orange, New Jersey.

Brief moments of recorded reality, these Lumière and Edison films can be seen in the tradition of the newsreel, or new documentary, one of the basic forms of the genre. However, from the very beginning, as the titles of these men's films perhaps indicate, the American tradition tended more towards the theatrical than did the French tradition.

In 1903 there was a major breakthrough in film technique and it sent movies into a new direction. The invention of editing - representing a kind of technological quantum jump - endowed the movies with great new capabilities for controlling and manipulating the flow of time, the speed of events, and screen continuity or order. Editing propelled films towards a radical change in screen subject matter. Motion pictures, until then almost exclusively devoted to the film-of-fact's objective recording of unmanipulated actuality, were now suddenly opened up to the rearrangement and reconstruction of reality for narrative and dramatic purposes. It now became possible to alter the measures and dimensions of the real world by staging and arranging events for the camera which later could be edited into a specific order or continuity to fill a fictional screen story.

The first major step towards the evolution of documentary as the genre we know today came out of Russia during and immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, principally



in the work of Dziga Vertov,<sup>2</sup> who edited actuality footage into newsreels; one of these series was called Kino-Pravda (Cinema Truth). Other newsreels or actualites simply recorded moments of reality; Vertov's differed essentially in having a social purpose - to help in the task of indoctrinating and informing the people about the Revolution. In the 1930s the importance of Vertov's work tended to be obscured in the debate about realism and formalism. Thirty years later Vertov found his rightful position as one of the great film pioneers when his Kino-Pravda, translated into French, gave its name to the cinéma-vérité school of film reporting.

When the documentary film began its history at the close of the 'twenties', the film as a medium had been variously used for almost forty years. The growth of the cinema as an increasingly popular form of entertainment, depending on the power of the film to tell a story, was responsible for its main use. But although film-fiction mainly relied on the staging of imaginary or reconstructed events played against a studio-constructed or reconstructed background, natural settings were sometimes used.<sup>3</sup>

A more immediate contact with everyday life was provided by the non-fictional films which, in a greater or lesser degree, have continued to hold a place in the commercial cinema programme. From the beginning attempts were made to depict actual events and places: news and travel films were always popular. The use of the film for instruction was developed by Bruce Woolfe and Percy Smith in their Secrets of Nature series (1919-1933), followed by that on the Secrets of Life. Bruce Woolfe, to whom

must go the credit for persevering with the educational and interest film in the 'twenties' also produced a series of films reconstructing events of the first war. This series included Armageddon, Zeebrugge and The Battle of Falkland and Coronel Islands (1919-1929). The early masterpieces of the Soviet Cinema such as Battleship Potemkin (1925), October (1928) and Turksib (1929) which found their material in contemporary history, also showed what could be done by the realist treatment of people and settings. This was the background against which the documentary film developed, with its emphasis on social analysis.

The term documentary was coined by John Grierson in 1926 in a review of Robert Flaherty's film Moana, which appeared in The New York Sun, of 8 February. It derived from the French word 'documentaire' used to denote travel pictures. It was adopted by the school of film-making which became centred around Grierson and is nowadays accepted as describing a particular type of film production. But documentary was to become more than just a new style.

Three key elements determined the situation out of which the British documentary film emerged. First, there was the development of mass political democracy and the consequent need to educate and inform the electorate, combined with the scepticism of some political thinkers about the possibility of this task ever being achieved. Second, there was the emergence of such media as the mass circulation press, cinema and radio, which provoked insistent public discussion of the impact they were having or were likely to have on democracy. Third, advertising and public



relations were becoming recognised as important and growing sectors of modern society.

Grierson became preoccupied with these issues when he went to the United States in 1924 to study the formation of public opinion. While in America he became particularly interested in Walter Lippmann's critique of democracy (expressed in books like Public Opinion). Lippmann's pessimism about the working of democracy sprang from his belief that the ordinary voter could never make informed judgements because of his lack of relevant information and time for consideration. The starting point of Grierson's career was his acceptance of Lippmann's analysis. Intellectual conviction, however, was not enough for Grierson. He was determined to tackle the problems which concerned him and so change the situation.

That he chose the cinema as his instrument was in one sense accidental. Any of the mass media would have been suitable for the purposes he had in mind. Grierson says it depended on a chance remark of Lippmann's.<sup>4</sup> He complained one day to Lippmann about the difficulties of research into the Press, and Lippmann suggested that the cinema might be more convenient to study since the basic data should be easy to get hold of. Grierson followed up the suggestion and went to Hollywood. There he met people like Walter Wanger, Chaplin, von Sternberg and von Stroheim, became actively interested in the cinema and wrote film criticism for a number of American journals.

In fact his choice of the cinema was probably not as accidental as all that. For the 1920s saw a flowering of the cinema. The German Expressionist film, the Soviet film, American comedies and Westerns, and all the various experimental



films provoked widespread intellectual interest. The use of the cinema for social and political purposes in the Soviet films was of great interest to Grierson, but he was even more responsive to the experiments in Robert Flaherty's Nanook of the North and Moana.

When Grierson returned to Britain in 1927, he approached the Empire Marketing Board with the aim of putting into practice the ideas he had formed in the United States. If proof is needed that Grierson did not create the British documentary film out of thin air, the situation at the EMB at that time provides it. The Secretary of the Board, Sir Stephen Tallents, was very conscious of the need to publicise the Board's activities. The EMB was already using posters, newspapers and exhibitions, and was also interested in the cinema. It had given the Imperial Institute money so that it could arrange film shows for children. Rudyard Kipling had been approached to help in the making of a film and, although he refused, Walter Creighton was appointed Films Officer by the EMB as the result of a suggestion he made. Grierson enjoyed a sympathetic reception when he went to see Tallents - so sympathetic that he was appointed joint Films Officer with Creighton.

Grierson's activities at the EMB were varied. Undoubtedly, however, his most dramatic step was the making of a film Drifters, which combined an approach derived from Flaherty, editing techniques suggested by Soviet films, and Grierson's own interest in a social process. At the same time Walter Creighton was at work on a film which was quite different in conception. One Family was a feature-length film (Drifters is 50 minutes long)

meant to illustrate the story of the Empire and its economic interdependence through a whimsical tale in which Imperial cavalcades travel across the world to bring ingredients for the King's Christmas pudding.

Drifters and One Family suggested two quite different ways of using the cinema as an instrument of propaganda. From the moment it was first shown in a programme of the London Film Society in the autumn of 1929, Drifters was accepted as the model for the propagandist use of the cinema. One Family was forgotten.

Films would have to be made on a regular basis if the working of democracy as analysed by Lippmann was to be seriously changed. A source of finance was essential. Grierson's social philosophy, reinforced by the response he got from the EMB, naturally indicated State organisations as the most likely patrons; and throughout his career, most of his energies went into encouraging the State to support film-making. Finance became easier when large-scale private organisations followed the lead of the State. When the EMB was closed down by the Government, Grierson and the film unit (along with Sir Stephen Tallents) transferred to the GPO. In the late 1930s he played an important part in the establishment of the National Film Board of Canada and gave advice to other Governments on the use of film. Ten years later he became Controller of the films section of the Central Office of Information.

Possibly the most important work Grierson did at the EMB was the training of a group of film-makers. These film-makers became the mainstay of the British documentary film; they



included Basil Wright, Arthur Elton, Stuart Legg, Edgar Anstey, Harry Watt and Paul Rotha. The training was broad in conception as well as technical expertise, it involved intensive discussion of the social and aesthetic ideas which Grierson was developing. The corporate spirit developed at the EMB became an essential part of the workings of the British documentary film. The film-makers not thinking of themselves simply as directors or individual artists, moved easily from directing films to producing them, to general administrative work and back again. Anstey took charge of the Shell Film Unit when it was first formed; Donald Taylor and Ralph Keene set up the Strand Film Company with Paul Rotha as the Director of Production; Basil Wright formed the Realist Film Unit.

Grierson's particular interest in the cinema as a method of social propaganda made it essential that the films should be seen by as wide an audience as possible. At first he concentrated on getting them shown commercially, and indeed throughout the 1930s British documentary films were shown in normal commercial cinema programmes. However, commercial exhibitors were never enthusiastic about including documentaries in their programmes. So Grierson looked for other outlets. Noting that there was a potentially larger audience outside the commercial cinema than in it, he encouraged the growth of a non-theatrical audience, which included schools, film societies, YMCAs, various women's organisations, trade unions and other bodies. The EMB set up a free loan film library for schools to service this audience; regular shows of EMB and GPO films were given at the Imperial Institute; both the GPO and the British Commercial Gas



Organisation sent out vans to give shows on the road; and the GPO appointed an education officer to develop showings to the non-theatrical audiences.

The last part of the structure that Grierson helped to create was the critical magazines like Cinema Quarterly and World Film News. Although their interest in the cinema was not confined to the documentary film, these magazines had three important functions for the documentary movement. They were a convenient forum for discussing ideas; they were useful instruments for publicising the work of the documentary film-makers; and they provided links with the film society movement.

In helping to create this complex structure Grierson endowed the British cinema with a unique feature. He succeeded in linking the film culture (film as art) which had grown up in the late 1920s to an instrumental use of film (film as a medium for instruction, education, propaganda). Grierson captured or decisively influenced areas crucial to any film culture. First, through the film unit at the EMB he captured the young people who were actively interested in the cinema and who were likely to become film-makers or critics. Second, a comparison of the critical magazines, Cinema Quarterly and World Film News with their predecessor, Close Up, shows clearly the impact of documentary ideas. Third, the ideas developed and the films made won the film societies for documentary.

So successfully did Grierson use the documentary film for propagandist purposes that it now seems the only kind of film that could have been used. But there do not seem to be good theoretical reasons for this assumption, and a few films made

in the 1930s indicate that other approaches could have been successful. Cavalcanti's Pett and Pott (1934) is an example; it used a comic fictional story to publicise the social usefulness of the telephone. In opting for the documentary film Grierson was making a particular choice, a choice which he never really questioned and certainly never tried to justify at any length. (In so far as he did discuss documentary he put forward a theory of 'naive' realism).

Grierson argued that the essential nature of the cinema came from its ability to record the appearances of everyday life - this for him was 'the real world'. Through its ability to record these appearances and select from them the cinema becomes capable of penetrating into the nature of that life. In his essay First Principles of Documentary,<sup>5</sup> Grierson puts forward three principles:

1. We believe that the cinema's capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself can be exploited in a new and vital form....
2. We believe that the original (or native) actor and the original (or native) scene are better guides to a screen interpretation over more complex and astonishing happenings in the real world than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio technicians recreate.
3. We believe that the materials and the stories thus taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article...

The job of the film director was to come to know that reality.

.....(documentary) must master its material on the spot and come in intimacy to ordering it.

This one-page description of principles seems to be the nearest Grierson came to formulating aesthetic reasons for choosing the documentary mode.



A variety of other reasons seem to have been just as important as aesthetic ones. The practical point of cost was important; the documentary film was cheaper to make than the fictional films. Moral attitudes were also important; Grierson, a true child of Scottish Calvinism, was suspicious of dramatic fiction. He often refers to the fiction film in moral terms; 'meretricious' is a favourite description.

Any predisposition, however, towards the documentary mode was likely to be encouraged in the cinema of the 1920s since the documentary film began to reassert itself at that time. If it had been based only on a theory of naive realism, it would have been close to the newsreel or the interest film. Grierson felt that his material had to be 'dramatised' or 'interpreted' if he was to achieve his ambition of using the film to involve men in the historical process. The impulse to dramatise the basic material was often in conflict with the principle of naive realism but Grierson does not seem to have been consciously aware of the contradiction, except in so far as he favoured methods of dramatisation that were not too obtrusive.

The cinema of the 1920s offered three different methods of dramatising documentary material.

First, and most obvious, there was the Soviet method of intense dramatisation - the use of stories and plots, the typing of character, rhetorical editing devices, etc. This was the obvious method to attract Grierson since the Soviet directors also saw the film as a social weapon. But in fact Grierson does not seem to have been much attracted by Soviet techniques. The



distrust bred by his Calvinist background for fiction and artifice was one reason for this lack of interest. More important seemed to be his ideological difference from the Soviet directors. He felt their methods of intense dramatisation were appropriate only to a revolutionary situation.

The other possible methods of dramatisation were provided by Flaherty and the school represented by Cavalcanti's Rien que les Heures (1926) and Ruttmann's Berlin (1927). Flaherty's method was to dramatise his films around a simple story.

Grierson was hostile to this method because Flaherty's stories were associated with a romantic view of the world which he felt to be outmoded. From Grierson's point of view, Berlin and Rien were the most suitable exemplars. Both films followed the lives of cities through one particular day. By editing together shots of events whose only common factor was that they occurred at the same time, they provided a cross-section of city life and broke away from being a simple narrative of events. The method had enormous influence on young film-makers of the time. But Grierson had one great objection to it. Cavalcanti and Ruttmann conceived their films as artists not propagandists. Their editing techniques were directed towards creating abstract, symphonic patterns. Grierson spent a good deal of time combating film-making of this kind, with Berlin as his special target.

Grierson finally chose the narrative account of particular social processes as his basic method of dramatising the subject of the film. Drifters (1929), for example, follows the process of men catching fish, starting with the men on shore, following them out to sea and then returning to see the fish sold and

disposed of; similarly Night Mail<sup>6</sup> follows the mail train on its journey from London to Scotland; Aero Engine, straightforwardly follows the construction of an aero engine. Inside the narrative of the films, particular emphasis was given to editing using techniques derived from the Soviet cinema.

The British documentary film, then, can be defined in terms of a meeting between the cinema's recording potential (its ability to reproduce the surface phenomena of everyday life), various aesthetic devices developed by the film-makers of the 1920s and 1930s (principally associational editing of picture and sound), and a technocratic/collectivist ideology. The ideological element is often thought to be the dominant one which determined a relationship in which aesthetic means were put at the service of ideological ends. In his later writings Grierson describes the relationship this way: "Documentary was from the beginning.... an anti-aesthetic movement.... What confuses the history is that we had always the good sense to use the aesthetes. We did so because we liked them and we needed them. It was paradoxically, with the first rate aesthetic help of people like Flaherty and Cavalcanti - our 'fellow travellers' - so to speak - that we mastered the techniques necessary for our quite unaesthetic purpose."

Films made then in the first phase (up until the mid 1930s) reflect the aesthetic position that Grierson had developed. Night Mail (1936), Coalface (1936), Aero Engine (1933) and Industrial Britain (1933) do not immediately provoke the question of whether they were made for aesthetic or propagandist reasons. The split becomes more obvious in the late 1930s when the



film-makers began to experiment with different documentary forms. Most important was the development of the lecture film where the film's visuals simply served to illustrate a commentary.<sup>7</sup> (Housing Problems (1935) and Children at School (1937) are among the best examples of this tendency.) At the same time there were also a number of aesthetic experiments. The most influential was the development of the dramatic documentary film, which was built around stories drawn from actual happenings but then recreated. The re-creation sometimes involved studio work but the actors were non-professional and usually people who had been involved in the events the story was built around. Harry Watt's The Saving of Bill Blewett (1937) and North Sea (1938) are good examples.

For obvious reasons the war weighted the balance in favour of the directly propagandist film. Although some formal experiments continued - the dramatic documentary was developed on a much larger scale by the Crown Film Unit with films like Target for Tonight<sup>8</sup> and Fires Were Started.

The GPO Film Unit came under the Ministry of Information in September 1939,<sup>\*</sup> and was renamed the Crown Film Unit in April 1940. Grierson had resigned as producer in 1937.

The particular achievement of the Crown Unit lay in applying the documentary approach and techniques to a wider canvas and in taking the dramatisation of people far beyond what had already been done pre-war to a point which was comparable in stature with the products of the feature studios.

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\* In the ten years between 1929 ("Drifters") and 1939 the Documentary Movement produced 300 films!



In the process the Unit enjoyed a fuller range of facilities than had ever been available before to a documentary unit. Installed in 1941 at Pinewood Studios, it was favoured not only with personnel and equipment, but also with the pick of subjects. By contrast, the small independent units still had to fend for themselves on severely limited technical resources.

The success of the Crown Film Unit in taking the opportunities that were offered is, however, undisputed. Documentary techniques achieved the widest public recognition through their application to feature-length subjects. The achievement was substantial and lasting, though by now it has suffered somewhat from excessive praise and attention. The hopes it raised, the patterns it set, were justified in their context, but viewed in post-war retrospect the real success of films like Target for Tonight, Merchant Seamen (1941), and Fires were Started (1943) has been blurred. It was to the great credit of Harry Watt, Humphrey Jennings, Jack Holmes, Pat Jackson, Jack Lee and others to have caught the living mood of the time and to have given it in four years a lasting embodiment.

The influence of the Crown Film Unit and its leading directors operated in a variety of ways. The initial impact was most clearly marked on the feature studios, both in choice of subjects and in approach. The fact that certain feature directors had been in one or other of the Service units was also a material factor.

Ealing Studios led the way, assisted by the advent of Harry Watt. The trend for greater realism grew rapidly: a number of feature directors contributed to its development,

among them Carol Reed with The Way Ahead (1943), Anthony Asquith with Freedom Radio (1942), Charles Frend with The Foreman Went to France (1942), Launder and Gilliat with Millions Like Us (1943) and Thorold Dickinson with Next of Kin (1942).

The swift rise in the prestige of British feature filmmaking during the war years was due in no small part to this realist tradition which documentary had first established.

Essentially in the same tradition there later appeared Budge Cooper's Children of the City (1944) produced by Paul Rotha for the Scottish Office, and Jack Lee's Children on Trial (1946) made by the Crown Film Unit at the time when Basil Wright was producer-in-charge. Both these films dealt with the social conditions and causes of juvenile delinquency, though with significant differences in approach. Children of the City started as an unambitious picture, had a relatively small budget and was shot silent. It adopted an orthodox documentary technique to tell the story of three boys who for fun broke into a pawnbroker's shop and, more by accident than design, finished up emptying the till just as the police arrived. Jack Lee, on the other hand, was clearly more attracted to the fictional dimensions of his subject in Children on Trial, the drama of adolescents caught in the maze of pin tables and bright lights: at Crown Lee had earlier made Close Quarters (1943) a feature length dramatisation of life in a submarine. Both of these delinquency films showed the potentialities of the semi-fictionalised social documentary.



Wholly different from this fictional approach - with or without the inclusion of professional actors - there was another field which was opened up during the war years and yielded rich results, the compilation film in all its various forms. At one level there were the feature-length campaign films: Desert Victory (1943) and Tunisian Victory (1943).

There were other approaches to the compilation film in many ways more important in their implications. In Britain Paul Rotha's World of Plenty (1943) provided one of the first and still one of the best examples. The beginning of the war found Rotha as a director finished with his earlier industrial impressionism and strongly influenced by what he had seen and learnt during his stay in the United States in 1937-38. In its approach there were certain of the techniques of the American Living Newspaper<sup>\*</sup> transposed into film, but the whole subject of world food - scripted by Rotha and the writer Eric Knight and based to a large extent on existing film material - was compressed and composed with all Rotha's editorial skill. Each device had its function in bringing the theoretical implications of the main argument home to the audience in terms that meant something to people. Screen interviews with experts alternated with newsreel material of the current problems.

Rotha has written:

"The essence of the documentary method lies in its dramatisation of actual material. The very act of dramatising causes a film statement to be false to actuality. We must remember that

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\* Documentary theatre devised in the 1930s in the USA by the Federal Theater - series of short scenes based on current social and political problems.



most documentary is only truthful in that it represents an attitude of mind. The aim of propaganda is persuasion and persuasion implies a particular attitude of mind towards this, that or the other subject.] To be truthful within the technical limits of the camera and microphone demands description, which is the aim of the instructional film, and not dramatisation, which is the qualification of the documentary method. Thus even a plain statement of fact in documentary demands dramatic interpretation in order that it may be 'brought alive' on the screen." 9

The British documentary film had a narrower perspective at the end of the war than it had in the 1930s. The situation had also changed in another way. Before the war the documentary film-makers had always considered themselves part of the cinema as a whole and had taken an active interest in what was happening throughout the cinema. But as the structure that had been created for the documentary film became self-sufficient it inevitably separated the documentary film from the rest of cinema, making it into a parochial world of its own. This isolation of the documentary film also meant that the link with the film societies became a less intimate one. The split between the documentary and the rest of the cinema was finally marked by the emergence of a new generation of critics. By the end of the 1940s the documentary had become essentially what it is today: a specialised world having no vital links with the general cinema, constrained by sponsors who thought in strictly utilitarian terms. If the documentary film has been revived at all in recent years, it had undoubtedly been from new sources like cinéma-vérité and television.

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In retrospect it is easy to see that the early 1950s mark a watershed in the development of documentary in England and the United States.<sup>10</sup> And it is possibly the luck of history that just when it seemed as if documentary would be assigned to the grave, television appeared - to transform concepts, opportunities and styles, in the short non-fiction film.

If the war years signalled the peak of British documentary the years 1945-1950 mirrored a sad decline. The reasons for the deterioration are various: the re-emergence of British feature films and the loss of various documentary directors to the feature industry; perhaps a growing distrust for the paternalistic lecturing of the documentaries and a preference for entertainment rather than sermonizing; the failure of documentaries to gain theatrical distribution; and the decline in the enlightened sponsorship that had given birth to the movement.

Ultimately the total transformation of the scene came with the establishment of the post-war BBC Television Service in 1946 and of a Network Television Service in the United States in 1948. Without doubt it was television which gave new life to the expiring documentary film. As the medium has grown in hours broadcast, revenues, and in greater sophistication, it has provided the film-makers with the three essentials of its existence; a demand for his programmes; an audience for his message; and the necessary money in order to start shooting in the first place.

But as television took documentary under its wing it had first of all to evolve a style all of its own; there were always



the technical limitations to be borne in mind. It was, however, at this point in time that the journalist began to take his place alongside the film-maker with a very deep and significant impact on the future development of broadcasting as Norman Swallow points out:

"This use of the film camera as the equivalent to the reporter's notebook and pencil, has arguably been television's main contribution to the development of the documentary film; artistically, that is, and in terms of an individual style.... they also introduced for the first time a visible reporter, decidedly a television device, and one that is very much and very rightly despised in the cinema.... The cameraman is sometimes a director-cameraman, and very obviously he has to be something of a journalist as well. This form of television is journalism rather than art, though art may now and then, if one is lucky, emerge from the journalism. BBC Television Service is probably making by far the most important contribution to the documentary film anywhere in the world." 11

Early programmes suffered in impact by being necessarily studio-bound, but nevertheless they succeeded in their main purpose of casting light on the important issues of the day and they certainly generated an impressive sense of responsible authority. Their limitations were, of course, partly technical, springing from the shortage of studio space, and lack of adequate mobile film units, and the limitations of the electronic cameras of those days. But they also suffered by being born at a time when national and international figures were still reluctant to suffer the ordeal of television and indeed felt no obligation whatever to face the cameras in an age when the television audience was limited to a few areas of the British Isles and when sound radio was still the more popular medium.

But the real excitement of television came with the realisation that it involved the instantaneous mingling of a form



of theatre and the dissemination of actuality (for these two facets of television are inseparable); that the camera's presence made people want to dramatise facts about themselves; and that the screen gave its audience pictures of events as they happened.

The special power of television, and hence its attractiveness for the new breed of journalist-documentary-director, lay in this inextricable fusion of mimesis with factuality. This early realisation coupled with the very primitive state of the television system produced the dramatised documentary with which this thesis is concerned. This was the obvious successor to the British documentary film and the forerunner of that style of television writing recognised today as the documentary drama.

However before television could assume the documentary, it was to be the radio feature which provided not only the nursery slopes where fledgling writers could acquire the necessary techniques and skills but with the outbreak of war the outstanding training ground for some of the very best creative writing and production of all time as will be shown in the following chapter.

### Notes

General background information for this chapter was obtained from the following sources:

Documentary Film: Paul Rotha: Faber (1968 Edition).  
Grierson on Documentary: Edited by H.Forsyth Hardy: Faber, 1966.  
The Factual Film (The Arts Enquiry), O.U.P., 1947.  
Studies in Documentary: Lovell & Hillier: Secker, 1972.

1. Report of the Royal Commission on the Press 1947-49, H.M.S.O. (1949), p.100.
2. See Kino by Jay Leyder: Allen & Unwin, 1960, p.162.  
 "Vertov organised a group of cameramen-correspondents stationed throughout the Soviet Union, whose movements from place to place he half directed and half left to each cameraman's imagination and quick thinking. And it was a method perhaps unthinkable before the invention of the compact, hand-held cameras. Thus, newsreel material on dozens of widely varied subjects continued to pour into his basement workshop, where he and his editor-assistant, Svilova, shaped these film-scrap into atoms of Soviet life sharply observed from the many angles of the Kino-Eye."
3. An early example of the integration of real documentary footage with fictional material was in D.W.Griffith's film Hearts of the World (1918). Lilian Gish in her memoirs published by Prentice-Hall (1969) recalls:  
 "During the six months we were overseas (France), Mr.Griffith made a film record of every type of armament and equipment used at the front. For once he was spared the task of research. He could film battle scenes as history staged them. He photographed actual infantry charges, men horribly wounded, men dying; the mud, the trenches, the machines of destruction.... By late November 1917, we were back in the old studio at Hollywood and Sunset. Sets were built, the other roles were cast, and the company began rehearsing for the remaining scenes."  
 Of the film, The New York Times of 5 April, 1918, commented:  
 "Sometimes one does not know whether what he is seeing is a real war or screen make-believe. The pictures of hand to hand fighting in the trenches, the bursting of shells from big guns, the demolition of buildings, the scouting trips and raids into enemy trenches are impressively realistic."
4. See Appendix 42 The Idea of Documentary: John Grierson.
5. See Grierson on Documentary: p.146.



6. For Harry Watt's account of the making of Nigh Mail see Appendix 43.
7. In 1935 Arthur Elton, still at the GPO Film Unit, on behalf of the Ministry of Labour, made a short one-reel film in an Employment Exchange called Workers and Jobs. Up till then, documentary had little or no experience of direct sound recording on location; it was both too expensive and results often left much to be desired in the quality of the sound. But now Elton took a camera and microphone crew into an actual place and recorded with sound and picture real people using unrehearsed speech with no script. Today this technique is ubiquitous using lighter and more economic equipment and with much improved film stock; in 1935 it was pioneer stuff. Elton's film did not use any of the techniques of editing and camera angles and impressionist sound so exciting to most documentary film-makers. It resembled more a newsreel but without a sensational news item. Workers and Jobs was not important as a piece of film-making but it predated television reporting methods by many years. For the first of the Gas Films, Housing Problems in 1935 a similar operation was used but improved. First Ruby Grierson who had a natural gift for handling people, and John Taylor sought out the slum-dwellers who were to tell their 'stories' and broke down their inhibitions against the intrusion of a camera and microphone into their homes. Then Elton and Anstey would appear and supervise the actual shooting of what were really interviews, and later the editing. Nobody pretended that this was good film-making it was factual film reporting of a kind not done before. The film created attention because of its subject matter and the spontaneity of the people chosen by Ruby Grierson. Grierson had this to say:

"I think the greatest (documentary) advance of all came with two little films, which, except among the far-seeing went almost unnoticed. One was called Housing Problems and the other Workers and Jobs.... they took the documentary film into the field of social problems, and keyed it to the task of describing not only industrial and commercial spectacle but social truth as well. These simple films went deeper than earlier films like Drifters and later films like Night Mail and North Sea. They showed the common man, not in the romance of his calling, but in the more complex and intimate drama of his citizenship."

Grierson on Documentary, p.215.

Note: The early EMB films were all made as silent pictures with commentary and music added afterwards; not until the GPO Unit obtained a small studio at Blackheath in 1934 did sound begin to play an important technical part in their films.

8. See Appendix 45 for Harry Watt's account of the making of Target for Tonight: and Appendix 44 for Rotha's description



of North Sea also directed by Harry Watt. Note particularly his use of 'real' people in fictional roles and his studio 'reconstructions' as part of his dramatised-documentary technique. In a personal letter to the writer (6.3.73) Robert Barr recalls this story of John Grierson's:

"One day a young cousin of his (Grierson's) came down from Scotland with a letter from the family asking if John could give him a job in his film unit. The bearer of the letter was the young Harry Watt. Grierson's unit, as always, was short of money, and wages were hard to find. He said Harry would have to start as a tea boy. Then Grierson said to me: 'all my life I was trying to find geniuses and all I got were tea boys. The day I hired a tea boy I found a genius'."

9. Documentary Film: Paul Rotha: p.117.

10. There was a strong touch of documentary in a number of Hollywood films of the thirties in their direct or implied social criticism of the American system that had brought on the suffering of the Depression. Gangster films, while frequently exploiting the material, nevertheless often attacked official corruption. A film like I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang (1932) based on factual material, was a powerful indictment of the inhuman chain gang system in the South, and King Vidor's Our Daily Bread (1934) showed a heterogeneous band of unemployed people finding their salvation working together on a farm co-operative. But documentary was sporadic in the US, until the mid thirties. In 1935 The March of Time came to the American screen from Time-Life, blending actuality footage with staged interviews and at times with staged events, in dramatic rather than descriptive fashion, the films have been criticised for their very conservative bias and manipulation of events. From an historical viewpoint it can be said that they really did exert profound and world-wide influence on screen journalism and the documentary and in their thirteen issues a year the editors managed to keep their material lively, timely, and even on occasion, controversial. It was in 1936, however, that the American documentary movement as such came into its own with Pare Lorentz' The Plow that Broke the Plains - a dramatic account of the tragic misuse of the Great Plains that led to the disastrous Dust Bowl of the mid-thirties. (To see this documentary and then John Ford's Grapes of Wrath is again to see a marked fusion of documentary and drama.) In 1937 Lorentz went on to make The River - a panoramic view of the Mississippi River basin, of the vast industrial and agricultural expansion that led to its exploitation and ruin. Other films of this era are: The City (1939) by Willard and Steiner about the City and social problems; Power and the Land (1940) Joris Ivens' first American film centred on the coming of electricity to rural districts and the human advantages it brings to



farmers; The Land (1942) and Louisiana Story (1948) both by Robert Flaherty. The American documentary grew out of a world in depression, and in time had a profound effect on Hollywood itself. For the 1950s saw a further extension of the social-realist film, ostensibly concerned with 'real-life' problems of the city and the community.

The form had emerged in the late 1940s with films such as Kazan's Boomerang (1946) and Gentleman's Agreement (1947) and Dmytryck's Crossfire (1947) concerned with social issues in American society, followed by Losey's fantasy The Boy with Green Hair (1948), Rossen's All the Kings Men, Wise's The Set Up, and Mark Robson's The Champion, Brown's Intruder in the Dust, Kazan's Pinky and Robson's Home of the Brave (all 1949). These explored issues of political and commercial corruption, race and class privilege. In 1949 Stanley Kramer Productions was established as a company, destined to produce in the 1950s such films as Zinnemann's The Men (paraplegics), Benedek's Death of a Salesman (the selling rat-race), Benedek's The Wild One (teenage motor-cycle gangs), Dmytryck's The Sniper (psychological pressures) and The Caine Mutiny (war neurosis). Writers such as Paddy Chayevsky emerged from television to support a new low-budget realist cinema with films such as Delbert Mann's Marty (1955) and Bachelor Party (1957), Brook's Blackboard Jungle (1955) or Martin Ritt's A Man is Ten Feet Tall (1956). Marlon Brando developed beyond the young anti-hero of The Men and The Wild One, to be replaced by James Dean in such films as Rebel Without a Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955), East of Eden (Kazan, 1955) and Giant (George Stevens, 1956).

This list could be extended, but it is already abundantly clear that whatever the motive - some, the commercial exploitation of new stars; some, a defiance of or a compromise with the investigation of 'the alleged subversive influence in motion pictures' by the House of Representatives Committee for Un-American Activities (J.Parnell Thomas) in 1947 or the Senate Committee's further investigation in the 1950s under Senator McCarthy - whatever the motives of Hollywood it was developing and revealing a conscience, a social awareness; and the most effective way of evaluating these films, as documents rather than as words of art, was to consider their conscience and their subject-matter set against the society they were examining.

11. Norman Swallow: This writer's personal interview, August, 1973: see also Appendix 47 for his 'Documentary Definition' and read Factual Television (Focal Press, 1966) p.176-206 for Swallow's account of 'The Personal Documentary'.

It is hardly surprising to learn that the two 'fathers' of documentary - John Grierson and Robert Barr - collaborated as early as 1948 on a television documentary programme about the work of UNESCO, with whom Grierson was currently working in Paris. Grierson wrote the script - J.B.Priestley

introduced the programme - and Barr produced. From the report of the programme it appears that the officials of the Central Office of Information were impressed with television 'as a medium for documentary' because of its flexibility and because 'it can use so many different methods of explanation within the compass of one programme'. (Robert Barr Papers) In an introduction to the programme Grierson wrote in Radio Times (April, 1948):

"All sensible film people these days are having a close look at the technical possibilities of television, and for the good reason that television is a new box of tricks which makes our older movie one look clumsy and slow. From what the professional trickman of the film studios tells me.... the television crowd are doing easily what we did laboriously even with the finest camera work and after much training. The main difference lies, of course, in the fact that the television camera is spontaneous. The picture is as immediate as a mirror. And the television producer works with multiple mirrors. He can have three, four, or even eight cameras under his control at the same time. He can choose the images he wants, cut from one to another, mix from one to another, superimpose one on another and so on. The possible variations are obviously many. To my mind it could be like playing the xylophone - only in pictures. Now, consider the movies. You shoot your scenes every one apart, like a rosary and then there are a dozen and one laborious manufacturing processes to go through before the sequence you want comes together."



## CHAPTER TWO

Documentary Radio

"It should not be forgotten, that  
the Sound Feature provided the link  
between the film documentary and  
the television documentary."

Arthur Swinson<sup>1</sup>

The period when Radio Drama began - the middle 1920s - was one of great experiment in both the drama and theatrical production, particularly in Russia, Germany, France and the American University Theatres. Every form of staging was being tried out to match the experimental techniques of expressionist and symbolic plays, while the avant-garde movement in the French and German cinema was prolific. Soviet theories of film montage were spreading rapidly westwards, and it was plain that even Sir John Reith's BBC would be forced to let dramatic experiment have its head in the new medium of sound, though Val Gielgud, who took charge of the BBC's Drama Department in 1929 has said that Sir John did not seem to approve of drama.

The first attempts to take plays direct from the London stages was, of course, abortive; the dialogue had to be adapted here and there to make the action clear to a 'blind' audience, and the actors had to learn a new perspective of acting within the limits imposed by the microphone.

Yet the most remarkable development of this period was the growing sense that the production of wireless programmes was an art, not a business. Talks producers had begun in the 1920s by

looking for 'Voices to Fill the Hours' - mellifluous 'golden voices' were specially prized - but they ended by treating the broadcast talk as a distinctive art form. The most distinguished thinkers, artists, writers and academics were expected to state their opinions in an approved form, to have their scripts scored like pieces of music, and to rehearse as diligently as actors preparing for a West End opening. The medium had to be respected.

It was now in drama and even more particularly in 'features', that the bounds of theatrical form and stage convention began to be thought of as shackles: what radio could do distinctively began to be prized. Experiment was felt to be a necessary part of the exploitation both of sound and, though the new medium was still young, of television.

But until 1928 radio was still caged by technical limitations; plays were confined to a single studio with rarely more than one microphone. In that year Captain A.G.D. West, one of the BBC's research engineers, put into drama's hands the device it had so long been waiting for. It came from the obvious need to separate one source of sound from another and mix them as required.

Captain West's Dramatic Control Panel<sup>2</sup> was the tool that set drama free. It was the size and shape of an old-fashioned inter-office communicator, with a row of knobs and buttons, and with it the producer could listen to what was coming from the studios, talk to the cast through his own microphone, and cue them with light signals. Studio sound could be cut, mixed, faded, wiped, superimposed, given deadness or an echo - reproducing in effect all the basic grammar that gave the visual



substance of the cinema screen such fluidity. Speech, music and effects lay under the producer's hand as an orchestra is under its conductor's. Such, then, was the instrument, and it was the daring and creative mind of a young writer-producer Lance Sieveking who first put it to the test with his production of Kaleidoscope 1<sup>3</sup> in 1928.

Sieveking was an actor and writer who had joined the BBC in 1925 as assistant to the Director of Education and switched to drama. (There was a good deal of this switching around in the Savoy Hill days. Val Gielgud became head of drama from editing readers' letters in Radio Times, and Eric Maschwitz joined as an assistant in outside broadcasting, became editor of Radio Times and moved back to production as head of variety.) Sieveking conceived the idea of taking the Control Panel to its limit by writing a kind of aural panorama of man's life, presented as an allegorical struggle between good and evil. Its subtitle was: 'A Rhythm, representing the life of man from Cradle to Grave'. Over a hundred performers - actors, effects men, orchestras, etc. - took part. The production ran for ninety minutes, occupied eight studios, featured John Gielgud as the Voice of Good, and was by far the most adventurous broadcast Drama has so far undertaken. Sieveking called it 'a play too purely radio to be printed for reading'.

The first dramatic broadcast of a classic play was a performance of Twelfth Night on 28 May, 1923. The first play specially written for radio was the work of a writer of considerable stature; Richard Hughes's Danger, which Nigel Playfair directed was broadcast by the BBC on 15 January, 1924.



Hughes had ingeniously devised a situation in which the visual element could be naturally absent from a play: Danger takes place inside a Welsh coalmine and opens at the moment when, owing to an accident, all lights have gone out and the three characters are trapped in complete darkness. Danger was a very short piece; it runs for barely more than fifteen minutes.

The first full-length play specially written for radio was The White Chateau, by Reginald Berkeley, first broadcast on Armistice Day 1925. This had been preceded by the first radio adaptation of a novel, Kingsley's Westward Ho! in April, 1925. By 1930 the Radio Drama Department was producing about two hundred dramatic broadcasts of all kinds each year.

It is remarkable, indeed, to see how quickly, perhaps too quickly, fascination with the art of radio, which led to original and exciting experiments with sound, like Lynton Fletcher's Pieces of Sound (1933) with its sequence of related and contrasting sounds, was merged with concern for the prospects of television. Tyrone Guthrie, for example, who wrote and produced The Squirrel's Cage in 1929 - 'a definite use of a new medium dealing with a story after a fashion which no other medium could have employed' - commented in 1931 that he felt that the future lay along the lines of television, 'of co-ordination with other arts - a vista of ever-growing elaboration, mechanisation, centralisation, most depressing to contemplate, but quite inevitable.'<sup>4</sup> In his play Guthrie used the unique flexibility in time and space which the radio form offers as well as its ability to get inside a man's mind - the radio play, after all, comes to life not on a stage but in the listener's imagination, and is therefore ideal for

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10/25  
cont

*These flowers are not for you to pick*

dramatizing the inner life - in The Flowers are not to Pick

(1930) he sets the action inside the mind of a drowning man.

Radio was also beginning to find its own poets: D.G. Bridson's

The March of the '45 (28 February, 1936) was the first of a

long line of fine poetical dramas on historical subjects.

It was not for many years, however, that television was to threaten the position of radio, and it was primarily to the arts of sound radio that the writers of the 1930s devoted themselves. The mood of the period is captured in Sieveking's book The Stuff of Radio (1934) where, after talking of the 'ghastly impermanence of the medium', he seized on the 'feature programme' - 'an arrangement of sounds which has a theme but no plot' - as the distinctive art form of radio.

The rest of the programmes, with the possible exception of running commentaries, were not specifically 'radio-centred': they provided material which could be handled effectively by other media - in the newspaper or on the concert hall or theatre stage. Another writer called the use of such material 'the reproductive side of broadcasting', by which he meant 'the distribution of entertainment and cultural matter that exists in the world already', a very wide definition.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, the radio feature, whatever form it took, was dependent not on reproduction but on invention, not on one form of art but on several. As early as 1928 Cecil Lewis, one of the pioneers of the British Broadcasting Company,<sup>6</sup> had drawn attention to features as being 'radio at its best'. 'Such programmes', he pointed out, 'mean research and study.... the absorption of the subject and, what is more important, the ability to select the



striking views which illuminate it best and are suitable to the microphone'. The obstacle in the way of more features, he suggested, was a shortage of the right kind of people to write and to produce them. This, however, was soon to be remedied.

Although the film was the first medium to give the documentary method a name, most art forms have long been put to such a use, for example, Hogarth's Marriage à la Mode, or the song, The Vicar of Bray.

The socially conscious twentieth century has encouraged even pure music to take an almost documentary form in such pieces as Honneger's Pacific 231, which imitates a specific locomotive and blends the composer's impressions of it with the 'real thing' and the Soviet composers' 'Factory music', and while almost every novel and play ever written gave some picture, often complete and acute, in their backgrounds, it was not until Dos Passos wrote U.S.A. (1930) and the Federal Theatre's Living Newspaper produced its propaganda playlets on Land-Lease and Social Security, that these forms admitted documentary as their main purpose.

It was dramatic writing of this style which coincided with the advent of the radio documentary - a dramatic form of presenting actuality which is directly parallel to that created by the filmmaker. At its best it was the outstanding artistic achievement of sound radio, able to accomplish far more in its own medium than the documentary film.

*John Grierson, 1929 - 1962*  
John Grierson as has been shown coined the phrase 'documentary' for this kind of film; at about the same time that the word 'feature' was extracted *at the BBC* from the term 'featured programme' which was used for the various kinds of semi-dramatised radio programme



of an experimental nature that the BBC began to evolve in the late nineteen twenties, and which often developed into a dramatic treatment of subjects dealing with real life.

There were great difficulties at first in defining what a 'feature' was. At one end of the scale was Laurence Gilliam's Christmas Programme, designed for a 'mass audience' and incorporating the King's speech among all the other varied materials. At the other end of the scale was the 'literary programme', blending words and music, designed for, and listened to, by a minority audience of the kind that now listens to Radio Three. Features like Erasmus and Coleridge belong to this tradition. So did G.K.Chesterton's Lepanto backed by Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. Other features, which attracted varying sizes of audience, included 'small-scale actualities' like Gale Warning, Fog, and Trinity House; 'large-scale actualities', like Scotland Yard or Underground; commemorative programmes, like Gallipoli, Scott in the Antarctic or Arthur Bryant's The Thin Red Line; and 'specialist programmes', like the series of Famous Trials <sup>introduced by Edgar Wallace</sup> or of reconstructed episodes from history, <sup>but interestingly presented</sup> so ably represented by D.G.Bridson's outstanding March of the '45. Some of these features overlapped with Talks, some with News, some with Outside Broadcasts, some with Drama. <sup>In short, they were the mainstay of the BBC's programming.</sup>

Val Gielgud writing in 1957 prefers to use the word in its wider sense:

"A Feature Programme may be described as any programme-item, not basically in dramatic form, designed to make use of radio-dramatic techniques in its presentation to listeners - while a Feature Programme is not a radio play, it needs the services both of actors and a radio drama producer." 7

Laurence Gilliam, whose view is significant drew the following distinction - 'Features deal with fact, Drama with fiction' - and

in an introduction to a book of BBC Features he wrote:

"In broadcasting the term has come to signify a wide range of programme items, usually factual and documentary, presented by a variety of techniques, but mostly making use of dramatisation and edited actuality." 8

Although Drama and Features drew on the same group of actors and employed similar techniques, there was obviously a case for organising them separately inside the BBC, and Gielgud, who had lost Variety - without regrets - to Maschwitz in 1933 - delegated Features to Gilliam in May 1936. The Drama Department was then split up into three sections, all under Gielgud's overall direction; the first, Drama (with Howard Rose in charge, assisted by Lance Sieveking); the second, Features (with Gilliam in charge) and the third, Children's Hour, which had been attached to the Drama Department as an independent programme section in July 1935. A few months later the title of the whole department was changed to Features and Drama, and, as if to show how open its frontiers were, Moray McLaren was transferred from the Talks Department as Assistant Director. Gilliam had joined Gielgud's staff in October, 1933 from the Radio Times. Among the outstanding Feature writers, E.A.F. Harding, who had produced his Imperial Communications as early as 1929, had gone on to be Head of Programmes for the North Region, where he had a hand in the discovery of Geoffrey Bridson, of Francis Dillon, and of Cecil McGivern, who were all later to become outstanding radio personalities. Again it was a sign of BBC flexibility that he became the BBC's first Chief Instructor in the Staff Training Department.

The first English documentary film, Drifters, (1929) by John Grierson, was made just at the time when the potentialities of radio were being discovered.



But although radio was recognised as a means of communication with an aptitude for easily created drama, the lack of sight, 'blind man's theatre', was too keenly felt for any imitation to be attempted. Instead, <sup>you see the power</sup> radio's power of re-creating the sounds of the past was <sup>partly</sup> exploited and several historical 'reconstructions' were made, followed by the series Famous Trials already mentioned.

Most significant at this time was Crisis in Spain, broadcast in 1931, which reconstructed a piece of very recent history, the first Spanish revolution, against Alphonso, using the leaders' speeches and the news-messages which flashed round the world, linked by snatches from the Spanish national anthem. It was in fact the first programme to be labelled an 'actuality' on radio.<sup>9</sup>

At that time Features were generally of two kinds, the documentary - The Shadow of the Swastika, The Home Front - and the actuality - In Britain Now, Go To It. Both forms crystalised with the Second World War as the titles show. The first was a carefully shaped work of writing, employing actors; the second brought the people to the microphone. The literary feature was an off-shoot of the historical reconstruction.

These programmes - developed very largely through the guidance and stimulus of Laurence Gilliam - brought to the fore a school of BBC writers and producers who mastered the art of dissecting a subject and then re-presenting it in a natural, authentic form which overcame all the limitations of sound. The pioneers in radio documentary included as well as E.A.F. Harding, E.J. King-Bull and Mary Hope Allen. Radio documentary was also used in the educational broadcasts to schools, with Rhoda Power as one of the pioneers. Later a number of writers and writer-producers both



inside and outside the BBC showed particular imagination and skill in using the technical opportunities offered by broadcasting to dramatise actuality, among them Nestor Pain (science), D.G. Bridson (the lives of ordinary people), John Gough (trials), Leonard Cottrell (industry), Jenifer Wayne (law) and W.R. Rodgers (radio portraits).

What is certainly true is Gilliam's claim that the Feature Programme, rather than the play specially written for broadcasting, tended to steal such laurels as were available for the possibilities of the new medium. The original radio play had to compete with the innate conservatism of the listening audience, which thought of a play as something essentially written for the theatre and by an acknowledged playwright. The play which they recognised as having the prestige of theatrical performance behind it was more acceptable than the new work <sup>of 1941</sup> by the unknown author. If Features are denied the credit for inventing a new art-form they certainly succeeded with a new craft-form. In fact they were by no means confined within the bounds of documentary, although they may have achieved their apotheosis in such programmes as War Report. Features could and did exploit the classic resources of music and poetry; they could call upon the famous letter writers and wits; and upon historians past and present.

In spite of, or because of, its limitations, radio is at its best when it appeals to the listener's imagination. Its evocative powers lie in the play of sound perspectives, in the pitting of one actor's vocal timbre against another's, in the suggestion of a physical environment by different acoustics. Sound effects matter particularly on the air. If in earlier days

spot-effects men were key figures with their simulations in the studio of the thousand and one noises of actuality, nowadays the portability of tape recorders makes it possible to capture virtually any sound in situ and to integrate it into the texture of a play or documentary.<sup>10</sup>

In the 'thirties the BBC, unable to take a critical stand on any issue because of its policy of impartiality, was altogether chary of the film documentary's subjects; and while such institutions as Scotland Yard and the weather forecasters were documented by both media, on the whole the BBC were happiest with retrospection, one of the most successful series coming, somewhat strangely from Variety Department - the Scrapbooks of Leslie Baily and Charles Brewer.

Features really came of age with the first war-time documentary series, The Shadow of the Swastika, which was able to treat the rise of the Nazi Party with some spirit. The Second World War provided the Department with its great opportunity. It had developed new techniques and was drawing on new resources in the way of mobile recording gear - though not as yet upon tape recording.<sup>11</sup>

Feature producers followed the armies, flew with the planes, sailed in the ships, and brought the new immediacy of sound to the impact of war reporting. They dealt with every aspect of the war, and brought to the microphone thousands of people whose personal stories were an integral part of the war effort. This made possible a new genre of programme, usually known as 'the actuality feature'.

No war had ever been reported and made real to world audiences



in such vivid terms before, and a vital part in the process - emotional involvement of the listener by colourful re-enactment - had been played by the feature programme. But over and above its achievement in imparting information, the feature had also proved its ability to engross and entertain.

In the field of documentary proper, parallel with the work of the Crown Film Unit it was splendidly developed by Francis Dillon, Robert Barr, Leonard Cottrell and Marjorie Banks and most notably of all - by Cecil McGivern. He was at his best in describing the new techniques of war and the ways in which ordinary men and women adapted their lives to cope with them. He had an unusually good ear for everyday dialogue and a tremendous capacity for hard work.

Not surprisingly, John Grierson foresaw the development of this form of radio documentary and had in fact criticised the BBC for not introducing it earlier. He argued that the audible surfaces of life were as varied as the visible surfaces and could be used by the artist in a similar manner.

The war presented innumerable new subjects to the feature-writer, about many of which the listener really wanted to know, and this in turn led to an improvement in the form of presentation. In the latter days of the war Cecil McGivern - later to become Controller of Programmes for the BBC Television Service - was to write some of the most impressive documentaries ever broadcast. Programmes which made his name included: Bomb Doors Open, about R.A.F. raids on Germany; Junction X, the story of the railway operation during the blitz; Radar, which told of its invention and increasingly effective use in bomber interception and A Harbour Called Mulberry which told of the building of the two



floating harbours used for the D-Day Landings and broadcast on 5 March, 1945, nine months after the Normandy Operation in which the floating harbours played so important a part.

This programme used the same technical resources as a radio play to establish its subject. It employed music (composed by Walter Goehr) to support and sustain the action, to punctuate sequences and at times to universalise the theme. A narrator was introduced to give shape and continuity to the script, to comment on what was happening, and to establish a unity of viewpoint for the audience. The narrator was humanised by letting him join in conversation with the characters who were directly involved in the action itself but also fulfilled the function of outside comment upon it, like the Chorus in a Greek tragedy. (This technique had also been used by film-makers, among them Paul Rotha in World of Plenty). Many of the characters were types, representing the servicemen, the officials and the contractors involved in making and using the harbour, and the treatment was broadly expressionist in the style of many experimental plays of the nineteen-twenties, using effects like free verse to add rhythm to phases of the action which were not directly dramatised. The gale which all but wrecked the harbours served to form a natural climax to the programme and the calm after the storm a natural end to it.

The Features team at this time became highly successful in dramatising the facts, ideas and persons of the contemporary scene. D.G.Bridson's The End of Mussolini, Leonard Cottrell's The Man From Belsen, Jennifer Wayne's studies of English Justice and Nesta Pain's scientific subjects, to name only a few, became

as well known to the listening public as the Crown Film Unit's Fires Were Started and Western Approaches were to the cinema-going audience. Their scripts and productions continued to roll off the assembly line - and still failed to glut the voracious demand of a couple of hundred million listeners from London to Sydney and Wellington, from North Africa to Cape Town, from Delhi to Singapore and from Boston to Vancouver.

At the end of 1945, Features Department was given a new and independent status. Up to then resources had been pooled between the two halves of the department, and producers had been available for helping out with work for either Drama or Documentary. There had been something to recommend the scheme, as it had helped to break down the rigidly water-tight departmentalisation so dear to the tidy BBC mind. But it was obvious that with a vast expansion of radio pending, separation was necessary; and by 1946, Gilliam had assumed the sole responsibility for feature programme output in both the home and overseas services. D.G. Bridson was his deputy and his March of the '45 in 1936 (already mentioned above) was the first of a long line of fine poetic dramas on historical subjects. Again during the war, when, during the long nights of the blackout, radio drama reached enormous mass audiences, this trend became a veritable movement towards verse drama, which continued the efforts of Ashley Dukes, T.S. Eliot, Auden and Isherwood and produced a considerable number of noteworthy achievements.

Louis MacNeice's Christopher Columbus (1942) with music by William Walton was probably the most memorable programme written during the war and was produced by Dallas Bower.<sup>12</sup> Edward



Sackville-West's The Rescue (1943) with music by Benjamin Britten was another. These were followed, after the end of the fighting, in the bleak post-war period, by Laurie Lee's The Voyage of Magellan (1946) and MacNeice's The Dark Tower (1946) - music by Benjamin Britten - a modern and highly poetical application of the Childe Roland story. Donald McWhinnie writes of this play that "although it is packed with technical invention - indeed it could serve, unaided, as a textbook of radio technique - the trickery is not imposed..... the total experience is of a work of art". The Streets of Pompeii by Henry Reid, produced by Douglas Cleverdon was a poetic, imaginative visit to excavated Pompeii.

The Third Programme, which opened on 29 September, 1946, became the vehicle for bold experimentation too. Here Dylan Thomas's masterpiece Under Milk Wood had its first performance in 1954; here Giles Cooper,<sup>13</sup> one of the most original writers whose best work was for radio, developed his laconic, ironical style of black comedy with plays like Mathry Beacon (1956), The Disagreeable Oyster (1957), and Unman, Wittering and Zigo (1958); here Samuel Beckett's plays, specially written for radio, spread the fame of their author: All that Fall (1957), Embers (1958), and Words and Music (1964).

It is also worth remembering that it was radio drama which furnished Harold Pinter, after his first near-disastrous failure with The Birthday Party at the Lyric Hammersmith in 1957, with further commissions for plays and helped him to continue as a dramatist: A Slight Ache (1959), A Night Out (1960), and The Dwarfs (1960) were the fruits of this policy. John Arden's first work as a dramatist, The Life of Man (1956), was written for radio as



an entry in a radio play competition organised by the BBC's North Region. Robert Bolt's greatest stage success A Man for All Seasons started life as a radio play in 1954; while Alun Owen, Bill Naughton, Willis Hall, David Turner, James Forsyth, John Mortimer, Henry Livings, James Hanley and many other prominent playwrights made their impact on radio before they <sup>even</sup> achieved recognition on the stage.

~~the actuality~~ <sup>feature</sup> By the fifties, the actuality feature had developed astonishing strength and variety. The popular presentation of factual information had been the purpose of the Light Programme's Focus series, which examined subjects ranging from coal, milk and housing, to Palestine, India and the Marshall Plan. There was also, Journey to Malaya and Special Duty - Hospital Burns Unit.

There were such scientific and medical features as The Silent Areas, dealing with operations on the frontal lobe of the brain as a treatment for mental disorders; The Story of Curare, relating the historical and modern applications in lung surgery of the drug of that name; and Cup to be Filled, dealing with geriatrics. Sociological features included In Need of Care, about a problem family. The subjects of radio biographies ranged from Samuel Johnson and George Bernard Shaw to Britain's prize-winning horsewoman Pat Smythe. There were also portraits based on recorded descriptions by contemporaries of W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and George Moore all produced by W.R. Rodgers. Denis Mitchell began to use the actuality technique to probe such current problems as the trade in horses for slaughter and vagrancy.

Features Department after the war had about forty people on staff in London, of whom half were actively concerned with

programme production. There were a few feature producers in the regions who would produce programmes for their own areas. Since the best feature programmes were usually the product of one mind, the key members of the department were a combination of writer-producer. The normal procedure was for one person to do the research, make contact with the experts in the subjects, write the script, work with the composers of special music (if any) and finally produce the programme on the air. But there were exceptions to this method and the department had a few producer-editors who worked with the output of other authors. Sometimes a team consisting of a reporter and an imaginative writer would be assigned to a project, in order to cover both the factual and poetic aspects of the subject, but generally it was all the work of one mind. ~~as~~ Cecil McGivern describes in the preface to his published play Junction X (June, 1944):<sup>14</sup>

"I cannot ever remember wanting to be an engine driver.... engines and trains and drivers and firemen had no interest for me at all. I wasn't mechanically minded - the inside of engines bored me... "Which," I said to myself in February, "is the reason I've been given the job of writing and producing a sixty minute feature broadcast on railways.... As I left, I gazed round at other producers about the place, hoping for a sign of sympathy. One or two looked at me rather vaguely, and rather vaguely muttered "puff-puff" or "chuff-chuff" and went on again with their work. They all get awkward jobs themselves. So I left London.

For the next sixteen days my life became a mix-up of railway lines, footplates, guards' vans, docks, floating cranes, refrigerating plants, sidings, offices, marshalling yards, loco-sheds and steadily increasing gloom. Very early in my wanderings I said to myself, "Railways are complicated things." And very soon the word 'complicated' seldom left my lips. Complicated - complicated - how can I get all this on paper? Standing on the back of a freight train, in a rattling, jerking, open inspectors' van, I listened (my face, I hope, showing intelligent interest, my heart, I fear, sinking into a blacker depression) to a



quick-thinking, fluent-speaking railway inspector telling me about the track, the permanent way. There was more first-class programme material in one mile of track than I could get into half a dozen feature programmes. One mile of track... and I had to cover all the British railways.... The one consolation was that the Railways were being most efficient guides.

At the end of my field-work I had a very dirty suit, with several holes burnt in it, a dirtier overcoat, with holes in it, an oily hat, oilier gloves, worn-down shoes, and in my head an uneasy mass of information. But - among many other places - I had been to Crewe! What does Crewe mean to you? A music-hall gag? A horrible pause in a boring journey? Not so to me. At Crewe I was shown round by enthusiastic railway men. The Divisional Superintendent skilfully guided my thoughts out of chaos and told me very funny railway stories with the wit and poise of a skilled raconteur. The mass of facts in my head began to click into position - one or two, here and there. I began to think of pen and paper. I left Crewe - blessing it.

I reached my desk with two main and very vivid impressions. First, the complications - surprising and extremely interesting - of railway working. Second, a sincere admiration and respect for the way the British railways are tackling the gigantic task this war has given to them. Eventually, Junction X was written - a sketch only of the work done at the real Junction X, a hint only of the work of the railways as a whole.

Much of what I had seen could not be mentioned - and a great deal of information I had to discard. On the latter score I offer my regrets to the railwaymen who at considerable bother gave me that knowledge. But - one sixty-minute programme doesn't tell listeners all that there is to know and enjoy about railways. I want one day to stand in that van again and listen while the hundred years of history that have gone into the making of those few miles of track are brought to life... And I want one day to go back to Junction X."

<sup>language</sup>  
For Gilliam the essential quality of the Feature programme

was that it should be the expression of one mind, whatever technique it used. He wrote, "It is the answer that each individual writer finds to the problem of making a statement by broadcasting, with the greatest possible force and coherence, emotional and dramatic impact, best suited to the nature of his material. The significance of the feature programme is, then, that it is the form of statement that broadcasting has evolved

for itself, as distinct from those other forms which it has borrowed or adapted from other arts or methods of publication. It is pure radio, a new instrument for the creative writer and producer."<sup>15</sup> This was also to be true, as will be shown later, of the television dramatised-documentary.

The BBC Features Department, obtained its independence from Drama in 1945. Val Gielgud, as Head of both, felt sad at losing half his empire, but had a great admiration for his second-in-command, who took over. Laurence Gilliam was a Londoner, born in 1907 and educated at the City of London School and Peterhouse, Cambridge. After a brief period on the Radio Times, he joined Features and Drama in 1933. He was prematurely retired in 1964, and died in 1967. With him died 'The Organised Jungle' as he called his Department. His staff called him Lorenzo, and the comparison with the Magnificent Medici was not a bad one. He was certainly the most dynamic figure in the BBC during the war years and after, and brought the documentary technique to its highest pitch. His great quality was equality. He would listen to the suggestion of a twenty-year-old Junior Programme Engineer as closely as he would to the opinion of a Controller. The only people he would brush off were the faceless ones, with initials instead of names, who got in his way. Under Gilliam scripts were closely read, not taken for granted; he would have made a first-class chief sub-editor on a newspaper. He once gave this advice on the writing of Features:

"Write your script and put your recordings in - then take out most of the things you yourself like best, and you've got a programme... The search for material, the living contact with what he is writing about, is the heart of the matter... The first and last rule of



good feature writing and production is - go to sources... Good documentary brushes aside secondary sources, dismisses the hearsay witness." 16

Departmental borders were as ill-defined then as they can be today. No one could say where Features ended, and where Talks or Drama or Variety began. Talks, with its more clear-cut brief, became the most doctrinaire of the three.

The specialists in Features<sup>17</sup> included such people as Jennifer Wayne, an ex-school teacher who presented the intricacies of the British legal system with superb simplicity in the series This is the Law; Nesta Pain, whose willing and lucid victims were often distinguished doctors or psychologists: Maurice Brown and David Woodward who professed a love of the sea and all things naval; Terence Tiller, Rayner Heppenstall and Douglas Cleverdon (producer of the immortal Under Milk Wood) whose handling of the literary feature set a new standard in radio; Leonard Cottrell, whose early interest in motor-cars was abruptly and most beneficially transferred to a study of the Ancient World, on which he is now an acknowledged expert; R.D.Smith, whose heart lay in the guady, bawdy scene of the Elizabethan dramatists; Joe Burroughs and Tom Waldron,<sup>18</sup> who would combine to take a topical subject and submit it to the bright glare of inquiry; these, and others beside them, had their favourite neck of the woods, but most were versatile enough to take on the 'standard' Feature which might be ordered for some anniversary, or that perennial and dubious act of devotion, the programme for St. George's Day.

The Country Magazines of Francis Dillon were in a category by themselves. With his helpmeet, David Thomson and with men like

A.G. Street and Ralph Wightman, he created on these programmes a unique rural ride which has never been surpassed.

Features people came from different backgrounds, as did their nearest counterparts, the Outside Broadcasters. One, John Bridges, had been a sergeant in the Grenadier Guards; Douglas Cleverdon had sold antique books in Bristol; John Glyn-Jones had been in the Players' Victoria Theatre; Alan Burgess, before he joined the year following the war, had sailed on the famous barquentine Cap Pilar to New Zealand, been a mountain guide, and had wandered and hoboed from Tahiti to the Panama Canal. The series The Undeclared, in which true stories of personal courage were dramatised, was his special care.

One of these, the tale of Gladys Aylward, missionary in China, became a book, and then a successful film under the title "The Inn of the Sixth Happiness." Burgess has written of the beginning of the story:

"It all started with a slender clue in a newspaper. A few lines of print saying that Gladys Aylward, who had once worked as a parlourmaid in London, was back home again after seventeen years in China as a Missionary. We rang up the reporter and got her address. We went to a small house in a small street in Edmonton and interviewed her. She was small and dark, and was dressed in Chinese clothes. She was not shy after our first explanation, but she was a little uncertain if her 'story' was good enough for our purpose. So were we."

But as the story developed, Burgess sat, fascinated, for three hours, and later, after many hours of discussion about the children she had cared for, he decided "we had stumbled upon a story of courage and fortitude with few - with very few - equals".<sup>19</sup>

The success of the programme goes back to Gilliam's dictum on the good feature writer: "The search for material, the living



contact with what he is writing about, is the heart of the matter."

Between 1949 and 1955 all the radio works submitted for the Italia Prize were productions of Gilliam's Features Department. It continued to dominate these international scenes until its dissolution. Louis MacNeice felt that, for liveliness of mind and enterprise, Features were unlike any other group of writers he had ever met. It had extraordinary range. To explain to visitors what Features did, Gilliam always declared that the aim was to have about twenty people ranging from poets like MacNeice, through the middle range like Cleverdon, to tough Fleet Street journalists like Robert Barr, so that whatever the subject might be somebody in Features could handle it. Perhaps its extreme versatility in the end harmed it. Its work was arguably overlapping with that of other departments; whereas Features could, and did, produce features that sounded like plays - from 1947 to 1955 all the Italia prize awards for drama were won by Features - features that sounded like original musical creations, and features that sounded like documentaries and current affairs productions, other departments never made the radio feature. The art of pure radio as defined by Sieveking remained with Gilliam's department; but the techniques it had developed began to spread, noticeably in Drama with the arrival in 1953 of Donald McWhinnie as that department's assistant head. One can see how he altered Drama by looking at the BBC's Italia Prize entries for 1956-62. Five of them were from his department; they included two Samuel Becketts, a Harold Pinter and a Giles Cooper.

The decline of Features began in 1959 when Gilliam was asked

to reduce the number of his producers. He did this not by firing anyone but by not recruiting, relying on retirement and resignation to decrease his staff. Strategically this was a mistake, for too many of the survivors were middle-aged and the department was not being refreshed, as Drama was, by the arrival of young blood more alert to the need to continue the exploration of radio. Some younger ones, including Robert Barr, Norman Swallow and Denis Mitchell, had already gone to television. The output of some of the older members had begun to lessen. And apart from drawing away contributors television was taking huge bites out of the evening audience for radio, forcing a heavier concentration of resources upon daytime radio for which the traditional kind of feature, expensive in both money and time, was inappropriate. Geoffrey Bridson<sup>20</sup> believed that Gilliam's principal error had been a failure to realise that economy had become a major factor and one in which a number of cheaply effective competitors had long been underselling him. Even producers close to Gilliam seem not to have known that he had already begun to die of cancer, and the awareness that his department's existence had become imperilled came on them quite suddenly. It was therefore necessary to force upon him premature retirement. Gilliam was Features, and it was necessary to topple him in advance in order to break up his organisation. This is a method the Corporation Establishment often employs. For a programme or a department to belong solely to one man is anathema to the Establishment.

Following weeks of rumour in the newspapers, leaked by producers who must have hoped that if the threat to Features became known the public would insist on rescuing it, the news was broken to the



department on a bad day in February 1964. Its separate existence was no longer convenient or necessary. Producers were invited to share themselves between Drama, Talks and Current Affairs, and Light Entertainment. They were guaranteed freedom to produce in any form they liked provided the appropriate department agreed. The intention was in part to introduce their skills to less experienced colleagues but rather more a device for preserving their jobs. The end had been reached of nearly twenty years of achievement, to which Gilliam's death in November, 1967, supplied a tragic epilogue.

Those directly affected looked on the ending of Features as one of the two most damaging misjudgments made by sound radio in the face of television's assault. Others saw it as the inevitable write-off of a diminishing asset.

Today television has assumed most of the documentary, as well as entertainment, functions of radio. Like the motion picture, radio has become more selective in finding its audiences, and the specialised audience cannot be the concern of the documentarist. Many of radio's forms and formalities moved directly to video, but the introduction of the visual gave the audience a choice, and it preferred the sight-and-sound form. Yet it was the radio 'feature' which provided the all important link between the film documentary and the television documentary. For it was inevitable as will be shown in the second half of the thesis that when the Television Service was re-opened after the war, the documentary tradition would be picked up and continued there too, and it was fortunate for them that several sound-documentary pioneers had been able to acquire some 'visual' experience by working with film

groups like the war-time Crown Film Unit.

Television, particularly in this field, has, practically absorbed radio, and by so doing has left only a shell of a medium which [now] combines some functions of a hi-fi set and some functions of a newspaper, and very little more.

But the spoken word, the pacing, the formats, the use of sound and music - all those exciting elements of truly 'mass' communication which radio had developed - moved into television and were there combined with the visual elements brought from the film to open up a new era of documentary.



### Notes

General works of reference for this chapter include:

Professor Brigg's History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom  
Volume 2, The Golden Age of Wireless;  
Peter Black's The Biggest Aspidistra in the World;  
P.P.Eckersley's The Power Behind the Microphone;  
D.G.Bridson's Prospero and Ariel;  
Keith Geddes Broadcasting in Britain.

See also Appendices 1 to 7 for information on both the early days of Sound Radio and descriptions of Lord Reith together with his personal account of that time.

1. Arthur Swinson, Writing for Television, Black 1963, p.115.
2. See Appendix 11 for Lance Sieveking's description of the Dramatic Control Panel.
3. See Appendix 12 for part of Sieveking's play Kaleidoscope which is published in full in his book The Stuff of Radio, 1934.
4. BBC Year Book (1931), p.185-190.
5. Filson Young, Shall I Listen? (1933), p.5.
6. For Cecil Lewis, see The Birth of Broadcasting (A.Briggs), p. 138 ff, 206 ff.
7. Val Gielgud, British Radio Drama (1922-1956), Harrap, 1957, p.48. See also Appendix 13 for an interview with Gielgud on 'The Early Days of Radio Drama' published December, 1965.
8. Laurence Gilliam, BBC Features, Evans 1950, p.9. See also Appendix 14 for the background to Features Department and the writing of programmes.
9. BBC Year Book (1932) 'Drama', p.183. This was the very first broadcast to be labelled an actuality "for convenience". See Appendix 90 for the complete Year Book entry. See also Appendix 15 for D.G.Bridson's account of 'Actuality Broadcasts'.
10. For a more detailed description of the 'art' of radio production see Appendix 20: Donald McWhinnie's The Art of Radio (1959).
11. See Appendix 18 for a brief history of Sound Recording.
12. Louis MacNeice in his introduction to Christopher Columbus (Faber Edition, 1963) writes of the peculiar virtues of the sound radio play in this way: "It is to be doubted if it can compete with television in the naturalistic presentation of everyday life. But then that is what television can do best;

in many other spheres it has still to prove itself and there are certainly very great difficulties facing any television writer or director who wants to get away from naturalism or to do things larger than life. Sound radio is free from these difficulties: as in most artistic media, its very limitations can be turned into assets. The complete lack of the visual element allows the radio playwright to jump about not only in time and place but on different planes of reality... It is also suited to the dramatised chronicle, which is larger than or simpler than life, a species of pageant less cumbrous and less cardboard than the traditional visual kind. This is where Christopher Columbus comes in." It is worth noting here that in America the old CBS Workshop which was revived in 1955 - was outstanding in a similar way to BBC Features. Norman Corwin and Archibald McLeish were among its writers. For MacNeice's 'poetic' description of Feature writing see his poem 'Autumn Sequel' Appendix 21.

13. See Appendix 19 'Radio Writing': Interview with Giles Cooper.
14. Cecil McGivern, Junction X, BBC Publication (1944), p.5-6. Desmond Shawe-Taylor, Radio critic of The Sunday Times described Junction X at this time as 'a beautiful piece of radio with the grasp and emotional power of a good film documentary... and first-rate propaganda for the man on the platform. Such features deserve not one but half-a-dozen repetitions.' (Quoted from the back cover of the published play.)
15. Laurence Gilliam, BBC Features (1950), p.9-10.
16. Ibid.
17. See Those Vintage Years of Radio (1972), p.173-178.
18. See Appendix 17 for Tom Waldron's description of Features Department.
19. Those Vintage Years of Radio, p.117.
20. Prospero and Ariel (1971), p.301.



## CHAPTER THREE

'Pictures-Over-The-Air'The BBC Television Service 1936 - 1946

On Monday, 2nd November, 1936, at 3.30 p.m. the world's first regular high-definition television service came into being. There were speeches on both systems<sup>1</sup> from Major G.C. Tryon, the Postmaster-General, Mr. R.C. Norman, the Chairman of the BBC's Governors, and Lord Selsdon. Sir Henry Greer, the Chairman of the Baird Television Company, and Mr. Alfred Clark, Chairman of E.M.I. were each televised by their own systems.

The speeches were followed by light entertainment provided by Adele Dixon and Buck and Bubbles, two coloured American comedians and dancers. In the evening Cecil Madden presented his second edition of Picture Page.

Apart from inaccessibility - it was six miles from Central London - Alexandra Palace was an ideal choice for a high definition, ultra-short wave transmitter, commanding as it does a windswept position 306 feet above sea level. The television mast, from ground to summit was 300 feet high so that together it could serve a very wide area.

The construction of the mast was a hazardous business. First the Victorian cupola roof had to be removed from the south-east tower, then several of the upper floors were reconstructed with fireproof materials. The four legs at the base of the mast were built into the tower, each embedded in seventeen tons of concrete as a counter-balance to absorb some of the enormous uplift that occurred during stormy weather.

The portion of Alexandra Palace leased by the BBC in 1935 covered a total floor space of 55,000 square feet, a reasonably adequate area for those days when no one could foresee how television might develop. To convert that part of the Palace to something for which it was never intended was a structural undertaking of some magnitude. Control rooms and studios were the first essentials. Scene docks were necessary; carpenters' shops, studios for scenic artists and designers and for the film unit; dressing rooms, make-up and wardrobe departments, restaurant facilities and kitchens as well as producers and administrators' offices, five small floors of them in the south-east tower alone.

While this work was in progress the powers at Broadcasting House were organising the world's first television staff. Gerald Cock, recognised as an organising genius as the first director of radio outside broadcasts - he organised, among other important events, all the broadcasts of George V - was made the first Director of Television. It was he who chose and recommended the Alexandra Palace site to Lord Selsdon's Television Advisory Committee.<sup>2</sup>

Cock had taken up his position in February 1935, almost immediately after the committee had reported. When he was first appointed he had 'not the slightest appreciation of what would be needed', but he very quickly came to the conclusion that he was concerned with 'the greatest medium for communication the world had ever seen'.<sup>3</sup> Cock decided in the summer of 1936 that the long and inevitable delay in providing a television service could best be brought to an end by a burst of activity that would capture public attention. Television could best be given a new boost by the



BBC organising television transmissions from Alexandra Palace to the Radiolympia Exhibition in August 1936. Whilst the Radio Manufacturers' Association was half-hearted about this, Cock received the full support of the Television Advisory Committee.

In the meantime advertisements were appearing in the newspapers for a "music director, stage manager, producer, producer of special programmes, a film assistant, announcer (male), hostess and artist booking assistant". Thousands of applications were received.

An early and very essential arrival at Alexandra Palace was Douglas Birkinshaw, as Engineer-in-Charge. There was little he did not already know about the station as he had been practically living on the premises for months with T.C. Macnamara and his technicians. He was joined by his old colleagues, D.R. Campbell and T.H. Bridgewater as senior studio engineers. D.H. Munro, veteran of radio production, was given the responsible position of Programme Manager, and then came another whose organising ability was to become a television legend. Cecil Madden arrived as Programme Organiser with a background of administrative and commercial experience in shipping and mining in the City and in Spain, with some years in almost every capacity in revue on the Continental stage, and more than a little experience as a serious playwright with nine West End productions to his credit.

Producers included Stephen Thomas, a man of the theatre who had produced for Cochran, Boucicault and Playfair and was also a lighting expert; Dallas Bower, a film director; Harry Pringle, a stage director of note; Bill Barbrooks, a film cameraman; Cecil Lewis, writer and radio producer; and, as assistant producer

George More O'Ferrall. A pioneer in another type of production was Mary Adams, who was to devise visual 'talks'.

Peter Bax, with six years' experience at Drury Lane and an international season with Cochran, joined as a studio manager.

Leslie Mitchell, combined his work as Movietone News commentator with that of being the first male announcer at Alexandra Palace, and the other two announcers, selected from over 1,222 applicants, were Jasmine Bligh and Elizabeth Cowell. But what was a television announcer expected to do? How should he or she behave before the cameras? Did he or she sit or stand? Would announcements be read from scripts or memorised? The BBC did not know. It had never been done before. The testing ground would be the Radiolympia Exhibition!

The programmes were planned by Cecil Madden and he was given only ten days' notice by Gerald Cock, to commission lyrics and music and to find stars and arrange films. He was at the mercy not only of the engineers of the two companies but of what were known to be difficult reception conditions at Olympia. Yet, with every kind of technical difficulty to harass him, and Cock's two highly publicised lady announcers both ill, Madden succeeded brilliantly. There had obviously been a wide enough range of programmes and sufficient signs of promise of future technical quality to attract a public. The range included not only live performances, but films of the Queen Mary docking at Southampton, and of Arsenal playing Everton.

The entry of Gerald Cock into the picture marks a shift of emphasis in the story of pre-war television. Hitherto almost everything had depended on techniques: after Radiolympia 1936 it



depended on programmes also. It is true that there was a deliberate pause between the end of Radiolympia and the official opening of the new television service on the 2nd November because plans were not completed. Yet pictures were being sent out during this period and at least one programme with a long future ahead of it, the magazine Picture Page, was first broadcast, with Madden as producer, during the pause, on the 8th October, 1936. Joan Miller,<sup>4</sup> the Canadian actress, was the commentator, shown sitting at a telephone switchboard and plugging the viewers - they were still called 'lookers in' in 1936 - through to the celebrities.

On the opening night of the television service the second edition of Picture Page was introduced by Jasmine Bligh, and included Jim Mollison, the aviator, Kay Stammers, the tennis star, and 'Bossy' Phelps, the King's Bargemaster, who was interviewed by John Snagge.

It was Gerald Cock's object to provide television programmes for two hours daily, from 3 o'clock until 4 o'clock and from 9 o'clock until 10 o'clock. New techniques were to be explored in every kind of programme. Informality and brightness would be the keynotes. Every effort was made to exploit not only the studio space in Alexandra Palace but the amenities of the surrounding park, with its grassy slopes, woods, and lake. Early studio programmes included revue, variety, ballet, illustrated talks and demonstrations, and film excerpts from West End shows. From outside the studios came demonstrations of golf, riding, boxing and other sports. By the beginning of December 1936 Reith admitted that he had been more impressed by television than he had expected and that it would

develop quicker than had been anticipated.

In 1938 Madden established the Sunday Night Play beginning on 28 March with Pirandello's Henry IV.

That year also the lake in Alexandra Park became the scene of a reconstruction of the famous Naval attack on Zeebrugge, twenty years, almost, to the hour, after the historic attack on 23 April, 1918, in which 225 lives were lost. The lake was converted into a scale model of the Mole and Canal at Zeebrugge. Staged in darkness the scene was lit by batteries of searchlights and gun flashes and burning wrecks. The ships were life-like models worked under-water by mechanical means. The object of the St. George's Day landing at Zeebrugge had been to create a diversion in order that three old warships laden with concrete might be navigated right up the channel and sunk in such a manner as to block the exit for the many German submarines which had made Zeebrugge their base. The plan succeeded and the port was efficiently blocked for the rest of the war.

On 12 November, 1938, heavy gunfire was heard in the vicinity of Muswell Hill; many people telephoned the police asking if the country was being attacked. But there was nothing to worry about. It was merely a couple of Howitzers being fired by men of the 53rd (London) Medium Brigade R.A. T.A. and the 7th Middlesex Regiment, T.A., all in the cause of a television play: White Chateau. A few windows were shattered that evening.

Four days later the first play was televised direct from the theatre - J.B. Priestley's When We Are Married from the St. Martin's. It was seeing this television performance which convinced producers of the value of having a studio audience. They realised that the



spontaneous laughter of the audience helped to provide atmosphere. The studios at Alexandra Palace were not large enough for the idea to be adopted at the time, but it was a point for the future.

As plays had proved by far and away the most popular form of television entertainment, Gerald Cock as Director of Television, announced that plays would be shown extensively - even horror plays, beginning in 1938 with The Tell-Tale Heart; ample warning would be given to keep children and sensitive people away from the screen.

The first full-length television broadcast of a West End play was given on 27 March, 1938 - it was Magyar Melody from His Majesty's.

During this period, a play produced under particularly trying circumstances was Bernard Shaw's Candida. It coincided with a firework display in the grounds of Alexandra Palace and although viewers were warned by Jasmine Bligh that some interference was expected, this proved to be a gross understatement, the noise exceeded all expectations! The bombardment started at the most dramatic point in the play where Candida (Marie Ney) was left alone with Eugene (Peter Osborn). Loud and intermittent explosions had a ludicrous effect on the dialogue but the actors managed to keep going without losing their composure. Perhaps that is why the producer George More O'Ferrall described television drama at this time as "a particularly thrilling business". Writing in the Radio Times he said,

"The Television producer is directly in control of his medium during performance. He is part of the performance in a way that a stage producer or a film director can never be.... I believe television drama is a medium of its own and that it is a mistake just to try to copy the films. We should regard fine acting

as our chief asset and use the cameras to show it to its best advantage and, where possible, to heighten its effect. The value of the close-up is immeasurable." 5

After the first year BBC Television had begun to settle down. There were fewer of the 'technical hitches' that had been only to be expected during the early stages. Cameramen, studio managers, producers and technicians were becoming more accustomed to the new technique - or, rather, were creating a new technique and beginning to understand the slight differences of method of one producer and another. Television was growing up. There were still the thousand and one problems arising from the limitations of the new medium, but the purely technical matters now rested with a highly organised staff of engineers who had thoroughly mastered the intricacies of vision broadcasting. Douglas Birkinshaw, who had 'lived' television since the early days of Studio BB in the basement of Broadcasting House, where Baird equipment had first been installed in 1932, was now leading a fine team.

The studio make-up of a muddy monochrome of grey that had supplanted the revolting colouring of five years ago had now given place to one of a sun-tan shade - a make-up almost normal enough for everyday wear. The change was of inestimable psychological value to artists appearing in any programme of a serious nature.

The success of Murder in the Cathedral had been followed by another milestone in television drama, Flecker's Hassan, with Greer Garson and Frank Cellier. Madden's Picture Page, the magazine highlight of the week, was approaching its hundredth edition. Motor racing from Crystal Palace was televised, and two noteworthy O.B.s at this time were the Lord Mayor's Show, the first pageantry



since the Coronation, followed a few days later by the Armistice Day Ceremony at the Cenotaph - a broadcast which was to test whether television was equally competent to deal with a solemn occasion. New cameras had been brought into use, tele-photo lenses gave close-up views of the King and the Cabinet. The same night George More O'Ferrall produced Journey's End, which widened the scope of the play beyond the stage version by the introduction of film shots of trench warfare and devastated areas.

The old Baird studio had been dismantled and not yet re-equipped, but it was brought into use when Eric Crozier, youngest of the producers at Alexandra Palace, produced Kaufman and Hart's Once in a Lifetime. Crozier used five different sets, a big undertaking in those days, four of them in the EMI studio and the fifth in the old Baird studio in which there was a camera linked by cable trailing along the connecting corridor. The cast - Joan Miller, Elaine Wodson, Guy Glover, Douglas Seale, Hannah Jones, Charles Farrell and Kay Lewis - were the first to learn the tricky business of rushing from one studio, along the corridor, to take up a position in front of the camera in the next studio.

More recruits arrived on the staff, including Philip Dorté who left Gaumont-British to take over O.B.s and films; Royston Morley, from Radio Features and Drama; Michael Barry, from stage directing at the Garrick and the Playhouse, and Jan Russell, playwright, painter, woodcarver and one of the leading puppet experts in this country. Others attracted by the new medium were Denis Johnston, who had already established his place in drama with The Moon in the Yellow River; Stephen Harrison, from Paramount Films and editor of Catherine the Great, and Lanham Titchener, also from the film world. The recruiting of more producers, technicians, administrators,

scene workers and others had increased the skeleton staff to three hundred or more.

There was a growing use of 'props' in the studio - trellises, doors, lamp-posts, fireplaces and the like - the derelict Alexandra Palace Theatre became the scenery store - settings, however, were still for the most part on a comparatively simple scale, great use as a rule being made of elaborately painted backcloths, as, for instance, in the first production by Royston Morley of The Importance of Being Earnest. Bookshelves, vases, pictures and so on were painted in relief, and the fact was not nearly so obvious on the screen as it would have been on the stage. There were attempts at more elaborate staging when time, space (there was only one studio in regular use) and staff were available, as in the case of Hassan and, later, Tristan and Isolde. Captions painted with such care that they sometimes approached the status of works of art began to replace spoken announcements. There was one school of thought that held that it was better to have one camera out of use for a few moments (focused on the caption board) than to have the intrusion of the voice. Captions set the 'atmosphere' of the programme to follow.

One production of particular note was W.P.Lipscomb and R.J.Minney's Clive of India. Lipscomb's interest in television as a vehicle for drama had its significance. He took the play, that had been running successfully in the West End for a year and was later filmed, adapted it to suit the demands of the studio, and added scenes and dialogue that were in neither the stage nor the film versions. He took the trouble to confer with the experts on what could and what could not be done in television. He was



fortunate in that a number of refinements had been achieved in studio equipment. For one thing, camera controls had now been geared for slow, medium and fast panning shots, and on each camera was a tiny signal light to signify that it was transmitting. It was a more efficient cue than the many forms of gesticulation hitherto adopted by studio managers.

Clive of India exploited and combined many of the tricks of the theatre and cinema for the first time, and introduced a montage sequence that is often talked about even today. Six cameras were brought into use on that single sequence - three of them on 'live' action in the studio, two scanning films and another on the caption board. It required much patient rehearsal; the sequence had to be run through over and over again to ensure exact timing to the split second. When the time came for the sequence during transmission the producer, George More O'Ferrall, gave the cue to Bill Ward, the vision mixer, and sat back to watch results on his screen. The sequence had been so well rehearsed that there was no need to cue the vision mixer or cameramen, and for five minutes no conversation was heard in the control room. There was the click of switches every few seconds as shot after shot was cut, mixed or super-imposed to build up a kaleidoscopic screen montage. As the studio action returned to normal More O'Ferrall, apparently so engrossed in the perfect working of his closely-timed sequence that he forgot momentarily that the play was on the air, exclaimed, "That's wonderful. Let's do it again!"<sup>6</sup>

Another big step forward came when the old Baird studio was fully commissioned as an independently equipped studio with three camera channels, and an early opportunity was taken of using both

studios for a single production, bringing into play a total of seven cameras as well as interpolated film shots.

The first production using the full capacity of the two studios was Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac.

Television between 1937 and 1939 was essentially a period of experiment from the artistic as well as from the technical viewpoint.

Gerald Cock recalls:

"For me television started in 1935. Nobody seemed to want it. Sometimes I'm afraid relations between the prodigal infant and its rich parent in Broadcasting House weren't all sweetness and light.... By early 1936 I had been faced with a few of the unceasing problems which bedevilled us to the very end. Prospects looked a bit grim then. When a creative staff had been collected, first light artistes had to be tempted to the wilds of Wood Green for less than princely fees, our resources being what they were. Then how to find and put over the right sort of programmes to make people buy receivers which were expensive speculations in those days. The early cameras too had, like ourselves, unpredictable personality quirks, which affected production. Curiously the need for rehearsal rooms had been completely overlooked - we just hadn't any.... Worst of all was having to work by two radically different systems - one a hopeless failure - on alternate weeks. Single system working and with it a real Service, only started in 1937... Of course the first thing visitors used to notice at Alexandra Palace was an atmosphere of cheerful turmoil, of continual improvisation. Even after the call-up began to take away our creative people in the summer of 1939, morale stayed high. But then war came to wipe the slate clean of all our efforts, scuttle plans for the future and scatter us to the four corners of the world."<sup>7</sup>

Douglas Birkinshaw the Engineer-in-charge at Alexandra Palace remembers getting the final order to close down the Service at 12 o'clock on the 1st September that Black Friday in 1939.

"Everyone was grieved beyond measure... we were a band of about 150 enthusiasts on the engineering side - and about as many on the programme and artistic side who had been working on this the first high definition television service in the world - and it was our hobby and our life and we had lived with it and slept with it -



if ever we did sleep - and to have it smitten away from us by a foreign dictator was almost more than we could bear. However at 12 o'clock the Service stopped and it is rather interesting to remember that the last words were spoken by Micky Mouse, who said, "Ah tink I go home!" "8

British television had gone to war. The staff poured out down the steps of Alexandra Palace setting out for pre-arranged destinations.

The Television Service had been closed down for three reasons. First, because it was considered to be a luxury enjoyed only by a small minority. Secondly, because the highly trained staff were invaluable in the service of Radar, and thirdly because the radiation could be detected by the enemy.

Alexandra Palace was closed down with the exception of two transmitters - one vision, one sound, and these were adapted for the highly secret war-time operation of beam-bending.

Up to 1939, with a few notable exceptions such as Zeebrugge, the influence of documentary methods on television production had been very scant indeed. It has been shown how the Drama presented by the BBC Television Service was firmly rooted in theatrical convention and the television camera used to highlight aspects of this, rather than to create a drama of its own. The war years were to intervene before any significant changes began to come about.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Re-opening of the Television Service 1946

In the weeks before the post-war opening of Alexandra Palace there was much speculation among the public, to the vast majority of whom television was still just a name. That British Television had reached a remarkably high standard was appreciated only by one per cent of the population in the area it served before the war - an estimated regular audience of 100,000 or so. To them the early summer of 1946 was one of increasing anticipation. For the other ninety-nine per cent of the potential television audience, pictures-over-the-air were still a mystery that had to be seen to be believed.

So the BBC, while short of staff and out of practice, was really in the happy position of starting more or less where it left off, but with a receptive audience that looked upon television as something starting all over again.

Lord Hankey's Television Committee<sup>9</sup> had issued their twenty-five pages of print that gave renewed hope to the Alexandra Palace staff in many parts of the world, reading army orders in Burma, minesweeping in the North Sea or writing memos in Whitehall. Soon they would be out, and in a studio instead of barracks, or a fo'c'sle or behind a desk. The proposals for the provision and development of the post-war television service were outlined in the Television Committee Report of 1943 which came to the conclusion that "the right course in the existing circumstances is to re-open the television service on the basis of the 405-line system rather than to wait for the development of a new television system as the result of research."<sup>10</sup>



On 9 October, 1945, the Government announced that it accepted the main provisions of the Hankey Report. This meant that the BBC was again to run television and that the Service was to be re-started as soon as possible. In fact the first contingent of pre-war television engineers went up to the old television station at Alexandra Palace within a few days of 9 October.

Maurice Gorham was given the job of running the Service on 2 November, 1945, working 'direct to the Management'<sup>11</sup> as he had done when heading the Light Programme on radio. Sir William Haley<sup>12</sup> was Director-General of the BBC at this time. Of the staff Gorham assembled he was later to write:

"The organisation was not quite the same as before the war. My deputy was to be the Programme Director, and the third member of the direction team was the chief Executive. Other key positions were filled by Cecil Madden as Programme Organiser, George More O'Ferrall and Mary Adams as senior producers in Drama and Talks, Philip Dorté in charge of Outside Broadcasts and Films. Imlay Watts as Studio Production Manager and Peter Bax in charge of design, which involved not merely designing all scenery and properties but making them and supplying them to the studio staff. All these were pre-war television staff; in fact I myself was about the only new boy there."

For his Deputy, Gorham chose Denis Johnston, a distinguished figure in the theatre before he joined the BBC. He had been a War Reporter during the war and he had an 'unrivalled' knowledge of theatre and radio as well as television. The fourth member of Gorham's 'Direction' was not on his staff - Douglas Birkinshaw. Gorham writes:

"It was a good thing to have Douglas Birkinshaw on my Direction but it would have been a better thing to have had him on my staff. For one thing, he was not high enough in his own hierarchy to get television its due. Whereas I could go direct to the Director-General he had to go to the Senior Superintendent Engineer who had other Superintendent Engineers to bother about besides him."<sup>13</sup>

The time fixed for the re-opening of the Television Service was 3 o'clock on Friday, 7 June, 1946, and the work of preparation, while never leisurely, was deliberate and unhurried for everyone realised that once a start had been made there could be no pause.

At the appointed hour viewers' screens flickered into life and

<sup>one of the announcements of pre-war TV</sup>  
Jasmine Bligh, was seen walking into close-up along the terrace of <sup>the pre-war studio</sup> the Palace. She smiled into the lens of the camera and, as

Eric Coates' specially composed Television March was faded out she made the first announcement. The service was formally opened by

the Postmaster-General Lord Listowel, and in the programme that followed a place of honour was reserved for the last item to be

televised before the service was interrupted on 1 September, 1939 -

<sup>however</sup> the film, Mickey's Gala Premiere.

Back to the screen came in the next few months all the attractions of a revived television service - plays, variety, the evergreen Picture Page, demonstrations, children's features, cartoon and feature films and the panorama of outside Broadcasts from sports arena, theatre, concert hall and a dozen and one other venues.

<sup>NCC</sup>  
The BBC's first move of any consequence was a great triumph. They televised the Victory Parade of 1946 and in so doing opened the eyes of the world to the realities of television.

The pre-war policy of presenting plays in plenty proved immensely successful again. There were many in the early days after the war - The Importance of Being Ernest, They Flew Through Sand, Saint Joan, Jeannie, As You Like It, The Shop at Sly Corner.

George More O'Ferrall was adding to his pre-war reputation as an extremely efficient producer <sup>for Theatre</sup> and was turning out one success after another; he and Michael Barry made an invaluable contribution



towards building up BBC Drama to its unparalleled position in world entertainment today.

Yet Maurice Gorham says of this period:

"The whole story of television is to me an alternation of restrictions and triumphs over them, of frustrations and success. We had far more obstacles to cope with than sound broadcasting had had at a similar stage in its evolution but we were constantly showing the way to what television could finally be. We tackled everything in the way of programmes, and although we had disastrous failures we had as many striking successes in the course of our 28½ hours a week. In spite of the limitations there were constant occasions when you sat up and said, "If this is what vision broadcasting can do now what a dazzling future it has to come"... I remember brilliant studio productions of plays such as Royston Morley's Mourning Becomes Electra... and of feature programmes in which the added element of sight transformed techniques that had been fully exploited in the narrower medium of sound." 14

Denis Johnston, who had never meant to stay in the job, left after the first year and was replaced by Cecil McGivern whom Gorham admired for his 'tremendous energy and concentration'.

In June 1947, the BBC completed its first year of post-war television. The Daily Telegraph viewed the year as one of accomplishment and their correspondent observed: "The great difference is that while before the war, the main obstacle was public reluctance to buy (receivers), today the problem is to produce the sets to meet demand". 15 Yet other areas of the press did not hesitate to sound a warning. The Daily Mirror, for example, said: 16 "Today Television is the poor relation of the BBC. Understaffed, under-equipped, short of cash, it is fighting grimly for survival".

There was one big battle to be won, according to Gorham, before he could get on with the job of running Television and that "was the question of relations between television and the producing departments in Broadcasting House". This was very much fundamental

to the whole of Gorham's thinking at this time. He writes:

"Before the war I had warned Gerald Cock that television was safe enough whilst it was still a pioneering enterprise hemmed in by difficulties and lack of resources, but when it grew to be worth taking an interest in, Broadcasting House would move in.... The clash came with Basil Nicholls (Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee), who held that Val Gielgud as the BBC's Director of Drama, ought to be professionally responsible for television plays, and I would not accept this." 17

For his own part Gielgud has said:

"It might be true that television had little to learn from the successes of, or the experts in, sound. It was certainly true that television could have learned something from the mistakes that had been made in sound. To widen the gulf fixed between Broadcasting House and Alexandra Palace, to establish as a Median and Persian law that practitioners in sound must automatically be both suspect and incompetent, may have seemed a fine gesture of independence to Maurice Gorham, flushed with his new Controllorship which gave him access to the inner councils of the Corporation. At less exalted levels it produced ill-feeling, bad blood, and much misunderstanding. I was to experience the results to my cost, when I ultimately went to Alexandra Palace in 1949." 18

However when Gielgud did eventually go to Television Gorham was in part at least proved right.

*W. H. Haley*  
Haley himself held strong views about the relationship of Sound and Television and in a Memorandum (1945) he asked if Television Drama should be staffed mainly by producers from outside, or whether producers from the present Features and Drama (Sound) should be transferred, adding, "there will be no artificial barrier preventing sound producers of any kind from being used on, or experimenting with, television" and he was concerned to see that there should be a substantial period of such experiment and training in Television Drama so that the foundations could be laid of "a new medium, and not an attempt either to give Radio eyes or to photograph the Theatre". 19



This running battle between Sound and Television was to last for many years until Television eventually succeeded in ousting Radio altogether from its pre-eminent position within the Corporation.

"For two years", writes Gorham, "I lived and thought and dreamt television, and even with all the obstacles I still enjoyed the job. I went on enjoying it up to November 5th, 1947, two years to the day after my appointment had been announced."<sup>20</sup>

When Gorham resigned he was succeeded by Norman Collins, originally Head of the Light Programme. Collins was to become a dynamic force in post-war television.

His first year proved to be one of special significance for it included the televising of the Olympic Games.

BBC TV broke all records during the Games in the greatest fortnight of its history. From 2.45 p.m. on 29 July when the Emitron cameras first opened up on Wembley Stadium until the evening of 14 August, the total time expended on television outside broadcasts was 68 hours 29 minutes - an average of nearly five hours a day.

2. This was in addition to regular transmissions.

Technically it was a triumph of old and new; one mobile unit used for outdoor track events at the Stadium had been in use since 1936; the other was entirely new. This involved the new CPS Emitron; it could operate successfully even at sunset and was the result of intensive development at EMI between 1946 and 1948. The BBC had begun in 1936 with the standard Emitron cameras and these were augmented for outside broadcast purposes in the pre-war era by the more sensitive Super Emitrons. Since there had been no advance because of the war years the Service re-opened with these two types,

but EMI began at once to widen and improve the field. The result - the new CPS Emitron - produced a very big advance in camera tubes and gave a much better picture; it was richer, clearer, devoid of smears and, perhaps the most important of all, had for the first time a useful degree of depth and focus - a quality which enables the viewer to see both the foreground and the background equally clearly. Previously the foreground had been clearly defined but the background was a mere blur. This work was stimulated in the BBC by T.C. MacNamara, in charge of television engineering planning.

Before 1950 none of the cameras had turret lenses. Two of them could be pushed backwards and forwards - 'tracking', as it was called - on wheeled camera supports known as dollies. The other two were mounted on 'iron men', so called because of their amazing intractability.<sup>21</sup> A producer could only move an iron man in between shots. The dollies were pushed about by studio hands in plimsolls, but when they have moved in for their close-up there was only one possible shot to follow. They would slowly move out again, for if the producer had cut to a second camera his picture would have included the first. This problem of keeping the cameras out of each other's vision called for much ingenuity in the visual scripting of a television programme. Another intrusive factor was the virtual certainty that a producer would not get through a show without at least one camera 'going down' on him, i.e. flickering out, thus converting what had begun as a coolly plotted four-camera sequence into a scene of wild and despairing improvisation.

Robert Barr a pioneer producer-writer in documentaries recalls how his camera 3 went down after ten minutes of a 60-minute



documentary.<sup>22</sup> He quickly moved camera 2 to cover some of 3's shots. Meanwhile 3 had been repaired but 2 was flickering ominously. He could not put 3 in to cover 2 so brought in 1. In the excitement nobody noticed that the cables connecting the cameras to the gallery had begun to tangle like a piece of knitting, and before anyone could prevent it two of the cameras were stuck together - like a pair of mating dogs! There was no way to move one forwards without pulling the other backwards except by unplugging the cables and untwisting them. After this it was natural enough that the engineers in their haste should have stuck the plugs back into the wrong cameras, so that in the gallery above the producer was getting the picture of Camera 3 on his monitor for Camera 2.

Producers got into a state in which if they had been told that their houses had burned down with their wives and children in them they would have replied absently, "Oh really."

Tremendous progress was made in all branches of Television in 1949. In February, on the technical side (again), a new outside broadcast unit with Pye Photicons was brought into commission at the Albert Hall; the Zoom Lens was also introduced for the first time; and in March, the London County Council agreed to the BBC developing the White City site as a Television Centre. That was the year that the Boat Race was televised for the first time from a launch, and in which tele-recording was begun; filming direct from the television screen. In November, the BBC bought Lime Grove Studios, and then, on 17 December BBC Television took the first of many steps which marked a new growth of the medium - Sutton Coldfield opened; the tentacles of television were beginning to

spread into the octopus that they are today.

In this same year Caroline Lejeune - film critic of the Observer newspaper began to write a column on television. She said:

"It is the widest folly to underestimate television [because it has not fallen on a sleeping world over-night, but stolen into its place by quiet marches.] A large proportion of the community has not yet experienced its force, but one has only to study the official figures - or, more simply, look out of a train window in Greater London and observe the tall, slim H-masts springing up beside suburban chimneys - to realise that something has arrived which is capturing the popular imagination at a pace controlled only by technical limitations, and not by conditions of income, taste or class. At the moment it is true, the audience for television is limited. The BBC is not prepared to guarantee reception beyond a radius of 50-60 miles from Alexandra Palace, although broadcasts have been picked up satisfactorily over much greater distances. But with the opening of the new transmitter at Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham, in the early autumn of this year and of a third station in the north sometime in the following spring, the story will take a new turn."

However, Miss Lejeune had her doubts.

"I cannot," she wrote "resist the feeling that the greatest threat to British Television to-day springs [not from any material difficulties, not from indifference, or from competitive entertainment, or lack of space, time and money, but] from the over-enthusiasm of its supporters. There is no kindness in pretending because so many wonders of science have been accomplished up there at Wood Green that everything transmitted is a wonder of art. Some of the BBC's television programmes are good; one or two of them are very good; but many of them are terrible."

She felt that it was terribly important for television to determine just what it was trying to do, what it could do best, and how far it succeeded in what it was doing before it did anything else. Only in that way would it avoid settling down to "a smug triumph of routine".<sup>23</sup>

In 1950 Norman Collins resigned and George Barnes became the



first post-war Director of Television. Cecil McGivern was appointed Controller. The Sunday Times in a 'profile' at the time acknowledged that "by his fervid zeal he (McGivern) has brought the Television Service up from the status of a toy to the status of a nation-wide service operating with the reliability of sound radio."<sup>24</sup> However McGivern, the Controller never produced a television programme - his greatest omission in the view of many producers - (nevertheless) he did familiarise himself with every trick and technique known to studio men. He was a History teacher when his first chance came with the BBC in Newcastle and he produced in 1934 a one-act play for radio by a local author Esther McCracken. From then on he could not be kept out of the studios. All the time he was questioning technicians about microphones, control panels and the principles of sound. Less than two years later he was offered a job at £320 a year and within a year he was virtually running programmes from Newcastle. In 1940 he moved to London to carry on a series of war documentaries that were to establish him. McGivern, more than anyone else, realised that Television desperately needed writers of the 'fiction type of applied documentary' and he pressed potential talents to see films like The House on 92nd Street, Boomerang, and Call Northside 777. He realised that each of these films was an example of fiction wedded to fact, and this in his mind was ideal material for television documentary-drama. It is also significant to note that after watching the first of a new television series of Current Affairs programmes called Ranorama (1954) McGivern ordered it off the air for a month and revised the programme schedules until the producer could plan the show along new lines suggested by McGivern himself.

To him television was the most important communicator ever put into man's hands, and he drove himself and others mercilessly to make it do what he wanted. He demanded the best, and when he felt men had offered less he would call them into his office and berate them like idle schoolboys. Not everyone could take it and some were crushed beneath it, but the tougher ones respected his judgment and revered his leadership.

McGivern aimed at maintaining the enthusiasm and width of ideas that had marked the amateurishness of the early years while channelling them into a firm, hard-edged professionalism.

"The schedules were put together and anxiously considered with certain basic questions always in mind. Were all programme categories covered as fully as possible? Had any idea of merit been omitted and why? Was there constant change and avoidance of monotony? Could we get in more people and personalities as opposed to professional performers? Could we get in more ideas? Were there regular 'hammer blows', ideas treated in depth and not just cursorily in magazine programmes? Were there enough single programme ideas (there are many which do not lend themselves to series)? Were we, in brief, using television as it should be used, to be as all-embracing, as varied, as exciting as possible?"<sup>25</sup>

McGivern had a perfect eye for quality and a killing tongue for the second rate; he could never admit that a great many people would cheerfully enjoy the bogus; he despised the kind of glittering, empty, showbiz formula that appealed only to the eye. He was always looking for the touch of extra quality that lifted a programme out of the rut.

Television started 1950 with two studios. It began 1951 with two more. This meant more hours of camera rehearsals for major productions and so ensured more polish and finish. It also meant better quality pictures and much less strain on producers, technicians and artists.



In January 1950 BBC Television transmitted 117 programmes. In January 1951, the number had risen to 174. Evening transmission time was increased. Holme Moss transmitter opened on 12 December.<sup>26</sup>

Television offered a complete coverage of the ceremonies at the opening of the Festival of Britain and each month television Drama presented a special Festival Theatre production of plays. Two classics, Shaw's St. Joan and Congreve's Way of the World, were followed by two original plays, commissioned for television, by J.B. Priestley and Terence Rattigan.

All departments devised special programmes for these five festive months.

Over 1,000,000 more licences for sound and television combined were taken out in 1954 than in 1953. The figure in 1954 was 3,248,892. In 1947 it had been only 14,560. By 1957 the figure of 1954 had been doubled and the 10,000,000 mark was reached in 1960. (In 1936 the figure had been only 300!)

During these early years of television and the last of the monopoly the BBC performed the priceless service of establishing standards, which the public accepted not simply because there was no choice but because it shared the BBC's view of television as an instrument of power and responsibility and wonder. The earliest and strongest of BBC traditions, which thought its duty was to nourish and expand the viewer's range of pleasures, found an echo among the audience at a time when the moving pictures in the living-room were a wonder in themselves. The marvel was equated with power and duty just as wireless had been three generations earlier, and the brute force of monopoly was offering audiences truly life-enlarging experiences. The certain faith that the spark of the desire

to know was inside everyone, and that the BBC's duty was to blow on it, was at the very core of the BBC thought and programme planning. With confidence, television produced a hundred plays a year, including the five parts of Back to Methuselah presented over five weeks; took the whole evening for opera from Glyndebourne; sent outside broadcast units to agricultural fairs, steel foundries, clog-dancing festivals and cricket-bat factories. It assumed that the audience was sitting forward in its chairs.

The object was primarily to show things to the audience. A live outside broadcast unit would be sent on location to an area with instructions to look for anything that could be put into the network. New technical aids created programmes merely by being used. It was enough for the new 'roving eye' single camera unit mounted in a van to ride down Piccadilly. A series called Saturday Night Out was inspired entirely by the belief - quite sound at the time - that people would be entertained by watching other people's night out, the magic being provided simply by the fact that they were seeing it as it happened.

Another speciality of the time was television that fitted into no special category: Philip Harben cooked; pleasant-faced women with Southern accents showed how to cut out dresses in the afternoon Leisure and Pleasure series; the archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler promoted his subject into a national interest with Animal, Vegetable, Mineral, a quizz in which archaeologists identified museum objects with what seemed to the audience a supernatural speed and ease. One of the most enriching of these series was Inventor's Club, in which a couple of baggy-suited handymen displayed, practical, sometimes highly commercial inventions sent in by viewers; no series



more entertainingly realised the BBC's notion that television should go after the rich variety of life. Huw Wheldon presented All Your Own,<sup>27</sup> a weekend tea-time magazine in which children displayed a talent and were 'brought out' by Wheldon in interviews afterwards. David Attenborough led Zoo Quest, a series on the joint BBC/Zoological Society's expedition to Sierra Leone.

However, by 1954 the BBC had realised that the annual pre-empting of almost a whole evening for Glyndbourne opera was out of the question and therefore they simply showed highlights from Don Giovanni that year, although there were five studio opera productions - not very good ones, because the technical limitations then imposed on photographing singers in full flood made rather dull pictures. Fonteyn danced on television for the first time; there was an excellent series of orchestral music called The Conductor Speaks.

People liked to watch some special knowledge or talent in action. The business of presenting people was being learned. The audience (and some people in sound) thought that all that was necessary was to let them see, as well as hear, The Brains Trust and Twenty Questions, etc. But television had learned very quickly that the production methods it required had to be broken away from sound and structured anew. The essential difference was that viewers could not look at the same picture for more than a few minutes without becoming aware of the strain. With talkers who demonstrated, like Harben, there was no problem. The camera showed what he did. When the speaker only talked the illustration had to be devised by the producer. It was perhaps the most special of television's arts.

Grace Wyndham Goldie, a great creator and shaper of form, explained how it was done.

(The Producer) "can choose still pictures, or prints and get them specially enlarged. He can get film specially shot, or use such little existing film as is available, and get it specially cut. He can write, or get someone else to write, short scenes and get actors and actresses to take part in them. He can use animated maps and diagrams if he designs them and can persuade someone to make them. He must plan all these illustrations so that they fit logically into the speaker's arguments; visually into a pattern acceptable to the eye; practically into the possibilities of camera movement, lighting and scene changing.

And when all that is done, the real difficulties of the talks producer begin; difficulties involved in persuading distinguished people who have never faced lights or studios or cameras, who are not accustomed to giving any kind of performance or repeating any sort of 'effect', to look natural in unnatural surroundings, to talk naturally and yet to time, to remember the thread of their argument without a script, to give 'cues' and take them." 28

This kind of television was an early success despite the ordeal indicated by Grace Wyndham Goldie.

Current-Affairs<sup>29</sup> television, because it could not eschew politics, was subject to the steady and merciless glare of the political parties, sunk as deeply then as now in the belief that television was an election winner if it could only be exploited successfully. The climate of BBC management at that time favoured not too much controversy, and the majority of current affairs output avoided hot domestic politics. If it had wished to be more aggressive it was thwarted by the ridiculous fourteen-day rule, under which the BBC agreed not to present discussions of a subject that was to be debated in Parliament within that period.

In 1951 there was London Town, an intricate magazine format for its day, in which Richard Dimbleby and producer Stephen McCormack



learned the business of running a show from the studio and switching smoothly from film to matching studio-sets and back to film. As the television network spread programmes could drop live outside broadcasts as well as film into a studio-based magazine. In 1952 Cecil McGivern launched Special Enquiry, the most ambitious current affairs series yet attempted, with a hard-hitting programme filmed in the slums of Glasgow with Robert Reid in the studio calling in Jameson Clark as reporter <sup>for the spot</sup> in Glasgow. This kind of thing established a basic technique of television reporting which proliferated into a score of later programmes.

At this time Drama was achieving an average of three productions a week. They went out from the inadequate Lime Grove building after two or three weeks of rehearsal, of which only the last few days (even hours!) were actually on the studio floor. Rehearsals began in rooms over pubs and empty boys' clubs, where producers' assistants imitated cameras and drew furniture on the floor in chalk.

Classics and stage plays included two Shakespeares, two Shaws, a Chekhov and a huge Peer Gynt. Later on it became fashionable to sneer at this use of theatre, and a myth grew that before the arrival of ITV the art of writing for television had languished unknown. That this assumption was wholly false will be shown later. ITV Drama, when it came, built on the foundations laid by McGivern and Michael Barry, whom McGivern made Head of Drama in 1952. They knew as a matter of arithmetic how many stage plays there were? How many times they could do Hobson's Choice - and that television had in the end if not sooner, to create its own drama. The side of television that had to do with the writing, casting, rehearsing and performing was very much harder to build up and

develop. An audience would take the Talks, the Outside Broadcasts, etc. in their stride because they did not know what they liked in those areas of television; it was all new. When viewing drama and variety they remembered the theatre and the cinema, and expected the standards of those media to be met by television. But there was little money about, and the equipment of the early days taxed everybody on both sides of the camera to the limit. With his cameras constantly 'on the blink' and everything 'live' a drama-documentary producer never knew, for example, when one of his cast was going to 'dry' - and television tended to have this effect on performers.

In films the director could cut out the scene and retake it; in the theatre an actor could walk over to the prompt corner; in radio he read his part. Only in television was there no possibility of covering up a 'dry'; and of course this fearful knowledge greatly increased the actors' chance of having one. Many actors for this reason would not appear on television and playwrights were heard to say that while they did not object to television doing that sort of thing to Shakespeare it was not going to do it to them. But under Val Gielgud and then Michael Barry drama found an astonishing number of star actors willing to appear in the classical repertory; and a loyal pool of lesser-known players were ready and willing to appear in anything whatever.

Just as in early radio, early television plays faithfully copied the presentation style of the theatre, including the raising and lowering of a curtain and a bell to signal the beginning of the next act. The Presentation Editor at Alexandra suggested in all seriousness on one occasion the following idea:



"I have a ten-minute hour-glass which could be filmed against a written caption and, if you wished, used as a stock interval on those occasions for which producers have made no special provision. It need not, of course, be used for the full ten minutes - only the last three or five minutes being used as required. Alternatively, the hour-glass could be run on Mechau (telecine) and superimposed by the producer on a studio caption of his choosing." 30

The terror of the 'dry' was conquered with the invention of a prompter's cut out. He could wipe out the sound before giving the cue. The audience could tell by the sudden deadness of their sets and the look of pain on the actors' faces; and sometimes the prompter's voice was a shade quicker than his finger on the button. But it was an important step forward, and what with one improvement and another the rise in viewing figures and its accompanying rise in artists' fees and equipment standards, the Sunday play and its Tuesday repeat became an institution and drama began to establish names to watch for. With better cameras the directors mastered the grammar of cuts, mixes, fades, tracks, wipes and so on inherited from the cinema, which the audience had always taken for granted it should also see on television, and learned to handle them on the run. On 'live' television many things remained impossible. It could not fade out an actor in jodhpurs in Berkshire and fade him in immediately in a dinner jacket in New York; the writer had to insert a short scene between these locations so that the actor would have time to change gear and bound across to the appropriate part of the set. The writers soon learned to write scripts that did not require these athletic feats. But nobody could make a television play a comfortable thing to undertake.

A name to be watched then, as indeed now, was Rudolph Cartier, a producer who came to Lime Grove following his association in

Germany with Max Reinhardt, Erich Pommer and the famous UFA film company.\* He liked television because the small screen enabled him to force the audience to see what he wanted it to see.

"In the theatre", he said "it is impossible, the audience can be distracted by the hang of a curtain. In the cinema the audience looks at the landscape."

There was no one quite like Cartier when it came to the trick of making a picture on television as wide and deep as Cinemascope; and it was done on equipment that was still more of a clumsy and unwilling conscript than an eagerly co-operative servant. He once said, "One only discovers the possibilities of television by attempting the impossible".<sup>31</sup>

Attempting the impossible from the moment that television got back on the air in 1946 was a group of pioneer writer-producers of the dramatised-documentary. It is to this group that it is proposed to give particular attention, for it is here that one finds the most creative and original work of those early post-war days.

Their programmes about the police, prostitution, welfare workers, the courts, alcoholics, broken homes and countless other subjects, created a school of writers who were beginning to tackle realistically the problems of society whilst theatre curtains were still rising on French windows and butlers answering telephones. *Dawson*

Through their unique style of 'social realism' in both writing and production, the documentary-dramatists not only established the ground rules for a whole new generation of television playwrights, but through their dramatisations of the

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\* Universum Film AG (U.F.A.) was formed in November 1917.



major social issues of the day, and by working the vein of realism so thoroughly, they helped significantly to bring about a change for the better in the public's attitude to human suffering and <sup>a more relaxed attitude towards the concept of</sup> sin, in the very best tradition of the established British documentary movement.

### Notes

The major sources for this chapter included:

The three volumes of Professor Asa Briggs's The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom;

Edward Pawley's BBC Engineering 1922 - 1972;

Keith Geddes's Broadcasting in Britain 1922 - 1972;

Adventure in Vision by John Swift;

Sound and Fury by Maurice Gorham;

The Biggest Aspidistra in the World by Peter Black.

The reader is also recommended to read the Appendices No.1-7 for background information on Lord Reith and the pioneering days of BBC Sound Broadcasting and Television.

1. As recommended by Lord Selsdon's Television Advisory Committee, the Baird and the Marconi-EMI systems were used during alternative weeks. It was soon evident however that the Baird system was markedly inferior, and had less potential for improvement. The official announcement of the exclusive adoption of the Marconi-EMI system inevitably followed in February 1937. Over-night Baird ceased to be a figure of importance on the television scene, though he continued to work on a variety of schemes until shortly before his death in 1946 at the age of 57. He was a man of undoubted vision, and a resourceful experimenter; at a time when established opinion held, quite correctly, that high-quality television was inherently impossible with contemporary resources, Baird had nevertheless demonstrated television of a sort. As a result, he was hailed by the Press and the lay public as a great inventor, and embarked on a decade of euphoric improvisation, mistakenly believing that his methods could be refined to produce high-quality pictures. But the scientific facts were against him, and his unwillingness to accept them, which in the short term had operated in his favour, in the long term proved his undoing.

The success of the Marconi-EMI system was primarily due to the development of the Emitron camera, but equally significant was the shrewdness with which the engineers chose the basic constants of the system. Many features of the 405-line standard have since been universally adopted, whilst the standard itself, though obsolescent continued to give good service into the 1970s.

2. In May 1934, the Postmaster-General appointed a Television Committee, under the Chairmanship of Lord Selsdon to advise him on "the merits of the several systems"; in practice, this meant the Marconi-EMI and Baird systems. Roughly £10,000,000 was at stake in the television war, as manufacturers were fighting for the supremacy of the ether. The Committee after a thorough investigation of technical progress in this country, and also in the USA and Germany, reported in January 1935. It recommended that a service be



instituted by the BBC, with Baird and EMI equipments to be used alternatively for a trial period. It decreed that "the definition should not be inferior to a standard of 240-lines and 25 pictures per second" (Report of the Television Committee para. 56) and that both transmissions should be readily usable by a single receiver. The Report though cautious, advised positive action. The Committee did not feel it wise to embark immediately on any attempt to create a network of stations covering the whole country, because new discoveries in the medium would inevitably lead to modifications during the early years. They did, however, feel that the first step towards such a general service "should be taken now".

Professor Briggs writing in The Golden Age of Wireless, p.593, Vol.2 of The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, says: "By the time the Selsdon Committee reported early in 1935 EMI had developed its system to the point where it could give demonstrations on a standard of 405-lines and 50 pictures per second... The doom of Baird was anticipated in September 1935 when the BBC finally closed down the old 30-line broadcasts."

Alexandra Palace was opened in 1873 and lasted only a fortnight before it was gutted by fire. The present version was re-built in 1875.

3. BBC Television Programme Window on the World November 7, 1961, See Appendix 9.

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of BBC Television in November 1961, Robert Barr edited a special programme called Window on the World. It told the story of BBC Television from November 1936 to November 1961 through the voices of the people behind the scenes and on the screens during that period - the people who helped to create the world's first television service. The programme was produced by Laurence Gilliam and Alan Burgess, the narrators were Leslie Mitchell and Richard Dimbleby.

4. See Appendix 8 Transcript of Joan Miller interview in the BBC-TV programme Window on the World.
5. Radio Times: Television Supplement: 19 March, 1937.
6. John Swift: Adventure in Vision: p.100.
7. Gerald Cock: Transcript of interview: Window on the World. See Appendix 9.
8. Douglas Birkinshaw (Ibid). See Appendix 10.

#### The Re-opening

It is advisable to consult Appendix 89 throughout this section for details of BBC-TV staff during this period. The war had



inevitably brought about a number of changes in high level BBC personnel. Mr.F.W.Ogilvie, who had succeeded Sir John Reith (later Lord Reith) as Director-General on 1 October 1938, resigned in January 1942. On 26 January 1942, Sir Cecil Graves and Mr.R.W.Foot were appointed Joint Directors-General, but Graves resigned in June 1943, and Foot was given the appointment of sole Director-General on the same day that Mr.W.J.Haley (later Sir William) became Editor-in-Chief. In March 1944 Haley became Director-General where he remained until June 1952. Sir Ian Jacob took office as Haley's successor in December 1952. He in turn was succeeded by Mr.H.Carlton-Greene (later Sir Hugh) in 1959.

9. See Appendix 22: Report of the Television Committee 1943: Sections 14-17.
10. Television Committee Report: Section 16.
11. Maurice Gorham: Sound and Fury: See Appendix 23.
12. Sir William Haley was a journalist, with the same care for the BBC's integrity as Lord Reith. Yet his was a more flexible and innovating mind which guided the BBC's output into far wider channels. To Haley was due the three-fold structure: The Light Programme, which describes itself, but in fact had many features on current affairs and induced millions of people to listen to good plays; the Home Service, complete in itself and drawing life from the Regions; and the Third Programme - Sir William's own project - which started in September 1946, and which, for a minority audience, brought a constant flow of all that is best, new and old, in music, literature, drama and talks to those (and they were many thousands) who could appreciate it. To Sir William's foresight also must be credited much of the gathering strength of the television service when it re-opened after the war.
13. Maurice Gorham: Sound and Fury: For his description of Alexandra Palace and his staff see Appendix 24.
14. Ibid - Appendix 25 for Gorham's description of the first year of the Television Service. Note also Gorham's concern for the pay and prospects of his staff - he was constantly trying to raise their grades.
15. The Daily Telegraph: June 1947: BBC Written Archives file. By the end of 1947 there were over 30,000 sets licensed.
16. The Daily Mirror: 16 August, 1947: The Observer of 3 August 1947 had this to say: "The great expectations with which television was resumed over a year ago are now sadly diminished. Its output of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours a day on seven days a week is equal to its pre-war achievement, but neither



technically nor artistically is there any sign of advance. The equipment which the devoted cameramen nurse so carefully at Alexandra Palace is the much worn pre-war stuff, the lighting is still early primitive, and such expected developments as colour and recorded vision are nowhere in sight." The Daily Mirror's report of 22 August 1947 offers a further insight into the Television Service at that time. "The BBC's poor relations are the staff of the Alexandra Palace Television station. Few of the television team are forty. Their chief, Maurice Gorham, is only forty-five. No one is in television for the money. Quite a few in fact, have deliberately forgone promotion and higher pay for the fun and excitement of exploring the unknown in entertainment. In the cramped, crowded studios, roasting under banks of lights, the engineers perform daily miracles in keeping the antiquated equipment in action. More time is spent working out how to do the job than in actually doing it. Already a year after re-opening, the Palace of Youth is screening 150 minutes of entertainment daily. Soon the time will be increased - which means more opportunities for young writers, artists and technicians. There isn't much money but there is plenty of fun!"

17. Maurice Gorham: See Appendix 26.
18. Val Gielgud: Years in a Mirror: See also Appendix 27 for the full explanation and note Gielgud's criticism that Television "cried up its wares too soon and too loudly." See also Appendix 55 'Television Drama'.
19. Memorandum from Sir William Haley to Maurice Gorham 27 April 1945: See also Appendix 28 for complete memorandum and Appendix 54 'Integration of Sound and Television Drama'.
20. Gorham: Sound and Fury.
21. See Appendix 64 for additional technical information on cameras, dollies, lenses, etc. for 1946.
22. See Peter Black's The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, p.157.
23. Caroline Lejeune, Observer newspaper, 10 April, 1949. See also Appendix 29 for the complete article.
24. The Sunday Times (1950) 'Mr. Television':  
 "He has no recreations. He reads nothing but scripts, letters and memoranda. Six days a week he is at his desk before 9.30 a.m. Seven days a week he stays on the job a passionate enthusiasm extending to the smallest detail. Within the limits of his vision he is a perfectionist. He 'lives on his nerves' and has been a sick man intermittently for years.... His subordinates say that he is a milder man since he lost his ulcer, but he still uses a professional ruthlessness of which he is rather naively proud. There is



no rancour in him as a man; rather a quick response to affection; but he believes in severity as an instrument of policy. "I think I get results by using the whip. There is no place in this job for kindness." By his fervid zeal he has brought the Television Service up from the status of a toy to the status of a nationwide service operating with the reliability of sound radio. But the pioneering days are almost over; there is not much life left in the Johnsonian criterion: "Sir it is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all." It is almost impossible to consider British Television apart from Cecil McGivern. Although he stands only third in the hierarchy of the BBC-TV Service - after the Director George Barnes and the Assistant Director, R.C. McCall, yet he, if anyone is Mr. Television." (Robert Barr Papers)

25. Cecil McGivern Contrast (Spring) 1962.
26. Between December 1949 and August 1952 the BBC commissioned four high-powered transmitters, bringing television within reach of about 80% of the population. Over the next four years, seven medium-power stations were added, increasing coverage to 97%. These shared channels, already in use by the high-power stations, had their mutual interference minimised by radiating vertically polarised waves from some stations and horizontally polarised from others, by making some of the transmitting aerials slightly directional, and by arranging that nominally identical transmitter frequencies were, in fact, very slightly different; this difference could be chosen to ensure that the interference pattern on the screen was of minimum visibility. To link the various transmitters, the Post Office installed coaxial cables and microwave radio links, capable of carrying the necessary frequencies, equivalent to 750 telephone circuits. This 'simultaneous broadcasting' network was mostly two-way, so that outside broadcasts could be originated from all parts of the UK and programmes produced in regional studios for national distribution.
27. This writer appeared in fact with his puppets on one of these programmes in November 1957. The Producer was Cliff Michelmore and the Editor of the series was Mrs. Joanne Symons.
28. Peter Black The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, p.154-155.
29. Television News and information was for a long time, like the rest of television, a second-hand medium. The development of Television news suffered from the immense prestige of BBC radio news. Right up until 1955 the news on television was sound only. It was then followed by a newsreel directly copied in format from the cinema newsreels. So from the start there was a tension in television journalism, which still worries its practitioners, between words which are seen as the real business of journalism, and pictures, which are



clearly a necessity of the medium, but are in some way tarred with the show-biz brush of the movies. It was not until Hugh Greene's arrival that things began to change, and Stuart Hood's 'advances' in presentation and content became policy. As Peter Black recalls: "Michael Peacock, then in outside broadcasts, Donald Baverstock, whose star was soaring with Tonight, and Ian Atkins, then a senior drama producer, were briefed to investigate the difficulties and opportunities of television news. Their eighty-page report represented the views of the first generation of television men to be available for executive responsibility. Apart from offering News their experience in more energetic presentation, they ridiculed its news values, its language, its newsreaders - "it is full of platitudes masquerading as attitudes" - and, as Baverstock recalled, almost mocked it out of existence.... Greene saw as his first task the restoration of its freedom, and from the hour of his appointment news began to improve... Meanwhile, the news and current affairs men began to acquire dominating positions in the BBC. By 1964 Peacock was in charge of BBC2 and Baverstock of BBC1, under Stuart Hood as Controller of Programmes and Kenneth Adam as Director of Television." (The Mirror in the Corner: p. 140.)

30. Memorandum from Presentation Editor to Head of TV Drama, 8 April 1953. BBC Written Archives.
31. Peter Black, The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, p.160.

## CHAPTER FOUR.

The Rise of the Dramatised-Documentary 1946-1955.

"In this age of social realism surely one of the first aims of documentary should be to examine the problem of Man's place in Society."

Paul Rotha<sup>1</sup>

(It was Cecil McGivern,<sup>2</sup> <sup>and he</sup> the former Radio features writer and producer <sup>who</sup> became Controller of Programmes for the BBC Television Service in 1948, after a brief but unfruitful spell as a film script-writer at Ealing Studios. His experience in the film world - <sup>(very brief)</sup> albeit brief - had given him some insight into the running of a visual medium, so at Basil Nicholls's suggestion he was offered the television job, which he gladly accepted, and over the next few years, his great gifts as an organiser were to be much in evidence. While television was still being run on a shoe-string it was McGivern who in fact succeeded in laying down the real foundations of the Service as we know it today. But of far greater importance in the history of television documentary, is the fact, that along with his other duties McGivern guided the very small Documentary section at the BBC until he appointed Paul Rotha as head of the department in 1953. During that time, <sup>however & continued</sup> the real management of the group was in the very able hands of Robert Barr. The group was small and its output was limited when compared with other producing departments; but McGivern continued the traditional documentary policy - learned in his radio days - of producers, in most cases, being their own writers,



and this important decision was to have far reaching effects as will be shown later. McGivern also recognised, again from personal experience, that documentary requires adequate time both for research and for writing and he therefore protected it from the assembly-line pressures normally required of programmes by a regular television service. Even so, there was little that he could do about the lack of money.

Recruiting from radio, journalism and films, the Documentary unit made a name for itself by 1952 with such programmes as Mock Auction, Pilgrim Street and The Course of Justice. In particular writers like Robert Barr, Duncan Ross, and Caryl Doncaster developed a form of story-documentary using professional actors and dramatised scenes, often linked with film insertions. From the very beginning, these programmes which tackled real-life subjects of social concern were extremely popular with the increasing number of television viewers.

For several years after the war the dramatised-documentary was not only the most creative, but the only truly original writing being undertaken for television. For as far as Drama, as opposed to Documentary, was concerned, little had been done to create a new television form and the BBC had lagged some way behind American television in this respect. In New York for example, writers like Paddy Chayevsky, Reginald Rose and Rod Serling, three leading television playwrights, had been forging new patterns for the Drama eminently suited to the television medium, whilst in Britain, Drama had clung for too long to its theatrical origins as if afraid to use the special advantages which television had to offer. But slowly it began to undergo a change largely due to the work and

influence of the writers in the Documentary Section. In order to do this successfully it had to evolve an entirely new structure - just as cinema had had to before it - and a new attitude towards its raw material. It was felt that television drama should be taken from life in a more direct way than its theatrical counterpart; that it should draw its subject matter from the contemporary life of the nation and even take its ideas from the daily press. People, the world over, are all fascinated by the lives and work of their fellow men and the complex chains of organisations and bodies, private or public, which affect them at every turn. Very quickly it was realised that there are more fascinating stories in the lives of apparently quite ordinary people than in most fiction, and television is an excellent medium for telling them, for it has the intimacy and power to explain and make exciting subjects which, at first sight, might seem dull and obscure.

As with a radio feature then, a documentary was usually the project of one writer-producer, who was assigned a subject and expected to gather data and write a script in consultation with subject-matter experts, thereafter producing the programme 'live' or on film as the case may be. Since one of the aims of documentary was to present important information, a great deal of careful planning and hard work had to go into them to ensure their accuracy. For example Caryl Doncaster in her programme The New Canadians, on the post-war British emigration to Canada, actually sailed with over 600 of them, spent four weeks watching them settle down in their new country, and talked to earlier emigrants, some of whom had lived in Canada for as long as twenty or thirty years. She then returned on a boat with both disillusioned and satisfied new Canadians. From



this twelve thousand mile journey came the ideas and film material for an hour long programme on the lives and problems, dreams and ambitions of those British emigrants.

The total output of the Documentary Department was fairly small - averaging less than a programme a week - but this is understandable when one considers how great was the research required and how small in number the department was. What is unmistakable is their tremendous keenness and facility for hard work and their loyalty and devotion to the work of dramatising documentary at a time when it was just out of the question to do it all on film.

A programme was in fact a mixture of 'live' studio shows with actors - studio programmes with extensive film inserts - and the occasional complete, filmed programme. But so often it was a question of the time that was available and the money that could be spent.

An example of a 'live' studio show with only brief film inserts might be a documentary (dramatised) about a man recently discharged from Prison - Return to Living - again by Caryl Doncaster - which presented the problems of a former convict from his personal point of view. Such a programme would have a considerable audience appeal partly because of Miss Doncaster's skill in telling a moving story and partly because it presented important facts with a clear social message. Later\* an often-raised proposition will be discussed, namely that a fictionalised documentary is a conflict in terms, and that if it is to qualify as a documentary it must consist of real people and real situations; for the moment, however, it will be enough simply to consider further examples of the television documentary during the late 1940s.

Entirely different in subject, though similar in technique was

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\* See Chapter 'The Principles and Practice of Dramatised-Documentary.'

Dancers of Tomorrow which told the story of the first twenty-five years of the Sadler's Wells Ballet School in terms of the ambitions and training of one pupil.

A second type of documentary combined 'live' studio presentations with film shot on location, the film serving as a flexible outside-broadcast camera. Programmes of this type were more descriptive than those produced in the studio, and often approached journalistic reporting. Yet they differed from television Talks with film inserts in that they were fictionalised and often used actors, whereas Talks naturally enough were basically expository and built around experts themselves. One of these, by Robert Barr, called Medical Officer of Health, used an imaginary smallpox epidemic in a fictitious small town, to describe the work of a local health officer. Cameras went to a number of such communities to create a convincing composite setting for the filmed sections of the programme.

There was also the Special Enquiry series (produced by Norman Swallow) which using a mixture of documentary and journalism, <sup>to</sup> investigated contemporary problems of major public concern in Britain, such as illiteracy, conservation, roads, housing and so on, with occasionally a lighter touch, for example, a look at fashion!

Some programmes were entirely produced on film. There were for example London Town, About Britain, and About Europe which probed less deeply and recalled the original meaning of 'documentaire' as a travelogue. Also at this time and done on film were programmes such as Sunk Rock, a sixty-minute report on the life of an isolated lighthouse crew; Malta a visit to the Mediterranean island; and About Vienna, a view of Austria's capital city. These latter



programmes were in fact built around the personality of Richard Dimbleby who appeared in the film as both interviewer and guide and who would narrate off-screen the rest of the time.

Finally, and in some ways outstanding among the Department's productions there were the film studies of several modern British artists, including Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Walter Sickert and John Piper. The Sickert film for example, showed film clips of the artist made during his life time, matched recent film of some street scenes with his own paintings of them, and recreated the atmosphere of the old British Music Hall by matching his sketches of some theatre acts to appropriate music. Another film in the artist series, Black on White was based on the work of famous British cartoonists from William Hogarth and George Cruickshank to David Low, with Low appearing in person.

In terms of subject matter and treatment the documentary had to keep within the overall policy of fairness and impartiality demanded by the BBC. But although the rule of editorialising forbid hard-hitting exposés of controversial topics, it did not preclude taking a stand on subjects like food cleanliness, aid for the disabled, or dishonest auctions. Nor did it prevent the objective examination of such sensitive subjects as the National Health Service (Health for the People), unmarried mothers (Women Alone), or Religion in Britain. And over the years the documentary writer-producers through their sensitive treatment of these controversial matters, may well have helped to change for the better public opinion on these issues.

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The first television documentary<sup>3</sup> of all was Germany Under Control which was written and produced by Robert Barr and was transmitted on 18 September, 1946. Its subject matter was the setting up of the control organisation and its initial functioning, and it was mostly filmed. It did include however a number of 'live' scenes produced in the studio.

Germany Under Control was followed on 6 October by I Want to be an Actor, again written by Robert Barr but produced by Michael Barry. This was a story based on the two years' course at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and apart from the artists, headed by Dame Irene Vanbrugh, those taking part were Sir Kenneth Barnes with students and former students of the Academy. A replica of the RADA theatre was built in the studio and the viewer was taken behind the scenes of the acting profession. Barr followed this some weeks later with a programme called Chorus Girl.

The production which in many ways first showed the path along which dramatised-documentary might advance to maturity was I Want to be a Doctor, by Michael Barry. This production involved Barry in weeks of research and the co-operation of the medical and scientific organisations. It was obvious to Barry that the long medical schooling would quickly lose the interest of the average viewer, so he attempted, successfully, to convey something of the tradition that the medical student inherits from his great profession. He did this by drawing from the history of medicine the sense of adventure underlying man's fight for knowledge through the centuries.

A good example of straight documentary as opposed to dramatised-documentary came in July, 1948, when Robert Barr presented his Report on Germany. It was acknowledged as first-rate factual reporting,



telling of the recovery of Western Germany under Anglo-American control. Barr went to Germany for the purpose with G. del Strother of the BBC's film unit and once there they hired German cameramen on the spot. They toured Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover, the farming lands of Nieder-Sachsen and Bavaria, the 'target towns' of Cologne, Essen, Dusseldorf, Dortmund, Gelsenkirchen and the rest, and the southern towns of Munich and Frankfurt. Because of the location of the subject matter, the greater part of the programme had to be on film. For once, studio action - interview and talk - was interpolated between film sequences, instead of vice-versa, but the result was an authoritative, documented survey which told of the situation up to the previous twenty-four hours.

Robert Barr,<sup>4</sup> the 'father' of television documentary, was metaphorically blown into broadcasting by the 1940 Blitz. As a reporter on a Fleet Street daily he collected nightly stories of heroism and tragedy during the winter of 1940-41. Because of censorship the paper could not print all of them. But they were first-class propaganda material for overseas broadcasting and Barr accepted an offer from Laurence Gilliam to write a radio series Marching On, and to launch it he picked script-writers from amongst his journalist friends. In 1943 he became a War Correspondent, but his war ended rather abruptly outside Magdeburg two days before the end of fighting, in a car smash when he broke seven ribs. In 1946 he joined the re-opening Television Service. He reported to Alexandra Palace on a Wednesday and produced his first show - an hour's dance band music - on Saturday that same week! Today he considers that his contribution to television documentary is bound up with his journalism. That all the best stories are in

fact 'human' stories and must be presented in 'human' terms if they are to come across.

"I like to choose a subject," he says, "which I feel is half-way home with the public before I start; that way you know you'll have their interest."

He soaks himself in the atmosphere and statistics on his chosen subject and then gets the drama from the facts. He uses actors because as he admits, "a real person is the product of 30 years of coalmining or whatever, but he can't show you the process by which it came about".

The story of Robert Barr's early life reads rather like a dramatised-documentary itself. At the age of fourteen he was writing boys fiction for Thomas-Leng (Rover, Wizard, Adventure) which proved very lucrative, since he was still at school at the time. At sixteen he was a junior reporter on a weekly newspaper, and as he was still at school, he was employed to cover evening meetings, police rounds, and to write odds and ends. His education showed a bias towards science and chemistry so a job was obtained for him in the Scottish Laboratories of British Dyestuffs Corporation. Here he was trained in colour chemistry and colour analysis. The laboratory was in fact engaged in analysing and matching the predominate German dyestuffs and when the firm was merged into Imperial Chemical Industries Barr was already second-in-charge of the laboratory and was chosen by ICI for a special course of training. This meant studying at Manchester and taking a B.Sc. at the University. For family reasons he was not able at that time to leave home so instead he decided to leave 'colour chemistry' and make journalism his career.

Between the age of nineteen and twenty-three he served as a



reporter on the Glasgow Bulletin and the Glasgow Herald. While on a story about the Scottish Film Industry he gave the director 'a few ideas' and promptly got a contract to write a film himself. Through this small incident he became friendly with a cameraman and suggested that they should go into the newsreel business. This they did. "My job to get the stories, his to take the pictures." They got an exclusive and sent it to Paramount. It topped their next newsreel and they offered to supply them with film stock. They would shoot it and send it off to the laboratory. Barr found that his cameraman-partner was a good technician but lacked the temperament for 'quick bustling newsreel work'. Barr learnt to work the camera himself - a Bell and Howell - and got a string of exclusives for Paramount. One idea which came his way seemed to warrant more than newsreel treatment so they decided to do a 'documentary' and Barr directed. Others followed. All this time he was still working on the Glasgow Bulletin, enjoying by his own account "a leisurely existence". But then C.B.Cochran brought a show to Glasgow. Barr interviewed him at the Central Station Hotel and wrote a 'colour piece' for his paper. Next day C.B. phoned the office and asked him to come around to his hotel. There he offered Barr a job in London on his publicity staff. He turned it down, but some months later thought better of it and wrote to Cochran to ask if the offer was still open and he replied by sending a first-class single ticket from Glasgow to London.

"I packed in my job on the Bulletin and handed the newsreel side over to the cameraman - who promptly lost the business - and came down to London."

He was just twenty-three years old. He joined Cochran's publicity chief, Major E.O.Leadlay and started to do publicity for Cochran,

Noel Coward, Walter Hackett, Marion Lorne, Frith Shephard and H.M.Tennant. He took shows on tour, covered West End first nights, but most important of all during this time was his close friendship with Walter Hackett, "who taught me how to write for the theatre and advised me to sit in on every production from the first reading of a script until final dress rehearsal". So he 'sat in' with the best London producers through long weary readings and rehearsals - including Barrie's The Boy David, all the time having long sessions with Hackett in the wings, when he would explain acting and audience reaction! All this only made Barr want to get back to writing, so he resigned from the publicity life and decided to write a play himself. He thought a short play would be best to start with - a radio play - The Oracle. He sent it to the BBC on the advice of a friend. It was accepted and produced by Laurence Gilliam. He wrote another and this too was accepted by Features and broadcast by Robert Kemp. Then the Daily Mirror offered him a job as a feature writer, which he accepted. He was now twenty-six. For a year he was a feature writer on the Mirror and then at the end of 1938 there was an editorial change on the Daily Mail and the new editor asked Barr if he would care to cross the street, at a salary of nine guineas a week. He accepted and for two years he was both reporter and feature writer on the paper. He also wrote two more radio pieces for the BBC. When feature output on radio began to go up in 1941 - Stones Cry Out, Sinews of War, Civilians War - Gilliam proposed that his name should be put forward for one of the BBC staff jobs in the Features Department. On 26 June an offer followed from the General Establishment Officer for the BBC, namely a post in the Features and Drama Department as



a Script Writer at a salary of £580 p.a. (later raised to £660). By this time newspapers were down to four pages anyway because of war time rationing - so Barr accepted - reporting for duty to Gilliam at Bedford College on the 5 August. His duties were to include the writing of scripts under the direction of the Assistant Director of Features Department and any other duties connected with the features programmes reasonably required of him by the Corporation.

'Any other duties' was later to mean that Barr would find himself a War Correspondent for the BBC crossing the Channel to Normandy with Eisenhower and the Rhine with Churchill.

After the war some documentary writers were to find great difficulty in transferring from sound to television because they had learnt to put everything into terms of sound. Good television documentary depends very much upon the visual naturally, with the fewest possible words - though more than the cinema requires - and the minimum of sound effects to add atmosphere.

It is notable that the radio documentary writers who were the first to succeed in television were invariably those who, like Robert Barr had been able to include documentary film-making in their early experience. Duncan Ross,<sup>5</sup> the other great name in this genre, was just such another man. He was a witty and amusing talker as well as a prolific writer.

Born and educated in Scotland he started to learn theatre management in 1928 as assistant at the St. Andrews Square Theatre, Edinburgh. Three years later he became the youngest manager to Gaumont British and was appointed to several cinemas in turn - later he ran the publicity for six Scottish theatres and wrote about

fourteen stage shows for them. After being persistently rejected by the Forces in the early years of the war, he joined Paul Rotha in 1941 as a writer and producer of films for the Services and the Government. He wrote and produced over forty war-time documentary films, and in 1944 was admitted as a full member of the Screenwriters' Association.

*The way the word 'script' was used*  
 In December 1947, Duncan Ross was appointed the first staff script-writer for the Television Service - and possibly the first full-time staff script-writer for any television organisation in the world.

He began his writing for television with a programme called London After Dark and then after a few months wrote a dramatised-documentary series to explain police-court life and the work of the Metropolitan magistrate. In this he had the full co-operation of a former Magistrate, Claud Mullins, who also appeared in the programmes, and the collaboration of a brilliant producer by the name of Ian Atkins. This series, which was called Magistrate's Court,<sup>6</sup> was based on factual police reports; a replica of Marlborough Street court was built in the studio and film was used for outdoor scenes where necessary. Duncan Ross, who believed in using as little dialogue as possible - that pictures, rather than words should tell the story - went on to write a television classic.

The Course of Justice series, the work for which he is best known in the dramatised documentary field will be considered in greater detail later.

Ross's investigation in September 1951, into the Loch Ness monster was a major inquiry which carried him miles and into many odd corners. Whilst preparing a documentary on road transport, he



travelled with the night lorry drivers along the Great North Road. Nothing satisfied him except that he should see at first hand and report accordingly. Ross was a natural writer and delighted in providing the necessary raw material for a good documentary. But he took his time. Barr says that his scripts were always expertly written and practically a production in themselves.

It was Robert Barr in fact who had suggested to Duncan Ross that he apply for the post of documentary writer and Script Supervisor when the post was first advertised. "Possibly because I was the only person to tackle it for so little money," wrote Ross, "the BBC appointed me to concentrate purely on the problems of television writing"..

The names of the documentary team which Robert Barr led at this time included Stephen McCormack, Caryl Doncaster, Norman Swallow, Tony de Lotbinière, Authur Swinson, Leonard Brett, Gilchrist Calder and Duncan Ross. By the time Ross had written his first documentary in 1948 Robert Barr had written and/or produced the following programmes:

18.9.46	<u>Germany Under Control</u>	Script & Commentary
6.10.46	<u>I Want to be an Actor</u>	Script
22.10.46	<u>Weather Story</u>	Script & Production
4.11.46	<u>Confidence Tricks</u>	Script & Production
11.11.46	<u>Night at the Inn</u>	Production
9.1.47	<u>Shipwreck</u>	Script & Production
15.1.47 to 20.8.47	Twenty productions of <u>Picture Page</u>	
26.1.47	<u>Mock Auction</u>	Script & Production
21.3.47	<u>I Want to be a Chorus Girl</u>	Script & Production

1.4.47	<u>April the First</u>	Script & Production
29.5.47	<u>Country Magazine</u>	Production
26.6.47	<u>Armed Robbery</u>	Script & Production
22.7.47	<u>The Case of Helvig Delbo</u>	Script & Production
11.8.47	<u>Crisis</u>	Production
29.9.47	<u>British Justice</u>	Adaptation & Production
13.12.47	<u>The Story of the BBC</u>	Script & Production
5.1.48	<u>Searchlight - No.1</u>	Editing & Production
24.1.48 to 21.8.48	Eight ' <u>Saturday Night Story</u> '	Production
20.2.48	<u>Searchlight - No.2</u>	Editing & Production
12.2.48	<u>It's Your Money They're After</u>	Script & Production
8.4.48	<u>UNESCO</u>	Script & Production
24.5.48	<u>Atomic Energy</u>	Production
9.7.48	<u>Report on Germany</u>	Script & Production
1.8.48	<u>Report on Germany (film)</u>	Script & Production

The following letter<sup>7</sup> to Cecil McGivern from Robert Barr will serve to illustrate the creative process involved in thinking up the ideas and planning future programmes.

"From: Robert Barr  
Subject: Oct.Nov.Dec. Schedules  
To: H.Tel.P.

I have now booked three 45/60 minute spaces on the Mondays of weeks 40, 45 and 49 (i.e. the first weeks in Oct-Nov-Dec 1950) and two 20/30 spaces in Oct and Nov.

First let's deal with the two 20/30 spaces.

Mathematics Made Easy: I have had a report from Arthur Clarke on the Leicester schoolmaster who explains mathematics by models. Clarke also took some Leica pictures of the models and the schoolmaster, which are at present being developed and printed. When they are ready I will send them to you with the report.



Briefly, he demonstrates by simple physics (and not by mathematics) that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is indeed equal to the sum of the squares etc.; and that the area of a circle is indeed  $\pi r^2$ ; and so on to other proofs. He does this by filling the areas under examination with coloured lights and then decanting them off to fill the areas prescribed by the formula.

The schoolmaster has also had film-strips made of both his simple and advanced demonstrations, so there should be plenty of material for us.

Clarke says that there are two programmes in it but, for the moment, we can settle for one.

Rocket Flight: I have received a number of letters from viewers suggesting that our "Asking for the Moon" programme was too light-hearted. They wanted to know more about the type of rockets that will take us to the Moon. I can provide a serious and exciting programme on this subject if it is wanted. There are ten reels of excellent rocket experiments made from secret German films captured at the rocket research station at Peenemunde. It traces the history of the rocket from the earliest experiments including very exciting failures, mis-fires and premature explosions. All sorts of weird rockets some with eight fins, some that spin slowly in the air, some that shed fuel tanks, etc. in the air, and some wonderful shots of remote-controlled rockets hitting their targets. With very little cutting room work we could get an exciting and instructive thirty minutes out of this with Arthur Clarke doing the commentary.

Now for the three main programmes.

1. Stalag Nord: As you know, Guy Morgan was a POW and wrote the prison scenes for 'The Captive Heart'. He has a very fine true story which would provide a plot. A prison camp is a good, well-defined setting for a television show. Also, he has a very fine true story which would provide a plot, against which we can play the life of the POW's. This is good documentary in the sense that we have in Guy a sensitive, observant ex-POW who is also a good script-writer - and he can give us his story of Stalag Nord.

Alternatively:

2. The Cross and the Arrow: This is a book by Albert Maltz and I would like to adapt it as a television documentary. It is the story of life in war-time Germany governed by the nightly raids by the RAF. It is a perfect shape and a tremendously strong story.

It is set in a remote German village in which there is a hidden armaments factory and over which each night the RAF bombers fly on their way to the big towns. Each night the siren goes, each night the people stir in their



beds and listen to the drone of the bombers passing over, each night they pass safely overhead and the villagers relax again and go to sleep.

One night, as the bombers drone over, a fire starts in a field next to the factory. As it develops it forms a huge flaming arrow pointing directly at the hidden factory. The SS Guards race to the field. The saboteur is seen in the light of the flames. He is shot in the stomach and collapses. The flames are doused. The bombers drone unheedingly overhead. The wounded saboteur is taken to hospital.

The story begins as the man, Willi Wegler, is being wheeled still unconscious from the operating theatre. The Gestapo man waits to question him. The Doctor says he will not recover consciousness for six hours. To try to wake him may in fact kill him.

The first part of the story takes place in that six hours as the life story of Wegler is uncovered by the Gestapo. They interview his work-mates, his bunk-mates, his mistress; they send for his records, have reports by the Party Section Leader, they trace his life back to the young soldier of the 1914 war.

Every piece of evidence they uncover builds the picture of a good German. He is a good worker, has never said a word out of place, never been suspect. The man becomes an enigma. And he is still unconscious, the Doctor sitting by his bedside striving to keep him alive because now they realise that only Wegler - gentle, docile, hardworking Wegler - knows why he did this....

Shakespeare: This, I think, is an important 45 minute documentary. Through S.E.Reynolds, Alan Keen will give us access to all documents, etc. Reynolds says that Keen is a colourful character and a good speaker and could act as narrator himself. I think you should skim through this book and read the Appendix. I think that this is a most important documentary, and that we should consider filming it off the tube for historical purposes. It also has the elements of a first class detective story. If these discoveries are indeed in Shakespeare's writing then this is a most important documentary." 8

In 1953 George Campey writing in the Glasgow Evening Citizen drew this comparison of the personalities and programmes of Barr and Ross. He writes:

"This last year or so has seen more documentaries on television. And as the Service expands - and income grows they will increase. There has been no better writing for television than Course of Justice and their merit has been recognised. Robert Barr is also a writer,



but his work as a producer is inclined to overshadow the fact. Like Ross, he has turned to the law as a reflection of life. He was responsible for Pilgrim Street - six stories about a London Police Station. The two sets of programmes brought an interesting comparison and at the same time showed an affinity between the two men. Ross reported his scenes faithfully to give a sense of drama, the comedy and the pathos behind the dock. In his production of Pilgrim Street Barr was equally faithful and accurate - to reveal that life in a police station, far from being a round of excitement, can be deadly boring. These two men have in common a certain fanaticism for the documentary business. They spring from virtually the same earth. Barr was born in Glasgow - Ross in Craigneuk, Lanarkshire. There the common ground ends. "I cannot," says Barr, "think back to a time when I did not know the name of Duncan Ross". The fact is that you cannot easily overlook Ross. The dynamic quality of his writing finds an expression in the man himself. He looks rugged and capable. He talks as he writes, with vehemence, and yet mindful of the lights and shades.... but if you have anything to say, Ross the reporter, the observer, the compiler of human documents, will listen with Boswellian acuteness....

Because of his long association with films Ross sees their use as an integral part of documentary in television. Barr is a believer in the immediacy of the 'live' broadcast with the development of back-projection, in which film scenes provide the background to action, they can meet half-way across the bridge. It is good for the Television Service and ultimately the viewer, that each man has an individual approach to the documentary." 9

The one quality common to documentary writing in all these outlets, film, radio and television, was skill in research; the ability to find the vital facts and the flair for choosing authentic people and dramatic settings. And there was no better training for this than journalism.

Writing for documentary or 'actuality' programmes is perhaps the most attractive of all television writing, especially for those with a journalistic flair. One advantage is that producers are fully aware that much time must be spent on them if they are to be informative and worthwhile. This does not mean leisure to write, because documentary must usually be synonymous with topicality,

but the writer shares the slight benefit of breathing space that the weekly magazine writer has over the daily newspaper man. Reputations can be made with a play or two, and a comedy writer can share a degree of fame with his partner or partners, but it has been the leading documentary writers in television who consistently over the years have received a great deal of appreciation and praise for their work from critics and public alike. When a writer really does have something to say he can express himself as well in documentary as in drama - and best of all perhaps in a combination of the two. Opinion and point of view, springing from study, research and knowledge will give a television documentary the authenticity and edge which are its real characteristics.

Of all the Departments under his control, it was Documentary which pre-occupied Cecil McGivern the most for he firmly believed that the documentary form - a development of radio features - was ideally suited to the intimate nature of the television screen and would in time provide a genuine form of writing, peculiar to that medium, in the future. Yet it is ironic that McGivern of all people would eventually 'kill the thing he loved' by his appointment of Paul Rotha as Head of the Department - a man who only wanted to make programmes on film! - against the almost total opposition of the rest of the documentary group and in the face of such talents as Robert Barr. The reasons for this decision will be shown later.

It is important to remember that throughout this time - in fact from the moment the BBC first transmitted a regular Television Service in 1936 - television was very much the younger brother of the powerful and important Radio Service of the BBC. It was not only



the little brother but it was also the poor relation. Many intelligent and able men inside the Corporation felt that television had little future, although there were indeed some far-sighted men, who from the beginning did realise its potential. In those far-off days there were very few viewers. Visual reception was poor and the organisation necessary to run a television service did not exist. Enthusiasts from Sound were drafted into the Service and others, particularly in the then small field of drama, were brought in from the theatre. It was not considered necessary that writers should be sought and trained especially for the new medium because, on the one hand there were radio writers, and by many television was considered to be little more than 'radio with pictures'; and on the other there was in existence a vast untapped body of existing drama material written for the theatre and available for direct transmission on the air.

As the audiences slowly grew, the Television Service was able to bring to them a selection of the greatest plays ever written in the English language, or translated into English. Now, when television began again, in June 1946, the situation reverted to what it had been seven years before. There were still many more existing plays to be performed than there were hours available of screen time. The producers who came back to serve in television were by and large the same men of the theatre, or refugees from radio that had started the Service in 1936. In the first six years of the re-opened Service there are on record only two original plays written for television.<sup>10</sup> No wonder that Documentary was so highly successful as a unit during this same period. Two things were becoming only too apparent. First that you cannot go on

indefinitely reproducing the standard plays written for the theatre for an audience always wanting some new things, and secondly, that with each year that went by, more and more stage plays of lesser quality than the first or second rank were not worth reproducing at all.

To meet the growing demand new writers would have to be found who would work closely to the requirements of television technique and feed the new young and excited producers who were beginning to join the Service.

What the Drama Department decided to do about this state of affairs must be left to a later chapter, suffice it to say, that as they were the biggest users of this kind of material they were the first to appreciate this fact and to decide that something had to be done about it.

Cecil McGivern for his part knew only too well that Sound had developed the BBC Feature Department, a group of people writing directly for radio. Some of these people - and they were some of the best of Laurence Gilliam's Department - were not writers in the normal sense of the word at all. That is, they had not written for other media. They were people with the ability to write, but their first writing was done for radio. They applied their writing ability to a medium which they had come to know from experience. The medium was young, and they were young. They grew up together. What they put on paper was inevitably right for the machine. McGivern more than anyone recognised that what television desperately needed was young people, with the ability to write, who were growing up at the same time as television was growing up. He wrote:



"Television needs writers. Needs them as the cinema needs them. Needs them more than sound radio needs them. Needs them so that Television can grow in full stature, can begin to cease to look like an imitation of other media. It needs them in drama and documentary, needs them all the time, and needs them now." 11

Of Duncan Ross, viewed retrospectively as one of the pioneer writers of television, McGivern recalls:

"Duncan came to television from documentary films. After a few weeks studying television he produced his first television script, a documentary on the GPO. In my opinion it was unsatisfactory. It contained a stream of short sequences of stamps, coins, exhibits, and all the rest of it, with some dramatised scenes thrown in and the sound column stiff with commentary. I handed the script back to him saying that that was not television. Ross left the room hurt, puzzled and probably angry. Later he agreed that all he had achieved was 'illustrated radio'. He had now to force his mind along different lines, to change completely his mental approach - and that is a difficult purgatory to go through. He succeeded. His next scripts were television, good television, written with reference to continuous action, to a definite number of sets in the studio, to a pattern for several cameras. They were written about human beings, about the strange characters in a small London hotel for people in the 'show' business ('Elvorelli's'), for the unfortunate people who appear day after day in Magistrate's Courts, for a medium which thrives on intimacy, on humanity, on personality. He used film only occasionally and as a useful adjunct when technically it was difficult to get along without it. But he brought to his work the screenwriter's habit of thinking straight away in terms of pictures, of the composition on a screen. He brought the meticulous care with which the film man takes over his camera-shots and set-ups. His present work is an important contribution to the growth of television." 12

McGivern was always personally concerned in the work of the Documentary group and above all to see that it "remained a section on its own" and was not absorbed by Talks or Drama, and he stated this publicly on many occasions.

The actual problem of laying down a foundation for television scripts as opposed to helping certain producers on an ad hoc basis had not been established in the early days. It will be shown

later how these foundations were laid. No one had been appointed - until Duncan Ross arrived - to study the problems, lay-outs, limitations, requirements etc. of writing for television. It seems absurd now as Ross himself said, "rather like building a battle ship and not worrying about where the fuel is to come from".<sup>13</sup> Even today few people seem to realise, that every occupation in television is ancilliary to putting a script on the air. "One idea I would love to kill", wrote Ross, "is the illusion that television writing began with Paddy Chayevsky. His collected plays weren't published till 1955. The drama I saw in America in 1952 was lamentable." For Ross the most important thing in television was the script - the blue print for everything that is produced - "Nobody can start a damn thing till they get a script to work on", was a familiar saying of his.<sup>14</sup>

Robert Barr, of course, felt much the same way, though he started his career in television as a Producer not as a writer.

He was in Germany working as a Correspondent when he got a signal to say that he was no longer with Radio but with Television. He had applied for a job as a Producer in March 1946 mentioning his early film, newspaper and Features experience. Originally he had hoped to return to Fleet Street after the war but with paper rationing still enforced the chance of getting employment was very slim. He badly wanted to get back to writing - not so much in radio where too much description was required - but in television where there was the added advantage that 'the viewers could see it for themselves'.

Barr's first production for Television was Germany Under Control which he wrote whilst his overseas experience was still fresh in his mind. It was not only the first documentary written for television



but the first programme of its kind anywhere in the world.

In those days Cecil Madden the Programme Organiser made up the schedules and as television was only on the air twice daily, once in the afternoon and again in the evening, Barr would do at least one programme a day. This was anything from a cookery demonstration, a song-and-dance act, to the occasional play. He recalls some of the problems already mentioned above:

"These were the days before turret lenses and zooms. Our cameras had a single fixed wide-angle lens and if you wanted a close-up you had to go in and when you were in you could only come out again, you couldn't cut to another camera, because your camera that was in close-up would be in shot.... and it was a regular thing for a camera to go down during a show too!" 15

During his first year Barr was doing documentaries all on his own - writing and producing them. And they were becoming more and more popular so it was decided that he should get some help. Barr also looked after a magazine programme called London Town helped by Stephen McCormack and Richard Dimbleby. This show led to About Britain and by now the staff included Peter Hunt, Stephen Hearst and Caryl Doncaster. Barr was now producing and writing a documentary a month as well as looking after the current affairs programmes. Then Duncan Ross who had been with Paul Rotha, was appointed by McGivern on Barr's recommendation, to the Documentary group. But according to Barr, Ross was always "very, very slow; his research was impeccable, but if you count up the number of scripts that he wrote in all the years he was at the BBC they won't work out to more than one a year - they've got to be good".<sup>16</sup> At this time Barr was writing, producing and directing and the team was growing too. Soon Ross paired up with Ian Atkins - the first television writer-producer team in the world - as Gil Calder

teamed up with Colin Morris later on.

Now the Documentary Group was responsible for both 'dramatised' and 'magazine' programmes. Special Enquiry which Norman Swallow and Tony de Lotbinière ran, was an example of the latter.

One of the things which Barr pressed for now was the use of more film. At first Producers were expected to draw on 'library' footage but invariably this was either not sufficient or too restricted. Gradually permission was granted for documentary producers to go out with Film Unit crews and direct film 'clips' but they were never entrusted with a film unit of their own. However once the principle of film was accepted the way was open for complete programmes on film and John Read was able to do his biographies of great artists like Sutherland and Moore.

When the Television Service re-started in 1946, Barr and his fellow producers simply worked for the Service and did every kind of programme item that came to hand. It was only by gradual stages that specialisation developed. In Barr's case this was documentary. From a single output it gradually developed into a section on its own so that in a year or two Cecil McGivern decided it should have its own Head. At the time a number of Radio men were surprised that it was not automatically offered to Laurence Gilliam, even though he might have declined to accept. One reason for this, as Bridson points out, was that television staff, "were bitterly resentful of the fact that a number of senior television appointments had recently been filled by radio personnel. To them radio represented the enemy, against which they tended to protect themselves by encouraging the theory that the two media were irreconcilable".<sup>17</sup> Reyner Heppenstall another Features man, supported this view and



felt that "experience in sound broadcasting was a positive disqualification and that Alexandra Palace would rather have people with no experience whatever".<sup>18</sup> Apparently the opposition to radio men came mainly from the former features producer himself, Cecil McGivern. For Gilliam this set-back is reported to have been "the bitterest experience of his career, indeed of his life".<sup>19</sup>

The position of Head of Documentary, whilst not being offered to Barr, was advertised, but without success. For a while Barr was asked to continue as acting Head, which he agreed to do for six months. If he did not apply himself for the job which he had after all been doing competently in the past, he did suggest John Grierson, with whom he had worked on a television programme on the work of UNESCO,<sup>20</sup> as a possible alternative. However as Grierson was only prepared to work on a part-time basis McGivern ruled him out. Eventually after several months delay Paul Rotha was appointed to the post in 1953. In Barr's opinion this was a mistake and he was to be proved right in a very short while. For the present only Duncan Ross appeared enthusiastic about McGivern's choice. *& McGivern also favoured Grierson's*

Barr handed over his office, his secretary and his filing system to Rotha, and from then on decided to concentrate his energies on being a producer, but this was not to remain the case for long.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It was certainly not in my mind at all to go to the BBC in the fifties," says Paul Rotha,<sup>21</sup> "and I was very surprised to be 'phoned one day by Cecil McGivern... to say that they had decided to form a Documentary Department which they had not done officially before, and would I be interested in becoming Head of this unit."

Apparently the offer was made to Rotha because of his great knowledge and experience of working on film but as soon as he had accepted the position McGivern warned him to "use as little film as possible" and to do as much of the work as he could in the studio. This naturally put Rotha at a disadvantage from the start.

He was delighted with the unit he took charge of however and was determined to maintain Documentary's independence over Drama and Talks. He considered his staff to be extremely loyal and hardworking with a spirit not unlike that developed by the Crown Film Unit during the war. And week after week he was proud to see his Department come second only to News Reels and always ahead of Drama in audience ratings.

The desirability of continuing to 'dramatise' subject matter in the studio became all the more necessary if there was to be a restriction on the use of film.

Rotha's knowledge of the film did enable him to seek out existing footage and incorporate this into new film series like The World is Ours and this was perhaps his outstanding contribution. He also arranged to exchange filmed material with European and Commonwealth countries but the difficulties were enormous and not very successful in the long term. All the time he was at the BBC Rotha tried to get a small film section attached to Documentary, as indeed Barr had tried before, but without success. Like all other Departments, Documentary was required to draw on the general



services of the Film Department's pool for cameramen and equipment but as Film Department was grossly over-worked at this time it was not a satisfactory arrangement.

Rotha, like Barr, did in fact manage to get some additional money - a floating fund of £1500 a year - with which he engaged the help of outside writers. (Barr had used this sum to allow his colleagues the occasional chance of putting on a production which was not 'box office' but if needs be, had the right to fail!) By getting one or two scripts written outside the BBC Rotha felt he could take the pressure off his staff who were already much over-worked, writing and producing a programme a month.

Rotha began to resent more and more the internal politics and the interference from above which the Corporation fostered. That and the embargo on film made things very difficult. Had it not been for the fact that he wanted so desperately to work again in documentary and that television offered him this chance, as well as a captive audience of many millions to whom he could address his social message, Rotha might never have accepted the job. As it was he believes they really did achieve a lot during the time he was at the BBC:

"without the work of our Unit you might not have had your Cathy Come Home or Edna's today. Plays of social comment like these are the best things in television in my opinion still. And it's interesting to ask how much they are due to the initiative which we started. Of course it has developed and come a long way since that time. We did not have the technical facilities for one thing which would have enabled us to turn in a Cathy - for one thing those plays were done on film, which, remember, I wasn't allowed to use." 21

In all Rotha was with the BBC from May 1953 to May 1955, then by order of the Director of Television, George Barnes, the Department was dissolved. Barnes told Rotha at the time, "the

trouble with you is that you know far too much about film and not nearly enough about television"<sup>22</sup> a fact that Rotha had never disguised.

Looking back Rotha sees the reasons for the closure to be firstly, jealousy from on high due to the success and loyalty of the Documentary Unit, and secondly the growing power of Talks under Grace Wyndham Goldie across the whole field of social and public affairs. There was just not room for both of them. When the end came some of the staff went to Drama, some to Talks, and some like Rotha simply resigned.

Robert Barr for his part blames Rotha for his mismanagement and the coming of Commercial Television as the fundamental causes of the disintegration of Documentary. Nearly everyone of worth was lured away to bigger and better contracts. Barr left the BBC himself for two years in 1955 to join an advertising agency as head of their television department though he did continue, very sensibly as it happens, to write and produce a certain number of programmes each year for the BBC. When it became obvious that Rotha could not manage on his own and Barr was told to assist him in the running of the Department <sup>again</sup> it was apparent to everyone that it must be only a matter of time before Rotha left. But as Barr recalls: I had to burn the house down to get rid of the tenant". Today he says of the Department:

"Documentary mushroomed because it attracted such diverse talents. But in a way that was its undoing, too many people doing too many things.... but it was never a huge thing at all, it was a whole crowd of enthusiasts who met occasionally, as individuals, in the pub next door and exchanged ideas and opinions and then went about their work.... I never had to say to anyone 'pick up that paper from the parade ground'." <sup>23</sup>



Norman Swallow,<sup>24</sup> a member of Rotha's staff during those years made the following assessment of Rotha:

"His real contribution was to persuade BBC/TV for the first time to make complete programmes on film (e.g. The World is Ours) and to bring us his considerable expertise as a documentary film-maker. The sadness was that by then the 'documentary film' was in the process of revolution and Paul's generation was about to be succeeded by a new one with new ideas, and employing new techniques. To look at The World is Ours now is to look at something remarkably old-fashioned (and I write this as someone who produced the whole series and directed most of them). It is my opinion that television documentary remained a poor substitute for documentary cinema until men like Denis Mitchell, Philip Donnellan and John Boorman came into it (and from the provinces, significantly) and programmes like Tonight and Monitor could develop new talent like Ken Russell, John Schlesinger, Jack Gold and Kevin Billington. Paul Rotha made complete film-making possible here (BBC) and he widened our subject-matter to include the problems of human beings in the developing countries; though both of these developments must have happened sooner or later anyway." <sup>25</sup>

After Rotha left the BBC he edited a book called Television in the Making in which he wrote rather critically of his experiences at the Corporation:

"BBC TV has a fine record in engineering; its weakness to date has been its failure to devise administration machinery flexible enough to accommodate the needs of the creative artist - be he writer, producer or director - to allow for the resilience the temperament or that occasional streak of lunacy that so often go with creative activity. Administrative minds prefer the foreseeable, the orthodox, the kind of respectable talent that can be evaluated and filed at an annual review." <sup>26</sup>

There was also an increasing tendency to mistake operational skill for creative artistry.

Of the pioneers, Duncan Ross alas is dead, and Robert Barr is now in his sixties. A quiet, warm, distinguished man who still looks very much the shrewd, tough newspaper reporter he once was. As a freelance writer he is still very much at the top of his medium with a vast writing and producing experience behind

him; talks, documentaries, drama series for both sound and television. His comments on the differing arts are important.

"A talk presents personal opinion; documentary presents a report, using dramatic effects to make an accurate point; drama deals in fiction and alters fact to gain the effect." 27

His writing credits range from those early documentaries to a range of brilliant series like: They Came By Appointment, Pilgrim Street, Scotland Yard, Spycatcher, Moonstrike, Dr.Finlay's Casebook, Maigret, Z-Cars, Softly, Softly, Hadleigh (which he created for Yorkshire Television) and most celebrated of all Medico - his story of the Post Office Radio Service of medical advice to ships at sea - for which Barr won the coveted 1959 Italia Prize award given by the Italian Government for world competition, and the television equivalent of an 'Oscar'.

His first crime series was written for radio, It's Your Money They're After, an exposé of the methods of crooks out to get the war gratuities of returning soldiers, which received an 'honourable mention' as a crime deterrent in the annual report of the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolitan area.

Barr still retains a phenomenal speed of work. In three to five days he can write straight on to the typewriter a script for a half-hour Spycatcher or a fifty minute Softly, Softly. He likes to begin with a short synopsis of one paragraph, generally starting "This is the story of...." and if he cannot write the lot in one brisk paragraph then the story isn't right for his purpose. He aims to do ten minutes each day - five minutes of screen time in the morning and five in the afternoon. "Never make the mistake of over-writing", he says, "because you'll only waste precious



time cutting it down and that's not just losing a few words here and there either, whole scenes and characters may have to come out so in the end you might just as well write the whole thing over again".<sup>28</sup> Barr has a clock inside his head now which tells him precisely when he has thirty, fifty or sixty minutes of script complete. That way he is automatically sure he never does more than is necessary. He once wrote a Spycatcher in a single day, but admits that there was pressure on him at the time and that it was pushing it a bit. Often, though, he has had to sit down and write an episode of Z-Cars, or Softly because another writer has failed to come up with a script or because the story needed taking in hand and tightening up.

Yet whatever the form in which he writes Barr always retains integrity. He is always trying to get people to understand each other better - not to like the other person necessarily, but to understand him. "If you learn to understand what an alcoholic is, then you will not like him, but you may be a better person towards him." The same can be said for his Police series - trying to get people to understand them better, not to like them, but to respect them for the job they have to do.

\* \* \* \* \*

The output of the Documentary Department, first under the guidance of Robert Barr and then Paul Rotha, was amongst the most creative and popular of any programme department in post-war television.

Programmes on current affairs, health and social welfare,

justice and the law, industry and economic life, the arts, psychology and morality, the many branches of science, and such specialised topics as the colour bar and racial prejudice, the prisons, juvenile delinquency, and other matters arising directly out of our immediate social life and its problems, were over the years handled with great sensitivity and brilliance, and every once in a while with real distinction. The documentary, which had always had some trouble fitting itself to the theatrical atmosphere of the cinema, except in semi-dramatic form, was an outstanding success when presented to audiences on television.

The dramatised-documentary as a production method is still a popular form of television presentation to this day.

The fluid intimate technique by which television, can switch so smoothly from studio interview or street encounter to the pre-filmed insertion, to the outside broadcast, or video tape recording, is ideal for the strong and vivid presentation of actuality.

Yet how many of these techniques would we be using now had it not been for the work of the pioneers themselves. The men and women who researched, wrote, produced, and most important of all, originated, the very principles on which today's documentaries are based. Principles which will be considered in detail in the next chapter. The seeds of the best dramatic series which were to come later, such as Spycatcher, Maigret, Dr. Finlay, Moonstrike, Z-Cars, and Softly, Softly, largely grew out of, and owed much of their success to, the style of writing and presentation forged by the early documentary writers.

For Robert Barr,



"the true importance of the Department we knocked together in these years in the early days of television was the fact that (as with John Grierson's workers in film) we were free to pioneer and, in the end provide the yeast and the rules for so many other television departments. Most of our current affairs programmes and all the successful drama documentary series still follow those original rules. They are all of them magnificently better today, and so they should be. And 'documentary' itself remains small, and so it should do. It remains as always, the humble egg. People can forget that it produced the eagles." 29

As an independent form the dramatised-documentary was not to last - partly, as has been shown for political and economic reasons, but mainly because the techniques available suddenly went past it, due to the greater availability of 16 mm film and equipment, which was to make filming on location away from the studio easier and more effective and thereby making possible something much more special to television - actuality on film.

But the original principles of documentary were to remain very much as they had always been and these are what must now be fully examined.

### Notes

**General background:**

The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, Peter Black, BBC 1972.

The Mirror in the Corner, Peter Black, Hutchinson, 1972.

Adventure in Vision, John Swift, Lehmann, 1950.

1. Paul Rotha, Documentary Film, Faber (1968 Edition), p.111.
2. See Appendix 38 for a description of Cecil McGivern in his role as Head of Programmes, BBC-TV Service, 1950. Also Appendix 40 for a further selection of biographies of Drama and Documentary Producers (1953).
3. See Appendix 41c for lists of Dramatised-Documentaries covering the period under review.
4. The details of Barr's career and output are drawn from personal conversations with this writer (for transcript of part see Appendix 33, correspondence with the writer and from his friends and colleagues. Also the references quoted in General Background above. See too, Appendix 32 for Newspaper Reviews of some of his productions.
5. The details of Ross's career are to be found in his personal file at BBC Written Archives, Caversham, colleagues recollections and General Background above. See also Appendix 46 'The Documentary in Television' by Ross.
6. For a more detailed account of the making of the series Magistrates Court see Appendix 31 'What is Documentary' and Appendix 59 for the transmission dates of the series. For a selection of press reaction to Ross's series and single dramatised-documentaries see newspaper reviews under Appendix 30.
7. Barr's letter of 1950 to Cecil McGivern, Head of TV Programmes, Robert Barr Papers.
8. See Review by J.Stubbs Walker, Daily Mail (24 April, 1951), Appendix 32.
9. Glasgow Evening Citizen, 7 February, 1953.
10. See Appendix 41b for the very first play specially written for television in 1937, The Underground Murder Mystery by J.Bissell Thomas.
11. Cecil McGivern, The Author (Winter, 1950) 'Television needs Writers', Writers News (January, 1949) reported:  
'Television desperately needs the fiction type of documentary, which Mr. McGivern terms the Applied documentary. He suggests a study of films, The House on 92nd Street, Boomerang and Call Northside 777. Each of these films is fiction wedded to documentary fact, and in McGivern's opinion ideal material for



television.' See Note 10 of Documentary Film for further titles in the social-realist field.

12. Cecil McGivern (ibid).
13. Duncan Ross - personal file - BBC Written Archives.
14. Ibid.
15. Robert Barr, See transcript of interview, Appendix 33.
16. Ibid.
17. D.G.Bridson, Prospero and Ariel, See Appendix 35, for full account.
18. Rayner Heppenstall, Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man, Appendix 36.
19. Ibid.
20. See Chapter Principles and Practice of Documentary.
21. Paul Rotha, interview with this writer, August 1973 - See Appendix 34.
22. Ibid.
23. Appendix 33 Barr's final thoughts on Documentary Department.
24. See Appendix 37 for the full transcript of this writer's interview with Norman Swallow (August, 1973) in which he talks of his early career in Radio, how he came into television in 1949, his experiences, firstly of working in Talks with Mary Adams, then of two years in Documentary under Rotha, before returning to Talks as the second BBC Current Affairs producer to be appointed (the first being Mrs. Grace Wyndham Goldie). He describes his work at this time on Special Enquiry and The World is Ours.
25. Personal letter to the author dated 24 September, 1973.
26. Television in the Making - Edited, Paul Rotha, Focal Press, 1956, p.13. He added in his Introduction on the BBC two further comments: "Its Documentary department, now disbanded achieved programmes of social importance that consistently won warm public response and more often than not critical praise from those who mattered." And on film (p.13) he wrote:  
"It is possible that the attitude of so many television trained people, especially in the BBC towards film is not so much antipathy against celluloid itself as envy of the professional skill already attained by film people which television in its infancy has yet to acquire."

27. Robert Barr - personal interview - August, 1973.
28. Ibid.
29. Robert Barr - personal letter to the writer - dated 6 March, 1973.



PART TWO

THE INFLUENCE OF DOCUMENTARY METHODS  
UPON BBC TELEVISION DRAMA.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The Principles and Practice of Dramatised-Documentary

"Ah! What avails the classic bent  
And what the cultured word,  
Against the undoctored incident,  
That actually occurred?"

Kipling

"Our drama-documentaries by people  
like Duncan Ross and Caryl Doncaster  
and Colin Morris were working the  
vein of realism long before the  
theatre break-through in 1956. It  
was in television that the ground  
was being prepared."

M. Barry\*

It has already been noted that the dramatised-documentary was one of the few art forms pioneered by television during the years immediately following the Second World War. From the point of view of sheer entertainment, it was a fact that the most unrewarding social problems would, when presented in this dramatic form, rival even the popularity of a football match or the Sunday Night Play.

The facts of life so presented 'got across' to a much wider section of the public, than for example, the straight Talk: talks generally appealing more to the mind and documentary more to the emotions.

The story documentary, however, has very little in common with the straight drama, which depends for its effect on what the writer has to say, the strength of his plot with which he captivates our

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\* Michael Barry, Daily Mail, 16 September, 1961.



interest while he is saying it, and that 'suspension of disbelief' which his audience must feel when watching, be it on television at home, at the theatre or in the cinema. The writer of the dramatised-documentary had to be on his guard, never to allow his own opinions on a subject he was interpreting to deflect him from impartiality. He had to try to present each facet of the problem in its true perspective.

As for plot, he was trying to present a cross-section of life; therefore, what plot he used had only to exist to give shape and cohesion. He could never make use of deus ex machina, the happy ending and the numerous other theatrical devices which untie the knots. On the other hand, he was not trying to suspend the disbelief of his audience for, through his technique both as writer and producer, the viewer was presented with reality itself. Yet of necessity this reality was only in terms of the documentary as presented on television.

It is therefore necessary at this stage to make some comparison between the principles of documentary as previously stated by John Grierson for the film documentary, and those which were to emerge in the late 1940s for television documentary, if we are to understand the production practices which were adopted by the dramatised-documentary writers and producers in their search for truth and greater realism.

On Television, documentary was:

1. Played by actors who gave as far as possible an accurate interpretation of the people they represented.
2. Produced 'live' in the studio with the addition of occasional film sequences, or inserts.

3. The locations in which the action took place in life, were copied and reproduced in a studio.
4. The stories were true in the sense that they were taken from life with as little modification as possible, bearing in mind the technical limitations of television at this time.

The term 'dramatised-documentary' is used to distinguish this form of writing and production from other forms of documentary and because it was the term generally in use at that time for this particular type of programme. Yet to do so is to acknowledge the fact that there were some critics who would not classify them as true documentaries at all, but rather as realist dramas.

In support of this view some commentators have written that the whole point of documentary is that it is literally true; for if it is not literally true it is not documentary but something akin to play-writing. In other words, the dramatised-documentary is not documentary at all because:

1. It is scripted and played by professional actors.
2. It is produced in the studio.

It may be remembered that Grierson said that documentary should "photograph the living scene and the living story".<sup>1</sup> The dramatised-documentary certainly deals with the living story; that it cannot deal literally with the living scene when employing this particular technique is due to its intrinsic nature and limitations. At the same time it must be remembered that great trouble was taken to re-create the necessary scenes in the studio.

Grierson said secondly he believed 'the original (or native) actor and the original (or native) scene were better guides to a



screen interpretation of the modern world'. Finally he said 'that the materials and stories thus taken from the raw could be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article'.

It will be seen that in his second and third principles Grierson appears to agree with the criticisms quoted above; but he only appears to, as there are still several further points to be considered.

When Grierson laid down the First Principles he was speaking more as a prophet than as a man reviewing past achievement.

He was clearing a path along which the documentary unit could advance although at that time it existed only in embryo as has been shown.

To Grierson, professional actors meant the commercial studio film and he passionately wanted to get away from the studio-based story. He knew that the film could do this. In television at this time, however, the position was very different. Except for Outside Broadcasts or when a little film is used, it was very much a studio-bound operation of limited flexibility. There was very little money, film equipment was extremely bulky and very inflexible - the lightweight 16 mm camera was a long way off. Television's use of pure action was restricted and it had therefore to rely much more than the cinema upon the use of words and the imagination of the writer to re-create the sounds and situations. Because it was impossible or impractical to film documentaries they had to be dramatised and this meant approaching the subject from an entirely new angle or not approaching it at all.

One has also to remember that television was in its infancy

and people (and actors) were often very reluctant to appear on it, especially professional men like Judges, Magistrates, Service Officers, Doctors, not to mention M.P.s. If it was out of the question to go to them, and they were unwilling to come to the studio then the only way left was to dramatise both characters and events. Not to have attempted documentary because one was restricted in the use of 'real' people and 'real' situations would have been a very short-sighted decision to have made at this time.

The contention that they were not true documentaries has still to be answered; but before any firm line of argument can emerge, it will first be necessary to consider some of the problems which arise from the differing natures of film and television, problems which have to some extent dictated the form in which the dramatised-documentary has developed. One is a subject already mentioned; the extent to which television relies on words.

A large proportion of film documentaries rely on silent or mute film plus sound narration, effects and music. Therefore the 'original (native) player' as Grierson called him can do all that is required of him by action alone. Also he need only act for a few seconds at a time, the film being photographed shot by shot. In television, with continuous action, speech is vital if the visual flow is to be upheld. The player must learn by heart his entire part together with movements and gestures and must also master the technique of playing to the camera. This usually demands great concentration from professionals and certainly requires a skill which would be beyond the scope of most amateurs, even if they were performing in familiar situations. Another problem is that of digging below the surface of every-day life to reveal colour and



emotion. With its technique of editing, film can make anything, even inanimate objects, take on extraordinary overtones. It can do this often merely by placing shots in a certain order. Television in the early post-war days was far more limited in this respect. There was no recording facility as such, and therefore no editing. Its natural subject-matter is people rather than things, and to convey meaning or emotion it relies chiefly on voices and faces. Again, in the dramatised field, this makes the professional, as opposed to 'the native (or original) actor', necessary. The third problem which applied then was that television was of course 'live'.

It is worth recalling here that even with the powerful techniques at its disposal, the documentary film has not often used 'the original (or native) player' with direct speech. It did in Harry Watt's North Sea, certainly, but that film has had few successors!<sup>2</sup>

From what has been said so far it should be clear that if television documentary was to tackle dramatised subjects at all, it had to approach them from a realistic angle, an angle which recognised the limiting factors inherent at that time in the medium itself. The result was the form of programme that was known as the Dramatised-Documentary. And although that form may have been outside the limits set by Grierson in his Principles it came very much within his definition of what documentary should be, the creative treatment of actuality.<sup>3</sup>

"Some people dislike the word documentary", wrote Duncan Ross, "because it is derived from the cinema. Television is not cinema, they say. No one has ever suggested that it is, but whether a camera is recording a scene on celluloid or through electronics it must still interpret that scene through a lens, and film people have been using lenses with considerable skill for over fifty years"

It is foolish to despise the art of the cinema simply because one is ignorant of it. It is equally foolish to ignore the vast knowledge that can be brought to television from the theatre and radio. At present the conflict of ideologies in television is a regular reminder of its infancy and is like children with a three-legged stool arguing as to which leg is the most important." 4

The new writers were not slow in setting down their own principles of documentary either. Robert Barr, 'father' of the television documentary, set about defining Documentary in 1951 in a memorandum to the Controller of Television Programmes, Cecil McGivern. The definition he proposes is a vital one and will therefore be quoted in full together with the reply it evoked from the Head of Television Drama.

"I have for long had a definition," writes Barr, "which satisfies my own feelings and sets out my own field of action; and I would like to know whether you agree with it.

My definition is concerned with the form and intention of documentary programmes (not with Documentary as a Unit) for I feel that if the 'intention' is clear the programmes themselves will have more form and style.

#### Subjects:

A Talks, Documentary or Drama offering may be on any subject under the sun; they are not to be defined by subject-matter, but by form and intention. Of these, intention is the more important.

#### Talks:

In a television 'Talk' expert opinion or information is conveyed directly from the authority to the viewer. (Harbin demonstrating his methods of cooking).

Television talks are concerned with people, preferably expert and well-informed, giving their own opinions and views. The appeal is to the intelligence; the intention is to convey information and opinion directly from an authority to the viewer.

#### Documentary:

Documentary presents a report. Documentary takes into account many opinions; its nature is to select, edit, synthesise and present its own conclusion.

Documentary is concerned with actions; its form is the dramatisation of facts, the reconstruction of events, and it uses any dramatic device to make its point. It



will use (and devise) any technique that will give force and clarity to the information it seeks to convey. Its intention is to make people feel as well as think. Its appeal is to the emotions and it talks in terms of human conduct. A good example of documentary form was Duncan Ross' report on Juvenile Courts. This was not a court in terms of an O.B. nor a court as described by a Magistrate or Probation Officer. It was a report on a process of law in terms of children, parents, probation officers, police and magistrates... dealing with actual problems and making recorded decisions. It was an example of fine observation and good reporting reaching a well balanced and fair conclusion. The court we saw was never held, yet it was true. It was created by accurate observation, sympathy, understanding and good reporting. That is the justification of documentary form.

Documentary also deals in true stories; it reconstructs events in order to explain them... usually in terms of human conduct. The question that may be asked is: are the events worth explaining?

If we can learn from the thoughts and actions of others (and the whole course of education pre-supposes that we can) then this is a field worth studying.

Since the nature of documentary is to study, select, edit and to use dramatic devices to point the facts - the basis of documentary is a script.

The script is the report. It is essential that the report is accurate and that the conclusions are balanced and fair. The 'reporters' in documentary are responsible directly to the BBC for the accuracy and fairness of their reports.

Documentary does not use drama for drama's sake; but uses dramatic effects to make an accurate point. It is not an essential of documentary that it should be dramatic, or use effects, or use actors - these are devices to be used as required. It is essential that it should convey accurate information.

Documentary believes that truth is better material than fiction.

Documentary has a specific purpose and intention of its own. It is not an elaborated talk, nor is it 'a kind of educational play'. The basis of good documentary is the script. And all documentary in television should stem from a script written, checked and approved as a documentary script. And the programmes should be produced by directors who understand the documentary purpose... who understand that they must appeal both to the head and the heart, and that this twin appeal is very powerful.

#### Drama:

Drama is the easiest to define; its purpose is to entertain. Of its nature it deals in fiction. There is



no dramatist of any merit who has not altered a fact to gain a stage effect.

Documentary alters the effect to point (more accurately) the fact.

It is true that some dramatists have used the stage as a political platform, but theirs is usually the antithesis of documentary practice - the creating of a fictional circumstance to support a purely personal opinion.

Drama requires of its actors that they entertain the audience; documentary requires behaviour.

The use of an actor to documentary is in his ability to interpret the normal (or abnormal) behaviour of another person - not by dramatic acting, but by dramatic timing - and so to point this behaviour with clarity. (Documentary like Drama uses realism when it is required.) Documentary has borrowed, intentionally, the techniques of drama - but it has equally borrowed from radio, film and the village green.

It will tend to borrow more from radio, for sound effects can serve our purpose very well: The whole field of non-synchronised sound (used so effectively by Hitchcock) is still to be explored by documentary.

Documentary: gets its effect dramatically out of truth, out of the audience accepting it as being true.

Dramatic fiction uses devices to make its fiction seem probable. And these are the devices which documentary has not borrowed. The borrowing from drama is not haphazard nor entire. Even in its borrowing, documentary studies, selects and edits. So for the moment we must make clear our own main difference by using our own name: Documentary - and saying: "This is a report... this is a true story."

For that is part of our effect. You cannot mistake one form - Talks, Documentary, Drama - for the other." 5

Michael Barry, as Head of Television Drama, replied in the following way:

"I would hesitate to draw too fine a barrier between true Television Drama and true Television Documentary even on the ground especially set out by Robert Barr. The successful true Television play seems to take it even more closely towards Documentary, and certain types of Documentary come closer to the true Television play. Quite apart from their programme content, I am sure that the producers of both have much more detail to learn from each other and especially on our side I would welcome workmanlike and practical consideration of the methods of both." 6



Donald Wilson, as Head of the Script Department, in his book The Television Playwright raised much the same point in his introduction to a Colin Morris play:

"The Unloved is a piece of dramatic writing in the television genre that has come to be known as drama-documentary. What is meant by this name? Are not Drama and Documentary contradictory terms, cancelling each other out? If a play is a story told by actors and a documentary is a piece of real life recorded factually without benefit of art and so communicated to the public, the answer must be 'yes'. But the more one looks at this odd term 'documentary', the less precise one finds it to be. Night Mail, they say, was a documentary; so were Drifters and One of Our Aircraft is Missing. Yet would anyone seriously claim that art took no hand in their making?

If one accepts that Michelangelo's Pieta existed already in the block of marble, waiting for the artist's hand to release it, then art can be defined as inspired selection - a definition I find satisfying, since it applies equally to painting, music and writing, as well as to sculpture. In its own way, too, the documentary depends on selection. In its own way it depends on camera angles chosen by the perceptive eye for their illustration of the theme; on the selection of significant incident; on the matching of sound and vision; on the blending of the material into a rhythmic whole, discarding the redundant, the diffuse and the unworthy. If you then add music or, as in Night Mail, a poetic commentary in a metre specially chosen to express in words the pounding of the wheels and the swaying of the coaches, you have come a long way from mere fact; you are arriving at truth. So it seems as if the documentary man looks at life as it is happening and expresses his own vision of it. The dramatist, on the other hand, starts quite differently. He is expressing the emotions of people facing some aspect of life. These are people created by him, not factual engine-drivers or postal clerks, and while he is writing, he himself is each of them in turn, feeling their emotions, living their lives. But once it is all written down this has to stop; he cannot play both Manley and Rolfe, so actors have to do it for him. Drama-documentary, as perfected by Colin Morris and a few others, combines both these approaches. The writer will select a theme - in this case the problem of delinquent children in a special school - and will first spend a period of research in finding out the facts, in taking the opinions of every kind of person concerned, in assessing the value of conflicting arguments, and thus getting a balanced picture. Having digested all this information, he will sit down and, within a context of faithful representation, will create



an original dramatic work. That television's insistence on 'reality' and 'immediacy' is satisfied fully by this genre when handled with the skill of a Collin Morris is proved beyond doubt by its standing with the Critics and by popular acclaim." 7

Successful documentary programmes exist largely because they avoid the pitfalls of conventionalising dramatic treatment; they look at places, techniques and people for their own sakes, and treat them as being sufficiently interesting in themselves to render overt dramatisation unnecessary. Even the style of dramatised-documentary is usually at its best when it treats people as necessary adjuncts of the work they do or the places they inhabit; once the writer finds that such things have insufficient interest in themselves to support the work he wants to do, he slips willy-nilly into a semi-fiction of stereotypes and ends with Emergency Ward Ten or Mrs. Dale's Diary.

The Times correspondent in June 1960 took up this point when describing the Scotland Yard series by Robert Barr:

"The current series of 'dramatised-documentaries' investigating the work of Scotland Yard, have provided unsensational but absorbing viewing. But without the expense of much imagination it is possible to appreciate the temptations to which the writers of programmes of this kind are subject, but is it in itself dramatically meaningful that a child capriciously dances into the road before an oncoming car? Does it not give the incident more point to suggest that she is running away from something - not, of course, anything really dreadful but from, say, a quarrel between her inharmonious parents? And the driver, his reactions slowed by a single glass of sherry; why should he not be one who has drunk sufficient whisky for everyone to notice that he has been drinking? Would not Night Beat, the first of the Scotland Yard programmes have been a more powerful tribute to the importance of police work and the heroism of the police if its ineffectual petty criminals had been armed desperadoes.

Reality is a peculiar material to work on. Techniques themselves are fascinating things, as the Founding Fathers of the GPO Film Unit knew, but the drama of other people's lives is often sadly inconclusive; it has, more often than not, an untidy skein of loose ends hanging from it; it makes powerful suggestions and only



the strong minded can resist the temptation to follow them up and falsify the actual by decorating it with semi-fiction. At the same time, reality is fundamentally unco-operative; writers attempt to tidy up the loose ends, to give definition to its obscure corners and liveliness to its half-articulate talk, and the result becomes dimly conventional. Week after week the toilers who produce Probation Officer begin with a convincing situation, but week after week they attempt to turn the suggestions of reality into a well-rounded story and sentimentalise reality into fiction."

This is not, of course, a matter of the unavoidable process of interpretation that occurs in the presentation of reality by a Zola or an Arnold Bennett as well as by television. Cameras declare their attitude to reality by seeing it quite literally from their own special angles. The juxtaposition of shots of varying lengths and different angles alone present us, before we consider the writer's contribution, with an attitude, and we see the piece only as we are shown it; its presentation is as much a fact as its contents. The writer, too, cannot dissociate his work from the significance he finds in the actuality he is treating (for this, to him, is its reality). If it be true, as we are so often assured, that no two witnesses will give identical accounts of the same incident, the writer of any factual script is a witness presenting us with reality as it appears through the lens of his personality, his sensitivity, his desire to show us what is of significance to him.

For this reason the dramatised-documentary is usually most satisfactory when it pays the minimum of attention to the people it unavoidably involves, but there are rare occasions when, dealing with specific people rather than with their work or surroundings, it can present us with a programme valid as drama as well as

information. Colin Morris's Who, Me? (1957) demonstrates clearly the point at which dramatised-documentary becomes drama. Who, Me? dealt simply with the interrogation of three men who, the police are morally sure, have been responsible for a robbery. Other officers having failed to gain any information from them, a detective-sergeant takes over the questioning and, by a combination of instinctive psychological acumen, personal sympathy, and the ability to find the most telling approach to each of his victims, secures their confessions.

The point of departure of this now classic programme is the personality and abilities of a particular detective-sergeant, not, as the BBC carefully pointed out, an account of police interrogation as a thing in itself. It is amusing, disturbing, and, above all, self-contained. But even here Colin Morris could not resist pointing the moral by making the most pathetic of his petty criminals, an illiterate tough, consciously aware that the sergeant's diabolical skill in finding and manipulating the weaknesses of those he deals with is accompanied by kindness and genuine good will.

At this level, because of the unusual nature of the documentary material used, we become conscious of more than places and techniques. Acting, on any creative level, has little to do with such pieces as Night Beat, but Who, Me?, because it deals with personalities meeting and conflicting, provides good acting parts within its unfaltering actuality. The study of personalities is as much a subject for dramatic documentation as any other, but the documentary writer and producer are safest when, faced with other than human fascinations, they subordinate men to the inhuman appeal of localities or techniques.



Cathy Come Home (1966) written by Jeremy Sandford and directed by Kenneth Loach, was a landmark in television drama. Since every programme these days seems to have to be pigeon-holed under a 'selling' though often irrelevant, general title, it was part of the series called The Wednesday Play.<sup>8</sup> It was on a Wednesday all right, but it was (more than a play).

Cathy was a young wife whose husband had an accident and could not keep up payments on their nice flat. They could not find anywhere to live, and slowly sank through over-crowded slums (on factual film you could not shut your eyes to them) down to sordid caravan site, to council reception centres, where, with hope extinguished, husbands and wives were kept apart. Still without anywhere to live, Cathy's husband went away, and she finally had heartrendingly to give up her children into 'care'. The final moments of the programme were three printed statements of fact about the number of homeless, how Germany has built more houses than we have, and how it had all been true.

It was dramatic but not drama: it was an acted pamphlet and made us feel about the subject more keenly than a factual television documentary would have done - more in fact than the real-life-Cathy's husband did later on that same evening in Late Night Line-Up, a television discussion programme on BBC 2.

The particular nature of television offers an opportunity to take this style of production - given the new technical developments - beyond the scope of short films for the cinema. There is an immediate relevance to any statement made on television, because it automatically becomes a part of the fabric of the audience's life and their observation of reality.

It presents itself when they are at their most vulnerable, in the relative safety of their own homes. It is impossible to close the mind completely against the continuing flow of images. The commitment of writers like Barr, Ross, Morris, and producers such as Gilchrist Calder, Elwyn Jones and David Rose, achieved an almost personal contact with the audience and created a form, complete in itself and more than that, prepared the ground for future writers and directors who were able to drive even further away from direct documentary statement towards an imaginative commentary, human or political, until the whole concept exploded in the documentary dramas of the sixties and the form had come full circle.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yet a curious thing about Documentary was that, for all its popularity, the number of writers who succeeded in it during those early days, was relatively small. In fact some fine dramatic writers found the form too restricting, whilst others simply could not bring themselves to master the demands that the research of a subject made on them. And the successful writing of such documentaries depended very largely on that initial very thorough research, as Colin Morris has pointed out:

"You need just as much invention as in an original play - even though everything in it is based on facts. But it is a very specialised field. You must be able to talk to every kind of person, be a good interviewer, and gain peoples' trust. Research can take anything from two to four months. In the course of that time certain common facts emerge - then you can begin to write your documentary. The aim in an original play is primarily to entertain - in a dramatised-documentary



the dramatic form helps to hold the viewer's interest, but you are primarily presenting a problem and passing on your information and as objectively as possible. After all the dramatic form we use is simply the crystalising of true situations and is the best way to focus on the essential problem - any other way is simply reportage." 9

Caryl Doncaster another documentary writer adds her views:

"Many a time trudging from town to town, trying to sift the heart of the matter from the differing viewpoints of all interested parties, I have envied the writer of plays, who is able to sit at home and conjure up character and situation from imagination. Research takes time and patience. For example, when writing Return to Living - the rehabilitation of an ex-prisoner - I had first of all to 'read up' the history and complicated theory relating to criminal conduct and prison reform and the complex rules and regulations governing H.M. Prisons. Only then did I tackle the experts, the Prison Commissioners, Governors and Officers. I visited prisons to meet prisoners on the point of re-entering the outside world. I talked to the 'ex-lag' in his own haunts (needless to say the views expressed by ex-inmates of H.M. Prisons and those who govern them were in most cases contradictory). After about six weeks of journalistic delving I was faced with a mass of research notes, a blank piece of paper in the typewriter, a production deadline and the task of interpreting accurately the many-sided problem in dramatic form." 10

Arthur Swinson has described the first steps he took towards the writing of his documentary The Road to Carey Street in the following way:

"I first got the idea for this programme by reading Public Examinations in The Times. It seemed to me that there was a subject that was important, a subject that few people, except the unfortunates caught up in it, knew anything about. Also a subject that was intrinsically dramatic. Having found my way along the devious corridors of the Board of Trade, I spent a good many days sitting in the Bankruptcy Court, listening to the various cases. Gradually I was able to divide the bankrupts into three main categories: rogues, fools and men who could not quite accept their own limitations, or admit the truth about themselves. Obviously, the third category was the most interesting; but what exactly should the man's trade be? The situation, I soon discovered, was that small builders provide more bankrupts than any other class, so I decided to make the central character in my programme a builder. But

why should a builder, in particular, fail to recognise his own limitations? After assessing various possibilities, I decided that my character must be an Ex-Army man, a Warrant Officer, who, during the war, was able to obtain a commission, and become accustomed to a life in the Services that he could not possibly sustain once he left. Also, if he were a Sapper, he would have some experience of building, and might think that this was enough to run a business. So, gradually I created the character of James Kitchener Lindley. But having done this, I had to recognise another fact: that very few people are bankrupt twice. The punishment, the humiliation and the social stigma are so great that bankrupts are driven towards reality. To accelerate this process in Lindley's case - as the programme would obviously have to end at his discharge from bankruptcy - I provided Lindley with a wife who was much more clear-sighted than he was. In the climactic scene she tells him that her brother-in-law - a man Lindley despises because of his undistinguished war record - is offering him a job. The test of whether he can now face the facts about himself is crystallised in his decision whether or not to take the job offered to him.

In this programme then, I was able to show the legal processes leading up to bankruptcy, the work of Examiners in Bankruptcy, Inspectors in Bankruptcy, and Official Receivers." 11

In general the writer/researchers would group their ideas and material under the following four headings:

### 1. The people concerned

How they dressed. How they talked. How they disclosed their class and professional background. How they addressed each other. Their attitude to their job and the people they had to deal with. (Not their external and superficial attitude, but their concealed one.) Anything about them which would give an immediate clue to their real character.

### 2. The buildings or general location

There is a very strong link between people and the buildings or places they live and work in. Each reacts on the other.



One can often get a clue to a man's character or methods by looking at his desk for example, which one cannot get by looking at him. Buildings often gave a clue to how an organisation worked.

Finally a selection had eventually to be made of those buildings to be reconstructed in the studio and those to be filmed.

It was as well therefore to get 'the feel' of them straight away as the information would have to go into the script, very early on.

### 3. The pattern of forces (or tensions) which hold people in their relative positions

This pattern often lies well below the surface. It could be some time before it could even be sensed. Once it was sensed then the writer could begin to plot it in detail. Before this plotting was finished, it was impossible to think about starting on the script.

### 4. The story

All the documentary writers would agree that the story had to grow out of the subject, as revealed in the research; it could not be imposed on the subject artificially. If the story did not emerge naturally and spontaneously then the subject was definitely not one for documentary.

It is sometimes argued that a documentary should have a theme, but that need not always be the case. The job of documentary as Grierson saw it, was to explain society to society. A writer is lifting the cover from some particular aspect of life and saying: 'This is how things are: this is how it works.' Sometimes,

inevitably, he will show how social or legal or administrative circumstances bear down harshly on particular individuals or groups, but by doing this he will not be saying: 'The law is wrong' or 'Society is wrong'. His business is to explain and to illuminate. He is a writer; not a lawyer or a judge, and any such pretensions will quickly be exposed.

In any documentary there is a good deal of background information to be conveyed, especially in the early scenes. This is not only information concerning characters and their relationship to each other (as in a play) but anything from legal points to the rules governing some particular institutions. It is one of the skills of documentary writing to 'put over' this information without the viewer realising what is happening. If he suspects he is being told something he did not know before he will switch off with the speed of light. Here are three examples of the way in which a skilled dramatist 'put over' his or her information.

Duncan Ross, at the beginning of Juvenile Court, wanted to distinguish between robbery and larceny. There is a scene in which the probation officer, Miss Hemingway, is glancing down the list of cases to be tried, and remarks on them to a police constable:

Hemingway: Larceny... larceny... robbery. Robbery! My, we are coming up in the world! Serious!

Constable: Naw, ruddy nuisance. Pinched another kid's trike in the park. Attendant caught 'im, so brings 'im in to the station. What can you do?

Hemingway: Did the boy use force?

Constable: 'Course he did or it would be down there as larceny. Maybe he just borrowed it to play with and would have handed it back more than likely. But what can you do? He was brought in.

The point is made deftly and the dialogue does not for a second



lose character. Caryl Doncaster, in Children in Trust wanted to give the reason why such elaborate precautions are taken before a child can be legally adopted. Miss Hill (the Children's Officer) interviews a woman, Mrs. Debenham, who wants to adopt a baby:

Miss Hill: I take it then there would be no objection to one of us calling round and meeting your husband - to talk it over with you both together?

Mrs. Debenham: There certainly would! I'm not going to be inspected. We're respectable people.

Miss Hill: Perhaps you should realise our position too. Once the child is legally yours, you know, we have no further powers of inspection. It is our constant nightmare we might make a mistake. Only today we are taking a little girl away from a home that could not be more comfortable materially. But material comforts are not everything. They mean nothing to a child if there is no love.

The point is made quite openly, but Miss Hill is forced to make it in face of Mrs. Debenham's attitude. It therefore comes out at a moment of tension which acts as a partial camouflage. Another effective camouflage is humour. In Jennifer Wayne's Can I Have a Lawyer? Wheeler, a man charged with a criminal offence, is talking to his solicitor:

Wheeler: Don't tell me this barrister chap's going to do it for nothing - who pays him?

Solicitor: In a civil matter the State guarantee him eighty-five per cent of his normal fee. In a criminal case, which is what yours is, he gets a specified sum assessed according to the case.

Wheeler: (Getting up to go) Up the Welfare State! I still think it's a racket.<sup>12</sup>

If the information was of a surprising or sensational kind, then of course, the writer's problem was very much easier. While the information was being conveyed by an expert to the main character

(for example) it was also being explained to the viewer obliquely without his realising it.

The dramatic devices of surprise, tension, conflict, suspense could all be employed in the documentary but only in so far as they contributed to the main purpose. They could not be employed solely for what one might call their theatrical effect, if they were, the programme lost its reality and developed into a bad play. On the other hand the documentary could never be allowed to get dull; in fact, if it was dull, it could not really be true documentary. For that after all was an interpretation, a creative treatment of some facet of life with all its absorbing interest, its infinite variety of pain and pleasure.

Having completed the research the next step was to turn all the facts and figures into a script and this was no easy task as Caryl Doncaster explains:

"The method I found that worked most satisfactorily was to begin by wrestling with an outline giving the progression of action, number and type of characters, sets and film sequences required. This served a number of purposes. It was useful at an early stage for practicalities like costing, design and the technical problems involved. It could be submitted to all interested parties so that minor inaccuracies of fact or emphasis could be corrected and any major points of disagreement thrashed out.

This dialogue script followed the outline. This, with further minor amendments, was used as the rehearsal script. To me this was the most enjoyable part of the writing. The most pressing worries of technique solved and unwieldy intractable material pushed into a shape, the characters could then start coming to life. Sometimes more research was required over specialised dialogue. For instance, in Return to Living I enlisted the services of an old 'lag' to turn what I wished to have said inside the prison into jail jargon." 13

Sometimes there was a temptation for the writer, as a newly-fledged 'expert' to include too many facts in the draft dialogue. True, the salient facts and theories leading to action had to be



included to inform the public, but they had to be cleverly disguised so that the characters did not end up talking like textbooks. The rule most of the writers applied was, 'when in doubt, leave out'. The viewer could always get a textbook on the subject for himself if he was sufficiently stimulated by the programme.

Another difficult discipline for the writer was to apportion the amount of weight given to each character and situation. Often the 'odd man out' had a colourful story which it was tempting to build out of context.

"The central character of Return to Living, writes Caryl Doncaster "was a Corrective Trainee whose crimes, sentences and future prospects of making good were average, and whose after-care showed best the work that was being done in this direction, though, as can be imagined, many of the stories related to me by members of the underworld were more colourful. Lesser characters were introduced to illustrate other facets of the after care problem and the attitude of the public and officials to the ex-prisoner. In it these lesser characters, by widening and enriching the canvas, compensated in this type of script for the lack of a strong plot and often undramatic incident.

Final scripting could take anything up to two weeks before one entered the four-week production period. The writer-producer was always worried that his two functions might owing to delay, overlap in time. It is still the most difficult thing for me to write creatively (I am not including here, script editing, or limited re-writing) once I have switched to the production process. The fact is that a production of this kind demanded a great deal of organising ability to fit all requirements to the television machine." 14

Often of course, the writer and producer in documentary were a two-person team, like the Ross-Atkins combination responsible for amongst other things The Course of Justice series. There was a lot to be said for such teamwork - Gilchrist Calder and Colin Morris were another team. Writing and direction are such entirely

different skills that they are not easily found in any one person, and a team of two can enrich the original conception in the cut-and-thrust of discussion. On the other hand, knowledge gained by the writer during research is a necessity during the production period for minute detail, and above all during the rehearsal period in order to help the actors achieve exact characterisation.

Colin Morris<sup>15</sup> was one of the ablest exponents of the dramatised-documentary in the mid 1950s. From his first play for the BBC Sunk Rock (1955), dealing with a light-house, he went on to increasingly bolder subjects - alcoholism, unmarried mothers, the psychology of strikes, and then - one of the long tabooed subjects - prostitution. (He was not allowed by the BBC at that time to do a programme on homosexuals.) One of his most important early works was one which has already been mentioned, The Unloved, for which he received the Television Award in 1955. Morris started life as an actor but soon gave this up as something completely unsatisfying for him. He had always wanted to be a journalist - then during the war he found his way into writing as a military observer in the same unit as people like Hugh (now Sir Hugh) Cudlip. Four years of this taught him a great deal about the writing business. He says he is still not one of those writers who can create within himself. He still draws on other people's lives and experiences as the material for his plays. Out of material gleaned from his war experiences came two successes Desert Rats and Reluctant Heroes - whilst acting in the latter - which is, when all said and done, a dramatised-documentary of life in the Army - he saw in a bar next



door to the theatre one evening, a television documentary called Dockland by Duncan Ross. This was the turning point for him and he knew that he wanted to write documentary dramas for television. So after four years of appearing in his own play of Reluctant Heroes he joined the BBC where he did a training course before being sent to join Rotha in Documentary. But with next to nothing to do he transferred to Drama. It was series like Magistrate's Court which made a deep impression on him and he began to write similar documentaries. At this time he also began a long collaboration with the television director-producer Gilchrist Calder and over the next five years he received three major awards for his documentaries.

"I have a deep curiosity about people", says Morris, "that is really the first essential of my craft". His credits include plays like, Strike, Woman Alone, Quiet Revolution, Without Love, Tearaway, Takeover, Rock Bottom and perhaps best known of all, Who, Me? So keen and excited was he in those days with the thrill of writing documentary for television that when writing Strike,<sup>16</sup> he would go out and stand with the strikers to get the 'feel' of the thing before sitting down to write his play.

This desire to go out and meet people produced some very fine writing indeed. They had the stories to tell and their experiences were what Morris and the others used for the raw material of their plays. The Unloved, for example came from a conversation with a child-care officer, Who, Me? from a conversation on Brighton sea-front with an ex-C.I.D. Officer.

Gilchrist Calder<sup>17</sup> started as a producer-director in the theatre but at heart he was always a frustrated journalist.

"That's why the dramatised-documentary with all the research gave one such a marvellous opportunity in those early days", he says. It was the meeting point of the two worlds of theatre and journalism. For Calder it was films like Harry Watt's North Sea which provided the real inspiration and the direction towards which television documentary should aspire.

"I knew that I wanted to make actors behave like this. This was a master-piece, this was about life. Dramatised-documentary had to do with life that is why it was so like Grierson's documentary film movement of the thirties... for our dramas we wanted (a) people who didn't look like actors (b) and people who didn't act but behaved. It was the personalities and their behaviour that concerned us... what we (Morris and Calder) would do would be to go into a factory... see for ourselves the various 'types' who worked there and then come back and audition thirty or forty actors until we found just the right man for the part - it didn't matter if he couldn't act - I, as Producer, would show him how to behave in the part... I believed at that time and so did Colin that you could talk to people and get behind their words and then get an actor to take the part. This way we believed we got closer to the truth."

The production of dramatised-documentaries was complicated by ordinary television standards and it made heavy demands - a big studio, elaborate film sequences, large casts, multiple sets, the maximum number of cameras, film and sound channels, complicated equipment moves. This is not to suggest that documentary production was more difficult than that of drama. There was no 'star' problem in casting, nor did documentary actors have to sustain performance to the same extent. Type casting, if great care was taken, as has been suggested, during the audition period, often meant that an actor could walk into a small part with very little direction; nor were the camera-angles usually as complex as those demanded in the production of a play, where much ingenuity was often required to keep the pictorial element through complicated action. (The



complications of cameras, etc., in a multi-set documentary occurred chiefly in moves out of vision.)

Here as an example is the production of a court scene in two different sets of conditions. Case (1) a production in which the main action takes place in a small court room. Case (2) the production of a bigger court scene which occupies a major portion of the story documentary. These two cases were authentic and the solution of the problems they presented was conditioned exclusively by the engineering facilities available. (Both examples are from the work of Duncan Ross.)<sup>18</sup>

A Magistrate's Court (produced at Alexandra Palace)

It consisted of three main interests which had to be shown in close-up: the defendant in the dock, the stipendiary magistrate on the bench and the witness in the witness box. On occasion, also, there would be a solicitor or counsel examining the witness. Since this was a documentary programme the layout of the court had to be accurate, and two fundamental layouts were encountered in actual courts. In the first of these, where solicitors or counsel faced the witness box, a fourth wall to the court set would have been required, and although this was possible it presented difficulties which could be avoided by the use of the other layout. Further requirements included one door through which the magistrate was to enter the court and others for the prisoner and witnesses.

The straightforward solution of the problem appeared to be the use of the first layout, but with sufficient space allowed for cameras to get into the court itself in order to take close-ups of the prisoner, the witness and the magistrate from the correct angle, the overall length of the set would be such that any form of long shot

taken with the wide-angle lens would look quite ridiculous, and the magistrate would appear to be some 200 ft. from the prisoner, whilst long shots with a longer-focus lens would necessitate the side walls being impracticably short. The solution finally arrived at lay in the building of a main set which allowed for one camera only to approach within close-up distance of the witness box.

A duplicate of the dock and a duplicate of the magistrate's bench were built at the sides of their respective positions in the main set and static cameras were used to take close-ups in these positions. The actors had, therefore, to talk to other actors which they could not see on a sight-line which brought all sorts of distracting mechanical devices and their operators into their field of vision. This sort of thing was inevitable and was one of the penalties then of acting for television, but it should be noted that, although to the casual visitor to Alexandra Palace in those days, a studio full of smart white-coated technicians seemed very impressive, to the actors they represented a refinement of torture. The above scheme worked satisfactorily and it was possible to show both magistrate and prisoner in position on the main set in mid-shot sufficiently often to retain the necessary illusion. Sound pick-up offered no problems on the duplicate set-ups, and ordinary stand microphones were employed. As two long-shot positions were used on the main set a concealed microphone was employed to cover both witness box and solicitors' bench. This was in the form of a lighting fitment made of white gauze to simulate porcelain with the microphone inside. The magistrate's ink-pot contained another microphone and the few words required from the dock on the main set were picked up by the boom microphone which could be raised for long-shots. As this used



all the five microphone channels available, the subsidiary scenes outside the court had to be covered by the boom microphone which covered the dock. Cutting on the duplicate set-ups obeyed rules established in the main set. The magistrate looked just off screen left, at the prisoner, and the prisoner looked just off screen right at the magistrate.

### Case (2) Produced at Lime Grove Studios

In this production the script called for considerable movement of both characters and viewpoint. The following sets were required:

A Court Room.

A Hall outside the court room.

A Clerk's Office.

A Police Room.

A Telephone Box.

A Jury Room.

Within the court the following required close-ups: the judge, the judge's clerk, the clerk of the assize, prosecuting and defending counsel, prisoner in the dock, the witness, the jury, the jury in waiting and seats occupied by witnesses who had given evidence. In the final solution the liberty was taken of playing the latter two in the same location. A table of events was drawn up which, in addition to showing the order in which the sets were required, indicated the various scenes in which the characters appeared and showed the possibilities of doubling actors for two or more parts. Producer, designer and script-writer visited many provincial courts of assize and examined the photographs of many others. They were confronted by a bewildering variety of shapes and layouts. There were even precedents for a pear-shaped or semi-circular court, but

since the studios were rectangular it was decided that a rectangular court would offer an easier solution. Two main styles of layout were encountered; that of the No.1 Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey, where jury and witness box are side by side and counsel face them, or where jury and witness box face one another and counsel face the judge. The latter was chosen for the production.

The script consisted of several minor cases within the court following the usual ceremonial opening of the session, interspersed with visits to various points outside the court room to give atmosphere and information. In none of these cases was a jury involved. The second half of the script dealt with a murder trial and it was desired that the viewer should be as closely as possible identified with the jury and feel the responsibility of the jurymen. That is to say, the angles used in the murder trial, could with advantage, be mainly from the jury viewpoint, whereas the earlier cases had to be seen from an objective viewpoint.

An examination of the table of events revealed that two cameras would have to be employed outside the court. On the other hand two cameras only on the court would be barely adequate for shorter scenes and three were an essential minimum for the main sequences of the murder trial. Therefore, one camera at least would have to travel between court room and the sets outside. The later sequences could be covered by one camera outside the court, but at the end of the programme two cameras would clearly be required outside again. The position of the scene in the jury room between the scene in the court and the scene in the police room was an added complication.

Many layouts were tried in plan with court and hall, etc., at right angles to one another, on opposite sides of the studio, and



in one and the same straight line, and, as is frequently the case, the latter proved the only possible solution to the problem of so arranging matters that four cameras could do the work of at least seven, eight sound channels the work of fifteen, and the cast could move from set to set easily and in the correct natural time.

Two cameras were permanently in the court: one of them could be trained down on the jury room on the extreme right, whilst the other was given a long run of rostrums which would enable it to obtain a long shot of the hall. Another two cameras were employed outside the court room. For the longer court scenes one of them could be moved to a position with a view-point over the backs of the first two rows of the jury. On one occasion the other camera was brought into the court to take a straight-on shot of the duplicate jury benches. Dimensions within the court were extremely critical. The distance from judge to camera three, position A, and from prisoner to camera four, position A, had to be a maximum of 18 feet. This was the distance calculated to give an adequately large close-up with the longest-focus lens to be employed - the  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in.\* The witness box and press benches were not substantially beyond this range and could be adequately covered in close-up. Double doors at the court room entrance enabled tracking cameras to get within the court for long shots of judge, sherriffs, clerk of assize, etc., and for reverse angles on the occupants of the jury-in-waiting seats beside the dock. Having established the layout of the court room the exterior sets virtually located themselves. The space between the court and telephone box was the minimum calculated to allow free

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\* See Appendix 64 for technical information on this lens.

deployment of sound boom and cameras and as the clerk's office was required only for one scene at the beginning of the programme it was placed on the extreme left.

The jury seats were duplicated in order to give effective angles as from the back row of the jury on the main set, but a reverse angle showing the jury's faces in order to see their reaction to the speeches of the advocates was considered essential, and the first two rows of jurymen were fully employed moving quickly in an almost horizontal position from one row of seats to the other.

Sound pick-up presented considerable problems; eight channels only were available. One of these had to be used for the gramophone turntables since music and various effects were required, but no sound on film was needed, hence seven studio microphones could be employed. Two were essential outside the court room itself, one on a boom to cover the main hall, one on a short boom or "lazy arm" to cover the clerk's office, the police room and the telephone box. That left five only for the court room itself. Close-up speech was required from the judge, the judge's clerk, the clerk of the assize, the witness, the two counsel, the prisoner, the jury-in-waiting, two jurymen in the front row in both positions, and, since it could not be covered otherwise, the jury room, though this need by no means be in close-up.

The embellishment of the judge's desk was so designed that one microphone could be placed quite boldly on its corner and given the necessary coat of paint. A stand microphone was placed in the witness box, a third microphone was disguised as a knob on the rail in front of the jurymen-in-waiting and a fourth became an integral part of a rather elaborate gas-fitting on the table between the



advocates and clerk of assize. A boom placed on a rostrum above the position of one of the cameras in the court had to cover speech from the dock, jurymen and jury room. This layout served very adequately for the programme but there were, of course, advantages in the fact that really quite quiet speech was required only from the witnesses and the jury-in-waiting, who were positioned very near their respective microphones, and the remaining members of the court would naturally speak more clearly and loudly than in normal conversation. It is interesting to note that even had more microphone booms been available it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to employ them owing to the cross-angle shooting of the cameras, but that twice the number of microphone channels would have made things considerably easier.

Here, then, was a typical example of the way in which technical facilities almost exclusively governed the physical layout and consequently the action of an entire programme. The number of cameras available for a given scene, and hence the degree of detailed selection and emphasis the producer could employ to convey the story to his audience, was never the ideal but always a compromise between the demands of previous, present and future scenes - a compromise, the artistic basis of which was for the most part subservient to technical considerations. Obviously this is always the case, but it is by no means always appreciated to what degree, even in the most favourable circumstances, the technical considerations tend to override artistic ones.<sup>19</sup>

Once in the rehearsal room, routine did not differ radically from that facing the drama producer, any more than the technicalities of production differed - technicalities that can be found adequately

treated in any television production-manual.<sup>20</sup>

There were however, one or two unique features about documentary productions. For instance, when the whole company was reassembled for the first time after the first 'read-through', which usually did not occur until about four days before studio rehearsals there was a certain amount of 'specialist coaching' undertaken.

"During these four days", explains Caryl Doncaster, "the experts were usually invited to the dingy rehearsal rooms to check performance and action for accuracy of detail. Where specialised action was required they were called in sooner. For The Call-Up, the War Office lent a regimental sergeant-major to acquaint our juvenile actors with Army drill - an unrewarding job for the sergeant-major. In Return to Living I contented myself with a Home Office official and a representative 'ex-lag' - whom we invited to see us on different days."<sup>21</sup>

Also the direction of actors for dramatised-documentaries differed a great deal from drama direction proper. An actor could not 'get by' by playing the character, however skilled his technique. He had to 'be' the person he was portraying. And to do this he had to forget most of the skills he had learnt - his voice production technique, his movements, the projection of his own personality - everything by which he becomes a little larger than life had to go. Nor was it enough to 'underplay' the whole time, though this was the first requirement and still is, for television performance as a whole. It was a fact that the most successful documentary performances at this time were often given by young people with little or no previous training. These productions were popular too with actors because they could often graduate from them to drama proper.

"Once lines and moves had been learned", writes Caryl Doncaster, "I would sometimes take the actor to meet the real people on whose activities the script was based. This usually altered their whole interpretation. In Jennifer Wayne's Can I Have a Lawyer? I took the whole cast to an East London Court. Thomas Heathcote,



who most powerfully portrayed a Corrective Trainee in Return to Living, spent many hours talking to an ex-inmate of Dartmoor, to get the feel of his character so that he might stop acting and become an ex-prisoner himself." 22

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The major problems throughout this period for the Documentary Group were the ever-rising costs of production and inadequate staffing for the enormous amount of work involved in getting programmes onto the screen. There were also the daily problems of equipment,<sup>23</sup> rehearsals and production standards, as Robert Barr pointed out in a memorandum to Cecil McGivern in March, 1949:<sup>24</sup>

"It has been your wish - and mine - for some time that I should produce three successive programmes of high standard. Instead, I find it successively impossible to attain, let alone maintain, any kind of professional standard at all with the tools which the Service provides.

The Time Machine, as you know, was planned for two days' rehearsal, which proved impossible. Then a repeat was planned, with an overnight set which did not mature.

London After Dark No.1, because of its very nature, was planned with about 50% sound film specially shot with the full co-operation of Scotland Yard. Last Tuesday I saw the takes, and spent Wednesday afternoon discussing cutting and editing with the Assistant Film Editor. The agreed schedule was that I should see the cut film this morning, leaving two days - in the midst of rehearsal - for correction, fine cutting, and track-laying, two days for processing, and the film to be ready the day before transmission, A tight but workable schedule.

This morning my appointment to see the cut film was cancelled and here is the story.

On Thursday morning the editola broke down. It was repaired, and broke down again on Friday. It was repaired and later ( I am assured) broke down a third time and began to issue smoke to such an extent that the Assistant Film Editor cleared all cans of film in case of fire.

Today, five days after the cutting of my film should have started, the editola is still unserviceable and my sound film still uncut. The film is 50% - and the best 50% - of this documentary programme. The Assistant Film Editor, with the enthusiasm of all Alexandra Palace technicians, tells me: "As soon as it is repaired I'll get cracking. I'll work late. I'll get it ready for you."

This is the same story as The Time Machine: "As soon as the scenery arrives it will be up in no time. We'll go without our tea-break. We'll get it ready in time for transmission."

The scenery was up in time for transmission, but not in time for rehearsal, and the result was twenty-five letters of harsh criticism of untidy production, studio noise, and of all the other faults of scamped, rushed and untidy work.

This successive frustration in production - from over-worked equipment, over-burdened service departments, delays that cut into production time - make it impossible to give other than hit-and-miss work.

Last time, in my enthusiasm, I went ahead with a programme that I believe did me considerable harm; the producer in the end takes the blame for hurried work. This new break-down has pushed me beyond the safety margin and means that once again I must take a chance. There will be no time for correction if either the Film Editor or the labs make a mistake, and this film is a critical part of my programme. Once again it is "nobody's fault", but - what do I do?"

The answer unfortunately is not on record.

The strains of working in such cramped conditions as those existing at Alexandra Palace are well described in a report captioned 'Palace Chaos' and published in The Isis of 8 November, 1950, when Val Gielgud,<sup>25</sup> then Head of both Sound and Television Drama, is reported to have provided the following information:

"Plays are televised on the same day that they receive their first studio rehearsal at Alexandra Palace. With its staff working at this pitch the BBC's TV Service was already strained almost to breaking point. It was absurd to talk of an early extension of transmission hours. Improvement in the standard of transmissions must come first. At present, although a producer has three weeks in which to prepare his play, he has the use of the studios only for the day of performance. He spends the morning supervising the



building of scenery, the afternoon rehearsing the play, and the evening watching it on one screen and directing three camera crews with the help of another. The BBC transmits a hundred and ten plays a year under these conditions. It is a miracle, said Mr. Gielgud, that screens were not blank for half of each play. Next year television would have room to develop its new Lime Grove Studios, but the aim must be to improve the technique and quality of programmes - not to multiply them." 26

The Press was also aware that improvements were needed both in technique and quality, as Caroline Lejeune pointed out in The Observer of 26 June, 1949:

"The people at Alexandra Palace might take note that as a general rule, there is little profit in a large number of camera set-ups, if the change of set-up is the occasion for an outburst of hammering, shuffling, talking, and what seems to be the dropping of iron girders.<sup>27</sup> Television is wonderful, we know, but it would be a lot more enjoyable if the prompter and stage hands were less frequently audible, and the professional artists would do us the honour of mastering their lines."<sup>28</sup>

Robert Barr, however, had some suggestions to make in the light of these and other criticisms in a memorandum to Cecil McGivern - The Time Machine and Rehearsal Problems:<sup>29</sup>

"If we are to produce a succession of polished and dramatic documentaries the following is the absolute minimum studio rehearsal we require, based on a 60-minute programme.

- (a) One walk-through for camera movements, scene striking, i.e. to let the technical staff know what they are expected to do. This is merely the equivalent of a radio "read-through" at the table. Time: ninety minutes.
- (b) One run-through with stops to put camera angles, lighting, sound cues, etc. right. The equivalent of a first microphone read-through in sound. Time: ninety minutes.
- (c) One rehearsal to see that cast and technical staff know precisely what to do and that all cues are on time. Time: (should be) 60 minutes.

If there is to be any standard of production at all, that is the absolute minimum. Below that a production is hit-or-miss. With it we can give a smooth and polished production and set a maintainable standard, so, let's

consider what this minimum rehearsal entails.

It entails an 'over-night set' or a guarantee that setting and key lighting will be over by 10.30 a.m. Then the floor cleared, cameras manned and warmed-up, cast called and everyone ready to begin the walk through by 11.00 a.m.

First walk-through: 11.00 - 12.30: on this walk-through the Stage Manager, Scene Shifters, Property men will learn what the show entails on the floor. The grams operator and the lighting engineer will watch in the gallery and the producer will point out on the 'monitor' where the cues come, what lighting effects are wanted and be free to discuss all points without listening to the lines being spoken by the cast. This is a technical walk-through.

- 12.30 - 1.00 : re-setting in studio, correction of lighting, discussion with technical staff, notes to cast.
- 1.00 - 2.00 : First run-through: the rough technical problems having been solved: this is for production: the correction of camera angles, speed of track-in, correction of sound cues and gram cues, level of background music.
- 3.30 - 4.00 : Re-setting of studio, final discussion with technical staff, alterations and notes to cast.
- 4.00 - 4.30 : Studio break for tea.
- 4.30 - 5.00 : Teleciné and grams rehearsal: it is essential that there is a moment in rehearsal when sound becomes predominant and vision is held to get the sound level and timing right.
- 5.00 - 6.00 : Rehearsal as for transmission. This is the first time the cast has had a proper rehearsal and the studio staff a non-stop rehearsal. This rehearsal should run to time, but the producer still has time for improvements, say, to 6.30.
- 6.30 - 7.00 : Re-setting of studio for transmission and final notes.
- 7.00 - 8.00 : Studio breaks for dinner and maintenance.

As I said, that is the bare minimum on which documentary programmes, can hope to found any standard of production."

The aim of all this planning that Barr had in mind was to produce a 'strike' of one dramatised documentary a month. McGivern's ambition was for a weekly strike as Barr pointed out in a letter to



the author concerning the first series for television called  
I Made News (1951):<sup>30</sup>

"(This)... has some historical interest since it was the first time we were able to do a weekly 'drama' series on television. Reason: there was then no means of pre-recording and since 'everyone was a Producer'<sup>31</sup> the turn-around for scripting, casting, design and rehearsal was about four weeks. It seemed impossible that there would ever be an equivalent of radio's weekly Dick Barton. My own series up to then were at four weekly intervals and one day Cecil McGivern breathed a sort of wish "if only we could do them weekly". It seemed at the time the impossible wish on television. I made a bargain with him: if he would give me two studio managers and let me set up two Units I'd give him a weekly series."

And here is how Barr proposed to organise the weekly  
 30 minute dramatised documentaries:<sup>32</sup>

"It was agreed that we should experiment on the lines of film practice, of having a producer in charge of all (12) productions, but with 'directors' responsible for rehearsal and for the studio presentation of the show and working to the producer. It was part of this experiment to see whether a producer having the choice of story, choice of script-writers, imposing the necessary documentation on the production, and supervising casting and rehearsal could impose a 'style' of production on the series."

A break-down of the day-to-day work of each programme showed that the minimum time for the preparation of these shows was fourteen days.

At first they considered having three units in operation, but Barr felt that that would be too costly in both personnel and office accommodation and he decided that the experiment would be much more worthwhile if this output could be achieved by using only two units.

The Unit: each unit was to consist of a director and a production secretary.

The Producer: was to be responsible for the choice of story

choice and briefing of script-writers and (within the limits of an average allocation) responsible for the allocation of money for each programme, e.g. although the average allocation was £425, actual allocation on each of the scripts ranged from £363 to £510.<sup>33</sup>

The producer was also responsible for the accuracy and documentation of the programmes, for preliminary design conference, for finding film locations, for obtaining all necessary permits, for filming sessions, and for the payment and entertainment of the 'personalities' who appeared in the programme. His office was to be responsible for the general routine of billings, booking rehearsal rooms, despatch of props and wardrobe lists, etc. and for all the day-to-day problems of alterations and additions to 'requirement lists'. The Producer was also to supervise casting and rehearsal, since part of the experiment was to see whether with choice of story, choice of script-writers, and such supervision he could impose a 'style of production' on the series.

At the end of the run of twelve programmes Barr made the following comments on the relative merits of his system:<sup>34</sup>

"The cost of a programme begins with the script. I was not at all satisfied with the quality of the scripts I received or with the television craftsmanship... All the writers were briefed in the use of no more than 12 characters (preferably 10) and a maximum of three main sets and three background... I had decided to pay a comparatively high price per script: 50 gns. I had also broken the script-writing down into three phases which were paid separately: story, treatment, scenario. This allowed two, or even three writers to contribute to each script. It is still a good scheme... I think it is fair to say that every problem that arose during this experiment stemmed directly from a late or indifferent script... Had the scripts for this series been ordered in reasonable time, had they been written with a knowledge of television studio practice I could have saved £50 per show, provided better programmes, and saved my directors from overwork."



As for the Unit system as a whole Barr wrote:<sup>35</sup>

"I have now learned enough about this system of production to say: (a) a Producer can impose his 'style' on the production; (b) obtain a better production, by knowing what is wanted by watching and advising; (c) smooth the way for the director by careful advanced planning.

And these things will improve with practice. It is, of course necessary, that the Producer and Director work well together and that their temperaments are suited to this style of work.

This system requires hard and continuous work from all members of the unit, its economy of personnel and allocation rests on continuous production; its style of production and streamlining of method, rests with the team.

Since the director is the most closely connected with the creative work, he will tire first. He is important, but he is also expendable. He can be rested, changed, given one show in two, three or four weeks, according to his capacity.

The unit is the driving force and its speed is founded on insisting on continuous output. The unit therefore should be an organisation capable of handing a 'package' to a director - (script, secretary, stage manager, basic floor plan, basic prop list, suggested cast list, and rehearsal schedule) and ensure that the programme is up to the unit standard. The unit should therefore consist of: Producer and Secretary, Unit Manager, Production Secretary, Designer, Senior Television Engineer, Casting Clerk - all allocated for all of the unit's productions."

This proposal of Robert Barr's has been quoted at some length because of its importance for the whole future of programme organisation, i.e. laying the foundations for the policy of 'continuous' production methods on which Public Service Broadcasting is built. This will be illustrated later in this thesis.<sup>36</sup>

Yet for all their hard work and experimentation the Documentary Group still came under repeated fire for being too 'expensive' and wasteful of both staff and money. George Barnes, Director of Television, wrote in 1953:

"During my first year in Television I was concerned to see that the resources then being added belatedly to

the Television Service were being fully used, e.g. the regional O.B. Units. We have now reached a stage when studios and Master Control Rooms can barely accommodate what we wish to do and I am satisfied that most output departments realise the importance of making full use of these facilities which carry a large overhead in the shape of permanent staff. There is one exception which is obvious - the Documentary Department. This at the present time is the most expensive of the output departments. The staff are fully used every quarter; even if each individual has enough to do, his output is not giving programmes the value which it should. The Department occupies less programme time than any other Department and for some reason its programmes are not repeatable. I realise that television documentary is a new art and one which has got to be given the resources to grow. If we can nurture it properly it may well become our greatest strength, but growth can be too slow and maturing can be too expensive. Now that the Department has a distinguished Head (Rotha) it is time not only that it produced more successes but that these successes are not proportionately more expensive than other programmes, e.g. Variety." 37

In answer to the enquiries of the press, Mr. Rotha revealed at this time that his staff of six producers and two directors had an average of about 55 minutes of screen time each week, and that the cost of a documentary programme was in the region of £1,000 an hour.<sup>38</sup>

Finally technical problems were not only confined to the studio but extended to the television receiver in the home of the viewer. Ian Atkins, writing in 1950 had this to say about the problems facing any television producer in those days - and even nowadays too:

"The film director and his camera-man would be greatly shocked if they were told that in future each member of the cinema audience would develop his or her own film. The television producer and his engineer colleague are in precisely this position. Worse in fact, the producer and camera-man may spend considerable time and thought on the composition of a particular shot and achieve what they think is the best result, only to have half their audience look at a receiver in which the scan has been so spread beyond the limits of the tube that only the middle of their master-piece is visible. Again, they may achieve an effect of macabre grandeur



by means of lighting and adjustment of the black level control only to have their viewers lean forward and twiddle the receiver controls to obtain, according to their tastes, soot and whitewash or a thin grey fog decorated with fly-back lines." 39

Three factors contributed to this disastrous situation: the output from various programme sources was not matched and as a result the viewer was tempted to re-adjust his receiver as the programme moved from studio to studio, from film to outside broadcast. As long as the output from the transmitter encouraged the frequent adjustment of receivers it was impossible to train viewers to leave well alone. The test card regularly transmitted by the BBC before each programme period, however suited to indicate maladjustment of scan and linearity controls and however capable of indicating resolution up to 3 Mc/s was not satisfactory for the average receiver for the correct setting-up of brightness and contrast controls. Many, if not most, receivers suffered to a greater or lesser degree a reduction in anode voltage when the beam current was increased by a superabundance of peak white in the picture. Few sets remained in focus when a white caption card with black lettering covering only a small proportion of the screen, or an aeroplane against the sky, was shown. The proportion of light grey in the card was too high, and that of dark grey and black too low, in comparison with the average picture, and it was for the average picture that the receiver would give its best results. Many receivers, if correctly adjusted to show perfect results on the test card, required an increase of contrast and a decrease of brightness to obtain satisfaction on the succeeding programme. This further encouraged the constant readjustment of receivers.

Some compensation for the ageing of the tube had clearly to be provided in the receiver, for the more stable in operation it could be made, the easier it would be to reduce the number of accessible controls and to achieve some fixed standard of reproduction without which the work of the studios was largely fruitless.

And if that was not enough, there was also the constant worry of breakdowns!

Yet despite all these problems the Producers of the day were not slow to seize on the real advantages that television had to offer them. Foremost was its technical capacity to synthesise reality. By the skilful use of film, archive material, editing and special effects, it would have been quite possible to broadcast magazine programmes or even newsreels which were in fact pure fiction. At the same time it was possible to suggest that fiction was fact and the cross-fertilisation of drama and documentary is a particularly interesting phenomenon which will be fully considered in a later chapter. However, the arguments for and against the dramatisation of documentary as written and produced by the Documentary group in the period under discussion can be summarised as follows:

Against: They can be tedious, and have none of the unexpected, which makes real things interesting. They can be dangerous if they fall into the wrong hands. (The Nazis for example, used to convey fraudulent anti-Jewish propaganda - fiction disguised as truth. And Orson Welles's famous radio dramatisation of The War of the Worlds and the invasion from Mars panicked a good deal of America in a matter of hours!) They can be dangerous if they present a



distorted picture of something, for example, a dramatised documentary series about the police which suggests that there are no corrupt coppers, or that the police never plant or fix evidence. Equally harmful would be a series which suggested that the police were all against the individual man in the street.

For: Most people find it hard to be their natural selves in the presence of a tape recorder or film camera. And there are many places to which these cannot get without destroying the very thing they come to show. But the researcher-writer can get into most of these places or talk to those who have been there, and can then script an objectively accurate recreation of what really happens and what people are really like when they are not posturing for the cameras.

*However, it is not all the answer -*  
 There are also facets of the human condition which cannot be expressed in terms of actual, living persons. Men and women will expose themselves thus far and no farther, and even if they cross this invisible frontier, there are the laws of libel and slander to be considered. Sexual relations are obviously matters which are best and more honestly discussed in fictional terms, and so are those of professional relationships whose truthful public exposure would do more harm than good to the people concerned. To claim that television documentary can do everything that drama can do, and then do it better than drama can is something yet to be proved. Also, the camera can only interview particular people about their particular view of some event. The dramatised-documentary writer can quintessentialise the wider implications. For this reason the drama-documentaries of the sixties, like Cathy Come Home for example, become a more powerful social instrument than either a play or a documentary. Cathy, or Rank and File are in fact the re-emerging

'dramatised-documentary' of ten years ago. The steady improvement in techniques - so that we now have the hand-held 16 mm sound-on-film camera which makes real-life instantly accessible and more convincing than the studio mock-ups of the past. There is too, the general acceptance of documentary television cameras into human situations where the BBC had formerly thought it should not go. But fundamentally it is the realisation that, for example, the chief surgeon of the Birmingham Accident Hospital is more worth watching when he talks straight to camera, than an actor playing his part, no matter how accurate and believable are the words written for him by someone as professional as say, Robert Barr.

Producers started once again, as will be shown later, to use the new technical advances to revive the old form pioneered by the earlier documentary writers.<sup>40</sup>

The fear that the dramatised-documentaries' days were numbered through lack of money, facilities, writers and support, was a very real one as Caryl Doncaster pointed out in 1955:

"I do feel that there is a danger that documentary-drama will be lost in the general growth of television, if an organisation isn't started with a view to getting more of this type of programme on the screen and at the same time keeping up the quality - which is primarily quality of writing and interpretation." <sup>41</sup>

It is sad to reflect that after all the hard work to establish and develop the principles and practice of television documentary the Documentary Department was to be dissolved later that same year.

Commercial Television and the threat of competition was to occupy most of the waking hours of the Corporation over the coming three or four years but the documentary form was in fact soon to return as the bedrock of the new series formulas of the sixties and



the 'organisation' which Caryl Doncaster was seeking for,  
happened naturally enough to be Drama.

## Notes

General reading: Major source of reference

Arthur Swinson, Writing for Television Today, Black (1963);  
 Peter Black, The Mirror in the Corner, Hutchinson (1972);  
 John Swift, Adventure in Vision, Lehmann (1950);  
 See also: Appendix 31 What is a Documentary Programme?;  
 Appendix 46 The Documentary in Television; Appendix 47 A Documentary Definition.

1. The three Grierson principles mentioned here are quoted by Forsyth Hardy in his book Grierson on Documentary, p.146-147.
2. See Appendix 44 for Paul Rotha's description of Harry Watt's film North Sea - in particular note: "As for acting, the men are magnificent. The crew was picked from unemployed. The trawler was, of course, specially chartered. They went to sea for a week. Then they shot the below-deck stuff in a studio mock-up." See also Appendix 48 and Gilchrist Calder's comments: "You know it was films like Harry Watt's North Sea which seemed so incredible to us then and more towards where we were hoping to go with television drama-documentary. That film was really my inspiration. I knew that I wanted to make actors behave like this. This was a master-piece, this was about life. Drama-documentary had to do with life that is why it is so like Grierson's documentary film movement of the thirties."
3. Grierson used the word documentary to describe Robert Flaherty's Moana which, he wrote "being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth, has documentary value." (New York Sun, February, 1926). Later he defined it as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Grierson on Documentary, p.13.)
4. See Appendix 46 The Documentary in Television, D.Ross.
5. Robert Barr memorandum to Cecil McGivern dated 3.8.51, BBC Written Archives - Documentary File.
6. Michael Barry - Head of Television Drama - reply to Cecil McGivern dated 15.8.51, BBC Written Archives - Documentary File.
7. The Television Playwright, Edited by Donald Wilson (Joseph, 1960). Introduction to The Unloved by Colin Morris, p.447.
8. See Appendix 92 Some Trends in BBC-TV Drama: Note in particular the entries under years 1963 (Sydney Newman) 1964-68 The Wednesday Play "blurring the boundaries of drama and documentary". See also Chapter Note 40 Leeds United!
9. This writer's interview with Colin Morris - April 1973.



10. Caryl Doncaster, Television in the Making, Edited by P.Rotha, Focal Press (1956), p.45.
11. Arthur Swinson, Writing for Television Today (Black, 1963) p.135: "The Story must grow out of the subject, as revealed in research; it must not be imposed on the subject artificially. If the story does not emerge naturally and spontaneously, then the subject is not one for documentary."
12. Examples of BBC Scripts are quoted from Arthur Swinson's book (ibid) p.139-140.
13. Caryl Doncaster, Television in the Making, p.45.
14. Ibid. p.46.
15. This writer's interview with Colin Morris - April 1973.
16. Review of Strike by Patrick Campbell, Yorkshire Observer, October 5th, 1955:  
 "Colin Morris's documentary play Strike! on Thursday proved an example of craftsmanship that has been sadly lacking of late in this field. Ever since Robert Barr and Caryl Doncaster left the peace and respectability of Lime Grove for the hurly-burly of the commercial world, BBC television has seemed singularly incapable of reproducing its past successes in the sphere of documentary. Indeed, from the day when it was decided to deprive the documentary of an identity of its own and to merge it in the wider pools of drama and talks, television programmes have been almost entirely wanting in the type of offering that used to be the very spine of the service.  
Strike! went a long way toward redressing the balance, although in its final 15 minutes Mr. Morris allowed the need for stating a case to overcome his skill as a dramatist - a defection that seemed to be conveyed to the actors, who became artificial and unconvincing.  
 Nevertheless this was, in its way, a minor masterpiece. If it paves the way to a renaissance of the television documentary, viewers may well be grateful to Mr. Morris and to his producer, Mr. Gilchrist Calder."
17. See Appendix 48 for the full transcript of this writer's interview with Gilchrist Calder, December 1973.
18. Both of the following examples are taken from Ian Atkins's 'Paper' to The Institute of Electrical Engineers, entitled Television Programme Production Problems in Relation to Engineering Technique (Vol. 99, part 111a, No.17, 1952), p.76-77. See also Appendix 59 for the transmission dates for Magistrate's Court and The Course of Justice.
19. For a first-hand account of a dramatised-documentary production of this period, 1954, see Appendix 58 Fashion Girl by Robert Barr.



20. See The Grammar of Television Production by Desmond Davis (Barrie & Rockliff, 1960) or Gerald Millerson's The Technique of Television Production (Focal Press - revised edition 1968). For historical accounts see Appendixes No. 60, 61, 62, 63 and 64.
  21. Caryl Doncaster, Television in the Making, p.48.
  22. Ibid. p.48.
  23. One major problem at this time was tele-ciné as this memorandum from Cecil McGivern to all Documentary Producers indicates: "I realise how difficult your lives have been and are being made by the complicated business of tele-ciné (Mechau and Central) in television. Documentary producers and writers in particular suffer, as television documentary is always a complicated mixture of studio and film. In fact it is not putting it too strongly to say that tele-ciné in television at present is seriously holding up the progress of documentary programmes in television. Programmes are being taken out of schedules, scripts are re-written to make them more simple from the film sequence point of view, rehearsals are frantically rushed and scamped." (April, 1951)
- Tele-recording: There was no regular provision for recording television programmes (tele-recording) until 1949. This was accomplished by filming the programme from the screen of a special high-quality monitor. This basically simple method is complicated by the difficulty of moving the film from frame to frame without thereby losing part of the picture; the moving spot of light that forms the television image is absent for less than 2 milliseconds between the bottom of one scan and the top of the next - alternate scans from the screen were simply blacked out to overcome this problem. The use of film tele-recording was restricted by its cost, as well as by the noticeable loss of technical quality it entailed, and it did not affect the predominance of 'live' programmes.
24. Memorandum from Robert Barr to Cecil McGivern - March, 1949, BBC Written Archives: Documentary File.
  25. Val Gielgud was appointed BBC Productions Director with responsibility for drama, features and variety, on 1 January, 1929, and ran the drama side of Sound for a quarter of a century. In 1950 he was combined Head of both Sound and Television Drama for eighteen months before returning to Radio.

Read Appendix 54, Memorandum from Norman Collins (Controller BBC-TV) to Sir William Haley (Director-General BBC), 14 September, 1949, Integration of Sound and TV Drama - note Collins' remarks: "Anything less than - complete familiarity with all aspects of television production will mean also that the Head of Television Drama is an amateur. To propose then that one man, who is already responsible for the professional standards of 450 to 500 Sound radio drama productions a year, should additionally be made responsible for the professional



standards of 100 to 150 television productions seems to me more perilous than to seek to put one man in charge of the professional standards of the Old Vic and of Pinewood." Complete familiarity for Gielgud included a part during rehearsals of the first TV play ever transmitted (14 July, 1930) The Man with the Flower in his Mouth - but not the actual production due to an attack of influenza - and a brief attachment to Alexandra Palace in 1939 when as Gielgud himself says (see Years in a Mirror, p.125) "Of course I had not become an expert. In terms of expertise I could not hold a candle to people like Michael Barry, Royston Morley, or Dallas Bower." Nevertheless he got the job. See Appendix 55 for Gielgud's description of those frustrating months and the failure of his twin objectives: "to make a genuine working Drama Department for the TV Service... and to produce a workable drama policy." In a memorandum he wrote in May, 1951, he said: "In sound, Features stemmed from Drama - and the best Feature producers had their original training in Drama. The line between documentaries - when not in the field of Talks and News - and Drama, is extremely hard to draw and I think there is no doubt that a great deal of original television dramatic material is bound to have strong documentary affiliations, and inter-related planning of such documentaries with regular dramatic output seems to me essential for the future." (BBC Archives - Drama File). But for Gielgud there was to be no future in television as The Times of 14 April, 1952, recorded: "From today Mr. Val Gielgud is to be head of the sound department of the BBC and Mr. Michael Barry will be in charge of Television Drama..."

26. The Isis, 8 November, 1950. BBC Written Archives - Press Cuttings File.
27. For a possible explanation of this point see Appendix 63 Studio Noise and in particular note Barr's reference to 'Iron Men'.
28. Caroline Lejeune The Observer, 26 June, 1949: BBC Written Archives: Press Cuttings File.
29. Robert Barr memorandum to Cecil McGivern dated 27 February, 1949, The Time Machine and Rehearsal Problems - BBC Written Archives - Documentary File.
30. Personal Letter to the author from Robert Barr, dated 9 May, 1974: "Among the items you so gallantly carted off (The Robert Barr Papers) was a little cost book for the series I Made News (1951) I have come across the 'rough' of the report I made at the end of the series which may interest you since it reflects something of the problems and politics of the time."
31. For a background explanation of the use of the term Producer/Director in television see Appendix 65, Denis Johnston's Production Memoranda (1946).



32. For the full report of the I Made News series by Robert Barr see Appendix 50 - Robert Barr Papers.
33. See Appendix 51 for the complete costings of the I Made News series of nine programmes: Robert Barr Papers.
34. Appendix 50, Report of I Made News.
35. Ibid.
36. For an account of the situation by March 1955 see Appendix 52, Caryl Doncaster's Proposals for the future development of Documentary - an attempt on her part to cope with staffing, rising costs and competition.
37. George Barnes - Director of the TV Service - memorandum to Cecil McGivern dated 18 September, 1953: BBC Written Archives: Documentary File.
38. The Manchester Guardian (31 December, 1953)  
 "Having opened with the statement that his staff of six producers and two directors have an average of about 55 minutes of screen time each week, Rotha later had to face a questioner who demanded to know if he thought his people did 'a fair day's work'? Rotha kept his smile. He thinks his team works very hard, "certainly harder than in films". One of those whom Mr. Rotha had apparently failed to please wanted information about costs. As a new boy Mr. Rotha wondered whether that kind of discussion is within his province. The questioner insisted. Suppose a variety programme lasting an hour cost £1,000 how would that compare with costs in the Documentary Department? Rotha thought that there is "very little in it."
39. Ian Atkins - Television Programme Production Problems, p.78-79, Op.cit.
40. On 31 October, 1974, the 'old form' was revived again by The Play for Today drama series. This time it was Leeds - United! by Colin Welland. In Radio Times Review of November 9th, 1974, Jonathan Raban wrote:  
 "The writer, director and producer of a television play have the odds stacked against them. They have to make their slice of imaginary life look as real as the rest of that unending stream of screened events - the football matches, wars, riots, Miss World contests, government upheavals and show-jumping galas. Play for Today goes out after the News. But beside a Belfast bombing or Mr. Healey, can a mere play ever seem anything but insipid, irrelevant and faked? Nearly ten years ago now, The Wednesday Play team found a solution of sorts. Their plays made news because they were made like news... When the real clothing strike happened in Leeds in 1970, it was hardly reported at all. Leeds United! was not content merely to make belated news of the strike; it was determined to turn it into History..."



As long as the screen was kept filled with crowds, buildings and machinery, Leeds - United! looked marvellous - a genuine television epic. But it drifted into a familiar, spurious form of television realism. There was an interview with the 'Northern Secretary' of a fictional trade union (identified by a caption across the screen), who talked past the camera in authentic News fashion. A cutter talked about his job straight-to-camera. Perversely, these tricks did not make the play more 'real'. Instead they served to remind one of the smell of cooking. They announced that here were two actors who were trying to look like trade-unionists and cutters appearing on television, and that Roy Battersby, who directed Leeds - United! was an adept copy-cat when it came to faking the techniques used by his colleagues in Current Affairs. They had an instant ring of untruth. Nor did Colin Welland's script always manage to live up to the demands made on it by the film camera. He caught exactly the way that people speak in public; and the climatic set-piece in Leeds Town Hall was a triumph of realistic writing. But close-up, in private conversation, people suddenly turned, disconcertingly, into actors doing a script....

Leeds - United! tried to have it both ways. It wanted stage villains and melodrama; it also wanted to be as 'real' as a Tuesday's Documentary. It was an attempt to break down the conventions of television that separate fact from fiction, news from comment. Finally it was imprisoned by the very conventions it was trying to smash. One watched, not a new kind of programme, but a bit of classic film, a bit of news, a bit of documentary, a bit of soap opera. Leeds - United! was a monster, rattling the chains of the conventions out of which it was made. An extraordinary mixture of splendour and banality."

It is worth comparing this review with the review of the Colin Morris play Strike! already mentioned in note 16.

41. Caryl Doncaster - Proposals for future development of Documentary (1955), Appendix 52.

## CHAPTER SIX

Commercial Television Arrives

"If we hadn't fired Collins there would be no commercial television now." <sup>1</sup>

Over-organised, over-administered, poor and in debt<sup>2</sup> BBC Television waited for the coming of the competitor in 1955; some of its staff confident and keen to get to grips, others aware that an epoch was about to close. For, though the government had promised that the constitution and function of the BBC would never be changed, change was inevitable and what remained might not be recognisable as the old BBC. So far all that the BBC had done had been in a vacuum: nobody could be sure whether its audience stayed with it because they liked what it was giving them or because there was no other Television to look at.

Various strands now began to intertwine: the television and electronics industries wanted competitive television because they believed something new, something additional to BBC television, would stimulate the growth of sales of television receivers. It was incontestible that the trade could do with a boost. As late as 1951 the number of licences had not reached 800,000. Advertisers and the retail trade wanted a fresh outlet for advertising. In the early 1950s newsprint was still rationed severely - The Daily Mail averaged six pages an issue during the first quarter of 1951 - and there was not enough space in newspapers and magazines for the agencies who clamoured to fill it. Tory politicians wanted to break the monopoly



because they thought it had been hostile to the party. Spearheading these movements was Norman Collins,<sup>3</sup> Head of BBC Television until his resignation in 1950.

This event, in October of that year, was not unexpected by those who had noticed that Collins and his chief, Sir William Haley, were publishing diametrically opposed theories about television. Haley thought that a civilised broadcasting system would wish to use sound radio and television as a unified service to which each would contribute what it could do best. In a better world this ideal might have prevailed. Collins, however, took a more realistic view of the mass audience. Haley had let him go to America to see what they were doing with television. He returned convinced that television would ultimately swamp Sound and wrote as much in the BBC Quarterly:

"The very fact that it is in the home is vital. Its only rival will be the wireless, and the rivalry will not be strong. The wireless set will remain silent, except for music where the contribution that vision has to make is, to say the least of it, still unexplored. Indeed, the first casualty of television, possibly the only casualty, is not the local cinema or the country theatre, it is sound radio." <sup>4</sup>

As a prophecy made in 1949, when radio was basking in the afterglow of its war, this showed a grasp of probabilities very rare among BBC men.

At this time Collins wanted a separate development of every facet of the Television Service, though under the umbrella of the BBC charter.

The break between Haley and his chief Television executive was only a matter of time. Collins' explanation for his resignation was that he did not wish to be associated with a state of affairs that he regarded as injurious to the future of British Television,

and accused Broadcasting House of apathy, lack of interest and open hostility towards television. The BBC promptly replied that Collins had been a candidate for the new post of Director of Television and had not resigned until he had been told he was not to get it. They gave the job to George Barnes and hoped Collins would stay to work under him as Controller of Programmes. Barnes was then Director of the Spoken Word, a mandarinish title for an office of immense power (news, religion, talks and education all lay under his hand). His appointment was thus a reassertion of Haley's conviction that television was bound up with radio in a general broadcasting service.

Time would show that in this Haley was quite right and Collins wrong. Over a wide area of programming - fiction series, panel games, comedy series, interviews, quizzes, documentaries, plays, outside broadcasts - there were many subjects that made good broadcasting, and it made little difference whether they were broadcast on sound or television. Television added the information of pictures and that was about all. But though Haley could take this catholic view those more closely engaged in television could not. To them Television had to establish its own identity and to a man of Collins' temperament, absorbed in the struggle to have television treated as a revolutionary broadcasting tool, Barnes' appointment was a defeat not to be borne.

Haley's thoughts on the new instrument faithfully echoed the radio pioneers of twenty-five years earlier, with their confident anticipation that the crofter in his croft, the labourer in his squalid tenement, etc., would all in spirit sit side by side with the patron of the stalls and together inhale great draughts of life-



enhancing education, information and entertainment.

Haley also foresaw, which is more than many of his colleagues did, that there was an accompanying danger that television would do exactly the reverse, would sap the individual's capacity by encouraging him to withdraw still further from active participation in the daily round. "If there is one responsibility that television heightens in broadcasting it is to ensure that it does not, in the end, make people even more passive than they are already."

Collins had his share of the crofter, tenement and stalls patron syndrome, though as a professional novelist he expressed it more graphically.

"With nation-wide television, when the King leaves Buckingham Palace the Mall will extend as far as the Royal Mile and the King will ride simultaneously through the four Kingdoms... the Lord Mayor of London will no longer be drawn merely through the streets of the capital but through every town and village where the spectacle of his coach and horses will bring back the magic of the fairy-tale",<sup>5</sup>etc. etc.

But Collins was also more realistic than most. He saw what Haley could not admit, that the supposed pastimes which television would threaten, such as conversation and home music, were already moribund.

Collins' resignation happened a week after the ludicrous affair of Party Manners. This was a mildly offensive, not very good political comedy which the Labour Party, traditionally sensitive to threats to its dignity, resented because it depicted Labour politicians as ready to feather their own nests. Lord Simon, Chairman of the BBC, took it upon himself to ban the repeat of this play ('live' on the following Thursday). He was perfectly within his rights, but the mainly Tory press took the view that in banning the production he, as a member of the Labour Party, was

showing political bias as Chairman of the Governors.<sup>6</sup>

Collins followed this affair up with a full-page article in the Sunday Express which forcefully dramatised the plight of a man like himself who had just committed what he called 'professional suicide'.<sup>7</sup> In 1951 he founded High Definition Films (ostensibly to improve the quality of television recordings) and began making speeches advocating a competitive service. Within a few days of Parliament's approval of the White Paper<sup>8</sup> he set about forming a company to develop the alternative service as promised by the Government.

This was the situation when Independent Television started in Britain in 1955, under almost primitive conditions. With makeshift studios, inadequate equipment, a handful of trained staff and scores of trainees, the ITA companies had the one advantage of enthusiasm, much of it surging from those who had left the BBC in some despair.

The new service was allocated channels in Band 3. These frequencies were three or four times higher than those hitherto used in this country for television, and required new designs of transmitters, aerials and receivers. The shorter wavelength of the Band 3 signals made them less able to bend round obstacles, so that pockets of poor reception within the service area of the transmitter were more troublesome than they had been for the Band 1 channels used by the BBC. By way of compensation, the smaller wavelength meant that more elaborate aerials could be designed for a given overall size, whilst the more nearly 'optical' range of Band 3 signals reduced interference between transmitters using the same frequency.



In September 1955, just over a year after the Television Act became law, the ITA's London transmitter was operational, serving over 12 million people. Before the end of 1956, three more transmitters had been commissioned, bringing about 60% of the population within reach of the ITA's programmes, though as yet only about half of the households with television had sets able to receive them.

So far as 'selling' time went, the ITA had no more and no less power than the BBC to let politicians or religious bodies use the screen, and no chance of outbidding the BBC on 'national' events, whether royal or sporting. Content and advertising were sharply divided, though this could not affect the advertiser's natural liking for 'peak time' popular programmes and so his power, by withholding custom, to make it uneconomic to put on 'minority' features.

The ITA, relying on a policy of regional devolution, had divided the country into twelve regions - London, the Midlands, and the North because of their size were divided between two companies. Thus fourteen companies were granted franchises and took up their responsibilities as soon as transmitter and other facilities were ready.

The first company to go on the air on 22 September, 1955, was Associated Rediffusion, responsible for Monday-to-Friday programmes in the London area. In its first two years it lost £2,880,349. So devastating were these losses - and so gloomy was the profit forecast - that Associated Newspapers (owners of the Daily Mail, Sketch, and other publications) decided to sell their substantial share in the company. Associated Television (ATV), which went on the air at the same time and was to provide weekend programmes for

London as well as weekday programmes in the Midlands, lost £602,715 in the first seven months of its operation. The early history of most of the other companies showed similar financial failure.

When the tide turned, however, the commercial companies were overwhelmed by an avalanche of money. In the year 1958 Associated Rediffusion made a net profit of £4,889,015, which adequately compensated them for their previous losses. In 1959 their net profit was over £7,000,000 and in 1960 it was almost £8,000,000. ATV's profit was over £5,000,000 annually in the years from 1959 to 1963. Granada TV, which started transmission a little later than the first companies, soon demonstrated that profits of this order were as available in the North of England as in the South. The smaller regional companies also revelled in this downpour of gold. Lord Thomason, whose profits from Scottish TV helped him considerably to finance his acquisition of such important English newspapers as The Sunday Times and The Times, wrote the disarming epitaph for this period of extravagant easy money when he said that a commercial television franchise was 'a licence to print money'.<sup>9</sup>

With a competitor in the field the BBC's whole approach to television underwent a complete, though gradual, overhaul. It did so, what is more, in the face of steadily rising costs.<sup>10</sup>

It is no secret that Commercial television presented a disconcerting problem to the BBC from a staff point of view, especially on the technical side. A very large number of BBC personnel at all levels received generous offers from the opposition; some of these offers meant as much as a 100 per cent increase in salary; it was tempting bait and many accepted it, although in the main most of



the offers were only on a short term contract basis.<sup>11</sup>

No longer were people at the top in BBC administration able to view their staff as having no other outlets for their talents; the general structure had to be reshaped. Many of the BBC personnel went into the commercial side and made advertising films; the public regarding the commercials as something entirely new, seemed to be more interested at first in the presentation of advertisements than the actual programmes.

While all this was going on the BBC was busy reviewing its staff position; many of those who remained were suitably rewarded for their loyalty. The opportunity now arose for guest producers and directors to be used on a free-lance basis and in this way much new blood was infused into the regular staff, and the battle was on.

At first instead of facing up to this competition the BBC ignored it, and went solidly on its way, satisfied that righteousness would triumph. For a year ITV struggled on until the autumn of 1956. Independent television's finances were at a low ebb then, because the audiences had not built up in sufficient magnitude to attract the big advertisers. But apparently there was too much complacency at the top in the Corporation and by the time minds had changed and the giant machine had rumbled into faster gear ITV was well established, had won the majority of the audience and was earning enough revenue to pay its way.

Nevertheless the arrival of Independent Television soon prompted the BBC to streamline its timings; programmes seldom overran as they used to do; they improved presentation; they adopted a more informal attitude - less dressy; they led the field

in many programmes which came under an old relic of a title - The Talks Department - a net which virtually embraced the whole of Current Affairs. A monopoly had ended; it was all for the better. In time, the BBC became a splendid fighting machine, using more skilfully the impressive array of talent in its midst, but it was a gradual process and at times reduced the BBC to a lesser role in terms of viewer popularity. It was to be some time before policy was changed at Board of Governors level and it was not until the appointment of a new Director-General and new key executives that the BBC could claim to be genuinely competitive. Huw Wheldon has summarised events in the following manner:

"the BBC, when the chips were down, felt for its power and used it. It met competition with competition. Competition in this sense means, competition for audiences, for on the size and share of the audience depended, in the final analysis, the financial stability of both Independent and BBC Television. What the BBC then had to do during the fifties and sixties was to get back from the frightening and slippery slopes of a 70/30 ratio in Commercial's favour, and achieve a position at least of rough parity.... It is important to note that, at that time, during the second half of the fifties and the early sixties, there was a generation of producers at work in BBC Television (of whom I was one...) who were seriously coming to grips with the medium. Largely ex-servicemen, they had knocked about the world a bit, they had learned the essentials of their trade in the days of the monopoly when things had been easier, and they brought their experience and their relative maturity to bear on the possibilities of an emerging medium. They worked under good leadership, and they changed the face of television in this country." 12

Not only a generation of producers, but writers too, as will be shown in the following chapter.



### Notes

Background reading:

British Broadcasting in Transition, Burton Paulu (1961);

Pressure Group, H.H. Wilson (1961);

The Least Worst Television in the World, Milton Shulman (1973);

The Mirror in the Corner, Peter Black (1972).

1. Pressure Group, H.H. Wilson, p.144: Lord Simon of Wythenshawe.
2. By the 1950s Television had begun to lose its way.  
The Daily Telegraph of 1 November, 1950, reported:

"A bit of a collapse in the standard of television programmes during July, August and September was admitted by Cecil McGivern.... He said that this followed a deterioration in the early part of the year. "About the time the slump became apparent," he added, "I was sent for by Sir William Haley, the Director-General, and told plainly - "the programmes are not good. Make them better fast!" "

And in 1954 Caroline Lejeune, writing her last piece on television for The Observer noted that:

"...something has gone out of BBC Television which has stopped its being a joint adventure between the people who make the pictures and the people who view them... Programmes tend more and more to become committee jobs. Sooner then help a Producer, Artist, or Writer to improve his own stuff, someone is brought in to 'doctor' it. There is little encouragement for individuality and any impression of strong personal opinion is liable to be cut off in a flash." (17 January, 1954)

And again Gerald Barry writing in The Observer of 7 February, 1954, said:

"If Television is an adventure - an exploration - as it certainly is, my unsolicited advice to those purveying it would be: Be as adventurous and experimental as possible. Glory in the fact that your art is still free and unformed. Don't be afraid of making plenty of mistakes (you will anyhow) mediocrity is the prevailing curse of this century of the Common Denominator.... Already the BBC has been forced by the very technique of television to be more flexible, and to take more risks than it takes with Sound; and this is welcome because it lessens that other risk - the risk of solemnity and protocol with which the guardians of monopoly are prone to invest themselves. If the P.R.A. says 'bloody' in front of the cameras - well its done, its irrevocable, it can't be erased from the disc. The question is - who cares? And the answer is - nobody who matters! These are not the dangers to our spiritual fibres that popular entertainment

threatens. Those are far more subtle and insidious. The most successful programmes will always be ones in which the producer has trusted his own judgement and not pulled his punches to appease some imagined minority."

All from BBC Written Archives - Press Cuttings File.

3. Norman Collins: A successful popular novelist, Collins joined the BBC Overseas Service in 1940, became Head of the General Overseas Service five years later, served as Controller of the Light Programme in 1946, and as Controller of BBC TV from 1 December, 1947, until 13 October, 1950. When told by Haley that he was not to be the new Director of Television he asked for two hours to think over his decision. Lord Simon recollects: 'Like damn fools we agreed, with the result that Collins filled the afternoon papers with the story of his 'resignation' because the BBC wasn't interested in television.' Quoted in Pressure Group, p.142-143.

4. Norman Collins, BBC Quarterly, April, 1949.

5. Ibid.

6. Val Gielgud in his book Years in a Mirror says:

"While still in New York - I had also written a trivial little comedy called Party Manners. To be honest I did not think much of it... The last thing that crossed my mind was that it would become not a nine days' but a four months' wonder; that it would shake the BBC to its foundations; that it would be discussed in both Houses of Parliament; and that it would be the subject of editorials and correspondence in almost every newspaper in Great Britain from The Times to the News of the World... The first performance took place on Sunday, 1st October (1950) and a second was planned for the following Thursday. As a rule telephone messages of protest on one ground or another are received before the transmitters close down. On October 1st, there were none. On the Monday morning the Daily Herald adorned its front page with the headline: "We Don't want Any More of This, Mr. Gielgud" and a vigorous accusation that I had indulged in a deliberate propaganda attack on the Labour Party. On that Tuesday Lord Simon of Wythenshawe cancelled the second performance...

The most important result of this singular outcry was a remarkable, and most desirable, relaxation of restrictions regarding TV drama. Within a short time of the Party Manners incident an attempt was made to raise a similar storm over the production of Orwell's 1984. It failed dismally, and the failure was generally attributed to the precedent set in the case of Party Manners." p.150-153.

7. Norman Collins wrote:

"The man who resigns from the BBC knows perfectly well... that in present circumstances he can never again engage in the control and direction of any broadcasting service within



these shores. That is unhealthy in a number of ways. It is unhealthy for the corporation because it means that some members of staff remain there, patiently and miserably working out their time, for the simple reason that they know only too well that their single, specialised talent is totally valueless and unsaleable outside. It is equally unhealthy for the man who resigns.... he is apt to fall into the dangerous mental state of believing that he is the only one in step. He may have been. Or he may not. The one thing that is certain is that he will never know, because there is no wholesome corrective of alternative employment that might disabuse him." (October, 1950) Sunday Express

BBC Written Archives - Press Cuttings File.

8. 'In May 1952 Backbenchers and Cabinet reached the compromise agreement that, in a single paragraph in the White Paper, set out to change the principle on which British broadcasting had been conducted since its beginning. 'The present Government have come to the conclusion that in the expanding field of television provision should be made to permit some element of competition when the calls on capital resources at present needed for purposes of greater national importance make this feasible'.' Peter Black, Mirror in the Corner, p.45.
9. The early finances of the commercial companies are discussed in Burton Paulu's British Broadcasting in Transition (1961).
10. In 1954-55, the last full year before the introduction of Commercial television, revenue expenditure - the cost of programmes, engineering and ancilliary services - amounted to £5,043,908. In that year programme costs were £852 per hour, an increase of 81 per cent. During 1956-57 the length of television broadcasts was increased by 165 hours - or just over 6 per cent by comparison with the previous year - but the cost of all the services involved rose by £581 per hour - from £2,675 to £3,256 - an increase of 21.7 per cent. Approximately two-thirds of this increase was due to the increased cost of programmes.
11. This 'tempting bait' applied equally to the Documentary Department as Barr and others have described elsewhere.
12. Huw Wheldon - The Listener - Vol.85 No.2198: 13 May, 1971. (See Appendix 66 for the complete quotation.)

Some idea of the popularity of BBC TV programme can be seen in the Audience Research Report which is contained in Appendix 67. Plays would by now have included the new-style Documentary-Dramas which were just emerging.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The BBC Script Unit

It has already been shown how dependent documentary was on the central pillar of a good script. Yet for many years it was not considered necessary that writers should be sought and trained especially for the new medium of television because, on the one hand there were radio writers, and after all television was considered to be only radio with pictures; and on the other hand there was in existence a vast untapped body of existing drama material written for the theatre and available for direct transmission on the air. Some of the first drama ever televised consisted of short extracts of not more than 25 minutes from pieces like Richard III, A Midsummer Night's Dream, O'Neill's Anna Christie, Sheridan's The School for Scandal, Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral and so on. There were in addition very short dramatised extracts from books, like Alice in Wonderland, or short stories from Tolstoy and Chekhov. These adaptations were done by the producers concerned. It is easy to see why this was the case. As the audiences slowly grew, the Television Service was able to bring to them a selection of the greatest plays ever written in the English language, or translated into English. The whole of Shakespeare lay open to choice, and Eliot and O'Neill and Sheridan and Thornton Wilder and George Bernard Shaw, and Ibsen and Pirandello. And even when Television re-started in June 1946, the situation reverted to what it had been seven years before. There were still many more exciting plays to be performed than there were hours available to fill screen time, and the producers who came back to serve in television were by and large the same men



of the theatre, or refugees from radio that had started the service in 1937.

Two things were therefore becoming very apparent. First that you could not go on indefinitely reproducing the standard plays written for the theatre for an audience always wanting something new, and secondly, that with each year that went by, more and more stage plays of lesser quality than the first or second rank were just not worth reproducing at all. To meet the growing demand, new writers had to be found who would work closely to the requirements of television technique and feed the new young and excited producers who were beginning to join the Service.

Yet it had to be a new kind of script, something between the theatre and the cinema. Whereas the theatre dramatised words, using colours and blocks of movement to present them, television needed much more of the kind of movement that was as important as the words; instead of the words indicating the movement they ideally came out of the action.<sup>1</sup> Television as a visual medium inherited the obligation to give the camera something to look at while the actors were talking; but because of the limitations of the studio it had to be something that decorated the plot rather than drove it along. This is why plays brought in from the stage were so popular. The public enjoyed the quality of the talk and acting. Between them and the new play written for television there lay, at first, a huge gulf. When the words were not compensating for the want of visual appeal, and the actors were not recognised stars, these plays when they were bad seemed very bad indeed.

Because the Drama Department were the biggest users of this kind of material they decided very early on that something had to

be done about it. As has already been shown the first original writing for television emanated from Documentary for the first six years after the war, but by the fifties a new sequence of events was set in motion. Michael Barry<sup>2</sup> was appointed Head of Television Drama in 1952, the Documentary Department was dissolved in 1955, and Robert Barr, Caryl Doncaster and others left the Corporation at about the same time that Independent Television was launched. For the next four years, the ball was very much in Drama's court until by a strange twist of fate involving Elwyn Jones, Robert Barr and 'series', the dramatised-documentary was reborn in the social realism of the sixties.

When Michael Barry became Head of Drama he had to take much harsh criticism for giving a hearing to writers who were not ready for it, but he could see his path plainly enough. He knew that television would have to create its own drama to back up the arithmetically dwindling stock of stage plays, and that this would come from new plays, serials and adaptations of books. Barry and his team set their teeth and toiled along the route they had to take, being refreshed just about often enough with the huge success that they knew television could have if only it could get the money, the writers and the actors. When they did Two Gentlemen of Verona<sup>3</sup> as an outside broadcast from the Old Vic Theatre, it was exciting to know that the national audience was seeing the national theatre presenting the national dramatist in many cases for the first time in their lives. Audiences enjoyed the same delightful sensation of cultural experience when they watched Joan Greenwood's superb Nora in A Doll's House. And in 1952 Michael Barry had the satisfaction of watching a new play not only become a smash hit on



television but instantly make its way into the theatre and the cinema. This was Frederic Knott's classic puzzle, Dial M for Murder.

Michael Barry had joined the BBC's infant Television Service in 1938 from the theatre and rejoined after the war as a writer-producer. It was Greer Garson who first encouraged him to "have a shot at this thing they call television" when he was working in a small Repertory theatre in Croydon in 1938. Barry who had never seen the thing they called television, slipped into a multiple store nearby to have a look. He produced his first work for television on Easter Sunday 1938, when he did St. Bernard. He found then that the camera had a narrow field of focus; the long column of pilgrims showed him that it was inadvisable to hold moving figures for too long, but it was here, in some strange and unrelated way, that Barry began to sense that the machine about which he knew so little, did have an imagination of its own.

St. Bernard convinced him that television did have a quality of individualism - a specific characteristic, not perhaps clearly definable at the time, but existing none the less.

In his time as Head of Drama, Barry did as much as any producer to encourage the writer whose sole aim was the television medium. He had already achieved a growing success with The Silence of the Sea, Adventure Story, The Wandering Jew, and Toad of Toad Hall, all adaptations in varying degrees, but it was not until Crock of Gold\* in February 1948, that his real experiment began. Crock of Gold was written by Henry C. James, an Australian script-writer in collaboration with Barry. It told a story of the Australian gold rush. Earlier than this though, in 1946, he had of course collaborated

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\* See illustration 13 at end of thesis.

with Robert Barr in a joint effort called I Want to be an Actor, and then I Want to be a Doctor which he both wrote and produced. Barry's efforts began to show real results by Easter 1949, when he produced Behold the Man, based on the legend of da Vinci's The Last Supper. It was a great advance on earlier specially written plays from the script planning and studio production point of view, but it clearly showed the need for good writing in television. Behold the Man as a story script had not the conception nor the distinction in writing that its great theme required. It also showed the errors that can occur if the staccato violence of cinema timing is used. Television production has a tempo of its own and the attempt to show too much too quickly can lead to confusion.

The lessons learnt from these productions came to fruition in The Passionate Pilgrim, by Charles Terrot and Barry, a play about the nursing sisters of Florence Nightingale. The cameras carried the audience into the right places at the right time and the emotional as well as the narrative content of the play was written and timed for those cameras. For Barry The Passionate Pilgrim was the consummation of three years' work in post-war television scripting and producing. His experience naturally led to conclusions about the medium:<sup>4</sup>

"Too often, the producer<sup>5</sup> has to compromise with his material because there are such fundamental differences between the theatre and television. For instance, the playwright can position six characters on his theatre set, and then construct a dialogue scene with short speeches from each of them. Only by the use of makeshift ingenuity can the television producer translate such a scene to his viewers. Nearly all theatre scenes tend to be too long when seen on the television screen, and the climax of mood and emotion that was correctly placed for the theatre audience can be weakened or made ineffective by the new punctuation of camera shots from several angles.



Any one group of the vast television audience is likely to be a small one sharing the experience of the play in the greatest intimacy with the actors. No proscenium arch and orchestra pit separates them. Projection, as the theatre actor understand it, is not required; instead, it is necessary that there should exist between the television writer and his audience the spontaneity, the imaginative give-and-take and the reality that exists during a conversation in a room, as opposed to the talk given from a public platform or stage."

Barry's policy as Head of Drama was that classic and commercial stage plays, adaptations of novels, series and serials, and the creation of new television writing, should all advance together; he knew that the last would be the hardest. The Department felt its way ahead on the slenderest resources. However, late in 1951 the first step was taken in the appointment of a Script Supervisor,<sup>6</sup> with one assistant, a secretary and two copy typists. Also, and this was an especially significant move, a clerk was appointed to run the newly formed Script Library.

Even as early as this, writers, and would-be writers, were sending manuscripts to the Corporation Television Service.<sup>7</sup> Then, as now, the vast majority of this work, some 90%, was worthless.

The Script Section<sup>8</sup> was not at that time charged with the task of finding new writers, training them and providing the Service with new scripts for production. Producers were expected to select for themselves the play that they wished to do, have it agreed in principle by the Head of Drama, and then adapt it themselves to the television medium.

Most writers of achievement or promise had, as they still have, agents representing them and, for the most part, they would send their author's script directly to one or other of the producers in the Service.

While the organisation and the output were still quite small and while the vast majority of plays had already been written for the theatre and were known works, this system was adequate. But even then there were many cases where no record had been kept of the receipt or the after history within the organisation of material sent in hopefully by aspiring writers.

One of the first functions, therefore, of the new Script Section was to deal physically with the material submitted, to acknowledge it immediately, to make sure it was read and reported on, and that rejected material was promptly returned.

The Supervisor's job was to advise the Head of Drama on the quality of material submitted, to offer suggestions for new programmes and to make sure that material submitted that had merit should reach not just one, but all possible producers. He had to liaise with Copyright Department on fees to be paid and terms of contract for writers. At this time, too, he was provided with one significant addition to his staff; a writer/adaptor, whose task was to cut and adapt stage plays on behalf of the producers and, when required, to dramatise material from other sources for the screen. The Librarian began to keep copies of all transmitted scripts, and instituted a filing system in which the names and details were kept of all writers who submitted material, details of contracts and the progress of an individual's script material through Drama Department.

At the end of 1951, a typical week's Drama Production would be as follows:-



Sunday EDEN END a play by J.B.Priestley, at 125 minutes.  
Tuesday THE TRIUMPHANT by James Parrish, at 20 minutes.  
Thursday EDEN END repeated 'live'.

One week's drama, early in 1952, was as follows:-

Sunday MICHAEL AND MARY by A.A.Milne, at 120 minutes.  
Tuesday One episode of PRIDE AND PREJUDICE by Jane Austen,  
 at 34 minutes, especially dramatised for television.  
Thursday THE WONDERFUL VISIT by H.G.Wells, specially dramatised  
 for television, at 94 minutes.  
Friday EBB TIDE by Robert Louis Stevenson, at 111 minutes  
 especially adapted for television.<sup>9</sup>

This would be an unusually full week for that period, but by now an episodic serial, either specially written for the medium or specially dramatised for it, had become a regular feature of the week's output. Thus, it was becoming vital that writers should be found, capable of this work and prepared to do it. It became, therefore, a matter of policy by 1953 to find writers who would come and live, so to speak, in the work shop, learning the craft of television and contributing to the screen. It was around this time that Giles Cooper<sup>10</sup> joined the Script Section. He was an actor, and already well known as a radio writer and had written an original play for television. At this time too, Nigel Kneale joined television.

In 1952 Michael Barry's budget for commissioning scripts and adaptations was £250; rather than fritter it away he decided to invest it all in one man. This was Nigel Kneale, who had been an actor in the Old Vic school and had recently won a Somerset Maugham award for a book of short stories called Tomato Caine that Barry

had read and admired. Kneale came to London and lived on five pounds a week and the promise of a staff post if he wanted it. He sat around writing and talking to producers, the group mutually learning from one another, and within a year Barry's judgment had paid off with Kneale's brilliant science-fiction series, The Quatermass Experiment. The success of Quatermass - "The public will never accept that name" argued McGivern, but he let it stand - marked the first occasion when television fiction created so irresistible a need to know what happened next that the pubs were affected on transmission nights. In 1954 another Kneale script, an adaptation of George Orwell's grim fable 1984, became the first play to frighten some viewers into a rage. Some politicians and newspapers tried to whip up a demand that the Thursday repeat should be cancelled. But there was no answer to Barry's claim that to frighten people sometimes in the name of honest drama was his department's right and duty, and the repeat went on.<sup>11</sup>

By early 1955 the whole situation had changed radically. First, the Commercial Television Service was about to begin. Secondly, Drama Department's output was still rising. It was clear that there would be immense competition for Copyright in existing plays worth producing or reproducing. Thirdly, Children's Programmes were developing in dramatic terms; and finally a change was becoming apparent in the needs of the Light Entertainment Department. This group who had, for so many years, provided entertainment drawn largely from the Music Hall and Variety were now finding more and more that to fill their programme places they would require nearly as much original writing of high quality and of a special kind, as drama.



The BBC decided that to fulfil these new demands, and to meet competition a new Central Script Section should be formed to serve the needs of all three departments. The major customer by the nature of things would be Drama, but the others had to be helped too. It was at this point that Donald Wilson was asked to join the Service and run the new Section. Cecil McGivern had set out details for the organisation of a Script Unit in 1954.<sup>12</sup> When Wilson arrived in 1955 his directive was as follows:

1. The safe custody, reading and recording of scripts and story material dealt with by the Section.
2. Directing the work of Adaptors and Readers.
3. Co-ordinating material chosen or originated by the Section in order to advise in the formulation of programme schedules.
4. Seeking out, encouraging and advising new writers for Television.
5. Ensuring that the Corporation's relations with writers were satisfactory and that matters under discussion with them were dealt with expeditiously.<sup>13</sup>

It was paragraph 4 which Wilson found the most interesting and on which he lost no opportunity of meeting writers of all kinds to discuss television with them and to get them interested in the new medium. By 1955 the intake of unsolicited material had reached the level of about 500 manuscripts a month!

The next major change in the structure came in September 1959. At this time a typical week's output of Drama was as follows:-

<u>Sunday</u>	THE MILLIONAIRESS by Bernard Shaw, 95 minutes.
<u>Monday</u>	DANCERS IN MOURNING Episode 5, a specially written thriller serial of 35 minutes.
<u>Tuesday</u>	CARDS WITH UNCLE TOM a specially written play by R.C.Sherriff at 75 minutes.

Thursday SPY-CATCHER episode of a specially written series at 30 minutes.

Friday THE HISTORY OF MR. POLLY Episode 3, dramatised from the novel by H.G. Wells - 30 minute episode.

This gives a total of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  hours of screen time in a week - five dramatic offerings, of which four had had to be written specially for television.

At this stage it was decided that the Section should now become an independent department, its Head on the same level, and with the same status, as the Heads of Output Departments, with direct responsibility on all script matters, to the Controller of Programmes.

As more and more writers became practised, either by working for a period of time on the staff, or in having their work repeatedly produced, it was possible to reduce the number of writer/adaptors held on the staff from 14 to 8. What was then needed, more and more, was the trained editor who could work closely in collaboration with writers. This development was forced upon the Department by the increase - as a matter of programme policy<sup>15</sup> - in the number of long running series that began to be transmitted around this time. These series, which consist, to this day, of self-contained episodes on a given theme and with the same central characters, are usually conceived by one or two writers in discussion with a producer and an editor, but thereafter many writers may be asked to contribute to them. The editor's job then is to co-ordinate the work of all the different writers, and maintain the standard required.<sup>16</sup> Thus, by 1959, although the staff of the Department had been fractionally reduced, the number of editors employed, working to all Departments, was nine, and only eight writer/adaptors were on the staff.



Most of these changes were brought about in consequence of a new structure developed for Drama Department. At one time, as has been shown, it was possible for an individual to read, and therefore affect, every drama script. At one time, too, it was certainly possible for the Head of Drama to do this among his other duties, but the simplicity of those days had gone.

A large measure of decentralisation had proved to be necessary, and the system adopted was to appoint what were first called Group Producers,<sup>17</sup> each with a responsibility for certain programmes; for instance, one man would be in charge of all plays to be produced on 26 consecutive Sundays; another to take over and run the production of 26 fifty minute programmes based on say, Simenon's Maigret. The multiples of 13 (26 and 39) used in television sprang from the American practice of dividing the television years into two seasons, the 13 week summer season, when audiences decline, ratings fall and advertisement revenue diminishes, 'replacement' shows of smaller budgets are put on, or film series will be repeated. Thus the target for a film series used to be 39 weeks. Competition reduced the lengths of runs of series and it has become more common practice to make twenty-six in a series. Generally, a producer makes a 'pilot' film and if this is successful he obtains a contract to make thirteen, with an option for another thirteen, subject to the success of the first thirteen on the air.

Group producers worked closely on matters of policy to the Head of Drama, but ran their own show once their proposals for programmes had been agreed. Together they formed a Council, at which future programme suggestions were discussed and decisions made to go ahead on the commissioning of new work and the preparation of

long term plans. The Head of Script Department was an ex-officio member of this Council and his editors were available for discussion and advice. More and more, Editors became perforce associated closely and directly with the Group Producer and were able to handle the day-to-day script planning and discussions with authors, on their behalf.

In principle this Group Production scheme was sound, but in detail it was difficult to operate, because it was time-wasting and resulted in divided authority. There were cases of differences of opinion, either on policy or on the actual quality of material provided, which led to friction, and even affected the finding and training of writers and editors.

A point has now been reached in the account of the Script Department where a decision had been made that the BBC should start a new television channel and that this decision coincided with the appointment of a new Head of Drama - Sydney Newman.<sup>18</sup> Briefly then, it was decided to maintain the existing control structure at the top, i.e. a Director of Television, with beneath him a Controller of Programmes, a Controller of Programme Services, a Controller of Administration and a Chief Engineer; to appoint a Chief of Channel 1 and a Chief of Channel 2, each working directly to the Controller of Programmes. Planning and administrative staffs were strengthened. The three main output Departments, Drama, Light Entertainment and Talks, were to be known henceforth as Groups - the Head of the Group still having the same relationship to the Controller as before. Each Group would be divided into separate departments, under a Head, each with its own area of output for both Channel 1 and Channel 2. These departments would be as nearly autonomous as possible, their



Heads working directly to the Group Head, but each being responsible for its own programmes. In Drama, the departments were to be called Plays, Serials and Series. It was said that these Departments would be nearly autonomous. That is to say they would have their own budget, would have a permanent number of producers and directors, and other production staff. They would be responsible for finding their own material - after general policy had been agreed - and this meant that they would need to have their own script editors and staff writers as they required.

It was therefore decided in the early 1960s to remove from the Central Script Department its editorial functions and to distribute the editorial staff, and therefore the responsibility for commissioning writers, from its control, in so far as the three major output Groups were concerned. In effect, each of these Groups now had the nucleus of a Script Department of its own. However, the Central Unit maintained all the other services it previously rendered namely: day-to-day work connected with submitted material; its responsibilities for collecting information about writers and their work; and the continuing traffic in scripts with other organisations all over the world.<sup>19</sup>

As Peter Black has written by way of a summary:

"Michael Barry's drama policy had been to advance on all fronts: classic theatre, adaptations of classic novels, original series and serials, and single plays by new authors. But the success of ITV had shown the BBC that the audience did not particularly want such a wide spectrum and in fact turned away from some of it. When ITV had begun, its drama, followed the Barry policy on a smaller and fragmented scale. But it quickly learned what its public did not like. Costume plays, fantasy, symbolism, plays that asked it to work out tricks with time could be sure of a low rating... On the other hand the public would follow almost anything that had a clear enough narrative line to catch its attention in the first few minutes. The companies developed recognisable house

styles. Granada went in for plays with a powerful sociological wallop, such as Ibsen and the latter-day Ibsen, Arthur Miller. ATV fed with drama from its H.M.Tennant tributary, favoured stage plays starring the big names on Tennant's books. Rediffusion did a bit of everything without establishing any special niche for itself. ABC devised Armchair Theatre for Sunday nights, in direct competition with the BBC's Sunday play; and this became as it were the focus of the BBC's concern." 20

Television production on the scale now handled by the BBC, was inconceivable without writers of talent and technical skill and experience. Whatever its other functions, the Script Department's major and primary responsibility was still the finding and training of new writers to meet this growing demand, and when it had found them and trained them, to make sure that their work was respected and that their status in the production operation was maintained.

A new writer would be assigned to work with a director on the adaptation of a stage play for the screen. Normally this would involve mostly discreet cutting, but in the process he would learn from the director some of the different values as between the theatre and television. If, at the end of the three months preliminary period, he wished to stay on, and the Department was satisfied with him, he would normally be given a further contract for six months. During this period he would be asked to do at least one major dramatisation. Adaptation here, means adapting existing dramatic works for television, and dramatisation, means taking existing works of prose, short stories or novels, and recreating them in dramatic terms directly for the screen. Donald Wilson says:

"I would estimate that normally the staff writer would be earning his keep round about the fourth month of his staff period, provided he lasted that long. I say that because no two people are alike. I have taken writers on the staff who have found it completely impossible to work to rule, to adapt their talent to the daily task of



routine, who have found even the fact of working with other people an impossibility. But even they have benefited from a short period of attachment, and from many of those who have left after a short period, we have obtained good work as a result of the experience they gained. The others who stayed on were those who liked the life of the work shop, whose talent was diverse, and for whom television writing and production became an interesting adventure. What we had always to watch about them was that they didn't stay too long. The routine and the monthly pay packet can have eventually a deadening effect on a writer's talent and what one had to gauge was each individual and then determine with him, the point at which he should leave and go back into the world. This period could vary from six months upwards." 21

Among the many successful writers nurtured by the Script Department were Frank Baker, Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath, John Hopkins and Philip Mackie but not everyone who came succeeded for as Wilson himself says:

"Sometimes our judgment in taking them was wrong, but that was a gamble to be accepted. Sometimes their temperament was just not suited to institutional life. But by and large the record is a good one, and apart from the fact that many of them are still writing for television to this day, they have had a tremendous influence during the time they were with the Department upon other writers outside, with whom they have had to collaborate." 22

## Notes

Background reading:

John Swift's Adventure in Vision;

Peter Black's The Biggest Aspidistra in the World and The Mirror in the Corner;

Gordon Ross' Television Jubilee.

1. René Claire, the French Director wrote in Réflexion Faite (N. Gallimard, Paris, 1951) "What Television Drama needs is the mobility and suppleness belonging to the film, which has spent fifty years struggling to free itself from the verbal chains of the stage play."
2. The account of the Drama Department which follows is based largely on the author's personal interview with Michael Barry (July, 1973) see Appendix 68: Peter Black's account in Appendix 57: John Swift's Adventure in Vision Chapter XXI, p.152 and Television Jubilee by Gordon Ross.

Barry is quoted in The Daily Mail (16 September, 1961) as saying: "Before television the major writers - Ibsen, O'Neill, Shaw - were only names in the public libraries to most people. Television made them talking-points in the bus next morning and even if some people didn't like them they talked about them... Television broke up the fixed three-act pattern of writing plays and brought back the one-acter, the sketch, the serial. It made it possible for writers to exist without the West End. It's given them an outlet for continuous work." (Appendix 56)

By November 1974 David Mercer was writing in The Stage and Television Today, p.18: "Anyone who tried to make his living out of writing television plays couldn't survive any more. That is why those who used to write the plays are now writing the series and making the adaptations."

3. Writing of the problems of producing Shakespeare on Television (BBC Quarterly, Autumn 1954) Barry said: "Since March 1952 - the variable lenses used on cameras for drama broke through the shallow field of focus. They allowed the cameraman to compose in depth instead of restricting his clear vision to a narrow alley running at right angles before his lens. He was able also to reach in to observe detail without thrusting a bulky vehicle across the foreground of the other apparatus on the floor."
4. Adventure in Vision, p.163.
5. Maurice Gorham in a memorandum dated 6 November, 1947, "Our Television Producers have learnt a lot since the Service began in 1936, and there is a lot more to learn. What we are doing now, with our present resources, may seem primitive to those who look back at it in twenty or thirty years' time,



because television production will develop as film production developed. But I hope that television producers of the future will find inspiration in what we are doing now, as film directors today find inspiration in the early work of Chaplin, Griffith and Mack Sennett."  
(BBC Written Archives.)

6. See Appendix 89 Television Service Staff Lists, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954. Also Appendix 71 for Donald Wilson's personal account of the Script Department.
7. See Appendix 70 Chart of TV Scripts prepared by W.P. Killa - November, 1950, BBC TV Script Unit.
8. Details of the Script Section are taken from Donald Wilson's personal account - BBC TV Script Unit, London.
9. BBC TV Script Unit.
10. See Appendix 89 Staff List for October, 1953.  
See Appendix 19 Giles Cooper interview with Michael Billington 'Radio Writing' December, 1965.  
Giles Cooper was best known for his adaptations, especially of many of the Maigret stories for BBC TV as well as being a highly successful original writer. He was born in Dublin in 1918. Educated at Lancing College and after serving in the Army became a professional actor. He then worked as a television script editor for several years and then in 1955 he decided to become a full-time writer.
11. See Appendix 68 Personal interview with Michael Barry, July, 1973.
12. See Appendix 69 Memorandum from Cecil McGivern dated 10 November, 1954 (BBC Written Archives). "Practically all television production, in every aspect of our work, depends on scripts."  
  
During the 12 months (September 1951 - September 1952) 86 full-length plays; 17 short plays, of which 8 were between 30 minutes and one hour in length; and 7 serials or series (16½ hrs.) were transmitted. The situation had been getting steadily more and more critical with each year that passed.
13. Donald Wilson, personal account, BBC TV Script Unit.
14. BBC TV Script Unit - Production Files.
15. This 'policy' is explained in a later chapter on the TV Series. However the details are contained in Appendix 72 Personal Interview with R. Barr, July 1973.
16. This is a matter of 'Formula' and details of this aspect of the television writer's work are contained in Appendix 77 'Organisation Plan for a Series'.
17. Robert Barr is later to become Group Producer of Z-Cars, for example.

18. See Appendix 57 for Peter Black's account of the Sydney Newman years at ABC and BBC. Note particularly:

"In 1961 Barry resigned to become head of programmes for the imminent Irish TV Service. For a year his chair stayed vacant. Then, as had long been expected, the BBC brought in Newman. His appointment marked the first time the BBC had bought a man from ITV to fill such a high rank; it said more loudly than any overt policy change, that the days when the BBC planned its programmes as though the competitor did not exist were really over.."

19. Donald Wilson in Appendix 71 writes: "A by-product of the new operation was that we were able to build up the most perfect and detailed statistical information. Anyone wishing to employ a writer could refer to his previous history, what work of his had been broadcast, how much he had been paid the last time, whether he delivered the material on time, and so on."

20. Peter Black, The Mirror in the Corner - Appendix 57. The four forms in which television drama is most commonly presented are:

1. The 60 or 90 minute single or 'one-shot' play.
2. The anthology in which a number of single plays by different authors are loosely grouped round a common theme.
3. The third is the drama series - self-contained episodes using the same central character/s.
4. The serial - continuing stories in instalments.

The single play is among the most difficult forms of television to sustain. The difficulties are obvious. The single play must tell its story, develop its characters, convey its ideas and establish its style with the audience on the one fleeting occasion. Yet its survival is essential if the life-blood of new writing is to be pumped into television.

21. See Appendix 71 Donald Wilson's personal account: BBC TV Script Unit.

22. Ibid.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Series: Z-Cars

"Up to a point the Police series is formula television, but nobody ever hit on a better one for prolonging active life. Barlow, Watt and four constables of Newtown happened because the BBC of 1961 wanted a series that could run and run. Up to then drama had only done serials, which packed up after six weeks. The longest running series were Dixon of Dock Green which counted as light entertainment, and Maigret." 1

Peter Black

The most important event in its consequences for the BBC, as has been described already in this thesis, was the ending of its monopoly in 1955 and the arrival of a commercial competitor. From then on the BBC had to do what it chose to do within the terms that the competitor had shown the public wanted: that is to say, after losing two-thirds of its audience it was forced to adopt the commercial pattern of placing its popular programmes at peak times and its programmes for minorities at times where they would not cause more of a national loss of audience than the BBC could afford to accept. The ITV companies had taken this pattern from American television; and the Americans had taught ITV that audiences the world over liked familiarity; far from resenting the fact that the police series Dragnet,<sup>\*</sup> a great favourite of the late 1950s, came on at the same hour of the night every week, they welcomed it and were far from grateful when the networks felt obliged to interrupt the

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\* American series and their relation to documentary has been deliberately placed beyond the scope of this thesis.

routine with some important news broadcast. What was more they welcomed the familiarity of the characters. They liked to hear Sgt. Friday say week after week, 'My name's Friday. I'm a cop.' They would have written letters to complain if he had left it out, just as radio's wartime listeners protested when Jack Warner dropped his 'Mind my bike' catchphrase from the Garrison Theatre. It is curious that television planners should not have learned this lesson from radio, but they did not; perhaps they did not want to, for in the early days of television one of the anxieties was that watching might become down-graded by habit. Cecil McGivern sought to preserve the quality of surprise and sense of occasion by trying to arrange schedules that did not look the same week after week.

That the audience liked its television in indefinitely repeated slots was the lesson the BBC had to learn from ITV and yet Robert Barr and Cecil McGivern had between them pioneered the 'series' idea as far back as 1950 as Barr recalls:

"The first move into series happened after Cecil McGivern went over to America. It was there that he found that the Americans were managing to do one show a week not one a month as we were. This weekly 'strike' as it is called impressed him very much and as soon as he got back he called me in to see him and demanded to know why we couldn't do the same." <sup>2</sup>

In answer to McGivern's question Barr did in fact devise a weekly 'strike' <sup>\*</sup> for the BBC (as has been mentioned earlier but it meant employing a Producer and two Directors. Up to then only Producers had existed and they had been responsible for doing virtually everything themselves <sup>3</sup> - hence it had only ever been possible to achieve a monthly strike. Barr now insisted that two Directors be appointed to work with the Producer and as it was

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\* Explanation of the 'strike' is given in Appendix 72.



evident from the start that no two Producers (in the old sense) would work together he decided to promote two Floormanagers - one of which was Gilchrist Calder - to the new post of Director. The idea was that each programme in the series would be in rehearsal for a fortnight, over-lapping each other. That as Producer, Barr would do all the organisation, e.g. casting, financing, working with writers and so on. In fact setting up an assembly-line of plays which were so designed as to be ready instantly to go into production as soon as the current play was completed. There was of course to be no let-up for the Directors.

The word 'series' was not in use to start with. The prime object of the exercise was the weekly 'strike'. Series as such simply could not happen in 'live' television until the problem of the strike had been worked out. And the first step was to break the hold of the autocratic Producer and share the responsibility of production amongst these new creatures called Directors.

The first series was called I Made News (1951).<sup>4</sup> It was based on true stories and the person who had been 'in the news', e.g. a detective who had arrested a murderer, introduced the programme and at the end said whether or not he thought it had given a true impression of what had happened or not. Robert Barr as Producer brought over the Chief of the Paris Police on one occasion and used Robert Fabian on another - which led later on to the series Fabian of the Yard. These were dramatised-documentaries but based, as always, on true facts.

Pilgrim Street was the series which was produced on the weekly strike basis and two weeks rehearsal. Barr received a bonus of £50 for introducing the Director system though at the time there

was controversy over the use of the term director which could currently only be applied to administrators not programme personnel. You could in fact say 'directed by' but you could not call someone a director unless he was an administrator.

There were immediate benefits brought about as the result of the introduction of series, as Barr points out:

"As a Producer I was choosing the stories, sometimes writing the script, casting the show, putting up the money and so on, so that whatever the Director did it was still very much my programme. And because we had to do all the production on the basis of the one week strike and that meant finding scripts - and there were very few television writers about then because the money was so little - most of the series I was turning out were in the main adapted from books. One of these was They Came By Appointment (1955) - based on stories of Harley Street." 5

It was series that enabled Documentary to re-establish itself as a Department. Duncan Ross came as a writer, Caryl Doncaster as a Producer, as did Norman Swallow, so that they could all write a programme a month for a weekly series. There were other advantages too. Floormenagers had the opportunity to become Directors as a first stage to becoming Producers which was much harder under the old system. The programmes themselves became much slicker because of specialisation - no longer one man doing fourteen jobs at once - and continuous work on programmes meant confidence in dealing with 'live' productions. It also meant that more scripts were required to fill the time available which meant more writers, and the writers in their turn could make a living by writing five or ten scripts a year where before they had only been asked for an occasional one. Actors benefited by longer rehearsal times and more continuous work during a year which would help to establish them in the eyes of the public.



"When series began there was no such thing as a continuing character, no star part, and although the same Chief Inspector went through a series like Pilgrim Street he was not a Charlie Barlow. Each story was different and he might have some part in it or no part, depending on the story demands. The beginning of the star system in series began in Britain with Fabian of the Yard which was done on film by a commercial organisation."<sup>6</sup>

The prototype for series was Dashiell Hammett's The Thin Man in the cinema but until television had solved the problems of the strike, insufficient writers, and the logistics of production - and much later on, had the advantages of videotape recording - there was a great deal of ground to be covered before a similar success could be scored by television.

Whilst Robert Barr was struggling with these problems Elwyn Jones, who was to become a central figure in the latter day story of documentary and series, was working on Radio Times. He had joined the BBC in 1951 as Assistant to the Literary Editor and after a while became its Television Editor. He was a graduate of the London School of Economics and then a journalist. Then a job was advertised, assistant to the script supervisor, for which he applied, but Michael Barry offered him the post of Organiser (Drama) instead and although he knew nothing about dealing with either money or studios he took it because it offered the chance to do an occasional production. As Television Editor on Radio Times he had had a special interest in Drama and knew Barr and the Documentary group anyway, so that once he had settled in he asked Michael Barry if he could keep a watching brief on the 'remnants' of the old documentary department including Colin Morris and Gilchrist Calder. As Elwyn Jones says: "they asked me to join them and they got me as Documentary Assistant to the Head of Drama, which was fine for me and certainly better than being a straight administrator as I was

as an Organiser."<sup>7</sup> But that was just the beginning:

"The politics of any producing department are very elaborate and in the case of television where money and resources were scarce, the big fight was always about what space you eventually got, what money you were allowed to spend, what studios to work in, what sort of support you got from Film (Department). Its the same thing today and its not unique to television it happens with any big enterprise... I realised very early on when I joined Drama that there was a group in Documentary, that would be worth fighting for and in the long run we won and we got people to come back and get things moving again."<sup>8</sup>

One of these people was Robert Barr: *He was the one who...*

"At around this time (1958) Elwyn sends for my file out of Registry and finds there one or two projects which I had intended doing before Rotha came and Elwyn wonders if he can tempt me back by offering to do them. Anyway... I agreed to return as his Group Producer. There were four of us and after Michael Barry left (1962) we ran the Department for a whole year. And in that year we four started Maigret, Finlay, and Z-Cars. It was just like the early days of documentary - when talent talked with talent and there were no Heads of Department to interfere... Just having four people whose only interest was in programmes, in stories and writing, we summoned out of the air three winning series... In that short time we had done an about turn and these new programmes were in one sense a continuation of the old dramatised-documentaries - series based on truth but with the old P.R. element removed so that you did it fictionally."<sup>9</sup>

A fairly constant proportion of leaders of public opinion would restore the BBC's monopoly tomorrow if they could, but one gift the coming of commercial competition conferred on the BBC was well worth what it cost. It freed it from the weight of paternal responsibility it had acquired through being the only source of broadcasting in the land. If part of the price was that it must do much of what ITV did, another part was that it was freer to do it better and to do what ITV did not do. It was this fact that the BBC had been set free to mirror the changing times, which Sir Hugh Greene grasped when he was appointed Director-General in 1959; and in implementing this freedom he engineered a period in the BBC's history which was



enjoyed, admired and respected more than any other.

To say that the BBC was a kind of PRO to the Establishment until Greene arrived is not altogether true, but it would take so many pages to do justice to the fine shades of argument to the contrary that it is convenient to admit that, broadly speaking, such was the case so far as the leadership was concerned, particularly where it saw a danger of offending political pressure groups. That mysterious influence known as the Establishment, made up of the leaders of politics, the church, the law, industry and science, felt they could count on the BBC as an associate member. It became apparent that the new regime did not mind including politicians and similar symbols among those who could be offended if the need arose.

The detonator of this explosion was not, however, the satire series That was The Week That Was which began in the autumn of 1962 but the great drama fiction series Maigret and Z-Cars. Suddenly there had arrived conventional fictions that broke out of conventions.

Yet when Barr returned to the BBC in 1958, after two years away, the first two programmes he wrote were very much in the established mould of documentary. One was about the Air Ambulance in the Hebrides whilst the second, Medico won the Italia Prize for documentary in 1959 and was about the British Post Office's Free Medical service for ships at sea. It was produced by David E. Rose, designed by Roy Oxley and filmed by Ken Westbury. It was first produced 'live' on 7 January, 1959.

The introduction in the official Italia Prize Programme of 1959 was as follows:

"The United Kingdom is situated at the north-western doorway, leading from Europe, to the oceans of the world. The sailors of all nations cross the threshold

where the northern seas meet the narrow channels surrounding the British Isles.

The British Post Office provides, without cost, a radio service to assist all shipping, especially vessels on which a doctor is not carried. The transmitters and control points are situated around our coast.

The programme opens by showing an accident to a seaman in a home bound cargo vessel. His injuries include a broken thigh and suspected fractured skull. The wireless operator calls for medical help. We see the call received on land and the doctor is summoned by a telephone call to his surgery at home. Meantime, the routine steps are put into operation to discover whether a larger vessel, carrying a doctor, is within easy reach of the emergency. The doctor is shown speaking by radio telephone to the Chief Steward, who is attending the injured man. This Steward has a little sick bay experience, gained in war time, but his knowledge is limited. The doctor listens to an account of the symptoms and the injuries and gives first medical advice. He next decides to assist the Steward, on the radio, to set the broken limb. The ship's Radio Officer arranges an apparatus so that the doctor's voice may be broadcast direct to the Steward in the sick bay. We see the ship's captain and officers.

Meantime the Post Office service on land have ascertained that no other ship at sea, if deflected from its proper course, will reach the injured man's vessel to be of help.

On board the vessel the broken thigh has been set with the help of the doctor's instructions. Arrangements are now made for the vessel to head for the nearest 'land fall' in the British Isles, where the doctor will board the vessel from a Lifeboat. During the ensuing hours, we see the doctor going about his daily duties, but receiving news and giving instructions to the vessel at sea by means of the nearest telephone. When the evening comes and the vessel approaches land, the Lifeboat is called out. Its crew are summoned from their homes and their work by the firing of rockets and the Lifeboat sets out from the Cornish harbour of Penzance. The wind rises and the sea becomes too rough for the doctor to board the cargo ship until, according to instructions, the latter has followed the Lifeboat to a more sheltered part of the coast. We see then the doctor at last reach his patient and make the final arrangements for moving him to the nearest hospital."

It was Maigret however that was the first series to come from the new policy of competing harder against ITV series that were designed to go on and on, binding the audience's loyalty to them week after week. Maigret was fashioned out of the detective tales of George Simenon. Its immediately apparent virtue was its respect



for the quality that lifted Simenon's work out of the rut; it was about real people in real trouble. Technically it was beautifully done, for Andrew Osborn and his directors, mixing film with studio more successfully than had so far been achieved, brought back a deeply satisfying flavour of Simenon's France, in which his detectives, crooks, tarts, landladies, pimps, maniacs, country squires, waiters and dockers laboured away at the sins and pleasures of the flesh with an authenticity never before seen in a crime series. It established the important principle that series drama could and must be as truthful about its subject as a one-shot play was supposed to be. Claiming, as always, to represent the nation, the Puritan fringe protested against its frankness and as usual was backed up by a few MPs and newspapers that thought they might extract some benefit from the situation. The continued success of Maigret - audiences of around 12 million each week - made it obvious that, so far, they represented only a diminutive part of the population, but with the first Z-Cars in January 1962 an uproar broke out compared with which the storm over Maigret had been a gentle breeze.

"The immediate prelude to Z-Cars," says Elwyn Jones, "was a set of six half-hour programmes Bob Barr wrote for us called Scotland Yard (1960) which David Rose produced. Then two or three things happened simultaneously as these things do. So that when Scotland Yard was over I had made up my mind that we had to do another Police series, but not set in London; we were too London-based as it was, and anyway Television was spreading over the whole country by now. Also I was sick to death of the Public Relations boys at Scotland Yard because they kept getting in the way. So I had (a) the feeling of the need for another Police programme, (b) that it should not be done in London, and (c) Colin Morris writes Who, Me? (1959) which I read and was so excited that I can remember going down to the canteen and saying 'It's a - masterpiece'. However, I did feel that we would have to be careful how

we billed it because I suspected, wrongly as it happened, that this was all part of the playing politics bit, that every Police force in the country would hate us for it. So we billed it as the most unusual story of a Detective Sergeant - well in fact all that happened when it was first shown was that we got some good notices - apart from one in The Listener - and we suddenly got the Police saying could they have it to show for training purposes... As part of a policy then of showing this to as many Police forces in the country as possible, I took it to Lancashire and it was then that I decided that this was where we had to go for the next series.

Then Troy Kennedy Martin who is one of the very best creative talents who has ever been in television came to see me one day and said, why didn't we do a series on cops in cars and I said, fine, but we'll do our cops in cars in Lancashire as distinct from anywhere else for there they have something called Crime Patrol which has the great merit that the two boys in the car are of equal rank - this was in the days when the Metropolitan Police used to run three men in a 'Q' car, one of whom was always a Sergeant - and they can get in and out of plain clothes uniform by putting on macs and things. That was the kind of set up we were looking for. So I sent Troy to Lancashire and he went to Kirby and returned to say that he considered it to be a 'frontier town' as rough and lawless as any out West.

Remember also that the Colin Morris crime series Jacks and Knaves was going on around this time too (1960). A further factor in all this was the rate of strike at which you could do programmes. This is almost a matter of hard accounting. The Maigret series was by then a substantial success, but as an administrator one of the things that I realised was that the rate at which we could do Maigret was entirely dependent on the whims and moods of Rupert Davies. If He'd dropped dead at that point in time we wouldn't have had a series any more." 10

It had been laid down that the series must have a minimum of six heroes, so that if one of them wanted to leave, or took sick and died, they would still have a series. (A few months after Z-Cars began, Leonard Williams - the desk Sergeant Twentyman - died of a heart attack between one episode and the next.) Kennedy Martin constructed a format: the Liverpool suburb of Seaforth became Seaport. Kirby New Town, a hideous, soul-crushing community outside the city, became Newtown. Four young constables patrolled in their crime cars, also called Z-Cars, reporting back to Newtown police



station where they were chivvied by Inspector Barlow and Detective Sergeant Watt. And here the borrowing of American techniques ended, for what Z-Cars achieved was a marriage of complicated series production methods with the BBC's tradition for documentary realism applied to a modern fictional police series - though where fact and fiction began and ended was hard to tell, for the original of Who, Me?'s detective, Sgt. Bill Prendergast, supplied the case material round which the stories were written.

Elwyn Jones insisted that the stories had to be so arranged that they were capable of being mounted one a week which meant ten days rehearsal for each fifty minute episode, the two crews alternating each week. "That is the way the size of the frame shapes the art."

It would have been just as easy in fact to have based Z-Cars on one crew and simply done six very interesting programmes.

"As it happens," says Jones, "that wasn't what we were about by then, for we were in the kind of situation when the BBC was beginning to realise, belatedly, that it needed, for 39 weeks in the year, something that really was a winner and one which it could keep up for that period. Of course it was a matter of logistics, of getting more people involved, particularly actors and writers... Now Script Unit had become Script Department but it had also run into political troubles over the question of where responsibilities lie. I was engaged at this time in a very hard, and I think proper, battle to say that I was the one who bought a script or didn't, and I was the one who commissioned it or didn't. Whilst I was all for having a Department who could advise me and to whom I could go and say, "Who do you have on your books, who can you recommend," but it is my department's money and I should be able to spend it my way. So we played a nice sort of a political trick. We had some staff posts we never filled and used the money to get a whole string of writers - Troy was one on such a contract... At the time of Z-Cars Bob Barr was in charge as Group Producer and I was called Acting Assistant Head of Drama (1961). Michael Barry had gone to Ireland, Norman Rutherford had taken over his job but we all lived very much in each other's pockets. And Bob did the script editing for the series, there being no script editors at that time. Bob wrote number four I remember Stab in the Dark because we were behind and we needed some kind of a rock to hang on to." 11

Donald Wilson had given his permission for Kennedy Martin to make that first visit to Lancashire and it was some months before Troy's report was passed on to Barr by Elwyn Jones. Barr considered that there was the makings of a series in what Kennedy Martin had written but before committing himself he went to Lancashire to see for himself. He came back convinced and Elwyn Jones immediately put him in charge of production. Barr's first request was that Allan Prior - Blackpool born and a former newspaper reporter who really knew the area - should partner Martin. This was agreed and Barr sent them both up to Lancashire to stay in a hotel and start straight away on the scriptwriting. He put Prior under contract for three scripts even if they were not used and they each had to write a minimum of two.

"I remember," says Barr, "that I phoned the Hotel after a week and spoke to Allan and said, 'How's Troy getting along?' and he said, 'He hasn't written a word but walks around most of the day and night saying, 'I can't do it, I can't do it.' Well I'd already taken a twenty-six week commitment on this series and there was the deadline to meet so I told them both they had just better get on with it. And I wrote to Allan, as I had arranged with him, thanking him for his first script, and had him show this to Troy to make him get a move on with his. And it worked because I got my two scripts from Allan and one from Troy and I was then only one short so I sat down and wrote this myself as it really was the only way to get it in on time.

The title Z-Cars was really mine. I used it first of all as a working title. The planners of course laughed and said, "Surely, that's not what you're going to call it?" "It will never sell in



America," they said, "because over there Z is pronounced Zee" - however I left it there - after all the cars were called this anyway - and before long they would be calling me up and saying "Now about your new series Z-Cars"... and very gradually they all started using it quite naturally as the title.

I remember the day after the first transmission the front page of the Daily Mirror carried a banner headline 'Z-Cars Outcry' - it was then that I knew we'd arrived."<sup>12</sup>

Topped and tailed by a lugubrious north-country folk song speeded up to the pace of a jaunty march, the first programme - Four of a Kind by Troy Kennedy Martin - went out on 2 January, 1962. An audience that had derived its picture of the police force from Robert Barr's documentaries, Ted Willis's The Blue Lamp, and Willis's reincarnation of the policeman who met his death in that film, Dixon of Dock Green, learned that policemen were human, came mostly from the same class as those they protected and displayed no better social habits than some of their charges. Lynch (James Ellis) made his first appearance as a young constable sticking his head through a window of the cars he was shepherding to ask who had won the 2.30. Steele (Jeremy Kemp) was seen rowing with his wife, who had evidently sustained contusions and bruises from an earlier argument; a stain on the wall marked the spot where he had thrown the previous night's hot-pot. The newspapers next morning printed columns of complaints from viewers who disliked the programme's proposition that policemen were human. The chairman of the Police Federation said it injured police status to represent them as wife-beaters and gamblers and, as some other critic added, "disgusting eaters". The Chief Constable of Lancashire, whose

Force after all had co-operated in the production, announced that he was on his way down to London to have the series stopped; but he was met by the BBC's Controller of Programmes, Stuart Hood, who assured him that to suppose the series would be abandoned was to suppose that the Romanovs might be restored. As it happened the Chief Constable was on shaky ground, for he had not seen the programme and was relaying the indignation of his wife; police wives led most of the first wave of protest, no doubt seeing the programme as injuring their neighbourhood standing. Hood had not seen the programme either but he had in his pocket perhaps the most unanimously laudatory reviews the newspaper critics had ever given a new television series. The officer had to retreat. The end of his protest was the withdrawal of the credit thanking his force for its co-operation.

The other scripts were as follows: No.2 Limping Rabbit by Troy Kennedy Martin (9.1.62), Handle with Care by Allan Prior (16.1.62), Big Catch by Allan Prior (29.1.62), and Friday Night by Troy Kennedy Martin (6.2.62).<sup>13</sup>

Technically and artistically the early Z-Cars represented the professionalism of live television at its summit. It amounted to the presentation week after week of a fast-moving feature film in fifty minutes flat with no retakes, their only cushion against disaster, two recorded programmes. With something like 250 changes of shot in each episode, an average of five a minute, the actor's hardest problem was to remember which scene he was in. Even when you knew how it was done you could not believe it.<sup>14</sup> And the technical artistry was serving a very fine artistic creation which transcended the crime series and offered a vivid social and moral



comment on a vast slice of life. It was the first television series not to reflect back to its working-class audience a flattering, fundamentally insulting picture of itself as making the best of things. The undercurrent was one of protest. The scripts showed people who had enough to eat - and usually more than enough to drink - but were pitifully and needlessly shut off from the graces of life. Culturally they were as deprived as the victims of nineteenth-century industrialism, had been starved physically, their affluence channelled into beer, bingo and betting shops. It offered, to quote Peter Lewis "a dry-eyed lament for the life as it is messily lived in affluent 1962";<sup>15</sup> among the life moved the police, tough, impatient professionals prowling round their charges like cynical sheepdogs.

As the audience figures climbed, from nine to fourteen million in the first eight weeks, it was clear that the BBC's inspired guess was correct; the public was good and ready to accept that the police were not all fatherly Dixon types who helped old ladies across the road and always had a sweet for a lost child. The intended first run of thirteen was extended to thirty-one. After a six-week break a further series began. Z-Cars became as permanent a fixture as Panorama, following the careers of Barlow and Watt as they rose up the Force in a new series called Softly, Softly and reproducing itself as the old Z-Cars with a second-generation cast moving through the old setting. Elwyn Jones believed that some of the scripts were as good as the best that anybody was writing in the Drama single-play slot. It offered a format<sup>16</sup> that was at once disciplined and free; a writer could say almost anything within it. It became a true source of new writers; Alan Plater, Keith Dewhurst

and John Hopkins were three who learned their craft writing for it.

And yet, finally, series writing even at its best has serious consequences not only for the future of the single one-off play but for the very writers it has helped to create as Ted Willis, the playwright, points out:

"...series-writers fall victim to their own success. In the beginning, a series can be fresh and exciting to work on but, after a while, its limits and attitudes are established and routine takes the place of creation. The characters are fixed, and the exploration has been done. It all becomes a little too easy and the iron, the sharpness and the sting, tend to disappear from the writing. What is more serious is that the writer is scarcely, if ever, aware of what is happening. He continues to turn out good, honest work to the utmost of his ability, but he no longer works under the creative tension which sharpens his vision and pushes him to the frontiers of his talent and even beyond them.

If he hangs on too long, he becomes what Vicki Baum described as a 'first-rate second-class' author. If he comes to terms with this, well and good. We have need of his professionalism, his honesty and his talent, and he can console himself with the thought that he is not alone. Not everybody can be an Arthur Miller. But the threat to original drama which comes from the series is not one that should be ignored." 17

Pressure of work, reductions of staff and growth of BBC departments and ITV companies to a great size has increased the factory system for producing programmes of all types, and decreased the time for creative discussion and pre-production experiment inside or outside of rehearsals - even the possibility of a creative team working together regularly on a succession of programmes or plays.

The relationship of the mass media of television with the masses it serves is an interesting one too. Despite the fact that it must have been clear very early on that working class viewers would come to constitute the vast majority of the audience - at first



they could not afford the receivers of course - using it as a cheap and ever-available form of entertainment, relaxation and escape, no conscious attempt seems to have been made to find a form of entertainment for them. Of course such an attempt had never really been made by radio (had perhaps been resisted). Television people were not usually from a working-class background, and apart from the variety show they had no popular entertainment models to refer to. It was in the series and serials that working class life and reality first started to encroach. Early serials like Compact and Emergency Ward 10 were solidly middle class - the equivalent of Mrs Dale's Diary. Then came Coronation Street, originally envisaged as a strictly local programme for the Manchester area, and not expected to have a national audience. But the viewers adopted it and have ensured its survival. What it represented was something recognisable as 'us' to the mass of viewers, having a nostalgia for lost community relationships in the years of redevelopment - maybe a substitute for next-door neighbours and street gossip, maybe something of a new dignity at seeing people like oneself presented on television as worthy of attention - an easing of the problems of life by seeing them presented at this slight remove towards fiction, where they are resolvable.

If Coronation Street, at least at first, stuck to the low key and everyday disputes of life, Z-Cars represented the first hard and clear look at real people - policemen doing a job but with feelings about their work and other people that were not governed by some ideal concept of the father-figure, law preserver like that presented in Dixon, criminals motivated by the real suffering of being poor, needing money for real social reasons, not on account of a

psychological kink that makes them fictional or romantic - and a hardness and speed of dialogue sounding like real people talking - though of course compressed and simplified in actuality.

Changes were gradually being made, pressures were being applied. Many writers could not keep up the pace so events became romanticised, characters and relationships softened. But the impact of these two series has affected single-shot drama and documentary ever since.



### Notes

#### Background:

Peter Black, The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, BBC Publication, 1972.

Peter Black, The Mirror in the Corner, Hutchinson, 1972.

1. Peter Black, Daily Mail, 6 January, 1972.  
Black also wrote in his book The Biggest Aspidistra in the World, p.162: "The seed of the BBC's best drama series was planted in the struggling early fifties, Z-Cars, Maigret, The Trouble Shooters, Dr. Finlay's Casebook all grew from and owed their success to the quality of vivid authenticity, of respect for the integrity of the subject, that the early documentarians looked for and set out to reproduce."
2. See Appendix 72, Robert Barr interview July 1973, "Evolution of the Series"; the following account has been based on this source.
3. Producers: From the beginning of Radio Broadcasting, the BBC used this title in the old theatrical sense. By that we mean that it was the producer's task, not only to cast and to plan productions, and be responsible for the creative content and the finance, but also to direct it in the cinematic sense. This nomenclature and practice was followed into television. The producer was responsible for creating his own camera script, rehearsing and directing actors, and controlling in the gallery the work of the camera crews, the sound engineers and so on. However, as the operation became even more complex, certain producers were called upon to supervise a whole range of productions, and directors were appointed to work to them, to be responsible for the gallery operation and the direction of actors. For some time this practice was adopted only for long-running series and serials, where the extra weight of organisation and administration of the show could be removed from the shoulders of the person responsible for the actual creative effort. At the same time, however, the director of each individual play, because the administrative burden was not heavy, continued to do this work and was called the producer. It is today fully recognised that the two functions are separate. The qualities required in a director and in a producer are not necessarily the same. It is obviously good practice and necessary for large scale production planning that one person should be looking forward many months ahead and organising new production, having scripts written, and dealing with the day to day planning, and for another, the director, to concentrate on the immediacy of rehearsals and transmission from the gallery. At the same time it should be clear that if the producer is to be a future planner, the work of writers and editors must come under his control as well as the work of other programme staff, designers, costume designers, musicians and so on.

4. See Appendixes 49, 50, 51 for full details of the I Made News series also the earlier chapter on the Dramatised-Documentary.
5. See Appendix 72 Robert Barr on 'Series'.
6. Ibid.
7. See Appendix 73, Interview with Elwyn Jones, July 1973.
8. Ibid.
9. Robert Barr, op.cit. (Appendix 72).
10. Elwyn Jones, op.cit. (Appendix 73).
11. Ibid.
12. See Appendix 74 Robert Barr "Origins of Z-Cars". For further Press comment see Appendix 79 "The Impact of Z-Cars".  
Keith Dewhurst writing in The Guardian, 1.12.71 said:  
"Z-Cars was an expression in the new mass medium of the changes that Look Back in Anger had proclaimed five years earlier in the theatre. The challenge for social position and status of a new educated meritocracy an assessment of its roots in provincial and working-class life, an awareness of Britain's decline from world power, and a need to measure received ideas against the actual feelings of a generation that grew up in wartime this is the background to the intense artistic activity of the late 1950s and the 1960s and for all that, there was a time lag between the expression of this change in the theatre and on television. Z-Cars in the three or four years of glory was at a genuine frontier."
13. See Appendix 76 for General Information on the first Z-Cars Series of 1962.
14. For a full and detailed description of a typical Z-Cars Production see Appendix 75.
15. Peter Lewis 'Z-Cars' Contrast (Summer, 1962).
16. For a full and detailed explanation of the 'format' principle see Appendix 77 Robert Barr's description of the 'organisation plan' for series writing.
17. See Appendix 78 Ted Willis 'Television and the Dramatist'.



## CHAPTER NINE

New Writing for Television

"Television writing is a form of drama peculiar to itself, more peculiar than any of us now writing for the medium really know. There is a special technique to writing television, a special craft..."

Paddy Chayefsky.<sup>1</sup>

For most writers, television Drama, including its various offshoots, thriller serials, classic adaptations and character series, is the most important form of television writing. It is attracting and probably will continue to attract, the brightest talents, and it can very often produce the quickest rewards. However, its progress down the years has been for the most part rather slow and painful.

The first phase in its development may roughly be said to have lasted from 1945 to 1955. The writers who came to the fore were a small band - the highly original work of the documentary group has been shown already - including Nigel Kneale, Iain MacCormick and Philip Mackie; but of these, only Kneale realised the potentialities of the medium. In addition to his adaptation of 1984, his original play The Creature, inspired by the Daily Mail expedition to find the abominable snowman, was a pointer towards the future. Then in 1956, there arrived from America Paddy Chayefsky's Collected Television Plays and more important still his prefaces. To most television writers, this volume came as a complete eye-opener. News of Chayefsky's work, together with that of Rod Serling and Reginald Rose, had already filtered across the Atlantic. But this was the

first time that anyone had been able to study Chayefsky's plays at first hand and his thoughts on writing for television. His plays include Marty, The Mother, The Big Deal, Printer's Measure, and The Bachelor Party. It was immediately obvious that Chayefsky had thought more deeply about television and achieved more in the medium than anyone else in Drama on this side of the Atlantic.

"For my part," he wrote, "television has been a kind medium. I came out of the legitimate theatre, and I want to go back again. When I do, I will not be able to calculate the debt I owe to television for the amount of sheer craft I have learned in these past two years." 2

Soon, his prefaces had taken on some of the qualities of Holy Writ. Statements like this, for example:

"...for the writer, there is still an area for deep and unprobed work. I am just now becoming aware of this area, this marvellous world of the ordinary. This is an age of savage introspection, and television is the dramatic medium through which to expose our new insights into ourselves. The stage is too weighty, the movies too intense to deal with the mundane and all its obscured ramifications. Television need not be a demeaning sequence of panel shows and horror - you can write honest dramatic literature for television, rewarding to your sense of pride." 3

Also:

"The point is, that no matter how a writer produces the construction of his script, it always comes down to justifying his moment of crisis." 4

And then on the distinction between theatre writing and television writing:

"The closest thing to reality I ever saw on the stage was in Death of a Salesman, but even this extraordinary play involved a suicide and an incident in which the son discovers his father in a hotel room with a woman other than his mother. These are



excellent dramatic incidents, but they are not everyday occurrences in the life of the lower-middle class." 5

It has been necessary to quote Chayefsky at length, because there was at this time a feeling that his influence on television drama in this country had been altogether a bad one and had in fact stifled and stultified its natural growth. Writers like Duncan Ross claimed that Chayefsky was not much of an influence and the work of the Documentary writers much more so. There seems reason to believe that both made a significant contribution to the new writing that emerged. Chayefsky's phrase 'the marvellous world of the ordinary'<sup>6</sup> had entered so deeply into the minds of a whole generation of writers, that they had taken it as a banner, a text and a frontier boundary all rolled into one. Yet it was argued by some, towards the end of the fifties, that it was this blind adherence to the creed of realism that was leading television drama up a cul de sac. For a writer like Arthur Swinson, this state of affairs was in fact no longer 'the marvellous world of the ordinary' but the sub-ordinary world of the ordinary.

"The demand for actuality takes us along dubious roads in drama... too often we have plays merely reflecting the superficial, the conventionally sensational aspects in which there is no room for argument... the results of this are odd... with one hand in factory programmes and discussions, television does a good deal to acquaint us with the complexities of many problems... while on the other hand with what skill it can, it uses its power to smooth them into conventionality. The window opens on the world, one might say, just in time for an entertainer to slap some rather obviously painted scenery in front of it. Realism, in fact, is not enough." 7

And in truth it was not enough. Just as the theatre was soon

to explore forms other than kitchen-sink so also in television by 1960 there was a distinct swing away from realism towards a more poetic form of writing.

Yet a television play is not an entity as is a film or stage play. It is part of a total evening's entertainment and is sandwiched between other programmes, most of which are non-dramatic in form, though usually a good deal more dramatic in impact.

This is the first challenge the television dramatist has to face. He is running in harness with Sunday Night at the London Palladium, all-in wrestling, football, quiz shows, Westerns, Current Affairs programmes and, above all, with the News, which brings the drama of actuality into the sitting-room - the war in Viet Nam, the assassination of a President, the death of a statesman, the crowning of a Queen, a rail disaster in Mexico and a riot in Panama.

Nor does his problem end there, for television drama in itself is a thing of infinite variety and has to fulfil many functions. The dramatist in the theatre usually attracts his own particular kind of audience. When a theatregoer buys seats he chooses the type of play or entertainment he wishes to see. He follows his own taste and he knows roughly what to expect. The Whitehall Theatre draws on one audience, The Royal Court on another, and it is rarely that these audiences are composed of the same faces.

With television, all these different audiences fuse into one, irrespective of taste, class, social background or bank-balance. The man whose taste runs to comedy sits down to watch



at the same time as the man who prefers serious drama. And furthermore, this strangely assorted audience is not sitting in a darkened auditorium. They do not share a sense of occasion, or feel that mysterious sense of communication, that magical intensity, which comes to people who are exposed to the same emotional and artistic experience.

There are still some people who maintain that there is no such thing as television drama, that it is still only a poor bastard thing, a sort of dramatic journalism, a pale imitation of the cinema or the theatre, or that it does not exist as a separate entity at all.

Yet, for example, Armchair Theatre under Sydney Newman, did create a definite style of its own and succeeded in establishing itself as a genuine theatre-of-the-air, with a huge following. The plays, taken as a whole were sharply critical of establishment ideas and orthodox attitudes and vividly reflected the approach of the new generation of writers. One of the main benefits of television over the years, has been that public discussion of such topics as abortion and prostitution and homosexuality has helped to create a climate in which it is easier for people to acknowledge the existence in themselves of emotions previously swept under the carpet. We know that many of these topics were first introduced by the documentary writers of the forties and fifties but it is also true that at the same time the theatre was itself searching for a message and exploring new forms - not without influence on the young writers of the day.

It would be as well to consider at this point what in fact was happening in the theatre during this same period.

In seeking to look at the dramatic activities of the years 1945-1962, not as an entity in themselves but as part of the general historical development of the English theatre, two things seem to emerge. First, there is the fact that, despite the incidence of war, the dramatists in the years immediately following 1945 carried on, as it were, from where they had left off. Maybe, however, that statement requires some modification, since the war years of 1939 to 1945 did not, in reality, create any essential chasm between post-war and pre-war. Although certainly the black-outs and the bombings interfered with the activities of the theatres, such performances as were given in these theatres did not differ markedly from the performances presented before 1939, and several dramatists continued to write plays which in style and content pursued paths which had long been clearly signposted. Blithe Spirit, Wind of Heaven, Mr. Bolfry, They Came to a City, all belong to this period.

Thus we might perhaps say that the war had no immediate and direct effect on the general playwriting trends which had been established during the thirties. Topical subject-matter, as in Ted Willis' Buster (1943), dealing with air raids, and Joan Temple's No Room at the Inn (1945), concerned with the problems of evacuation, certainly and understandably came into focus, but it was the subject-matter that was different, not the style or the basic approach.

The second matter to be observed is that from the mid-fifties onward a new movement seized the theatre in its grip, and, when we examine this new movement carefully in relation to the



twentieth-century playhouse as a whole, we suddenly realise that, in effect, it takes shape as a kind of condensed and accelerated repetition of the more long-drawn-out movement from 1900 to 1930. Clearly, this statement demands further elaboration and elucidation, but before devoting further attention to it we may first briefly consider the progress of the stage during the ten years from 1945 to 1955.

The thirties, were marked by three general styles of play - the relics of the old realistic social drama, now rarely concerned with the problems which had captured the attention of the Galsworthys and St. John Irvines at the beginning of the century, and tending more and more to centre upon domestic issues; the various experiments in more imaginative styles, such as the series of dramas written by Priestley; and the sudden advent of a new poetic drama, signalled by the appearance of Murder in the Cathedral. It is precisely these three forms which characterise the drama for the decade 1945-55.

Thus we reach the close of the first decade following the end of the war, when the second dramatic movement begins to take shape. In this second movement, the progress of the poetic drama has been summarily halted. A few stray experiments in the writing of verse plays have been made sporadically, but virtually, in so far as this type of theatre is concerned, we are back where we started.

The special character of the years 1955-61 was provided by the sudden upsurge of a new realism, distinct from the old yet strangely reminiscent of the realistic endeavours at the beginning of the century. Just as John Ferguson, Chains, Rutherford and Son,

and all the various essays in the depiction of lower-middle-class life aroused excitement between 1900 and 1915, so a similar excitement has been evoked in at least certain quarters by the 'kitchen-sink' school of this period. And the parallel goes beyond just a general outline: numbers of the new dramatists were demonstrating in their plays that consciously or unconsciously, in revolting against both the poetic play and the 'drawing-room' drama, they were exploiting themes, situations, and characters which already had been freely put upon the stage in the earlier years; the impact made by the Manchester Repertory during the first two decades of the century was mirrored in the impact made by the Royal Court Theatre and, to a certain extent, by the Stratford Theatre Royal; angry young men and women were sponsored both by the one and the other.

Look Back in Anger startled the public in 1956 by its re-treatment of the old theme concerning the well-brought-up girl who marries a man out of her social milieu; here was a fresh orientation and a vehicle in which the author's vituperative abilities were offered full scope. Look Back in Anger was followed by the would-be symbolic The Entertainer (1957), which makes use of the music-hall tradition, associated with the presentation of realistically drawn scenes.

These plays of Osborne's set the pace. They made their impact in the theatre by their abusive wrath and self-centredness as well as by their shock tactics. Both qualities are reproduced in Arnold Wesker's somewhat adolescent The Kitchen (1959) and in his later ambitiously titled "Wesker Trilogy" consisting of Chicken Soup with Barley, (1958), Roots (1959), and I'm Talking



about Jerusalem (1960). Other playwrights followed suit. Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall produced Billy Liar (1960), an inconclusive documentary; John Mortimer infused a dash of irony into Lunch Hour and Collect Your Hand Baggage (1960), Doris Lessing experimented in Each His Own Wilderness (1958), a rather confused play of ideas with the usual angry overtones; a new Journey's End was provided by Willis Hall in The Long and the Short and the Tall (1958); the documentary style enriched by Irish eloquence was cultivated by Brendan Behan in The Quare Fellow (1956) - a prison 'comedy-drama'; other attempts at the documentary, enlivened by colourful language, appeared in John Arden's Live Like Pigs (1958), and Sergeant Musgrave's Dance (1959); Shelagh Delaney attracted attention for her A Taste of Honey (1959) and The Lion in Love (1960); Alun Owen took a kindred way in Progress to the Park (1960); Stephen Lewis aimed at the ultra-naturalistic in Sparrers Can't Sing (1960). These, and many other similar plays, were eagerly praised by a number of the critics, being hailed, much as the realistic plays of the early nineteen-hundreds had been hailed. It was almost as though there had been no Gorki to write a Lower Depths in 1902. Certainly the outspokenness of the modern authors brought upon the stage episodes and references such as could never had been heard in the past, but fundamentally the shock-tactics were not different in kind.

While all these playwrights sought in their own ways to cultivate the realistic drama, interpreting 'realism' mainly by reference to the class of characters introduced and by the nature of the social message incorporated in the action and in

the lines, and while some critics at least, lauding this movement as though there had been no realistic movements in previous years, called for further developments of the 'journalistic theatre', the interesting thing is that in many ways the playwrights showed that they themselves soon came to see that realism was not sufficient - like the television dramatists. Already in 1959 there were signs within the group which had been sponsored by the Royal Court that fresh attention was being paid to the possibilities of the historical theme; and in 1961 this Theatre's director drew attention to "a movement away from modern-dress naturalism". Thus, in a sense, the pattern of the years 1900-1935 was being repeated.

Yet one of the great English failings is for the maintenance and perpetuation of realism. It is so deeply ingrained in the English temperament that it is almost heretical to suggest that the finest works of art, in literature as well as the performing arts, are those which manage to transcend the cramping confines of realism; which manage to produce imaginative abstractions which deliver a metaphysical rather than a social resonance. A work of art that does not in some way put a mirror up to nature might be given attention, even praise, but when all is said and done, it is not artistically commendable as the cosy reflection of something which we can all recognise and affirm.

In recent years writers as dissimilar, or similar, as D.H.Lawrence, David Storey, William Douglas Home, Peter Shaffer, A.E.Whitehead, Christopher Hampton and Peter Nicholls have been roundly praised for creating the shape and feel of identifiably realistic social situations. Getting it right - that is,



producing an artefact that corresponds with generally accepted social and psychological verities - has become the unchallenged measuring rod of dramatic art.

It is not easy to produce any kind of work of art and if one is fortunate enough to throw up a piece of effective realism, it is only perverse to pull a long face and complain about cramping verisimilitude. Nor does this imply that a work which depends on easy identifications and socially accurate observations is something one can do without. But the real failing is the assumption that the best works of art are those which fit that description, and that other works less socially focused, less realistically based, fall into a subordinate category.

Every good play is true to something to be found in our own world - whether it be the palpable world of social - psychological realities or the equally real world of our inner lives. A location traceable in the London street guide is no less real than the fantasy terrain where most people spend more time than anywhere else. So the distinction is never between true or false, identifiable or obscure, real or surreal. It is a question of where the writer goes foraging for his reality. If it is in hallucinations and what he digs up is grotesque and distorted, it is just as true to his experience as the found objects of the naturalist whose trusty tools are the tape-recorder and the instamatic camera.

All realistic plays, whether they intend to or not, prove certain theses, and thereby confirm views already held by one faction or another. In other words, the theatre endlessly reiterates, using dramatic means, certain truths already held

to be self-evident.

When Artaud cried "No more masterpieces" that, essentially is what he meant. Let us have an end to propaganda for life. Let us confront the more harrowing truths from which our natures recoil: the exact opposite of the liberal platitude enthroned in the quasi-political play.

Gradually there was emerging a better understanding of what television drama really was all about as Hugh Whitemore points out:

"Television is an enormously flexible medium and I believe that there should be more flexibility in the dramatists use of the techniques at his disposal. If one is writing a comedy, then one should feel free to draw heavily from the inventive techniques of the very best light entertainment shows. If one is working on a serious subject, then the cinéma vérité approach of certain documentary programmes might well suggest a method of construction that is totally televisual. By drawing from the resources of television itself, one is not only creating a new dramatic language, one is also creating a new something that is part of a common experience for the viewer at home... in many ways television drama belongs more to television than it does to drama." 8

This last remark of Whitemore's, that "television drama belongs more to television than it does to drama" was a fact that concerned Anthony Pelissier, a producer, very much indeed. Convinced that all television was doing was to produce sound radio with pictures he ran an experimental group for one year for the BBC called The Langham Group. Despairing of finding writers to produce scripts in the required form, the group wrote (if that is the word) their own. It cannot be said that their productions always found favour with either critics or viewers, and to some extent the group must take responsibility for this. All revolutionary groups - in the world of drama anyway - tend to move to extremes, to invent their own jargon or religious writ and



delight in obscurity.

The Langham Group in 1959 represented a definite step forward in television, not so much because of its conclusions, but because of its attitude. It formulated, for the first time, the explicit conception of television drama, by stressing the visual nature of the medium. At the time its productions were largely laughed at, or ignored, because television as a whole did not want to know. It wanted to turn out the same old stuff in the same old way, to keep the public happy. In fact, to a large extent, Pelissier has had the last laugh: the visualist clichés common among the majority of television directors in recent times, the fashionable ideologies of 'writing in pictures' have their origins, more often than not, in his original, unpopular ideas. But the ultimate failure of The Langham Group was more interesting than a mere inability to interest the creators of popular television. It was an artistic failure, and a very revealing one, because it was based on an aesthetic misconception. Pelissier's approach can best be summarised by quotation:

"If Television is not primarily a visual medium what on earth is it? Here in Britain, and everywhere else as far as I can make out, it is merely illustrated sound radio... it is surely in one's visual approach that any individual artistic statement can be made in the Television medium. For me, this was first revealed when one day in an empty studio I found a camera that for some reason was still live. It was pointed at nothing. All it showed was a blank image. Suddenly I realised that any individuality in its use lay in filling that blank image not with whatever happened to come before it when the actors got together in front of some conventional sets, but with what I might devise for the viewer to see. It might be a thumb, a face, a composition of light and shade, a crowd, anything at all, in focus, out-of-focus, upside-down, what have you. Here to hand was a magical paint-box giving

immediate results, not just a recording machine but a new self-contained medium, potentially creative in its own right. And it wasn't being used, not at all, by anybody. Nor is it now." 9

Pelissier wanted directors to be free to concentrate on making the pictures the prime centre of interest and dramatic suggestion. This is an immediately attractive philosophy, and it gave a much needed punch on the nose to the conventional televisors. But the Group's own work was disappointing. By cutting dialogue to a bare minimum, using stills, and a thick and often overloud sound-track consisting of almost everything except words, it tried to tell a story in a series of carefully planned pictures, using common sounds and objects for their associative and emotive value. But the result was vagueness, an assault on the ear, and worst of all, irrelevance.

Pelissier himself said of his methods with regard to the Group's production of Mario:

"If you want one word to describe the kind of effect we are seeking, I would call it orchestration. We have taken the theme and the atmosphere of a seaside resort, visited by a respectable ageing couple and their grandchildren; and in the unfolding of the events that involve Mario, a handsome young waiter, his former girl-friend Pauline, and Omar the Magician, we have sought to present a visual treatment of the subject in the sort of way a composer might try to express an idea in music." 10

Torrents of Spring was the first presentation by the Group.

Yet however fine the ideas looked in print, they did not succeed in conveying much more truth than the old-fashioned ways.

Langham became obsessed with its own techniques, and often forgot that, in fact, it was trying to tell the viewer something about something.

There was, however, one production by Mervyn Pinfield which



did open up more possibilities for the writer. It was an adaptation by John Wiles of The Pimpernel in Prague by Donald Campbell-Shaw and was called On the Edge. In type, it was a straight-forward thriller, but so mobile that in ordinary terms it could not possibly have been crammed into a studio. Pinfield, however, had an original idea. He argued that if we look at something with the human eye, the depth of focus is very limited. That is, if we look at a girl standing three feet from the piano, the girl is in focus, while the piano, and therefore the wall beyond it is not. Therefore (he reasoned) why should one expect an unnatural depth of focus from the television cameras? Why not adjust them to reproduce the vision of the human eye which, as we know, could be done by stopping them at 2.9. The immediate effect of this adjustment was to abolish the need for detailed realistic scenery. As long as the viewers got a vague impression of the background that was quite sufficient.

Having established this fact, it was only a short step to realise that with minor changes, one set could be transformed into another. Altogether Pinfield was able to accommodate 36 sets in the studio. None of these were sets in the conventional sense of the term, but because of the adjustment to the cameras, it did not matter. He even made six trees represent a wood, and by shooting at carefully selected angles and rehearsing the cutting meticulously he was able to stage a long chase through the wood. Up to this time, any such thing would have been considered impossible.

Generally Pelissier seized on half the truth as if it were

the whole gospel, and created only confusion. Sound is not merely something that can be pre-recorded, leaving the producer free to concentrate on telling his story in pictures. It is one half of the instrument of communication. Television is not primarily a visual medium. It is not primarily anything. Sound radio is purely aural, and silent film is purely visual. Television like film, is an equal partnership of the two. If either half possesses a greater power of communication, certainly of precise communication, it must surely be the aural half, which is the vehicle of the word.

For all its 'ideas' the BBC remained unimpressed and at the end of the year they put a stop to the project.<sup>11</sup> Its emphasis on 'story-telling', however, is a point worth noting as will be shown later; and for one member of the group, Tom Clarke, the 'visual approach' to writing for television has remained with him for the whole of his professional career. Beyond that it is hard to see what immediate contribution it made to television drama. Far more alarming at this same time was Chayefsky's admission that he had become totally disenchanted with 'realism':

"I am bored to tears with what you British call Kitchen-Sink drama and we Americans call Ash-Can Stuff... The trouble with the social comment kind of play - the kind you usually get on television - is that you can never get a third act, and therefore it doesn't work properly. That's one description of a realistic play - a play with no third act. How are you going to resolve realistic problems if you consider them real? ...I've always been somewhat obsessed about the English language: but I put myself off by my rather cold-blooded apprenticeship in television. Through reading Edna Vincent Millay's work and life, and about the other poets she was interested in, I got back to poetry. It's made me a lot more purple, but that's the risk you take." <sup>12</sup>



Other writers too were coming to the conclusion that a swing away from realism and towards poetry might not be such a bad thing. Six examples from 1960 can be chosen which illustrate this change of heart: Bill Naughton's June Evening, Peter Dews' adaptation of William Shakespeare's An Age of Kings, John Mortimer's David and Broccoli, John Arden's Soldier, Soldier, Jack Kepler's Three Ring Circus and Alun Owen's The Ruffians.

all  
poetic  
illustration

June Evening was an evocation with poetic undertones; David and Broccoli moved between drama and fantasy; An Age of Kings moved from prose to verse and back again; The Three Ring Circus had a fantastic, nightmare quality about it, quite removed from realism; and The Ruffians, like all Alun Owen's plays, had a vein of poetry.

Vivian Daniels's production of Bill Naughton's June Evening was, according to many critics, a land-mark in television drama at this time. The script had started out as a radio play and was about the events in one Lancashire street during a June evening in the 1920s. In a superficial sense the play did not deal with the modern world; no great social or political problems were touched on, and yet it pierced right to the heart of things. From a technical point of view, the production was remarkable for the fact that the whole street (interiors of houses included) was built in the studio. Using six cameras, Vivian Daniels was able to follow the action up and down the street and in and out of the houses.

This great scope and freedom of movement was essential, in fact, if the true meaning of the play was to be realised. As

Daniels said:

"Bill Naughton had written something new, a play not about a haphazard collection of people but about a community. The play shows the people to be facets of their community... What had to emerge most fully was the corporate character of the street. For this reason there had to be an Aristotelian unity about the action." <sup>13</sup>

And this was undoubtedly achieved by Vivian Daniels and his designer Barry Learoyd. The physical movement, the business of walking or running or skipping along the street, or in and out of the houses became an integral part of the play.

David and Broccoli was the story of a small boy at a private school and his relationship with Broccoli, the cauliflower-eared boxing master. David gets into trouble with the Headmaster because he will not hit Broccoli during the boxing lesson. Planning to take his revenge, he finds that Broccoli is fascinated by what he calls the 'Almanac of Forecasts' and the end of the world. Taking the figures Broccoli supplies, David convinces him that the end of the world is a few days off. This was a penetrating play about the cruelty of small boys and the gullibility of men. The characters living more in their own fantasies than in the real world; they are in fact only on nodding terms with realism.

Soldier, Soldier was a satire on dull, respectable, working class existence. Arden wanted to show up its values as shallow and false, his story concerned a Highland soldier, who comes into a dull Midland town like a gale. He is another large extrovert character, with a wild driving force. In a world that lacks confidence, he has supreme confidence; in a world that is bleak and grey and old, he is bursting with youth and colour.



The Three Ring Circus was Jack Kepler's first play for television. It concerned a young man who had lost his memory and went to the Police Station to find out who he was. There the extraordinary Inspector persuaded him to try out a number of identities, none of which suited him. In the end, when the young man came face to face with a man who could tell him who he was, he no longer wanted to know, and decided to follow the road with the circus. Fantasy is the hardest form of writing to control - as the Langham Group discovered to their cost - and this play did not always succeed in this respect but there were moments when the fantasy became startlingly real.

Alun Owen, the author of The Ruffians and other plays such as No Trams to Lime Street, Lena, Oh My Lena and The Hard Knock is one of the most successful of television writers. In 1960 he was given the Award of the Guild of Television Producers. His Liverpool-Welsh working-class background gives him a marvellous command of the vernacular. He has succeeded in doing what so far has been found impossible by other writers; he has taken the common speech and woven into it a vein of gold. Fortunately he realised from the start that even the colourful speech of Liverpool could not be reproduced literally for dramatic purposes. As he says:

"It is always very difficult to make literal truth look like dramatic truth as well. On the other hand, most people said how vivid and realistic the Liverpudlian dialect was in No Trams to Lime Street. In fact, no one in Liverpool ever spoke as I make them speak in the play. It is just my idea of how, ideally, they should speak, and how I would like them to speak, but far away from any literal truth." 14

This quotation shows quite clearly where the poetry comes from.

For in Owen's writing, there undoubtedly is poetry. He is concerned not with the real so much as with the ideal. And yet, there is so much truth in his writing that his plays have a validity and a meaning that many other works lack.

The setting for The Ruffians, is a Liverpool pub; the characters are the publican and his barman, a policeman, a run-away Irish gunman, and a gang of louts. But even in this ordinary and realistic situation, the dialogue keeps lifting the play on to another plane. There is nothing poetic about the language, but the feeling behind it is shot through with poetry, giving the whole a richness of texture and depth of meaning.

An Age of Kings was summarised in an entry for the BBC Annual Report 1960-61:

"74 full length plays - each of an hour and a half or more; of those, 32 were specially written for television. The production of the complete cycle of Shakespeare's Historical plays was a long-felt ambition. By 1960 the development of studios (White City) and technical resources (VTR) had brought it within the possibility of achievement in television and the whole cycle was televised in 15 parts and produced by Peter Dews." 15

\* \* \* \* \*

It may be said, and perhaps fairly, that all the foregoing arguments apply to the thin top crust of television drama - the one-shot play - but bear no relation to the average output, week by week. What has poetry to do with the crime play, the thriller, the bread-and-butter sex drama? Yet it is fair to say that in television as elsewhere, the outstanding influences the good,



and the good influences the run-of-the-mill. Even a thriller is not ruined by good characterisation and an enriched verbal and visual texture; it simply becomes a better thriller.

The full-length television play is one of the hardest dramatic forms anyone can attempt to master. The small-screen can convey vision and feelings so quickly that all too often the writer has said all he has to say about his characters long before the end. It needs, in fact, as much material as a full-length stage play; and few playwrights - even in the top class - have produced more than twelve good plays in a whole life-time. Some of them - O'Casey and Karel Čapek, for example - achieved world-status on the strength of only two or three plays. It is not surprising, therefore, that so many plays, even from good writers, fail on the screen or even fail to reach the screen.

The 30-minute play or serial, or even the 60-minute play can achieve pace and mobility because it is short, relative to the number of sets that can be erected in the studio. But the studio remains the same size for the 90-minute play, and its mobility is therefore reduced in proportion. On the screen, these plays move and develop more slowly than shorter programmes, and sometimes this lack of pace kills them. Illogically, the longer the programme, the wider is the canvas that the viewer expects it to cover. But all too often, the canvas is not only relatively but absolutely narrower. While documentaries and thriller series and serials appeared at this time to develop with the hustle and bustle of life around them, too many of the plays appeared artificially constructed. Once again, as will be shown later,

it is the documentary writers - this time in Series - who are leading the writing field!

Most of us spend our lives in homes and offices, factories and shops, cinemas and theatres, and pubs and cafés; and in cars and buses, trains and planes, as we move from one to another. Without free movement, our lives would be so different as to be rendered quite unrecognisable, and the television writer ignores this fact at his peril. Certainly the arrival of better film equipment (light-weight, flexible 16 mm. sound cameras)<sup>16</sup> and, more important still, videotape recording<sup>17</sup> (with editing facility later) helped to mitigate this situation. Plays could be recorded in sequences, or out of sequence - as all the sets no longer had to be erected at the same time, there could also be more of them. But economic factors did of course still control the purse strings generally.

One answer was for producers to allow for a greater use of film particularly in a series like Maigret for example. The Annual Report of 1960-61:

"Another major drama series of the year was based on George Simenon's Maigret stories - the first selection of thirteen episodes, pre-recorded by an electronic process newly developed by the BBC (VTR), justified the temerity of translating the famous French detective in television terms." 18

Slowly but surely television drama was changing. In the early sixties along with satire, as evidence that the BBC under Sir Hugh Greene was determined to shock and disturb viewers into a recognition of the changes that were taking place in Britain, was a series of regular 75-minute plays called the Wednesday Play.<sup>19</sup> Edited by James MacTaggart, these plays were



rarely comfortable, easy or conventional. Not only did they tackle themes such as abortion, bad housing, political corruption, schizophrenia, but they dared to shoot them in an experimental fashion that was confusing to viewers familiar with the cosy, straightforward techniques of conventional television directors. In plays like Cathy Come Home, Up the Junction, In Two Minds, produced by Tony Garnett and directed by Kenneth Loach, the blend of videotape and film, the use of documentary techniques and the speed and verve of the editing created a television drama that could rouse millions to a recognition of such social scandals as the treatment of the homeless, back-street abortions, and callous mental hospitals. The assault on pre-conceived notions of what a television play should be - the involvement with sordid and complicated issues, the readiness to distort the truth for a passionate dramatic effect - all provoked vociferous resentment in those who saw the BBC as a rampaging Goliath, ready to trample upon all the cherished attitudes of the past.

"The BBC faced its biggest public censure yesterday after Wednesday's television play Up the Junction", ran a news story in the Daily Mail of 5 November, 1965. "It received a record number of protest calls from viewers. The first of hundreds came three minutes after the play started. The protests continued coming in throughout the night and all day yesterday."

The Annual Report of 1963-64 said:

"There have been criticisms of the content of some of the individual plays... These criticisms will not make the BBC abandon its policy of presenting established plays by established playwrights about the problems of

sex and violence in human relationships, which have been the very stuff of drama since it was first written. Nor will it change the BBC's belief that the serious writers of today must be allowed to say freely what they feel about the society in which they live." 20

Two years later the 1966-67 Report noted:

"The Wednesday Play provided perhaps the most natural outlet for original writing for television. Here plays of recognised distinction were created by such writers as John Hopkins, John Mortimer, David Mercer, Dennis Potter, Jim Allen, David Halliwell, Simon Gray. These and others are not only writing for BBC television but are increasingly helping to nourish the theatre and the cinema. So too are the growing band of directors, producers and actors who were brought up in television and are now more and more making the running in the plays and films produced in this country. One writer whose Wednesday Play became famous over-night was Jeremy Sandford." 21

Yet Oscar Wilde once said that realism was the last refuge of the unimaginative and this was no doubt very much in the mind of Troy Kennedy Martin when he led an all-out attack on television drama in 1964. It was his first play for television Incident at Echo Six (1958) which had established him as a formidable talent. By 1964 with his Z-Cars experience behind him, he was convinced that "television drama at the moment is going nowhere fast. Informed management believes it is so bad it can't get worse. They are wrong." He continued:

"It can and will destroy itself unless a break-through in form is made, substantiated and phased into the general run of drama programmes. Not an art set-up like the Langham Group to be propitiated on the altar of prestige, but a working philosophy which contains a new idea of form, with new language, new punctuation and new style. Something which can be applied to mass audience viewing. Something which can re-create the direction, the fire, and the ideas which television used to have. Something which can provide, for the first time, an area of theory, experiment and development which television drama has never had and which it needs so badly." 22



For Kennedy Martin the key to this revolution lay in taking a long look at naturalism to find out why it was the wrong form, in his opinion, for television drama.

Naturalism had come to be identified in terms of television with the work of Chayefsky and other American writers. The organic growth of the American Actors' Studio from the teachings of Stanislavsky and the paramount position of Freud in the American Art-consciousness had combined in the work of these writers to create a vital theatre of dialogue, a theatre of psychological motivation which could be adequately photographed with the techniques currently at the disposal of television directors. What is so often forgotten, is that what was produced was still basically 'theatre' - though, because the new writers, their works and their artists won public acclaim through television before going on to Broadway and Hollywood, the medium claimed that it had founded a television drama. This dangerous notion became more dangerous as time passed because the industry's belief in it became more absolute.

In one sense television drama had been imported into Britain, when Sydney Newman, first at ABC and then the BBC, cross-fertilised new writers with transatlantic directors of the calibre of Ted Kitcheff to produce the 'new' dynamic. Owen, Exton and David Turner were the writers in a television theatre which could stand on its own two feet. Lena, After the Funeral, No Fixed Abode, The Train Set, were genuine dramatic masterpieces more representative of the decade than many of the more celebrated films and theatre plays. However, by 1960 things began to break. Some of the good writers, tired of the

limitations of the naturalist form, had taken to poetic fantasy. Others had just opted out. There was a shrinkage of good material and a growing pessimism and, although the disquiet developing within the industry was obscured by the overall pressures upon it at this time - for the Pilkington report, the actors' strike, renewal of the ITV licence, the BBC Charter, the coming of the Second Channel, internal re-organisation and problems of management all hindered a long look at the dying television drama form - the rise of the big drama series like Z-Cars, by directing the attentions of the critics and the resources of the companies to further enterprises of the same kind, ironically made the situation of drama on television more exposed, for the series had begun to embrace areas of experience previously covered by the naturalistic-realistic form, and the public and the critics became dissatisfied with the single-shot drama spot, which now plainly needed to provide something special, different and distinctive if it was to survive.

For Troy Kennedy Martin the intention of the new drama, had to be deliberately understood, its growth deliberately assisted and an attempt made to halt the present confusion by cutting down some of the trees in order to see the wood. In order to produce his 'working philosophy' he suggested action along the following lines:

1. The deep-rooted attitude shared by artists, critics and executives within the industry alike, that naturalism is synonymous with television drama, must be got rid of.



2. All drama which owes its form or substance to theatre plays is out. The photography of theatre plays such as in World Theatre or Festival, should be given over to Talks department or Outside Broadcasts.
3. Naturalist series from Dixon through Z-Cars to It's Dark Outside can be separated. They are folk drama - excellent of their kind but can serve the new drama's purpose only as a school where young writers learn the fundamentals of television.<sup>23</sup>

Having stripped Drama of its irrelevances there remained only the question of naturalism; and as naturalism evolved from the theatre of dialogue, the simplest way to free the camera was to remove dialogue from the screen. A narrative form of drama was the obvious choice of replacement. Therefore Kennedy Martin wrote:

"The new drama will be based on story rather than plot. It will relate directly, man's relation to God, to other men, to things - and to himself." <sup>24</sup>

(Later it will be shown how one playwright, Tom Clarke is today able to fulfil so successfully in his work many of the ideas which Kennedy Martin put forward at this time.) But what of these ideas in practice then? Six stories, with which Kennedy Martin was concerned were transmitted in the summer of 1961 under the series title of Storyboard, and conceived along the lines of the ideas expressed above. Studio 4<sup>25</sup> was the next series associated with narrative drama, but it was not until Teletale came on that it was possible to discern the faint emergence of a form, despite the fact that it was handled by novice directors

in pocket-sized provincial studios. Martin remarked:

"The overall attitude of the BBC executive was that the form was cheap and could be used for training directors. This has proved limiting for narrative needs directors of experience, quality and technical ability. The number of critical notes that these three series attracted could be counted on the fingers of two hands. Yet out of a possible fifteen shows, five were worthy of more serious attention than the rest of the nation's television drama put together... Teletale's The Black Madonna is the best piece of television drama since Morning in the Streets." 26

Stuart Hood who was responsible for Studio 4 and Storyboard whilst he was with the BBC said later:

"Television drama must never be allowed to die. You see it died in America after Chayefsky. I'd like to see many more single act plays. There are too many situation dramas that get you nowhere. These are okay for the theatre. But mass audiences aren't interested in frozen situations or complex character development. They want a plot - something to get their teeth into. I suppose the Aristotelian definition is true - a play should have a beginning, a middle and an end... telling a story by dispensing with scenery, props and superfluous action. Instead you have a narrator." 27

But between the struggle for narrative or plot, naturalism or realism, (the ideas of Troy Kennedy Martin, or those of Stuart Hood, there came to the fore in the 1960s an actor turned producer by the name of Tony Garnett who was destined to change the face of television drama. First of all by clearing away 'the deadwood of naturalism',<sup>28</sup> and then by taking creative and technical risks 'on the screen' very much in the spirit and tradition of the dramatised-documentary writer/producers of the late 1940s. Under his direction the theory of the documentary-drama was about to emerge and would itself provide the necessary terms of reference, over which so many writers had agonised down the years, for the critical attention that television drama -



not televised drama - was so richly to deserve but not always  
to receive.

## Notes

Background reading:

Writing for Television Today, Arthur Swinson (A & C Black, 1963).  
Also Tyrone Guthrie, Appendix 84.

1. Paddy Chayefsky Television Plays, Simon & Schuster, N.Y., 1955, p.127.

Chayefsky was born in America in 1923. He first made his name in television. After the spectacular success of the film of his TV play Marty (1955) he turned increasingly to the stage and the cinema. His first stage play, Middle of the Night (1956), explored much the same sort of subject-matter as his television plays: it is a quiet, naturalistic examination of emotional problems in a modern urban setting.

2. Television Plays, Introduction, p.XIV.
3. Ibid. p.178.
4. Ibid. p.82.
5. Ibid. p.173.
6. Op.cit. (3), p.178.
7. Arthur Swinson, Writing for Television Today, p.166.
8. Hugh Whitemore, Contrast, Winter 1964.
9. Anthony Pelissier, The Journal of the Society of Film and Television Arts, Spring 1962.
10. Anthony Pelissier, Radio Times, 11.12.59. He continued:  
"What we are trying to do is to explore new techniques in television, techniques that break away from the inheritance of the theatre and the cinema, and from which eventually, we hope, will evolve something that is exclusive to the medium."

Transmission dates of productions by the Group:

Torrents of Spring - Turgenev-Pelissier - 21.5.59.

Mario - Thomas Mann - Pelissier - 15.12.59.

On the Edge - D.Campbell-Shaw/John Wiles - 16.7.60.

(BBC written Archives - Drama File)

11. See Appendix 82 'Revolutionaries in a Sea of Convention'. Romney Sutton writes: 'The Langham Group' has an important place in the television industry. Its ideas should be allowed to permeate through the BBC's Drama Department. This would create a greater awareness of television's potentialities.



12. Quoted in Arthur Swinson's Writing for TV Today, p.177-178.
13. Ibid. p.169.
14. Ibid. p.174.
15. See Appendix 91 BBC Annual Reports (1960-61), p.43-44. See other entries under 'Drama' and Appendix 90 for BBC Handbook entries.
16. The most significant trends in documentary film-making since the war have been cinéma-vérité and documentaries made for television. The origin lies, in part, in the Second world War: the enormous amount of combat footage shot in 16 mm. led to a greater acceptance of 16 mm. as a professional medium and to a proliferation of 16 mm. cameras and projectors; also professionals started to use 16 mm. for its lightness, cheapness and portability - all much greater in 16 mm. than in 35 mm. This gave the film-makers the means to shoot outside the studio much more easily and to capture reality as it happened - or to create this appearance. In time, tape recorders with acceptable sound were produced - the Nagra, invented by Stefan Kudelski, is considered the best and is the one most commonly used; and finally a portable rig capable of recording synchronised sound was created - one of the first was by Richard Leacock, Al Maysles and D.A.Pennebaker while working for Robert Drew in America. It was television which forced the professionals to accept 16 mm. that compelled the manufacturers of cameras and sound recorders to develop the new equipment that television demanded, and persuaded the laboratories that unless they took 16 mm. work seriously they would shortly starve to death in an age when the bulk of the world's film was being shot for the small screen. The necessary technical revolution took place in the 1950s. New 16 mm. cameras were developed, equipped to work with a sound track recorded by a magnetic stripe running down the edge of the film-stock, and simple developing baths were manufactured, allowing a television News Editor to process his incoming film in a matter of minutes. Film editing equipment, already existing, was modified to suit the faster needs of television news, and improved teleciné machines made it possible for high-quality pictures to be transmitted from a negative. What had started in News quickly spread to other departments including Drama and the techniques of filming went too: the direct recording of reality without the interference of the film-maker/cameraman, and the non-manipulative editing of the footage. These techniques have enormously influenced not only documentary film-making but also fiction films as well.
17. For Videotape Recording see Appendix 80A and Norman Swallow's comments on its value and uses in Appendix 80B.



For an indication of recent developments see Appendix 81, Drama Recording (1974).

See Appendix 62 Ian Atkins personal interview with this writer:

"Of course one of the things that goes on now which I never had the advantage of, is editing of VTR. I remember I did one production once, something to do with an anniversary and there wasn't a studio available so I had to do it straight on to film - film recording that is. During the show the vision mixer unit played up, with the result that there were three blank frames on every cut, so we had to take this into a cutting room and not merely top and tail it but actually go through every cut and take out these blank frames. Being an old film man I wasn't content to leave it at that, so I tightened up the cuts as well so that you saw for example, someone come in through the door and then they were three quarters of the way across the room by the time you next saw them. And this really showed up the weakness of the time factor in television, and that is something that has always been a fault with the medium... But the moment recording came in this was no longer necessary. It's an entirely additional weapon in the director's armoury today."

See also Appendix 90 BBC Handbook entry for 1962.

The main advantages of the introduction of VTR can be summarised as follows:

- (a) VTR has permitted higher utilization of studio-space which is an enormous capital investment.
- (b) VTR has made possible more elaborate and sophisticated production styles than ever before.
- (c) VTR has provided greater freedom and flexibility to the programme planners.
- (d) VTR has permitted high standards of performance and production.

Indeed it is difficult to think of any facet of television which has not been markedly and favourably changed by the introduction of VTR.

- 18. Appendix 91, BBC Annual Report: Drama, 1960-61.
- 19. See Appendix 92, Some Trends in BBC TV Drama.
- 20. See Appendix 91, BBC Annual Report, 1963-64, p.22-23.
- 21. See Appendix 91, BBC Annual Report, 1966-67, p.14-15.
- 22. Troy Kennedy Martin, Encore, March, 1964, p.21.
- 23. Ibid. p.23-24.
- 24. Ibid. p.31, Also Christopher Morahan, Head of Television Drama (Plays) had this to add in 1975: "I've a feeling that the movement of social realism is no longer appropriate to us."



The social realist school of the 1960s was the expression of that generation. It sprang from a protest against 'never had it so good', from a sense of freedom created here in the BBC by a particularly farsighted management and from a sense of disgust with the criteria by which we lived our lives... perhaps what television plays could do now is tell us how to go on: tell people about the richness and warmth of human relationships, without drawing a veil over what is evil. We must break free of the strictures of naturalism. We have sometimes taken refuge in the simulation of reality. Now we are forced to economise, we may drive through the barrier of our imagination." Radio Times, 9.1.75.

25. Studio 4 was launched by Elwyn Jones. The plays were produced in a very large studio, a considerable number of sets and composite sets being used. Most of them were adaptations from novels and a deliberate attempt was made to retain as much as possible of the original action. It was largely judged to be a failure. Its aims were confused and made more so by the introduction of naturalist plays within the format.
26. Troy Kennedy Martin, Encore, p.32. See also Appendix 83 for the published replies to Kennedy Martin's article in Encore. The following quotations are from the May-June Edition of 1964:
 

Philip Mackie: "I entirely agree, naturalistic drama is dead. It died of a surfeit: too many too often. And it died of a decline: the third-raters learnt the trick of writing it, and the third-raters got produced too."

Ken Taylor: "This new television drama seems to have so much in common with old steam radio - sound and narrator - What is intrinsic television drama then? Radio with pictures?"

Denis Potter: "Splendid, the narrative method opens up new perspectives. The writer can begin to pick out a priority among objects and feelings and human speech. But this way, too, people can get so entangled with things and bits of things that we get utterly dehumanised art."
27. Stuart Hood: interviewed by Compton Miller for Cherwell, 14 October, 1964.
28. Tony Garnett: Appendix 83.

### Documentary Drama - A Postscript

"It may well be that the boundary between drama and documentary, between fact and fiction, is being slowly erased, and that in having separate departments called drama and documentary our television organisations are keeping them apart for reasons of administrative tradition and convenience long after their separation has ceased to be artistically desirable. For the man who writes a true play and the man who writes a personal documentary have much in common, and the man who wants to create television programmes which tell the truth, as he sees it, about our world and its people, is as likely to choose the documentary as the play." <sup>1</sup>

Norman Swallow

"Television is, at one time or another, newspaper, magazine, cinema, theatre, music hall, cabaret, sports arena, conference hall and even lecture room. It is often forgotten that this multiplicity of programmes is produced not by some mysterious body known as the BBC or Granada or Thames, but by individual writers, producers and directors." <sup>2</sup>

Joan Bakewell

It has already been shown elsewhere in this thesis how when television first started it recruited from many other media - from legitimate theatre, variety theatre, from cinema, from journalism, from radio - drama, news, documentary and light entertainment. Its new practitioners had all the models of these media to choose from and to adapt, as well as the opportunity of exploring what original things the medium was capable of. In retrospect the conservatism of much of what was attempted is sad, but no doubt that was part of the non-experimental nature of



society in the years immediately after the war. The important developments were left to a younger generation of writers and directors who were gradually drawn in to television by the technical innovations which increased its flexibility, and by the new examples from other media.

The outstanding fact about television drama in Britain was that it all happened in such a relatively short space of time. It had, of course, no written history. The dramatist working in the theatre on the other hand has a tradition which he can write to. This lack of history meant that the people coming into television began literally as they came through the door. What has been achieved then in the period under review breaks down into three main phases. The first of these was from 1946-1955, when there was only one producing organisation - the BBC - with the only organised television drama and documentary departments in the world. The former, led by Michael Barry, because of his theatrical background tended to look towards the stage for material.

Up to 1951 television drama lacked mobility; it originated from small studios at Alexandra Palace; it was viewed through three cameras, each of which had only one lens. The actors moved to the cameras not the cameras to the actors. The result was a kind of imitation theatre, though there were exceptions.

The dialogue was all important, the pictures secondary. Most of the writers had learned their trade in the theatre, most of the directors (and producers) were ex-theatre directors and not from the cinema. Programmes could not be recorded so plays had to be broadcast live which meant a small number of sets,

and a limited number of actors and actresses.

But two important things happened during this period. The first was the development of Dramatised-Documentary and the kind associated principally with Robert Barr and Duncan Ross - who aimed amongst other things at breaking up the action into many scenes helped by the introduction of film sequences. The second thing was the crime serial of the kind originated by Robert Barr and Francis Durbridge.

By the nineteen-fifties the Dramatised-Documentary and the crime serial were setting the pace, and moved across the TV screen with more authority than the television Drama of the same period.

There was also at this time the work of Nigel Kneale and Iain MacCormick whose plays had a considerable influence.

The second phase, coming after 1955 and the arrival of commercial television, opened up the studios to a number of new writers, many of whom established themselves through a straight realistic style of writing mainly under the influence of Paddy Chayefsky. It was this period which produced in many peoples view, the 'golden age' of television drama, including Armchair Theatre at ABC under the direction of Sydney Newman, one of the most important figures in British television at this time.

It was not until the late '50s and early '60s however that the third phase started when Sydney Newman moved from ABC to the BBC and became responsible for, amongst other things, the innovations and experiments of the Wednesday Play team and their documentary style dramas - the natural successors of Barr and



Ross - plays like Up the Junction, The Lump (1966) and Cathy Come Home (1966).

When Look Back in Anger opened in the mid-fifties at the Royal Court Theatre, the prevailing traditions of English Theatre were abruptly shattered.

Audiences regularly plied with Christopher Fry and T.S.Eliot suffered cultural shock. Those who had yielded to the charms of Anouilh or the bitter staginess of Whiting staggered less violently, but were nonetheless stopped in their tracks.

The English public saw an ironing board and mistook it for real life. The idea was widely current - certainly among the young people - that Osborne had broken the barriers of realism, that his characters talked like 'real' people themselves - and that he had encapsulated some kind of naturalism in what we can now see as a series of highly theatrical scenes and speeches. What was attributed to Osborne's highly structured rhetorical dialogue was applied simultaneously to Pinter's entirely different highly-structured but spare style. Suddenly everyone had relations who talked like overheard conversations on buses. They invented a word for it - Pinteresque. Again, there was the mistaken idea that Pinter characters were merely like life - usually someone else's - and that anyone who was nifty with a notebook and pencil in a public place had a chance of catching the flavour. People recognising truths about themselves and others ascribed the dramatist's insight to a literalness or reported speech. It was nothing of the sort. The writing of plays that conjure in people an intensified sense of their own

reality is one of the highest achievements of the creative imagination. Its product is unquestionably a work of art.

We know that by the sixties <sup>and early</sup> <sup>as a result of</sup> this vigorous new writing had reached television. The break-through had been Z-Cars. Kennedy Martin, Plater, Prior, Dewhurst, Hopkins and Alun Owen were all writing in a way that was considered more realistic more gritty than anything that had previously been seen on the screen. Again, an apparent realism, a power to convince and a closeness to the characters: these were the characteristics of the new television playwrights. And their plays were made in television studios, on videotape, with only external scenes made on film.

The Wednesday Play pushed the changes even further. Up the Junction, produced by the late James MacTaggart can be said to be the Look Back in Anger of television - the starting point of a new era of plays for television made - in the interests of authenticity - on film.

The story editor of Up the Junction was Tony Garnett. He went on to produce many Wednesday Plays in the newly evolving documentary-drama style - most notably Cathy Come Home. This play caused a nation-wide fuss, won an award and led to the founding of Shelter. From then onwards Tony Garnett's name was to be associated more closely than any other with this type of play: socially aware and committed in content, documentary/realistic in treatment. An obvious successor to the earlier dramatised-documentaries yet with all the advantages of film and videotape facilities.

Tony Garnett recalls:



"Sydney Newman used to say our greatest strength was our ignorance. We didn't understand or know about the BBC machinery, so we didn't know about the rule. . . We didn't know what a television play was, but who cares? One thing we were f-d off with was the way television drama almost exclusively used the kind of naturalism that emerged in the 1890s in the theatre. It was drama seen as a group of people who would occasionally walk in or walk out of a door, but while they were together they would sit around and have conversation. Occasionally, because you wanted a bit of action, they would pour a drink. It was just people talking to each other, away from their real world. Other people had broken away from this before us, of course Z-Cars did it, so did some of James MacTaggart's earlier work (Telly Tales, and Studio Four) and the Langham Group. So I think we were obviously part of a movement. We wanted to find a new kind of writer. To do that, you read everything. And invited people who'd never written anything before, perhaps, but who seemed to have something to say. . . I suppose, from a Marxist point of view, we were trying to create something from the point of view of a materialist philosophy, where the whole tradition of television drama previously had been based on an idealist philosophy, whether they knew it or not. It had all existed in their heads, or at least in the television studio. And if somebody pointed out that what they were doing was not remotely like the real world or anybody's real experience, they would say, 'We're doing art'. We were very firmly not doing art. We were just trying to make sense of the world." 3

Set in the context of theatre and television drama as it was, and is, evolving, the search for realism in the Garnett plays is scarcely revolutionary. Yet in two respects it has broken with tradition in such a way as, first, to bring headaches to the BBC, and, second, to cause concern of a more profoundly artistic kind to its followers. The BBC's headache centred on the use of documentary and factual material within a play to make it all the more convincingly real to the public. In 1969, Paul Fox, then Controller of BBC1, held over the showing of Five Women (in which five actresses played five ex-prisoners) because it was neither fact nor fiction: "I think mixing fact and

fiction knocks and denigrates the whole integrity and authority of the BBC. One of the great things we've got going for us is the authority of News and Current Affairs. If we start mixing fact and fiction I think we lose that credibility." <sup>4</sup>

Tony Garnett subsequently left the BBC for Kestrel Productions - a group making independent films and with a contract with London Weekend Television. He returned to the BBC in 1972.

Paul Fox went to Yorkshire TV and Christopher Morahan, BBC's Head of Plays, <sup>is now happy</sup> is now happy that as long as a play is clearly labelled as such, then the mixing of technique is neither fraudulent nor misleading. <sup>5</sup>

The documentary style is used to its fullest and most convincing extent in two of Garnett's most recent productions, Steven (1973), and The Enemy Within (first shown on BBC 2, 2 June, 1974). <sup>6</sup>

Steven was devised and directed by Brian Parker. It is about a mentally handicapped child and the struggle his mother has to bring him up. Parker came to Garnett with the idea and Garnett sent him off to do a month's research. Parker visited handicapped clubs, saw social workers, mothers, local government officers, he read medical books and looked at buildings, hospitals, schools. He chose his central character - a boy aged eight; then chose the ailment from which he was suffering. He worried about casting a child actor to play the part: might an eight-year-old find the groups of mentally handicapped very disturbing? He went instead to the Society for Gifted Children - visited one of their Sunday clubs and met Paul Moss, who, though only eight, seemed bright enough to talk about the problem. Parker now had



his central character - but no script. There was to be none:  
 a copy, taken from the film, was typed a week before transmission.  
 The simple plot took shape in discussions. Barbara Ewing was  
 cast as the mother and went off to teach in a school for mentally  
 handicapped children. Garnett kept a check on developments:  
 did Parker know the budget for certain facilities for the  
 handicapped had just been cut? How did he feel Steven should be  
 treated? The play was rehearsed for five weeks. Each player  
 discussed his character in great detail, giving him a background  
 and a past. The scenes in the film were hardly ever rehearsed:  
 rather they were arrived at when the time came to film.  
 Concentration was a strain for everyone. Barbara Ewing, playing  
 the boy's mother, when told by the paediatrician that her son  
 was mentally retarded, fainted dead away. And that was just in  
 rehearsal!

When the time came to shoot, the scenes were decided, the  
 part of each character had been plotted, but no lines had been  
 fixed. Much of the incidental chatter just happened. The  
 handicapped children were themselves - and the actors, now knowing  
 them each by name, fitted in easily.

At the editing, much had to go. Garnett's inclination is  
 always to drop anything that goes over the top. The shooting  
 ratio was 18:1. The cost, £58,000 for a 75-minute film.

The Enemy Within, was devised and directed by Leslie Blair.  
 It was just as impeccably authentic. It concerned the clash of  
 ideas between two teachers at a Midland comprehensive. A middle-  
 aged woman who returns to teaching and is shocked at what she  
 finds; a young socialist housemaster eager to promote the newer

questioning style of teaching. Eight weeks before shooting, the actors had come together with Blair and Garnett to discuss the story outline and characters. Again each actor fleshed out his part with foibles, attributes, history.

Three or four weeks before shooting, everyone went up to Birmingham, and began attending the school where they were to film. The male teacher took on his own flat and walked the teacher's route to school daily. They all gave lessons: the actor playing the French master taught French. Garnett himself taught economics (he has a degree in psychology). The camera crew, arriving a week before shooting was to start, found the entire school treating the actors as teachers. By the time they started shooting, the children took cameras, too, for granted.

The shooting was tight on schedule. The content of each scene was planned. But often the actors would play out lead-in scenes before the cameras rolled. The woman teacher, shocked by the lack of Christian assembly and the lax discipline among the pupils, explains to her husband that a campaign is needed to stop the rot. But the scene began with them exchanging small talk about business, groceries, etc. - none of it filmed.

In both plays, this search for authenticity paid off in the playing of the actors. Barbara Ewing as the mother in Steven, Elizabeth Choice as the reactionary teacher in The Enemy Within, both gave marvellous performances. And Paul Moss as the handicapped Steven was so convincing among the genuinely handicapped children, one had to be reminded that he was acting.

But is authenticity enough? Is that all it should be - a mirror image of what we see actually reported in documentaries?



In both plays, the plot is unsurprising - even predictable. The characters in each, though fascinating in their accuracy, carry weight not so much as individuals as ciphers for the social problems they represent. The mother of the handicapped child is deserted by her husband. This is presented more as adding to the social problem than as a deep personal hurt. The actors have succeeded in behaving as 'real' people behave in a documentary. The background against which they move is a meticulously observed copy of what we see in documentaries.

Is that all drama should be? It is almost possible to conceive of a do-it-yourself Garnett play and his formula could be in danger of developing into the Victorian morality tales for our times. That is unless the writer returns.

Garnett, as producer, sees his job as bringing together the creative people who together <sup>will</sup> make the film. He resists making statements about his role more than that; 'It's a shared thing, we don't go in for definitions'. Nonetheless, there is one creative figure missing from his recent credit lists: the writer. In the past, his Wednesday plays have been written by some of television's best writers: Jeremy Sandford (Edna and Cathy), Jim Allen (The Lump and The Big Flame), David Mercer (The Parachute and In Two Minds - later made into the film Family Life) and Peter Nichols (The Gorge).

By comparison, <sup>they</sup> the films made without a writer have lacked the creative cohesion of a work of the imagination - the intelligence working upon the material of reality to make its impact more sure and its comment more single-minded.

If we dismiss the writer from his creative role, why not dismiss

the actors too and settle into a long run of The Family<sup>7</sup> television's reductio ad absurdum of the search for reality.

Much of what Garnett and Ken Loach wanted to do in drama was made possible by the realisation that 16 mm. filming was quite adequate for television transmission, was flexible, was not much more costly than studio videotape recording and meant ACTT minimum crewing, rather than feature-film crewing with 35 mm. The use of 16 mm. film meant much greater control of editing by directors - it had been used for News and Documentaries before but not for Drama - brought the medium much closer to film, of course - and made possible the innovations of the French New-Wave in cinema, which included rapid cutting from scene to scene and shot to shot, encapsulation of action, elimination of tedious linking scenes, very big close-ups, and cinéma vérité filming with a newsreel quality of actuality and lighting for that effect. In Britain this had reached the cinema screen in some of the Woodfall films, but in television only in a few commercials, which probably did more than anything else to accustom viewers to rapid cutting, a large amount of content, large numbers of pictures in a small space of time, and to a voice-over not directly connected with the pictures. This important development of the wild sound track came most directly from the documentaries of Denis Mitchell and Norman Swallow.

As Tony Garnett points out:

"The whole logic of the scripts we were getting was forcing us to use film and to shoot outside the studios on location. We were interested in social forces and the fabric of people's lives and the kind of conflicts that go on particularly at places of work, where people spend quite a lot of their lives. It seemed to



be driving us towards actually going out there ourselves... so we started to push for more film... and except on very rare occasions our team hasn't been in a studio since the first year of the Wednesday Play." 8

In the meantime videotape recording and much lighter more flexible television cameras and dollies had improved conditions in the studios, as had the introduction of stronger lanterns and zoom lenses. The main improvement was that, with VTR, plays did not have to go out live, more than one take was possible of each scene or sequence of scenes, and some degree of editing was possible, though this was much cruder than was possible with film. Later developments of improved editing machines for playing back videotape helped to sophisticate editing, as did the ability to transfer video recordings to film.

All of this contributed in no small part to several possibilities that have seemed singularly at home on the television screen rather than on the stage or in the cinema. The interior monologue, the pictures of the imagination, the fantasy life, all have come into their own. Starting, probably, with David Mercer's A Suitable Case for Treatment, in which the mental images of the central character Morgan, his fantasies of Tarzan and Karl Marx and betrayed revolutions, alternate on the screen with pictures of his real life. Mercer's television plays especially, with long soliloquies by their central characters, have benefited enormously from this possibility, and from the fact that it communicates readily with the viewer. Another aspect of this is the flashback and flashforward between periods of time in the life of characters, which, though developed in the cinema, has been exploited much more fully by television plays.

Without this the plays of John Hopkins, especially Talking to a Stranger, could never have been performed. And in view of the way in which television gathers and disseminates information in a truly multi-media process it is hardly surprising that the new writers were drawn to the medium partly because of its remarkable flexibility and partly because of its ability to intertwine facts and fictions into composite pictures and statements. It was this factor which was to result in some very strong directives from the top as to the nature of programmes and their presentation to the general public. For the moment it meant that writers like Jeremy Sandford had to devise dramas around newspaper cuttings, tape recordings, court reports and first-hand experience, as he shows in this introduction to his play Cathy Come Home.

"I filled a hard-backed spring binder with bits of quarto paper which had the headings of the various sections of the film on them, such as caravan, slum, luxury flat, courting, mothers-in-law, the first home for the homeless, and so on. I then worked from a very large number of newspaper clippings that I had accumulated through the years, transcripts of tape recordings, actual tape recordings, notes of people I had met, and places I had been to. I went through all this material, picking facts and incidents out at random, seeing if they fitted what I wanted to do or not. Most of the selection I ultimately rejected; but those incidents which seemed to fit, I would put in, sometimes in an altered form, sometimes almost verbatim. This all went on for a couple of months. Having written a large number of little scenes like this for each section, I juggled them around into the best order; then I had the whole thing typed. The story went to the typist two or three times after that. Each time I would work it through, trying to see the development with objective eyes, excluding some scenes, altering the position of others, amplifying incidents, and writing in a few scenes out of my head. I'd add touches to Cathy's character, and so on. It was the general drudge which I expect many writers go through till they consider the script is right."9



In all it took Sandford four months to complete his drama out of these human documents. His method of working was almost identical to Caryl Doncaster's or Robert Barr's fifteen years before.

The sixties also saw a new generation of directors (and producers) and the search, usually in co-operation with the author, for the right expressive visual image, one which reinforced the dialogue or said something additional, or even, in some cases, replaced a line of dialogue as no longer necessary. One of the best examples of this is Ken Russell's Isadora (1966), an arts documentary about the dancer Isadora Duncan, in which, though he followed the events of her life, he made no attempt at a documentary, naturalistic reconstruction, but found images which were often stylised and even surrealist, but which expressed the emotional reality succinctly.

For ten years (1959-1969) Russell worked for the BBC first on Monitor until it ceased production in June, 1965, and then for Omnibus. His producer on Monitor was Huw Wheldon, now Managing Director, Television. Wheldon had always had reservations about 'dramatising' documentary from his early days with Russell on Monitor.

"I have a natural caution about the idea of dramatised documentary, which of course had been around for some years before Ken came on the scene. If you're doing a programme on, say, lifeboats, you either make a documentary with the lifeboat there, and the members of the crew, and a rescue if possible; or you have a play. That's the slant of my mind. A 'dramatised-documentary' is something between. You can do a documentary about Beethoven with Beethoven stamping about all over it - people have - but you've got to be very, very careful, otherwise it will seem hollow, like cardboard, as most of them do.

The only thing that will make a dramatised-documentary about Beethoven not seem hollow - unless it's a real play, written as a work of art - and give it dimension and flesh is not if the player is very well cast, or if he looks like Beethoven or it's awfully interesting to see him in this marvellous old house in Innsbruck, but if the music is played in such a way as to make you glad to be listening to it; and if the pictures (a) tell you something true about Beethoven, and (b) fit the music. This is what is great about Ken's best films, and what is good about Elgar. The music is the hero of the film... I always had this suspicion of documentary 'dramatised' as a genre. I preferred a real documentary, one that did not pretend, or a play... The second consideration is falsity... The third is this deception thing, which came up on the Prokofiev film (Portrait of a Soviet Composer: 1961). My main objection was not so much to an actor playing Prokofiev as to Ken faking some film to look like newsreel footage. You're giving something an authority it doesn't actually possess. Provided the audience know it's invented, you're all right, but when you start mixing reality and reconstruction you're in very tricky circumstances. For example, I would never, even today, allow a documentary programme to be transmitted in which an actual BBC newsreader broke in and read an item of made-up news. I'm not worried about an Orson Welles War of the Worlds situation - the news item could be quite innocuous - but once you mix up those conventions the act of broadcasting becomes virtually impossible. Having been deceived, the audience always wonders when seeing anything else whether it is being deceived again." 10

Yet it was this very 'mixing of conventions' which made television so attractive to the young writers and directors of the sixties. It is hardly surprising that Wheldon as Managing Director, BBC Television in 1972 had prepared for his producers a pamphlet entitled Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes - to guide them and their work for the BBC. On the matter of programme labelling it offered the following recommendation:

"It is essential that the nature and purpose of every programme should be made clear to everybody. Not only must the audience know that they are watching a documentary, as opposed to a play; they must know



that it is a documentary, which sets out to do this or that, and to do it from certain standpoints only." 11

Yet on 15 November 1974, Peter Fiddick, television critic of The Guardian had this to say about a piece of Drama:

"The main BBC news bulletin that preceded the Play for Today ended with a baby snatch case done at some length - photofit, interview with the top detective, the mother, all that. If it was by accident, then someone should give the news room a copy of Radio Times; if it was in any way deliberate, then it was a cynical misjudgment. David Edgar's Baby Love was about a baby snatch case, and it raised enough problems on its own, without being related so closely to the day's reality - especially since what came between was a disclaimer that the play had any relation to any living case."

This could well be an example of the hazards professional television dramatists face in contributing to the endless stream of nightly programming. Or it could be that on this occasion the factual upstaged the fictional. For if one takes away the tools of realism from the playwright one may at the same time unintentionally strengthen and heighten the 'dramatic' content of the News to the point where it seems to be more like recreation than reportage. There may well be more danger for the viewer in this state of affairs than in the mere 'dramatisation' of documentary.

Yet despite the dilemmas of Programme Controllers and Programme Producers in separating the two departments and their respective functions, the means whereby the facts are gathered and the information disseminated are as readily available to the dramatist as they are to the documentarist. And the skills of both filmmaker and playwright are always interchangeable in a medium as eclectic as television. No one understands this better than

Tom Clarke, he having been a former member of the Langham Group (see pages 261-289 "New Writing for Television"). His award-winning play Stocker's Copper (1972) is a contemporary example of the near-perfect fusion of drama and documentary. It was directed by Jack Gold<sup>12</sup> as part of the Play for Today series, and is included here as a postscript to the thesis.

Tom Clarke<sup>13</sup> feels that we live in a society which is traditionally 'literate' but the technology of this society is in fact not a literate one at all but an audio-visual one. Yet if the dramatist abandons literature - the word - or the theatre, as the basis of his drama he has to put something in its place. This is not to say, that words are dead. But the theatre for a long time has been content to speak to the people who already understand its message, whilst television is speaking to people who do not understand the message. In order therefore to make it plain for them the channel of communication must be the one of experience. Not intellectual, nor social, nor environmental but human experience. The play in order to be meaningful must reflect a reality which the audience can recognise. The experiential play which is what Clarke writes, sets a man in a situation in which he is faced with certain choices, which lead to other choices and to new situations, and in this way the play is built up of a series of scenes which express these critical moments in a character's life during the course of the play. This is different from the traditional play which is generally speaking a narrative in which the scenes are connected 'causally' one to the other.

The main incidents on which Clarke based his play Stocker's



Copper took place during the Cornish clay workers' strike between the 21 July and 5 October, 1913. The strike failed in that the men eventually returned to work without the employers acceding to their demands, though conditions did improve shortly afterwards. Police were drafted into the County from Bristol, Devonport and Glamorgan. It cost the authorities £5,742 10s. 8d. and a 1½d. rate was levied to meet the expense.

"In my play there's a moment when the striker, whom you've already identified, comes home and goes into his kitchen and he finds a policeman standing there and he has to decide there and then whether he's going to make a fuss and get rid of the policeman or whether he is going to let him stay. Now, in order to illustrate this, what I did was to try to think what the factors would be which would influence him in making up his mind, which would be immediately intelligible to a non-literate audience - in other words I wasn't going to have a bit of explanatory dialogue where his wife says, "This is PC Griffith he has come to be billeted on us because..." People lose interest in television when they aren't finding things out for themselves and are simply being told them in terms of words. So what I tried to do in the play was to show on the screen all the factors which help make this striker decide whether or not he is going to let the policeman stay in his home. And these factors are: his wife, twelve bob on the table, the sort of kitchen they are standing in (as it happens a neat and tidy one which indicates that he is a law-abiding sort of a chap and unlikely to make a fuss) the behaviour of the policeman, the presence of the children, the fact that there is a strike on and the children have to be fed which makes them a sort of family pressure group. The policeman incidentally is nervous because he's out of his normal situation. He is there in fact as a sort of official guest and certainly not as a threat to the striker, and so on. Now in this way the audience can say to itself, "Looks as if he's a poor sort of a chap, the money's meaningful to him, there's his wife standing there looking at him, here's this shambling policeman and he doesn't look too bad. What I would do, says the viewer, is to say, "Oh, all right, he can stay". Or alternatively they might say, "If I were Manuel, I'd kick the bugger out of my house". But either way they've come to a decision and the fact that the character in the play doesn't necessarily reflect their decision doesn't matter - as long as they've gone through the 'experience' of all the

factors connected with making the decision for themselves." 14

The scene which Clarke described above was written like this in the screenplay:

7. INTERIOR: COTTAGE KITCHEN: DAY

THE KITCHEN HAS A LIME-ASH FLOOR STREWN WITH WHITE SAND. UNDER AN OVERMANTEL IS A SMALL IRON RANGE, A FUEL BOX BESIDE IT FILLED WITH PEAT TURVES. AN IRON POT AND A KETTLE ARE STEAMING ON THE RANGE.

THERE IS A SCRUBBED DEAL TABLE CENTRE, WITH A SETTLE PUSHED BACK AGAINST THE WALL ON THE FAR SIDE OF IT. AGAINST THE WALL FACING THE RANGE ARE A PAIR OF BUFFETS + CUPBOARDS CONTAINING CHINA WITH DRAWERS AND WITH SHELVES OVER.

OVER THE MANTEL ARE A PAIR OF CHINA DOGS AND A PAIR OF MATCHING TIN TEACADDIES, A SLAT BOX AND A CHEAP ALARM CLOCK.

BESIDE THE RANGE IS A PAIR OF BELLOWS, A POKER AND A PAIR OF TONGS. AROUND THE TABLE ARE TWO WOODEN ARMCHAIRS AND TWO BENTWOOD CHAIRS.

A STEEP STRAIGHT STAIRCASE RISES TO THE UPPER FLOOR AND BESIDE IT IS A DOOR WHICH LEADS TO THE FRONT DOOR.

BESIDE THE BACK DOOR, BENEATH A WINDOW OVER-LOOKING THE GARDEN, RUNS A LONG NARROW WORK TABLE. THERE IS A BOWL OF WATER ON THIS TABLE AND SOME VEGETABLES, HALF WAY PREPARED FOR SUPPER.

THE TABLE IN THE CENTRE HAS BEEN SET WITH A CLOTH, THE CREASES EVIDENCE OF ITS RECENT UNFOLDING FROM THE LINEN PRESS. ON THE CLOTH IS SET OUT THE BEST CHINA TEA SET, A PLATE OF SPLITS, A DISH OF BUTTER, A YEAST CAKE, A LOAF OF BREAD AND A POT OF HONEY.

MANUEL'S WIFE, ALICE STANDS BY THE RANGE, A TEAPOT HELD IN HER HANDS. SHE HOLDS HER HEAD HIGH, LOOKING STRAIGHT AT MANUEL, A LITTLE DEFIANTLY.

ON THE TABLE LIES TWELVE-SHILLINGS, FOUR HALF CROWNS AND A FLORIN.



MANUEL'S TWO CHILDREN, MORWENNA, EIGHT, AND GRAHAM, NINE, SIT HUDDLED ON THE SETTLE, NOT LOOKING AT MANUEL BUT AT A YOUNG, FRESH-FACED CONSTABLE OF THE GLAMORGAN CONSTABULARY, HERBERT GRIFFITH. HE STANDS RIGIDLY AT ATTENTION, HIS HELMET HELD IN THE CROOK OF HIS ARM.

MANUEL STARES AT HIM. HE STARES BACK AT MANUEL.

THE SILENCE IS BROKEN BY ALICE. SHE SPEAKS QUICKLY, HER VOICE HIGH-PITCHED AND DEFENSIVE.

ALICE: 'T'wasn't no use to say no. Twelve shillin' a week, they'm payin'.

(SHE MAKES A GESTURE TOWARDS THE COINS ON THE TABLECLOTH. MANUEL STILL STARES AT THE POLICEMAN.)

ALICE GIVES A QUICK LAUGH.

HERBERT LOOKS AT HER. HE CLEARS HIS THROAT)

HERBERT: A proper surprise it was to us. Usually they bed us down in some old hall. But no. Billeted, they said.

(HE GLANCES AT ALICE)

A pleasant surprise, of course.

(MANUEL TURNS ON HIS HEEL AND WALKS OUT.)

ALICE FROWNS IN DISPLEASURE. SHE PUTS THE TEAPOT DOWN ON THE TABLE, MOVES THE KETTLE TO ONE SIDE OF THE RANGE AND FOLLOWS HIM. BUT AT THE DOOR SHE STOPS, TURNS AND COMES BACK INTO THE ROOM. SHE SCOOPS UP THE TWELVE SHILLINGS OFF THE TABLE AND PUTS THEM UNDER THE CHINA DOG ON THE MANTLEPIECE. THEN SHE GOES OUT.

HERBERT SHIFTS UNEASILY.

THE TWO CHILDREN ARE LOOKING AT HIM.

THEN HERBERT PUTS HIS HELMET DOWN ON THE SETTLE, SMILES AT THE KIDS AND GOES TO THE BACK DOOR) <sup>15</sup>

For Clarke the pictures are more important than the words. Dialogue is there simply to perform its function of vocalising the thoughts of his characters, it is certainly not required to carry plot and narrative as in other media. In fact in this script of 120 pages there are only between 50-60 pages of dialogue. He also includes exact descriptions of everything of significance in a scene together with all the revelant sounds but he never lists the 'shots' that he leaves to the director.

Stocker's Copper is a documentary drama and a good example, Clarke feels, of the cross-fertilisation process which works so well on television.

The idea for the play came from a BBC documentary film entitled The White Country produced by Stephen Peet<sup>16</sup> for his Yesterday's Witness series in 1970. This film was about the China Clay Industry of Cornwall and included interviews with elderly clay workers and a policeman - long since retired - who remebered the Clay Workers' Strike of 1913.

Clarke saw the transmission in March 1970 whilst he was living in Cornwall and he was particularly fascinated by the words of the policeman interviewed in the programme who described how he had been billeted with a striker when he went to Cornwall:

Sergeant William Knipe: "When we got to Nanpean there was rather a pleasant surprise waiting for us because we thought that we would be billeted in some old shed or some old church halls but lo and behold two of us were detailed off for one billet, two for another billet, and we were billeted with the strikers and a fine lot of people they were. We enjoyed ourselves immensely there." 17

Since Clarke is interested in examining the solidarity of a cultural group of people, as these are constantly being split by



social forces, he realised that here was a perfect example in the miner and the policeman, both from the working class, a Welshman and a Cornishman, who because of circumstances outside their control, find themselves living together. "Now what happens, I ask as a writer, to these two men, who having made friends, then have to start performing their respective roles."<sup>18</sup> It was this thought that triggered off the idea in Clarke for his play.

He then saw the transcripts of the documentary interviews, met the characters for himself and used much of that raw material for his fictional recreation of the events.

Stephen Peet received his original idea for a documentary when he visited the home of his friend Kenneth Hudson, who was the BBC's Industrial Correspondent in Bristol. He had been writing a book on the Cornish Clay Mines and showed Peet an old photograph of a line of policemen, with big handlebar moustaches, holding their bicycles, who were the force of strike-breaking policemen sent to Cornwall in 1913. Hudson also had in his possession a tape recorded interview with one of the old Cornish miners, who described how they had sent in 'foreign' police from Swansea to break their strike and it was these two images which prompted Peet to see if he could track down anyone else still living, who would recollect what had taken place at that time. In fact there was one policeman - William Knipe - who had been in the Tonypandy riots and described being hit over the head, when he was interviewed by Peet later in Wales. Tom Clarke's 'policeman' in his play recalled the same story.

Here is part of the original transcript of the interview with Knipe as research for the documentary programme:

"On the 26 November that was the last night of the riots, they, the Metropolitan Police was overpowered at the Scotts Collieries. Well, they sent an SOS over to us. Well, we had to fight our way down through Tonypandy right over to the Colliery and they were just about getting in to smash the colliery when we got there. Well, then we were driving them up... the Colliers had always been there... and they were in the bedroom windows there... everything was coming down you could imagine. Matter of fact it was a bed chamber split open my head, had fifteen stitches in it. I woke up next morning in hospital. I had five teeth knocked out gum and all, and my eye was hanging out down to my feet, never went back too... so you can tell that on that riot, on that particular night that there was over 500 treated in Dr. Llewellyn's surgery in Pontypridd alone." 19

In his play Clarke used practically every word of Knipe's for the speech of his policeman, Herbert Griffith, only giving him the additional line "We were punchin' up the niggers a little bit down there," delivered with a grin.

"You see what I was doing was taking what had been taped in an interview as part of Stephen's research - a long speech spoken to someone who was interested in hearing what happened and I took it out of context and used it in quite a different way. I used it in a context of people who didn't want to hear what was happening. So you see this is an example of how fiction can use fact to transform it. What interested me about that speech - because I also went to see the policeman and heard it again from his own lips - was how he could stand up there and say, "By damn it was lovely, hitting those buggers over the head" - knocking people about was his job but he really enjoyed doing it, and I wanted this in the play. And when I first started thinking about the garden scene\* I thought well he can hardly talk about that but then I realised that this is just the sort of person who does talk about that and what's the effect going to be on the people who are listening to him. What he's saying to them in effect is - here I am ready to bash you up - and so you get a

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\* (18): Exterior: Cottage Garden: Day.



meaning arising which is altogether beyond the  
literal meaning of the words." 20

18: EXTERIOR: COTTAGE GARDEN: LATER

HERBERT: First strike I was in was '08. That was an interesting strike because the owners imported some colliers from Scotland to keep the pits workin' and that didn't suit our boys at all. Rough it was. Oh yes.

Then '09 we had the dock strikes down Cardiff. We were punchin' up the niggers a little bit down there (HE GRINS) Ah, but the real fight came in nineteen ten. Tonypandy. Brought in police from all over the country. One night, the twenty-sixth of November it was, remember it clear as today. We got word sent down the Metropolitan boys were in trouble, and we were sent for to march to their aid. A proper SOS it was. Well! Believe you me, we had to fight our way, charge, we did, all the way there. Up a street, Hammer Hill it was called and well-named, and the strikers ran into the houses before us and up in the bedrooms, see, and they were spoutin' everythin' down on us. Coal, flat-irons, bricks, the lot. Unfortunately I stopped a bed-chamber pot and that split open my helmet. Fifteen stitches I had put in my head. Oh, it was a proper fight up there. An inspector was killed in that fight. But I can tell you, after, there was five hundred strikers attended Dr. Llewellyn's surgery in Pontypridd alone.

(HE BEAMS AT THEM.

ALICE IS LOOKING DOWN,  
 LIPS PURSED.

MANUEL STARES AT HIM  
 WITHOUT EXPRESSION). 21

In this speech Clarke has used the actual words of the real-life policeman as the raw material for his dramatisation; but more than that he has used them in such a way as to tell his television audience something more about the character of the man and his attitudes so that they realise just what is going to happen as the result of this meeting.

The dramatist achieves this with his pen, whilst Stephen Peet in his documentary makes his characters talk to each other by splicing recorded conversations together in a montage of ideas.

Throughout this second part of the thesis it has been shown how obsessed television drama was with its false dependence on the theatre, its equivocal attitude towards films, and how for a long time it refused to grapple with the real problems of its own existence. The result was impotence, an inability to define itself in any satisfactory way which would offer encouragement to young writers and so produce a new form of independent creative work.

Clarke and his generation changed all of that. They discovered the form which worked best and proved their point. The pity is that today the single play is becoming almost too costly to be regularly produced on television!

It has been demonstrated how television in so many ways was (and is) better suited than film to the handling of documentary themes and ideas in an effective and forceful fashion; how documentary itself flourished and changed in the hands of the BBC during the late 1940s and 1950s, gradually becoming a source



more of drama than of pure information; and finally how naturalistic methods, encouraged inevitably by documentary itself, were not enough, and that new treatments of actuality by the medium required new techniques, closer to those of a Tom Clarke with his personal and effective re-thinking of some of the notions of the Langham Group - than the earlier school of realist writers. Gradually it became obvious to everyone that, as in every instance, the nature of the medium dictated the style of the art.

For Clarke the essential difference between documentary and drama is not one of function but of purpose. Both have much in common yet drama may well begin where documentary ends.

As William Bluem has already pointed out:

"In no other medium in history have the two forms been forced into such close and immediate relationship with each other within a single social and aesthetic context - a framework which suggests the existence of an entirely independent television form." 22

### Notes

1. Norman Swallow, Factual Television, Focal Press (1966), p.208: Robert Barr wrote in Kinematograph Weekly 12.4.62: "Documentary-Drama is a report. It is a dramatic re-creation of an actual incident or story. It is the marriage of a good feature writer and the dramatist; and television is the only medium where these two people can meet."
2. Joan Bakewell, The New Priesthood, Penguin Press, 1970, p.3.
3. Tony Garnett, Theatre Quarterly Vol.11 No.6 April-June 1972 'Television in Britain', p.19.

John Bowen (Plays and Players, March 1975, p.11) writes: "The Great Days of television drama began when commercial television began, because suddenly there was a demand for plays and the companies actively looked for playwrights. Cecil Clarke at H.M.Tennent Globe Productions had a system by which he contracted people to write two plays a year for £1,500 which was then quite enough to live on. David Mercer and David Rudkin wrote for him, and Peter Nichols and Ronnie Harwood and I. Sydney Newman had his own stable over at ABC and the BBC were forced to compete. At that time, it was very hard to get a play produced in a theatre because the West End was as difficult then as it is now and the Reps performed only revivals and West End successes. Only the Royal Court provided hope for the future. Those great days of TV drama not only mapped out the forms and styles and concerns of television fiction, they also gave an apprenticeship to a generation of writers whose work television had rejected or overlooked - in particular that of Edward Bond and David Storey. By the late '60s and early '70s a new generation had grown up to identify television with their sit-at-home bourgeois suburban-torpid parents - and who broke away to take part in the emerging fringe theatre. Television drama by that time had hit a plateau. The break-throughs of The Wednesday Play had been absorbed and both content (socio-political moralising) and style (fluid alternations between studio set-ups and film sequences) which had once provoked discussion were now taken for granted. The plays were not necessarily any less good, were perhaps if anything more technically and aesthetically sophisticated, but the form had been around long enough to provoke little excitement in new writers. For excitement younger writers turned to the theatre which also at that time provided relief from the endless minutiae of television naturalism... the influence of television on stage technique could be a study in itself."



4. Paul Fox quoted in The New Priesthood, p.236.  
Fox continues: "I have inhibitions about mixing fact and fiction, really because one has been brought up, trained, as a journalist. To my mind this is a far more worrying thing in television than sex or violence... (yet) the content of what goes into the Wednesday Play, what goes into the Tuesday Documentary is up to those chaps who are running the Departments. I would not dream of interfering with them."
5. See Huw Wheldon's remarks (Chapter note 10 below) p.333 in An Appalling Talent, by John Baxter.
6. This information was supplied by the BBC's Script Unit and Drama Department - Television Centre, London.
7. The film documentary series The Family - about a real-life family, the Wilkins of Reading, Berkshire - began transmission on BBC 1 in March, 1974. The programmes, which had a steady audience of between 7 to 10 million viewers brought forth a storm of protest and were considered by many to be an insult to the average British working-class family.
8. Tony Garnett, Theatre Quarterly Vol.11 No.6 April-June p.20: See also Appendix 85 for Peter Black's review of a Wednesday Play in which he refers to the original documentary methods of Robert Barr and others.
9. From an interview with Jeremy Sandford published in The New Documentary in Action, University of California Press, 1972, p.172-173 by Alan Rosenthal.
10. An Appalling Talent by John Baxter (Michael Joseph, 1973) p. 122-123.
11. Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes, BBC-TV April 1972, p.17.
12. See Appendix 87 Jack Gold interviewed by Paul Madden (1974). Of his production methods in Stocker's Copper Gold says: "All one is trying to do is to use a filming style which makes you believe that those events are happening. And to a certain extent having a camera close to a situation, going with the subject rather than the subject going for the camera, is a sort of *vérité* approach. But again the crowd scenes were carefully worked out. You know they are going to work in a certain way, you've given the cue. You've bunched up a crowd, and they are going to walk where you have told them to walk. Then you move the camera in to record it in the most dynamic way. As opposed to standing back and letting them approach in a wide angle, you actually come back to them... You can be limited by the scale on

television sometimes. But with Stocker's Copper, for instance, it was like doing a Western.

13. See Appendix 86, Transcript of an interview with Tom Clarke, October 1972.
14. Ibid.
15. Original script Stocker's Copper by Tom Clarke. 'Play for Today' BBC-TV 1972 (BBC-TV Script Unit File).
16. See Appendix 88, Interview with Stephen Peet - October 1972.
17. William Knipe from the BBC-TV Documentary Programme The White Country (1970). Documentary Department, London.
18. See Appendix 86, Interview with Tom Clarke, October 1972.
19. Original transcript with William Knipe (1969), Documentary Department File, BBC-TV Centre, London.
20. See Appendix 86, Interview with Tom Clarke, October 1972.
21. Stocker's Copper: Tom Clarke.
22. A William Blum Documentary in American Television, Hastings House (1965), p.85.



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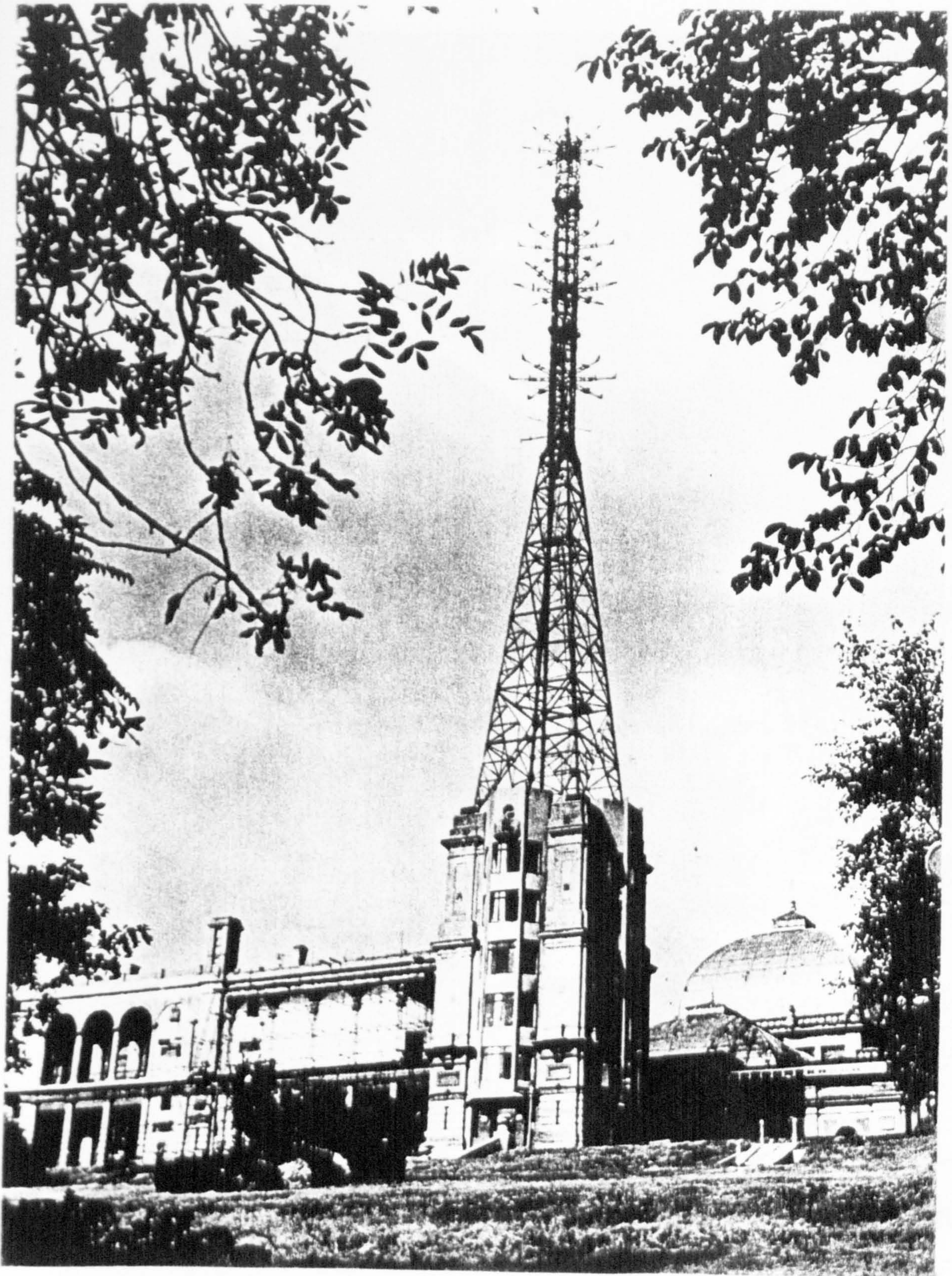
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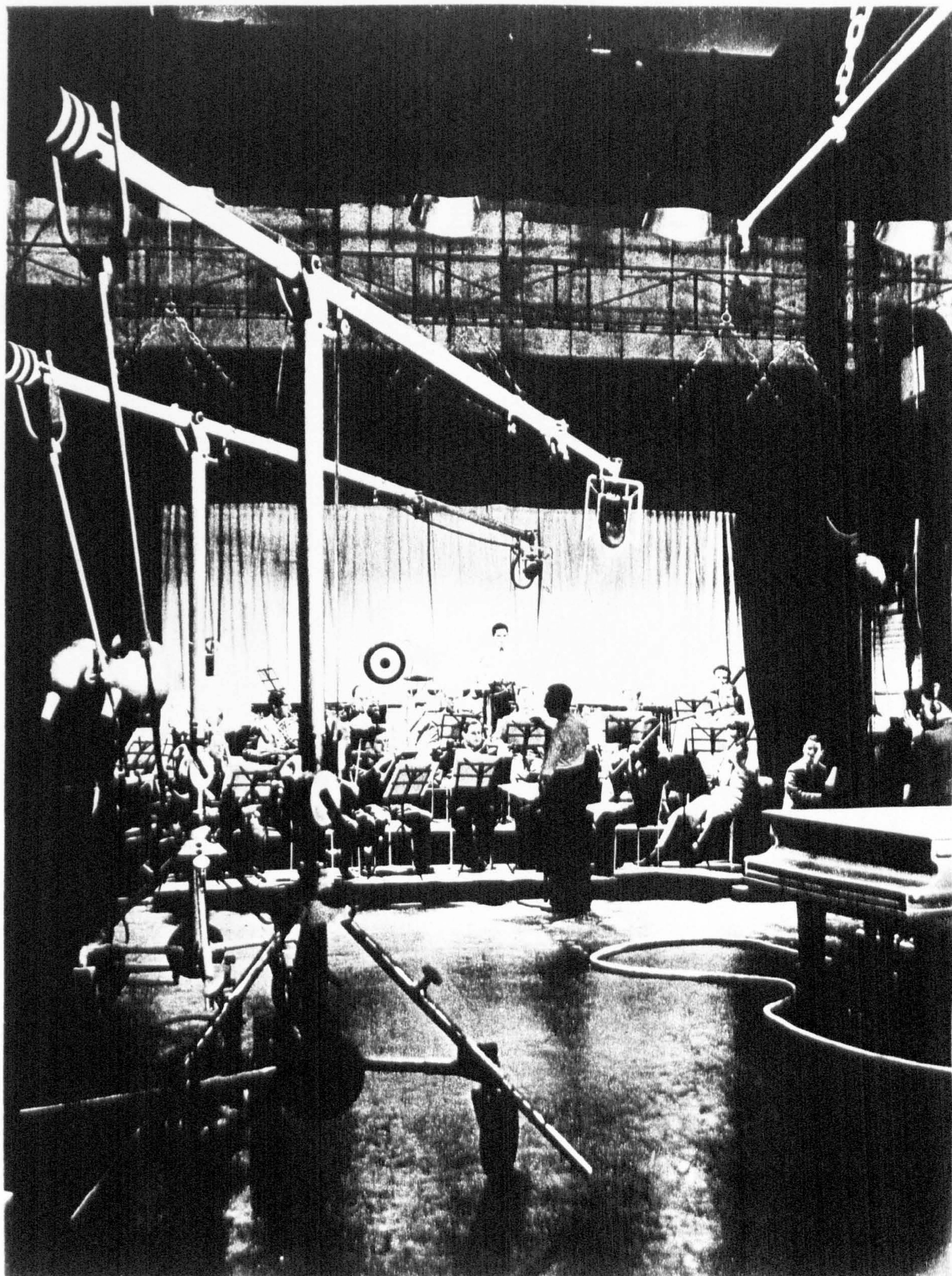
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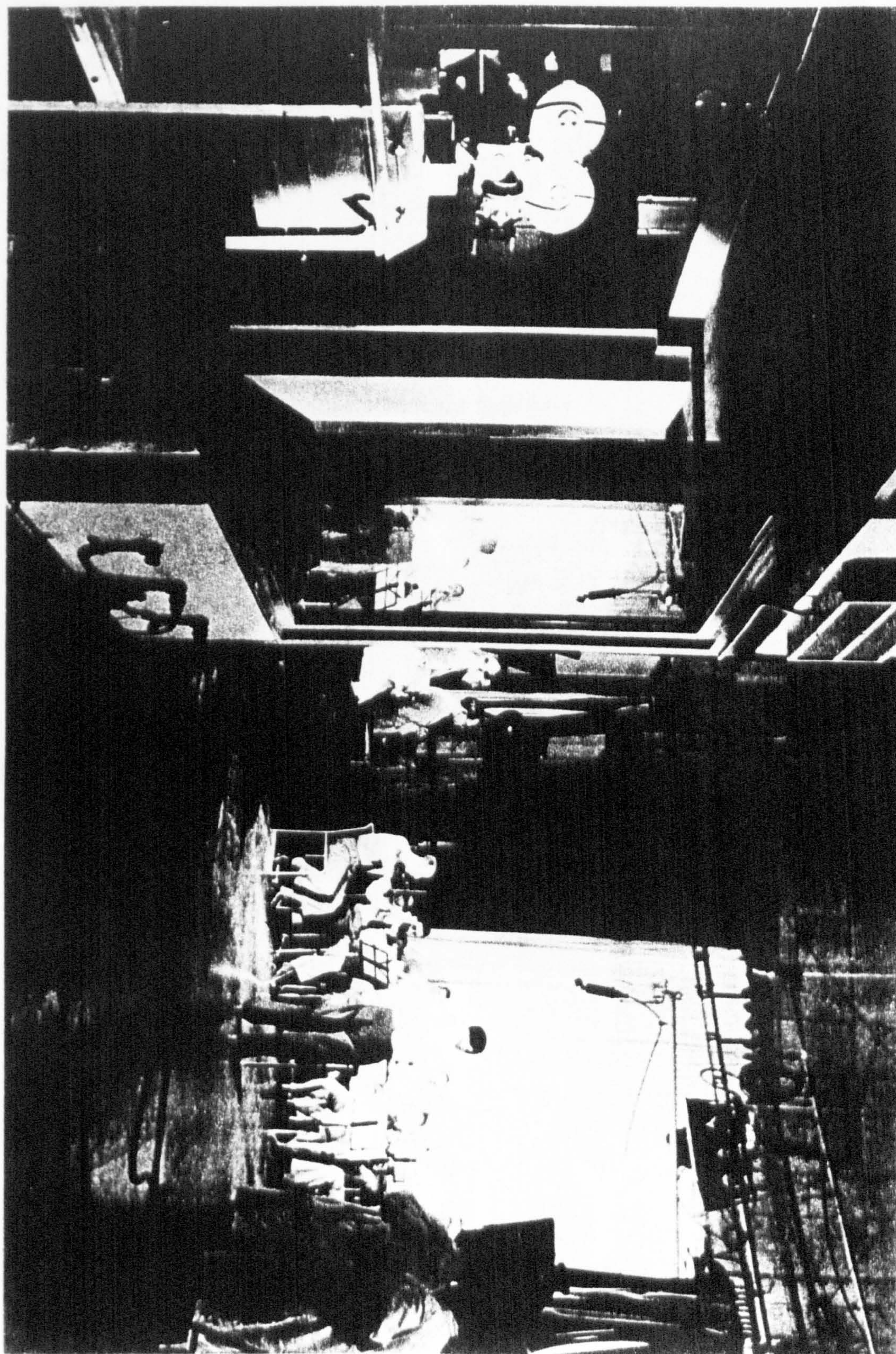
Alexandra Palace, North London  
showing television mast. Sept. 1946.





Alexandra Palace, Studio A, showing (far right) the Marconi EMI instantaneous Television camera, with an orchestra. August 1936.





Alexandra Palace, Baird Studio, showing Intermediate Film Scanner (left). August 1936.





Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rostand: Produced for television  
by George More O'Ferrall with Leslie Banks as Cyrano.  
30 October and 4 November 1938.





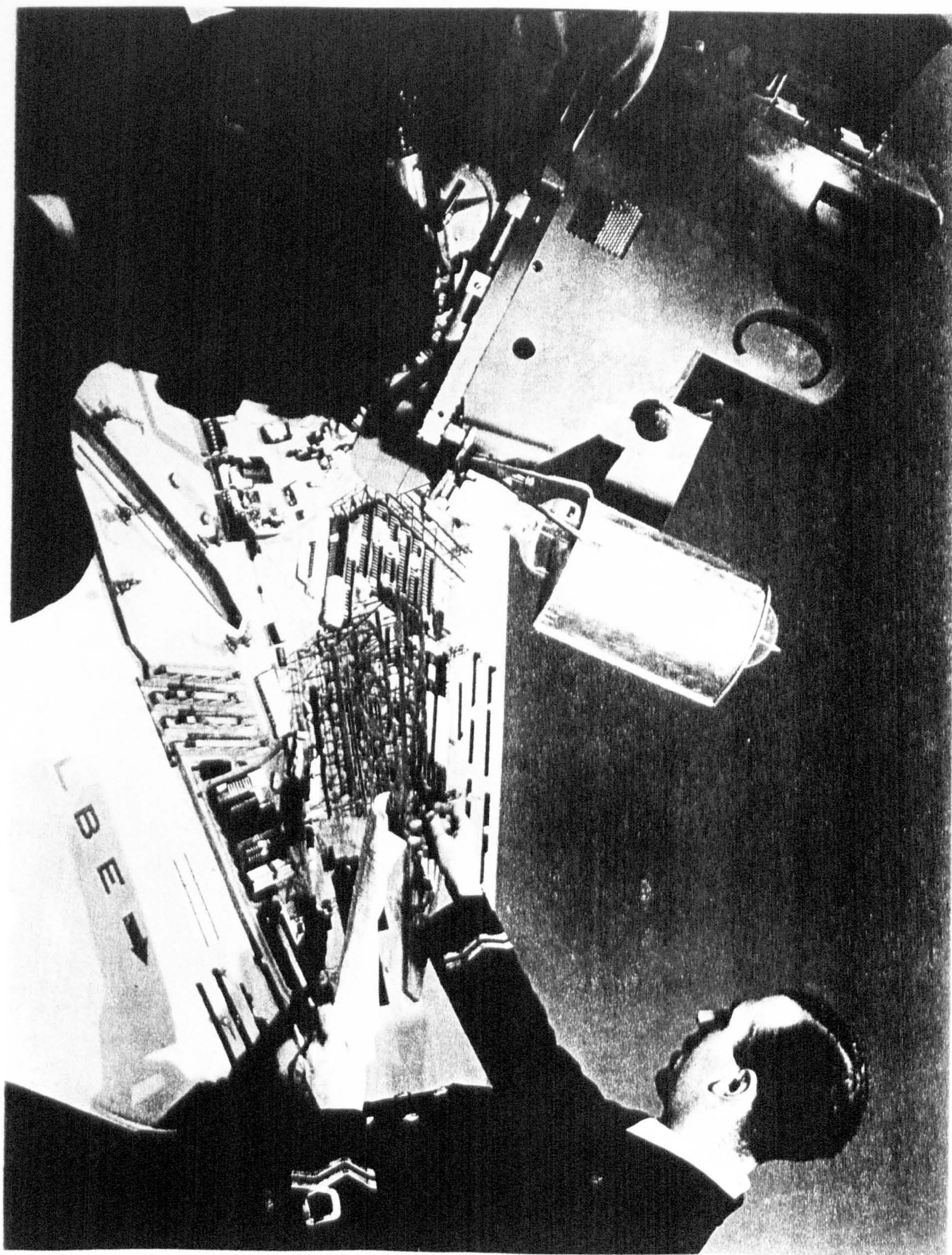
Journey's End by R.C.Sherriff with Reginald Tate as  
Capt. Stanhope. Produced for television on 11 December 1937.





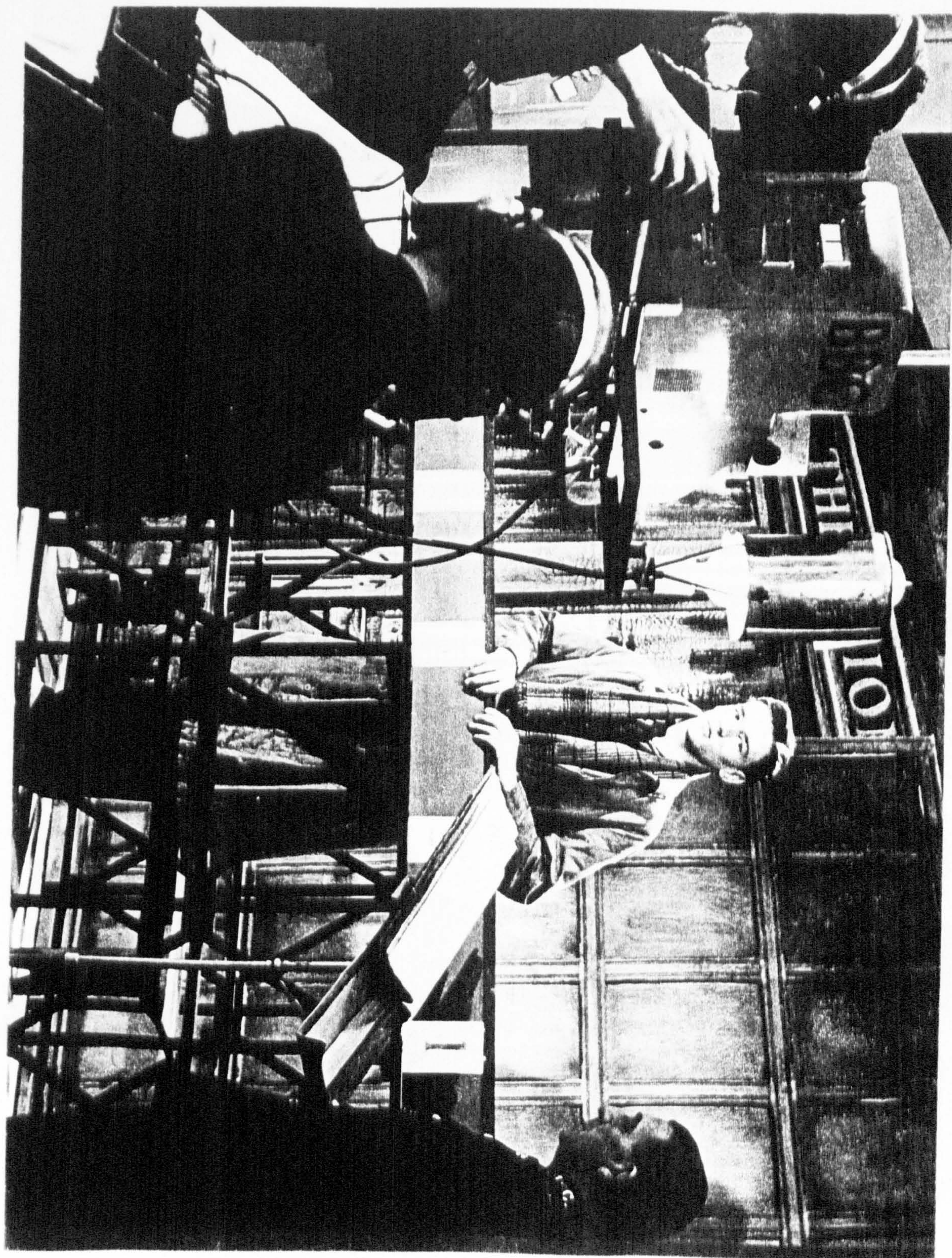
Cormack Swann with Robert Barr (right) Dangerous Drugs  
7 April 1952.





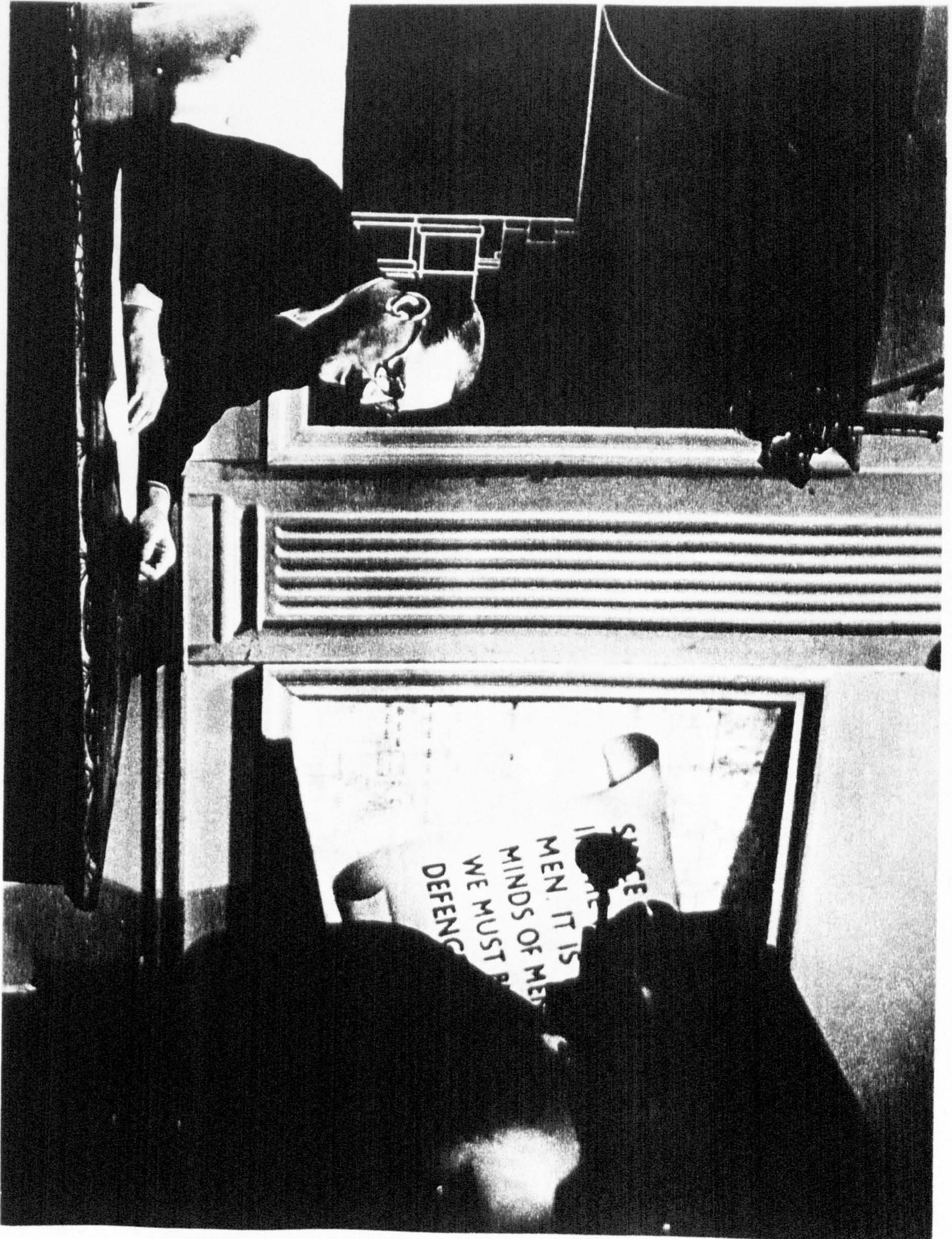
Germany Under Control - first television documentary written by Robert Barr and produced 18 September 1946. Lieutenant G. Salisbury, RNVR, naval spokesman in the programme, with a model of the Blohm and Voss shipyards at Hamburg.





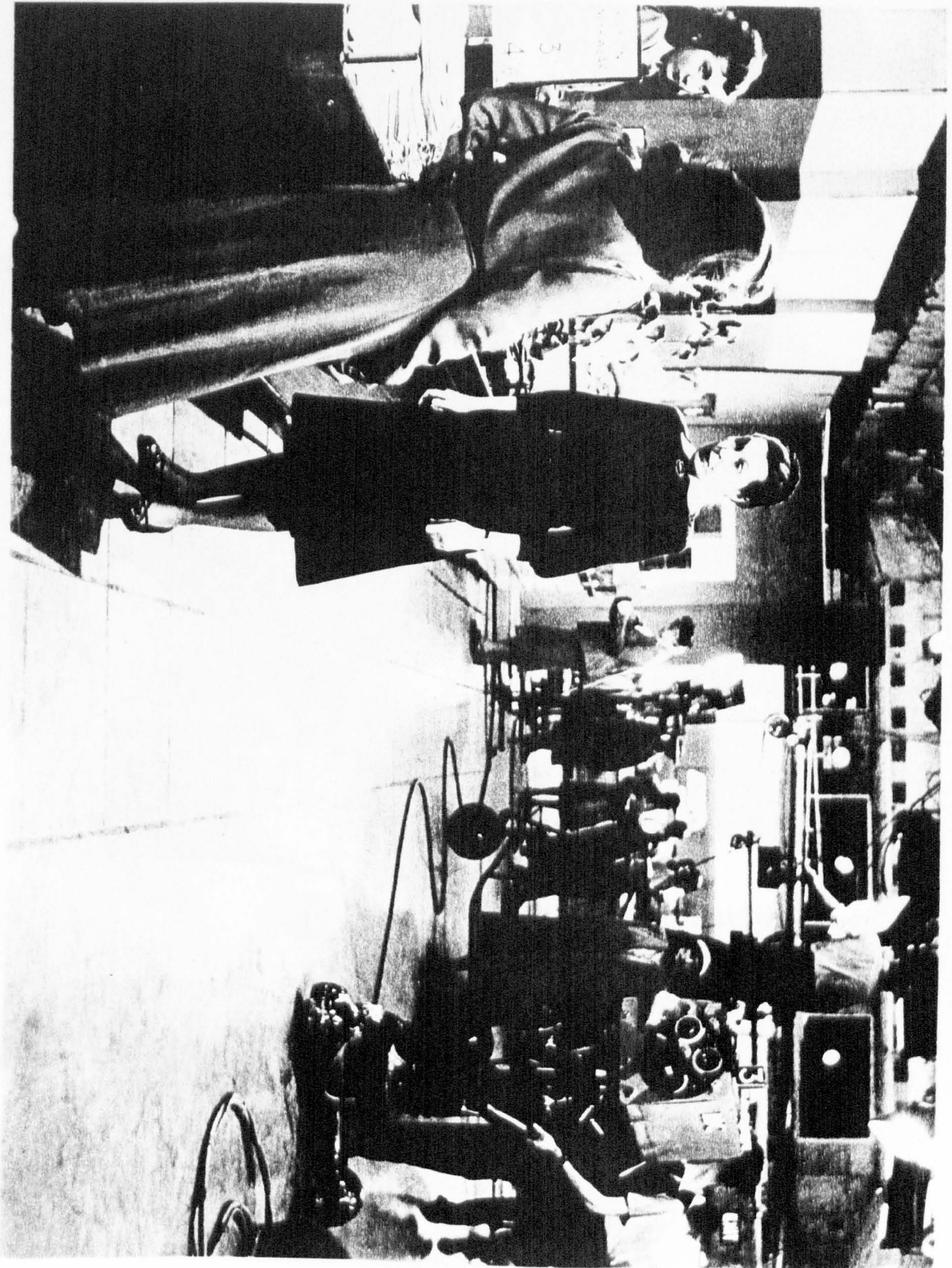
One of the best examples of the dramatised documentary was Magistrate's Court by Duncan Ross. The young film actor Anthony Wager, in one of the scenes. Producer: Ian Atkins.





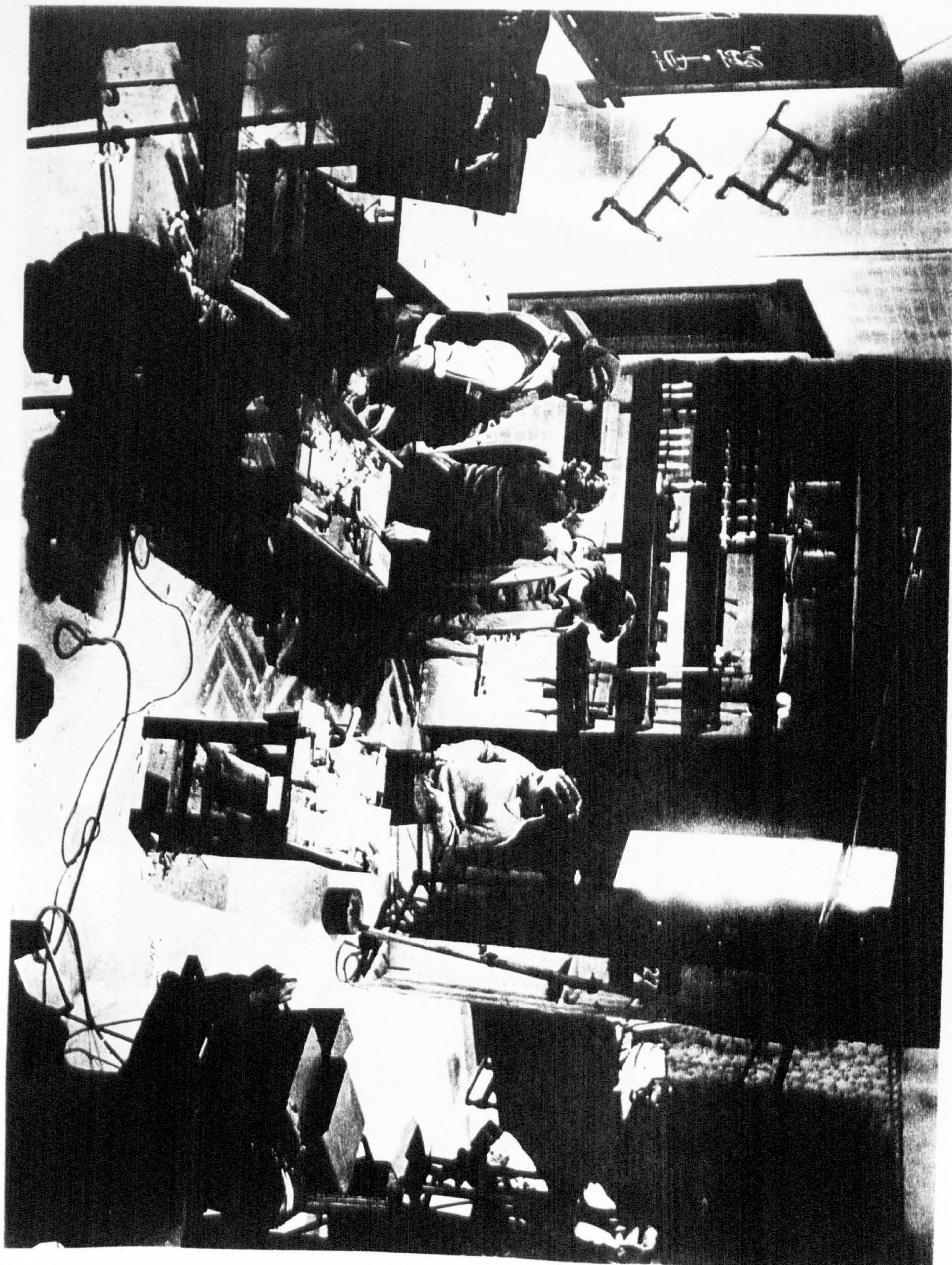
John Grierson appearing in Robert Barr's production of UNESCO, 8 April 1948.





The Rising Twenties 'Sales Girl' by Caryl Doncaster  
23 May 1952.





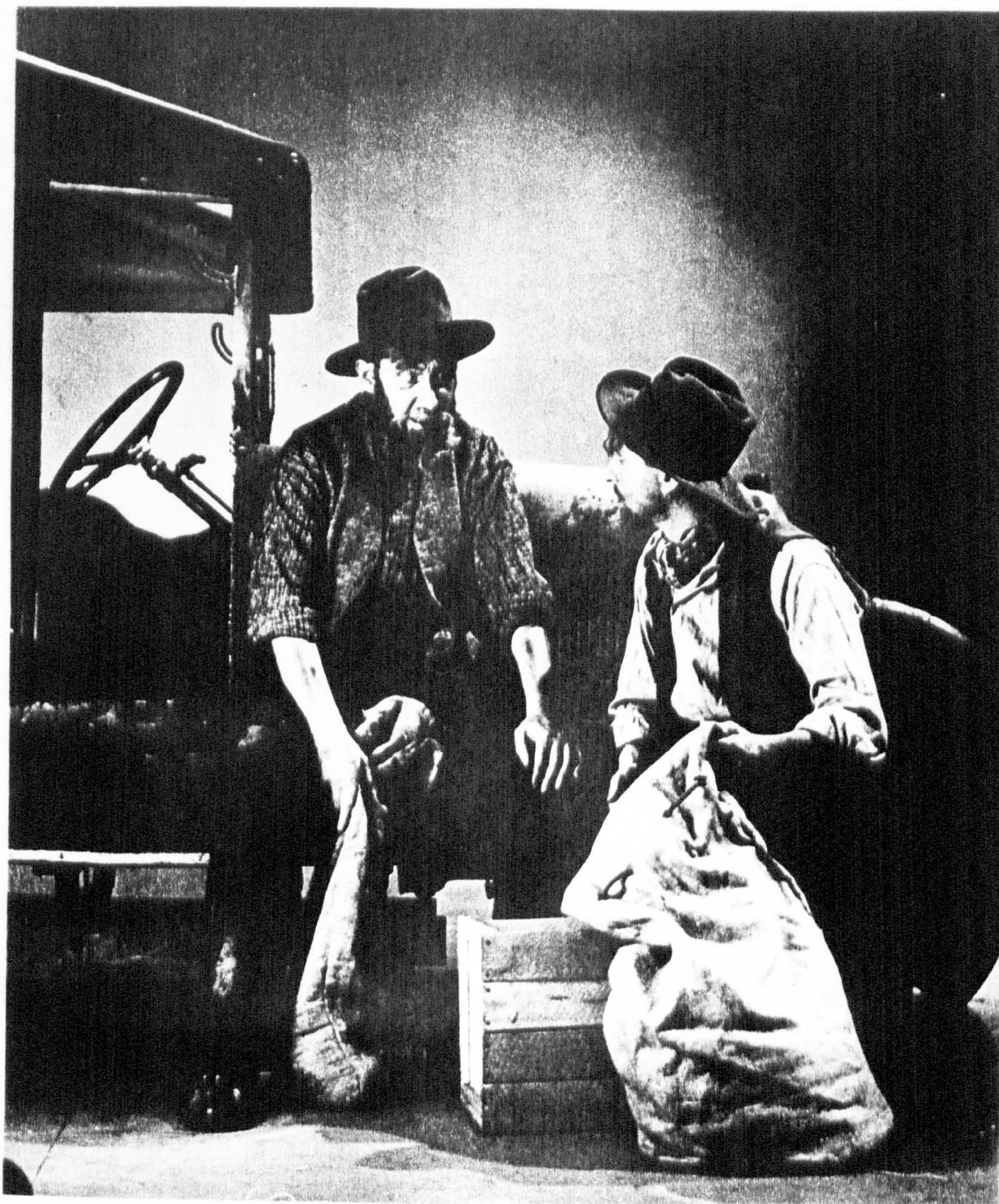
The Remand Home Carpenter's Shop from The Course of Justice  
No.2 Probation Office by Duncan Ross. Produced by Ian Atkins  
22 December 1951.





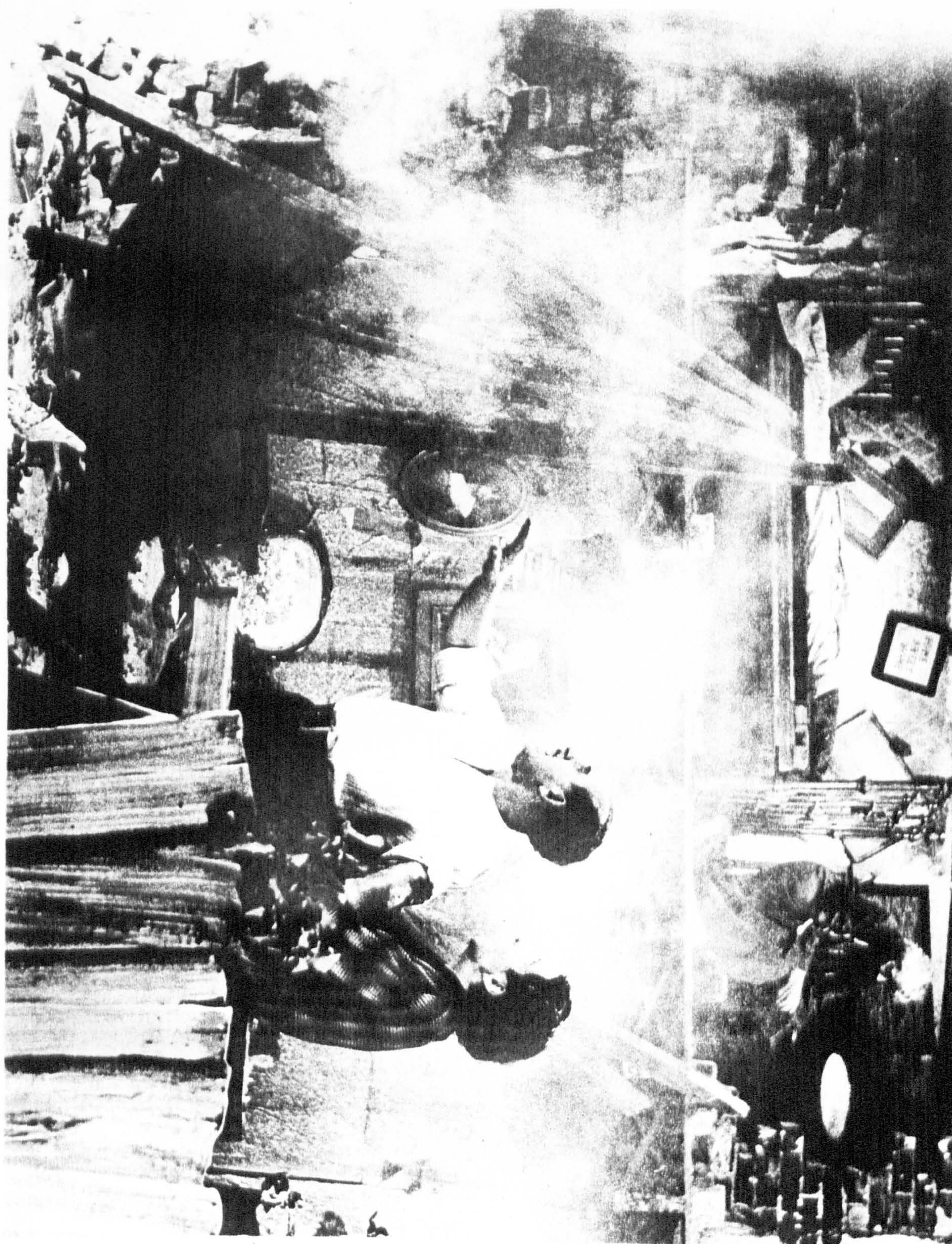
Return to Living by Caryl Doncaster with Thomas Heathcote.  
16 February 1954.





Crock of Gold by Henry C. James and Michael Barry.  
A story of the Australian Gold Rush. Transmitted  
19 February 1948.





Quatermass Experiment by Nigel Kneale. Produced by  
Rudolph Cartier. 'After the Rocket has Crashed'.  
Transmitted 18 July 1953.



THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE INFLUENCE OF DOCUMENTARY METHODS

UPON BBC TELEVISION DRAMA

With particular emphasis  
upon the years 1946-1962

VOLUME II

Being a thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the University of Hull

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## APPENDIX 1

P.P. Eckersley: 'Writtle Calling': The Power Behind the Microphone: Cape, 1941: P 41

"Our programmes were, at first, very formal. They were made up entirely of gramophone records. A mechanical gramophone played the music into the air and one of the staff held an ordinary microphone, such as one talks into when telephoning, in front of the trumpet. In those days there were no concealed loudspeakers in beautiful shiny cabinets and no 'pick ups' connected directly to the electrical circuits of the transmitter.

The operator, before transmitting a record, went through a long rigmarole, based on the technique of commercial station operating, repeating for a minute or so:

'Hullo, C.Q. Hullo C.Q. This is two emma tock, Writtle Calling'. (C.Q. are the code letters meaning 'all those hearing me' and 'emma tock' is operatorsese for M.T., the call sign which, if said in a normal way, might be confused with, for example, N.C., or N.E.).

And then:

'We will now play a gramophone record entitled', so and so, 'played by', such and such an artist and 'recorded by' this or that company.

Then the gramophone was put on and the microphone was pushed up against the noisy air. When the record stopped, the operator, transferring the microphone from the gramophone trumpet to his lips, said, once more:

'Hullo, C.Q. Hullo C.Q. This is two emma tock Writtle Calling' etc. 'You have just heard a gramophone record entitled .... played by .... made by .... We are now closing down for three minutes.'

At the end of three minutes the process started all over again".

## APPENDIX 2

P.P. Eckersley: The Power Behind the Microphone: Cape, 1941.  
Pp.237-241

"I cannot remember whether I first heard about television through the public press or confidentially in my capacity as Chief Engineer of the BBC. Nor can I remember when it was, 1926 or 1927 perhaps. I was naturally interested both as a technician and an official of the BBC. I asked A.G.D. West, who was then a member of my staff, if he would go and find out more about what was happening.

West reported that a Mr. J.L. Baird had shown him a demonstration in which the crude outlines of moving images had been instantaneously reproduced on a screen. West was enthusiastic. Much later he became Baird's right hand man and did some admirable work developing the Baird system.

Baird might perhaps agree that he has had an overdose of adulation by the lay press and too little recognition of his pioneering work by his fellow technicians. Neither he nor anyone else invented television; in any case, no one can invent a principle, protection is only given for a process of manufacture. What Baird did was to prove that what had hitherto been a theoretical idea was, thanks to the invention of the valve and the light cell, a practical possibility. For this alone, apart from the development of the system which bears his name, Baird deserves the thanks and praise of the technical world.

British television is already well established. This is due, more than anything, to the BBC which has put aside large sums of money to start the service. That it was able to do so is a justification of the principles on which our national broadcasting is founded. Without the BBC it is doubtful if our television service would have led the world as it can justly claim to have done. An interested and authoritative American said to me when talking about television "This is the first time I have seen any use for your old BBC." In America they were then waiting for the television hen to lay a financial egg or a financial egg to hatch out into a television chicken. It was no good, in the absence of a large number of viewers, asking American advertisers to pay for an expensive television programme; but the public would not take up 'viewing' without expensive television programmes to look at.



Doubtless a retroactive process will, in time, build up an American commercial television service, but the financial risk in starting it is considerable. Our rich and centralised BBC on the other hand can afford to test if the consumer demand is large enough to justify continued transmissions.

I believe an impression exists that I am, or was, an opponent of television. It would not make the slightest difference to television if I were, but, as it happens, I am not. I do not want to be classed as an opponent of any interest save my own. The impression that I do not want television to prosper was produced in the early days of its development when the financial interests behind Baird pressed the BBC to broadcast low definition pictures on medium (that is to say, sound-broadcasting) wavelengths. The vital technical fact in television is that a clear detailed picture requires a very wide channel to contain it. One television station working on medium waves would occupy more air than all the broadcasting stations, all the ship stations and all the long wave stations, together, occupy today. It is only possible to find a sufficiently wide channel to contain a television transmission among the ultra short waves. It seemed to me to be as clear from the principles of physics as the example of the then existing pictures (pictures which would fit in the narrow channels provided by medium sound broadcasting wavelengths), that it was an insult to the public to put on such a poor service and encourage the idea that the broadcast pictures would improve. If they could be improved it would be impossible to transmit them through the narrow channels provided by medium wavelengths. If they were not improved they were not worth transmitting. I therefore successfully opposed even the appearance of the BBC collaboration with the Baird interests. I said that directly the technicians could show a good picture the BBC would be glad to try and broadcast it, but it would be impossible to do so on existing wavelengths. This may have been disappointing to the Baird financiers, but it protected the public. When I left the BBC, however, my policy was reversed and the crude pictures were broadcast. The public proved me right by taking practically no interest in the service in spite of a great publicity bally-hoo. The service was then stopped and a lot of money which had been trustingly subscribed was wasted. It was not until a great deal of research had been done behind the scenes that the production of good detailed pictures by television was made possible.

These pictures could not, however, be transmitted by the sound broadcasting stations, primarily because they did not offer wide enough wavelength channels and also because the sound broadcasting stations were occupied in broadcasting sound programmes.

Obviously a public television service was desirable, when the pictures were worth looking at, but the question was could they be transmitted? I thought not. I thought the ultra short waves essential to broadcast moving pictures would have much too small a penetration or 'range'.

I certainly made a big technical mistake in prophesying that television had a doubtful future because of fundamental technical difficulties in transmitting it. I saw that it was bound to be possible to produce good pictures in the laboratory, but I thought that the ultra short waves would be no good for transmitting the pictures. The facts proved otherwise, ultra short waves have a perfectly satisfactory range. That I made a wrong forecast about wave propagation theory and refused to give the BBC's backing to now provedly worthless pictures hardly makes me an opponent of television...

I think that television will never completely oust sound broadcasting, and that it will supplement rather than rival films. I believe that its function will be chiefly reportorial, it will bring dramatic events and interesting sights immediately and vividly to the home screen. The elaborate film drama, part reality, part fake, and all painstaking repetition, which takes months or years to prepare and demands even hundreds of thousands of pounds spent on it, will always be part of a cinema technique. Music loses rather than gains by fidgety close-ups and sudden perspectives; it can be better enjoyed by itself and for itself. But the potentials of television for education, for defeating distance, and bringing events literally home to us are immeasurable".



## APPENDIX 3

Asa Briggs : The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom,  
Volume Two, The Golden Age of Wireless : Oxford University Press:  
1965. P.530

"Baird had not met John Reith in October 1928 - indeed Reith's diary for this period is silent on all matters relating to television - and by the BBC Moseley (his partner) meant Peter Eckersley the Chief Engineer, and Gladstone Murray, the Assistant Controller in charge of Public Relations. Murray seemed 'sympathetic': Eckersley, for the best of reasons, was sceptical .....

(His) categorical statement provided the basis for a clear, coherent, and sensible policy for the BBC to follow at that stage. If Baird and his technicians could show good pictures the BBC would be glad to try and broadcast them, but it had to be recognised that it would be impossible to do so on existing wavelengths. Eckersley never tried to mislead the public about his policy. Indeed, in the same number of Popular Wireless in which Moseley first advertised Baird's work to what was thought of as a 'hostile' technical audience, Eckersley wrote an article on the opposite page stating his own views of the significance of television development (14 July 1928) ".

## APPENDIX 4

J.C.W. Reith : 'Applications are invited .....': Into the Wind:  
Hodder & Stoughton 1949. P81

"On the first Sunday of October 1922 I had gone as usual to Regent Square Church. At evening service Dr.Ivor Robertson preached from Ezekiel: 'Thus saith the Lord .... I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none.' He said the Lord was looking for a man to stand in the gap now; perhaps there was someone in the Church that very night who might do great things for the country. This entry in my diary:

"I still believe there is some great work for me to do in the world."

A few days later, October 13, scanning the advertisements of public appointments in a newspaper, I read : 'The British Broadcasting Company (in formation). Applications are invited for the following Officers: General Manager, Director of Programmes, Chief Engineer, Secretary. Only applicants having first class qualifications need apply. Applications to be addressed to Sir William Noble, Chairman of the Broadcasting Committee, Magnet House, Kingsway, W.C.2.'

I wrote out an application; posted it in the letter-box of the Cavendish Club; then did what should have been done before - looked up Sir William Noble in Who's Who. Having retrieved the letter I rewrote it with a reference to my Aberdonian ancestry. No reply till December 7."



## APPENDIX 5

J.C.W. Reith : 'A General Manager is Appointed' : Into the Wind  
 Hodder & Stoughton 1949. Pp82-83

"On December 7, 1922 a letter came from Sir William Noble inviting me to attend for interview at Magnet House, Kingsway, on the 13th. I have never met him, but he came out of the room and greeted me with the cordiality of an old friend. Three others were present at the interview. A few superficial questions about my past; after references to letters of complaint I was asked if I could deal with correspondence; was informed that the general manager would, within a short time, know everybody worth knowing in the country. I had no idea what the letters of complaint were about nor what would cause such notoriety. I did not know what broadcasting was.

On the 14th. Noble telephoned that the Board were unanimous in offering me the appointment. He had tried to get them up to £2,000 per annum; they had stuck to £1,750 and Godfrey Isaacs of Marconi's would not agree even that until he had seen me. Would I, therefore, go and see him the next day? I did; was approved - most cordially so. The same day I met Burrows and Lewis who had apparently been appointed Director and deputy Director of Programmes, whatever that might mean; went with them to look for an office; Savoy Hill was the last place we saw. Afterwards I took Burrows to my club with intent to discover without disclosing my ignorance, what I had become General Manager of. He told me a great deal; his voice, he said, seemed to carry particularly well. He only made me more mystified.

But I thought I had gotten what I had been waiting for. I had kept my faith alive; night and morning had comforted and encouraged myself: 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass.' For the next two days I tried to bring every casual conversation round to 'broadcasting'. It was a Glasgow schoolfellow who enlightened me. Then I was quite sure of it."

## APPENDIX 6

R.S. Lambert : Ariel and all his Quality: Gollancz, 1940: Pp 9-10

"Do you accept the fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ?"

This question did not come from a preacher addressing a revivalist meeting, but from the executive chief of the most powerful public corporation in Britain, and was addressed to a young man who was interviewing for an educational appointment. I was the young man, and the questioner Sir John Reith .....

The question I had been asked struck me then - as it strikes me now - as one of the strangest that could be put in a business interview, to anyone other than a candidate for ordination to a Ministry .....

It was addressed to one who had been employed for some years by the University of London in supervising the spare-time studies of working-class students of economics, history, politics and literature; who before that had lived among the miners of South Yorkshire, teaching them similar subjects. I was an applicant, I understood, for the position of assistant in the BBC Education Department, to take charge of arranging certain evening broadcast courses of instruction for adult listeners. What connection there might be between my suitability for this, and my private opinions on religious matters, I was at a loss to understand.

I did not then realise what I have since been told - that the question was not one addressed to me exceptionally, but that it had figured in various forms in interviews with other candidates. It was calculated, not so much to test my knowledge of theology, as to introduce an element of surprise into the interview."



## APPENDIX 7

Lord Reith : Those Vintage Years of Radio : J.Snagge & M.Barsley  
Pitman 1972. P.49

"John Reith, the man who made the BBC, was a paradox: an extraordinary figure, full of contradictions. To the public he was both an inspiration and a terrifying taskmaster. To his close friends he was a shy, unpredictable charmer, a man of great principles and boundless ambition who nevertheless often felt desperately insecure. Over and over again there were things he wanted to do, positions he wanted to hold but he couldn't bring himself to attempt them without elaborate persuasion. He left a trail of glory behind him, a halo of respectability, a permanent reputation - and £76

No one, in the many descriptions of him - he both invited and defied description - has ever managed to explain what really made him tick, and probably no one ever will, however patient and penetrating the analysis. His life is really made up of references to him: what he did, and what he didn't do. What he said, and what he left unsaid, What he created, and what he apparently deserted "stupendous folly to have left one of the most responsible and rewarding posts in all the world" - the BBC.

Physically, he was formidable, a gift for the cartoonist, and he knew it. He played his height - about six foot six. He played his majestic appearance. He played his wound - an ugly scar gouged out of his left cheek by a First-World-War sniper's bullet. Sometimes he would deliberately present the scarred side of his face to intimidate people. (It also fascinated photographers). He was autocratic, certainly, and he liked to be surrounded by yes-men, in the sense that he wanted people to do what he told them, and not to do things without his knowledge. Yet he would spoil for a fight with the highest in the land, and was the only commoner who invented a title for an ex-King, when he announced "His Royal Highness, the Prince Edward", one day in 1936.

## APPENDIX 8

Joan Miller : Transcript of BBC Television Programme

Window on the World : November 7, 1961 : Robert Barr Papers.

"They were very adventurous, wonderful days, and all the chaps were so very young. Every programme was a way of finding out how to do the thing. The Directors didn't quite know what to do, the planners didn't quite know and so it was all trial and error and that made it all the more exciting. My first programme was most terrifying of all because television had nothing to do with theatre so I didn't know whether you could act straight out - be big or small - one had to learn what to do as one went along. Cecil (Madden) had the idea that we might do Picture Page with me sitting at a switch-board and plugging people in. I had a list of people I was going to introduce but we hadn't made up our minds as to what I would say - but it was usually at that point that the camera broke down and on my earphones I would hear the man in the directors box saying, "Oh, tell Joan to go on talking for goodness sake!" so I would talk and then they'd go over to Leslie Mitchell and he would also fill in, and we often had to ad lib this whilst they were setting things up.

The Baird system would break down more often than the Marconi one - and sometimes there were long long waits when we just had to chat away, whilst the engineers were trying to sort out things. The great thing then was to get a picture on the air and then try to keep it there."



## APPENDIX 9

Gerald Cock : Transcript of BBC Television Programme

Window on the World: November 7, 1961 : Robert Barr Papers.

"For me television started in 1935. Nobody seemed to want it. Sometimes I'm afraid relations between the prodigal infant and its rich parent in Broadcasting House weren't all sweetness and light. They had arrived at a plateau of complacency at Broadcasting House. They had got up to a certain point and they thought 'well we've come a long way, we're pretty good people', and there they sat; they didn't want anything new and you know the feeling.

In those early days we used to rush up to Alexandra Palace whenever possible, impatiently watching the ascending aerial mast and trying to make plans. By early 1936 I had been faced with a few of the unceasing problems which bedevilled us to the very end. Prospects looked a bit grim then. When a creative staff had been collected, first light artistes had to be tempted to the wilds of Wood Green for less than princely fees, our resources being what they were. Then how to find and put over the right sort of programmes to make people buy receivers which were expensive speculations in those days. The early cameras too had, like ourselves, unpredictable personality quirks, which affected production. Curiously the need for rehearsal rooms had been completely overlooked - we just hadn't any. Yet all programmes, properly rehearsed, had to be televised directly from the floor - none of the present pre-recording on film or tape and re-editing afterwards. Better I'm sure for viewers but very hard on our nerves at the time.

Outside Broadcasts of great national events which are, of course, the life blood of a Television service became possible only in May 1937, after which we tackled nearly all those you see today. The film people, meanwhile, had cut off supplies of potted entertainment and most variety artists were banned from appearing, sometimes even intimidated by telephone as they were about to perform.

Worst of all was having to work by two radically different systems - one a hopeless failure - on alternate weeks. Single system working and with it a real service, only started in 1937. After that we made rapid progress. Up went receiver sales and by January 1938 television was in full cry. (Later, in spite of the adverse effect of the Munich crisis, 7,000 receivers were sold between mid-September and December, compared with a little over 4,000 sets sold in the two years between September 1936 and September 1938).

Leslie Mitchell: "What exactly happened to you when you started Television. What were you doing at that time?"

Gerald Cock: "I was running Radio Outside Broadcasts. I'd started as an organiser of O.B.s in sound many years before and after some sort of dithering I gradually found out that I had got the appointment as first Director of Television. I believe incidentally that I was the only person who didn't apply at all to be actually appointed. What I mean is that I was appointed without having applied and the only one that didn't was considered. Well, this was still 1935 because I used to rush up to Alexandra Palace, and generally get fined for speeding as I went through Hampstead, to see where we stood, what we should be able to do with the limited facilities we had and I can assure you they were mighty limited. It was a terrific strain in those early days."

Leslie Mitchell: "Who told you that you were appointed?"

Gerald Cock: "Reith told me. He was then Sir John Reith. Well first of all he had me round to his office once or twice tentatively suggesting that I might do something else and I said 'All right, well I might, but I should like to consider it', but I didn't. He never mentioned it for a long time, then finally he did, and I asked for some certain undertakings before I became the first Director of Television. I'm sorry to say those undertakings were never carried out. However, once I'd seen electronic television - I don't mean mechanical because that was a failure - as soon as I'd seen electronic television working I thought I saw what could be done with it.



It was not very obvious at the start but I felt that with the right people, the young people with new ideas and energy and no particular feeling for tradition we might be able to knock it into shape and get something really worthwhile out of it. In other words a real visual broadcast. It sounds funny these days to talk like that, but its a very uncertain business."

Mitchell: "How did you recruit your staff?"

Cock: "Well, we went into the backwoods. I was determined that I couldn't take on people from Broadcasting House whose whole experience had been how not to use vision, or how to substitute sound for vision. So I went out into the wilds, well into the West End or the film world and the theatre world, trying to find young men who had experience in production but were not violently prejudiced in any one method .... So I got them and it was a very difficult job, I may tell you. Fortunately British films were in a sort of a slump at the time and I picked some extremely good men, and some extremely good theatre people too. Among them George More O'Farrell for whom I had the greatest respect and regard. I gathered them together, explained the sort of thing that would be required from them, the shortage of rehearsal time always knocked them out, you know, to think what they could do without rehearsal, the artiste has got to learn the part, I mean it's astonishing what people expect them to do. No`rehearsal rooms. Then I also had to see forward, as to how I could persuade celebrities to come up into the wilds of Wood Green. It's very difficult to get to and all sorts of things of that kind. Well it worked out up to a point. It was rather slow at the start getting people but when they did they were also fascinated by the possibilities, and so they helped and they set to and for small fees they did these extremely difficult jobs rushing around.

Greer Garson was a case in point. She was quite marvellous that woman, bless her heart. We did 'Hassan' on one occasion after I'd fought and fought with Basil Dean to get the rights, during a Bank Holiday by the way and our people from Broadcasting House had left the building and I had to go and fix it myself to rehearse, and all that. Greer Garson came up. She learnt the thing practically on the floor and it's not an easy thing

you know, James Elroy Flecker doesn't go in for very easy writing, and she learnt all this on the floor and the rest of them learnt their parts and the beggars came in and it was an extraordinarily fine show, and of course there was a series of Sean O'Casey's which was brilliantly done I think. I never see anything like it now. I don't think I'm prejudiced."

Mitchell: "What about your audience? Were you conscious of its size?"

Cock: "Apparently, the people who actually performed were conscious for a time and then they gradually lost their self-consciousness of an audience and were working rather as if they had been at RADA, or on a film set with no audience. There were several problems involved in the choice of material which would be likely to sell best. You cannot imagine the problem when there was no audience at all. Nobody had bought a television set and we had to go on. So we had to invent publicity stunts, if you like to call them that, although it rather jarred us, it did me certainly. To make publicity matter over things like Jasmine Bligh and Elizabeth Cowell. We had to because the Press would then take it up. They took these two lovely wenches and worked it up in the press and people bought receivers, I think, partly to see these two females .... I didn't like doing it but one had to get people to buy the damn things."

Mitchell: "How did you recruit these girls?"

Cock: "Oh I did that personally. I used to get around a bit in those days and I knew what was what and to a certain extent who was who, and there was a girl I met at Chester Beatty's or somewhere, some party or other - Elizabeth Cowell, a very beautiful girl, she'd be at that dinner. She was a brunette and then I chose Jasmine. She was introduced to me as a blonde. You see they had contrast, and also they had contrasting voices and personalities. The deep one was Elizabeth, and the rather high one was Jasmine Bligh. Well that was a stunt and I must say I shivered a bit doing it. I had to get people to buy sets and we hadn't got Outside Broadcasts. We did the Coronation and the Derby afterwards, but at that time we hadn't a thing to go and sell sets on. That's why I thought of, and gave it the name



by the way, of Picture Page, and also the whole idea of it which was to bring in a sort of ever-changing, topical person in the news, the sort of thing you see on a picture page of a newspaper ..... later it degenerated and lost its topicality ... I got fed up with it and had the whole set-up changed. I had given it to Madden to produce and finally I had it changed from a telephone girl and our friend Joan Miller. We kept her but did a different montage sort of business."

Mitchell: "When and at what particular moment did television have an impact on you?"

Cock: "When I first undertook the thing I hadn't the slightest appreciation of what would be needed .... I'd been playing about with these tubes, you see, to see what could be done - these cameras and things and just messing around, and it was during this time, about the beginning of '36 possibly, that I got the feeling that this thing was the greatest media for public communication the world had ever seen, and they're going to know it. Of course, when I said that in Broadcasting House like a damn fool at meetings they just laughed at me like a half-boiled, half-baked enthusiast without any sense of proportion and they even thought I was disloyal to the BBC which is the most humorous thing in the world, of course, Because I was enthusiastic about this new thing I must, therefore, have been disloyal to the dear old plateau-sitting BBC. However, I wasn't. I believe the BBC to be one of the greatest organisations there's ever been. I don't treat it as a sacred cow, that can't be criticised, that can't be disagreed with, but, having disagreed one does what one's told from the top level. But at the same time it has had certain limitations. There's been too much chairwarming on the whole, there's been too much complacency, occasionally they need a kick in the slats just to make them realise that life is not all one sweet dream of peace and quiet and otherwise the BBC's a marvellous place to be.

In my day they were grossly underpaid. Unfortunately there's no question of that - the engineers were, for one, and so were a lot of the programme people, and that was a great pity because it gave the idea that only cheap people

could get into the BBC, which is as you know, a very lamentable feeling. But that would have changed in the course of time without commercial television. But in my days of dear old Carps - Admiral Carpendale - we had terrific set-tos and I'd want a good man and he wanted a man who was a little cheaper. He told me "If two people apply to me and one wants £350 a year and the other wants £300 I'd give it to the man who wants £300." I said "Not with me you don't, I want the man that's good, I don't care what you pay him." We used to have set-tos like that, though I admired him enormously. Mind you, I finally beat him on one or two occasions. I got an assistant. I think I wangled a hundred a year more than they wanted to give him or something. But I didn't want dead heads, I've no use for dead heads, I didn't want rejects from the War Office. I remember they were kicking army officers out about 1920 and they came around to the BBC for jobs, and some of them were pretty poor quality and I saw them and I thought "Oh God, I'm not going to be tied down to people like that" and so I introduced another sort of person altogether.

Of course, the first thing visitors used to notice at Alexandra Palace was an atmosphere of cheerful turmoil, of continual improvisation. Even after the call-up began to take away our creative people in the summer of 1939, morale stayed high. But then war came to wipe the slate clean of all our efforts, scuttle plans for the future and scatter us to the four corners of the world.

On September 1, 1939, not a drum was heard, not a funeral note, and television, less than three years old, was put into cold storage for seven long years. Now only a handful of aficionados remember that there was a television service so long ago and, if I may say so, not a bad one at that."



## APPENDIX 10

Douglas Birkinshaw: Transcript of BBC Television programme  
"Window on the World": November 7, 1961: Robert Barr Papers.

"I was in my office at Alexandra Palace on the morning of September 1st, 1939 and at 10.30 that morning I got a first warning from Broadcasting House that it seemed almost certain that we would have to close the Service at 12.00 on that day but I wasn't actually to do anything at the moment. At 11.30 I got a final warning that I was to close the Service and that, I think, was one of the most awful things I ever had to do. It was my duty to go around Alexandra Palace and to tell everyone that at 12.0'clock they were to Fade Out, switch off everything and to close down the Service which we loved and at which we had worked so hard and so enthusiastically for three years and to leave it and the Palace to whatever fate might befall, and to go away to their War stations.

So - I did this, of course. I don't know how I managed to get around. Everyone was grieved beyond measure. It may seem rather extraordinary to say this - one knows now how insignificant something like television was then, in the face of a rather terrifying world situation.

But you must remember that we were a band of about 150 enthusiasts on the engineering side - and about as many on the programme and artistic side who had been working on this the first high-definition television service in the world - and it was our hobby and our life and we had lived with it and slept with it - if we ever did sleep - and to have it smitten away from us by a foreign director was almost more than we could bear. However, at 12.0'clock the Service stopped ..... and it is rather interesting to remember that the last words were spoken by Mickey Mouse, who said, "Ah tink I go home!"

## APPENDIX 11

The Dramatic Control Panel: L.Sieveking: The Stuff of Radio:  
Cassell, 1934. P 102

"This panel is simply the centralising and mixing unit, by which means the output of several studios can simultaneously be used, and welded together into a single whole at a central point under the control of the producer" so writes Val Gielgud in How to Write Broadcast Plays.

Yet this is one of the essential differences between us. He thinks the instrument should be 'operated', I that it should be 'played'. The sound effect, is most truly the stuff of radio, because, whereas everything else that is broadcast existed before wireless was invented, including the father and mother of the radio sound effect, namely noises-off of the theatre, the art of painting with pure sound is a new thing, peculiar to radio.(p.58).

The Dramatic Control Panel is an instrument that was invented and perfected by British genius, and so far as that goes it is true to say that the new art of radio-drama was born in England, and has, so far, continued to live in England. It was born when a certain electric instrument made it possible, just as modern architecture was born when certain new materials were invented that made new shapes and methods of construction possible. Radio-drama, as such, will develop along the roads peculiar to its own needs and possibilities.

It will be developed only by men and women who can and do think in terms of it. It can develop in no other way. The greatest men of literature and of the theatre cannot develop it with great plots and grand themes alone. Poets, composers and playwrights can pour themselves out, and radio will not advance; Actors and actresses and singers may perform till they are unable to continue. All this will be in vain unless it is realised that radio is only a conduit when expressly used as a conduit.

The occasions on which it is not being expressly - and quite rightly - used as a conduit, are comparatively infrequent, but none the less delightful; and the Control Panel is the central instrument of the new art which is practised on these occasions.



Namely when plays are broadcast which have been especially written for the microphone by people who are thinking in terms of the microphone and the Dramatic Control Panel, and produced by people who are thinking in the same terms.

I have tried to convey something of my sensations when playing the Panel. I will not do it again here. I will only say that the moment comes, in the process of producing a radio-play, when you leave the cast and all the others, completely, and go up to the D.C. Panel room. It is then that you begin to hear with your actual ear what you have previously heard only with your mind's ear. The last part of the process is now. All the studios, banks of gramophones, and so on, are centralised here and you weave them together, listening to what you are doing as it comes out of the loud speaker. Now you can begin to make those patterns and those pictures which melt you as you listen."

## APPENDIX 12

Radio 1928 (Production) L.Sieveking: The Stuff of Radio  
 Cassell, 1934 P383 - 384

KALEIDOSCOPE (1) A Rhythm representing the life of Man from Cradle to Grave , by Lance Sieveking.

Note: John Gielgud as 'Voice of Good'  
 Val Gielgud - Studio Manager.

Fade Up

Dance Band: "Eccentric".

Man: What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do? I want to go one way and I am torn another. Shall I stay with her, and try to work and make her happy? Or shall I go away, forget and be free? Which? Which?

## 3rd KALEIDO

Orchestra: Beginning of 4th Movement.

Finale 5th Symph. Beethoven.

Effects: Musical Box.

Bad: Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine  
 There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed  
 Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;  
                   (continuous double-fan mix)  
 And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
 Yea, I was desolate and bow'd me head:  
                   (Flick 8 quick)  
 I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

Piano: Chopin 17 Prelude

Quintet: "My Queen"

Dance Band: "Eccentric"

(Fade up Orchestra ..... Fade Down)

(Fade Up Jazz ..... Fade Down)

(Fade out Effects, Speakers, Piano and Quintet)

(Fade Up Jazz to Max. Keep for one min. then Fade Out)

(Fade Up Speakers)

To hear each other's whisper'd speech;  
 Eating the Lotus day by day,  
 To watch the crisping ripples on the beach  
 And tender curving lines of creamy spray;  
 To lend our hearts and spirits wholly  
 To the influence of mild-minded melancholy;  
 To muse and brood and live again in memory.....



Man: Ah, well ..... What's the good. If love is at an end, it is at an end. Nothing remains. I'm bored with her... bored! bored! BORED! - and I feel so lazy. I shall take a ship and go... to... where the sun is warm and life is easy.

Bad: That's the way, dear boy, that's the way - where the sun is warm .....

(Fade Out)

(Fade In)

Choir: Negro Spiritual.  
(Surging of Water)

3rd Voice: (after a pause) I can't see anything.

4th Voice: (pause) Reckon he's a goner, poor devil.....

(River noises stop)

(OUT)

(Fade Up Orchestra to max. It finishes the 4th.Move. fortissimo)

(UP EFFECTS)

Effects: (Terrific outburst of applause sustained till flick out. After it has been going time count eight):.....  
Flick 4.

Good: Listen!

Bad: Yes - listen to the sea -

Good: It isn't the sea! It is applause - and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side!

(Fade Up quick - sudden burst)

Orchestra: SWORD MOTIF ON THE HORN ALONE .....Echo without Studio.

(Fade Out All).

#### Quoted on Page 21:-

"In one of the studios I made a long elaborate announcement explaining what was about to happen, and how. When the last sepulchral notes of my voice had ceased I ran from the studio, fell down two flights of stairs and burst into the little room already described (Dramatic Control-Panel Room).

The first two or three pages passed in a trance. I faded one studio in after another. I flicked cue-lights at certain points - all in a state of suspended consciousness. Presumably everything progressed from point to point as rehearsed.



I heard nothing. It was not until the top of page four that I came out of my trance and heard what was coming out of the loud speaker.....

Next day what did the papers say? All manner of things ....  
"Real Wireless Drama At Last"..... "Strange Experience Last Night"..... "One of the most extraordinary Feats of broadcasting"..  
"Experiment"....."New Technique"..... "Recalled One's Impression of Gas in the Dentist's Chair".....



## APPENDIX 13

Val Gielgud: The Early Days : Interview with Peter Roberts  
Plays and Players : December, 1965

Roberts: " You were in charge of radio drama from 1930 to 1950. One would imagine that in the early days plays submitted to the BBC were essentially stage plays and that only in the course of time writers came to appreciate the different qualities of radio drama. Was that in fact so? "

Gielgud: " In fact the first original play - Danger, by Richard Hughes - was produced as early as 1924. I don't think it took intelligent producers interested in a new medium long to realise that while many stage plays - notably the classics - made excellent broadcasting, the normal modern stage conventions tended to handicap, as opposed to exploit, the particular qualities of the studio and the microphone. I think it is true to say that it was the realisation that plays simply could not be broadcast satisfactorily from the stages of theatres, which compelled the adoption of special techniques of acting and writing. Certainly by 1930 the original radio play - I need only cite the names of Lance Sieveking and Tyrone Guthrie in this connection - was already a flourishing, if minority, interest. It was prevented from coming to its full flowering by the dreary, but permanent, conditions of economics. Good and successful writers were inevitably disinclined to spend good ideas in a field which could not hope to provide fees comparable with those earned in the cinema and the theatre."

Roberts: " Did you, in the course of time, alter your own views on what could and could not be done with drama on radio? "

Gielgud: " I don't think my personal views altered very much. It seemed to me obvious that the broadcasting of plays must imply three things: a repertory of revivals of classic plays with first-class casts and production: a steady output of what might be called 'bread-and-butter' dramatic entertainment, which should aim at popularity combined with quality - at whatever level; and original or avant-garde work, which found its feet with the establishment of the Third Programme. All three types were mutually dependent, and of equal importance."

The last seemed to me to increase in stature over the years - partly because its audience grew more accustomed to its special conventions, and partly because the plays thrown up by the New Wave in the Theatre proved - by a certain formlessness combined with vitality of ideas - more and more susceptible to radio presentation. "

Roberts: "In looking back over your years with the BBC what do you feel were the most significant changes in drama on the radio and what do you feel brought them about? "

Gielgud: "Apart from the development I've mentioned when radio drama ceased to be another outside broadcast from theatre stages, the most important development was undoubtedly the achievement of a recognised professionalism of radio acting and production. At Savoy Hill, the broadcasting of plays was little more than an indifferently-considered joke, and acting for the BBC no more than a chance for unsuccessful actors to earn what they called contemptuously 'cigarette-money'. By the early 1930s this attitude had vanished for good. The producers had learned their business. The actors and writers had come to take radio drama seriously. It remained for Hitler's War first to establish the majority audience by keeping it at home and demanding an alternative to just sitting waiting for blitz; and secondly by forcing the formation of the BBC Repertory Company, which in the long run made British radio acting the envy and admiration of most foreign broadcasting organisations. "

Roberts: "Do you feel the coming of television really brought about the end of an era of drama on radio and a decline in its importance and standing - or do you feel television in catering for mass audiences allowed a greater degree of specialisation and ultimately the freedom to do more interesting and experimental work on, say the Third? "

Gielgud: "Television drama's coming of age certainly ended an era for drama in sound. It still remains to be seen whether this was a good thing in itself; still more whether the television play can make the radio play a museum piece. So far it seems that the latter is not happening.



It might have happened if the responsible television authorities had been more imaginative, and had preferred Quality to Quantity as a yardstick of merit. As it is, quite a proportion of an audience for drama, surfeited by television output, is finding the output of sound an agreeable alternative. It is also quite true that radio producers have been given more opportunity for specialisation, more freedom to experiment - and a valuable incitement by Television competition."

## APPENDIX 14

Laurence Gilliam:      BBC Features :      Evans 1950. Pp 9-14

"Once broadcasting had got over its initial intoxication with its own existence, it started to wonder what it was for. It spent its first ten years happily cutting and adapting works created for other forms of art, entertainment or instruction. But slowly, obstinately, and with growing success, a group of writers and producers insisted on exploring the possibilities of the radio medium itself. Because what they produced fitted no known formula, and for that reason stood out from the run of programmes stemming from existing forms, they were grouped under the generic title of 'feature programmes'. A growing audience followed these efforts with interest. Critics supported and encouraged them. Growing popularity caused the radio authorities to support them with money and technical resources. The Second World War projected them suddenly to the position of powerful propagandist agencies. Five years of peace have seen them putting to diverse uses the techniques that creative pioneering and official backing had combined to fashion for their use.

What then, precisely, is the feature programme? There is no precise answer. For radio it has confusing associations with both film and newspaper usage. In the cinema 'feature' denotes both the principal item in the programme and specifically the item that carries with it the guarantee of being an acted story. It is a gilded promise of entertainment, of illusion and escape, guaranteed to be unlike a 'documentary' which is a true story, and usually anything but gilded. In journalism, the term 'feature' is used to classify a whole range of material which is generally understood to be practically anything the editor chooses to print other than news and comment. In broadcasting the term has come to signify a wide range of programme items, usually factual and documentary, presented by a variety of techniques, but mostly making use of dramatisation and edited actuality. The essential quality of the feature programme is that it should be the expression of one mind, whatever technique it uses. It is the answer that each individual writer finds to the problem of making a statement by broadcasting, with the greatest possible force and coherence, emotional and dramatic impact, best suited to the nature of this



material.

The significance of the feature programme is, then, that it is the form of statement that broadcasting has evolved for itself, as distinct from those other forms which it has borrowed or adapted from other arts or methods of publication. It is pure radio, a new instrument for the creative writer and producer.

The main achievements of feature writers have been in the field of documentary rather than imaginative creation, which, in the main, is the province of the radio play. Feature programmes first won real prominence in the war years when they were shown to command powerful techniques for the presentation of fact and for the generation of emotion., and it is in the field of documentary, both historical and contemporary, that this progress has been achieved. Here their uses have been wide, from reconstructions of remote and recent history to the presentation of current issues and experiments in the popular exposition of law, science, medicine and industry. Feature techniques have been widely used in school and adult educational programmes, in literary criticism and biography, in fantasy and satire. The BBC Features Department numbers among its staff some of the leading poets of our time, working side by side with journalists, scientists, novelists and dramatists. Outside the staff of the Department, there is an ever-widening circle of professional writers and experts in many fields, who have been drawn to broadcasting as a means of expression by the exciting possibilities made available by the persistent exploration of the radio medium by this body of professional radio writers, and producers.

Radio feature programmes have always been under the compulsion to make the listener feel, as well as think, to entertain, as well as to inform. For the majority of people, a dramatised statement is more powerful and more effective than a spoken statement. Therein lies the main difference between the feature programme and the broadcast talk. In its simplest form, the feature programme aims at combining the authenticity of the talk with the dramatic force of a play, but unlike the play, whose business it is to create dramatic illusion for its own sake, the business of the feature is to convince the listener of the truth of what it is saying, even though it is saying it in dramatic form.



One of the first discoveries of broadcasting was that the listener himself, and the world in which he lived, provided a rich field of programme material. The outside broadcasters, with their travelling microphone, were the first to exploit this field. With the development of mobile recording techniques, this material was put at the disposal of the maker of feature programmes. His business was with reality; real men and women, in their natural setting - at home, in the place where they worked, or where they played. The feature producer no longer had to imitate reality. It was in his power to go direct to the source, photograph it in sound, and then edit and shape it. This extension of the available material has produced the other main characteristic stream of documentary feature programmes. Such programmes as Country Magazine, the Christmas Day Reunion of the Commonwealth peoples to listen to the King's Christmas message, the series 'Window on Europe' the many programmes reflecting life in the Colonies and Dominions, all stem from the capacity, unique to the feature programme, of giving shape to the stuff of reality by imposing the discipline and pattern of a form under the control of one creative mind.

Almost from the beginning of broadcasting the BBC realised the necessity for stimulating original work. The first field experiment in radio writing was radio drama, and a group of avowed experimentalists was formed, charged with the task of exploring and testing the boundaries of the new medium. Naturally enough the 'how' was exalted at the expense of the 'what'; form explored, technique experimented with. From this group of pioneers, who included such writers and experimental producers as Tyrone Guthrie, Lance Sieveking, E.J. King Bull, E.A. Harding and Mary Hope Allen, came many of the techniques which are common practice today. Their imaginative daring, their mistakes as much as their triumphs, sowed the seeds of creative broadcasting in Britain, and all who work creatively in radio will remain in their debt.

For a time this experimental spring was forced underground, to emerge again in the shape of the Features Department. It was the expansion of this unit, charged with the development of the radio documentary, that led to the establishment of an increasing staff of writers and producers both in London and in the Regional centres who were given the opportunity and the means of exploring



the possibilities of the new medium. This unit first formed part of the BBC Drama Department, under Val Gielgud, to whose support and critical faculty it owed much from its beginnings. Workers in this unit were encouraged to experiment in radio forms, and its development owed a great deal to the diverse and stimulating essays of Stephen Potter, and Francis Dillon, A.L.Lloyd, Olive Shapley and Felix Felton, and two particularly gifted creative spirits, John Cheatle and T. Rowland Hughes.

A few further names will indicate the richness and variety of contemporary talent that was attracted to this field, some of them full-time workers in radio, some, with established reputations in other spheres, occasional contributors: Poets like Louis MacNeice, Dylan Thomas, Henry Reed, Laurie Lee, Kathleen Raine, Patric Dickinson, D.G. Bridson, Terence Tiller, W.R. Rodgers, John Pudney; Dramatists, Novelists, short-story writers and critics like J.B. Priestley, Eric Linklater, Denis Johnston, Robert Kemp, V.S.Pritchett, Edward Sackville-West, Elizabeth Bowen, Rayner Heppenstall, Herbert Read, Christopher Syke, Rose Macaulay, Compton MacKenzie, Moray MacLaren, Michael Innes, Stephen Potter, Sean O'Faolain, and many others; among Historians - Professor Harold Temperley, Professor L.B. Namier, H.R.Trevor-Roper, J.Wheeler-Bennett and C.V.Wedgwood. "

## APPENDIX 15

D.G.Bridson: 'Actuality Broadcasts' : Prospero and Ariel:  
Gollancz, 1971. Pp51-52

"Archie (E.A.F.) Harding's belief that radio should reflect the life of the people was one with which I fully concurred. I also believed that radio was there to put people in touch with each other, not merely to instruct or inform or even to entertain them. It seemed to me that since its inception, broadcasting by the BBC had been the exclusive concern of 'us' and listening the lucky privilege of 'them'. That the man in the street should have anything vital to contribute to broadcasting was an idea slow to gain acceptance. That he should actually use broadcasting to express his own opinions in his own unvarnished words, was regarded as almost the end of all good social order. Never once in history had the man in the street been even consulted. As a member of the electorate he had been invited to express a preference for either side of somebody else's question - but that was as far as social order had so far been prepared to go.

This is another way of saying that very few 'actuality speakers' - as the BBC chose to call the vast bulk of their licence payers - had yet been on the air. Eric Maschwitz (Variety) had begun to put a few of them into In Town Tonight but there they had hardly been heard to advantage. Stumbling awkwardly through their scripts, they had suggested anything but the actual, and had mostly proved a painful embarrassment. The reason for this was simple enough; they were none of them trained readers, the scripted dialogue in which they were asked to take part with professional announcers was in no way natural to them, and the awesome surroundings of the studio - in many ways reminiscent of a dental surgery - were not the best setting in which to meet up with a microphone for the first time. One has to remember that during the thirties - indeed until after the war - nearly all speech on radio was live, and had to be pre-scripted. The microphone was regarded as such a potentially dangerous weapon that nobody was allowed to approach it until it was fully known what he intended to do with it.

A case can be made out for checked and censored scripts in wartime on the grounds of national security.



But that spontaneous speech should have been banned by the BBC for the first twenty odd years of broadcasting is almost unbelievable. The fact remains that it was true. The result, needless to say, is that few beside professional actors, professional speakers, and what one might call professional personalities ever got near the microphone at all..... the voice of the BBC remained the voice of the upper-middle class, and almost the only accent heard on the air was Standard Southern English."

## APPENDIX 16

D.G. Bridson : Prospero and Ariel : Gollancz. Pp80-83

"It was during the war in fact that the Feature programme had come of age. It had developed new techniques and was drawing on new resources in the way of mobile recording gear. Feature producers had followed the armies, flown with the planes, sailed in with the ships, and had brought the new immediacy of sound to the impact of war reporting. They had dealt with every aspect of the war, and had brought to the microphone thousands of people whose personal stories had been an integral part of the war effort. No war had ever been reported and made real to a world audience in such vivid terms before, and a vital part in the process - emotional involvement of the listener by colourful re-enactment - had been played by the feature programme.

But over and above its achievement in imparting information, the feature had also proved its ability to engross and entertain. It had been developed notably as a medium for creative writing of a new order. In the field of documentary proper, parallel with the work of the Crown Film Unit, it had been splendidly developed by Francis Dillon, Robert Barr, Leonard Cottrell and Majorie Banks and most notably of all - by Cecil McGivern. He had joined from Newcastle and was at his best in describing the new techniques of war and the ways in which ordinary men and women adapted their lives to cope with them. He shared my interest in people, and had an unusually good ear for everyday dialogue. His tremendous capacity for hard work was to prove itself once more in the formative days of postwar television. Meanwhile his output of wartime radio was remarkably effective, and in the later days of the war he was to write some of the most impressive documentaries ever broadcast. 'Bomb Doors Open' gave an exciting picture of the RAF raids on Germany; 'Junction X' told the story of the railway operation during the blitz; 'A Harbour called Mulberry' told of the building of the two floating harbours which made the D-Day landings possible; and 'Radar' told the story of its invention and increasingly effective use in bomber interception.....



In 1952 the position of Head of Television Documentaries was advertised. I was surprised that it had not automatically been offered to Gilliam, even though he might have declined to accept it. McGivern and Gilliam were the two most influential members of the Appointment Board - friendly as we had always been McGivern made it clear enough that he was no more anxious to have me working for him than he was to have Gilliam himself...

I was under some pressure, by now, to try my hand at a television documentary, but this I had no intention of doing. Those that were being produced at the time (1950s) seemed to me no less dull and unimaginative than the ones that were being done on radio, and I wanted no part in them. The only ones that appealed to me were the finely observed documentary studies of Northern life being written and directed by Denis Mitchell. But as these were generally frowned on by his colleagues as being 'more radio than television' there seemed little point in ploughing a similar furrow .....

So far as the new men in television were concerned any recruit from radio represented a potential threat to their own promotion., and they were bitterly resentful of the fact that a number of senior television personnel appointments had recently been filled by radio men. To them, radio represented the enemy, against which they tended to protect themselves by encouraging the theory that the two media were irreconcilable. Training in radio, they held, was an automatic bar towards any understanding of camera work. Complete separation of the two services was something for which they worked and prayed, and their distrust of the BBC itself was almost more pronounced than their distrust later of the ITV. Many a radio man before me had been faced by this hostility, and more than a few had found it operating against them. For one reason or another Val Gielgud had already returned to radio with some relief after trying to bestride the worlds and run drama for both services. Gilliam had singularly failed to find a television niche for himself. (According to Heppenstall - Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man; Owen, 1969 - this disappointment of Gilliam's was 'the bitterest experience of his career, indeed of his life.') Leonard Cottrell, one of our most talented feature producers, having been seduced away from radio with specious promises, was then in process of being frozen off the television staff., but neither Louis MacNeice, Douglas

Cleverdon, nor I, was to find a very warm welcome when we went over to join in the Television Drama Department. Meanwhile we had to grapple with a totally new technique as television producers-elect."



## APPENDIX 17

Tom Waldron : The Daily Telegraph : 13 March 1964 : Robert Barr Papers.

"For some 13 years I was a BBC Producer for what was, in my opinion, the most exciting branch of sound radio - Features Department. I have been reading, with very real regret, that Features may well be eliminated as a department and its producers merged into the general pattern of sound broadcasting.

I am quite certain that if Features is liquidated it will be a great disservice to imaginative sound broadcasting. The individuals who form the department would immediately lose their corporate identity and become voices crying in the wilderness.

No final decision has yet been taken. I hope that the BBC will conclude that Features' record demands its survival.

Having come lustily into being during the last war Features really began to establish itself as a specialist department in 1946 in spite of the departure of such fine writers as the late Cecil McGivern, Robert Barr, now firmly established in television, Paul Dehn, who returned to Fleet Street, Joel O'Brien, the young American who adapted Stephen Vincent Benet's Civil War masterpiece 'John Brown's Body' and John Hersey's frightening narrative 'Hiroshima'.

New people were attracted to this most stimulating form of sound radio presentation. "Features" became a nursery for creative writing and thinking. Stephen Potter gave a new word to the English language in 'Gamesmanship' to say nothing of his masterly presentation, with Neville Coghill, of Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'.

The late Louis MacNeice, the quiet Irish poet, had a tour de force with his 'The Dark Tower' and 'Christopher Columbus'. In documentary vein Leonard Cottrell ruthlessly rammed home the bestiality of concentration camps with his coldly factual 'Man from Belsen'. A new factual series under the generic title of 'Focus' was started in the Light Programme by R.D. Smith and the writer of this article.

The Third Programme came into being about this time and Features accepted the challenge it offered, going on to win many distinctions from a critical and highly intelligent audience. As time progressed the entire field of sound radio became the field of Features.

Features Department has always approached its programmes by thinking and working in terms of sound radio presentation. The Scripts are written to be spoken, not to be read, as a book is read or a newspaper article is read. The producers, who very often are the writers as well, have always sought to present their subjects in a manner best calculated to have maximum impact in terms of pure sound, and they do not tend to go beyond the limitations of their medium.

Particular expertise in the uses of sound radio must be applied to each production. They do not work to formulae established by precedent - they work out their own manner of presentation. Their varied output cannot easily be labelled Drama, Talks or Documentary they cover all three - and more.

I feel that I may reasonably be able to suggest that the Features method of working in sound radio has its merits from the fact that of the eleven Italia Prizes gained by the BBC nine were gained by Features programmes. Further than this; of the 30 or so radio programmes submitted for awards all - except four or five - were Feature Programmes.

Features have been on the Berlin Airlift and at the partition of India. It has translated from the ancient Greek, presented ballad operas, been down coal mines, in hurricanes and earthquakes. Such Features men as have been able to cut their way through the barbed wire defences that have, it would appear, long kept sound radio practitioners out of television, have made considerable impact upon that medium, among them Cecil McGivern, Robert Barr, Denis Mitchell, and Norman Swallow."



## APPENDIX 18

Sound Recording: Broadcasting in Britain: K.Geddes:

HMSO 1972. Pp17/41

The modern art of recording both sight and sound originated with Thomas Edison, although there were many others who also investigated possibilities in this field. In 1877, Edison produced the first practical sound recording. This device took the form of a cylinder on which sound was recorded by indenting the surface in accordance with the pressure of a sound wave. In 1888 he invented the first motion-picture projector, which used a sequence of still pictures projected rapidly one after another on to a screen, the method still in use today. In 1913, by synchronising his phonograph and motion-picture machines, Edison demonstrated the world's first sound motion picture. It was not until 1927, however, when electronic amplifiers were available, and accurate, foolproof synchronisation between sound and picture had been achieved, that sound movies became practical.

After Edison's phonograph appeared, many inventors sought other methods whereby sound might be recorded more accurately. Vladimir Poulsen, a Danish Engineer, conceived the idea of recording sound by varying the magnetisation along a steel wire, for which he received a United States Patent in 1900. Poulsen's machine used a steel wire over which was passed an electromagnet, the 'recording head' of the machine. After making a recording, the microphone was switched out and an earphone substituted. The electromagnet now acted as a pick-up device to convert the magnetic pattern on the wire back into electrical impulses that would actuate the earphone, thereby reproducing the original sound.

Several years later, Poulsen redesigned his machine and produced what was essentially the present day tape recorder in simplified form. Thin wire was stored on a reel and drawn across a stationary electromagnet. After recording, the wire could be rewound and played back. The machine also contained an erasing device for removing unwanted recordings. The Telegraphone - as he named the instrument - was an advanced idea for its day, but it could not compete with the acoustic phonograph since it contained no amplifiers, and therefore produced a very low sound

output during playback. Mostly, the Telegraphone was used as a dictating machine, and some of them, although more than 50 years old, are still in use today.

Magnetic recording languished for some 30 years after Poulsen's invention. Many improvements were made on the basic machine during this interval, but magnetic recording still did not come into widespread use until, in the middle 1930s, several German firms brought out magnetic recorders. These newer models featured electronic amplifiers, and much later, coated plastic tape to replace the steel wire originally used by Poulsen. In the late 1930s similar machines known as wire recorders, appeared on the market. The Second World War stimulated research into magnetic recording for military applications, with the result that at the end of the war, the tape recorder had been improved to more or less its present form.

One of the most important aspects of BBC Engineering lay in the increase use of recordings, and entire recorded programmes. Reith had always believed in the mystique of a broadcast being "live" and there are many actors, reporters and producers who prefer its excitement and its challenge. , but as programme locations became more far-flung and planning more complex - not to mention the editing of items of unpredictable length - recording often became essential. The first Recorded Programmes Executive, Lynton Fletcher, was appointed in 1934, at the time of the celebrated Blattnerphone, which was recorded on steel tape.

Empire broadcasting created an urgent need for sound recording facilities, so that programmes could be transmitted to each time-zone in turn. Gramophone recording would not serve, being too expensive for everyday use, and involving a delay of at least twelve hours while the discs were processed, thus preventing the transmission of topical items.

The only machine at that time capable of providing direct playback was a magnetic recorder of German manufacture. The BBC had shown interest in the original version, an office dictating-machine invented by a Dr. Stille, as early as 1925, but had found its quality inadequate for broadcasting. By 1929, however, Louis Blattner had undertaken exploitation of the machine in this country, had named it the Blattnerphone and had



improved it to the point where the BBC was interested in an operational trial, which began in 1930. The quality of reproduction, particularly the constancy of pitch, was not good enough for music recording, and a typical application was the repetition, in an evening news bulletin, of a speech or running commentary recorded earlier in the day.

The Blattnerphone was the forerunner of the modern tape recorder, in so far as it involved magnetic recording on a tape. The tape, however, was of steel, 0.08 mm thick, and ran at a speed of about 150 centimetres per second, so that a half-hour programme required a massive spool containing nearly three kilometres of tape. Editing was possible, but involved welding or soldering the tapes, whilst any irregularity in the tape surface could damage the recording or play-back heads. Despite these shortcomings, use of the Blattnerphone in the BBC's domestic services gradually increased and the Empire Service made great use of it from the outset.

The Blattnerphone was only one of a large number of different methods attempted in the search for the perfect recording device, but it was not until 1936 that the first tape-recorder called a Magnetophone made its appearance at the German Radio Fair. The first concert recorded by this method was a performance that year by Sir Thomas Beecham, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra .... Meanwhile the BBC stuck to disc recording, on records made of aluminium with a light acetate covering. Near miracles could be achieved in editing with these, by dubbing from one disc to another. At other times a 'jump' cut might be necessary, the engineer making a yellow chalk-mark on the groove to follow, and dropping the tone-arm on to it while the disc was running. Done 'live' this was a nerve-racking business and demanded exquisite sureness of touch.

It cannot be contested that both the British and the Americans lagged far behind the Germans when it came to tape. The actual beginning of the present type of magnetic recording was in 1940, when H.J.von Braunmuhl and H. Weber took out German patent number 743411. It was a pity there was a war on! Not until 1945 did one of the machines fall into Allied hands. Until that time, the BBC contented itself with studio recording and with the use of mobile recording gear for O.B.s and Features, but the cars used to house the gear were the most unsuitable

choice that could have been made. The Humber Pullman, a long, dull, black vehicle, suitable for funerals and little else besides. In fact the BBC bought a second-hand lot which had been lightly used for just such purposes. These ungainly monsters, though roomy enough to contain massive 'E' type recording gear, were not fitted for the job at all, and yet they were sent on long and sometimes urgent journeys. It was as if a hearse were asked to exceed the speed limit.

After the war the BBC installed high-fidelity disc recorders of its own design, but the future of recording was soon seen to lie in the magnetic tape recorder, which had undergone remarkable development in Germany. As early as 1935, a recorder using  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch acetate tape with a ferric oxide coating had been marketed in Germany. Its performance, however, had not been up to broadcast standards. However, workers at the research establishment of the German broadcasting organisation re-discovered the fact (previously known in America and Japan) that both the distortion and the noise level were dramatically reduced if the audio-frequency current magnetizing the tape were augmented at an ultrasonic frequency rather than by the direct current customarily used.

At the end of the war, a limited number of Magnetophone machines were brought to this country; the BBC put a pair into service in the Autumn of 1946, for replaying music recordings obtained from the continent. Other machines were handed over to manufacturers so that British versions could be developed, and in July 1948 EMI lent specimens of their first recorder to the BBC for appraisal and for service trials. Though the verdicts were quite favourable there was a further period of trial and deliberation before the BBC first entrusted the 'repeat' of a live programme to tape, in April 1950.

By 1955, the BBC had 200 static and mobile tape recorders in service, handling 60% of its recordings.



## APPENDIX 19

Giles Cooper (1918-1966) 'Radio Writing' Interview with  
Michael Billington : Plays & Players : December 1965: P10

Billington: "What advantages are there in writing for radio as opposed to other media?"

Cooper: "In radio you can be a perfectionist. In television there are so many things over which you have no control. There's always a race against time. You can't always get the actors you want. Above all, the costs of mounting a play are high. It's generally true to say that the greater the budget for any play, the less regard is paid to the writer. This applies to the Hollywood epic at one end of the scale and the radio play at the other, so the cheapness of putting on a radio play is actually an advantage to the writer. Casting is also easier because West End actors can often fit in radio work between stage performances and, of course, there's the satisfaction of knowing that the listener will come half-way to meet you, whereas television tends to go in one eye and out the other. The only trouble is that the audience for radio drama isn't what it used to be."

Billington: "Bearing this in mind, would you still write for radio if you were starting out as a dramatist in 1965?"

Cooper: "Yes, I think so. If a young writer wants to write plays, he'd be wise to try radio. After all, the main market in television is for series and serials, but there are still plenty of single plays being done on the radio. I will admit, though, it took me a long time to live down the slur of being a radio writer, but this was in the early fifties when I spent a year working in television as a script editor and there was a certain hostility between the two media. Radio hadn't yet recovered from the rather arrogant feeling that it had won the War and television was recruiting people mainly from the film world. Things are better now."

Billington: "Propagandists for radio drama always insist that it can do things no other medium can. Yet some of your own plays have transferred easily from sound to vision. What about Unman, Wittering and Zigo, for instance?"

Cooper: "That was the object lesson in the differences between the two media. The essential point of the play is that there are three

distinct pressures on the hero (a schoolmaster). They come from the boys themselves; the art master; and the wife. Now on television that third pressure had none of the force it did on radio. It had nothing to do with the performance. It was simply that, on radio, one could handle three different strands quite easily and expect the listener to respond, whereas on television the two strands were as much as anyone could absorb. Also, a play that wasn't particularly naturalistic on radio had to be so when done on television."

Billington:" You think plays lose something if transferred from radio?"

Cooper:" They tend to. In another of my plays, Pig in the Middle, I created a hero who was meant to be an Everyman figure. This worked on radio, but on television such a hero would take on the physical characteristics of a particular actor. "

Billington:" What about the limitations of radio drama? Locale has to be established somehow; character can't be indicated by appearance or mannerisms. Do these things worry you? "

Cooper:" Firstly, I can't say that I worry much about setting the scene for the listener. When I worked as a script editor, I used to find this sort of thing very tedious., and such things as jumps in time can usually be covered very simply. In Mathry Beacon, for instance, the passage of nine months is announced by the crying of a new-born baby. This soon tells how much time has passed. As for the other point, character is basically what people say. How they look and the way they smoke a cigarette are really the trappings. Even when I'm writing for the stage or television, I like to leave an actor to build up this side of the character with the director.

There is one limitation I do notice in writing for radio - the fact that you can't use sounds themselves as naturally as you can in a television play. Ordinary small sounds, that is. These are the ones that have to be anchored to something visible."

Billington:" I see what you mean. The rustle of a dress, the moving of an ashtray - they'd sound exaggerated over a radio microphone; but that aside, do you think radio drama can develop any further? Hasn't everything now been tried? "



Cooper: " Well, everything's now been tried in the theatre but that doesn't stop people writing for it, I think there is still a type of play, appealing to the listener's imagination, that works better on radio than elsewhere. One innovation that could happen is for freelance producers to be given a chance. At the moment all BBC plays on sound are done by staff producers. They're very good but the present system doesn't allow ex-radio producers to return for the odd play. "

Billington: " Does the BBC's policy of having a repertory company mean that some actors' voices become almost too well known? "

Cooper: " Not really, no. In fact, some radio actors - Gladys Young was one, Hamilton Dyce is another - have a remarkable understanding of how their voices will actually come out over the microphone. They can subtly vary them according to the character they are playing. I can't say that the knowledge one is writing for a permanent company affects one's approach. "

Billington: " One last point. Your early plays tend towards macabre fantasy, your later ones are more naturalistic. Is this because you've moved away from radio towards television and the theatre? "

Cooper: " That's really easier for the critics to decide. All I can say is that, although some of my radio plays have fanciful stories, in essence their situations are perfectly real. "

## APPENDIX 20

The Art of Radio - Donald McWhinnie: Faber, 1959 : Pp37,38,158-173.  
1953 - Assistant Head of Drama (Sound)

" The radio performance works on the mind in the same way as poetry does; it liberates and evokes. It does not act as a stimulus to direct scenic representation; that would be narrow and fruitless. It makes possible a universe of shape, detail, emotion and idea, which is bound by no inhibiting limitations of space or capacity. In a way it is a bridge between poetry or music and reality; a means of apprehending what is artistically incalculable with one's feet several inches off the ground. Perhaps, in terms which submit to some kind of analysis, poetry is the closest analogy: that which, within a strict creative discipline, sets one most free to cross undreamed-of depths of experience. Which means that the range of possibilities, visual and aural, in the 'blind' medium is restricted only by the writer's own inventiveness and by his poetic insight. Film is every bit as fluid and flexible, because of its techniques of prefabrication and editing, but the very nature of Sound Radio offers the writer a horizon as broad as his own imagination. From a practical standpoint, there are no physical problems of, say, scenery, lighting, sight-lines, transport; aesthetically, its dimensions are incalculable and uncapturable."

P.158

"The most obvious radio form - and the most difficult to manage successfully - is the free fantasy. Obvious, because no medium could be more fluid or flexible; difficult, because these qualities, with their invitation to cast discipline aside, are the most dangerous of temptations to the imaginative writer. If radio fantasy is to succeed artistically it demands at once the subtlest imagination and the most stringent discipline. Giles Cooper's Under the Loofah Tree is an impeccable and apparently effortless example of the best kind of 'free' radio writing. Cooper takes as his basic situation a simple, but potentially comic event: a man having a bath.

In The Dark Tower, Louis MacNeice chose a broader canvas and an ostensibly more serious theme ..... The strength of The Dark



Tower is that, although it is packed with technical invention - indeed it could serve, unaided, as a textbook of radio technique - the trickery is not imposed; rather it springs out of the need of the particular situation, so that in performance we are conscious only of the inevitability of every word. The poet guides us effortlessly through the maze and our understanding is enriched at every turn; the total experience is of a work of art, complete in its own terms .....

In Under Milk Wood Dylan Thomas used yet another technique - a technique which in less poetic and gifted hands has provided us with a great deal of indifferent radio - namely, the impersonal narrator linking a sequence of 'character cameos'; with Thomas's exuberance, wit and zeal inspiring it, it comes up as fresh as paint .....

None of these works is a 'play' in the accepted sense (in spite of the fact that Under Milk Wood has been performed in the theatre), but each offers a special kind of vision to the listener. Each is 'well-made' in the sense that it does not waste words or emotions and works creatively and consistently within its own framework, but none has any relation to the 'well-made play', as we know it in the theatre. It is this very freedom of imaginative potential which has prompted some of the most gifted radio practitioners to turn to other - apparently unpromising - media for source material. Craftesmen such as E.J.King Bull, Henry Reed, Lance Sieveking, John Keir Cross, have found in the novel, for example, a fructifying supply of radio material, in addition to whatever original creative work the medium may have evoked from them".

Quoted on Page 38:

"I heard recently of a child who, having been allowed to listen for the first time to radio, expressed appreciation of what he assumed to be a television performance; when advised by his parents that "in television you see a picture", he replied disarmingly "But I SAW a picture."

.....I believe that generally speaking it is true to say that an image which we have made for ourselves with the help of our imagination will stay with us longer than something merely seen, if only because it is part of us. Words spoken into the ear, highlighted by vocal and musical emphasis, live and breathe, vibrate in the mind for years. Which is not to suggest that we need not use our imagination creatively when we take part in a

visual experience, but simply to say that we are often encouraged not to do so -to assume that what can be seen is sufficient in itself .....

Briefly, then, an imaginative work of art in radio (and, ideally, in television) evokes rather than depicts; it cannot offer the sheer physical release, the social experience of the theatre. What it does offer is far closer to what happens in the most imaginative kind of reading to oneself; a personal experience, lived through by an inner self, seen by an inner eye. How often it succeeds in achieving this is another matter...

Film and Radio share certain technical advantages; they both have magnifying instruments of great power (camera and microphone), both can select their point of focus at any given moment, and as a natural corollary can switch that point with remarkable speed and accuracy; and both have almost unlimited flexibility and range, film because of its cutting and editing techniques, radio because of its appeal to the imagination. Yet with Sound Radio and Television we find another relationship between audience and performer, and although Television is often watched by sizeable groups of people it is in its essence of the same kind as Sound Radio indeed an extension of it. Suddenly the performance comes to you, privately and personally, in your own room. It is designed specifically for you, it is an individual communication from writer to listener. The total audience may be larger than any theatre could possibly accommodate, but it is an audience of individuals or small groups, whose reflexes are individual, not collective.

Television still has echoes of the other, public, media; inevitably, because a considerable act of imagination is necessary to exclude memories of cinema when talking about moving pictures and memories of theatre when watching a continuous visual performance. The great travail of Television is going to be the fight to rid itself of practices and theories which are basically foreign to it (although common to the cinema and the theatre) and to discover its own horizons.

Sound Radio has had, and still has, similar battles, but it also has the advantage of being more patently a world in its own right."



## APPENDIX 21

Louis MacNeice :        Autumn Sequel :    The collected Poems:  
Faber 19

"To work. To my own Office, my own job,  
Not matching pictures but inventing sound,  
Precalculating microphone and knob.

In homage to the human voice. To found  
A castle in the air requires a mint  
Of golden intonations and a mound

Of typescript in the trays. What was in print  
Must take on breath and what was thought be said.  
In the end there was the Word, at first a glint,

Then an illumination overheard  
When the high towers are lit. Such was our aim.....

## APPENDIX 22

Report of the Television Committee 1943 under Lord Hankey:  
H.M.S.O. 1945: Pp 6-7

Reinstatement of the 1939 service in London

14. The television service in Great Britain before the war was the only regular broadcast television service anywhere in the world. It had, however, been in operation for only 2½ years, and was available only in the area of the London station. The service was new, and improvement and development were to be expected; for instance, the quality of picture given by the television receiver was related to a standard of definition of 405-lines. This standard of definition gives a very satisfactory picture (of the order of 8in. by 10in.) in the home, but it is not adequate for the large cinema screen which requires a definition equivalent to a standard of the order of 1,000 lines.

15. Had it not been for the war, developments and progress would doubtless have taken their ordinary course, but the fact of the interruption caused by the war raises the question whether, instead of re-opening the television service on the old basis, the re-opening should be delayed for a sufficient time to give an opportunity for the incorporation of fundamental improvements, such as an advance towards a higher standard of definition.

16. We have reached the conclusion, which is supported by a large majority of our witnesses, that the right course in the existing circumstances is to re-open the television service on the basis of the 405-line system rather than to wait for the development of a new television system as the result of research. The reasons influencing us in reaching this conclusion are as follows:-

(a) The Alexandra Palace television transmissions had by September, 1939, achieved a high degree of reliability and afforded consistently good entertainment value in the home, and it is to be expected that, with more experience coupled with certain minor refinements which it is now possible to introduce, the pre-war system will give still better results. Moreover, many of the receivers on the



market in pre-war days failed to do justice to the signals which were actually transmitted, and there are good reasons for thinking that with transmissions of greater efficiency and the use of receivers of better design and quality, the good entertainment value of the 1939 (405-line) service should soon be surpassed.

b) A good deal of research and development, as well as new studios and other buildings, will be required before a markedly improved service can be put into operation. Owing to war demands on scientific and other staff and on materials it is improbable that much progress could be made in this country on such work before the end of hostilities in Europe, and some years would be likely to elapse before the new service would be available to the public. To leave a gap of some years without any television service would damp interest and seriously retard commercial development of the television industry in this country.

c) The re-establishment of a television service as soon as possible after the war is important from the point of view of preventing the dispersal of the highly specialised staffs (now engaged on war work) who were employed on Television by the British Broadcasting Corporation and the industry in pre-war days. A certain number of men and women who have acquired appropriate experience during the war will no doubt find employment on Television, but they will of course constitute only a fraction of the numbers trained in radio work of one kind or another during the war.

d) It is very desirable that before the introduction of a new and improved system, which will involve novel problems, the operating authority should have an opportunity with the 405-line system to consolidate and develop still further the valuable experience gained before the war on both the technical and programme sides of Television. Moreover, any other course would involve discarding the old television receiving sets still held by the public.

e) It is most important that there should be no avoidable delay in restarting a television service if this country is to hold a leading position in the television field.

17. Our recommendation, therefore, is that the pre-war system of Television on the basis of 405-line definition should be restarted in London (Alexandra Palace) as soon as possible after the cessation of hostilities in Europe. The service could, we believe, be in operation within nine to twelve months of the requisite staff being released.

## APPENDIX 23

Maurice Gorham: Sound and Fury: Twenty-one years in the BBC  
Marshall, 1948. P174

"In Broadcasting House we were all wondering who would get the job of running television this time.....

Gerald Cock had done his job unsparingly and he was a sick and weary man by the time the war came in 1939. I thought that the first man to take charge of television would have the hard battling and the excitement and the second man would have more of the rewards.

All the same when Sir William Haley sent for me and began to discuss my future in the BBC, I had no hesitation in saying that my real interest was television .... Haley asked me why I wanted to go to television and I said that judging by pre-war experience it had all the lift and sparkle that had long passed out of sound broadcasting; it was a new and lively thing free from the stagnation that hung around Broadcasting House. Further, I said that I had never lived by ear alone, and television was to me a far more convincing medium than sound radio. Though I admitted that this was really less a qualification for working in television than a disqualification for working in sound.

I was given the job on November 2nd, 1945. As usual Haley put the position very clearly. I should work direct to the Management as I had done on the Light Programme; that was the main thing. Before the war Gerald Cock had suffered badly from being under the Controller (Programmes); nothing of that sort was to happen again. I was on my own.



## APPENDIX 24

Maurice Gorham: Sound and Fury: Marshall 1948 : Pp181-185

I went up to Alexandra Palace the week after my appointment, for the first time since the war.....

That November trip reminded me powerfully of my first visit there with Gerald himself on a grey November day in 1935. The poor old Palace looked more tumbledown than ever and the television station that lurked in one wing of it had barely got beyond the caretaker stage. It had been abandoned very suddenly in 1939, almost as suddenly as the Mary Celeste; offices left all standing with half-finished letters on the tables and foresaken cups of tea cooling there for two years. It still had rather that atmosphere in 1945.

Television has a remarkable pull on people who have once worked there; both before the war and since, a large proportion of the staff at Alexandra Palace have always stayed there for choice and at the expense of the bigger salaries they could get elsewhere. After the war many Officers had to realise that civilian life was tougher financially than they had ever dreamed but in television we were cheek by jowl with the film industry, and that seemed to be the one place where salaries and expenses had kept ahead of the cost of living and taxation rates. When our television people had to consider whether they should come back to television or take a job outside, the tempting alternative was very often a bigger salary and more tax-free expenses in films.

However, most of them came back as they came out, and I had managed to provide some better-paid jobs. The organisation was not quite the same as before the war. My deputy was to be the Programme Director, and the third member of the direction team was the Chief Executive. Other key positions were filled by Cecil Madden as Programme Organiser, George More O'Ferrall and Mary Adams as Senior Producers in drama and talks, Philip Dorte in charge of Outside Broadcasts and films, Imlay Watts as Studio Production Manager, and Peter Bax in charge of design, which involved not merely designing all scenery and properties but making them and supplying them to the studio staff. All these were pre-war television staff; in fact I myself was about the

only new boy there.

As for the Direction, Jack Knott was doing an excellent job as temporary executive, and when the regular job was finally advertised he got it, but I had as yet no deputy. The obvious person for the job was Denis Johnston, so I wrote off to him in Dublin and asked him whether he would like it if I could get it through. His reply left no doubt that he would so I went ahead.

Denis had been a distinguished figure in the theatre before he joined the BBC; when I first met him he was already the author of *The Moon in the Yellow River* and he had been producer at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. He came to the BBC as a producer in Belfast but his aim was television as soon as he got there. During the war he had been a feature producer and War Reporter - he went through the fighting from the Western Desert to Germany. He had an unrivalled knowledge of theatre and radio as well as television, and I knew him to be a mine of practical good sense as well as being one of the most intelligent people I had ever met. I met with no opposition to his appointment.

The fourth member of my Direction was not on my staff. It has been said that no job in the BBC ever covers quite as much ground as its title implies: the Controller of Talks never controls all talks, or the Controller of Programmes all programmes. That was true, and though I was in charge of the Television Service I was not in charge of all the television staff. Little more than half of the people who worked at Alexandra Palace worked for me. There were house staff belonging to London Area, registry clerks belonging to Secretariat, and various other splinter parties, but the main body was composed of television engineers, and they were part of the Operations and Maintenance Department of the Engineering Division of the BBC.

The top engineer at Alexandra Palace was Douglas Birkinshaw, who had been the BBC's television expert ever since the days of the 30 line studio at Broadcasting House. During the war he had run the great short-wave station at Daventry and now he was back as Superintendent Engineer (Television), still a young man and remarkably keen; a real television enthusiast if ever there was one.

I included him in my direction team because it seemed to



me that in television the programme and the engineering sides had to go hand in hand. In sound broadcasting you know by now just what the engineers can do for you; debatable ground is limited to comparatively small questions over new studios and communications. In television the technical problems had hardly been charted and we were expecting to break new ground all the time, so I thought we should plan jointly with the engineering side rather than think up things we wanted to do and then go to the engineers and find that they could not be done.

It was a good thing to have Douglas Birkinshaw on my Direction but it would have been a better thing to have had him on my staff. For one thing, he was not high enough in his own hierarchy to get television its due. Whereas I could go direct to the Director-General he had to go to the Senior Superintendent Engineer who had other Superintendent Engineers to bother about besides him ....

Television, as a new activity that had not yet got the tools of its trade, needed more weight than this set-up could give, and in practice I myself had often to deal direct with the engineering side.

I met with the greatest friendliness from all the engineers with whom I had to deal, but the set-up on this side proved in practice to be too much like the set-up that I had resisted on the programme side.

Television was fitted into a detailed and elaborate organisation built up for the needs of sound broadcasting, and sound broadcasting had too long a start. Some of the engineering departments were overworked and understaffed, and they could hardly be blamed for shying when everything to do with sound broadcasting was so much more straight-forward and brought so much more obvious results."

## APPENDIX 25

Maurice Gorham : Sound and Fury : Marshall 1948: Pp 224-226

"The whole story of television is to me an alternation of restrictions and triumphs over them, of frustrations and success. We had far more obstacles to cope with than sound broadcasting had had at a similar stage in its evolution but we were constantly showing the way to what television could finally be.

We tackled everything in the way of programmes, and although we had disastrous failures we had as many striking successes in the course of our 28½ hours a week. In spite of the limitations there were constant occasions when you sat up and said, "If this is what vision broadcasting can do now, what a dazzling future it has to come!" And they were not always the big public occasions like the Royal Wedding procession and the Victory Parade.

I remember brilliant studio productions of plays such as Royston Morley's Mourning Becomes Electra; variety productions like Eric Fawcett's all-coloured show at Radiolympia; Algernon Blackwood telling a ghost story; Professor Allibone's illustrated talk on atomic energy, and Bertrand Russell's unaccompanied talk on the future of mankind. There was Bernard Shaw's masterly performance on his ninetieth birthday. This was a world scoop by the way, and we owed it to Denis Johnston's good standing with Shaw. He would not broadcast and would not talk to the newsreels, but he agreed to let us film an interview with him for television, and how beautifully he talked!

I have vivid memories of ballet in the studio and from Covent Garden, of exciting moments in the finals at Wimbledon caught on the television screen, of feature programmes in which the added element of sight transformed techniques that had been fully exploited in the narrower medium of sound.

So far as we could judge our viewers seemed to like what we were giving them, the regular series like Horrabin's News Maps, Manvell's film talks, Harben's cookery, Street's



gardening, Muffin the Mule for children on Sunday afternoons, as well as the high-lights. By the end of 1947 there were over 30,000 sets licensed, and we knew from the trade that people would have bought more if more had been available. The dealers had not begun to encounter sales resistance at all.

In my time at Alexandra Palace I acquired a great admiration for the television staff, who were an invaluable asset to the BBC. As I saw it, Britain's lead in television depended almost entirely upon the people who worked in it. Other countries have better equipment and better studios, but it will be a long time before they can match the collective ability and experience of that staff. It worried me that so many of them were unhappy about their pay and prospects. I was continuously trying to raise grades and pay and make them commensurate with the degree of skill and responsibility that television work involved, but it was slow going. I had constantly to reassure my producers that whatever had been the case before the war, this time Broadcasting House was not hostile to Alexandra Palace, the Management did really want to have a good television service, and television was not the Cinderella of the BBC.

In February 1947 the fuel crisis came down in all its rigour and hit us hard. For a month the station was closed down. The first week or two could be used in maintenance, overhauls, set-building and rehearsals, getting ahead of future schedules instead of always toiling just abreast of them, but after that the atmosphere at Alexandra Palace became very gloomy. It was sad to walk down the corridors and see no lights blazing in the studios, and the staff began to feel chill hands closing around them. It was all too reminiscent of September 1, 1939. However, we got back to our full schedule at the end of April, and normal Conditions of pressure and over-strain soon set in again.

At this time I lost Denis Johnston, my Programme Director and right-hand man. He had never meant to stay in the job more than a year as he wanted to get back to writing and production, but he had made such a success of it that I tried to get him to stay. He was replaced by Cecil McGivern, one

of the BBC's most successful writer-producers of features programmes, who had left two years before to go into films. Denis and I worked very informally, sharing out the stuff as it came in; Cecil had different ideas and we had to do a good deal of settling down. But I admired the tremendous energy and concentration that he brought to the work and this soon earned him the respect and confidence of that rather distrustful staff."



## APPENDIX 26

Maurice Gorham: Sound and Fury: Marshall, 1948: Pp178-9

"There was a big battle to be won before I settled down to doing the television job..... this was the question of relations between television and the producing departments in Broadcasting House, and it was fundamental from my point of view.

Before the war I had warned Gerald Cock that television was safe enough whilst it was still a pioneering enterprise hemmed in by difficulties and lack of resources, but when it grew to be worth taking an interest in, Broadcasting House would move in. There had been various hints of this in views expressed at General Liason meetings; departments such as Drama and Schools were not likely to stick to their last, carry on with sound broadcasting and let television have all the fun exploiting the resources of sight. The first threat of the move-in came as soon as television was to begin again.

In running the television programmes I was quite willing to keep in line with BBC policy and to use the advice of BBC experts in such matters as music, religion, and news, and I had no difficulty in coming to agreement with the Controllers in charge of producing activities as to how this could be done.

The clash came with Basil Nicholls (Chairman of the Co-Ordinating Committee), who held that Val Gielgud as the BBC's Director of Drama, ought to be professionally responsible for television plays, and I would not accept this. I felt very strongly about it. If there is any professional aspect to radio drama it surely consists in skill at presenting plays in sound alone. Television drama is as different from radio drama as radio drama is different from the theatre or the films.

It seemed to me absurd to say that radio-drama experts could take it in their stride. Still less could they be responsible for it from their distant viewpoint in Broadcasting House.

Successive Director-Generals had said that television was to be part of the BBC and there were to be no barriers between it and sound. I was not contesting this; in fact I was very sorry that when the time came we could not do more in the way of arranging exchanges and recruiting our producing staff from radio instead of from stage and films.

But in my view people who wanted to be experts in television would have to come and work in it. They could not just stay in the positions they had earned in sound radio and be responsible for our results.

We argued this from the start to finish and back again, over and over again. I do not think I ever had a tougher struggle over anything in my time at the BBC, but I stuck to my point because I really did not see how I could otherwise set about the job."



## APPENDIX 27

Val Gielgud: Years in a Mirror : Bodley Head, 1964 .P126-28

"From the date of his appointment until his resignation in 1947 Gorham, with an enthusiasm and determination worthy of a better cause, laboured and sorrowed to achieve his own imperium in imperio, to destroy any vestige of Broadcasting House control over the Television Service. He certainly had a hand to play. Unfortunately he consistently overplayed it. I believe that his Irish temperament set him on principle 'agin the Government', no matter what the Government might be. It apparently irked him profoundly that he should be expected to address the Director-General as 'sir'. Also he had gone too far rather too fast. We had been friends and colleagues when we were both under Eric Maschwitz on the Radio Times, of which ultimately he became editor and I preserve pleasant recollections of draught stout and ham rolls consumed in his company at Mooney's in the Strand. But during the war he was given charge of the North American Service, and later of the Light Programme. He was referred to as 'Haley's rocket', and referred to himself as being 'one of the two BBC live wires' the other being Norman Collins. He became opinionated and dictatorial to a degree which made working with him more and more difficult. We clashed a good deal when he was in charge of the Light Programme; first because he did not conceal his intention to Americanise it as far as he was able, a process which I thought both vulgar and stupid; secondly, he insisted on the soap opera as a programme-item because it could be counted on to produce satisfactory listener research figures. These things, no doubt, were in his mind when he refused to have me at Alexandra Palace.

The personal angle is of little importance. What was significant about it was that it was symptomatic of an attitude that basically bedevilled BBC television. I would emphasize at once that Gorham, and those who agreed with him, were by no means entirely to blame. In its early days not even the personality and drive of Gerald Cock could prevent television from being regarded at Broadcasting House as the Cinderella of the BBC.

It was thrust away out of sight. It was neglected. It was starved. Everything possible was done to settle chips on the shoulders of everyone who worked at Alexandra Palace, so that many of them came to think of themselves largely in terms of nuisance value. It was an attitude that incited the Television Service to cry up its wares too soon and too loudly; to tackle subjects like ballet and opera and elaborate full-length plays at a time when both gear and technique had only reached a stage for quite elementary programme-items. In 1939 this Cinderella was loudly proclaiming her presence at the Ball, in spite of the failure of the Fairy Godmother to provide her with the appropriate costume and slippers.

The re-opening of the Service in 1945 was an opportunity to forget such bad old days and start afresh. It might be true that television had little to learn from the successes of, or the experts in, sound. It was certainly true that television could have learned something from the mistakes that had been made in sound. To widen the gulf fixed between Broadcasting House and Alexandra Palace, to establish as a Median and Persian law that practitioners in sound must automatically be both suspect and incompetent, may have seemed a fine gesture of independence to Maurice Gorham, flushed with his new Controllorship which gave him access to the inner councils of the Corporation. At less exalted levels it produced ill-feeling, bad blood, and much misunderstanding. I was to experience the results to my cost, when I ultimately went to Alexandra Palace in 1949. Individualism is a virtue. Rancid individualism can be the devil."



## APPENDIX 28

Memorandum from Sir William Haley - Director-General of the BBC.- to Maurice Gorham - Controller of Television:  
27 April 1945 : BBC Written Archives Centre.

Last Thoughts

Should Television Drama be staffed mainly by producers from outside, or will producers from the present Features and Drama (Sound) be transferred?

There will be a staff of Television Producers separate from sound producers but there will be no artificial barrier preventing sound producers of any kind from being used on or experimenting with television.

Should there be preliminary professional and technical training for television dramatic producers?

There will be adequate time for the training and practising envisaged during the period when we shall be either experimenting on a closed-circuit or radiating a limited service for dealers only, all of which will take place substantially before the public service starts.

Should television plays be performed more than twice?

No.

Should a Television Repertory Company be formed?

The idea of a Television Repertory Company is not so practicable as that of a Sound Repertory Company ... we want to introduce a wide range of visiting talent for the principal roles.

There should be a substantial period of experiment and training in Television Drama before the Service to the public begins, so that foundations can be firmly laid of a new medium, and not an attempt either to give Radio drama eyes or to photograph the Theatre."

## APPENDIX 29

Caroline Lejeune : Observer Newspaper : April 10, 1949 :  
 BBC Written Archives Centre : Press Cuttings File.

"The Year 1949, which marks the legal coming-of-age of the talkies, brings to the talkies a challenge just as real, and just as inescapable, as that which they issued to the silent pictures 21 years ago. The new factor, of course, is Television.

It is the widest folly to underestimate television because it has not fallen on a sleeping world overnight, but stolen into its place by quiet marches. A large proportion of the community has not yet experienced its force, but one has only to study the official figures - or, more simply, look out of a train window in Greater London and observe the tall, slim H-masts springing up beside suburban chimneys - to realise that something has arrived which is capturing the popular imagination at a pace controlled only by technical limitations, and not by conditions of income, taste or class.

At the moment it is true, the audience for television is limited. The BBC is not prepared to guarantee reception beyond a radius of 50-60 miles from Alexandra Palace, although broadcasts have been picked up satisfactorily over much greater distances. But with the opening of the new transmitter at Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham, in the early autumn of this year and of a third station in the north sometime in the following spring, the story will take a new turn. Thousands more families will look-in every night; for looking-in, even more than listening-in, is a group affair. Thousands more people will argue, from eight-thirty until ten as to whether the room lights should be left on or switched off during reception. Thousands more people will say of a play, or a performance, or a visit or an event, "Oh yes, I know all about that. I saw it on television."

How will this fresh enlarged audience affect the quality of the work put out by the BBC? Only very lightly, I expect.



The toy is so new, the relationship of laissez-faire between Alexandra Palace and the home viewer so cordial, that programmes may continue to scramble on for years with all the jolly irresponsibility of the old 2LO. I cannot resist the feeling that the greatest threat to British Television today springs not from any material difficulties, not from indifference, or from competitive entertainment, or lack of space, time and money, but from the over-enthusiasm of its supporters. There is no kindness in pretending because so many wonders of science have been accomplished up there at Wood Green that everything transmitted is a wonder of art. Some of the BBC's television programmes are good; one or two of them are very good; but many of them are terrible.

I am concerned that British television should not be covered from the start by the sort of blanket approval under which the talkies have been encouraged to multiply in sin. Over seventy-five per cent of viewers like everything they see, an attitude which is not conducive to the production of good work. You hear people remark with fervour, "I believe in television." Of course they believe in television: they would be fools to do otherwise. Television is a fact, like Marshall Aid or Atomic Energy. But it is not a religion; and before it can even become an art as lively and minor as the circus or the cinema, it must have rules laid down for it, and limits set upon it. It must learn discipline.

The attitude of complacency among viewers infects Alexandra Palace as well. There are too many people up there, in that monstrous sanctuary on the heights, who are too sure that they are right; and walk with their heads in the clouds, and London sprawling at their feet. One cannot blame them for this feeling. From an isolated stronghold, they have fought a lonely fight. The position is heady. At night, with that enormous mast piercing the sky, and the millions of lights twinkling below; another programme over, brilliant on the studio receiving sets; another bus load of artists packed off to London, and the comfortable silence stealing up the bends of the long hill, a man gets odd delusions of power.

I would not for a moment try to destroy the belief that Alexandra Palace has in itself. I wish there were more of

this spirit at Pinewood and Denham, for it is the confidence that begets living work. But nothing is more unkind than kindness in the formative stages of any art. Some appallingly slipshod work comes out of Alexandra Palace, just as it comes out of the film studios. There are good and bad television programmes/producers, just as there are good and bad film directors, and it does not stimulate the better work to condone the worse.

I recently asked the head of a department at Alexandra Palace how many good producers he employed. He replied, "ten - as many as we have." This judgement, proper perhaps in an employer, could be refuted, at once, by any viewer who uses his brain as well as his eyes while looking-in.

Experience has proved that there are certain producers at Alexandra Palace who are television men to the bone, and others who could be transferred to another department with little loss. To discriminate between these people, to determine what television is trying to do, what it can best do, and how far it succeeds in what it is doing, seems to me a critical job of some urgency; and a job that must be done if a State entertainment service, protected from competition, is not to settle down to a smug triumph of routine."



## APPENDIX 30

Newspapers reviews of Documentary Productions by Duncan Ross:  
Duncan Ross Papers : BBC Written Archives Centre.

Observer: C.A. Lejeune.

"On Easter Monday they wrapped up 'The Course of Justice' series. I find myself reporting this event with mingled feelings. It is always sad when a good programme, like a good book or a good holiday comes to an end; but there is a certain relief, a long gasp of splendid satisfaction, when a fine start is nobly sustained and finishes with a lot in hand and all its colour's flying.

"The Course of Justice" a tricky series dealing with the Law Courts was one of the Broadcasts from Alexandra Palace that never went wrong. It was informed; it was sympathetic; it was amply spaced; and it was television material first and foremost all the time. From the opening scenes of any single instalment we knew that this stuff was 'class'. It belonged to that semi-documentary world in which Britons when they choose to take the trouble can excel. These Britons took the trouble, and if there is any justice at the BBC they will consider the claims of Ian Atkins, the Producer, Duncan Ross, the Writer, and all the scores of Actors who took part in the series when they are handing out next year's awards."

Daily Mail: Peter Black

"Duncan Ross is one of the basic men in television. His name at the head of the credit titles is a guarantee that the programme will carry three distinctions. It will be easy to look at, the characters will be shown with an extraordinary sharp exactness of costume and behaviour, the dialogue will be its essence. All these were present in his Dockland programme..... it was important because it succeeded. He can put into a few sentences his guiding principles, 'You must see a man not a statistic, humanity comes first, the particular subject second. Successful documentary is a matter of getting facts, checking and then driving an imagination through them. Then you cut, cut and cut.' He can compress it all into a sentence. 'Live fully and keep your eyes open.'"

The Statesman:

"Duncan Ross, the writer of The Course of Justice programmes is a master of dialogue stolen from the lips of living people. "

Picture Post:

"Duncan Ross, a Scot who learned his film writing under Carl Mayer, writer of the 'Cabinet of Dr. Caligari'.... Ross has turned to real life subjects like Police Courts and Bloomsbury lodging houses ..... With almost Maupassant observation he puts the detail he has seen into his scripts: the result is an interpretation the art of which is that it looks real."

Yorkshire Post:

"It is in the Department with such writers as Duncan Ross and producers as Gilchrist Calder that the medium is developing more swiftly and more surely than anything else."

Scottish Sunday Express:

"Television's man of the moment, and many think he is the man of the future, is Duncan Ross a 43 year old Scot.... Ross is the only man in Britain who has got anywhere near mastering the technique of producing scripts for this difficult medium.... He has done away with the annoying narration that goes on in radio....Financially attractive offers come regularly from films. He rejects them all. He believes that it is the writer more than the actor, director or producer who is pushing this young medium towards perfection....Others think along similar lines. Cecil McGivern, Head of Television Programmes, has said, 'It will be the writer writing specially for Television who will give it life, excitement, ideas .... who will kick ahead its technique.'"

The Daily Graphic :

"Duncan Ross has just made television history with triumphant conclusion of his magnificent series 'Course of Justice'.....Not only has he secured a viewing figure of 88 per cent (the highest ever achieved) but he has projected the British law as it has never been projected before. The final issue had all the characteristics of its forerunners; authenticity, vivid character, humanity, humour and an almost Galsworthian genius for presenting both sides of the case..Throughout you felt: 'The writer knows his stuff - he's lived it all before putting pen to paper....To this panegyric add the name of producer Ian Atkins who is to Ross what Sullivan was to Gilbert."

Television Weekly:

"Brilliant team work has made the social documentary series 'The Course of Justice' amongst the most successful of all television presentations."



Daily Mail: Peter Black:

"The Course of Justice is as good a documentary as I can recall and I include those of the film industry. What a delight it was to watch a programme which knew what it wanted to say, how to say it - and said it. It had all the virtues; it was slick, professional, objective, sad, amusing, human, brilliantly selective and absorbing. It was a joy to watch the detail of characterisation, dialogue and the skill which was employed to supplement the other two. It illustrated strikingly what can be done when a writer and producer reach a complete harmony of ideas."

News Chronicle:

" Television skilfully produced documentary on the Assizes, last in the Duncan Ross - Ian Atkins series cleverly put the right into the jury box....This revival of one of television's most outstanding productions in which 77 actors were employed and one of the biggest sets ever built covered the huge floor of the main studio.... Ross's dramas will stand as television's finest contribution to progressive society so far."

Sunday Times: Maurice Wiggan:

" This was the shortest most exciting hour of television for months. With Dockland, Ross emerges as a man of the highest value to television. He brought to his task a sharp eye, a fine ear, a humane mild scepticism, a sense of irony, a talent for tenderness. My thanks go to Mr. Ross, to his colleague Mr. Calder and to an excellent cast and cameraman for pleasure and for hope renewed."

Observer: C.A. Lejeune:

"Dockland is a model that should be shown to learners again and again; something as important in the development of a technique as the Griffith close-up or the Eisenstein and Pudovkin frame-cutting. "

Halifax Guardian:

"All honours to that able television man, Duncan Ross, who gave us last Monday an example of a perfect small-screen documentary. I sat glued to the set during the entire time his Dockland characters recreated their lives before me. Ross has, I think, reached perfection in the art of making documentary palatable to the millions. If only he could impart some of his knowledge of camera angles to television's younger producers."

Observer : C.A.Lejeune:

"To anyone who has a keen feeling for television, either as a potential art or as a cogent means of communication one of the most exciting features for many months must have been the one flatly described as Dockland a documentary programme based on the experience of living in the Sailors' Home, Stepney. The writer and producer Duncan Ross, disarms us with the initial statement that he has no story to tell. Whereupon he sits down, beckons a dozen seafaring types into the enchanted ring and, before they recognise the spell that has been cast upon them, has them pouring out a wealth of stories.

The characters in Dockland are played by actors, but only a pedant would insist that this makes the truth they have to tell us less true. The real genius of the programme, the sharp discovery for television, is its positioning. The stories are elicited by questions, and the questioner sets himself right down in the viewer's chair. Each subject in turn comes up to the front of the screen, looks us full in the eyes, and talks to us. This intimate exchange of views, this genuinely confidential intercourse is something I have never seen before on the television screen."



## APPENDIX 31

Kenneth Baily: What is a Documentary Programme? :

Here's Television : Kenneth Baily: Vox Mundi, 1950 : P48-52

"Robert Flaherty, the supreme producer of documentary films, has said, "The future of documentary is with television programmes." From the start of television in this country the documentary programme has been much talked about. The arrival of radio vision invited all kinds of theories and notions about it. There was a lot of talk about "putting real life on the screen." There were conjectures that a television camera, once made mobile enough, would be able to go anywhere to "shoot" life as life is. This would surely beat the films at their own game - or a good part of their game. By some, the great future for television was thought to be in the documentary programme. It may still turn out that way, but, up to now, things have developed along a very different line.

Every programme which has advanced the documentary idea in television has been produced inside the studio. The programmes have been an amalgam of all the artifice of radio, stage and film; and they have received their life not from real people, but from actors. The television documentary programme is, at present, not a radio photograph of life, but an artistic interpretation of life; an interpretation created by prodigious research, imaginative script writing, and the most artful kind of production. One might say that the more theatrical you are in presenting real life on the television screen, the more realistic the thing will appear.

The basic flaw in the original theory was that it did not allow for the limitations of real people trying to re-enact what they do in real life, or trying to talk about their real life jobs before the camera. People have to be trained in the art of appearing natural in a medium which, as soon as it tells a story, becomes dramatic and not merely photographic.

An attempt was made to launch a monthly series of programmes called Searchlight which should reflect some topical features of the times. Ordinary people were put into the studio and, with the help of simple scenic sets, models and pictures, were asked to describe or re-enact their real life circumstances. The first programme was not impressive; the second was withdrawn while in rehearsal and was never broadcast. The scheme was dropped.

To follow the search for the television documentary programme nothing could be better than to look behind the scenes at what went on in the production of the Magistrate's Court series, in 1948. This adventure was begun when the one staff scriptwriter at Alexandra Palace, Duncan Ross, decided to see if a single documentary programme could be devised around the experience of Mr. Claud Mullins, the Metropolitan magistrate, who had then just retired. The notion was to show on the screen not only what happens in a police court, but also what it is that turns people to do criminal acts, and what the judicial system to-day attempts to do in order to remove causes of crime, as well as to punish criminals. Duncan Ross soon discovered that this could not be done adequately in a single feature, and a series of three programmes had to be planned.

Nor was it sufficient for Ross to have to talk with Mr. Mullins, and then go away and write a script. Mr. Mullins could give facts, and to some extent he could reflect the 'feel' a magistrate has about matters concerning his court. Facts, however, rarely breathe life. Facts are made lively by the characters of people, their odd little idiosyncrasies, and the quirks of circumstance made by human relationships. There are also, of course, the qualities which make drama; and what Ross really found himself doing was the writing of three plays, around the facts of real life as he discovered them in Mullins' court.

The danger might be that a writer in this situation should rely too much on his imagination. After all, a play is make-believe. But these programmes were to be documentary, not fiction; the stuff of these plays must be a reporting of what was really going on in the police courts. All the characters, all the lines they would speak, and all the situations they would find themselves in, were to be found only within, and about the perimeter of a real police court. Ross had to do several weeks of research, observation and watching on the spot. He believes that no television documentary story can be produced without this. If he were asked to write a programme about the Covent Garden Market, he would probably go and work there first. If a lorry driver's life on the Great North Road was suggested as the subject for a television programme, Ross would go and spend days and nights in lorries on that road.



A great deal of the treatment of criminals goes on outside the walls of the police court, and wherever it goes on, there Ross went. He spent time with probation officers and psychiatrists. He observed what went on inside a psychiatric clinic. He did research at the Institute for the Scientific Treatment of Delinquency. He studied files of 'cases' and stacks of newspaper cuttings of police court reports - all this as well as attending a London police court several times. The facts he found went into his script; but the personalities and details involved were mixed up, and telescoped, to avoid any reflection on the real persons whose cases he had studied.

Early on, he started co-operating with the producer for the three programmes, Ian Atkins. Ross and Atkins together have since become a team in television, and both believe that team work is essential for good television. Ian Atkins decided to reconstruct Marlborough Street Police Court inside the studio. He went there during the court's sittings, and made detailed notes, not merely of the scene, but also about the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of court ushers, policemen, jailers, lawyers, clerks and defendants. He noticed four different Bibles on the ledge of the dock - the Alexandra Palace 'props' men had to supply four like them. He noticed the glass of water in which the presiding magistrate placed the rose from his lapel. This too became a necessity in dressing his production in the studio. He measured the court, and, with his scenic designer, discussed how it should be exactly reproduced in plywood and paint.

The first of three programmes told the story of a youth - played by Anthony Wager - who got into trouble, first by stealing books, and then by breaking into a cafe for cigarettes. Scenes showed the boy's involvement, with other boys, at a loose end, all of them beginning to be influenced by the 'spiv-mentality' of older lads around them. A meeting with a spiv gave the boy further ideas. His fancy for a girl filled him with grandiose notions about having enough money with which to entertain her. At this stage Ross used a film sequence to give an impression of the boy daydreaming what he would do for the girl if only he had the money to do it. In fact, the boy's arrival in the police court was incidental to the final story of the programme. There was



a scene with the probation officer, showing that the boy came from a broken home, and reporting the unsatisfactory circumstances and influences which had arisen from the situation. Mr. Claud Mullins appeared at the beginning and at the end of the programme, but whenever the story moved to the court an actor played Mullins' part in the magistrate's chair.

In the next programme in this series, a typical day in a magistrate's court was re-enacted, with several charges of varying types up before the magistrate. Court procedure was followed faithfully, and all the cases were credible ones. Though in fact the script was still written as a play, what we saw had the realism of a news film. Again Ian Atkins had been painstaking to get every detail exactly authentic, and Maurice Wiggins, the Evening Standard police courts writer, who visited the studio admittedly to pick faults, could find none to pick. One of the cases shown was that of a young woman who had suddenly 'broken out' into committing thefts of a serious nature. Before that she had led a quiet and blameless life. The magistrate remanded her, because he wanted to know more about her before he judged her. He suggested that reports be obtained on her from a psychiatrist and a doctor.

Ross used the third programme in the series to show what happened to this young woman during the remand. We saw her with the woman probation officer, and being interviewed by a psychiatrist at a clinic. (This sequence included scenes of children being treated by psychiatry). Through the interview at the clinic we learned that her outbreak was largely due to emotional disturbance when her father died, when she was a child, coupled with an unsatisfactory relationship with her mother. By dramatic flashback we were shown the incident which started this girl on the course of thieving.

Duncan Ross followed Magistrate's Court with Elvorelli's another documentary play, this time about a Bloomsbury boarding house, frequented by variety artists. This again was based on an actual establishment which exists near the London University building. Various types of variety and music hall performer were introduced 'off-stage' during a week at the house - those working in London, those passing through on the way to provincial dates, and those not working at all. Stephen McCormack was the producer,



and used a most realistic scenic set - hallway, stairs, cafe, rehearsal room and bedrooms of the boarding house opened out of each other on the studio floor, very much as though the roof had been lifted off the real establishment.

It is along these lines that television documentary programmes appear to be developing. In time, certainly, this kind of programme may be affected by the increasing mobility of the outside television cameras. Already cameras have been put right on the spot at Ford's blast furnaces at Dagenham, at a glass works in Harrow, at the National Physical Laboratory, and on a farm on the outskirts of London. In all these outside telecasts real people were shown going about their real life work. Some combination of this radio-photography of life with the dramatic interpretation of character and circumstance, devised by Duncan Ross, may yet provide the television programme of which Robert Flaherty expects so much."

## APPENDIX 32

Newspaper Reviews of Documentary Productions by Robert Barr:  
Robert Barr Papers.

Daily Mail : Collie Knox (1950)

I am not one of those who think our police are wonderful. They are no more wonderful than you or I. They are, in the main, highly trained, persevering, shrewd, and extremely hard-working men. If I add that they are under-paid and under-housed, I doubt if a police officer exists who will, for once, contradict me.

The vision series War on Crime is timely in this era of the cosh. It depicts - and vividly - the back-breaking, unglamorous toil that goes to solving crimes. Guy Morgan and Percy Hoskins, the writers thereof, know their Scotland Yard backwards, and, with the maximum of effect and the minimum of heroics, entertain and instruct our civic conscience.

The Star: (20.10.51)

Combination of a Television documentary and production by Robert Barr gives me a comfortable feeling of anticipation. Latest, The Case of the Talking Dolls, in the I Made News series, was another in the now long line of television documentary successes. Simply, but, effectively, it told a strange story of wartime espionage in America. The drama flowed easily, smoothly and realistically. And to top it all this true story was parcelled neatly into a half-an-hour as entertaining a 30 minutes as you could wish for.

Daily Graphic (20-10-51)

Television has found a winner in its documentary-drama series, I Made News.

The second, by journalist Percy Hoskins, had more authority than 50 G-men films I have seen.

Evening Standard: George Campey (20-10-51)

If anybody had told me that last night's documentary in the I Made News series was a film made in Hollywood, I should not have been surprised. It was slick and full of mobility. This is the kind of feature, done with a touch of craftsmanship, which puts heart into television programmes.



Daily Sketch: Mark Johns (17. 7. 54)

Seldom has T.V. rendered its public such a service as it did last night with a brilliant expose of mock auctions.

I can imagine a march of seedy-looking gentlemen along Lime Grove this morning with banners saying : "Unfair to Crooks".

Anybody watching Robert Barr's documentary who ever bids again at these shyster sales deserves a mug's reward.

Michael Balfour was really brilliant as the auctioneer giving away trash before making his 'kill' and the whole production with its side-stage commentary was authentic, yet had the dramatic impact of a good play.

Evening Standard (May 1952)

The march of the television documentary, one of the most encouraging trends in recent television, continued last night with the introduction of Pilgrim Street, the six part account of life in a London police station.

Comparisons with the Blue Lamp can be ruled out, even though the author is Jan Read, who wrote the film story. Pilgrim Street is a plain unvarnished tale of what makes a policeman's lot. Last night we saw in the missing child, the stranded foreigner and the petty thief. A commonplace routine which spells no glamour.

There was a casual air of factual honesty about the programme, and that sure touch which viewers have now come to expect in documentaries.

Daily Mail : (J.Stubbs Walker) 24. 4. 51)

Something surprisingly new came to television last night. Producer Robert Barr made a serious attempt to bridge the Hidden Years in the life of Shakespeare.

These missing years fill the period between the dramatist's marriage at the age of 18 to Ann Hathaway and his appearance in the court of James I as a famous playwright.

Robert Barr, backed by the research of Mr. Alan Keen and Mr. Norman Long-Brown put forward a convincing theory.

A likely story of Shakespeare's movements showed that it was probable that for several years he travelled the homes of British nobility as a touring player, using the name of Shakeshaft. The presentation of such a complicated subject bristled with difficulties, but it must be said that Robert Barr put over the story convincingly and without letting interest in his involved subject flag.

Manchester Daily Dispatch : (22. 9. 54)

Something of producer-writer Robert Barr's background as a crime reporter showed through his treatment of



The Medical Officer of Health documentary last night. The tell-tale craters of smallpox are now unfamiliar disfigurements. Modern medical officers may face the case only once in their career. Barr's story was of that once - in a small industrial town where one victim could make 34 contacts in an evening. Many medical people and social workers are involved in controlling the epidemic, but responsibility falls on the MOH. Barr treated him as the chief detective, and turned the hunt for victims and source-of-infection into a murder investigation. With this formula he could easily have erred by using false effects to increase the tension. Instead he sustained interest with his mastery of detail - patients' subdued gossiping as the lens tracked past them - and a concise, dispassionate linking report from the world outside. Features of this quality are a public service. "

The Sunday Times: Maurice Wiggin : (13. 4. 52)

" To my mind Dangerous Drugs ranks with Miss Caryl Doncaster's brilliant essay in the documentary 'Rising Twenties' as an example of what television can do to reassure critics, who, like me, are apt to complain that, since television is undoubtedly habit-forming, it had better be a good habit. The strength of Dangerous Drugs lay in this, that the factual material had been assimilated and integrated into a dramatic form that had its own unity. In any medium, this is the salvation of the factual feature. The perfectly efficient factual feature stands on its own feet as entertainment with a life of its own independent of its message. The least hint of the schoolroom, the intrusion of the pontifical or patronising 'official' voice, ruins the illusion and sets up an immediate prickly resistance in at least one mind (mine). The documentary writer and producer should be artists. (Propagandists can be artists.) On this showing, Mr. Robert Barr and Dr. Cormack Swann, who between them were responsible for Dangerous Drugs can lay claim to that proud and perilous title."

News Chronicle : (16. 4. 52)

"Television's small but efficient documentaries section is looking ahead. Lack of money, writers and staff is holding it back. But Robert Barr's recent feature on Dangerous Drugs helped lift television documentary to a status which assured it will never be short of one thing - co-operation from outside authorities.

Now the War Office and Scotland Yard have offered to help. National Service men in action will be seen in Caryl Doncaster's story of the call-up next in her series, The Rising Twenties.

The Yard is helping Jan Read (story-writer of the Blue Lamp film) with a series on life in a London police



station.....the hard pressed production staff of four - Barr, Doncaster, W.Farquarson-Small and Stephen McCormack - have worked wonders with what the viewing public feared would be 'the dull side' of television.

Outside writers and directors will be brought in to boost production, including men from the disbanding Crown Film Unit.

All this, plus freedom from the over-riding authority of Broadcasting House, should produce better documentaries."

British Medical Journal: September 1952

"The television programme Family Doctor which was broadcast on September 3, seems to have been generally enjoyed by the public and welcomed by most of the professional critics. This second documentary programme on a medical subject was written by Cormac Swan (assistant editor of the BMA's popular health magazine Family Doctor) and Robert Barr, who also produced it.....a workmanlike job, marked by its sincerity and authenticity, the whole script, from start to finish, was essentially based on facts. As entertainment Family Doctor sustained its interest throughout."

The Sunday Times (1950)

"What television can do in the way of feature programmes was shown on the same night in the second of the series War on Crime. This story of Scotland Yard tracking the murderer of an unknown woman was the best documentary I have seen on television.....It was well acted and well-written but I feel the chief credit goes to producer Robert Barr, who succeeded in breaking away from the confined atmosphere that still cribs and cabins so many television shows. He has clearly profited by his sojourn with the documentary film-makers, not least in the neatness with which he 'covered' his inserts of silent film."

News Chronicle:(17.7.54)

"Mock Auction, which knocked down the racket in a Robert Barr documentary. This is among the most blunt exposures T.V. has yet screened. Barr's half-hour programme was a model of honest but entertaining reporting, with fairground scenes augmented by the voice of someone who knew the business inside out - the voice of tactful and painstaking research. Barr's information came from an anonymous informer who may soon be out of business, for the programme had complete authority."

Daily Mail (May 1952)

"Television continues to build up a first class name for itself in the presentation of documentary programmes. The worst part of this particular form of entertainment is in its name, the very word 'documentary' carries with it an

idea of education. The programmes are presented with a sense of drama which, in practically every case, enables them to be classified as first class entertainment.

Tonight in Pilgrim Street, we have a new approach.

This, the first of a series of six, is based on fact and has been written after months of research. It deals with the activities which surround a normal London police station, showing the kind of thing - the inconsequential and often pathetic incidents - on which the life of the ordinary policeman is based.

The police station in the new series is called Pilgrim Street and all the work of the police station staff will be shown."



## APPENDIX 33

Transcript of a tape-recorded interview by this writer with  
Robert Barr : April 1973

"When I went to Alexandra Palace they were still taking the dust sheets off the cameras and the equipment just as it had been wrapped up at the start of the war when television closed down in 1939. I went to Alexandra Palace more as a writer, but in fact it had to be as a Producer because there were no such beings as just writers in television at this time, and we all started on re-training, though there were one or two producers about who had been in television before the war. It had been seven years since the Service closed down - there had to be promotions, so some of these elderly producers were sent into Administration and one or two of the original cameramen and studio managers, Ian Atkins was one, became Producers, and we just started it up all over again.

I had expected to go back to Fleet Street when the War ended, but the idea of working in Television soon struck me as being more practical. You see after the war a Labour Government got in and paper rationing was in force for at least four years so it was nonsense to go back to Newspapers because all the other reporters who had been called-up were coming back and with only four pages to fill there just wasn't enough space for everyone who wanted to write.

So I took the Television job when it was offered for two reasons:- 1. After radio I was sure that you wouldn't have to do all that research in television, because if you wanted to do, for example, a machine gun on radio, you had to say all the detail in the dialogue, whilst all you had to do in Television was set up a camera and let the actor get on with it - the viewers could see for themselves - one simple stage direction 'He fires machine gun' not all that explanation. So I thought what a relief not to have to put in all the dialogue, between the dialogue which carries the picture. Secondly, it offered a chance to write which I badly needed.

As I'd just come back from Germany the first two things I did were in fact based on things I had learned over there - like, Germany Under Control - which wasn't only the first

documentary written for television, but the first of its kind in the whole world. This involved going back there and taking film with German film units - and this was followed by a film on the Berlin Blockade. Gradually the whole documentary thing began slowly to evolve from these beginnings.

As a producer, Cecil Madden, gave me a couple of stage plays to do first of all. It was Cecil who made up the schedules and told everybody what they had to do. As a member of the Television Service staff I would be required to do at least a show a day. Not a play because that had to be rehearsed. We went on-the-air twice daily, once in the afternoon then again in the evening. So in the morning you would do a cookery demonstration which would last, maybe, half-an-hour then you'd stop whilst a show was done from Studio A, whilst you got on with setting up your next show which was, maybe, Starlight which included a singer and a pianist - and for these shows as Producer you had to do all your captions, camera movements. Remember too, these were the days before turret lenses and zooms. Our cameras had a single fixed wide-angle lens and if you wanted a close-up you had to go in and when you were, you could only come out, you couldn't cut to another camera, because your camera that was in C.U. would be in shot. So there was always this terrible thing that as you made this great dramatic movement into close-up you had always to follow it with an anti-climax and pull out. Unless, of course, you were to cut to another scene, so you quickly learnt to cut to say, the pianist's fingers, whilst the other camera came out, but for this you needed three cameras and only one studio had three cameras, and even these weren't always in full working order. It was a regular thing for a camera to go down during a show and most often then not during a play when you had all your camera movements plotted, then all hell would break loose. At this time I did Big Band shows - 50 pieces and skipping rope acts in the front - and I don't know a note of music, but I would see who was lifting something up to his mouth and cut to him. The golden rule was always cut to the point where there's interest, and hold it for a count of three then away.



I remember on Picture Page an occasion when a woman was showing a champion dog from Crufts, and two puppies. Whilst Wynford was talking to the woman about the dogs he suddenly said "Oh look at the little one", and I said "Alright Camera Two cut to the little one" only to see that it had just been sick and was licking it up, but you just had to stay with it for a count of three, as if you had meant it all the time, and then cut to something else. I didn't forgive Wynford for some time for that!

All this time I was doing documentaries all on my own - writing them and producing them and in today's terms directing them too., and they were becoming more and more popular and one of the Senior Staff men said that we must do more of these programmes so who else could I find to help me. Well there was a lad at this time called Stephen McCormack, who was a Studio Manager and he had an idea for doing a magazine programme called "London Town" - interviews around London and so on. Well it needed a front man and I thought of Richard Dimbleby as we had been War Correspondents together. I believe that this was the first time that Richard had appeared on television. London Town was a great success and so I was building a department unknowingly because I was looking after Stephen McCormack and at the time I said why don't we do another programme called About Britain - using Richard and the same set-up and we'll get two editors - the one for London Town was Peter Hunt - who later started This Week with Caryl Doncaster on ITV - and for the second editor I got a young lad who spoke two languages because I could see this thing becoming 'About Europe' and his name was Stephen Hearst.

Cecil McGivern had come into Television by now and it was he who introduced Caryl Doncaster and passed her on to me, and she had lots of ideas - and the marvellous thing about working for the BBC is that you're not paying them, so you're always willing to give them a chance - so Caryl joined us.

All this time I was working non-stop, writing and producing roughly a show a month which included casting it, rehearsing, and putting it on, and all the rest of the stuff I was doing over my shoulder.

This is really the point at which Duncan Ross appears.

I knew him years ago in Glasgow where he had been a young cinema manager - later he got a job with Paul Rotha as a film editor; by the way Rotha was, and still is, a brilliant editor, but certainly not a producer - well Duncan found himself out of a job and expressed an interest in working in television. So I arranged to meet him one day for coffee, and as I was leaving Alexandra Palace on my way to see him, I stopped to look at the notice board and there to my surprise was an advertisement for a "writer in television". Mind you, McGivern had never mentioned this appointment to me.

However, I met Ross and asked him if he was sure he wanted to work for the BBC and he said 'yes' so I said well make a note of the number on this internal advertisement, which I don't really think you can apply for, but have a go. So Duncan duly wrote in, and mentioned that he had been working with Rotha, and McGivern who thought Rotha was the greatest, sent for me and said "I've got a marvellous writer for you, I've managed to get him from Rotha, it's Duncan Ross!" Well, he got the job, but he'd really never written anything much before in his life and here he was given the job of writer in television by McGivern. But in time he developed into a very good one, but he was always very very slow; his research was impeccable, but you know, if you count up the number of scripts he wrote in all the years he was at the BBC they won't work out to more than one a year - God, it's got to be good, it just can't be bad. One a year! I was doing as many as two a week at this time, and I was both producing and directing.

Now came this question of one show a week, which McGivern had seen operating in America, and it was now that I brought Gil Calder off the Studio Floor and put him with Duncan Ross, and Gil never forgave me for that, but he was fortunately soon to team up with Ian Atkins which left Gil free to join Colin Morris a little later on. Ian and Duncan complemented each other and he was really the only one who was able to work so closely on Duncan's scripts, because normally he wouldn't have a word or even a comma changed without his express permission.

All this time the department is growing as you can see. There's the drama-documentaries which I and Caryl Doncaster, Gil Calder and Duncan Ross are doing. Then there were the



magazine programmes I've mentioned already - and Norman Swallow joins us here from Manchester because he wants to do documentary. He proposes a news magazine programme called 'Special Enquiry' and for this Bob Reid was engaged as anchor man, and as it grew and got more powerful we got a director for Norman called Tony de Lotbinière. So you can see, we've now got Norman, Bob and Tony in that corner, Stephen Hearst, McCormack and Dimbleby in their corner, Caryl, Duncan, Gil and me in our corner.

I started to press Cecil McGivern for more film around now. At the start of documentary we had no film at all. Then slowly we got a little but it had to be library footage. This was when I got in touch with Dorte who was in charge of film and supplying me with clips for my programmes. Well library film was fine whilst it was new but very soon people got tired of the same shot of London Bridge, especially when the same bus kept crossing it week after week, anytime someone was in that location. So I asked for permission to send a man out to film the sequences we required. So off he went and when he came back invariably we found what he got was wrong. So next I had to get permission to go out personally and direct it myself, and in this way, little by little we were getting all the time nearer to film., and it was the same story for Caryl who also wanted to go out and shoot her own material too. Of course, the film unit created hell because we were not supposed to know anything about film - only they know that, but gradually things changed and today, as you know, the director always directs his own film sequences, but in the first place we had to fight hard for that right.

It was through the film controversy that John Read came to the BBC and was able to work entirely on film mainly on art subjects and artists like Sutherland and Moore.

Altogether by now we were a big department numbering nearly twenty producers.

As I've explained in the first instance working for the Service we did a bit of everything and in consequence got to know everyone, but little by little we began to specialise, each of us taking an area like Talks, Documentary, Current Affairs, that sort of thing, but all under the same roof. As it grew into a larger and larger department McGivern decided that it should have its own Head of Department. This was the third time

that this had been decided and as before I said I did not want the job. So when a notice went up on the board I paid no attention to it. However, McGivern sent for me and said, "We put a notice on the board for a Head of Documentary." I said "Oh did you?", and he said, "You know damn well we did." I said, "When did you ever mention it to me?" He said "Didn't I?, well I see we've got all the applications in and you haven't applied yourself." I said, "That's right, I haven't." He said, "Why not?" and I said, "I've been running the Documentary Department since the start, surely you know by now how I run it. If that's what you want, you don't put an advertisement on the board. If it's not what you want then, of course, you put an advertisement on the board and you look for someone else. I took this to be your intention, so I didn't embarrass you by applying." "No," he said, "you misunderstand me, that advertisement was meant for you." "Well," I said, "I haven't applied so that's that. Now get on with it."

Well they went through the usual business of seeing all the people but McGivern wouldn't accept any of them and quite a number of television producers had applied for the job.

So the notice went up again about six months later and this time McGivern sent for me and told me that the notice had gone up and I was to apply. I told him I wouldn't for precisely the same reasons as before. If he approved of the way I was running the department then there was no need to advertise, if not, then look for someone else.

This time they drew up another short list and interviewed yet again but without success. Then McGivern informed me that I was to be appointed Acting Head until they could find the right man, because I wouldn't accept the post.

Well I felt that this could drag on for years and if I wasn't to be Head I did at least want to be free of the administration to be a Producer. So I set a time limit of six months, after which time if they hadn't found a Head they could count me out. McGivern said "You can't dictate to the BBC like that", but I told him I had just done it!

So they searched and searched but without success. Then I suggested John Grierson, who in fact was quite interested but



only as a part-time job - one week a month in fact, but they didn't like the idea of a Head of Department being on a part-time basis. It may have been this suggestion of mine which sparked off an idea in McGivern's mind because a short time after this he said to me "We've got Rotha!" Well frankly I knew that Rotha wasn't suited for the job, but McGivern had sent for Duncan Ross and Duncan who had once worked for Rotha naturally liked the idea of his coming to the BBC and gave his full support to the idea. So Rotha arrived in due course to take up his appointment in 1953.

Just before this I had managed to achieve something of which I was rather proud. A small matter but nevertheless it meant a lot to the Documentary team. What I had done was in fact to save a sum of money which would allow each producer working for me, once a year, to buy a script and if he so wished to tear it up! You see believe me that was a luxury we could never afford on our budget. If you bought a script you had to produce it no matter how bad it was - or you had to break your heart putting it right, and we had some very bad scripts produced at times because they had been bought and there was no way of writing them off. Once they were bought, they were scheduled - given a number, a studio, design and so on, and there was no way of pulling them back except by sheer desertion. With the money I had saved there was the chance to remedy that situation. At that time a script rarely cost more than £100 - £80 for your first, £90 your second and then between £95-£100 after that. My fund was around £800 when Rotha took office but I'm sorry to say it didn't help with dud scripts.

As soon as he arrived I gave him my office, my secretary, my filing system and that was that. Then I put all my efforts into being a Producer, and I thought that was the end of it."

Robert Barr's recollection of the end of the Documentary Department is as follows:-

"After Paul Rotha had been at the BBC for a few months McGivern sent for me and told me that he would like me to attend the monthly planning meetings. I said, "Instead of Paul?" He said "No, with him." Apparently they needed my help again to run

the Department. So there I was, back at square one, but without the title of Head of the Department. The very thing that I had wanted to avoid all along.

By now Commercial Television was upon us and practically all the Department felt that they wanted to leave; these included McCormack, Doncaster, Peter Hunt and John Oxley. Then I resigned too, though not to go to Commercial Television, though I had several tempting offers believe me.

I told George Barnes what the situation was like now and left it at that. Then about four weeks later I heard that Rotha had been given the push. Things had got so bad that the BBC had decided to split up the Department, sending some of the staff to Drama and the rest to Talks. That way there was no longer a big enough Department for such a big man as Rotha to run - and he left.

George Barnes - Director of the Television Service - said to me a little while later, "You got rid of Rotha didn't you?" "Yes," I said, "but I had to burn the house down to get rid of the tenant." But he agreed that it had to be done.

Well that was the end of the old documentary department. I was away from the BBC for the next two years from 1955. I joined an advertising agency as Head of their television department though I did continue, very sensibly as it happens, to write and produce a certain number of programmes each year for the BBC."

Barr's conclusions:-

"Documentary as a Department mushroomed because it attracted such diverse talents, but in a way that was its undoing, too many people doing too many things, unlike the early days when we all did a little of everything and no one really specialised in Film, or Art, Talks, Drama or Documentary.

It was a marvellous big department rather like a huge tanker with little tugs fussing around it. The Drama tug, the Talks tug, the Film tug. The mistake George Barnes made was to imagine that this was a very big thing, yet when you went up and looked through the porthole there was nothing inside, and you



blamed its size for this., but it wasn't a huge thing at all it was a whole crowd of enthusiasts who met occasionally, as individuals, in the pub next door and exchanged ideas and opinions and then went about their work. So it broke up when Commercial Television came along and just before that there was Paul Rotha! Everyone in the Department - except perhaps Duncan Ross - realised that this was the end of the free and easy era. All I had done over the years was hold the reins and give any advice I was asked for. I never once said, "I'm the Boss" and I never went to anyone and said "pick up that paper from the parade ground."

Remember it was a Government decision that the BBC must make available any member of its staff who wished to go to Commercial Television. So many of them jumped at the generous contracts they were offered in most cases 50% more.

It was then that they realised that the Department was folding up - though we were more a group with talent than a department by now. So Administration acted quickly and disposed of what remained.

Once part of the group went into ITV to get it off the ground - Stephen McCormack put the first day of ITV on the air - and Peter Hunt went and John Oxley and Caryl and then me, that was it. The end!"

## APPENDIX 34

Transcript of a tape-recorded interview by the Writer with  
Paul Rotha : August 1973

"It was certainly not in my mind at all to go to the BBC in the fifties - and I was very surprised to be 'phoned up one day by Cecil McGivern - whom I knew slightly but not well - who was then Controller of Television programmes - to say that they had decided to form a Documentary Department which they had not done officially before - and would I be interested in becoming Head of this unit.

I said that I would be, but I'd like to know more about the idea and as I was just on the point of leaving for Mexico to make a film for UNESCO - which meant I couldn't consider doing anything else for the next six months - McGivern said that he would set up a special interview board as he said they were so keen to have me.

Well I went to this board - McGivern was in the Chair and the usual group of BBC bureaucrats, certainly not creative people. Cecil said, "Paul we want you first of all because of your great knowledge of film which we have not got here." They then agreed to keep the post open until I returned from my film-making.

I hadn't been in Mexico more than a few days when there came a telegram from McGivern saying, "BBC will pay your return air trip London - if you will return for a further interview." This was quite impossible as I was all set to start filming two hundred and fifty miles North-West of Mexico City. So I simply replied, "Delighted by your generous offer but cannot accept. Will be in touch as soon as I return to England."

I did get in touch on my return and I was given the job. I will always remember, and this is what is so important, Cecil McGivern maintained, "It's your film experience and knowledge of documentary that we are really interested in." He went on to say what an excellent group they already had on staff, which indeed they had. So a Documentary Department was set up, but.... almost immediately the first thing that happened, very much to my surprise, was that McGivern said to me "Paul I want you to use as little film as possible." I said, "But I thought you



appointed me to the job because I was a film man." "Yes," he said, "But you see we must watch costs and if we make a programme in the studio all the studio charges go as overheads, but if we use film it has to go outside because we only have a very small film servicing department here, with no laboratory processing of our own. We have to buy the film stock and pay union rates for the job which we don't normally do, so please use as little film as possible."

I immediately felt that I had handcuffs on before I even had a chance to get started. Well I agreed to have a go and anyway I rather liked the girls and boys of the unit. Those I remember particularly are Robin Whitworth, my production manager. He organised the schedule and the services., Bob Barr, a splendid writer whose work was highly successful., Caryl Doncaster - also a very good writer., Norman Swallow who hit out on a line of his own called Special Enquiry which was a programme done partly on film and partly live in the studio. Stephen McCormack who did a travelogue About Britain; John Read (Sir Herbert Read's son) who made Art films and who came under my Department, and, of course, Duncan Ross - another very good writer indeed.

Colin Morris was someone I brought in later and I'll explain how in a minute.

Michael Barry was Head of Drama at this time but I had very little to do with him because we tried to keep Documentary separate from Drama. Separate that is, with the exception of this fact, as I had to use the studio rather than work on film we tried to "dramatise" (particularly Bob and Caryl) our subjects so that we could play them in the studio against studio backgrounds which was really the only way of overcoming the problem of the lack of film.

The only other way, and this was where my film knowledge came in handy, was to think where there existed film material - stock library footage - which could be welded to the new idea.

Now when Special Enquiry was ended - through no decision of mine - I had to come up with something for Norman Swallow to do and as I knew that the United Nations had a large library of film much of which had not been used, I thought up the idea for a series of twelve programmes which would be films about the U.N.'s Agencies Work throughout the world using as much as 95% of 'library' film stock, which we would not have to pay for. The



series was called The World is Ours and each programme had a separate title.

The team I've mentioned - and there were several others too - were extremely loyal, and immensely hard working, and I have no criticisms to make of any of them. When it was decided to dissolve my unit no one was more upset than they were, because they were so proud of themselves and their achievements rather like the Crown Film Unit during the War, or come to that the GPO Unit long before the War.

You see, week after week, Documentary came second in the audience ratings - News Reels being first - and always above Drama which annoyed Michael Barry - and everyone in my Unit was terribly proud of this success.

You see, here's a way, an example, of the sort of scraping of the barrel which went on all the time - I had always to think of ways of getting material without having to pay for it. I thought up the idea of an European Magazine and through my contacts I got France, Italy, West Germany and Holland to collaborate. They would shoot an agreed item in each country on shall we say, Housing or Public Health - anyway always a social problem of one sort or another. They would pay for this and send the film to London. We would then shoot an item for them so that we interchanged all the way around., and I made up the final programme in London. I did the same thing with all the Commonwealth countries too, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, but it all fell down not through lack of co-operation or collaboration but you see, if you have all this film coming into a small department without editing facilities, because we were simply 'production', it had to be passed on to an editor who was already working on four or five other programmes, so the stuff was shoddily edited and quite naturally it died a natural death as did the European project.

I tried over and over again to get a small film section for the Documentary Unit because none of my staff had any knowledge of film-making. They were going out almost as amateurs to direct and I, who had all the experience, couldn't go with them because I was stuck behind a desk vetting scripts and heaven knows what! - and I found myself in the humiliating position of having to tell them how to be film directors. All they knew about was how to make television programmes and its not the same thing, not by a long way, but I never succeeded



in getting my way. The Film Department was grossly over-worked as a consequence because as a 'service' department everyone had the right to draw on it.

One thing that Cecil McGivern did do for the Department was to give me a floating fund of £1500 a year to employ outside writers to develop scripts and ideas, and I had the freedom to spend this on writers from outside the BBC and that's how I first got hold of Colin Morris, Arthur Swinson and one or two others, and I commissioned them to write scripts for our Department which was a really great help because you see if one of my staff had to write a script and direct a programme etc., as they had to in fact at the rate of one a month, it was pretty hard going, and that with a very limited budget as well. Getting one or two scripts written outside helped relieve the pressure enormously.

What I did dislike very much about the BBC whilst I was there was the internal politics of the place and the interference which came from above over programmes. I remember a Special Enquiry under Norman Swallow which was to deal with the state of British Railways. There was a lot of complaints by the public and in the press about the dirty state of carriages and stations, the lateness of trains and so on. Knowing the BBC's great 'impartiality' and the putting of both sides in a dispute I went to see the PRO of British Railways whom I knew. I told him we were going to do a programme on the Railways and told him that I wanted him to have his say in the matter and thus ensure fairness to both sides. He agreed, on one condition, that he be allowed to vet the script. I said, I'm sorry no, but he would just have to trust to my sense of fair play. Eventually he agreed and willingly gave the go-ahead.

So on our very tight film budget Swallow and his team started filming at Liverpool Street Station. Two days later McGivern 'phoned to tell me that we must cancel the Railways programme. I said "What do you mean, we can't cancel it we've already spent two days filming and besides there isn't time now to write a new script for this month's programme." "well," he said, "You'll just have to put out an old film instead." The reason behind this decision I found out later, was that there was a General connected with the BBC who was also a senior person in British Railways - that's just one example of the 'politics'



and interference one was up against and there was a lot more I can tell you.

Of course the real attraction for me in taking this job was that Television had, and certainly still has, an enormous access to audiences which is very much what we wanted for our social documentaries. Far larger than for a film in a cinema where it might take nine months or more to circulate, and of course it could get as large an audience in one night on television. So I was prepared to sacrifice the technical side, good photography and so on, which one does even to this day, for the simple reason that I wanted to get to that enormous audience.

Secondly I wanted very much to build up a unit once again. I'd abandoned my old one - as a result of the Central Office of Information's interference - I'd gone independent for a while and then I saw that here in the BBC TV Documentary Department was a nucleus of creative people whom I could work with - though at the time of course I had no idea of the internal workings of the BBC. Had I, the result may have been very different.

I also recognised the tremendous international distribution that Television could get through film and through its exports overseas, but, alas, I got no support for this idea; they were only at that time concerned with the UK market.

I like to think that without the work of our Unit you might not have your Cathy Come Home, or, Edna's today. Plays of social comment like these are still the best things in television in my opinion still, and its interesting to ask how much they are due to the initiative which we started. Of course, it has developed and come a long way since that time. We did not have the technical facilities for one thing which would have enabled us to turn in a Cathy - for one thing those plays were done on film, which, remember, I wasn't allowed to use!

Drama then cost very little because it was all done in the studio and went on overheads unlike film costs. I had around 10½ hours of programmes every seven days which was heavy going for such a small department. Remember though we didn't call ourselves a department - the BBC did - we were a 'Unit' like the old film-making days in the GPO and there wasn't a comparable unit working in England at that time or anywhere else for that matter. We were unique.



But to be honest I don't like studios and never have. You can't get the 'feeling' in a studio in the way that you can on location, but what could we do. The essence of film-making is in the editing room, in 'live' television you do your 'cutting' on-air and that leaves you no chance of retrieving your mistakes. I didn't care much for that.

In those days we used to put the credits at the end because if the audience realised that we had used actors they would not accept it as a truthful documentary. However, we got very realistic performances out of our cast by using little-known performers who really did look the part. Michael Barry was always rather envious of this.

My time with the BBC lasted from May 1953 until May 1955 and then it was all wound up by the Director, George Barnes. He told me bluntly that they had decided not to renew my contract and to dissolve the Documentary Department. When I asked for an explanation he said, "Rotha, the trouble with you, is that you know far too much about film and not nearly enough about television." I reminded him that I had been offered the job in the first place because of my knowledge of film and not television.

My own feeling why the Department was dissolved is partly that the BBC did not like to see growing up in its midst a self-contained unit, very successful and very loyal to itself and one which didn't work with any other departments. This kind of loyalty just didn't exist elsewhere either in Drama, Light Entertainment or in Talks. Actually 'Talks' under Grace Wyndham Goldie were rather worried that some of my Documentary people were encroaching on her territory. Well we certainly weren't doing 'Talks' but we were tackling Public Affairs - very successfully. I'm inclined to think that Mrs. Wyndham Goldie may well have had a lot to do with our dissolution. It was a very sad day for all concerned."

## APPENDIX 35

D.G. Bridson : 'Television' : Prospero and Ariel : Gollancz, 1971.

Head of Television Documentary (p. 161)

"In 1951 the position of Head of Television Documentaries was advertised. I was surprised that it had not automatically been offered to Gilliam, even though he might have declined to accept it. McGivern and Gilliam were the two most influential members of the Appointments Board. Friendly as we had always been McGivern made it clear enough that he was no more anxious to have me working for him than he was to have Gilliam himself. A year later Paul Rotha was appointed."

Television (P. 243)

"So far as they were concerned (the new men in television) any recruit from radio represented a potential threat to their own promotion, and they were bitterly resentful of the fact that a number of senior television appointments had recently been filled by radio personnel. To them, radio represented the enemy, against which they tended to protect themselves by encouraging the theory that the two media were irreconcilable. Training in radio, they held, was an automatic bar towards any understanding of camera work. Complete separation of the two services was something for which they worked and prayed, and their distrust of the BBC itself was almost more pronounced than their distrust of the ITV. Many a radio man before me had been faced by this hostility, and more than a few had found it operating against them."



## APPENDIX 36

Rayner Heppenstall : Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man:  
Peter Owen, 1969. P63-64

"Leslie Stokes had been in Features Department at the time of my arrival, and indeed I had had a little to do with him before the war, after John Pudney's departure. Cecil McGivern, as I said earlier, was also in Features, but already on the point of departure at the time of my arrival. By 1952 he was Controller of Television Programmes, under George Barnes, who had become Director of Television. Myself, I was not much tempted by television, but some of my immediate colleagues were. Among them, very soon after television started up again, it became an accepted view that sound Broadcasting was, of all possible fields of recruitment to television, the least favoured.

Experience in the cinema was a natural qualification, but it was commonly stated that experience in sound broadcasting was a positive disqualification and that Alexandra Palace would rather have people with no experience whatever.

There was a phase during which a few people from Features went to television on six-month attachments, from which, after six months, they returned, having got nowhere. Louis MacNeice went. Nesta Pain went. So did one or two others. Val Gielgud and Laurence Gilliam both went. Both returned, though Val, as I seem to remember, was for a while theoretically in charge of all BBC Drama, both sound and television. I don't know just what either had planned for himself, but some who were more in his confidence than I was have told me since his death that Laurence's disappointment in television was the bitterest experience of his career, indeed of his life. Even at the time, it was said that the opposition to television recruitment from sound (and specifically, from Features) came mainly from McGivern, who had been a Features man and to that extent was Laurence's creature.

## APPENDIX 37

Transcript of a tape-recorded interview by this writer with  
Norman Swallow : August 1973

"I used to produce a 45-60 minute programme a fortnight and some of these were dramatised-documentaries - e.g. The Brontes, Mrs. Gaskell, Gladstone - and I also wrote plays on documentary themes set against realistic backgrounds. I did one on Coalmining set in a Durham village. I spent a month talking to people up there, then I wrote a fictional script but one which nevertheless was based on facts that I'd researched.

Of course, we had enormous freedom as Producers in those days. It was John Salt Head of North Region, a marvellous man like Gilliam, who encouraged me to first do these features and plays, and talking with him I was probably greatly encouraged to write them in dramatised form. Mind you as a boy I had grown up with radio Features and been very impressed with the work of men like Geoffrey Bridson and one was aware of inheriting what he had achieved in this respect. Though remember recording on disc and editing were both very clumsy in those days but one was inheriting this great tradition of radio documentary which in itself was very exciting.

I came into Television in 1949 by a fluke really because I just had not seen any, you couldn't get it in Manchester then at all, but my Secretary told me of an advertisement for a vacancy in the Talks Department (Mary Adams was Head then) - there was, as you know, no Documentary Department at that time. At my Board (interview) I startled everyone when they began to ask me what I thought of their programmes by saying, "I can't tell you because I haven't seen any of them." Actually I was at an advantage here because I could dodge the difficult questions. I think it was Cecil McGivern, who was on the Board with Mary Adams, who gave me the job, and Laurence Gilliam talking with Cecil helped too. Incidentally the first time I heard the famous McGivern radio feature Junction X was as a repeat in 1947. I was away in the war when he was at his peak.

Looking back now, one has to remember that at that time Radio Producers just did not want to work in Television.



There was no competition, so it was easy for me to get in because there was no one else applying. They all thought Television a minority thing, which of course at that time it was; that it had no future; and the really sad thing is that really the best creative people in Gilliam's Department (Radio Features) just didn't ever try to get into Television; - more fool they! But I got in just in time whilst it was still easy. A few years later and it might have been a very different story.

I worked with Mary Adams in Talks then for about three years, and we had one tiny studio in Alexandra Palace, very little rehearsal time and as film cameras were scarce then you had to do pretty well everything in the studio. You relied very much on diagrams and photographs and people talking, but remember the reasons for this were technical and certainly not of our own choosing. We thought of ways around the problems. From Talks I moved into Documentary, as it was now called, under Paul Rotha and stayed there for two years before moving back into Talks when Documentary was broken up. I believe that I was the second BBC Current Affairs Producer to be appointed. Grace Wyndham Goldie was the first but she soon needed some more help for a series she was then doing called I believe World Survey. The overseas part was introduced by Christopher Mayhew and the Home Affairs part was introduced by Graham Hutton, and as I was the second producer I got the second part of this weekly series to look after. This meant in fact a programme a fortnight as I alternated with Mrs. Goldie.

Also started by Mary Adams was a series called Special Enquiry - which was a monthly report on social problems. The first one, about the Glasgow slums. The idea was that we would work with the BBC Regions, Cardiff, Glasgow, Bristol etc., and go around the country using the local Features man as co-producer. A.P. Lee was the Features Producer in Glasgow hence the 'slums' - and it was in its time a kind of landmark in its way because television hadn't done this kind of thing before and it was a great success. Then we did Unemployment in Wales - but it was a poor programme. Then we did problems of Farming in the West of England, and then a programme from the Midlands called Has Britain a Colour Bar? - which in 1953 was really a revolutionary



thing to have said or even suggested, and Renee Cutforth was the local reporter. The format for Special Enquiry was to have Robert Reid - features editor of the News Chronicle and a Yorkshire journalist from Bradford - in Lime Grove introducing and then we would hand over to a reporter on the spot, which in fact was a filmed insert. Then we'd come back to Reid for the studio discussion at the end. This particular series ran from 1952-1957. We were very much influenced then by the magazine Picture Post and by Edward R. Murrow's television programme in the States called See It Now. I'd watched a lot of his programmes and been very impressed. Nothing we were doing in television at the time seemed to measure up to this at all. McGivern wanted to do an investigatory Current Affairs programme and put me onto Special Enquiry and I chose Robert Reid, a tough reporter, who, coming from Bradford was not a BBC 'voice' but much more on the side of the audience, the oppressed and the victims, than of the establishment. He had been Head of BBC News in the North before coming to London and the News Chronicle, and he was free-lance for us in his spare time. The film reports (35mm mute) were usually about 20 minutes in length and the whole programme done live lasted around 45 minutes. It began as I've said in Talks, but when Paul Rotha arrived and I went to Documentary he inherited the programme - and the Colour Bar one was in fact done under him. I also got all the film effort I needed without any bother, unlike Paul who always wanted to make complete films as programmes, which we do now, but which then was out of the question.

The next thing I did with Rotha was The World is Ours with the United Nations about once a quarter. We took a different Agency of the U.N. - World Health, Unesco, etc. - and made this complete series on film which may well have been the first documentary series to be made entirely on film.- but largely due to Paul's efforts.

Tony de Lotbinière, who worked on Special Enquiry and directed the film sequences at the beginning when I had no experience of film - he was a Film Editor before that - he and I worked as a team for six or seven years doing these two programmes. Special Enquiry every month and The World is Ours every Quarter. Which is the kind of output nobody achieves nowadays!



In 1963 Norman Swallow left the BBC and went to Granada Television and it was there that he and Denis Mitchell made the very first documentaries on video-tape.

'The reason why that was possible was that Granada had more Outside Broadcast crews than they could use. In those days they were providing programmes Monday to Friday and the weekends were covered by A.B.C. They didn't have therefore to do either Sport on Saturday or Religion on Sunday - which after all is the main use of O.B.s, so they had more crews and more men than they could deploy and when Denis and I came to them they actually begged us to do something with these crews because they didn't know what to do with them. (The BBC were in a completely opposite position). Add to this the fact that Granada had just perfected the way to edit, electronically, video-tape (the first to do so in this country) we immediately launched a week's experiment. Granada rented a house near Manchester which we loaded with gear, cameras, lights, mics etc., and this experiment later became the basis of a programme called The Entertainers which Mitchell produced and John McGrath directed. It was about a theatrical digs where the 'entertainers' who are playing Manchester are staying. It was all in one location which is essential because an O.B. isn't very flexible. This 'experiment' succeeded very well and as the O.B.s and crews were still available we did several more.

Although The Entertainers was the first to be made it was not the first to be shown because it was banned by the ITA because it had a 'strip' scene in it - one of the girls living in the house!

The one that I produced, Wedding on a Saturday, in Yorkshire was the second documentary to be made on video-tape in this country and the first to be shown. We were the only producers at Granada who would agree to use the O.Bs. On Wedding we recorded about 30 hours of material and I had a crew of twenty men for a total of three weeks, which is very expensive but it was ours for the asking. Of that thirty hours we reduced down to 3 or 4 hours and then edited that to 45 minutes. The electronic editing facility which Granada engineers had developed was really very efficient indeed. So the coincidence of the O.B. vans, electronic editing, and our enthusiasm for video, really paved the way for these dramatised documentaries. In all we did about

seven of them and they were a great success, but today the idea is a dead duck. No-one has done one since, partly I suppose because its too expensive having a twenty-man crew about. All those documentaries were unscripted though we usually went into production with a 'shot sequence' worked out. On Wedding I wrote about six pages setting out what I hoped each sequence would achieve but, of course, I had no idea what people were going to say when we started recording. In the end I made 365 edits in the 45 minute programme!

The advantages of video-tape over film (and remember both Denis Mitchell and I were working in 16mm film also at this time) were that you could shoot continuously for an hour and play back your recordings immediately - and if things looked bad you could start straight away to re-record. In other words you could see your 'rushes' there and then. The other advantage with video is that you can have three or more cameras set up and cut and mix smoothly from one to another without interrupting the flow of the action. You've not got to keep setting up the camera for each new angle that's required, and in terms of raw material its far cheaper than film because you simply wipe clean what you don't use. So in Wedding we wiped the 29 hours and fifteen minutes and kept the 45 minutes of our programme. The main advantage as far as Denis and I were concerned was in getting people to talk. To talk for sixty minutes uninterrupted as you can with tape is far better than film where you have to change the magazine every ten minutes and that, psychologically, means starting the conversation all over again. With V.T. you can forget the first fifteen minutes but on film, that's a roll and a half and that's money!

On tape then we both felt we got people talking far more naturally and honestly and also ironically though an electronic camera is bigger than your 16mm sound camera, it makes no distracting noise and it doesn't have to be re-loaded as I've explained, so the person you are talking to is far less aware of it and can talk simply and directly to the viewer - no 'Scene One, Take One, crash! - about it, so we felt we got far more out of people. Right from the start both Denis and I have



been totally against the narrator-interviewer in documentary, and even my most recent television programmes like The World of Liberace still follow that basic philosophy illustrated by Wedding on a Saturday and even my early radio documentaries, no interviewer-narrator - let the people speak. I did the same thing in the studio when we were 'live'. I had housewives and coalminers speaking straight to camera, saying their piece, but no interviewer. It was quite a risk to take but it always came off. In Current Affairs programmes like Panorama on which I worked for a number of years, its different, you need your professional journalist reporter. Not in documentary, in my opinion!

Later Swallow wrote in a letter (31.8. 73)

'What I didn't mention, when we talked together, was our constant contact in the 1950s with those who were making documentaries outside of television; Denis Mitchell and I were particularly close to Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz. We saw all their films and they most of ours (I remember that Denis and I ran three or four for them one evening and we all went out to eat, drink and talk afterwards; on another occasion I addressed a meeting at the NFT, chaired by Karel, at which both 'sides' met in a stimulating discussion). I think you can assume that we ourselves saw all their films; what we shared was an interest in similar subject-matter and what we did whenever we met was to compare verbal notes. We do it still, come to that.'

## APPENDIX 38

Kenneth Baily : Cecil McGivern, Programme Head BBC Television Service : Here's Television : Kenneth Baily : Vox Mundi, 1950  
Pp 70-73

Inevitably, in the BBC's system of organisation, considerable power is given to a handful of men whose names never appear among the programme credits, and are never announced at the microphone. These are the controllers and programme heads. In television a great deal of the responsibility for what you see, and when you see it, rests on Cecil McGivern, whose official title is Head of Television Programmes. He is Number Two in the Alexandra Palace hierarchy. While Norman Collins gives the Television Service its broad guidance, and has the responsibility for planning its development, with all the administrative and supply problems this involves, McGivern is concerned with the day to day implementation of the agreed programme policy. On him rests the onus of seeing that every kind of television programme is not only of good quality, but, if humanly possible, is contributing to a continuing improvement in standards.

It is because he has a vehement belief that the present limitations of premises and equipment must never serve as an excuse for shoddy production work, that he is possibly the hardest man to please in British broadcasting. Inherently a sensitive man, of artistic talent, he is perhaps most sensitive toward any signs of complacency. Either because he honestly believes it, or maybe sometimes because he finds it good tactics, he is forever denouncing as not good enough programmes which, in the circumstances, might sometimes be regarded as miracles of television production. With this is allied an intense belief in television qua television. Basic to the decisions he takes is his faith that television must develop its own special technique, and, in particular spheres, must devise new forms of entertainment and instruction. This makes him ruthless toward the hundred and one programme ideas always being thrown at him by people who may be capable enough of scoring successes in sound radio, in films or on the stage. For him television must fight its own fight with its own material, and in the process it shall create writers, producers, and to some extent artists, who shall be supremely adroit in television work, whatever their other capacities they may have for work in different spheres



of the entertainment business.

His job is a trying one, composed of resistance and encouragement; resistance to the several easy ways out which present themselves, often when time is pressing; resistance to phoney ideas; resistance to valid enough stories of difficulties and frustrations getting in the way of a programme project; and encouragement on those rare occasions when, by some programme, television has leapt forward, or has discovered a creator with the television touch. He has to inspire the ingenuity which will make good television bricks out of very little straw. He has to press relentlessly for ever more and more straw. He has to strike a balance between providing programmes which are known to be thoroughly 'safe' as good family entertainment, and those which risk experiment with untried goods. The detailed work, the memoranda, the interviews, the business luncheons and dinners, the meetings, the programmes planning conferences, the attendance at rehearsals, the amount of viewing all this involves cannot be got into normal office hours, and Cecil McGivern rarely leaves Alexandra Palace until the evening transmission has closed down. His wife has long reconciled herself to being a 'television widow'.

This is the job. What have been the influences in making the man who has risked much in taking it on?

Forty-two years ago Cecil McGivern was born on upper Tyneside. He left Durham University with his B.A. degree, though his main memory of 'varsity days' is of his presidency of the University Dramatic Society. During his teens he had produced amateur dramatics, once taking a company on tour for Sunday shows - in which he placated the Lord's Day Observance Society by having a choir sing hymns in the intervals. Some of his first earnings were garnered as a professional producer to amateur dramatic societies and as a violinist in a number of dance bands in the North-East. He tried to get into films, and was offered a job of reading scenarios at three pounds a week, which he turned down. He tried to get into journalism, and was told by the editor of the local evening newspaper to try something else.

Feeling the pinch, he had to take up schoolmastering. For six years he taught history by day, and in the evenings and at week-ends careered all over the North-East acting and producing in

repertory companies. It was one of those shows which the Director of the BBC's local studios in Newcastle saw, and as a result asked McGivern to join his producing staff in the studios. A colleague in that set-up was Jan Bussell, who has since been a television producer, and is now establishing himself as a pillar of the television Children's Hour. There was also a BBC engineer about the Newcastle studios, whom he was to meet again as Assistant Engineer-in-Charge at Alexandra Palace. For a year he was transferred to the BBC Manchester staff. Then the BBC gave Newcastle a more important place in its scheme of regional broadcasting, and called McGivern back to the city as Chief of the BBC in the North-East.

In the early months of the war McGivern was considered a key man for continuing wartime broadcasting and was brought to London to join the features and documentary staff at Broadcasting House. He had seen no television; and now Alexandra Palace was closed for the duration, but sound radio in war gave him an opportunity to develop a form of radio documentary which became a highlight of British broadcasting. He devised, researched for, wrote and produced such radio features as The Harbour Called Mulberry, Radar, Junction X, Bombers Over Germany, and the wartime Christmas hook-ups. In the early days of peace Cecil McGivern decided to resign from the BBC and turn his attention to films. He got a job in a film company in the Rank combine, as a screen writer and story editor. He was not to be there long. Television was opening up. He had contributed to the film of Great Expectations and to Blanche Fury, when the call came to him from 'the ultimate form of radio.'

The BBC offered him a job in television, under Maurice Gorham, then Controller of the service. At the same time two good offers of film work were before him. He decided on television, but could not leave his film work for three months. During that period he spent the daytime at Pinewood film studios, and every night at Broadcasting House in a viewing room studying television on the screen.

With Norman Collins, he has organised the Alexandra Palace staff into programme departments - Drama, Light Entertainment,



Outside Broadcasts, Talks-Features, Films, Documentaries and Music. Heads to each were appointed, and producers work directly to their Head. Though a great deal of daily contact goes on between McGivern and the department Heads, there are occasions when he is not satisfied with anything but direct contact with a producer on the job. In consequence there is a stream of staff in and out of his room in the Alexandra Palace tower. "Whatever we achieve in television," he once told me, "it is done by hard work, prayer and miracles."

## APPENDIX 39

Norman Collins: Here's Television : Kenneth Baily:  
Vox Mundi, 1950. P.70

"The drive, tenacity and stamina of this 41-year old novelist-executive comes from French-Huguenot stock on his father's side, and Welsh farming stock on his mother's. His childhood home was dedicated to the arts, and at eight he began to write. He produced the inevitable school magazine, and on leaving school at eighteen he got a job at the Oxford University Press., but there was to be no dawdling; within two years he was at the News Chronicle, as assistant literary editor. At 21 he wrote a survey of the English novel. At 23 he joined Victor Gollancz's publishing firm, where, between heavy desk work and business trips to America, he wrote a novel under an assumed name, sent it in to Gollancz's and had the fun of seeing them accept it. Touring provincial bookseller's, he wrote a novel about commercial travellers; reading a book about the fauna of the East Indies, he wrote a novel about Penang. Reading some more books, this time about South America, he wrote a novel about that land, and for it was, to his surprise, elected Honorary Vice-President of the Bolivian Geographical Society. The war came and his BBC career had started.

He is still writing novels. Having viewed the evening's television programme in his home up to about half past ten, he takes to an armchair with pen and paper and gets on with his current one, going to bed at one. He gets up at seven, and is at his desk in the Alexandra Palace tower at nine."



## APPENDIX 40

Biographies : BBC Television Annual (1953) Odhams Press.

George Barnes.

Was made Director of Television in 1950. He is forty-eight and was originally intended for the Navy, being educated at the Royal Naval Colleges, Osborne and Dartmouth, and at King's College, Cambridge. Returned to Dartmouth as an assistant master, but later decided to take up writing and joined the Cambridge University Press. He joined the BBC staff as an assistant in Sound radio's Talks Department and within six years was made Director of Talks; there followed appointments as Head of the Third Programme and as Director of the Spoken Word.

Michael Barry

Though Head of Television Drama - since 1950 - still finds time to return to the studios as a producer, in which capacity he shone brilliantly for many years. He has also written plays for television. Forty-three years old, Michael Barry originally trained for an agricultural career, but instead of taking up this he became a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. Held a number of production jobs in repertory theatres up and down the country. Has directed films. Made television history in 1951 by producing the first religious programmes on television, the Epilogues.

S.J.de Lotbinière

Became Head of Television Outside Broadcasting in 1952. Previously he had been Head of Sound-Radio O.B.s as well, with an assistant head for television. Now he has complete charge of the mobile cameras, and the future of televised sport and outdoor events and occasions rests with him. Lotbinière joined the BBC in 1932, having previously practised at the Bar after an Eton and Cambridge education. He became an outside broadcasts commentator. During the war he held a number of important BBC jobs - Assistant Controller of the Home Service, Regional Director at Bristol, Director of Empire Programmes, BBC Representative in Canada - becoming

Director of Outside Broadcasts in 1945.

### TALKS

Mary Adams, as Head of Television Talks, has charge of those demonstration and informative features which are not dramatised-documentary programmes. Has been in the BBC since 1930, all the time associated with informational broadcasting. After Newham College, Cambridge, she spent four years producing sound-radio talks, joining the television staff at the very beginning of the Service, in 1936. During the war was for a short period Director of Home Intelligence at the Ministry of Information, and then produced overseas programmes for the BBC.

### Talks Producer

Grace Wyndham Goldie, responsible for Christopher Mayhew's foreign affairs programmes, is a graduate of Somerville College, Oxford, and late drama critic of The Listener; was also television critic in that journal for two years before the war. Has been a BBC sound-radio talks producer, being responsible for presenting many eminent people at the microphone, including the late George Bernard Shaw. Broke new ground in television talks programmes with such features as International Commentary. Is married to Wyndham Goldie the actor.

### Norman Swallow

Produces programmes about Current Affairs at home. He left Keeble College, Oxford, after taking honours degree in Modern History, to join the Army in 1941. Served throughout the war, though occasionally writing in periodicals, mainly as a literary critic. Joined BBC North Region in 1946 as a feature producer, transferring to London for Television in 1950.

### FILM

Philip Dorté is Head of Television's growing Film Department and came to Television from Gaumont-British. His first job was as Television Outside Broadcasts Manager. Served as a signals officer during the war, being three times mentioned in dispatches and attaining the rank of Group Captain in R.A.F.V.R. Was awarded the OBE (Military). Returned to TV as Outside Broadcasts and Film Supervisor, and appointed



Head of Television Films in 1949. Has been to America to study Television, particularly in regard to newsreels.

#### DRAMA PRODUCER.

Ian Atkins, who directed The Three Hostages serial, was trained in the film industry, which he entered as a cameraman just as talkies were beginning. Was stage-manager to his father, Robert Atkins, at Regents Park Open-Air Theatre, and later played small parts for such producers as John Gielgud and Komisarjevsky. Joined Television in 1939 as a studio manager. After the war his first job in television was to handle the televising of his father's production of As you Like It by the Regent's Park Company.

#### DOCUMENTARY PRODUCERS.

Robert Barr directed the Pilgrim Street series of documentaries and has contributed several other outstanding documentary programmes, especially on crime and its detection. Had a varied career in Scotland and Fleet Street as a reporter, and joined the BBC from the Daily Mail. First BBC job was as sound-radio script writer. Became a radio war correspondent. Three days before the final German capitulation he was injured and flown back to England. Became a TV Producer in 1946.

Caryl Doncaster, at thirty, was responsible for the outstanding series on The Rising Twenties. After training at Bedford College and London University, she took a social science course at the London School of Economics. Then worked with a concern developing film strips for schools. Is married to TV drama producer Harold Clayton.

Stephen McCormack produces the popular London Town and About Britain programmes, having pioneered the all-but-undetectable marriage of filmed scenes to live ones. Joined BBC as a TV studio manager in 1946. His training had been in stage management with the Prince Littler commercial-entertainment concern. The war put him in the Irish Guards and he produced the first pantomime ever presented in that regiment. Was later posted to India and was two years with British Forces Radio in the Far East, originating broadcast messages from the troops to their homes.

W. Farquharson-Small produced Current Release, the series of film "trailer" programmes by which the film industry allowed glimpses of new films to reach viewers' homes. Has been in the BBC since 1938, producing features and drama for sound radio in the West Country and Scotland. Began his career as an artist and has been a stage manager, scenic-set designer and director of colour films.

(Above biographies taken from the Television Annual for 1953)



## APPENDIX 41 A

John Swift : Adventure in Vision : John Lehmann Ltd (London) 1950:  
 'The Man with a Flower in his Mouth' Pp 46/152

'It is amusing to recall that an attempt was made in July 1930 to televise a short play - Pirandello's The Man with a Flower in his Mouth - chosen for its suitability in view of the limited resources at the producer's disposal. Lance Sieveking's services were recruited as producer, Sydney A. Moseley entered into the spirit of the experiment as assistant, and the cast of three were Gladys Young, Earle Gray and Lionel Millard. Val Gielgud was to have taken part but fell ill at the last moment. The distinguished artist C.R.W. Nevison, was persuaded to paint four canvases to be used as 'settings' and an improvised theatre was built. George Inns, radio producer of Ignorance is Bliss was then an 'effects' boy of sixteen. His job was to manipulate the primitive roller caption and to share with Brian Michie the onerous task of putting fresh needles in the gramophone soundbox when necessary.

For the first time a producer came up against the problem of make-up which for some unaccountable reason does not appear to have seriously exercised anyone's ingenuity up to now. Make-up, it was felt, could do much to improve the quality of the image on the screen, and after much rehearsal with greasepaints, chiefly blue, brown and yellow, it was found that an exaggerated form of film make-up did improve facial reproduction. The face was painted yellow, the lips and below the eyes blue, and there was a strengthening of the lines of the nose with streaks of blue. It was not a pretty sight off stage. The size and range of the field in which the producer worked were not extensive, being represented by the head-and-shoulders picture of the actor sitting in front of the transmitter and, alternately taking his or her place, items of scenery or captions or inanimate objects of about the same size and seen at the same distance. In this brave effort, a member of the cast began the dialogue as he was seen on the screen. He continued as he was faded out of vision and in his place came a small setting to create the scenic illusion. Occasionally the screen showed an expressive view of a pair of hands resting on a table or holding a tumbler as the dialogue continued. The gestures and changing expression of face were frequently visible, which was unfortunately more than one

could say for some of Nevison's 'scenery' though at one time it was possible to detect plainly a glass of mint frappe with straws projecting from it.

The Man with a Flower in his Mouth could still be only an essentially radio version accompanied by what might be termed 'establishing' pictures. It was impressionistic rather than realistic. Nevertheless, it was the first step towards television's maturity as an art medium.

"Television may not be an art, but it can claim to be an art form. It uses and blends all we know of the theatre, cinema, music, news and education plus all the allied arts and crafts, and serves them all up through the air. Moreover, television has an excitement, a lack of horizons that will make new reputations for artists, authors and producers. Some people ask where television drama is going, whether it aims to be a photographed stage play, a competitor to the film or an illustrated broadcast. The truth probably belongs somewhere between them all..... "

I am quoting Cecil Madden, writing in the BBC Quarterly. He goes on: ".....Perhaps its (television's) closest affinity is with broadcasting, but the television writer cannot use the easy radio devices of effects and a 'music bridge' - the whirring of propellers and some oriental music to signify that the special agent has whisked himself off to darkest Shanghai, or sirens hooting in the night and a crumpled matchbox to suggest that the Inevitable has hit a submerged iceberg. Above all, scripts specially written for the medium will be needed, and the chance to experiment."



## APPENDIX 41 B

The Underground Murder Mystery.

by

J. Bissell Thomas.A Play for Television.

Transmitted 19. 1. 37

Repeated 27. 2. 37

"The scene is laid in an underground railway station. Three people are sitting on the station bench, waiting for the last train which is due in another fifteen minutes - a young man reading a paper - a beautiful girl - and a drugged or drunken man."

Quote from script (Page two)

Man "Look here. It would be so much more amusing if we talked instead of reading the paper.

Girl Why not.

Man It's rather a thrilling situation isn't it? Here we are total strangers being thrown together on a bench in the underground in the middle of the night - in another ten minutes the last train will have whirled both of us off and we shall never see each other again. But just at the moment there is nothing so important to you or me as each other.

Girl Haven't you forgotten our sodden friend on the other side of you?

Man Oh, the old soak doesn't matter - don't mind him.

Girl Do you really find it thrilling? Two ordinary, commonplace people waiting for a train.

Man How dare you say we're commonplace? I deny it. You may be Miss Jones of Pimlico, but for God's sake don't tell me. Just for these ten minutes you're a woman of mystery - capable of anything - beautiful - desperate to corner - fatal to love.

Girl I had no idea I looked such a sinister figure.

Man Oh, but you do - you do. Are you on the films?.....

By page nine - the final page of this quarto script - the Man has accused the Girl of murdering the Drunk with the hypodermic syringe which the girl has just collected

from an all-night chemists - her Mother needs a refill -

Girl For God's sake don't make such a scene on the Underground - there'll be headlines in the papers about us and then we'll find the man has committed suicide and you'll be made the most complete laughing stock.

Man Now I ask you - does a man come to an Underground Station to commit suicide? No he does not - he stays neatly in his bed or in the gas stove or something.

Girl You can't possibly tell a thing like that without the facts - He may be a drug addict and has given himself an overdose - it often happens. Sound of tube train.

Man Oh rot.

Girl Listen! There's the train now. The Man takes a better grip of her.

Man Don't think you're going to escape from me in the confusion because you're not.

Girl (struggling to get away) Let me go you brute - take your hands off me.

Noise of train is louder and the train comes into the station. The man and the girl struggle together. The dead man staggers to his feet stands swaying about for a fraction of a second, and then reels towards the train. They both become conscious of this astonishing fact at the same time and fall apart, and as they gaze open-mouthed at the place where the corpse lay, the last train moves out of the station.

Note: First TV play - specially written for the medium - happens to be about crime and drugs!



## APPENDIX 41 C

The following list of documentary plays is taken from the files of the BBC TV Script Unit Library.

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>TRANSMISSION</u>
After the Crash	Wilfred Greatorrex.	13. 4. 61
The Air Traffic Controller.	John Whitney.	16.10. 58
Alias	Robert Barr.	3.12. 48
April the First	Robert Barr	1. 4. 47
Armed Robbery	Robert Barr	26. 6. 47
Course of Justice	Duncan Ross	53
The Barrier	Stephen Grenfell	28. 2. 57
Private Investigator (series)	Arthur Swinson	59
Beginners Please	Leonard Cottrell	2. 6. 60
Black Furrow	Elaine Morgan	4. 3. 58
Black Spot	Derek Wellman	13. 4. 60
The Bloodless Arena	John Elliot	23. 5. 57
Body Found	John Prebble	26. 2. 59
British Justice	Jenifer Wayne	29. 9. 47
The Brittle Bond	Colin Morris	17. 6. 58
Canada Day	John Knight/ Alvin Rakoff	1. 7. 55
The Case Before You (Series: Prod.Elwyn Jones)	John Whitney/ Bellman.	6. 7. 59
The Case of Helvig Delbo	Robert Barr	22. 7. 47
The Challenge	Leonard Cottrell	7. 1. 58
Confidence Tricks	Robert Barr	4.11. 46
Crime Report	Michael Gilbert	14. 8. 58
The Cross and the Arrow	(Albert Maltz) - (Adapt. R.Barr)	6.10. 50
The Cruelty Man	Arthur Swinson	20. 6. 57
Epidemic	Robert Barr	26. 1. 61
The Family Doctor	Robert Barr	3. 9. 52
Fireground	Duncan Ross	16. 7. 59
First Novel	Leonard Cottrell	2. 8. 56
Flying Ambulance	Robert Barr	11. 9. 58
The Golden Egg	John Elliot	20. 5. 58
Germany Under Control.	Robert Barr	18. 9. 46

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>TRANSMISSION</u>
The Hidden Years.	Robert Barr.	23. 4. 51
I Want to be an Actor.	Robert Barr	6.10. 46
I Want to be a Chorus Girl	Robert Barr	21. 3. 47
I Want to be a Doctor	Michael Barry	3.11. 47
Incident at Echo Six	Troy Kennedy Martin	9.12.58
The Invaders	Leonard Cottrell	15. 8. 57
It's Your Money They're After.	Robert Barr	17. 2. 48
The Interrogation (Jacks & Knaves Series).	Colin Morris	23.11. 61
The Mastermind (2)	Colin Morris	16.11. 61
Great Art Robbery (3)	Colin Morris	30.11. 61
It was Doing Nothing (4)	Colin Morris	7.12. 61
The Lock Ness Monster	Duncan Ross	25. 9. 51
Loneliness	Colin Morris	1. 4. 58
Man at the Door (Series of 4)	Allan Prior	7. 1. 60
A Man from the Sun	John Elliot	8.11. 56
Medico	Robert Barr	7. 1. 59
Mock Auction	Robert Barr	16. 7. 54
Moonstrike (No.1) (Series of 27 - different writers throughout).		
The Net	Wilfred Greatorrex	21. 9. 61
New Editor (Series : You Take Over)	Bellman/Whitney	23.10. 58
Night Call (not transmitted)	Arthur Swinson	2. 5. 61
On the Road	Alan White/John Elliot	9. 2. 60
Our Mr.Ambler	Whitney/Bellman	1. 8. 61
Outbreak	John Irving	22. 3. 56
Outside	Whitney/Bellman	19. 2. 59
Point of Return	John Prebble	28. 7. 60
Portrait of Man	Nesta Pain	5. 1. 60
The Property in Question	Arthur Swinson	15. 5. 60
Quiet Revolution	Colin Morris	21. 6. 56
Result of an Accident	Nesta Pain.	22. 1. 59
The Road to Carey Street.	Arthur Swinson	10.11. 60
Rock Bottom	Colin Morris	15.10. 57
Roundabout	John Elliot	12. 5. 59
Scotland Yard (Series)	Robert Barr	
1. Nightbeat		12. 4. 60
2. Information Received		19. 4. 60
3. Hit and Run		26. 4. 60
(Altogether 13 episodes - all by R.Barr) Prod; David E.Rose.		



<u>TITLE</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>TRANSMISSION</u>
Seeing Both Sides	Arthur Swinson	5. 7. 54
The Seventh Age	John Prebble	2. 7. 59
A Shaft of Light	Ken Alexander	9.10. 58
Shipwreck	Robert Barr	9. 1. 47
Some Call Me Sister	Duncan Ross	28. 4. 59
Speech	Arthur Swinson	2. 2. 56
Skipper's Ticket	Alan White/John Elliot	29.10. 57
Spy Catcher (Series)	Robert Barr	
1. One Must Die		3. 9. 59
2. Three From Spain		10. 9. 59
3. Friend or Foe?		17. 9. 59
(the first series of 6 - all by R.Barr)		
Spy Catcher (2nd Series)		
No.1 "Double Agent"		18. 2. 60
(7 in this series all by R.Barr)		
Spy Catcher (3rd Series)	Robert Barr	
No.1 "Left Luggage"		4.10. 60
(6 in this series again by -	Robert Barr	
Spy Catcher (4th Series)		
No.1 "Stooping to Conquer"		2. 5. 61
(7 in this series all by -	Robert Barr	
The Strange Case of Hans Krantzer.	Robert Barr	14. 2. 51
Strike	Colin Morris	29. 9. 55
Struck Off	John Prebble	6. 3. 62
Takeover	Colin Morris	20.12. 57
Tearaway	Colin Morris	11.10. 56
They Made History (Series)	Bill Duncalf	11. 8. 60
Those Who Dare	Caryl Doncaster	3. 5. 55
Town Vet	Allan Prior	30. 3. 61
The Unloved	Colin Morris	7. 6. 55
The Wall	John Prebble	4.12. 62
The Wharf Road Mob.	Colin Morris	28. 3. 57
Who Me?	Colin Morris	15.10. 59
Who Pays the Piper?	John Elliot	13.10. 60
Without Love	Colin Morris	13.12. 56
Woman Alone	Colin Morris	5. 1. 56
You Take Over (series)		
1. The Air Traffic Controller.		16.10. 58

A LIST OF DOCUMENTARY PROGRAMME PRODUCTION FILES HELD BY  
BBC WRITTEN ARCHIVES.

A Book is Born	1950
About Britain	1952 - 54
About Europe	1953
Barrister-At-Law	1952
Behind These Doors	1953-54
Behind These Walls	1948
Born with the Century	1950
Boys will be Boys	1949
Britain in the Skies	1952
Camera on Europe	1954
Can I Have a Lawyer	1954
Children in Trust	1953
Course of Justice	1948-53
Cross and the Arrow	1950
Dangerous Drugs	1951
Declining Years	1952
Duchess Vanishes	1951
Elvorelli's	1948
Family Doctor	1952
First Time Ever	1948
Fourth Dimension	1949
Great North Road	1949
Hist. of the British Film	1950
I Made News	1951-52
I Was a Stranger	1951
Lancashire Story	1951
Loch Ness Monster	1950
London After Dark - Casualty Ward.	1949
London After Dark - Night News Desk	1949
London After Dark - Scotland Yard	1949
London Town	1949-54
London Town Scrap Book	1959
Made by Hand	1950-53
Make Me An Offer	1952
Malta	1954



Medical Officer of Health	1954
Memos : Documentary Programmes	1946-54
Missing from Home	1953
Mock Auction	1947-54
Mosaic 50	1950
New Canadians	1954
No Other Woman	1948
Out of Doors	1952
Pattern of Marriage	1953
Ransom Paid	1952
Report on Germany	1947
Report on Women	1951
Return to Living	1953
Reuter Report	1951
Rising Twenties	1952
Rising Twenties Gen File	1951
Salute to America	1939
Schedules (1 File)	1953
Searchlight	1948
Seeing Both Sides	1954
Special Enquiry -	
All the Worlds Children	
As Old As You Are	1954
Business of Beauty	
Colour Bar	
Cyprus	
Germany	1955
Illiteracy	
In All Weathers	
It Could Have Been You	
Leisure	
Living in London	
Nations Meat	1954
Projected Programmes	
Railways	
Refugees	
Roads Across Britain	
Sinking Earth	
Smoke Menace	
Story of Silk	1951
Suffragette	1950
To Save a Life	1951-52
Total War in Britain	1954

Visit to Britain	1953
War on Crime	1950
Your Winter Coat	1952



Note:

The Following Additional Information on Documentaries is From the  
BBC Written Archive Files

<u>TITLE.</u>	<u>PRO/DIR.</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Under Her Skilled Hand	R.Barr/G.Calder	4. 2. 53
Outbreak	R.Barr/G.Calder	3. 3. 53
The Pattern of Marriage 1.	Caryl Doncaster	11. 3. 53
" " " " 2.	" "	8. 4. 53
The Silent World	G.Calder	27. 3. 53
Britain in the Skies 1.	G.Calder	22. 4. 53
The Pattern of Marriage 3.	Caryl Doncaster	27. 4. 53
The Course of Justice 1.	Ian Atkins	28. 4. 53
Britain in the Skies 2.	Gilchrist Calder	6. 5. 53
" " " " 3.	" "	20. 5. 53
Pattern of Marriage 4.	Caryl Doncaster	22. 5. 53
Course of Justice 2.	Ian Atkins	9. 6. 53
" " " 3.	" "	21. 7. 53
Chorus Girl	R. Barr	28. 9. 53
Looking Around (Dockland)	D.Ross/G.Calder	19.10. 53
Children in Trust	C. Doncaster	24.11. 53
Missing from Home	R. Barr	11. 1. 54
Behind These Doors 1 (Doctor's Waiting Rm.)	Ross/Calder	20. 1. 54
Return to Living	C.Doncaster	16. 2. 54
Fashion Girl	R. Barr	5. 3. 54
Behind These Doors 2 (Sales Room)	Ross/Calder;	17. 3. 54
Seeing Both Sides	R.Barr	5. 7. 54
Mock Auction	R.Barr	16. 7. 54
Can I Have a Lawyer	C.Doncaster	13. 9. 54
Medical Officer of Health	R. Barr	21. 9. 54
Emigration (The New Canadians)	C.Doncaster	17.11. 54
They Came By Appointment 1.	R. Barr	5. 1. 55
(Series) 2.	"	12. 1. 55
3.	"	19. 1. 55
4.	"	26. 1. 55
5.	"	2. 2. 55
6.	"	9. 2. 55
Dancers of Tomorrow (Sadlers Wells)	Naomi Capon	26. 2. 55
Sunk Rock	G.Calder	19. 4. 55

<u>TITLE</u>	<u>PRO/DIR:</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Those Who Dare	Caryl Doncaster	3. 5. 55
The Unloved	G. Calder	7. 6. 55
Mock Auction	R. Barr	20. 8. 55
Strike	G. Calder	29. 9. 55
Woman Alone	G. Calder	5. 1. 56
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## APPENDIX 42

John Grierson, 'The Idea of Documentary' from Grierson on Documentary : Edited by H. Forsyth Hardy: Faber & Faber, 1946. P.290.

"The idea of documentary in its present form came originally not from the film people at all but from the Political Science School in Chicago round about the early 1920s. It came because some of us noted Mr.Lippmann's argument closely - that because the citizen, under modern conditions, could not know everything about everything all the time, democratic citizenship was therefore impossible - and set ourselves to study what, constructively, we could do to fill the gap in educational practice which he demonstrated.

At first, I must confess we did not think so much about the film or about the radio. We were concerned with the influence of modern newspapers .....it was Mr.Lippmann himself who turned this educational research in the direction of the film.

I talked to him one day of the labour involved in following developments of the Yellow Press through the evanescent drama of local politics. He mentioned that we would do better to follow the dramatic patterns of the film through the changing character of our time, and the box-office records of success and failure which were on the file.

I took his advice and a young man called Walter Wanger (later, a well-known Hollywood Producer) opened the necessary files. A theory purely educational became thereby a theory involving the directive use of films. That directive use was based on two essential factors : the observation of the ordinary or the actual, and the discovery within the actual of the patterns which gave it significance for civic education"



## APPENDIX 43

Harry Watt describes the making of the film Night Mail from Don't Look at the Camera: Harry Watt: Elek Books, 1974.  
Pp 79-97

"I was suddenly asked to report to the front office, where I found Wright and Grierson. I was still, of course, very much a junior. They told me that they had decided to make a film about a special mail train that ran nightly from London to Scotland and that they wanted me to direct it. I was delighted and agreed at once, although, in point of fact, from the way we worked, it was an order. They told me something about the subject and showed me a rough outline that had been prepared. I was to go and write a full script.

None of us were to know for many years that, from that short informal meeting, was to evolve one of the most famous documentary films ever made - Night Mail. It has been written up in every anthology of film history, is required study in the film schools of the world, was voted one of the ten best pictures ever made, and so on. But to us, at the time, it was just a routine Post Office job, and rang no loud bells when we had finished it.

I got in touch with the London, Midland and Scottish Railway and discovered, to my astonishment, that they had a film director. I arranged to meet him, and he turned out to be the only film director I've ever known who wore a bowler hat.

He was happily making instructional films for the railway, on how to drive a spike into a sleeper and things like that, and I'm sure he must have cursed the day Watt appeared on his horizon. As the Post Office were major users of his railway, he'd been told to give me every assistance. I drove him mad.

The scripting research was reasonably straightforward. The train left Euston for Scotland every night of the year except Christmas Day, with a complete Post Office personnel, apart from the train crew. There were thirty or forty sorters, and a special gang for dropping and receiving mail en route. This was the unique feature of the journey. As the letters were sorted they were bagged and carried to a man in the centre of the train.

There the mailbag was carefully strapped into a heavy leather pouch, and this, in turn, was hung on the end of a long, hinged, metal arm by a slip-catch. At a set moment, the arm was swung out of the open door of the van, so that the mailbag hung suspended about three feet out from the side of the train. At regular points of the journey, usually rather remote, for safety's sake, a net had been set up by other Post Office personnel. As the train rushed by, the pouch hit the net, the catch slipped and the bag was caught. At the same time, a bag, hung from a sort of gibbet by the people on the ground, was caught in a net let out from the train, and was catapulted into the van with an enormous bang.

All this took place while the train was thundering through the night at seventy miles an hour, and needed split-second timing. If the bag for delivery was swung out too soon, it would have been smashed off by a bridge or a tunnel, or could even have decapitated some unfortunate late traveller loitering on a platform. As it was often foggy or misty in winter, and there were no obvious visual aids, the timing of this operation had to be done solely by sound. So skilled were the workers of this operation, that they could tell exactly where they were by the beat of the wheels.

The only stop of the night was for thirteen minutes at Crewe, around midnight, where great quantities of mail were exchanged, and the London sorters swapped over with a new team. Then the train climbed up Beattock in the dawn and thundered down into the heart of Scotland in time for the morning deliveries.

Having written a full treatment, I prepared to go into production. Our scripts were never as tight or detailed as feature films had to be. As our units were so small and cheap, we had no need to maintain a strict schedule, and with facilities often being delayed through red tape or the inexperience of sponsors, we found ourselves having to write sequences as we found them. But even if it was only scribbled on the back of an envelope, I always tried to have a shooting script.

Basil Wright was to be the producer, with Grierson, of course in overall command, and Cavalcanti, on the sidelines, advising. The budget was, I think, £2,000 - it may have been less. My whole unit consisted of Pat Jackson, now a first-



class assistant, and either Jonah Jones or Chick Fowle, two marvellous Cockney kids, still in their teens, who had been trained up from messenger boys to become superb cameramen. An unexpected recruit joined us at the last moment. It was W.H. Auden, the poet. With our growing prestige and publicity, a number of the intellectuals of the time began to want to know more about this new art-form, and Grierson had quite rightly told Auden that he'd better start by working on a production. I remember him as a tallish, clumsy-looking creature, even worse dressed than we were, with red knobby wrists and hands sticking out of a jacket that appeared much too small for him. Because of his shock of uncombed blond hair and rather blank expression I once described him as looking like a half-witted Swedish deck-hand - with a posh Oxford accent.....To me, at that moment he was only somebody to run along the railway line with a spare magazine, and if he turned up late - as he was inclined to do - he got the hell bawled out of him. He was to prove how wrong my estimation of him was, and to leave me with a lifetime's awe of his talent.

'We decided that the interior of the sorting van would have to be done in our studio. The set of a whole railway carriage was an ambitious one for our tiny studio, but looked extremely authentic. Indeed, I imagine many people who have seen the film will not have realised that this sequence was done in a studio. The main problem was to get movement on it, to simulate the fact that the train was travelling at seventy miles an hour. We had none of the hydraulic aids or sets built on massive springs that the large studios use. So we had to show our ingenuity as usual. Shaking the set was no good. It just rattled like a sideboard in a junction town. Moving the camera only made a wobbly camera movement. Knowing we would have train noise going on all through the sequence, we finally produced a simple solution. The real railway sorters manned the set, of course, and as they spent four days a week standing and balancing in trains, we just asked them to sway gently as they worked or talked, and this, plus one other trick, worked the effect perfectly. Beside each two or three sorters a string hung down from a ball fixed on the roof, to tie bundles of letters as they were sorted.

In every shot, if we could, we swayed this string, just enough to give a bit of movement. It was extraordinary how that tiny swinging motion, plus the sound, created the illusion of speed.'

How were the background sounds recorded?

'We took the sound-van out to places like Bletchley, and got all sorts of perspectives of the sound of the passing trains.

We arranged with the railway for the trains to make different types of engine noise as they passed us, and we got a marvellous whistle, starting far away, rising to a shrieking crescendo as it passed us, and then dying away, that I swear has been used in every steam train film ever made since that time. We soon struck an enormous snag. We needed, of course, the sound of the travelling train as heard by the people on it. To get this we put our enormous sound-van on to a flat bogey behind a special train, and trundled up and down the line all one Sunday. (In these days of attaché-case sound systems, this must sound incredible.) Inside our private carriage, we could get the general sound right, and variations caused by passing bridges, tunnels and the like. But our microphones were not selective enough to get the 'clickity-clack, clickity-clack' of the wheels as they crossed the joins in the rails. The general overall roar drowned this out. We tried everything, outside the window, inside with the windows closed, microphone on the roof, on the floor, all no good. We thought we'd solved it when somebody suggested dangling the mike down the open lavatory. Even then the roar drowned the clacks. We gave up in despair.

This was a major setback. The central sequence of the film depended on the trainee mail-dropper hearing and counting the 'Clickity-clacks' or beats, as his instructor called them, before the pouch went out, and we intended bringing them up to dominate the sound as we held the close-up of his face counting. We tried all sorts of compromises in the cutting room. We even cut the sound-track of the overall train noise into tiny sections and then joined them together again in a 'clickity-clack' pattern hoping this would give the effect. It sounded like a series of hiccups.



Then somebody had a brilliant, simple idea. We would do it in model. Off we went to Bassett Lowke, the model train makers and got a class-six engine, made to perfect scale. The model rails were to scale also. It was then a simple mathematical calculation to work out, as the joins in the full-size rails were twenty-six feet apart, where to file nicks in the model rails. Every three inches, shall we say? We knew the speed at which the trainee counted, from our picture of him, so we pushed our tiny train by hand backward and forwards on its section of line until we were in synchronism with the picture and then recorded it. It worked a treat. All we had to do was to marry this sound to the general noise of the train at speed, and we had got what we wanted.

This may sound too laborious and detailed for a moment in a short film, and only of interest to technically-minded people. I have put it down, because part of the reason for this exercise is to show the rather complacent technocrats of today what we were up against, and because the solving of that problem is an achievement ever present in my memories. Without that sound, the centre of a film that was to make my career would have completely failed. When I see the film again, I don't see the nervous trainee or his instructor. I see Pat Jackson's earnest face, sweating with concentration, pushing his toy train backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, while I am beating time like a podgy metronome, and the sound man, deadpan as always, swings his microphone in unison.

Somebody suggested that Auden should write the commentary for the end part of the picture - in verse. It was not I who had the idea, and I wasn't particularly keen. I want to be utterly fair about all this, because when the film became one of the peaks of documentary achievement and a museum piece, there began the usual arguments from the analysts and the experts of who did what, and whose contribution was the most important. All I know is that I directed every foot of the picture. That is, I chose the visuals, showed the cast what to do, wrote the dialogue and, from Wright's notes, planned the overall shape of the film. The aesthetic highlights, that is, Auden's poetry, Britten's music and the overall editing, were the ideas and work of Wright Cavalcanti, under Grierson.

If anyone was ever to make an analysis of my films, he would see it all starting in Night Mail. I developed a capacity to portray ordinary people in dramatic form, yet at the same time make them appear completely natural on the screen. It was dramatic journalism without the hysterics and exaggerations of the press. My jokes were awful, my dialogue flat. But it was real and, therefore, successful, because the public will always recognise this reality. I don't think this is boasting, because, although I knew I could do this, I never quite knew how it came about. It was, perhaps, merely simplicity - not naivete, which is only a knife-edge away, but poles apart. Cavalcanti paid me the greatest compliment when he said 'Harry Watt put the sweaty sock into documentary'.

Auden sat down to write his verse. Being at the GPO Film Unit, he had no pleasant, airy office, looking out on the children playing, and the old men dozing in the sun. He got a bare table at the end of a dark, smelly, noisy corridor. We were now bursting at the seams, and the last corner available was in what was inevitably known as 'the back passage.' It ran parallel with the theatre, where films were constantly being shown. At one end, a bunch of messenger boys played darts, wrestled, and brewed tea. At the other end, Auden, serene and uncomplaining, turned out some of the finest verse he has ever written. As it was a commentary, it had, of course, to fit the picture, so he would bring sections to us as he wrote them. When it did not fit, we just said so, and it was crumpled up and thrown into the waste-paper basket! Some beautiful lines and stanzas went into oblivion in this casual, ruthless way. Auden just shrugged, and wrote more. Wright and I can only remember one tiny lost fragment. Auden described the rounded lowland hills that you meet as you enter Scotland, as being 'heaped like slaughtered horses' - a tremendous visual image. The final commentary, the first part spoken by Stuart Legg at a great pace to match a rushing train, began like this:

'This is the night mail crossing the border,  
Bringing the cheque and the postal order,  
Letters for the rich, letters for the poor,  
The shop at the corner and the girl next door.....

The music was the next problem, so one day Cavalcanti said to me, 'There's this boy, he is, I think, very clever. Maybe you should show him your film. I think he could do something



about the music.' I asked 'What's his name?' Cav answered, 'Benjamin Britten - he is very young, but he will be very good.' So rather nervously, into our theatre came this shy, soft-spoken kid, with close-curled blond hair, and a pale and sensitive face.... We broke it to him later that he could only have eight musicians and that his fee would be about ten pounds! It was one of Britten's first commissioned works, and the music he did for us showed all the enormous potential that Cavalcanti had spotted. The film had an immediate succes d'estime, but the impact it made at first was comparatively small.....certainly my life was unaffected and nobody offered me a job, or anything like that, although I think I got a raise to five quid a week.'

## APPENDIX 44

Paul Rotha describes the film North Sea in a letter to Richard Griffith, May 31, 1938 quoted in Documentary Diary :  
 Paul Rotha : Secker & Warburg, 1973 Pp219-220

"The guts of North Sea are simple enough. The crew of a trawler at home in Aberdeen in the early morning, their home backgrounds and human ties, their dates for what they'll do when they return home on Saturday. Out to sea. A storm just the biggest ever, all unfaked, the real thing.

The drama of radio contact with the coast station. Then the aerial snaps. The pumps jam. The trawler ships water. The coal shifts in the bunkers. For 48 hours they hang on like grim death. They get their radio working again. They shift the coal. Contact is re-established with shore. The pumps get going. A salvage tug is not needed. So they make a cup of tea. And back to Aberdeen. No commentary. Just plain speech and a wonderful sound-track by Cavalcanti. Fine music by Ernst Meyer. As for acting, the men are magnificent. The crew was picked from unemployed. The trawler was, of course, specially chartered. They went to sea for a week. Then they shot the below-deck stuff in a studio mock-up very well done by Edward Carrick.

They showed the film to Erich Pommer and Charles Laughton, who are about to make Jamaica Inn, which has a storm in it. Laughton said, "Huh, I couldn't have acted that skipper better myself." They asked Harry Watt to go down to Elstree to do the storm scene for them. He found himself expected to make a storm in the studio-tank!

North Sea is really brilliantly cut, not by Watt, but by an editor R.Q.McNaughton, who did so well on Night Mail. It is superbly photographed by a couple of lads aged about 22, who used to be messenger boys at the Post Office - Jonah Jones and Chick Fowle. How they were not swept overboard I don't know. But it is the sound-track by Cavalcanti that puts the drama of the film across and the quiet natural quality of the people. Everything and everyone belongs. The distant singing of the sea hymn over dawn shots of sleeping Aberdeen on the Sunday morning when the



trawler is 24 hours overdue and no word has been heard from it since the radio stopped working. Sleeping, did I say? Aye, save for the men and women who keep watch, who cannot go to bed, the shore radio-operators searching the ether for the sound of a word. I don't give a damn about the cavilling; it is a bloody fine film."

## APPENDIX 45

Harry Watt describes the making of the film Target for Tonight from Don't Look at the Camera : Harry Watt : Elek Books, 1974  
 Pp.146-152

"I decided to make the film at Mildenhall Aerodrome near Newmarket, where 149 Squadron was stationed, because the CO and the Group Commander were eager and interested. Then began the long journalist-cum-detective work necessary to get a really authentic script. I read over two thousand pilots' raid reports. Ninety-odd per cent of them just said 'Took off bombed targets, little - or lot of - flak' , and left it at that, but a few, with perhaps, literary aspirations, gave descriptions of exciting or memorable moments, and these I tucked away to use later. I hung around the aerodrome for a month, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, but talking to everyone. It developed into gin with the Officers, beer with the Sergeants, and mammoth mugs of tea with the maintenance crews in the dispersal huts. I attended every briefing, and sat behind Wing-Commander Powell, the CO, when he was giving his last whoop talks to 'sprog' crews, that is, newcomers straight from training, going off on their first bombing raid. I can see them now, those eager faced kids, from all over the Commonwealth, fidgeting and grinning nervously as they listened to the banal words of encouragement. I can see them because I followed the CO into the operations room and waited and waited, and prayed for their return. Almost inevitably, it was the beginners who copped it. Gradually the entries on the blackboard were filled up as the squadron straggled home, until there would be one blank space left as dawn began to rise. And it wasn't the blank space you saw, but those young, so terribly young, faces, lovely faces, that you knew were lying somewhere burnt and smashed.

Having finished my script, and had it passed as technically correct, - very important when working with the Services - I set about casting. I had of necessity to use all the senior officers as they came, but I needed the crew of one bomber, to follow throughout the picture. The story was, again, utterly straight-



forward, just the choice of a new small target, the selection of a squadron to bomb it, and the adventures of one bomber, 'F for Freddie' during the raid.

I picked, as the captain of the bomber, and the key figure in the film, Squadron Leader Freddie Pickard, who happened to be the brother-in-law of Sir Cedric Hardwicke, but who had never acted.....I sent for my faithful little unit, Jonah Jones and Julian Spiro, and we started shooting the many essential atmosphere and cut-in shots around the aerodrome before starting the story proper.....

We decided to shoot all the interiors in a studio, but most of them were too ambitious for our little Blackheath Hall, so we did them at Elstree or Denham. As this was very expensive for us, we had to schedule carefully for maximum speed. I had, of course, brought my air-crew to London, and they were working marvellously. Apart from Pick, I had a Scotsman, an Australian, a Canadian, and two other Englishmen.

Came the day when we were all set up to start, in one of Elstree's smallest stages, on the changing-room scenes, where the crews get into their flying gear before being taken by lorry to their respective aircraft. Wing-Commander Williams was to provide thirty more personnel to be a milling background to the foreground dialogue of our crew. By nine o'clock we had rehearsed the dialogue and lit the set, but no extras had appeared. I got on the telephone to Williams, and he had forgotten all about it! 'Very sorry, but frightfully busy, old boy' - I waited for him to say 'There's a war on, you know,' but luckily he didn't - 'I'll get on to Three Group and they'll let us have some chaps in a couple of days.' A couple of days, at two hundred quid a day - not on your Nellie! I smashed the phone down and ran to find Julian Spiro. Within half an hour he had hired a bus, and set off for nearby Uxbridge, a big RAF recruiting depot. He stood in the main street, accosting wandering airmen like a tout for a Mystery Tour, and offered them five bob and a free lunch to appear in a film. Uxbridge High Street has few attractions to hold anyone even in peacetime, so Julian was soon back with a full load of bewildered AC2's. Luckily, we had plenty of flying kit, so they were soon pulling on wool-lined boots and shapeless padded suits, and no doubt dreaming of the time when they would be doing it in earnest. Strangely enough, the scenes

came out full of atmosphere, and as realistic as any in the film.

Then we came to our big scene. It was on a full stage at Denham and was, I think, the biggest set ever built by documentary. It was a replica of the operation room at Bomber Command, much enlarged, and with double the number of bomber squadrons mentioned around the walls than in fact Britain possessed. By enormous persuasion, we had persuaded the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Richard Pierce, DSO, AFC, to appear in person. He had finally agreed to give us one hour exactly, while, presumably, the air war stopped.

The big day came. I was in my suit, we had scouts out along the approach road with signal flags to warn us of the approaching cavalcade, everything had been prepared, the set was pre-lit. The C-in-C brought with him so much brass it looked like the signing of a Peace Treaty. Army liaison officers, Naval liaison officers, and the lowest form of air officer was a Commodore.

We led the great man onto the set, which he duly praised, and I explained that he had to sit at his desk, look at the aerial photos and intelligence reports which we had already described in the film, and, swinging round on his chair, say to his second in command 'Yes, I agree these are interesting. Put a squadron on to bomb it tonight.' (We were then to follow what those few casual words meant to six ordinary Air Force bods).

Owing to the time limit, we decided to shoot right away. The old boy did it perfectly, but as he swung around in his chair there came from it a tooth-edging screech, the kind one sometimes hears from the axle of a mule cart in the remoter parts of Italy. The propmen were in like a shot 'don't worry, guv, sort it aht in a minute, guv, drop of oil, that's all it needs, guv', and proceeded to squirt oil in all directions. The C-in-C did his stuff again, and the squeak was worse! Two hours later we got the shot, and it was three hours before we got his nibs away. He had become so film struck that it didn't seem to matter, so I presume the Germans slept in their beds that night.

We had now only the main sequence to shoot, the interior of the actual aircraft, and I had asked Wing Commander Williams, to supply me with the fuselage of a crashed Wellington bomber. Pranged aircraft were one of the more common phenomena of south-



east England at that time, and dotted the landscape like molehills. Any one of us could have told him where half a dozen Wellingtons lay. But it had to go through 'the proper channels', so we kicked our heels for three weeks .....then a spanking new Wellington fuselage drew into Denham on a low-loader. I had specifically asked for a really clapped-out job, so that we could tear it to pieces, but this was ours to do what we liked with, so we proceeded to cut it up and get our cameras and lights inside. We had been filming happily for about a week, when an RAF chap, who had wandered onto the set, drew me aside and said 'That black box, just back of the pilot's seat, do you know what it is?' I replied 'Haven't the faintest - can't understand half of those knobs and things.' He then looked around in the conventional mysterious manner and said 'If I were you, I'd have it unscrewed right away and put in the safe'. It turned out to be one of Britain's newest secret weapons, an anti-radar device, with a self-destructive charge included.

We had an excellent musical score written by Leighton Lucas, who was in the RAF. McAllister did his usual superb job of cutting and we informed the Ministry that the film was finished.

It is interesting, in retrospect, that we had no belief we had'a good 'un' in Target for Tonight - we nearly called it F for Freddie - as we had had for London Can Take It. There had been so many delays and frustrations, and we had been so close for so long to the desperate reality of the bombing campaign, that it appeared to us just an ordinary account of a minor operation.

It is difficult for me to tell the staggering impact Target for Tonight had.....but I can say that, while the film was honest and well made, it was no cinematic revolution, but an understated and unemotional account of an average air raid.....Statistics are boring, but Target for Tonight ran at three large West End cinemas simultaneously, while its story was being serialised in the Daily Express, billed as 'The Greatest Story of the War'. Charles Oakley, in his authoritative book on the history of British cinema, Where we Came In, says: 'In the course of a few months the film was shown in over 12,000 theatres in the United States, Canada and South America, and was seen by 50 million people.' This does not, I imagine, include the blanket exhibition it received in Britain, where the phrase Target for Tonight became a national catchword. A comedian had only to look at a pretty

chorus-girl and say 'Target for Tonight' to get a howl of laughter and a round of applause." (Page 152)

Of his contribution to documentary Watt says: (P.185)

"Did I achieve anything? As I have said, I had imagined that I had only contributed one or two cinematic moments worth remembering. But recently, all my old films of thirty years were run to refresh my memories and, by God, do you know, I think I had an influence on British cinema. Not me alone, of course, but Jack Holmes, Pat Jackson, Humphrey Jennings and Jack Lee, all of us who developed the story documentary. Through some unsuspected theatrical trait, no doubt inherited from my father's loud checks and extraordinary cravats, I drew documentary away from the accepted assemblage of visuals tied together with a commentary, to a dramatised, more human approach. However, when it comes to our definite influence on the feature film industry, don't let's kid ourselves about our creative impact. War was our bonus, as was the sudden shock that our kind of film was actually taking more money at the box-office than theirs. Although documentary remained a dirty word, realism became accepted as the basis for many films. As Parker Tyler, an American film critic of the time, has said, 'Journalism crept into the techniques of American and British films.' Such war pictures as The Foreman Went to France, San Demetrio London, The Way Ahead, and The Cruel Sea were direct descendants of North Sea, Target for Tonight, Merchant Seamen, and Fires Were Started. And it went on, although how much our work was influential is hard to say. There were the tremendous Italian post-war films, like Open City. There was the excitement when American features went out into the cities and the streets with films like Naked City and Boomerang. Most of such techniques and realist ideas have now been taken over by television, at times superbly well.'

'The decision of Cavalcanti, myself, Jennings and the others to stay on at the GPO Unit (in the thirties) and concentrate on the dramatised realist film was actually following one of Grierson's beliefs that 'Documentary would not have succeeded if it did not influence cinema as a whole.' To us that meant what it meant to the man in the street - the commercial cinema. It was incredible cheek of us to take on such a task, and as I've said, it would not have succeeded if war had not come. But we didn't funk it.' Of



that pioneer group Watt says:

'To this day writers on British documentary make it sound like one of the more solemn research foundations. No-one ever seems to have recorded that we were just a bunch of enthusiastic kids, accepting the basic theme of the dignity of man from our brilliant but erratic boss, learning our job by trial and error, bubbling with ideas but making thousands of mistakes, cheerfully exploiting ourselves and each other in the absolute belief that what we did or were going to do was worthwhile. No-one has ever suggested that we were happy, that we laughed, and we had a million laughs.'

## APPENDIX 46

Duncan Ross, The Documentary in Television: BBC Quarterly Vol.5 No.1 Spring 1950.

"Although the word documentary has become associated with television only within the past three years, it is an interesting coincidence that it was born in the same month in which Baird demonstrated 'true' television for the first time. In 1926, John Grierson used the word to describe the work of the American explorer and film-maker Robert Flaherty. Grierson had seen something deeply significant in the films that Flaherty was making. Previously any film that did not tell a fictitious story was called an 'interest' film.

Interest films concerned travel and served as an animated form of picture postcard. Nanook of the North showed the Arctic wastes, and, Moana showed the South Sea Islands - but there the similarity between Flaherty's films and 'travel' films ended.

Flaherty was not content to let us merely look over the places he had visited : he wanted to interpret their meaning to us so that we could understand them and feel what it was like to live there. With keen observation he made the camera lens penetrate the significance of the things he saw. The result was that falling snow became more than a pretty pattern on a frozen landscape; it could be the beginning of a blizzard that meant starvation to the people who lived there. The bone spears and fish hooks were no longer things that we vaguely remembered having seen before in a museum somewhere, but the explanation of why Man could conquer the Arctic. We became excited about Nanook's battle for existence and saw drama, beauty and even poetry in a film that used only a handful of words to explain itself. It was a new approach to film-making. Its main principle was that the treatment of the film should grow from first-hand study of the subject by the film maker, and its purpose was, as Grierson defined it, 'the creative interpretation of reality.'

In twenty years the word 'documentary' has spread all over the world to describe almost all films of social significance. The approach that Flaherty used did not have to restrict itself to Eskimos and South Sea Islanders. There was just as much to



interpret in the problems of less picturesque people - the British for instance. The word has now overflowed its original intention and is often applied to radio programmes, books, articles and paintings. Indeed, it has been so tortured and transformed even within the limits of cinema that, at times, it must be a wise Grierson who knows his own child. It is, however, perfectly at home in television. Indeed so many opportunities occur in television for 'the creative interpretation of reality' through the visual image, that Flaherty himself has said that the eventual future of documentary lies there.

Some people dislike the word 'documentary' because it is derived from the cinema. 'Television is not cinema', they say. No one has ever suggested that it is, but whether a camera is recording a scene on celluloid or through electronics it still must interpret that scene through a lens, and film people have been using lenses with considerable skill for over fifty years. It is foolish to despise the art of the cinema simply because one is ignorant of it. It is equally foolish to ignore the vast knowledge that can be brought to television from the theatre and radio. At present the conflict of ideologies in television is a regular reminder of its infancy and is like children with a three-legged stool arguing as to which leg is the most important.

Neither the term 'talks' nor 'features' is appropriate to 'documentary'. Indeed both are peculiarly uninformative in describing even their own purpose. 'Talks' suggest housewives gossiping over a backyard fence, while 'features' conjures up the image of a face that is interesting but not very handsome. It is through the long use of these terms in sound-radio that we have learnt what is meant by them, and perhaps its long use in television will make the word 'documentary' just as intelligible - even to those who have never heard of 'Drifters', 'Target for Tonight', 'Desert Victory', 'World of Plenty' and hundreds of other great documentaries.

'Talks' and 'documentaries' serve separate and equally important functions. The purpose of 'talks' is to present eminent speakers and authorities on chosen subjects to radio audiences. In television these talks are illustrated because it is usually more interesting to see what a person is talking about than merely to see him talking. Whatever form of illustration is used, whether it is photograph, film, diagram



or demonstration in the studio, however, the first duty of 'talks' is, obviously, to interpret a speaker. Documentary, on the other hand, is not concerned with speakers and is at its best when it ignores them completely and interprets the subject straight from life. Nor does the documentary worker think in terms of illustrating anything; the values of the various visual images that will tell his story are indigenous to his research. While studying his subject on the actual location he will automatically have observed everything as through a lens. If he does not see it that way his audience never will, and although the microphone may still be the dominating partner in television, it is the lens that will mainly control the mechanics of how the story will be reconstructed in the studio. The documentary approach, however, does not eliminate the need for talks. It would be absurd, for instance, to suggest that a recent talk on insulin given by Dr. R.D. Lawrence of King's College Hospital could have been bettered by any other method of presentation. On the other hand, it should not be expected of anyone whose skill lies in the presentation of talks to handle programmes that have been conceived in terms of the highly complicated documentary-dramas that have been presented in the past two years. Here is another unusual aspect of documentary : 'the creative interpretation of reality' can take it from a simple series on things that are 'Made by Hand' to a dramatised series on delinquency employing thirty-six full studio sets and over a hundred actors in three articulated, bi-weekly programmes.

This vast range of documentary brings its nature nearer to what is meant by features - particularly the features presented by Laurence Gilliam's department in BBC Sound-Radio than any other title. But in television where films are used a great deal the term can be contradictory. Years before radio took up the word, the cinema was using it to describe long films that were based entirely on fiction. Another difference between radio features and television documentaries is that the former never had to concern itself with film, nor the relative values of sound and vision which are vital to the latter. The real documentary programme could never be described as an illustrated 'feature'; that approach merely substitutes the word-pictures of good sound-radio for a series of disjointed visuals that make bad television.



The complex character of documentary has taken it at one time or another through every BBC department in television; Talks, Films, Music, Outside Broadcasts, Light Entertainment and Drama. It will, however, always have, in whatever department it finds itself, a unique and troublesome characteristic peculiar to itself - every single documentary programme must come from original research and be written and produced specially for television.

Naturally - although the output of documentary in television has been increased considerably over the past two years - it still lags in numbers far behind other programmes. Only six people - four in the Documentary Section and two in Drama - concentrate on this type of production and often their interest has to be diverted elsewhere. Despite this, medicine, delinquency, handicrafts, police, theatricals, crime, courts, politics, mining, textiles, science, education, social experiments and many other subjects have all been dealt with in the studio and in outside broadcasts. Nor should the work of the BBC Film Department be forgotten. The television newsreel skilfully uses the documentary approach to many items that would not appeal to commercial companies interested only in recorded news and selling it as quickly as possible. In the Film Department too, there is an expanding documentary section which, as well as editing, producing and presenting documentary films, also make film excerpts for inclusion in 'live' television productions.

The creation of documentary programmes from research to cameras invariably takes longer than other presentations. They cannot be turned out with the speed even of 'features', where books, newspapers and conversation with specialists alone can sometimes constitute the entire investigation, and where long narrations from commentators that might enthrall listeners but would bore viewers can help to present it. Like Plato describing his metaphysics, there can be no worthwhile documentary programme until 'there has been intercourse with the thing itself and it has been lived with'. This study of subjects at first hand is vital. Not only will the interpreter know his subject more thoroughly, but he will be applying his knowledge of his medium to it at every point of his investigation. Only by that method will the subject and the visual medium in which it is to be interpreted become a harmonious whole and the feeling of sincerity and reality



be apparent all through it. There is also the basic responsibility of assuring ourselves that the programmes are not only accurate in their facts but in their appearances. Verisimilitude can be utterly ruined and the BBC ridiculed if care is not taken with every visual aspect of the story during research.

A good illustration of the work required is to be found in the series Magistrate's Court. It was intended that the programmes should be built on original research and conceived exclusively in terms of television. Although a retired magistrate was to introduce them, they were to be documentary dramas - not illustrated talks. Preliminary research began with books - particularly the excellent books written by the magistrate himself - and visits to courts. Taking an actual day in a court, and reconstructing the cases found there, was not enough. That method would merely give a catalogue of crime and interpret nothing. Five different days were spent in five different courts, looking for the one that was most suitable for reconstruction in the studio. The first problem, after selection, was what angle should be taken for the general 'establishing' shot. That would almost determine the shape of the story. From the public benches, we would not be able to see the defendants' faces. The magistrate's point of view would be interesting but not for the 'key' shots - he was too important to them. Opposite the witness box seemed best. This decision made, observation really started. Apart from collecting facts, figures, stories, data, contacts, cases, and a knowledge of law, the mind had to work rather like this: 'Watch expression on a pressman's face - tell you the verdict almost. That policeman, old RAF type. Officer too - obviously an officer, it's a DFC. Two Bibles, the Koran, a skullcap; wonder how a Quaker takes the oath, or does he? Clerks take evidence in longhand. Why longhand? Why does the probation officer walk about the courts so much? Motoring offences don't go into the dock but stand in front of it. That will still keep them in shot as a duplicate set will have to be built anyway to get in for close-ups - same for the magistrate's bench. That'll mean watching the timing of action and dialogue carefully so that the various people have time to shift over to the duplicates' .... and so it goes on. Days can be spent in the court alone, but where do crimes begin? 'Go the rounds with the probation officer and on the beat with the police. Visit Soho cafes, coffee stalls and clubs to study the breeding ground of the types one sees in the



court each day. Visit the psychiatrist - that will help.'

Three-and-a-half months were spent on investigation and scripting alone for three fifty-minute programmes. It gave great encouragement for applying the same approach to other subjects when letters arrived from magistrates and probation officers expressing appreciation and in some cases surprise - at the accuracy of the detail and procedure in the courts, when the series was presented. No comparison with sound-radio should ever be made with regard to the time factors necessary to complete television scripts. They require even more care and detail than a stage play for the writer must not only create, and direct his players through a multitude of sets - he must also guide four cameras and often plan shooting scripts for film cameras as well.

Is all the trouble necessary to produce television documentaries worthwhile? It is and it will become increasingly important, particularly in the field of documentary drama. The theatre, although it will always be the most potent source of our programmes, is not sufficiently representative to indicate the tastes of the mass audiences we must serve in the future. Radio and cinema are the two dominating media. We have seen in radio the popularity of spreading information through features. The cinema shows us an even more interesting example. At the end of the war the prestige of British films was higher than it had ever been. The documentary approach that gave us Target for Tonight, Western Approaches, The Way Ahead, Millions Like Us and many other informative films put us in a position we had never enjoyed before. Since then the documentary approach to feature films has proved to be one of the most popular and effective methods of conveying information and entertainment to a mass audience. Popularity is very important to television in view of the limited programme time, the single wavelength and our responsibility as a public service to concern ourselves with subjects of social significance - and documentary need never be dull.'

## APPENDIX 47

Norman Swallow: Documentary Definition : October 1961 :  
Robert Barr Papers.

"It is useful to begin with definitions. John Grierson, who invented the word and therefore should know, regarded documentary as "the creative interpretation of actuality"; more recently an eminent television critic has defined it as 'a programme based upon documents'. Both definitions are true, but neither is perhaps complete. If I were to define documentary myself (in radio and journalism the word would be 'feature') I would suggest that the good documentary must deal with fact both dramatically and with imagination, is allowed to comment on the facts but must never itself be false, must illuminate the truth but never distort it; and although it must be about facts it must also be about people, for its recurring theme is the impact of the physical and social world upon the men and women who live in it. These are very broad terms of reference, and the frontiers of documentary have always been vague. Is 'Zoo Quest' a documentary or not? Was Ibsen the first writer of 'dramatised documentaries' ? As long as writers and producers continue to gather together and discuss with passion the things they care for, definitions of documentary will be invented, rejected and invented again.

One thing is certain; documentary was essentially a British creation, and on the whole we have been rather better at it than anyone else. The documentary film was created thirty-odd years ago by those splendid pioneers of the Empire Marketing Board and documentary radio was created by the BBC. Documentary television has inherited this dual tradition and has not let it down - the boast will I hope be excused. To some extent television documentary has superseded those earlier forms; the absence of sponsorship has given it the freedom of honest comment which the documentary cinema has so frequently and so sadly lacked, and the vast size of its audience has given it an essential advantage over both film and radio. Fine work, arguably as imaginative as anything in the past, still comes from the two older media, but there are few who would deny that the most powerful contribution to British documentary in the nineteen-sixties comes from BBC



## Television.

The size and scope of this contribution is enormous; it numbers about a hundred documentaries a year, with an audience that is never less than two millions (for subject matter of a very specialised kind) and is often over ten millions. Its subject-matter varies from the sculpture of Henry Moore, to alcoholism, from the glories of ancient Greece to an outbreak of smallpox in Lancashire, from the latest scientific research to life in prison, from the making of crystal glass to the demolition of slums, from village life in Egypt to urban life in Chicago, and from bomb disposal to the death penalty. The international reputation of BBC documentary is high. In 1959 two BBC documentaries Medico written by Robert Barr and produced by David Rose, and Morning in the Streets by Denis Mitchell and Roy Harris, won the Prix Italia, the annual prize awarded by an international jury for creative work of imagination. This year (1961) at the Vancouver Film Festival the BBC was given a special award for the continuously high standard of its documentaries, and in the past five years BBC documentaries have won awards in Festivals in Venice, Cannes, Edinburgh, Bergamo, Brussels, Rome, Vancouver, and Karachi. Richard Cawston's film, This Is The BBC won one of the annual awards of the British Film Academy. This is a proud record, and almost certainly a unique one.

Documentary's importance in television output has long been accepted, and it holds a position mid-way between drama on the one hand and the topical reporting of Panorama and Tonight on the other. The difference between a play and a 'dramatised-documentary' (that is, a documentary played by actors) is a fairly easy one to define, and it is a difference in purpose rather than in technique. The writer of the dramatised-documentary needs more self-discipline than the dramatist, is much more the slave of his factual material, and his opportunities to develop character or to invent exciting situations of plot or of human emotions are severely restricted. At the same time he is expected to sustain an interesting 'story', to present interesting characters, to write exciting dialogue, and to create that element of suspense without which no television programme, of any kind whatsoever, can be completely successful. He is like a boxer whose hands are tied behind his back and who is still expected to win. That he does so frequently, is due to the developed skills of a team of writers and producers who have developed the dramatised-documentary to a point where it is



arguably one of the BBC's most original contributions to creative television. Writers like Duncan Ross, Colin Morris, John Prebble, Wilfred Greatorix and Allan Prior; writer-producers like Robert Barr and John Elliot; producers like Ian Atkins, Gilchrist Calder, and David Rose - men like these who have consistently bitten off more than they could chew, and then chewed it. They have realised moreover that it is not enough for a dramatised-documentary to be true; it must also seem to be true, and this presents an infinitely harder task. Their skills are largely concealed. The audience of, say, Rock Bottom was left with the belief that it had witnessed the real decline of an actual alcoholic, and the problems of alcoholism were no doubt what that audience discussed amongst themselves when the programme was over. They did not, I suspect, talk of the qualities of Colin Morris's script or of Gilchrist Calder's production, and the fact that they did not do so is, ironically, the greatest tribute they could pay to Morris and Calder. Similarly the 'characters' in The Course of Justice were so recognisably real that it was hard to believe they were to any extent at all the creations of a writer, a producer and a team of actors. When this illusion of reality is complete then the success of the dramatised-documentary is complete also, and the frontier that divides it from 'drama' is clear and unmistakable.

That other frontier, between the non-acted documentary (which is frequently a complete film) and the kind of television reporting which is associated with Tonight and Panorama is, or should be, equally clear. It is a difference partly of technique and partly of depth. The difference of technique is that the documentary rarely uses the visible reporter, preferring to avoid anyone who stands between the audience and the subject-matter. The documentary producer aims to establish a direct communication between the people in his programme - the lawyers or steelworkers or prisoners or presidential candidates or the sick or the unhappy - and the audience at home. The more complete this communication, the more satisfactory the programme, and the producer would argue that he can never hope to get the complete communication he needs if he relies upon the response which that very skilful reporter, Charles Staircase, can get from this man or that woman or that child. To the documentary producer the redoubtable Mr. Staircase gets in the way.



There is also the difference of depth. Nor do I mean merely length; for an item in Tonight would not necessarily become a documentary by being three times as long. The documentary (and here I am writing entirely of films made for television) tries to dig deeper than the topical report can afford to do, to think in longer periods of time than this week's headlines, to explore in greater detail the varying relationship between people and the society they live in, and to accept the value of the heart as well as the mind. The documentary maker is helped in his task by having more time in which to work; for before he can establish the direct communication between audience and subject-matter which he needs he must himself be steeped in that subject-matter, must become a personal friend of his real-life heroes and heroines, and must know enough about them to sympathise fully with their own outlook - which is not, of course, the same thing as agreeing with it.

If what has been said so far is true, then it should follow that the documentary is a complimentary form of television to the News and to the topical report. The News gives us an item about racial violence in South Africa; Panorama sends Robin Day to do a topical report which is a powerful comment on that news; Denis Mitchell makes three documentary films called The Wind of Change which together illuminate the News and Panorama, and do so by getting beneath the political surface and into the hearts and minds of men and women. News reports a strike; Panorama interviews management and unions; but only by a dramatised-documentary (this time by Colin Morris) could an actual strike be reconstructed and the deepest feelings of those concerned be brought to the surface. News and topical programmes covered the day to day progress of the parties and candidates in last year's America presidential election, and a complete documentary (by Anthony de Lotbinière) explored the backgrounds and biographies of the two candidates, thereby providing an illumination of a personal kind which added greatly to our understanding of that particular moment of recorded history. To this extent no documentary programme should perhaps be considered in isolation. Documentaries are part of television's obligation to reflect the contemporary scene. If they ceased to exist, then that obligation would no longer be adequately met.

Every available television technique is at the disposal of



the documentary producer; 'live' studios, outside broadcast cameras, highly mobile film units, international relays. Those technical resources should always, of course, be the servants of the subject-matter; the basic purpose of each programme will determine the technique to be used. Film is still essential for any programme located overseas; Chicago, The Grandeur That was Rome, The Inheritors. It is still the most flexible way of catching the flavour of towns and streets and backyards and factories and villages and kitchens; Morning in the Streets, Between Two Rivers, A House in Bayswater, The More We Are Together. Film offers the best chances of expressing effectively the personalities and the deepest feelings of men and women who are not by nature or profession public performers; In Prison, Joe The Chainsmith, Borrowed Pastures, The Artist Speaks, This Is The BBC. It is the best way of catching complex visual action; Call For Action, and Living with Danger. Without the mobility of light film equipment the expeditions of David Attenborough would still be a pipe-dream.

I believe myself that the documentary should stick to real people and real places except when its subject-matter is such that the literal presentation of reality is either impossible or inadequate. The Course of Justice, for instance, could hardly have been made in terms of the actual persons concerned. The documentaries of Alcoholism Rock Bottom or prostitution Without Love were effective because they were completely dramatised. Strike could never have been reconstructed in terms of the real strikers and the real management. For quite different reasons John Elliot's programme about advertising The Golden Egg had to be dramatised and based upon a fictitious product. There are also the occasions when the natural reluctance of ordinary people to expose their deepest feelings in public, or to allow their personal problems to be laid bare before an audience of millions, force the documentary producer to recreate those feelings and those problems by a framework of fiction. Those who are unwilling to face a camera and a microphone themselves are usually happy to talk in confidence to a sympathetic writer on the reasonable understanding that their names are concealed and their environment disguised. A documentary film would be restricted to a half-truth, but a documentary that is played by actors has greater freedom, and



if the writer has done his job honestly and well the result is equally valid.

The use of outside broadcast cameras is another technique at the disposal of the documentary producer and one which, I suspect, will be used increasingly in the future. Its effectiveness has already been proved in Eye On Research and Your Life in Their Hands, and the combination of OB cameras, domestic studio, Eurovision link, and film was dramatically employed in Aubrey Singer's ambitious programme which introduced the International Geophysical Year.

The purpose of documentary has always remained the same; its progress has therefore been largely due to technical development and to an increase of the technical resources on which the producer may draw. This development increases the range, but of course it does not necessarily increase the quality; I doubt whether we have seen a better documentary than The Course of Justice, written by Duncan Ross and produced by Ian Atkins over a decade ago in the tiny studios at Alexandra Palace. The potentialities of the dramatised-documentary have nevertheless been greatly increased by the size and resources of the studios at Lime Grove and Television Centre. It was David Rose's use of new facilities and new resources (at Lime Grove and Riverside) together with the developed skills of his technicians, which made Medico a combination of 'live' studio, film studio and film location, so subtle, that it was impossible to tell which sequences were film and which were not. The development of mobile sound-film units has made possible such documentaries as The Wind of Change, The Inheritors, Morning In The Streets and the industrial portraits of Philip Donnellan. It was a revolutionary date in the history of television documentary when Denis Mitchell, in a Special Enquiry on teenagers, first used a tape recorder to get closer to the hearts and minds of ordinary people than anyone had ever got before. A similar technique was also used by John Read to explore the thoughts and ideas of contemporary artists.

It is this continuous interplay of technical resources and creative imagination which has determined the lines of documentary development so far, and will no doubt continue to do so in the future. If I were to seek a line of progress both in the past and in the ten years to come I would suggest that it lies in the

endless attempt of the television documentary producer to get closer and closer to the feelings and opinions of ordinary people, and to harness each new technical development to this end. The most obvious difference between the documentary cinema of the 1930s and the documentary television of the 1960s is that whereas the first was largely both objective and didactic, the second has become subjective and suggestive. Indignation has been replaced by tolerance, and argument by a more subtle analysis of the human condition.

I believe that in the future we shall see a greater number of longer documentaries than we have seen hitherto. The Lawyers, Chicago, and such fine American films as Sit In and The Trials of Charles de Gaulle have already proved the staying power of the hour-long documentary-in-depth. Anthony de Lotbinière's new sixty-minute film about the death penalty, and Richard Cawston's even longer survey of television and the world are likely to be just the first of a long line. I believe also that we shall see more examples of documentary history, of which the possibilities have already been proved in Malcolm Muggeridge's script of The Thirties, in Bill Duncalf's They Made History and in the American The Real West.

Yet whatever the future holds we must not forget the men and women who pioneered the documentary form for television and laid the foundations of our craft."



## APPENDIX 48

Gilchrist Calder: Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer, December, 1973.

"I started as a producer-director in the theatre but at heart I was always a frustrated journalist. That's why the dramatised-documentary with all the research gave one such a marvellous opportunity in those early days. You had the pleasure of working with actors and doing your own research and putting the two together. You were a little one-man creative band. Dramatised-documentary was the meeting point of the two worlds of theatre and journalism.

For instance, when Colin Morris and I did a play about industrial relations called Strike - the best one, I believe, that we ever did and it was shown in Smiths Square for a long time afterwards as a perfect example of how a strike should be handled - I could go to Smiths Square, meet a Communist Shop Steward, chat with the Government's Relations Officer and go to see Sir William Monkton if one wished. That was the golden era for the BBC because we were living on the marvellous things that people had done during the war. That's why all the doors were open to you - not through our efforts alone but because of the splendid job the BBC had done for the country during the war.

In those early days one always did a particular subject because you wanted to do it and there was no one to say 'don't do this' or 'don't do that'. You researched it thoroughly to find out where the real interest lay. The first time that the word 'prostitution' was used on the air was when we did a documentary-drama called Without Love (1956). We had long meetings about it and whether we could do it as a subject and then we got the go-ahead and there was never any interference from then on - and conceitedly I say, because it was done with taste - you see in those days if you got your intention right you could do anything, violence and all. But if you sat down, as happens so often today and deliberately set out to shock and disturb - then the result as we know is bad taste and people complain.

Of course we had certain technical limitations in those times but if I was ever up against a really big problem I would

use film. That would give me time to breathe in the studio. For example we did a programme once about Foot and Mouth disease called Outbreak (1956) and we had all the animals in the studio. But, of course, they all had to be slaughtered, so this you did on film; and whilst that was running the studio doors were flung open and the animals pushed and prodded outside, the doors closed and the cast in their places ready for the start of the next scene. If you had mastered your craft both as a writer and as a producer then despite the 'live' show you could do it successfully but you had to keep on your toes.

The BBC was very much smaller in those post war days and for the first six or seven years I was lucky enough to work with the same camera crew, the same Technical Operations Manager (in those days called a Senior Maintenance Engineer) and we were one tight little group who understood each other and knew our individual strengths and weaknesses. No doubt arrogant because we thought we were the best! But you know what those early documentaries really said was 'love thy fellow man' they were full of genuine concern and compassion for society and man in it.

The first time I worked with Colin Morris was on a programme about a Lighthouse called Sunk Rock (1955). I actually chose this subject as a technical exercise as much as anything else. I wanted to show the audience what the sea really can look like, so we shot it from Beachy Head and used a marvellous cameraman called Cliff Hornby. At that time filming was done on 35mm equipment and it was extremely cumbersome to handle. Not like today's lightweight gear - and the dialogue was always the problem. So we mostly had a mixture of film and studio. For example, in this programme the boat would arrive and the man would get off the boat and walk into the Lighthouse and step into a small room. Walk up the lighthouse stairs on film because we couldn't reconstruct them in the studio and so on; a mixture of the two, that's the way it happened. Audiences then weren't so aware of post-synching sound and picture as they are today so if things got slightly out-of-synch no one minded.

I remember in this film we took a piece of the glass prism out of the light and slipped a clockwork camera inside - spin it off - and it would do 365° and the actors could just act in the middle and then we would lay the sound track on afterwards. You wouldn't get away with that sort of thing today. Usually these



programmes ran for around fifty to sixty minutes depending on subject matter. The most I ever did was six or seven a year but usually it was closer to four or five. But remember that was doing everything oneself.

For dramatised-documentary we wanted (a) people who did not look like actors (b) and people who didn't act but behaved. It was the personalities and their behaviour that concerned us - not tour de force acting (except Philips Latham's performance in Alcoholics). What we would do would be to go into a factory say, if that was what our story was to be about, see for ourselves the various 'types' who worked there and then come back and audition thirty or forty actors until we found just the right man for the part - it didn't matter if he couldn't act - I, as Producer, would show him how to behave in the part. This calls for very disciplined acting and we certainly didn't have the time to indulge in stunts like 'the method' which is very time-consuming anyway.

Tearaway (1956) which I did with Colin was the genesis of Z Cars and not his later play Who, me? As some writers have suggested. Tearaway, if you read it, is the exact formula for the later Z Cars - Who, Me? was an interrogation piece on three planes but Tearaway has the chase, the clip of film, the Coppers here and the Crooks there, patrol cars everything., and the closing sequence was of a little boy (Malcolm Hayes) running after a police car, falling flat on his face, and me filming him, having dropped some flies into his hands, so that they were running up and down as the end came. Later I was asked if I would do Z Cars but after Jacks and Knaves (1959) I'd had enough.

You know it was films like Harry Watt's North Sea which seemed so incredible to us then and more towards where we were hoping to go with television drama-documentary. That film was really my inspiration. I knew that I wanted to make actors behave like this. This was a master-piece, this was about life. Drama-documentary had to do with life that is why it is so like Grierson's documentary film movement of the thirties.

When documentary as a department was wound up in 1955 I went to Drama. That way I had my independence to do the sort of plays I really wanted to do. In fact continue with documentary. You know when I started in television I did a little holiday relief work as a studio manager and then I started to direct and then I

went back into the theatre for a spell and acted some more and then I came back again to television and this time they offered me a job and I stayed on. So I was very happy to be back in television drama.

What helped to kill off the one-shot dramatised documentary was Series . Here you had to pick a subject and develop it ad infinitum. For example, John Prebble and I did a play about a newspaper and immediately I was asked to do a series on it and I said 'no', but all the same they made a framework out of it and called it Deadline Midnight, and they hung all sorts of things on it which were never in the original. That way it seemed to me you changed the premise because you now have to find material to fill the framework. The whole intention is different it becomes formula writing, and I just don't believe that you can go on repeating this endlessly without losing spontaneity and the rest.

Drama Department was always very envious of us in Documentary because we were considered 'original' - new in every sense of the word and very virile.

I believed at that time and so did Colin Morris that you could talk to people and get behind their words and then get an actor to take the part. This way we believed we got closer to the truth. Mind you filming was always the problem. In those days I often used to get a Post Office hide and put the camera gear inside it. Then I would get the actors to walk through their actions in long shot and cut down to it afterwards. Then after the crowds had gone away, the actors would do it for real and I would purposely have the camera jogged to give it a slightly 'newsreel' quality, an immediacy! What else could one do with that bulky equipment. You certainly couldn't hand hold a clock-work Newman-Sinclair and a bloody great Mitchell - sound and picture camera. You could hardly tuck it under your arm or stick it on your shoulder like you can with today's lightweight stuff. Techniques have all changed so very much - mostly for the better. You can certainly get much greater realism now. I think that the films have learnt a great deal from television realism.

It's very much a director's medium today. Incidentally the first time we ever had a director as such - previously the producer was his own director - was in a programme in 1953 called Under Her Skilled Hand - Bob Barr was producer, I was Director and Dr.Cormack Swann was the author."



## APPENDIX 49

Letter to this writer from Robert Barr: 9 May, 1974, concerning the television series I Made News (quoted in part).

Costings.

"Among the items you so gallantly carted off\* was a little cost book for the I Made news series (1951). I have come across the 'rough' of the report I made at the end of the series which may interest you since it reflects something of the problems and politics of the time. It has some historical interest since it was the first time we were able to do a weekly 'drama' series on television. Reason: there was then no means of pre-recording and since "everyone was a Producer" the turn-around for scripting, casting, and design and rehearsal was about four weeks. It seemed impossible that there would ever be an equivalent of radio's weekly Dick Barton.

My own series up to then were at four weekly intervals and one day Cecil McGivern breathed a sort of wish "if only we could do them weekly". It seemed at the time the impossible wish on TV. I made a bargain with him: if he would give me two studio managers and let me set up two 'units' I'd give him a weekly series. The report tells how it was done. It also reminds me that Cecil had no great faith in the impossible and had warned me that he'd take it off if it wasn't up to normal 'monthly' standards. I don't know if the final copy of the report exists, this is only the rough of it but it established the producer-director relationship."

\* The Robert Barr Papers - (St.Luke's College Library, Exeter, Devon).

## APPENDIX 50

Report on the I Made News series by Robert Barr (1951)  
Robert Barr Papers.

"In September of this year (1951) Controller Television Programmes (Cecil McGivern) asked me to set up a production 'unit' capable of producing one 30-minute documentary programme each week over a period of twelve weeks.

It was agreed that we should experiment on the lines of film practice, of having a producer in charge of all productions, but with 'directors' responsible for rehearsal and for the studio presentation of the show and working to the producer. It was part of this experiment to see whether a producer, having the choice of story, choice of script writers, imposing the necessary documentation on the production, and supervising casting and rehearsal could impose a 'style of production' on the series.

A break-down of the day-to-day work of each programme showed that the minimum time for the preparation of these shows was fourteen days. At first we considered having three units in operation, but I felt that would be too costly in personnel and office accommodation, and I decided that the experiment would be much more worthwhile if this output could be achieved by two units.

#### The Unit:

Each 'unit' was to consist of a director and a production secretary.

#### The Producer:

The Producer was to be responsible for the choice of story, choice and briefing of scriptwriters and (within the limits of an average allocation) responsible for the allocation of money for each programme, e.g. although the average allocation was £425, actual allocation on each of the scripts ranged from £363 to £510.

The Producer was also responsible for the accuracy and documentation of the programmes, for preliminary design conference, for finding film locations, for obtaining of all necessary permits, for filming sessions, and for the payment and entertainment of the 'personalities' who appeared in the programme.

His office was to be responsible for the general routine of billings, booking rehearsal rooms, despatch of props and wardrobe lists etc. and for all the day-to-day problems of alterations and additions to 'requirement lists' that happen during rehearsal.



The Producer was also to supervise casting and rehearsal, since part of the experiment was to see whether with choice of story, choice of scriptwriters, and such supervision he could impose a 'style of production' on the series.

#### The Unit:

Each unit was to consist of a 'director', a production secretary, and a stage manager. These were to remain constant throughout the series, work as a team and (I thought it important) rehearse always in the same rehearsal rooms.

Unit No.1 was: Leonard Brett, Director; Shirley Wilkinson, Secretary; and Paddy Russell, Stage Manager.

Unit No.2 was: Kevin Sheldon, Director; Louise Laurence, Secretary; and Shirley Cleghorn, Stage Manager.

#### Designer:

Design Department arranged that Mr. Stephen Bundy should be responsible for the design of this series of programmes, giving a continuity which was most valuable.

#### Senior Television Engineers:

There were three changes of S.Tel.E's during the series. All of them gave full and ready co-operation, but they all agreed that it would have been smoother all round if one S.Tel.E. had been given this series.

#### Studio Manager:

Mr. Osmond agreed to second John Oxley as full time Studio Manager for this series. During the run of the series his work increased and he was acting eventually as 'Unit Manager'.

Later in the report I will deal with this very necessary phase of 'unit' work.

#### Budget:

The series of 30-minute programmes were to be produced on an average budget of £425. During the three-month period the Producer was to be 'allowed' to overspend on any show what he had saved on another. A break-down of this average budget was made and agreed.

Here is a table showing the estimated and the actual spending for each item in the budget, and showing an underspending of £50 over the nine (9) programmes.

Costs	<u>Script</u>	<u>Cast.</u>	<u>Des.</u>	<u>M/W</u>	<u>Film</u>	<u>O/Set.</u>	<u>Trans.</u>	<u>Display</u>
Estimated	£52	£218	£75	£25	£40	£14	-	-
Actual	£38	£244	£75	£26	£31	-	£3	£2

The figures given are to the nearest £ and it will be seen that whilst I budgeted for an overnight set and was not required to pay for it; I had not budgeted for transport or display.

There was also the encouraging attitude of the directors in trying to do better and better shows, with bigger and better casts. This led to an increase in the cast-bill from £200 for No.2 to £323 for No.9, but the average as shown was £244.

The exceptionally high cost of No.9 was due to the following:

- (a) We had saved the necessary money, (b) I felt that the Director, Leonard Brett, had had the less interesting of the stories to direct during the series, (c) that I wanted the last to be the best.

The fact is plain, however, that the least expensive cast received the highest (to date) appreciation figure for the series.

#### Analysis of Programmes:

The Appreciation Figures for the series of nine programmes were:

71%.....77%.....55%.....72%.....72%.....78%.....73%.....78%

Kevin Sheldon had the commendably high Figures for his four shows:

77%.....72%.....78%.....78%

It is worth noting that the three highest figures were obtained by 'foreign' stories i.e. FBI....FBI....Dutch Resistance; and that all three cost less than budget.

It is also worth noting, perhaps, that of these three stories two were written by me and the third re-written by Kevin Sheldon and myself. The cost of a programme starts with the script, and experience of television saves money!

The most costly of the programmes (No.9) was a first attempt (a good but expensive first attempt) by a film writer Jack Howells.

He used his characters well but too lavishly, I thought. However, I had saved the money on my own shows and decided to give both the writer and the director a 'break' as part of the experiment.

#### Scripts:

I will begin by repeating: the cost of a programme begins with the



script. I was not at all satisfied with the quality of the scripts I received or with the television craftsmanship. In all, I tried four writers: Sylvia Dye, Guy Morgan, Wilfred Greatorox and Jack Howells.

All writers were briefed in the use of no more than 12 characters (preferably 10) and a maximum of three main sets and three backgrounds.

I had decided to pay a comparatively high price per script: 50gns. I had also broken the script-writing down into three phases which were paid separately: story, treatment, scenario. This allowed two, or even three writers to contribute to each script. It is still a good scheme.

Had the scripts for this series been in on reasonable time, had they been (as were Nos.2,6,8) written with a knowledge of television studio practice I could have saved £50 on each show, provided better shows, and saved my director from overwork.

I think it is fair to say that every problem that arose during this experiment stemmed directly from a late or indifferent script. There was one occasion when two service departments complained to Television Programmes Operations about the lateness of 'requisitions': that was also the week when the main scriptwriter (on the day when a script should have been delivered) said that he was busy on a film script and was calling off.

This problem, however, stemmed directly from an early script problem. Controller Television Programmes having launched the hare took the opportunity to put some salt on its tail. He said: "If it doesn't click after three, I'll take it off!"

As a piece of 'ginger' this is most effective, but in a new series it does not permit forward planning of scripts. Indeed, but for the fortunate accident of the C.Tel.P's being in Paris when we hit the all-time low of 55% this series would have been taken off, and I wouldn't have said 'no'.

By the time I found that the series was 'safe', I also found I had no scripts. The quantity production was never in doubt, the lack of quality in certain programmes was due almost entirely to this restricted authority. Had the scripts for this series been ordered in reasonable time, had they been written with a knowledge of television studio practice I could have saved £50 per show, provided better programmes, and saved my directors from overwork as I've already said.

Directors:

Both directors worked continuously for 10 weeks. They worked hard and well, trying to fit themselves into a new type of programme, and a new system. At times it could not have been easy to continue rehearsals wondering whether a scene or situation would be approved, but I was most grateful for their keenness and interest in the 'bitty technique' of documentary, and it was most noticeable that with each programme less and less 'supervision' was necessary.

Indeed, I think they will both agree that in the last four programmes there was a feeling that the Producer was quite useful 'you could always try the tricky bits out on him'.

Design Problems:

Perhaps the most difficult of the problems arose from the fact that, with two shows constantly in rehearsal, the directors (or their secretaries or Stage Managers) tended to phone the designer with immediate problems, forgetting that he insisted (rightly) that all amendment requests, alterations, etc., should come through the Producer. Stephen Bundy's lament: 'I can't deal with three people - all wanting priority in the same series'. Again, early and better scripts would obviate most of the problems, and the realisation that the Producer is ready and willing to do all that 'trouble-shooting' for the 'unit'.

One of the most interesting points of this experiment was that a Producer, for the first time, was able to work through all studio rehearsals, and then sit back and watch transmission. It's quite an experience, frightening at first, but you get used to it, and it's very useful.

Unit System:

I have now learned enough about this system of production to say:

- (a) A Producer can impose his style on the production.
- (b) Obtain a better production, by knowing what is wanted by watching and advising.
- (c) Smooth the way for the director by careful advanced planning.

And these things will improve with practice. It is, of course, necessary that the Producer and Director work well together and that their temperaments are suited to this style of work.

This system requires hard and continuous work from all members of the 'unit', its economy of personnel and allocation



rests on continuous production; its style of production and streamlining of method, rests with the team.

Since the director is the most closely connected with the creative work, he will tire first. He is important, very important, but he is also expendable. By expendable I mean just that. He can be rested, changed, given one show in two, three or four weeks, according to his capacity.

The 'unit' is the driving force and its speed is on insisting on continuous output. The 'unit' therefore should be an organisation capable of handing a 'package' to a director - (script, secretary, stage manager, basic floor plan, basic prop list, suggested cast list, and rehearsal schedule) and ensure that the programme is up to the 'unit' standard. The unit should, therefore, consist of:

Producer and Secretary, Unit Manager,  
Production Secretary, Designer, Senior Television Engineer,  
Casting Clerk -

all allocated for all of the units productions."

APPENDIX 51

Costings for the I Made News series of nine programmes (1951)  
Allocation per programme was £425 : Robert Barr Papers.

No.1 : Rough Diamonds : Friday October 12: 8.45 - 9.15 pm.

Copyright ... ..	£21.	12s.	0d.
Cast ... ..	£208.	19s.	0d.
Design & Supply...	£75.	0s.	0d.
Make Up & Wardrobe. ...	£10.	10s.	0d.
Film ... ..	<u>£48.</u>	<u>0s.</u>	<u>0d.</u>
Total...	£ 364.	1s.	0d.

Underspent .. £61. 1s. 0d.

£18 of film cost (Studio Film Labs) put on to No.2's charge.

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No. 2 : The Case of the Talking Dolls : Friday October 19:  
8.15 - 8.45 pm.

Copyright ... ..	£31.	10s.	0d.
Cast ... ..	£180.	12s.	0d.
Design & Supply ..	£75.	0s.	0d.
Make Up & Wardrobe. ...	£30.	0s.	0d.
Film ... ..	£30.	0s.	0d.
Display. ... ..	<u>£10.</u>	<u>14s.</u>	<u>6d.</u>
Total.	£357.	16s.	6d.

Underspent .. £67. 3s. 6d.

Cost includes £18 of film shot for No.1

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No. 3 : The Theft of the Pink Diamond : Friday November 2.  
8.15 - 8.45 pm.

Copyright ... ..	£52.	10s.	0d.
Cast ... ..	£265.	14s.	0d.
Design & Supply ..	£75.	0s.	0d.
Make Up & Wardrobe. ...	£30.	0s.	0d.
Film ... ..	£19.	0s.	0d.
Display. ... ..	£1.	11s.	0d.
Hospitality & Transport.	£15.	11s.	9d.



Misc ... ..	£1.	10s.	0d
		18s.	0d
		<u>3.</u>	<u>8s. 6d.</u>
Total ...	£465.	3s.	<u>3d.</u>

Overspent .. £45. 3s. 3d.

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No. 4: Gunmen in Park Lane : Friday November 9 : 8.15 - 8.45 pm.

Copyright ... ..	£52.	10s.	0d.
Cast ... ..	£259.	7s.	0d.
Design & Supply...	£75.	0s.	0d.
Make Up & Wardrobe. ...	£30.	0s.	0d.
Film ... ..	£26.	0s.	0d
Display. ... ..	£3.	3s.	0d
		<u>£446.</u>	<u>0s. 0d</u>
John's gratuities ...	<u>1.</u>	<u>5s.</u>	<u>0d.</u>
Total....	£447.	5s.	<u>0d.</u>

Overspent ... £22. 5s. 0d.

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No. 5 : Phantom Millions : Friday November 16 : 8.15 - 8.45 pm.

Copyright.(Writer) ...	£10.	10s.	0d
G.Morgan....	£31.	10s.	0d
S.Dye .. ...	£15.	15s.	0d
Cast ... ..	£214.	14s.	0d
Design & Supply .. ...	£75.	0s.	0d
Make Up & Wardrobe ...	£30.	0s.	0d
Film ... ..	£18.	10s.	0d
John Rhodes . ...	£5.	5s.	0d
Display ... ..		<u>16s.</u>	<u>0d.</u>
Total ..	£402.	0s.	<u>0d.</u>

Underspent .. £23. 10s. 0d

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No. 9 : The Black Butterfly : Friday December 14 : 8.30 - 9.00 pm

Copyright ... (Fabian) ...	£21.	0s.	0d
(Howells) ..	£31.	10s.	0d
Cast ... ..	£323.	2s.	0d
Design & Supply...	£75.	0s.	0d
Make Up & Wardrobe ... ..	£30.	0s.	0d
Film ... ..	£25.	0s.	0d
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Total ....	£505.	12s.	0d.
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Overspent... £80. 12s. 0d.

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## APPENDIX 52

Caryl Doncaster : Proposals for future development of Documentary:  
 March 1955 : BBC Written Archives Centre : Documentary File.

1. Programme Allocation :

At the moment an hour's programme involves 3 to 5 sets and roughly 15 characters at a cost of around £1200.

2. Facilities:

The general facilities required for this type of production are heavy. This is probably a more important consideration than actual programme money. It involves studio equipment i.e. four cameras, two to three booms, teleciné and back-projection, heavy flatage from design and supply; heavy bookings, make-up, wardrobe and dressing room requirements, owing to the number of artists; heavier film facilities in terms of footage, location, and pre-planning than the average drama. And the shorter ten-day rehearsal period which has followed increased Equity costs now means assistance for the producer on the technical side, even at this point.

3. Scripts:

With the coming of Commercial television, the time involved in research for the writing of documentary scripts is bound to make them dearer next year - and if we want to keep up standards and get the best writers, this must lead to increasing an already heavy budget.

We should reach a decision now as to whether the importance of these programmes justifies the money and facilities involved. The 'educational' ideas they contain can often be put over more cheaply by other methods. The dramatic method does appeal, however, to the greatest number of people, as viewer appreciation figures have shown. Therefore, it is a weapon for the future.

In order to achieve one hour's duration of drama/documentary every six weeks, the following Unit would be necessary :



The Producer: Working with, at any point :-

3 Scriptwriters: These could be outside scriptwriters engaged for a series, or for individual programmes. The Producer would make all contacts, would be responsible for the policy side of the writing, and would have editorial responsibility for the scripts.

Producer's Secretary: Working on preliminary scripts, before handing over to the script typist pool at production script stage. Camera scripts would be typed within the unit.

Director: Working with the Producer.

Floor Manager.

Assist. Floor Manager.

Copy Typist.

The Director at least ought to remain with the Unit continuously. As requirements must be in 5 weeks before every programme, this allows the Unit to work one week ahead on planning. It would therefore, help if the same designer could be allocated for at least six programmes.

This team could be the basis, and output could be increased very easily at any point after the team had got used to working as a Unit. After the first six to twelve months' period, a half-hour series could be started, scheduling one every two weeks for a given period, with a temporary increase of another director. If scheduling were carefully organised, it might not even be necessary to increase floor production staff, who, instead of being allocated elsewhere during the non-rehearsal period, could remain with the Unit.

I do feel that there is a danger that documentary drama will be lost in the general growth of television, if an organisation isn't started with a view to getting more of this type of programme on the screen and at the same time keeping up the quality - which is primarily quality of writing and interpretation. As we shall be needing to train writers unused to the medium, perhaps my efforts would be most wisely spent on this side."

## APPENDIX 53

Maurice Gorham: Sound and Fury : Marshall 1948 : P. 214-217

"I had a regular itinerary for visitors, with shortened versions for those who were not interested or interesting enough to see it all. After a good dose of back-stage they would trace the picture signal back to the local control room, where the 'tilt-and-bend' engineers do wonderful things on complicated panels known laconically as 'the racks'; on up to the producer's gallery where the producer talks fast and continuously into his microphone as he watches his two screens, the 'transmission' screen showing the picture that is going out and being seen at that moment by viewers at home and the 'pre-view' screen on which he sees the picture from any other camera, so that he can be satisfied with it before he tells his vision mixer to mix or cut. The atmosphere in the producer's gallery is always tense during a show and it becomes almost unendurable when anything goes wrong - for instance when No 1 Camera begins to flash and show signs of being about to pack up.

From the studio gallery we would go on to the telecine room next door, where films were shown by being played through a special projector direct into an Emitron camera. Next came the Central Control Room, from which the Presentation Assistant and another squad of engineers controlled all the switching from one studio to another and brought in 'outside broadcasts' and films as required. Here again were the two screens, the vision mixer and the sound mixer, plus a mystification of apparatus that would much better have been placed somewhere else, if we could have found anywhere else to put it.

'Central' was the linking centre of all television transmissions and it was manned whenever we were on the air. Normally a quiet and leisurely resort, it sprang to life when we had one of our frequent breakdowns - when a whole studio packed up just before a show, or when the pictures coming from an Outside Broadcast location were worse than we would normally have thought fit to put out. Then the crowded room became pandemonium, engineers searching faults, people running in and out from the studios, the Presentation Assistant arguing with the O.B. people over lines that the engineers were constantly snatching away.



For anybody like myself, coming from sound programmes that had made a speciality of slick presentation, television was a nightmare. It took some months and many arguments to find out exactly what Central Control Room could do in the way of switching out studios, and when we had been through it all it still took anything up to four minutes to put out an emergency announcement in sound only. We made many plans for getting some kind of presentation studio where an announcer could be permanently ready at a microphone, but the complications of doing anything at Alexandra Palace were such that nothing had in fact been started when I left at the end of 1947.

From Central I would convey my now baffled guests to Studio B. This had been the Baird studio in the early days of the television service, when Baird and EMI systems had been used in alternate weeks. The Baird system had had disadvantages from the first and a certain atmosphere of defeat and failure still hung around Studio B. It had three cameras instead of four, and various other technical limitations, its control gallery projected into the middle of the studio and its internal arrangements were even more reminiscent of Heath Robinson than those in Studio A; the Engineers' control, which for A occupied a large room, was squeezed into an alley formed by bricking in the outside balcony, and was so congested that in crises the engineers worked literally breast to breast. The synonym for a show that could be given no resources worth speaking about was that it would have to go into 'the wrong end of B'.

Just to cheer them up, I would then let my guests peep into the more human activities of the make-up room and wardrobe. By 1946 make-up for television had become a very harmless affair. The days of blue noses and black lips were over; people merely looking as though they had taken a lot of trouble over their appearance and had acquired a nice tan.

Wardrobe still presented complications; the television cameras have capricious likes and dislikes. We had no incident so striking as that of the pre-war bathing suit that went transparent in the lens, but there were times when I realised that the camera can on occasions see more than the human eye. Apart from these embarrassing aspects camera tubes varied in red sensitivity, so a dancer's frock might appear almost black in one shot and light

grey in the next. Unrelieved black was apt to cause 'flare' or 'fuzz' at the bottom of the picture, and unrelieved white to cause halation. We got quite used to seeing television performers walking about in correct evening dress with their dress shirts deep yellow instead of white.

There was a thing called 'swizzle' too. Sometimes when we televised women in striped jumpers or men in striped shirts the stripes danced madly before your eyes. That was usually when the wardrobe experts had not seen the costume until it was too late to change it.

Last exhibit in the studio corridor was the Upper Scene Dock. Here all the scenery and properties that were too big to come up in the passenger lift were hauled up on a hand-worked hoist through a most break-neck hatch in the floor, and stored until they were wanted for the show. In a corner of the Scene Dock was the Aladdin's Cave of television - the Property Store packed with telephones, clocks, pistols, calendars, pictures of all periods, glasses in all styles, and anything else that might be wanted at short notice in any kind of show.

From the end of the studio corridor, past the corner where the boxing and wrestling ring was stored - for there was not an inch of space wasted anywhere in the station - you went downstairs to the ground floor. Here at the Lower Scene Dock, where all the scenery comes in from the open air to the underside of the hoist; the restaurant - always overcrowded and often quite inaccessible - music library, film projection theatre, and transmitter rooms. The sound transmitter room also houses the BBC's pioneer frequency modulation transmitter, but the vision transmitter was the real show. Here is the last stage before the picture signal goes out to the aerial mast. Tall panels of battleship grey, witches' cauldrons of mercury rectifiers, fascinating screens on which engineers who understand these things can see the waveform that they are putting out, are all dominated by an over-powering hum of machinery that kept even the most inquisitive of technically minded visitors fairly quiet.

For those whom I really wanted to impress the tour was not yet over. Braving the winds that usually howled around the terrace we would walk across to the old Alexandra Palace theatre and look at the artists' room, scene store, and carpenters' shop,



and see every sort of scenery in every stage from the rough design to the finished set. This was the part of the station that inspired most envy in American television men. They remarked on the variety of technical skills that our producers could draw upon, and it is true that a team to equal the sixty men who worked under Peter Bax could not have been found at any other television station in the world."

## APPENDIX 54

Memorandum from Norman Collins (Controller BBC TV) to  
 Sir William Haley (Director-General BBC) 14 September, 1949  
'Integration of Sound and Television Drama' : BBC Written  
 Archives Centre : Drama File .

"At this stage in our conversation about the proposed integration of Sound and Television, may I please put down on paper a number of points for your consideration. I do so because the proposed integration is a matter of major internal policy and it would be bad for both Sound and Television and, therefore, for the Corporation as a whole, if the arrangement proved to be either unworkable, untidy or unduly extravagant in terms of man-power.

Clearly there are merits in unity. There is a tidiness in the conception of one Head of Corporation Drama, one Head of Corporation Features, one Head of Corporation Children's Programmes, and so forth, that is organisationally attractive, and I recognise that, as things are, these Heads exercise their functions purely in terms of Sound radio and their present titles are, therefore, misnomers. Moreover, by the time the television audience approaches the size of the listening audience, there will obviously have to be co-ordination, i.e. to take the simple instance of Drama, it would be absurd if the Television Service staged PYGMALION at the same time as the major Sound Service were reading the parts of PYGMALION in front of the microphone. Co-ordination, however, does not necessarily imply integration; and more and more when I hear integration mentioned, I find myself wondering whether the essential difference between the two media of Sound and Television have been sufficiently appreciated.

By now, it is probably true to say that Sound radio has been developed to its utmost technical limits. In other words, it is improbable that, in ten years' time, a sound radio SATURDAY NIGHT THEATRE will be any different technically from the SATURDAY NIGHT THEATRE that was broadcast last Saturday or will be broadcast next Saturday. The only foreseeable difference is that, as a result of the activities of the Corporation, public taste may have improved so that the choice of plays will be



different. The technique will remain approximately the same.

The latter is completely untrue of Television Drama, as this is really the crux of the matter. Television drama is still in its beginnings and, in ten years' time, the production of Television Drama will probably bear very little resemblance to present production. There is, indeed, every indication that the development of Television Drama, if properly directed, will be more rapid than the development in the corresponding ten years of films, because the lessons of the films will be there for television to have before it.

Television production, however, is not the same as film production any more than it is the same as stage production, and its relationship with sound radio drama production is negligible and can be ignored. What is, therefore, essential for the most fruitful development of Television Drama is the appointment of one man, the Val Gielgud of Television, working full time and without any other distractions whatsoever in this new, largely unknown, infinitely complicated and most exacting medium.

Before anyone can be in any other than a purely nominal and misleading sense Head of Television, he must familiarise himself in the closest possible detail with studio production from the initial moment of discussion with designers to the handling of the controls at the time of the actual production. He must be so fully familiar with all the details of caption design, scenic design, wardrobe design, make-up, lighting, telecine, television sound, studio lay-out, camera characteristics and production gallery procedure, that he can alter them when he feels them to be wrong - all this in addition to the knowledge of the theatre, whether derived from stage or films, which originally disqualified him for this post. Moreover, if the Head of Drama in Television is usefully and completely to fulfil his function, he must work throughout in the closest association with the engineers in the design of new types of cameras and new types of lenses, the design of artificial scenic devices and the types of cranes and dollies and the architecture of the studio that drama productions require, as well as in giving advice on the number of camera channels, the number of telecine channels, the number of caption channels, and so forth, that his productions require. Television is still so young that whoever takes over such a post must plan for the future as well as conduct operations in

the present.

Anything less than this complete familiarity with all aspects of television production will mean also that the Head of Television Drama is an amateur.

To propose then that one man, who is already responsible for the professional standards of 450 to 500 Sound radio Drama productions a year, should additionally be made responsible for the professional standards of 100 to 150 television productions seems to me more perilous than to seek to put one man in charge of the professional standards of the Old Vic and of Pinewood."



## APPENDIX 55

Val Gielgud : Television Drama : from Years in a Mirror :  
 Bodley Head, 1964: Pp 128-134

"I did not know Norman Collins well but I enjoyed his novels, and, following upon one or two disputes, we had, I believed, achieved a mutual respect for each other's work when he was in charge of the Light Programme. My immediate programme chief would be Cecil McGivern, whom I both liked and admired enormously. He had been the most brilliant of features producers in sound during the war, and there are still people who remember his Junction X and Bomb Doors Open! Since those days he had done a stint in films only to meet with frustration and disappointment. I knew him well, and looked forward to the prospect of working with him again.

I was prepared to enter an atmosphere quite different from that of Portland Place. To an extent I even welcomed the prospect. But until I got there I had no idea of just how different that atmosphere was going to be. As far as television drama was concerned I found myself back in almost precisely the same situation that I had faced at Savoy Hill in 1929. Apart from occasional and spasmodic suggestions from McGivern - who was supposed to be frying more important fish - there was no sort of direction. There was no policy. There was a collection of producers of very varying merit, who were supposed to, but did not, form a department. There was an officially acknowledged Senior Producer in the talented person of George More O'Ferrall. There was a Drama Co-ordinator with ill-defined responsibilities, who had expected to get my job and resigned when he failed to do so.

As I saw it, the case was one of starting again from scratch with two main objectives in view. The first was to make a genuine working Drama Department for the Television Service. The second was to produce a workable drama policy. In my innocence I found myself running my head against a brick wall both above and below.

This was sufficiently discouraging. In my previous experience I had found that when on occasion I had trouble with my producers I could count on support from my Controller, or, if the

issue warranted it, from my Director-General. When I felt that I had to argue an issue with my Controller I could count on the backing of the professional opinion of my department. This war on two fronts simultaneously was something new to me. Apart from overweighting the odds against my getting what I wanted it made me feel lonely and miserable. If McGivern did not want a policy for his drama, and if drama producers resented a representative spokesman, I could not help but feel that I was wasting my time.....

What happened in practice was that McGivern saw as little of me personally as he could, preferring to send me curt directives in writing to decide issues which could only have been settled satisfactorily in discussion. This resulted in misunderstandings, in mutual exasperation, in interminable correspondence, and in a hideous waste of time.

He agreed that both a policy and planned schedules were necessary for television plays. Both depended on foresight, forethought and consistency. The policy problem was far more difficult than it had been in sound, where alternative programmes made it possible to channel different types of play to differing types of listener. With only a single programme to achieve a balance which should satisfy the philistine and the highbrow, devotees of thrillers and lovers of the classic drama, the difficulties of framing a policy and creating schedules which should implement it were formidable. For McGivern it was simply a question of 'doing as much good stuff as possible', of sensing when the main body of viewers was getting restless, and then of whipping into the schedule an Ibsen, a Shaw, or a Shakespeare, to satisfy the critics and bolster up prestige. It is an attitude which, both with the BBC and the independent companies, has persisted with the years. I still find it inadequate.

He was also passionately addicted to off-the-cuff and last-minute changes. He would hear of a new disease in Paris or a remarkable comedy duo just arrived from the States, and I would be told that a play, often already in rehearsal, must be changed for one costing less money because the budget was strained - it always was - and he needed the balance to pay for his new enthusiasm. The general programme may have been vitalised and brightened up; the drama schedule was knocked to pieces, its balance ruined. That this was bound to happen he could not or would not see.



Worse than this was the tradition among producers, crystallised under the Gorham regime, of that individualism which I have called 'rancid'. With no established script unit and with no departmental control worth the name, it had been left almost to each individual producer to choose the plays that he would handle according to his own tastes and whims. This obviously made balanced scheduling impossible. While I am strongly averse from compelling a producer to handle any play with which he is not in sympathy, and while it is true that a producer will naturally work more enthusiastically on a play which he particularly wants to produce, I know from experience that producers are by no means the best judges of the type of piece they produce best. Clowns long to play Hamlet. Admirable producers of Ibsen yearn to handle light comedy. The assigning of the right play to the right producer seemed to me always one of my most important responsibilities at Broadcasting House. It seemed to me even more important at Alexandra Palace. I was not surprised that the producers themselves disliked the change. I was bewildered and affronted when to that dislike was added the disapproval of McGivern.

While determined to get my own way over choice of material, I was able to sympathise to some extent with the producers' feelings in the matter. Their inability to see eye to eye with me over another principle of our work was far more serious. Even in Broadcasting House I had always felt that our output of drama had increased unduly, was still increasing, and ought to be diminished. A groan would run around the programme board when at regular intervals I pleaded for 'fewer and better plays'. Quality as opposed to Quantity was known as my King Charles' head. Still the point was taken, and I was never pressed into commitments for which there were inadequate production facilities or inadequate rehearsal time.

At Alexandra Palace, with only two studios - one of which was much too small - at our disposal, the regular production of two full-length plays a week was beyond our capacity, if a proper professional standard was to be maintained. About one piece in every three was properly rehearsed. Again and again one heard laughingly how a play had been televised with a final act unseen by the cameras until the actual transmission.

I expected to find that producers would dislike this state of affairs as much as I did. I was wrong. I have never seen the



adage that 'everything will come out alright on the night' so monstrously abused. Not only had television producers been expected to work under such handicaps and surmount ensuing crises by improvisation and ingenuity, they had come to pride themselves on this state of affairs. It was part of the mystique of the Television Service, naturally incomprehensible to outsiders.

This was a straightforward professional issue - there was of course more than one aspect of the policy issue - over which I believed I could tackle McGivern and, if necessary, Norman Collins, with confidence. In fact my preliminary approaches were sympathetically received. McGivern, however, wanted to know if my point of view was supported by producers whose experience of work in television studios had been longer and more varied than mine. This was reasonable enough. I put the question to a producers' meeting accordingly. My proposal amounted to this: That we should, as a department, give our opinion in writing that no play should be televised without a minimum of three camera rehearsals, even if this implied cutting our output of drama by a third, which I anticipated it would. Two voices were raised in my support. A few were silently disapproving. Most were outraged, and made no bones about saying so. I was asking them to admit that their present production standards were not as good as they ought to be. (They were not). To subscribe to my opinion would imply that they knew they were falling down on the job. (It would not have done anything of the sort). Of course facilities were inadequate, but if they had allowed themselves to be held back by that sort of thing, television drama would never have got anywhere. (This was at least arguable). What about all the 'rave' notices gained by television plays in the press? (Few of such notices were written by recognised critics, and any 'new thing', with the publicity interest of television, can count on plenty of newspaper coverage). In short I had grievously offended their amour propre and was proposing to denigrate their professional capacities. McGivern, who could hardly have been expected to welcome a smaller output of plays for the sake of his programmes as a whole, concluded that I was trying to rush my fences; that I was trying to act with insufficient knowledge of the facts. Things went on as before, and though in my own production of St.Joan I got my three camera rehearsals by flatly refusing to



handle the play without them, an average of two or one and a half day's camera rehearsal remained the convention. I get the impression that even today it has not been significantly extended.

I should perhaps make it plain for the benefit of the layman that a play can be rehearsed outside the studio for three weeks or a month. The camera rehearsals are the only ones that really count, except for the learning of lines and the rough plotting of moves.

Such was the atmosphere in which for eighteen months and during seven days a week I worked harder than I have ever worked in my life with - as far as I could and can judge - no good effect whatsoever, except the quite fortuitous result of the Party Manners row which seems to have freed the BBC permanently from any danger of political censorship.

But let me repeat that I was principally to blame. I should have been more patient, more prepared to temper the wind. I could have been much more tactful. I should probably have insisted on a personal show-down with McGivern, or at worst gone to Norman Collins over his head. I should have been more courageous and much more far-sighted. I should have thickened my skin and stuck to my guns. After all, I had been through much the same sort of thing before, and all had turned out for the best.

(In time)...."my face was saved handsomely. It appeared that I had been missed at Broadcasting House. There seemed to be still plenty of life in the old dog, radio drama. Even nominal responsibility for sound and television drama combined had been proved too much for one man. I could take my choice. So I returned to Broadcasting House, taking no sheaves with me, and leaving, I imagine, a good many hearts the lighter in the Television Service for my going."

## APPENDIX 56

Profile of Michael Barry as retiring Head of BBC TV Drama :  
by Peter Black (Television Critic) Daily Mail : September 16,  
1961 : Robert Barr Papers.

"The change in the sort of play that's fashionable is most neatly reflected in the means authors use to get a character off-stage.

In the old days the unwanted character would look at his watch and say "Good gracious! I never posted those letters."

In, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring on BBC Television this week the character just said : "I shan't be a minute," and walked off, another character shouting after her : "Yer can't miss it, firs' door onner lef' ."

The man whose job it has been to detect, steer and provide for these revolutions left his office in the Television Centre last night for the last time. After 23 years with the BBC the last ten of them as Head of its giant Drama Department, he has left to become Controller for Irish Television.

"A splendid, exciting opportunity," said Michael Barry, using three of his favourite words.

Enthusiasm, miraculously intact after ten years as Head of the largest play-producing organisation the world has had, is Barry's most noticeable trait. The next is the sustained ability to inspire it in others.

He believes in television the way other people believe in nuclear disarmament, or capital punishment. Ask him what television drama has accomplished. The answer comes in a tumbling rush of words."

"Before Television, the major writers - Ibsen, O'Neill, Shaw - were only names in the public libraries to most people. Television made them talking-points in the bus next morning and even if some people didn't like them they talked about them; they were for or against Ibsen, Priestley or Henry IV Part 11.

Television broke up the fixed three-act pattern of writing plays and brought back the one-actor, the sketch, the serial. "

"It made it possible for writers to exist without the West End. It's given them an outlet for continuous work. "

People talk about the new wave in the theatre but forget



that television was marching shoulder to shoulder with it. Our drama documentaries by people like Duncan Ross and Caryl Doncaster and Colin Morris were working the vein of realism long before the theatre break-through in 1956. It was in television that the ground was being prepared.

They say that Television plays aren't as good as they used to be. This is nonsense. They are much better, it's just that there's so much more drama that it's hard to disentangle. Obviously its beyond our resources to be good all the time."

The most modest and unassuming of men Barry's greatest satisfaction from his tenure is characteristically impersonal.

"I think it's to have been in the middle of a group of people whose unbreakable professional thrust prevented a factory operation from becoming industrial."

But he wasn't in the middle he was out in front, heading an operation that, seen in the perspective of ten years, is an astonishing feat of drive and organisation and artistic skills.

The achievements of the ITV Companies in Drama are the brightest part of their record. But they have been Panzer-like thrusts towards limited objectives, directed by small, manageable units.

The BBC's drama has advanced like an army on all fronts. Shakespeare and other classics were there, serialised adaptations of famous novels, regional drama including translations from the Welsh, Brian Rix farces, international series such as Maigret, the adventure serials, and plays by new writers.

One of Barry's last jobs was the decentralisation of his department into smaller groups - new plays, Sunday plays, documentaries, thrillers - each operating under its own Controller. It is a reform he has long wanted and it ought to answer the critical objection that BBC drama has become awkwardly huge.

The new drama chief will be something like the Chairman of the Electrical Authority, something like the Director of the Edinburgh Festival. It will be interesting and revealing to notice which the BBC chooses: the organisation man or the artist."

## APPENDIX 57

Peter Black : Mirror in the Corner : Hutchinson, 1972 : Pp142-146

"It will be remembered that Michael Barry's drama policy had been to advance on all fronts : classic theatre, adaptations of classic novels, original series and serials and single plays by new authors. But the success of ITV had shown the BBC that the audience did not particularly want such a wide spectrum and in fact turned away from some of it. When ITV had begun, its drama, as has been seen, followed the Barry policy on a smaller and fragmented scale. But it quickly learned what its public did not like. Costume plays, fantasy, symbolism, plays that asked it to work out tricks with time could be sure of a low rating. (Anything like Our Town was a disaster.) On the other hand the public would follow almost anything that had a clear enough narrative line to catch its attention in the first few minutes.

The companies developed recognisable house styles. Granada went in for plays with a powerful sociological wallop, such as Ibsen and the latter-day Ibsen, Arthur Miller. ATV, fed with drama from its H.M. Tennant tributary, favoured stage plays starring the big names on Tennant's books. Rediffusion did a bit of everything without establishing any special niche for itself. ABC devised Armchair Theatre for Sunday nights, in direct competition with the BBC's Sunday play; and this became as it were the focus of the BBC's concern. Until 1958 Armchair Theatre had been run by Dennis Vance, a director trained in television by Barry's department. Then ABC brought over from Canada Sydney Newman, who had won his reputation as head of drama with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

To Barry's policy of advancing along a broad front Newman opposed a commando raid. His basic idea about television drama was that it was produced for a mass audience, it had to be truthful, and to be about something a mass audience could identify with. He thought too many plays were merely converted rehashes of passé West End hits, and, just as important, the subject matter of the plays themselves rarely had anything to say to the Bradford mill worker, the Clydeside shipwright or the Welsh Miner. As a Canadian he had been reared outside the theatre tradition and saw that in Britain it had ceased to mean much outside half a dozen



cities. "The majority of the audience would never go to a theatre even if it were gratis with free beer in the interval."

His production principle was that it was harder to hold a television audience than any other because it could remove itself at the twist of a knob.

Under his self-mocking and sardonic turn of expression "Tell the writer that if his play has a message, be sure the characters don't know what it is" he was a highly skilled and intelligent craftsman. His brief from ABC was to put on good plays and get high ratings, and the brief he set himself was to find plays that would reflect the changing Britain which to him, an outsider, seemed extraordinarily interesting and dramatic.

He arrived in England in a lucky hour, for Look Back in Anger had just opened at the Royal Court Theatre. Oddly enough, Newman, then still with the CBC, was taken to see it by Michael Barry, who told how Newman sat through it enthralled; he was seeing the future drama, and it worked.

In his first year or two he had to fill up his schedules with adaptations, and imports from America, where television drama was declining from its brief golden age. But he produced no equivalent of the three-act theatre play. The proportion of new writing steadily rose; the play's common factor was involvement of the audience; and when the involvement was small ABC drama's group of brilliant directors, Philip Saville, Ted Kotcheff, Vance, John Moxey, Wilfred Eades, knew how to enlarge it. It was said at this time that you could distinguish between a BBC and an ABC play by the opening: a BBC play opened on a long shot of a house and moved in, an Armchair Theatre opened on a close-up of a mouth and moved out.

Alun Owen, of course, became one of Newman's major talents at this time.

But there was from the first a style, an energy, about Armchair Theatre, even when they were too obviously papering over cracks in a play's structure. By 1960 it was a fashionable success and with ITV's midweek Television Playhouse had established a style of ITV drama that had forced the BBC on to the defensive. It was not only doing better in the ratings but also in terms of quality, over the comparatively narrow field of new single plays and series fictions.

In the BBC there was a feeling that maybe the policy of

multi-drama was not right. At programme meetings the ratings figures lay on the table and the talk circulated around what was wrong with drama. Surely it was possible to do good stuff and make it more popular? If they had to do Chekhov could they not present it better? (Presentation, as always when the ratings slip and nobody knows exactly why, took a lot of punishment).

Barry found himself having to defend a policy that had gone out of style. He was blamed for not holding the writers he had found. Hugh Greene said he had watched the BBC offer every writer of talent and quality in Britain their first opportunity of writing for television, and then seen them go away and never come back. In 1961 Barry resigned to become head of programmes for the imminent Irish Television Service. For a year his chair stayed vacant. Then, as had long been expected, the BBC brought in Newman. His appointment marked the first time the BBC had bought a man from ITV to fill such a high rank; it said, more loudly than any overt policy change, that the days when the BBC planned its programmes as though the competitor did not exist were really over; and the competition was not between the forces of darkness and light but two organisations employing the same means.

Newman created THE DRAMA GROUP with three separate departments; Series, Serials, and Plays. Some of the Script Department's functions were taken over by the Groups new Script Editors whilst the remaining script responsibilities were handed to the newly-formed Television Script Unit.

Now came the dawn of THE WEDNESDAY PLAY. A new group of young television enthusiasts begins to emerge with DIARY OF A YOUNG MAN, a six-part serial written by Troy Kennedy Martin and John McGrath, produced and directed by James MacTaggart and Ken Loach. Soon after this, MacTaggart will take over THE WEDNESDAY PLAY from Peter Luke, and give a frank new look to social realism. UP THE JUNCTION (Nell Dunn) is followed by Dennis Potter's two plays about NIGEL BARTON. In 1966 Tony Garnett joins the circle and produces CATHY COME HOME (Jeremy Sandford) which wins the Italia Prize. The tape-recorded naturalism of the treatment only serves to blur the boundaries of drama and documentary more than ever. Other notable Garnett productions in this same style included: THE LUMP (Jim Allen) 1967 : IN TWO MINDS (David Mercer) 1967 : THE GOLDEN VISION (Smith/Honeycombe) 1968 : This was fast



becoming the day of the anti-establishment anti-hero. Audiences also began to ask "Why are television plays so 'sordid'?" From now on the single play was in jeopardy but Sydney Newman championed the need to keep the Single Play slots as training grounds for original playwrighting. All of this was still a few years ahead when Sydney Newman first arrived at the BBC in 1962. One other character has still to quit the stage and make way for a whole new generation of television men. That person is Cecil McGivern and in a sense the last classic drama he was involved in was his own.....

The kind of service McGivern had shaped had shown that it could not hold the share of audience that the BBC needed. He had worn himself out shaping it, but he had to go. "I am leaving you in the hands of the best professional in the business" Barnes had said when he retired. But the McGivern phase was over. Television was moving out of the era when it was just about possible for one man to retain a large measure of personal control over programme detail, if he didn't mind draining himself to exhaustion. It had also ceased to be a monopoly. There had to be a radical alteration of policy, and a man who had personally fashioned the one that had been forced out of fashion was not likely to be asked to run the new. It is doubtful whether, even if he had been asked, McGivern could ever have done the job. He believed passionately and uncompromisingly in the readiness of the general public to respond to excellence. His answer to ITV was to produce the best programmes he could which would continually extend the range of the public's enjoyment, and he was as contemptuous of the 'give-'em-what-they want' policy as Reith had been thirty years before.

He accepted the necessity of light entertainment and old movies, but in his heart thought they had little to contribute; he always wanted television that stretched the medium, and didn't believe light entertainment could. He earned the ungrudging affection and respect of the people who worked for him but could not get along with his superiors. He did not fit the image of a senior executive; he sometimes got tight, had no sense of his own dignity, and his leisure tastes were Bohemian. His strategy of over-spending earned him a reputation for financial irresponsibility. By those who had worked with him from 1947, and felt the driving

lash of his enthusiasms and scorn, he was greatly admired; but to the younger ones he seemed eccentric and out of touch.

He was unwise to accept the deputy directorship of BBC TV for it demanded a different discipline of behaviour, took him away from the sphere in which he was a master and into one that frustrated and irritated him. His friends saw him decline into a white shrunken figure who talked sadly about his fall. Then, suddenly, the old McGivern, assured and confident, reappeared. What had bucked him up was an invitation from Sidney Bernstein to join Granada. Like most Bernstein gestures it was part chivalry (he felt McGivern had been badly treated), part showmanship and part common sense; if McGivern had anything to offer Granada would profit from buying it.

McGivern met a sad and ludicrous end in 1963 when he accidentally set fire to his bedclothes; he was an incorrigible chain-smoker and was believed to have dropped off with a lighted cigarette in his hand. He had never been able to do much for Granada. "Cecil was dead when we bought him," Bernstein is said to have remarked. It is a story without villains. For various reasons, some personal, some professional, McGivern had reached the point where his present inconvenience outweighed his past achievement."



## APPENDIX 58

Newspaper account by Stanley Baron of Robert Barr's dramatised-documentary production Fashion Girl :  
News Chronicle, March 1954. Robert Barr Papers.

"Robert Barr's Fashion Girl, the documentary feature he will produce tomorrow night took four years to fructify. In various forms it had been proposed, dropped, picked up, redressed, refrigerated and thawed out when - O.K'd by McGivern - it again reached his plate.

Being himself too busy to do the script, it remained there - an idea looking for an author - until last December.

Barr's own fashions run to faded overcoats, inside-out ties and shoes picked for the rigours of Shepherd's Bush rather than dress salons. So it seemed fortunate when just before Christmas Miss Pamela Search, a young girl who claimed she knew all about fashion, under Barr's direction began writing her first documentary script:

"I suggest using four characters .... Noreen, a top-line model, grand and glamorous; Peter, her boyfriend, a wholesale proprietor-couturier; Anne, a designer-sketcher; Mary, another model.....".

Three weeks later, after several conferences with Barr her final script, fifty foolscap pages, was in - and the girl and boyfriend angle out.

Fashion Girl had begun. Cold-shouldering the glamour, it would pick up events as they might be after any model house couturier's return from seeing the Paris collections.

One such London maker is Mr. Eric Paneth. A good humoured naturalised Hungarian, his show salon, Adam Style, is up one flight of stairs across the way from Worth in Grosvenor Street.

Up Mr.Paneth's stairs went Miss Search. Mr. Paneth had been approached - and now agreed - to let Mr.Barr and Co. take his salon as a setting for the programme. If he didn't know then what he was in for, he soon discovered.

So, to their evident pleasure, did his pattern cutter, tailor, stock room clerks and odd-job men when in by the front stairs - through the Chinese lacquered salon doors - into the workroom, dressing room and Paneth's own private office -

everywhere Miss Search had said - marched eleven men with a ciné-camera and microphones, trailing cables and chaos behind them.

At their head went a dark young man with black wavy hair. By the name of John Oxley. He had been seconded, as Television Studio Manager, to be at Barr's disposal during the last five weeks of production. Behind clumped a certain bewildered journalist, writing his own documentary on the making of a documentary, and finding it hard on the feet.

Mr. Paneth, on this particular day, was perhaps advisedly absent. Never mind. Mr. Brett was there. Mr. Stanley Brett, 21 years old, with a grandfather who once made suits for the Czar.

"You could do a feature about me," said Stanley.

"We'll take his hands working on that bit of stuff," said Oxley to cameraman Ted Wooldridge, a moustachioed cousin of Humphrey Lestocq.

"Toile," corrected Stanley.

"No faces," said Oxley. Matching actors' bodies in the studio with Stanley's hands in the film would come later. Stanley would help.

"Fifteen seconds on that roll of cloth, Ted.....Wouldn't it be nice just for once to start filming with a script and a cast."

Downstairs, at the back of the showroom, two surprised GPO parcels van men found themselves in front of a BBC camera, accepting boxed-up gowns - "live" props in a show barely yet in the making.

It was now February 9th - three and a half weeks before transmission. But things had begun to roll.

Back on Barr's desk a foolscap paper - his budget for the one-hour programme - bore the single sum of his allocation £1,250.

Downstairs Barr himself sat with Michael Yates, his designer. On a piece of squared paper labelled 'Lime Grove Studio G' Yates pushed a transparent scale to and fro across the plan. The black lines on the paper showed the exact positions of the sets made from still photographs taken at Paneth's premises. With the scale they decided on the camera angles.

"Couldn't we have two iron men instead of that old crab?" asked Barr.



Yates made a note of it. A baffled Baron also:

"Iron man - dolly or wheeled platform for changing camera positions. Crab -ditto, but more awkward."

Eighteen professional actors and actresses and probably twenty-five extras were by now required.

Casting began on February 11. Barr hoped three days' non-stop individual interviewing would see it through; but with interruptions it took ten, thanks chiefly to the difficulty of finding the right actress for the "difficult" Noreen.

A tall, toothsome redhead named Gwen Evans finally got the part, while a dark girl with a heart-shaped face and an equable smile - Jane Hardie - had begun already to learn her lines for Mary.

William Sherwood and Ruth Trouncer - shared the lead as proprietor-couturier and designer-sketcher respectively with Marne Maitland as Stanley the cutter.

On February 15 the scene had again switched back to Paneth's showrooms where thanks to a scoop pulled off by the programme's fashion adviser, Miss Betty Spurling, twelve leading ladies of fashion columns in the Press had agreed to be filmed filing upstairs as though to an actual Press show.

Hemmed by cables and cameras between two racks of his own dresses, Paneth wistfully asked Barr : "Do I get a credit for all this?"

"No," said Barr. "I'm afraid we couldn't manage that. A programme like this is really to the advantage of the whole industry, and as a radio licence-holder we regard you as, so to speak, a shareholder in the whole affair."

Shareholder Paneth, abandoned the idea of seeing any clients that day. Said Miss Spurling: "I'm always going round apologising for the BBC not having any money." Lifting Paneth's phone. she began dialling other London dress houses asking who would like the honour of providing the BBC free with a gown, a really special affair, to be the fashion parade showpiece.

At the other side of the salon Oxley, had now switched his attention to a close-up of the Observer's Alison Settle signing the visitors' book.

Above the clatter of instructions Miss Spurling's voice continued: "Yellow's too dull in television; blue's too dark; red's doubtful. What about cyclamen pink? Of course it will

probably come out coffee-coloured. Organza would be nice - gayed up with rhinestones....."

Over the phone fell the blow. Like a ship at sea, six weeks out of port and with three more still to go, Fashion Girl, the television documentary you will see tonight, was sailing well. Now came dirty weather.

Producer Robert Barr took the call. The voice of Organisation, speaking from Shepherd's Bush, said it was frightfully sorry but from 2.15 p.m. until 8.45 tonight, when Barr would be holding his last rehearsals, the use of Central Tele-cine would be out.

The only machine of its kind at Lime Grove, it had been collared, it seemed, by Newsreels, Children's Hour, a couple of afternoon film shows and - immediately before Fashion Girl - Ronnie Waldman's Puzzle Corner. What Central Tele-Cine is and why it was vital soon became clear, even to an eavesdropper. The film sequences in Fashion Girl - the workroom and packing scenes and the Press arrival - would run for some six minutes with breaks. It and only it would fit Barr's need for projecting pictures of the highest quality when the tricky moment came for mixing these outside shots into the studio scenes, during the actual transmission.

"Am I going to show fashion girls with bags under their eyes and their faces covered in dirt or am I going to have a proper rehearsal with proper transmission?" he inquired without compromise.

Couldn't Barr - the Voice asked - use Mechau (a different type of projector)?

No, Barr could not and would not and if he was being asked to go on the air with the peak programme without rehearsal or without film he would like it in writing, please.

"Or am I," he asked darkly, "supposed to organise my own way round it?"

Organisation preferred, evidently, to remain non-committal. Barr hung up. "Anyway," he said "I didn't lose my temper."

On a table his studio manager, John Oxley, swung his legs, expressively lofted his eyes. They would get round it no doubt.

Still using Central Tele-cine for the film projections, as planned, the loss of rehearsals meant they would have to cut the film into three sequences instead of five or six and then slam



them straight out from the studio.

By mid-February it was the turn of Miss Helen Littledale, Barr's secretary and 'Fashion Girls' slave, to have a weight on her mind.

Besides re-typing five scenes of the script, added by Barr as rehearsals proceeded.....prodding him constantly to try to get some lunch,.....checking the mounting costs and fees.....sending a first list of 170 items on blue paper to the Props Department,.... sending another on orange (for credits, Factory Acts notices, etc) to captions and a formidable third, on white, to Wardrobe and Hairdo.....She remembered that Barr, sometime, would want six bolts of cloth and four toiles.

Perhaps rolled-up blankets would do for the former (they did). The latter being the cutters' mock-ups, were to be televised - with the dresses they represented - in the work-room scenes. But first, of course, they must be made. Decided Barr: "We'll get Stanley Brett - the cutter at Paneth's - to do it."

By now the production of Fashion Girl was proceeding on four planes and in as many places.

At Lime Grove the sound effects of sizzling irons, sewing machines and a specially cooked-up radio programme (to be heard as though playing in the workroom) were being synchronised, or in backroomese "sunk" with the film shots.

At Alexandra Palace the voices of the five leading actors were being dubbed, and would eventually be fitted on to a master track.

In a Knightsbridge store the programme's authoress Miss Pamela Search, and its fashion adviser, Miss Betty Spurling, ransacked racks for suitable dresses for the final piece de resistance, the Fashion Parade.

In a small hired rehearsal room near Euston Station, its floor marked out with lines representing the exact positions of the studio sets, Barr marched from imaginary camera point to camera point, drilling his cast down to their last movements - even to the steps they must make to dodge the Lime Grove cables.

It was now that two torpedoes promptly rocked the ship. Returning from a private session with Stanley Brett in which the latter, sacrificing his Sunday off, had groomed Marne Maitland, his documentary double, in the techniques of cloth-cutting and fitting, Maitland remarked casually to Barr: "Stanley's got a

holiday. He says he hopes to see the show from Bournemouth."

"The toiles!" cried Miss Littledale.

"Telegram!" cried Barr.

It caught Stanley after he had booked his ticket and his seat on the Bournemouth train. After ringing Barr's secretary he unbooked both and on Tuesday morning, a cutter again, started working against time to produce the four toiles essential to the workroom sequences.

Sketches for the dresses with which the toiles correspond had also to be called for. They would be seen being discussed by couturier Peter Cardew and his designer-sketcher Anne Scott.

Barr is not sure now why they provoked the question: When a house model changes dresses, what do you see underneath? He only knows that what you see underneath would be quite surprising on a television screen. You won't see it. Miss Littledale's note to Wardrobe read: "Two black slips, urgent."

The pulling together, was now apparent.

At nine o'clock yesterday morning when the lighting engineers began work in Lime Grove's studio G they found the sets for Fashion Girl already mounted.

At 5.00 pm from the producer's box, Barr watched while John Oxley gave the cue. The studio pre-rehearsal had started, and the clock ticked on relentlessly towards the starting time of 8.45 pm."



## APPENDIX 59

Transmission dates for Magistrate's Court and The Course of Justice series 1948-1951 : BBC Written Archives Centre:  
Documentary File.

<u>Title.</u>	<u>Transmission</u>
<u>Magistrate's Court</u>	
No.1 <u>Who's to Blame?</u> (the crime)	27. 8. 48
No.2 <u>Trial Without Jury</u> (the trial)	10. 9. 48
No.3 <u>On Remand</u> (probation)	24. 9. 48
Writer: Duncan Ross : Producer: Ian Atkins. Adviser: Claud Mullins.	

<u>Course of Justice.</u>	
No.1 <u>Juvenile Court.</u>	27.11. 50
No.2 <u>On Remand*</u>	22.12. 50
No.3 <u>Who's to Blame?</u>	22. 1. 51
No.4 <u>Trial Without Jury</u>	20. 2. 51
No.5 <u>The Assizes**</u>	19. 3. 51

Writer : Duncan Ross. Producer: Ian Atkins.

\* Finally called Probation Officer.

\*\* This production was 105 minutes long - specially written for the new Lime Grove Studio using cameras with turret lenses.

New Series of Course of Justice began on 28. 4. 53

## APPENDIX 60

Description of the BBC Television Lime Grove Studios by a correspondent of Kinematograph Weekly: April 5, 1951.

Robert Barr Papers.

"The four studios are used for about three hours' live material each day - always two plays and an elaborate feature each week.

Producers rehearse their programmes a few weeks in advance in West End rooms. During the later stages of rehearsal a cameraman will join the producer. Camera and technical crews work a shift system. For this reason the Sunday night plays are repeated on Thursday night because this will mean that the same crew is working on the programme. The number of people in the studio for a major production is usually between 20 and 30. The studio is overlooked by a central control room. The producer sits here together with a group of assistants. With him is a senior maintenance engineer who is the link between the technical and artistic elements in production.

The camera crew consists of an operator, a trucker and a 'tilt-and-bend' operator, who has a shooting script from which he prompts the operator for all the movements such as panning or change of lens. He also operates the crane mechanism of the standard vinten dollies that are in use. All are in constant contact with the producer in the control room.

Often only three cameras are in use - two on dollies and the third on a Debie Iron Man which was movable but not mobile in the same sense. The purpose of the Iron Man camera is for fill-in shots while the mobile units are moving to new angles and new set-ups.

The camera unit normally sees the script for the first time on the actual day of the transmission; very seldom is there time for earlier rehearsal. The script is in extreme detail, giving all the cues for cutting from one camera to another and the size of lens used on each shot, among other things. Combined with this is what is known as the 'ground plan'. This is most important for it plots the movements of all the cameras and the microphone booms throughout the whole transmission. It is the job of the camera crews to work out the changes of position so



that their cables keep clear of one another. This task is complicated by the fact that a television studio has sets, or bits of sets, more or less round the perimeter.

Although more off-stage noise is permissible than in a film studio owing to the general (but not exclusive) use of directional cardioid microphones, quietness is essential, and the crew intercommunicates by a 'home made' system of very simple hand signs. These are used by the stage manager. Standing by his side is the conventional theatre prompter. She trails a length of wire attached to which is a push-button. If an actor misses a line she presses the button, which cuts out the whole sound circuit and gives her prompt - and the viewers are none the wiser!

The lighting system is more simple than in a film studio because television cameras are more sensitive, so that fewer lighting men are carried. Producers can also play amazing tricks with a combination of both lighting and picture contract controls. The BBC Engineers have no hesitation in using the most simple of effects to create the most elaborate shots. For example, when a train had to pass down a tunnel all that was needed was a roll of cardboard, flickering before a spotlight (carriage window patterns on the wall), a puff of smoke from a firework, and the background noises from a record of an express train roaring through a tunnel.

Before the camera crew gets to work the lighting expert has usually completed his job. The emphasis in his job is on knowing the power of his lights and the capabilities of the cameras, of which there are two main types - high and low velocity. On the low velocity type the contrast range is rated at 15-1 which means that soft lighting is required - on the high velocity cameras the limit of the acceptable contract is rarely reached, and this allows for the more liberal use of spots and more variation.

Generally speaking, however, the main lighting is provided by the overhead banks of ordinary lamp bulbs, the candle-power being dictated by the requirements of the subject. In any case the sharpness of contract and the volume of light seen on the screen can be, and is, varied to the producer's wishes in the central control room.

The normal plan was to flood the set with soft light (front)

and then superimpose with overhead spots where required. Only very rarely is low level lighting used.

The sound boom, of course, is a constant source of shadow headaches, but here again, television is less exacting than films, and although a boom shadow is often inevitable, the spread of the light source makes it negligible.

If a camera breaks down during transmission the senior engineer comes into action immediately, but it is still the responsibility of the producer to decide whether to make an instantaneous change of schedule by cutting to another camera or whether to signal up interval music and train a static camera on a caption which reads: 'Normal Service will be resumed as soon as possible'.

Of the four stages at Lime Grove only two have so far been converted to television. (1951)

Sets are all designed and prefabricated at Alexandra Palace. They are all so simple and reduced to essentials only that transport presents little difficulty and their storage in one of the empty stages makes for instant availability.

In the telecine room is the Mechau scanning apparatus in conjunction with a television camera, by which film sequences are cut into the live transmission, using interlaced scanning. Much of the film for this purpose is shot by the BBC's own film unit, which is housed quite separately at Shepherd's Bush. (John Elliot in charge of sequences - Donald Smith, Children's Newsreel).

For nearly all purposes the BBC Film Unit uses a Vinten Visatone combined vision and sound head."



## APPENDIX 61

Michael Yates: Designing for Television: The Stage,  
September, 1955: Robert Barr Papers.

"I doubt whether we have reached the point when we can say: "this is how you design for television," or "This is television design" as opposed to that of the film or theatre. Though, as the years pass, we come nearer to achieving an individual approach to the problem, designing for this medium is still an overlap of films and theatre - nearer the films certainly - but still not an approach of its own.

Some of the fundamentals are: clear physical form; simplicity to ensure unfussy backgrounds; a sparing in the use of wallpaper; as many textured surfaces as possible broken only with the essentials in either painted design or placing of props; good contrast in tone between actors and scenery, and also between furniture and scenery; outline in costume rather than detail; as much space between the players and the setting to achieve depth and perspective; as much height as can be managed.

In television the smallness of the screen necessitates much being taken in close-up or medium shot to stress the point of the script. This at once produces for the designer a problem never experienced in the theatre, and only in a small way - comparatively speaking - in the films.

In the theatre, the audience can see at a glance the constant perspective and scale of figures full length in a complete scene. Moreover, they are helped by colour in the scenery, costumes and lights. The boldness of form and scale, especially height, is always there in its entirety.

In the films the width of shot used by cameras, made possible by the size of a cinema screen enables a far greater perspective behind an actor without diminishing his size. This allows for a greater scope in settings, a more lavish use of detail, and a better sense of actual scale as opposed to a suggested scale between actor and surroundings.

In television the scene must be established at a distance and then lost when the camera closes in so that the actors may be

a reasonable size on the screen. In the cinema the scene can be held in long-shot.

The television designer, therefore, rarely, if ever, sees his set theatrically. Neither does he see it with the completeness of a film and the broadness of a theatre set will not look good in close shots. The complexity of a film set seen and depending on wider angles will lose its effect in constant medium shot. The designer must, therefore, consider it from a different viewpoint. It must be split into smaller sections seen separately but each tied together as a whole. It must be on a smaller scale but without losing the actual architectural scale with the human figure. To avoid confusion in the picture there must be a greater simplification, a more ruthless cutting of detail in what appears behind a player's head.

The completeness of detail, the extent of complex construction (especially in plaster), and the degree of finish required by a film is not possible financially in television. Moreover, it is probably wrong. Again the smallness of the screen would lead to a confusion in the background; and the expenses of such a finish would be unjustified by the amount which would be seen.

This does not mean that a rough treatment is acceptable - far from it! Rather it means a simplification, a compromise to achieve the same effect without indulging in unnecessary lavishness. This requires considerable selective skill as well as technical skill too.

On the other hand, the conventions accepted in the theatre will rarely do on television. The degree of reality normally required, and the pitiless and exposing nature of the camera forces a designer nearer to a film treatment than the broad or painted one often preferred by the theatre and its canvas flats. A method of scene construction peculiar to this medium is therefore needed. A construction which will produce the effect of firm solidity combining to a certain extent the mobility of theatre scenery. Though with the provision of exact drawings most construction firms can cope with the problem, it is infinitely preferable and quicker to possess one's own workshops. The speed of production, the sheer quantity and cost, demands a constant re-use of specially designed units on a stock or repertory basis. It is impractical to do this on an outside contract basis.



There are, of course, many more technical details and problems which the television designer must master for without this mastery a designer cannot expect his scenery to appear on the screen as he visualises it. His knowledge and understanding of equipment both limits him and helps him in the preparation of his designs."

## APPENDIX 62

Ian Atkins (BBC TV Producer) Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this Writer : August 1973

"My Father Robert Atkins the actor-manager got me a job at Lime Grove when it was the Gaumont film company and for twenty-five bob a week I did "the clappers" and my first job was to put sound sequences onto a silent picture of Alf's Button because silent pictures weren't likely to be a very good prospect anymore. The next production I worked on was a musical called Greek Street and they knew little or nothing about cutting a music track so that if they did a musical number with twenty-four camera angles they had to have twenty-four synchronous cameras. So the 'clapper boy' was up in the roof doing the Busby Berkeley straight-down shot on the circle of girls and all that kind of thing. In this way I was very fortunate in becoming a camera-operator very much more quickly than one would normally have done. Then Gainsborough from Highbury began to be associated with the Gaumont Company and ultimately they merged to become Gaumont British. They decided to rebuild Lime Grove because the studio we'd been working in had got the original glass roof that Gaumont had put in to let the sun in to expose the film, but which subsequently had been painted black but that was all. So we all got the sack and I went freelance - did two films with a cameraman called Henry Gerrard, who was an American and had done Love Parade and one or two other exciting pictures but after he was killed I went to Warner Brothers at Teddington.

They had opened the studios with a completely American set-up but they took me on as a camera operator and they were making 'quota-quickies' one second feature film a fortnight which was very good training for television really when it came along because of the time scale and pressure and so on. Then I fell ill and was told to get lots of fresh air so I joined my father in the Regent's Park Open-Air Theatre as a very bad actor but a perfectly adequate stage manager.

From there I went to the famous New Theatre season (1936-1938) with John Gielgud when they did Hamlet, Obey's Noah, Romeo and Juliet (this was the production where Gielgud and Olivier alternated



Mercutio and Romeo) and The Seagull which Komisarjevsky produced; Saint-Denis produced the Obey so these were very exciting times. I finished my time in the theatre at the Phoenix with Saint-Denis's black and white production of 'Twelfth Night' and finally got a job in television.

Actually what happened was that the television people came one Monday to do an Outside Broadcast of the play and I went back with the Van the following morning and joined the BBC in January, 1939, and then the war came and I was a Gunner with the Territorials so that was the end of television for me - at least for a while.

I joined the BBC as a Studio Manager which is the equivalent of a Floor Manager in today's language.

The studio at Alexandra Palace was very, very small and the only thing that saved our life was that the camera lens was a very wide-angle lens - about 33° - so if you wanted a close-up you had to be close and this helped the actors in quite a number of ways because they could scale their performance instinctively to how near the camera was. They didn't have this business of remembering and then forgetting that the director said that this bit would be in close-up, because they had only to see where the camera was to know for themselves. This was undoubtedly one of the few advantages of that time.

Your problem was the size of the shot, to be able to cut from one shot to another and you had to fake the angles to a certain extent. When we came to Lime Grove and subsequently the Television Centre with turret and then zoom lenses - the size of the shot no longer becomes a problem, then it's getting the right angle and you needn't fake quite so much because you can actually get the camera into the right place.

When I first joined I worked on everything, Picture Page, which was Cecil Madden's famous weekly and all the usual chores one does as a Studio Manager before one got little directing jobs to do. One of my earliest was Ivy Benson and her girls' Band and not being very musical it was quite funny. We were called Producers then by the way because directors didn't exist on the production side of television - that title was reserved for important gentlemen high up inside the Corporation hierarchy. So in fact everyone both produced and directed their shows.

Pre-war I used to produce the Childrens' programme and the

format was left entirely to me to devise. We had a great deal of freedom then.

The only remnant of the Baird system of 1936 which lasted for quite a long time was the bow window in Studio B at Alexandra Palace, which housed the scanner which sent coloured light onto the actors which was picked up by a whole series of receptors which were the equivalent of today's studio lighting. So that instead of spreading the light around and picking out parts of the picture you scanned with a point of light, then the receptors took the reflection of this and turned it into electrical impulses.

One of the chores was that we had to broadcast the news in sound only at the end of the day, and that meant an announcer (Jasmine Bligh) and a studio manager being on duty after the others had gone home.

We had only two studios at Alexandra Palace, A and B. Studio A was 70' x 30' and Studio B was 68' x 30' . If you were doing a big production like for example At the Villa Rose which I did, you didn't get the second studio until after tea when the afternoon programmes were over. You got in around 6.00 pm and rehearsed frantically for all you were worth., but we were never late going out. The engineers were always marvellous in that respect. There's a celebrated story of Jan Bussell the Puppet man. He arrived too soon one day for his programme so he went down to the little viewing room which used to be in the basement of Ally Pally and it was always so hot and stuffy down there. Jan dozed off and only woke up in time to see his end credits rolling - the engineers, bless them, had done his show for him.

In the days before the war, remember, you could only mix from one camera to the other. The cut wasn't introduced until after the war, so it made for an awfully leisurely sort of a production. The easy way out was to go to camera 1 and track in, and then mix to camera 2 which was back and then track in and keep on doing this on the pianist or the singer or whatever it was you were producing at the time, and we did a bit of everything as I told you.

One of the interesting things about the Emitron camera and its lens was that it was an enormous lens with a huge diameter and although it was a wide angle lens when it was focused on infinity because it was nice and close to the target on the tube,



When you focused it near, it moved out about three inches it seemed, and all the acceptance angles closed down as you focused forward and there was very little depth of field and you, therefore, couldn't get any Hitchcock shots or anything like that out of it.

There was a lens known as the tele-photo which had a much narrower angle and required an awful lot of light, and the engineers were always very worried about whether they would get enough light, so they used to say, you can have the tele-photo for this production if on the day we can get enough light. But you know, they never let you down and invariably they would produce enough light on the area involved, but it was a problem which we had to contend with all the same.

As well as cameramen there were other helpers on the studio floor. There was one operator required for the Iron Man, which was the heavy three wheeled pedestal, with the camera mounting on the top., and two operators were required for the various dollies. There's rather a curious story here because when we were making that film I told you about, Greek Street, at Lime Grove we had a hold up for several days while we waited for the very latest camera crane from UFA in Berlin. This was a triangular affair with wheels at each corner and bicycle chain around all three wheels on sprockets, so that when you turned the tiller on the back wheel all the wheels changed. This could, therefore, crab and not only track in and we used it with more or less success on this film, and that would have been in 1931 or 1932. Then when I went to Alexandra Palace in 1939 there in the corner of Studio A was this same dolly which was the second dolly in use in A. The number one dolly had four wheels and tiller steering for the two small back wheels, with the camera on the front and that again had two operators, one 'pusher' and one cameraman. We'd no cranes so we couldn't alter the height of these cameras except by winding them up on the central stalk.

For sound we used boom microphones - which were then in short supply - and they had a fairly crude extension device which rattled; it had wires and things, and if you demanded that the boom should be retracted in a hurry then there was a great rattling like in a ship's rigging, as this thing came rumbling in.

There was also a device known as a 'lazy arm' which was in

fact a heavy lamp standard with a fixed arm on it which had a counter-weight and you could swing it round but you couldn't alter its length.

On the studio floor the eyes and ears of the Producer was the Studio Manager. He wore earphones and trailed a great thirty-six foot cable, plugged into the most convenient place in the studio and fallen over by himself and everyone else in the course of the production., and he did all the cueing. There's another splendid story of the early days of cueing. They started off with the green light of radio and this wasn't very satisfactory because it was always such a nuisance to get rid of. First they had it on a stand, but it got in the shot so they put it on the wall of the studio, but invariably the actor was looking the wrong way when he was flashed so that was not used. So they got the cameraman to do a 'thumbs up' to the actor - but in the heat of the moment they often forgot to cue him. So there was this famous occasion when Robert Speaight was in full regalia as Becket, in Murder in the Cathedral, sitting on his throne and getting a sudden thumbs up from the cameraman and returning the good wishes just as the camera was faded in!

The green light, by the way, was always used for the announcers and so you always caught them looking at it before they said, "Good Evening". This worried the Engineers and so they set to and devised the 'electric garter' which was strapped on the girl's leg (of course the engineers regarded this as a very important technical responsibility they could only undertake themselves) anyway this garter had in it a little buzzer which she would feel as her cue and all the time she could be looking straight into the camera. Well, came the day, and she is all set to go - the camera is faded up, the buzzer buzzed and she says "Aaaaaahhh Good afternoon" -

Soon after this it was decided that the Studio Manager should do the cueing and later also, the CPS Cameras, used first on O.B's and later in the studio, had a red light on the front of them.

The cameraman also had earphones - they always had two mutually exclusive conversations going on in their ears - one from the Producer telling them what to do from his point of view and the other from the mysterious subterranean chaps called 'Racks' who looked after the camera control units down below in



Studio A - and racks would always be cutting in and overriding the producer and saying to the cameraman "Open your Iris" or "Alter your Gain" or "Don't you realise that your pointing at a light" and this was always very disturbing because the Producer never knew when this override took place because only the cameraman could hear 'racks'. So the Producer was often furious when the cameraman didn't respond immediately to his instructions.

Mind you, racks were known for their skill in using "the back of their heels" to cure faults. If as a Producer you were told that camera one was on the blink and you'd see the picture fluttering, you'd hear a voice say "Just a minute" and then you'd hear crash, crash crash, with "the back of the heel" at the right place on the camera control unit and, low and behold, up would come the picture as right as rain.

Before the war as well as there being no cuts there was only one pre-view screen. So you had to take your cameras in an established order and you could only go on-air from the camera actually on-air to the camera on pre-view, you couldn't go to any other camera.

The lay-out in the Gallery wasn't markedly different from what it is today except that sound used to be in front of you, or to your side in Studio B but now, of course, there are separate sound control rooms.

Lighting which today has its own control room off the Gallery was then little more than a glorified Strand Electric Board down in the studio with an electrician standing by with earphones on winding great wheels to adjust the brilliance. But then there were next to no lighting cues as such because the Emitron cameras required a colossal amount of light and you couldn't do effective 'night shots' because of this reason. The camera tubes would 'streak' and 'smear' but didn't appear to 'stick' as badly as some of the later ones.

We had two mysterious controls at that time called Tilt and Bend which were knobs which put all the mush and nastiness in the picture, up or down, or right or left. So what you did was to push it all into the bottom right hand corner and leave it there!

The cut was introduced after the war, by the late Henry Whiting I believe, and it was in fact two post office switches.

One was switched on when that camera was on-the-air and the other was switched off. When you wanted to cut you quite literally switched one camera off and the other camera on. So that you had to be fairly simultaneous otherwise you got a blank in the middle. It was quite a while before the cut button came along which actually did it correctly and, of course, times it to the beginning of a frame now.

Very little film had been used in television before the war. There was only one cameraman then, a Major Babrook I believe, and it was mostly 'newsy' sort of stuff. But never was film used with drama. You see we had rather a purist attitude in those days and felt that it should all be done by television, and the television camera. That was the name of the game then.

I remember after the war an early play by Duncan Ross called The Case of Mr. Pelham in which a little man finds himself being taken over by his alter ego, an absolutely identical twin who was actually the devil who was doing it for fun. There was one scene where they confronted one another, and held a long conversation and I did this 'live' by duplicating the other end of the room in the right position. The vision mixer, for the first time in history, came to rehearsal and we fixed her up with two switches and two electric lights to represent which camera was on and she and William Mervyn, who played Mr. Pelham, they rehearsed together so that his expression and eye line changed on her cut and it worked and was a great success. That could have been done on film but all the cake would have gone out of it.

But we did begin to realise how claustrophobic we all were, and in 'live' television we had the eternal problem of costume changes, so we would try and get our writers to write a bridging piece that actually carried the story forward, but its primary purpose was really to allow the actor a few minutes to change his costume. There was always a slight urge to stick some film in to solve that one.

I first met Duncan Ross about the time of the early preparations for the first Magistrate's Court. I'd seen and heard this rather eccentric Scotsman before that, about the place, but we'd never actually got together. We really were an awfully good combination because he would always be inclined to write with his heart's blood and I always had to somehow off-set this. I remember in one production, The Probation Officer I think it was,



there was an absolutely heart rending piece by the Mother of some delinquent child which I managed to make very natural, by having the poor actress do the ironing whilst she was spilling the beans to the Probation Officer.

In those days, and probably still, television tended to be a slightly 'proppy' medium - keeping people busy so that they were more concerned with behaviour rather than historionics was a rule of the game., and in dramatised-documentary it was all-important.

I remember in Juvenile Court I landed myself with an old lady who was up before the beak for something her child had done, and she thought she ought to act the part so she sang her lines. Well I didn't want to hurt her feelings and I didn't want to boot her out but I didn't quite know what I was going to do with her. Finally I hit upon the idea that she should be deaf, and then she had to speak in a monotonous voice and be hard-of-hearing when the Magistrate spoke to her and in that way it was alright on the night. But you had to keep them down, otherwise the whole reality of the thing got lost and indeed in the Juvenile Court in particular what I did was to get my Studio Manager to start the thing off and with very few exceptions to keep it going as if it were a stage performance almost, and then it was up to the cameras to keep up with the action and make sure they were on cue on time, and the slight roughness that this created gave the production an even more real appearance, than the total polish of everything being ready. I remember when all the cast of Juvenile Court put their clothes on and went down to the canteen everyone moved away from them because they really thought they must be lousy - they looked so real, and, of course, no make-up. That was a great step forward to my mind. I just would not allow it. The effect was very startling.

The war-time documentary films were more influential than say the work of the GPO Unit, which for my purposes were always too lyrical in their cutting and rhythm.

The studio at Lime Grove was 104' long, at Alexandra Palace it had only been 70' - so there was a considerable gain in floor area. At A.P. we had always to do a great deal of faking of bits of background. When I did At the Villa Rose I remember I had to have a gambling Casino for one of the scenes. There was absolutely no room for it. So the designer, James Bould, who worked on the Course of Justice sets, he and I worked out just little bits of



the background of the Casino, no more than a suggestion, and we shot this from the right angle and the total impression for the viewer was of a huge gambling hall. One just hadn't the space to do more than that and necessity was the mother of invention.

Duncan was quite marvellous to work with, in that he always wrote what we called 'the left-hand side' of the page. He did in fact write the visuals. You couldn't always give him the visuals he wanted even if you agreed with them, but you knew the way his mind was going, and this was so much better, I felt, than the writer who wrote only dialogue and left it to discussion, argument or a stand-up fight to decide what he was getting at in a particular scene. Duncan brought his film experience into television and so he wrote in pictures. But I think he accepted that with the small screen and the limitations one needed more dialogue than you could get away with in films, and his speech in the plays was always very natural indeed. Mind you, you had for the most part self-dictated forms of speech. The characters were mostly professional men, police, lawyers, social workers, poor and so on. One of the things I remember about this was that we rehearsed Juvenile Court down in rehearsal rooms in the East End. I staggered the whole cast one day by giving them the afternoon off, on condition that they went around the East End into Woolworths or places like that and listened and observed the way real people spoke. Well the following day I couldn't understand a word most of them said so it all had to be softened down. Basically though it was all genuine stuff and Duncan was a real master at getting the information across without actually giving a lecture or writing an essay for someone to speak.

There just weren't the people interested in writing for television at this time. The rate of production of scripts compared with the rate of using them up was very slow indeed and you needed an awful lot of writers and this was made doubly so where research was involved. If you were writing a fictional piece then the research was probably part of the life you had already lived, but if you were writing dramatised-documentary like Ross and Barr and Morris and Caryl Doncaster then you couldn't be wrong and your research had to be absolutely meticulous, immensely detailed and it was all very time consuming and consequently quite expensive, and I would say that this was done best by Staff writers. You see the BBC has always been and



probably still is very conscious of the fact that if somebody goes somewhere and says "I am from the BBC" they should be authentic and responsible people and it was very much easier for these documentary writers to go in as members of the BBC staff and ask the Home Office or the War Office or whatever for facts and facilities than it was for someone under contract for just one programme.

The other point worth remembering is that the advent of the 16mm camera made places available and accessible that had not been so before - of course, in the case of the Law Courts it was prohibited anyway, but in most cases it was simply the bulkiness of the old 35mm equipment that had prevented its use, and the old RCA sound recording trucks were enormous things just as big and bulky as today's Outside Broadcast Vans. So that taking out a 35mm film unit as well as being wildly expensive was also a fearful business. But the moment you got hand-held equipment the whole situation changed; you no longer needed to reconstruct in the studio, you could go to the actual locations themselves. No, what the drama-documentary writers had had to do in the studio could now be largely done on film. What was inherited from that gallant band was this brilliant expertise in scripting and production and their style of realism, the backbone of television no doubt.

Drama producers when, for example, they were dealing with the classics, they would take the theatrical performance and as it were, squash it, so that it became a small scale replica of the original, but all its shape was the same; whereas the documentary producer would simply take behaviour and make it just large enough to go on the air which was quite a different process and it is this that has spun off into the later social realistic series of the sixties. You see as a producer what one was attempting to do all the time was to make actors think so that you said to them "If your thought is right at this moment, what you are doing will be right" then their acting or behaving would be to the right scale and they wouldn't try to project. But if you were desperate you always gave them something to do - the more complicated the business the better - then they were so busy trying to get that right- making sure they didn't drop it or whatever - the performance scaled down to naturalism.

We always felt that the continuous performance of television



gave the actor the opportunity to build up and create the character, the atmosphere and the emotion in a way which film precluded, and at the same time the intimacy of the medium meant that the performance could be absolutely genuine because they'd no need to project. We were quite clear that our audience was two people sitting six feet away and that they mustn't be embarrassed. On the other hand you see you soon came to realise that the key word in all this was the genuineness of the performance - and the really genuine actor or actress could bite the furniture and still be totally convincing.

Television for actors then was a little bit of jam, no one could make a living at it, so it was something that they did in between films or theatre. It was quite fun but not everyone would risk it of course - and many couldn't be bothered.

When the zoom lens first arrived in the late fifties it caused a great deal of problems because a Producer would take a close-up of one character on a 24° angle and take the same size close-up on about 5° on the other person with the depth of field entirely different and there was a terrific confusion for the viewer at home caused by this too.

As far as videotape recording was concerned I experienced the ironic moment of the time when black and white film recording just reached perfection as VTR arrived to supersede it. We used to do our repeats on recording. Then we were doing the production twice each week on Sunday and again on the following Thursday and for a long time we had to completely remount the whole thing. Then the recorded repeat came in and that gave an extra studio day. The recording was merely a matter of re-taking any terrible mistakes, for example, if a boom came into shot during the live transmission you would re-take that particular sequence. Incidentally, it cast a very interesting sidelight on the actors for they seemed to be divided fifty-fifty. If you had to do a re-take after the show half your actors would be giving you on re-take a splendid relaxed performance you never achieved during the tenseness of the 'live' transmission; the other half would go right off the boil because they knew it was just a recording and we could always re-shoot, so they didn't seem to care.

Of course one of the things that goes on now which I never had the advantage of, is editing of VTR. I remember I did one production once, something to do with an anniversary, and there wasn't a studio available so I had to do it straight on to film -



film recording that is. During the show the vision mixing unit played up, with the result that there were three blank frames on every cut, so we had to take this into a cutting room and not merely top and tail it but actually go through every cut and take out these blank frames. Being an old film man I wasn't content to leave it at that, so I tightened up the cuts as well so that you saw for example, someone come in through the door and then they were three quarters of the way across the room by the time you next saw them, and this really showed up the weakness of the time factor in television, and that is something that has always been a fault with the medium. If someone has to walk across a big room they have to walk across a big room and you can't do anything about it. You've got to live that amount of time. But the moment recording came in this was no longer necessary. It's an entirely additional weapon in the director's armoury today.

Of course I was convinced in my day that it would have been considered rather old hat if I had gone back to the principles of film editing when we were all so excited by television as television and not as an extension of the film.

In the fifties I was a member of the Television Centre Development Committee (T.C.D.C.) and I was the operational representative for all the studios and all the technical side of it, and through the committee I was able to tell the architects what was wanted; the layout of the studios, control rooms, the handling of scenery in the studios and the right lighting rigs. You see the whole design of the Television Centre was based on the necessity of being able to finish a show on Sunday say, during the evening, empty the studio, put a new show in and have it all ready for Monday morning. It was the turn-round that was the controlling factor and everything was geared to this. We'd come a long way since the improvisation days of Ally Pally, but perhaps some of the fun had gone too!"

## APPENDIX 63

Studio Noise : Memorandum from Robert Barr to Cecil McGivern :  
December, 1948 : Robert Barr Papers.

" Studio Noise : Iron Men and Microphones.

During the production of Alias (a dramatised-documentary) in Studio A (Friday 3rd December, 1948) I was aware of persistent noise from the studio. This continuous noise was distracting , and tended to spoil the story.

I made several enquiries about the source of this noise during production and assured myself that it was not the fault of the studio staff (God bless 'em) who, in any case must move around to carry out their tasks.

Later, I was told by the Studio Manager that the noise was due largely to my habit of moving iron men cameras around the studio during transmission. The iron men dollies are heavy, they are manned by one operator, and they trundle around on small castor wheels.

1. Studio Noise : Iron Men

The noise was due, therefore, to two of the four cameras in the studio being mounted on dollies which are quite unsuited to this type of studio work. These dollies are designed for fixed shots such as captions and are, by present day production practice, archaic. We have four camera channels in Studio A : Why should two of the cameras be mounted on dollies which make their movements noisy and difficult? I have given this matter a great deal of thought and I can see no particular virtue in this type of camera stand for studio work. Would you consider having Cameras No.3 and 4 mounted on small three-wheeled 'crab' dollies? I visualise a dolly smaller, but on the same principle as the present 'crab': a dolly which would enable these two cameras to move quietly, quickly and deftly across the studio floor. If, in addition, the dolly could be designed to allow these two cameras a small amount (I repeat, a small amount) of tracking and crabbing while 'in shot' this would be a great advantage: but for the moment I'd settle for the first requirement - quick, quiet and deft movement on the studio floor.



## 2. Studio Noise : Microphones:

A lesser amount of studio noise - also persistent - comes from the normal movement of studio staff, changing props and furniture, positioning caption boards and lights, and so on. The staff work as quietly as they can, but they cannot move objects around the studio without making a small amount of noise.

Since this 'noise' comes from sets other than the one 'in shot' it means that our microphones are picking up sounds not intended for them: on occasions they pick up sounds from the far end of the studio and even from the corridor. This type of noise would be greatly reduced if our microphones were directional - shielded.

We don't permit our cameras to shoot 'off the set'; why should we allow our microphones? The usual answer to this is that directional mics have not the 'high quality' of our present mics; but what do we gain from 'high quality' if it is mixed with bangs, bumps and furtive coughs. Our television mics are so sensitive that they can pick up the chatter on the Studio Manager's earphones - they can even transmit the Producer's instructions to his S.M. - but what do we gain by this?

The microphone in television, particularly in our congested studios, has one job to do and one only: to pick up sound from a source indicated by the Producer. It should leave all other sounds alone. It should turn a 'deaf ear' to them.

Do you i.e. Cecil McGivern - recall the tricks we could play at Broadcasting House by using the dead side of the microphone? Why can't we have mics with a dead side - or, better still, three dead sides?

Again, why is it that we have one type of mic to cover the wide range of work we do? The same mic for a play as for a single piano. A story-teller sitting quietly in an armchair and talking in a quiet conversational tone is provided with a microphone which picks up sounds on the other side of the studio wall.

There was a third source of continuous background noise in Studio A during this transmission - the noise from the ventilation system. But I feel that if we continue to have

noisy ventilation in a television studio the whole thing becomes a joke."



APPENDIX 64

Technical Information No.1 (1946) D.R. Campbell of Engineering Department. Information on Cameras and Lenses for use at Alexandra Palace.

Technical Information No.1 (1946) from D.R.Campbell, of Engineering provides a contemporary survey of available cameras and lenses :

CAMERAS NORMALLY IN STUDIO A

<u>Crane Dolly:</u>	Maximum height from ground	7 ft.
	Minimum " " "	2ft. 10 ins.
	Radius of swing of crane arm, arm in horizontal position.	3ft. 4 ins
	Radius of swing of crane arm, when camera is 6ft from ground	2ft. 4 ins
<u>Vinten Dolly:</u>	Maximum height from ground	6ft. 4 ins
	Minimum " " "	4ft. 5 ins
<u>Iron Man</u>	Maximum height from ground	6ft. 2 ins
	Minimum " " "	4ft. 3 ins
<u>Boom</u>	Maximum length from central pivot	18ft.
	Minimum height " " "	8ft.
	Height of pivot-point from ground.	8ft.
	Maximum height of microphone with boom at minimum extension.	15ft.
	(It should be noted that the microphone hangs 2ft below the actual boom).	

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CAMERAS NORMALLY IN STUDIO B:

<u>Vinten Dolly :</u>	This camera has two raising and lowering mechanisms.	
	The normal, which can be used during operation, gives a rise and fall of .. ... ..	
		14 ins.
	The capstan, not practical when in operation, gives another ..	
		14 ins
	By combination of both :	
	Maximum height ...	.. 6ft. 3 ins
	Minimum " ...	.. 4ft.

Crab Dolly: It is not advisable to raise or lower during operation.  
Maximum height .. ... 5ft.  
Minimum " .. ... 3ft. 10ins.

Iron Man: Maximum height .. ... 6ft. 2ins  
Minimum " . .. 4ft. 3ins

Boom: As in Studio A.

- - - - -

TRIPOD CAMERA: Lowest camera position is 31ins. from ground.  
(All above to centre of lens)

The angle of elevation and depression is of the order of 32 degrees from the horizontal for all cameras, but individual cameras may vary from 3 degrees either way.

ANGLES OF VIEW: The standard 6½ins. lens.

Focused at infinity, 35 degrees in horizontal plane.

"	"	"	28	"	"	Vertical	"
"	3-ft.	27	"		horizontal	"	
"	3-ft	21.5	"		vertical	"	

Nearest object in focus ... 27ins. Area covered at this distance  
= 13ins. x 10.4ins.

With the camera set 4ft.6ins. from floor level (average height at which camera is normally used), and in horizontal position:-  
at 5-ft distance, backing must be 6ft.9ins high

10-ft.	"	"	"	"	8ft.	"
15-ft	"	"	"	"	9ft.3ins.	"
20-ft	"	"	"	"	10ft.6ins.	"
25-ft	"	"	"	"	12ft.	"
30-ft	"	"	"	"	13ft.	"
40-ft.	"	"	"	"	15ft.6ins.	"

(The above all have 1-ft added as a safety factor, and are calculated for the largest angle in the vertical plane, 28 degrees).



TELEPHOTO LENS:

Angle of View focused at infinity ,				20 degrees	horizontal plane		
"	"	"	"	16	"	vertical	"
"	"	"	7ft.10 ins.	17	"	horizontal	"
"	"	"	7ft.10 ins.	13.6	"	vertical	"

Nearest object in focus .. 7ft.10 ins. Area covered at this distance ... 25½ ins. x 20½ ins.

(N.B.) A telephoto does not produce such a big close-up as a normal lens).

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SUPPLEMENTARY LENSES:

These lenses will focus objects from 3ft. to 1ft.4ins.distance. At 1ft.6ins. distance, the area covered is 10ins. x 8ins.

It should be borne in mind that these lenses are not suitable for moving objects, as the view finder is not corrected with regard to parallax.

(This is the first of a series of technical data which will be issued from time to time).

## APPENDIX 65

Three Production memoranda issued by Denis Johnston as Television Programme Director during 1946 : Robert Barr Papers.

1. Producers or Directors? (18 June, 1946)

"I am fully aware of the usefulness of the description 'Directed by.....' rather than 'Produced by.....', but I am afraid that at present BBC policy is against the use of the words 'Director' or 'Directed by' in the sense that it is used in the Film Industry. Would you please be careful in future to make sure that your programmes are described as 'Produced by' rather than 'Directed by'. We may possibly get a further ruling in the matter later on if and when Producers in the film sense rather than the stage sense are appointed, but until then please follow the theatre practice rather than that of the film. "

2. Producers' Credits (2 July, 1946)

"It has been decided to return to the pre-war practice with regard to producers' credits. Under this it was the practice that credits were given for any kind of a programme involving the 'production' of artists, as distinct from presentation of the items in terms of television on the screen. This, of course, primarily covers plays and features. A credit can be taken at the producer's discretion either in sound or in vision, and either at the end or the beginning of the programme, but not more than once: that is to say, if the sound announcement refers to the producer by name there should not also be a caption card giving his name in vision, and vice versa. This, of course, does not refer to credits in the Radio Times or any other publicity matter which are entirely a different matter, but please see that the old practice is stuck to, and that where you show a caption carrying your name it is only used once in the programme and that the sound announcement doesn't repeat the matter."

3. Operations (5 July, 1946)

"One or two points have been raised recently that I think should be brought to your attention. Naturally they don't apply to everybody's productions, but it is usually helpful to know the kind of criticisms that are being made.



- (1.) There is a tendency to put pictures on the air without their being pre-viewed immediately beforehand. This most usually arises in a sequence where there is rapid cutting, and it raises a number of legitimate engineering objections. It is all very well to cut rapidly from one camera to another and back again to the first where it is merely a matter of inter-changing pre-view and transmission screens, but where a third camera is introduced it is always necessary to pre-view this beforehand for the benefit of the racks, even when that camera has been in transmission only a short time previously.
- (2.) It has also been suggested that there is a tendency to cling to a bad camera even when there is another camera available at almost the same angle. I can understand myself quite clearly why this is done, and how dangerous it is from the producer's point of view to depart from a pre-conceived camera script simply because one camera is not giving as good a picture as it might. But where it is possible to change to another camera without materially affecting the continuity and for the sake of getting a better picture, producers might perhaps be a little more ready to do so.
- (3.) It has also been pointed out that there is sometimes considerable distortion when cameras are facing a scene where objects are standing well out in the foreground. For instance, a character sitting with his hands clasped in front of him at a table very often appears to have gigantic hands when in close-up owing to tricks played by depth of focus. It sometimes has a laughable effect, and it would be well to be careful about this.
- (4.) Normally during the transmission hours of the Demonstration Film in the morning, two channels will be in use and this may sometimes seriously interfere with a producer's rehearsal. I have had it agreed that when producers are rehearsing in the morning and are actually using cameras during the transmission hours of this Film, one of these channels can be released if they make a case for it beforehand. It will mean putting the film out in two sections with an interval, which is not a desirable thing, but this will be done to convenience producers in rehearsal whenever it is really necessary to release a channel for their use.

- ( 5. ) The Presentation Office points out that quite frequently the material describing a play and those taking part is so completely covered by captions that there is practically nothing left to put in the announcement, without repeating what is already in the captions. Too bald an announcement always sounds bad, and at the same time a great many captions look fussy and are sometimes a nuisance to have to handle in the studio. May I remind producers, if they can, to make use of the announcer whenever possible, thereby cutting down the necessity for multiple captions and at the same time giving the announcer something more to say. There is, of course, no objection whatever to them writing the essential parts of the announcements relating to their own show, and in any event these should always be seen by them.
- ( 6. ) It has been commented on that there seems to be an unnecessarily large amount of swearing in our programmes. Although it is hard to avoid this in stage plays which appear to run to swearing to an enormous degree in these days, we should keep an eye on it, particularly in the case of programmes which are adapted or are written for television by members of our own staff."

Denis Johnston.



## APPENDIX 66

Huw Wheldon : Managing Director of BBC Television.

The Listener : Vol.85 No. 2198: May 1971

"Commercial Television started in England in 1955. It was set up under a statutory authority and had some public service ingredients from the beginning.

What happened in the first two or three years of its existence was the BBC found that its costs had risen very steeply and that it was losing its grip on the audience. By 1957 the audiences were dividing in the proportion of 70 to 30 in ITV's favour, occasionally touching a point of 72 to 28. The programmes costs went up nearly 50 per cent. There was nothing to do about that except meet them. The licence went up, too little and too late, as is the nature of licence revisions, but up it went all the same.

The audience situation was much more difficult. People were bothered for two reasons. The first worry is a difficult one to put into brief words: it seemed intolerable that an organisation which, one way or another, was the envy of the world should be limited and diminished into being a lesser and even a sectional thing. If the BBC had ever meant anything in terms of national standing and purpose, it seemed to be well on the way to meaning much less. The second, a simpler and altogether coarser worry, was this : the ready payment of a licence fee on the part of a viewer naturally implies that he feels he is getting something for his money. If six people met at random in a pub, say, Dundee or Portsmouth, and it should emerge that none of them had seen any programmes on BBC Television over the last three or four months, or even weeks, but only on the competing channel, then it would be purely a matter of time before one of them said : 'Why should we pay this licence?' Multiply that, and you have a problem.

In a word, seriously diminishing audiences put the very financial foundation of the BBC at risk. With a proportion of seven to three in favour of ITV the problem was not yet critical. There was still a great deal of BBC viewing. Experience showed, however, and showed relentlessly, that once you started losing audiences, it was not only very difficult indeed to win them back, but extremely easy to lose more. The next stop after a 70/30 ratio is 80/20.

The situation was gradually put to rights. There were various elements in this: The BBC, when the chips were down, felt for its power and used it. It met competition with competition. Competition in this sense means, of course, competition for audiences, for on the size and share of the audience depended, in the final analysis, the financial stability of both Independent and BBC Television. What the BBC then had to do during the Fifties and Sixties was to get back from the frightening and slippery slopes of a 70/30 ratio in Commercial's favour, and achieve a position at least of rough parity. The central competitive instrument was the way in which programmes were scheduled. In the meantime, the programmes themselves were improving.

It is important to note that, at that time, during the second half of the Fifties and the early Sixties, there was a generation of producers at work in BBC Television (of whom I was one, and I am very proud of the fact) who were seriously coming to grips with the medium. Largely ex-servicemen, they had knocked about the world a bit, they had learned the essentials of their trade in the days of the monopoly when things had been easier, and they brought their experience and their relative maturity to bear on the possibilities of an emerging medium. They worked under good leadership, and they changed the face of television in this country.



APPENDIX 67

The Public and the Programmes: Audience Research Report:  
BBC, 1959 - R.J.E. Silvey, Head of Audience Research: Pp 57-58

Eighteen categories of television output were examined. The findings about them are summarised diagrammatically below, showing the relationship between tastes and the sex, age, and educational level of viewers:

Programme Category	Order of Popularity (the 'T.V. Public' as a whole).	Sex.	Age.	Educational Level.
Plays	1st.	Less popular with men than women.	Much the same in all age groups.	Much the same in all three groups.
News.	2nd.	Equally popular with men and women.	Slight tendency to increase in popularity as age increases.	Do.
Travel.	3rd.	Do.	Much the same in all age groups.	Popularity increases with each step up the scale.
Variety ) ) ) ) Sports ) ) ) )	4th	Slightly more popular with men than with women. The most popular category with men, much less popular with women.	Slight tendency to increase in popularity as age increases. Much the same in all age groups.	Popularity decreases with each step up the scale. Do.
Quizzes.) ) ) ) )	6th.	Less popular with men than with women.	Slight tendency to increase in popularity as age increases.	Do.

Animals & Birds.	) ) ) )	6th	Equally popular with men and women.	Tendency to increase in popularity as age increases.	Most popular with top group.
Feature Films.		8th	Slightly less popular with men than with women.	Popularity tends to decrease as age increases.	Least popular with top group.
Current Affairs.	) ) ) ) )	9th	Slightly more popular with men than with women.	Popularity tends to increase as age increases.	Popularity increases with each step up the scale.
Document- aries.)	)		Do.	No clear association.	Do.
Light Music and songs.		11th	Less popular with men than with women.	Popularity tends to increase as age increases.	Much the same in all three groups.
Crime Series.	) ) ) )	12th	More popular with men than with women.	Popularity decreases as age increases.	Popularity decreases with each step up the scale.
Western Comedy Film Series.)	) ) ) )		<u>Do</u> Equally popular with men and women.	<u>Do</u> Much the same in all age groups.	<u>Do</u> Do.
Religious Services.		15th	Less popular with men than with women	Popularity increases as age increases.	Popularity decreases with each step up the scale.
Science		16th	Not unpopular with men but unpopular with women.	Most unpopular with viewers over 60.	Popularity increases with each step up the scale.



Serious Music.	17th	More unpopular with men than with women.	Much the same in all age groups.	Unpopularity decreases with each step up <u>the scale</u>
Opera.	18th	<u>Do.</u>	<u>Do.</u>	<u>Do.</u>

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The outstanding difference between the tastes of the average man and the average woman viewer is in terms of Sport, which tops the list for men but is well down the list for women.

The most noticeable example of a category which becomes increasingly popular as viewers get older is Religious Services, Feature Films, Crime Series, and Westerns are the categories showing the most marked tendency to decrease in popularity as the age of the viewer increases.

The higher the educational level of the viewer the more he tends to like programmes about Science, Opera, Serious Music, Current Affairs, Documentaries, Travel, and programmes about Animals and Birds; on the other hand, the Less he is likely to favour Variety, Quizzes, Western Comedy and Feature Films, Crime Series, Sport and Religious Services.

The more time the viewer spends in watching Television in the evening the less interest he is likely to take in the more serious types of output, and the keener he is likely to be on such categories as Variety, Quizzes, and Feature Films.

The way in which Band 1/3 viewers exercise their choice between BBC-TV and ITV is clearly reflected in their tastes. Those who spend nearly all their viewing time with ITV rate particularly highly such categories as Westerns, Crime Series and Quizzes. Those who, on the other hand, spend most of their time with BBC-TV rate highly such categories as Travel, programmes about Animals and Birds, and Documentaries. But there are some categories, such as Plays, Sports, and Light Music about which these two extreme groups of viewers do not significantly disagree.

In so far as comparisons between listeners' and viewers' tastes are possible they show a close similarity. Sport and

Documentaries, however, are rated more highly in their TV form, whereas Light Music and Religious Services are rated more highly in their Sound form. The unpopularity of Opera as a broadcast is greater with the average viewer than with the average listener."



## PART THREE

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Michael Barry: Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer : July 1973.

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Cecil McGivern : Memorandum on 'Script Unit' : 10 November 1954 : BBC Written Archives Centre : Drama File.

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W.P. Rilla : Drama Script Department : Details of Television Scripts showing growth of work of Script Department : 21 November, 1950 : BBC Written Archives Centre : Drama File.

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Donald Wilson : Personal account of the Television Script Department (1960) : BBC TV Script Unit : Television Centre , London.

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Elwyn Jones : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer , July 1973.

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Robert Barr : Origins of Z-Cars : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer : July 1973.

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Alan Hancock : The Small Screen : Heinemann, 1965 : P.24-40 'Description of a typical Z-Cars Production'.

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General Information on the first series of Z-Cars 1962  
BBC-TV Script Unit, Television Centre, London.

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Robert Barr : Organisation Plan for a 'Series' : Letter to this writer, dated 6 August, 1973.

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Ted Willis : Television and the Dramatist : Plays & Players. 1965. P. 50

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The Impact of Z-Cars : Press comments on the Series and the Writers.

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Encore : May-June 1964 : Replies to Troy Kennedy Martin's attack on naturalistic television drama.

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Tyrone Guthrie : In Various Directions : Michael Joseph, 1965: 'Theatre versus Television' : P. 122-124

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Peter Black : Daily Mail : 22 August, 1968 : 'Mrs. Lawrence Will Look In' (Wednesday Play Review) Robert Barr Papers.



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Tom Clarke : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer : October 1972

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Jack Gold : Sight and Sound : International Film Quarterly : Summer 1974: 'Getting Close' Interview with Paul Madden and David Wilson : Pages 134-137

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Stephen Peet : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer : October 1972.

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BBC Staff Lists: Television Service : Years ; 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955.

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BBC Year/Handbooks : Entries under 'Drama', 'Documentary', and 'Engineering' : Years: 1932, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962 : BBC Publications, London.

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BBC Annual Reports: Entries under 'Drama', 'Documentary' and 'Engineering : Years; 1951-52, 1953-54, 1954-55, 1955-56, 1956-57, 1957-58, 1958-59, 1959-60, 1960-61, 1961-62, 1962-63, 1963-64, 1964-65, 1966-67.

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Some Trends in BBC-TV Drama 1937-1971 : BBC-TV Script Unit, BBC Television Centre, London (1972).

Appendix 93. Page 369

List of Major BBC Dates 1922-1962 : BBC Handbooks : BBC Publications.

## APPENDIX 68

Michael Barry: Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer, July 1973.

"What happened immediately after the War was that one had these feelings that one could no longer go to the BBC Library shelf and take theatre scripts down; and of course the only other scripts available were Film scripts and they were financially beyond us and certainly not suitable for our facilities then anyway.

When I became Head of Television Drama in 1951 we literally had £5 a week for the adaptation and writing for television - on a staff basis. Before that, individual groups of us had tied ourselves to this or that writer, Royston Morley with C.P.Snow, Ian Atkins with Duncan Ross.

Well I met a man called Charles Terrot, who wasn't exactly a dramatist but rather a wonderful story finder and I used to take the stories he would find for me and jolly well adapt them myself - though naturally one had a joint partnership on the credit line at the end, so it did really matter. Well all of this was being done by individual producers who were dissatisfied with the material which was then available and one just had no money to pay for writers, or even sufficient to attract the interest of such scenario writers as were working in films at that moment. So the first thing we had then was this £5 a week. It was around this time that I happened to read a remarkable volume of short stories called Tomato Cain (Collins, 1949) which had won the Atlantic and Somerset Maugham awards which had been written by a young, one-time actor from the Old Vic, who had retired to the Isle of Man to write, called Nigel Kneale, and I was so shattered by these stories - The Excursion, Chains, The Putting Away of Uncle Quaggin, The Pond - which seemed to me to be way above the Edgar Allan Poe class that I got him to come over and see us., and one of the really great decisions we made then, to my mind, was that instead of splitting up the £5 into thirty bob, we gave Kneale the whole lot. So he came to London and starved on that, and his very first offering for television was an adaptation of Chekhov's Tobacco. Then he formed an association with another freelance who'd got into television



around this time, Rudolph Cartier, and they launched on a science fiction serial called Quatermass, and I remember Cecil McGivern saying; "The public won't take Quatermass you can't use that name it's absurd". But Kneale went ahead and it was a tremendous success and led on to a partnership - producer and writer - which, at Cecil's instigation, led to a dramatisation of 1984 which was televised the week that the national network was for the first time completed and the Scottish station came on the air. There were national banner headlines I remember on the Monday morning following the showing of 1984 on the Sunday night. I saw them at London Airport as I was on my way up to Aberdeen for a celebration of the opening of the Scottish Station - and these two-inch headlines said in effect that the BBC must not be allowed to repeat this blasphemy on the following Thursday. Cecil McGivern was on holiday at the time so I phoned Lotbinière who was in charge, and full marks to him, for he was one of our strongest critics of rolls-in-the-hay (fully clothed you know!) which worried him enormously. But he stood by his guns and we repeated and it was all very much to the credit of Kneale and Cartier.

When we first opened up after the War, Denis Johnston was for a short time in charge of programmes and he was someone whom I admired enormously and he shared my concern to seek out new writers and to really do something with the medium and get away from both theatre and films.

My first attempt in this respect was I Want to be a Doctor and that taught me a lot about the constraints as well as the possibilities of television.

During this time it was very fortunate for us that the Observer Newspaper had a very intelligent critic - a film one actually - called Caroline Lejeune. She was always very concerned with our work and as a critic she really minded about us and although acquainted with us she never allowed that to bias her criticism in any way but concentrated her reviews towards the improvement of our drama. I remember at the time of my production of The Last Supper I waited so anxiously for her piece and when at last it appeared it began "What does Michael Barry think he's doing?" and then she tore the thing to shreds. Well, fine!

Well, as I've said, we were constantly searching both for material and talent and experimenting all the while. Sometimes it



paid off, sometimes it didn't. I had found my story-teller and I would try to make his thing work as a director - we'd all of us, Morley, Atkins, myself, work very closely with our writers. I would invariably, though, take the material and ruthlessly re-write it, whilst others would perhaps be more patient. But not me, I was too impatient. So one went home and wrote the stuff and all the time one was trying to make the thing work as "television". I just didn't seem to be getting anywhere until I'd had this period away in Pinewood. Incidentally, you really can't go ripping a writer's work apart like that, they don't like it, they become suspicious obviously and then resentful and in the end they won't allow you to do it on television.

It was shortly after this that I felt that the period of 're-working' was over and I had to start from scratch and this was where Terrot was such a help because he had a mine of stories, Passionate Pilgrim amongst them. We tried always to get into the human gut of the story and try to make it work on our screen, and long before Pelissier and The Langham one was doing the wards in Scutari say, making something of that vast army with three peanuts and a penny by simply shooting a single incident, or a detail in close-up, no more. Shout Aloud, about the Salvation Army, a great mass of material which Duncan Ross handled so well for me, was all about character and situation which is the real essence of drama.

It was in 1951 the Serials started on television, in fact, just before I took over Drama, and for me this was just like the Victorian father reading the classic to his children by the fireside.

An interesting point to note about the serial which came as the result of its introduction was that whereas the single play, as far as quality was concerned, was always touch and go and something you could never guarantee because our talent was always growing and we just hadn't enough to go round - which is what Commercial Television did when it arrived, broadened the field of talent, and we just hadn't enough skills amongst ourselves, let alone increasing them - whereas these strange little serials seemed to challenge people to produce quality and you could practically guarantee people that they would be good - far more easily than you could a single one-shot play. Of course, for us the main advantage here was the whole field of literature and stories that television could do far more easily and infinitely better than film, and was one of the proudest achievements of television, for it helped to build an



audience if nothing else.

But original writing for television, as I've explained, started so very slowly for us in Drama. Bill Naughton was one of the earliest - short story in Reader's Digest and not then a playwright and as tough as they come. But we had not got the resources to engage a top ranking writer who could, most importantly, win the confidence of other writers outside the department who would know that their work was not being mucked about with.

As the department grew and the hours increased we just had to do something or drive ourselves out of our wits - and we floundered around as best we could.

During this time Basil Bartlett ran the Script Unit but it didn't really work, in fact Cecil McGivern complained that I kept it on too long, but really there was no other choice, no other option, that is not until Donald Wilson, whom I already knew and admired, following the crash of Rank, was able to come to television. In him we at last found a writer who understood other writers and was sympathetic to their every need. He immediately began to create this confidence and to bring in the new writers and build up this department which was still, of course, within Drama.

As I remember, the instruction given to Donald by McGivern, was that as soon as possible, he should found a separate Script Department which was to be built up within Drama and which later would become the Central Script Unit. When it came down to it, it really was as much as anything, a matter of building confidence so that writers knew that they would be in the hands of a fellow professional and amongst other professionals.

After a few years the post of Drama Organiser was advertised to work under me. Elwyn Jones had applied for an Assistant to the Script Supervisor's post - I remember that it was a rather tough interview and Elwyn did rather well. Afterwards I wondered if he wouldn't be far better for the Organiser's job, which was at a more senior level and was really an administrative post. I must say at the time he was surprised to be offered this but fortunately for us he said yes. He soon became one of the most important members of the 'quartet' which comprised the Drama Department then (1958) - the four were, myself, Anglo-Irish, Elwyn, the Welsh man with his clear logical mind, whom I always

found to be an invaluable alter ego, in terms of business management for he'd say to me, read this, or, read that, and so on. Then there was Norman Rutherford, who was a dogged terrier-fighter on administrative matters, and Donald Wilson, the Scot, though Elwyn and he did not get on well together. But as a quartet I believe we made a complete whole because we were all so completely different.

By now what was really worrying us was that we couldn't get 'specialisation' so I went to McGivern and said : "Look Cecil, the time has long since passed when one Head of Department can be responsible for every programme on the screen let alone every moment on the screen which is where the damage could be done at that time. We must have delegation," but he snapped back, and I'll always remember this, "Michael you're seven years before your time, go away." So amongst ourselves we jolly well decided that whatever McGivern said we would do a little delegating of our own - which in fact worked out as Elwyn Jones being given the 'documentary' unit to look after, and Douglas Allen being in charge of the 'serials' (series, as such, had not really emerged with, say, the same importance as Serials to warrant a separate department - that was to come later.)

What is interesting at this time is the re-emergence of the dramatised-documentary of the late 1940s under the guidance of Elwyn and with the help of Bob Barr who returned to the BBC. Mind you, Elwyn had always nurtured 'documentary' from the moment he arrived in Drama. What I especially remember about this time was the long-drawn-out battle, with the resistance from the Metropolitan Police, over Barr's Scotland Yard series - which established series anyway.

During my years in television drama, especially in the 50s one could not help but be influenced and have deep respect for that brilliant upsurge in American television of writers like Paddy Chayefsky. Though it aborted and they all went their separate ways there is no doubt in my mind that the influence of their plays - and Paddy Chayefsky whose name then was next to the Holy Ghost for any aspiring television dramatist - did have a profound effect upon us. Another major influence was Sydney Newman at ABC Television.

Before he joined the BBC he came around to see us. We



entertained him and I took him to Stratford during one week-end and we stopped for a drink on the way back and I remember he said to me, "Michael was the production any good?". Well I wasn't very enthusiastic myself, and then we went to see Look Back in Anger at the Royal Court and that was it as far as he was concerned. When he eventually came over from Canada to join ABC Television and set up the now famous drama department which created Armchair Theatre he never forgot that early experience and went all-out on the 'new' writing, and it's perfectly true that when Hugh Carlton Greene came to the BBC he said "Why haven't we got these people working for us?"

But Newman had only this single programme to do. He knew exactly what he wanted and above all he had the money with which to do it.

I will maintain even today, rightly or wrongly, and I think rightly, it may have been tactically the wrong battle but I felt that we should not go to one particular kind of writer and only one style of play. We had that one studio at Lime Grove and if we had restricted ourselves to this one kind of drama we'd have wiped out everything else including the serials. For that reason we had to advance as Peter Black says, 'on the broad front', classics, new writing - (it was Donald Wilson who brought in Mercer. He was one of the chain of Oxford men. We started with Ken Tynan who came for a year, then Michael Elliot came, and then Don Taylor, and it was Taylor who produced Mercer) - serials, and forge ahead this way."

## APPENDIX 69

Memorandum from Cecil McGivern 10.11.54 : BBC Written  
Archives Centre : Drama File.

"Practically all television production, in every aspect of our work, depends on scripts - one of the great strengths of the American film industry lies in its amazingly able script departments. The subjects can be tommy-rot but they are written with complete professionalism and ability. Healthy television must have capable and an adequate number of script-writers and adaptors.

The Script Unit should consist of 12 writer/adaptors.

Drama Script Unit : created because of the need to:

1. Adapt theatre plays and adapt novels and stories.  
(Both involving liaison with the original playwright and authors or their executors and agents).
2. Liaison with and guidance of, outside writers during the writing and preparation of scripts being specially written for television.
3. Advice to producers on practical script difficulties arising at rehearsals or during preparations of final shooting script.
4. Assisting the script supervisor to stimulate the flow of new material from outside sources and to encourage promising new writers."



## APPENDIX 70

TELEVISION SCRIPTS

21st November, 1950

1950

	No: Received.	No: Read.	No: Accepted.	No: Rejected.	No: Outstanding.
May	146	139	6	128	27
June	103	115	2	72	44
July	147	130	3	74	114
Aug.	134	185	2	96	108
Sept.	157	197	5	108	112
Oct.	214	163	3	131	171

Figures show the rate of growth of the work during past 6 months and our inability to cope with it.

Rilla & 1 Secretary.

W.P. Rilla.

Drama Script Department.

## APPENDIX 71

Personal account by Donald Wilson of the BBC Television Script Department : BBC TV Script Unit files, Television Centre London (1960).

"My own duties began to range further and further from the day to day detail of the early days when it was possible for me to read, myself, every dramatic script produced by the Service. By now, we had at any one moment some 150 writing projects in hand, and up to 70 writers with whom one had to keep in constant touch. We had authors under contract to supply us, over a period of one to three years, with so many plays, serials, or episodes of series, for both Drama, Light Entertainment and Childrens' Programmes. In addition to the writer/adaptors we kept in constant employment, we decided to appoint three editors, one for Drama, one for Light Entertainment and one to serve the smaller users. This was a process of decentralisation and it was necessary to maintain proper liaison and effective working at different levels.

It was at this time too (1960) that a new Department was formed, to be called Television Enterprises. Its function was to buy material from other Television Services, or film-making companies abroad, for our own programmes and to sell our own recorded programmes overseas. It was to be responsible for setting up co-production deals with other organisations for the purpose of making programmes of international appeal. Much of my own time began to be spent in advising this new department."

Wilson continues:-

"On the formation of the Script Department, my first task was to set out for all our new customers precisely what services the new organisation would supply. I went round and talked to all the Departments and listened and these Departments included others than the three mentioned in my brief. For example: Music, Schools, Talks and so on. Foreseeing future needs, I was anxious to make it clear to everybody in the television service that we would be able to help. As a result of these discussions I prepared a memorandum describing the aims of the Central Script Department and what services it was prepared to supply.



I had, for some time, been concerned about the routine which had grown up for the commissioning of written material. Within the Drama Department it had long been accepted that this should be done by the Central Script Unit, on briefs agreed by the Head of Drama. This enabled checks to be made at each stage of commissioning, with our Copyright Department, who make out the writer's contracts, and what should be the appropriate fees for an individual writer. We were able to ensure that by having this information centrally, writers were not kept waiting, that the balance of fees was maintained, that a good writer would not be underpaid just because he had a poor agent, and that a poor writer was not over-paid because some individual liked his work. The formation of the Script Department enabled me to carry this principle through the entire Service.

A by-product of the new operation was that we were able to build up the most perfect and detailed statistical information. Anyone wishing to employ a writer could refer to his previous history, what work of his had been broadcast, how much had been paid the last time, whether he delivered the material on time, and so on."

"My first general principle was that we would not take anyone on the staff who had not proved himself capable of writing a piece worthy of production in one or other Department. This may sound an impossible restriction on the face of it, and several times we had to break the rule in exceptional cases. But remember what we were looking for was a talent to be trained. There is no easy way to assess a writer's talent, except by what he writes. It might be that a young author, having had a play produced by some small theatre in the provinces would submit it to us, or that somebody in the Service would see the play and report on it. No pains have been spared, or time withheld in helping a young writer to have his work produced. Only an expanding medium like television could afford to spend this time and trouble on nourishing emerging talent in this way.

The number of posts available for staff writers greatly increased over the years - in proportion to the output demand. This enabled me to take on a young writer, or indeed a not-so-young writer, coming from another medium, for an initial period of three months. During this time I expected very little in return for the money and time expended. He would be attached to productions as an observer. This would give him the feel of rehearsal rooms and



studios. He would learn something of the immense complexity of production, the special problems involved in the construction of a script in television terms.

During this term he would normally only write in snippets, ranging from perhaps a commentary for a dress show in Womens programmes, to extra lines of dialogue required at the last minute for a play that was not going well and whose author could not be present.

He would be assigned to work with a director on the adaptation of a stage play for the screen. Normally this would involve mostly discreet cutting, but in the process he would learn from the director some of the different values as between the theatre and television. If, at the end of the three months preliminary period, he wished to stay on, and we were satisfied with him, we would normally give him a further contract for six months. During this period he would be asked to do at least one major dramatisation. For convenience at this point, I make the distinction between adaptation, which means adapting existing dramatic works for television, and dramatisation, which means taking existing works of prose, short stories or novels, and recreating them in dramatic terms directly for the screen. I would estimate that normally the staff writer would be earning his keep round about the fourth month of his staff period, provided he lasted that long. I say that because no two people are alike. I have taken writers on the staff who have found it completely impossible to work to rule, to adapt their talent to the daily task of routine, who have found even the fact of working with other people an impossibility. But even they have benefited from a short period of attachment, and from many of those who have left after a short period, we have obtained good work as a result of the experience they gained. The others who stayed on were those who liked the life of the workshop, whose talent was diverse, and for whom television writing and production became an interesting adventure. What we had always to watch about them was that they didn't stay too long. The routine and the monthly pay packet can eventually have a deadening effect on a writer's talent and what one had to gauge was each individual and then determine, with him, the point at which he should leave and go back into the world. This period could vary from six months upwards.

Amongst the successful writers nurtured by the Script Department



were Frank Baker, Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath, John Hopkins and Philip Mackie, but not everyone who came succeeded. Sometimes our judgement in taking them was wrong, but that was a gamble to be accepted. Sometimes their temperament was just not suited to institutional life. But by and large the record is a good one, and apart from the fact that many of them are still writing for television to this day, they have had a tremendous influence during the time they were with the Department upon other writers outside, with whom they have had to collaborate."

## APPENDIX 72

Robert Barr: Evolution of the Series : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview , with this writer.

July, 1973.

"The first move into series really happened after Cecil McGivern went over to America. It was there that he found that they were managing to do one show a week not one a month as we were. This weekly Strike as it is called, impressed him very much and as soon as he got back he called me in to see him and demanded to know why we couldn't do it ourselves. So I set about devising him a weekly strike, but it meant employing one Producer and two Directors. Up to then only Producers had existed and they had been responsible for doing virtually everything themselves - hence the monthly strike!

I insisted that two Directors be appointed then to work with a Producer and as it was evident that no two producers would agree to work together I decided to appoint two floor-managers - Gil. Calder in fact was one - to the post of Director.

Then I worked out the following plan: each programme would be in rehearsal for a fortnight, over-lapping each other: as Producer I would do all the 'production' work e.g. casting, financing, working with the writers and so on, in fact setting up an assembly line of plays which were designed and ready to go straight into production as soon as the current play was finished. There was to be no let up for the Directors.

The word series by the way, was not in use to start with. The object of the exercise was simply a weekly strike. Series as such simply could not happen in 'live' television until the weekly strike had been perfected. The first step was to break the power of the autocratic Producer and share the responsibility with these new creatures called 'Directors'.

The first series was called I Made News (1951). It was based on true stories and the person who had been 'in the News' e.g. a detective who had arrested a murderer, introduced it and at the end said whether he thought it had given a true impression of what had happened or not. I brought over the Chief of the Paris Police and Robert Fabian - out of which incidentally came the series Fabian of the Yard a long time later. These were



documentary plays but based on true facts.

Pilgrim Street was the series which was produced on the weekly strike basis and two weeks rehearsal. I got a bonus of £50 I remember for introducing the Director system, but there was controversy over the term 'Director' which only applied to administrators not programme personnel at that time. You could say, 'directed by' but you could not call someone a Director unless he was an administrator!

There were immediate benefits brought about as the result of the introduction of series.

As a Producer I was choosing the stories, sometimes writing the script, casting the show, putting up the money and so on, so that whatever the Director did it was still very much my programme. Because we had to do all the production on the basis of the one week strike and that meant finding scripts - and there were very few television writers about then because the money was so little - most of the series I was turning out were in the main adapted from books. One of these was They Came By Appointment (1955) - based on stories of Harley Street.

Gradually these series were building into a documentary department when I was beginning to have more staff, people like Caryl Doncaster as a Producer, Duncan Ross as a writer, Norman Swallow as a Producer and others. I now had sufficient staff to enable me to write one show a month as could Caryl and Norman so that it became a series of one weekly programmes.

There were other advantages too. It opened up the opportunity for Floormen to become Directors. Whereas before you could only become a Producer and you wouldn't get to that position in one jump unless you had been a successful Producer in the theatre and had had outside experience and success. Now under the guidance of a senior Producer they could become Directors and in time Producers. David Rose and Leonard Lewis were both Directors first.

As for the programmes; well, they became much slicker because each chap was doing one job instead of fourteen. Continuous work on a show a week meant that you rapidly lost your fear of the 'live' production and they could walk into the gallery like no other Producers had before them, with no nerves at all. They were able to learn on the job, week by week, and they were able to watch the work of others and see where the strengths and weaknesses were.

All of this meant more scripts were required to fill the time available so there had to be more money. Now a writer had the



chance to do five or ten scripts a year which is a far better proposition than one or two. Writers were soon able to earn half their income from television which in time led to full-time television writers. At first we started on Radio rates which was around a guinea a minute so that we paid sometimes £150 - £200 a script (Today a series writer gets around £1200 a script).

There were advantages for the actor too in series. Plays at this time were in rehearsal for four weeks, not two, like documentaries. So an actor, if he was lucky, might get two or three plays a year which was not sufficient to establish him with the public especially if the parts were all different. Now when the series began there was no such thing as a continuing character, no star part, and although the same Chief Inspector went through a series like Pilgrim Street he was not a Charlie Barlow. Each story was different and he might have some part in it or no part, depending on the story demands. The beginning of the star system in series began in Britain with Fabian of the Yard which was done on film by a commercial organisation, and although it ran for a number of years, Bruce Seaton, who played Fabian, never made much money out of the series. As series developed the public saw the same characters each week and in that way they could get to know them, to like or to loath them, but most important of all, know what to expect from them.

The prototype for the series was the great success of the Dashiell Hammett The Thin Man in the Cinema, and the public's adoration of stars. But until we were able to do the one-a-week television show we were unable to take advantage of this fact, and we were slow getting around to it whilst we were short of original writers, doing adaptations in the meantime and coping with the logistics of production.

Remember too that Drama hadn't yet put an actor under long-term contract. The first actor I put under long-term contract (14 weeks) to play a Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard (a series) was Arthur Young. You see we had so little to pay them and if a good film or theatre part came along we felt duty bound to let them go. It wasn't until recording came and we could sell overseas that we were in a position to offer more cash.

The series could, of course, make an unknown, a star over-night.



Bernard Archer in Spycatcher was an example of that. But you could easily become typecast and find it hard to get work outside that part. Rupert Davies as Maigret and Seaton as Fabian. Many of these ideas would grow out of discussions and work of the original documentary group."

"When I returned to the BBC in 1958 the first two programmes I did were strictly documentary. One was about the Air Ambulance in the Hebrides, and the second one, which won the Italia Prize, was called Medico (1959)

In the meantime, Michael Barry did a film and then returned to television very impressed by a chap called a script-editor 'who puts everything right for you'. As it happened this chap turned out to be Donald Wilson who then took over from Sir Basil Bartlett who had set up the Script Department to supply writers; which was fine for adaptations but not much help to us when it came to working on the raw material of documentary. However, to give him his due, Wilson did start to build up the nucleus of a very good group of writers yet in spite of some excellent ideas for adaptations and series they found it very hard to sell their ideas to the other Departments.

Let me go back in time a bit. For whilst all this was going on Elwyn Jones, who is to become really a central figure in the latter day story of documentary and of the emerging series, was then working on Radio Times. A job went up on the board for the post of Organiser Drama - administrator to the Head of Drama. Elwyn had always been a friend of mine and knew everybody in documentary because this had always been a particular interest of his too. So once he was settled into his new job he asked Michael Barry if he could keep a watching brief on the 'remnants' of the old documentary department who had survived in Drama after Rotha's departure. It contained the partnership of Gilchrist Calder and Colin Morris amongst others. Michael Barry is only too happy to agree so that little by little Elwyn is able in fact to build a little department all of his own and as well producing some plays by Arthur Hailey of Airport and Wheels fame. At around this time he sends for my file out of Registry and finds that there were one or two things, projects and so forth, which I had intended doing before Rotha came and Elwyn wonders if he can tempt me back by offering to do them. Anyway we had a drink together and I agreed to return as his Group Producer. There were four of us and after

Michael Barry left we ran the department for a whole year, and in that year we four started Maigret, Finlay and Z Cars. It was just like the early days of documentary - when talent talked with talent and there was no Head of Department to interfere. You see Heads of Departments can't have talent otherwise they'd be writing every programme themselves - that's why it's better to have a man with no talent then he can appreciate everyone else's. McGivern, when you gave him a script, as a Producer, first took the pencil out of his pocket before he'd read a word. Not unlike the story of Sam Goldwyn who when handed a script would weigh it in his hand and say 'this is going to take a lot of changing.'

Just by having four people whose only interest was in programmes, in stories and writing, we summoned out of the air three winning series and we could have done this for the following year too but by then a Head of Department had been appointed. In that short time we had done an about turn and these new programmes were in one sense a continuation of the old dramatised-documentaries - series based on truth but with the old P.R. element removed so that you did it fictionally.

Now Drama divides into three units under Sydney Newman, series, serials and plays; and series is almost that one part of the old documentary department which had been Caryl, Duncan and me writing the 'one-offs'. It was Elwyn who brought it to life again and I assisted as Executive or Group Producer. It was whilst I was running Z Cars and contributing scripts to that I was also writing the Moonstrike series too. On average, scripts take me five days to write; I do ten minutes of screen time a day. Five in the morning and five in the afternoon. Fifty minutes in all and I never make the mistake of over-writing because that way you only waste time in cutting it down to size.

The real strength of that small group was that we always knew what we wanted to do next. But we had to wait until Michael Barry went and all the French's Acting Editions with him. Norman Rutherford who took over for a year was better, but it was practical people like Elwyn and me who walked about the studio floor and, therefore, really got to grips with what was happening."



## APPENDIX 73

Elwyn Jones: Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer, July 1973.

"I joined the BBC in 1951 to work as Assistant to the Literary Editor and after a while I became its Television Editor. I was a graduate of the London School of Economics and then a journalist. I applied for a job as Assistant to the Script Supervisor, and Michael Barry offered me the post of Drama Organiser, which I knew nothing about, dealing with money and studios - so I did a bit of producing myself in order to understand the problems better - and it was really during this time that the remnants of documentary came my way.

By then the Documentary Department as such had been shattered partly by Paul Rotha and partly by Cecil McGivern who had always wanted to maintain close personal contact and control over it and did not wish to delegate that control to anyone. Then the advent of Commercial Television really slew it completely as a department because Bob Barr left, Duncan Ross left, Stephen McCormack went off, and Gil Calder and Ian Atkins were really the only ones left. As I understand it, when Documentary disbanded in 1955 some of them went into Talks and a couple of them came to Drama where they occasionally did a play or two.

At this time Ian Atkins was planning the new studios (White City) and a lot depended on him. He was the producer liaison between the technical boys and the planning boys so he had precious little time left by then for either Drama or Documentary.

Gil Calder and Colin Morris had teamed up rather in the way that Ian Atkins and Duncan Ross had done and it was as a result of having known them all during my Radio Times days - we were in Marylebone High Street, they in Marylebone Road, and we drank in the same pub together, it was as simple as that - that they asked for me to join them and they got me as Documentary Assistant to the Head of Drama, which was fine for me and certainly better than being a straight administrator as I was as Organiser.

The politics of any producing department are very elaborate and in the case of television where money and resources were scarce, the big fight was always about what space you eventually got, what money you were allowed to spend, what studios you work in, what sort of support you got from film. It's the same thing today and it's

not unique to television it happens with any big enterprise. In time I had become fairly skilled in achieving results of this sort in terms of Drama. Michael Barry was unfortunately no politician himself which is why he never became a big-shot in the BBC. He's a stunning Producer, a brilliant director and a great encourager of talent but he had no more 'political' sense of running the department than my left foot! I realised very early on when I joined Drama that there was a group in Documentary, what was left of it, that would be worth fighting for and in the long run we won and we got people to come back and get things moving again. One of them was Bob Barr.

Bob's famous programme at this time was Mock Auction (1954). This was a splendid example of what the dramatised-documentary could do and that is to take a situation and make it so vivid for the viewers, without running into problems of libel.

But what are the merits of a dramatised-documentary as distinct from a straight face-to-camera documentary which we see today? Very simply that if you do the former properly you do in fact get closer to the truth. I used to say, and its still true, that no matter how skilful the Current Affairs boys are at creeping up on somebody with a camera; the fact that they are getting a person to talk in the presence of a camera will nine times out of ten make them more wary and cautious about what they are saying, than they would be if they were not being recorded. So that if a writer has done his job properly, he ought to be able to get nearer to the truth, than someone being asked direct questions and being identified.

Mock Auction was a very good example of this in fact. The only other way of doing it would have been to have got a failed Mock Auctioneer and let him tell you how he did it. Whereas Bob Barr was able to go to several auctions and in his own way 'created' a better Mock Auctioneer for Alfie Burke to play than the best Auctioneer in the business. Also because we were able to see behind the scenes we got that much closer to the truth as well.

### Z Cars.

'The immediate prelude to Z Cars was a set of programmes Bob Barr wrote for us called Scotland Yard (six half-hours) 1960 : which David Rose produced. Then two or three things happened simultaneously as these things do. So that when Scotland Yard was



over I had made up my mind that we had to do another Police series, but not set in London, we were too London based as it was, and anyway Television was spreading over the whole country by now. Also I was sick to death of Public Relations boys at Scotland Yard because they kept getting in the way. So I had; (a) the feeling of the need for another Police programme., (b) that it should not be done in London and (c) Colin Morris writes "Who, Me?" which I read and was so excited that I can remember going down to the canteen and saying 'It's a bloody masterpiece'. However, I did feel that we would have to be careful how we billed it, because I suspected, wrongly as it happened, that this was all part of the playing politics bit, that every Police force in the country would hate us for it. So we billed it as the most unusual story of a Detective Sergeant (incidentally they still take it up to Lancashire unofficially three times a year and use it as a police training film) - well in fact all that happened when it was first shown was that we got some good notices - apart from one in The Listener - and we suddenly got the Police saying could they have it to show for training purposes. But for a whole set of contractual reasons they couldn't buy a copy, which is nonsense really. One can take it as a BBC official and although there may be 300 police there it is still classified as a 'private' showing for you. As part of a policy then of showing this to as many Police Forces in the Country as possible I took it to Lancashire and it was then that I decided that this was where we had to go to for the next series.

Then Troy Kennedy Martin, who is one of the very best creative talents who has ever been in television, came to see me one day and said why didn't we do a series on cops in cars, and I said fine but we'll do our cops in cars in Lancashire as distinct from anywhere else for there they have something called Crime Patrol which has the great merit that the two boys in the car are of equal rank (this was in the days when the Metropolitan Police used to run three men in a Q Car, one of whom was always a Sergeant) and they can get in and out of plain clothes uniform by putting on macs and things. That was the kind of set up we were looking for. So I sent Troy to Lancashire and he went to Kirby and returned to say that he considered it to be a 'frontier town' as rough and lawless as any out West.

Remember also that the Colin Morris crime series Jacks and



Knaves was going on around this time too (1960).

A further key factor in all this was the rate of Strike at which you could do programmes. This is almost a matter of hard accounting. The Maigret series was by then a substantial success, but as an administrator one of the things I realised was that the rate at which we could do Maigret was entirely dependent on the whims and moods of Rupert Davies. If he'd dropped dead at that point in time we wouldn't have had a series anymore. So it was laid down by Troy in his format that he had to have a minimum of six heroes (or eight) but that it was not going to be about one chap called X, and that the story had to be so arranged that they were capable of being mounted once a week. We did in fact use two crews so that the viewers saw Fancy and Jock one week and the other two the other week, and this gave very good rehearsal conditions for television - roughly ten days for each 50 minute episode which is, I think, still a sensible minimum. But we were enabled as a department to guarantee this weekly strike and that really is the way that the size of the frame shapes the art. For it would have been just as easy for us to have based Z Cars on one crew and we might have done just six very interesting programmes. But as it happens that wasn't what we were about by then, for we were in the kind of situation when the BBC was beginning to realise, belatedly, that it needed, for 39 weeks in the year, something that really was a winner and one which it could keep up for that period. Of course, it was a matter of logistics, of getting more people involved, particularly actors and writers.

Script Unit had become Script Department but it had also run into political troubles over the question of where responsibilities lie. I was engaged at this time in a very hard, and I think proper, battle to say that I was the one who bought a script or didn't, and I was the one who commissioned it or didn't. Whilst I was all for having a Department who could advise me and to whom I could go and say "Who do you have on your books, who can you recommend?", but it is my department's money and I should be able to spend it my way. So we played a nice sort of a political trick. We had some staff posts we never filled and used the money to get a whole string of writers - Troy was one on such a contract. You would hire them for three months give them enough to pay the rent, you didn't really expect any work out of them though you might ask them to look hard at a script and see where they could take out two



minutes and then at the end of that time if a particular writer was any good he would go off somewhere knowing people in television and knowing something of what was wanted. The first thing we did of Troy's was Incident at Echo Six (1958) which we bought within a week of seeing the script and it was on the air within seven weeks after that - that is really moving and you'd be hard put to do that in television today. Actually it was Gil Calder who produced that, which again indicates how they were all interweaving at this time.

At the time of Z Cars Bob Barr was in charge as Group Producer and I was called Acting Assistant Head of Drama (1961), Barry had gone to Ireland, Norman Rutherford had taken over his job but we all lived very much in each other's pockets. Bob did the script editing for the series, there being no script editors at that time. Bob wrote number four I remember Stab in the Dark because we were behind and we needed some kind of a rock to hang on to.

I have never regarded myself as a writer but rather as a journalist, but of course when you are in contact with writers on series of this sort its very tempting to say "Come on, let's have a go." So over the years I had done one or two small pieces. I wrote my first Z Cars out of anger and out of relative desperation because we had got behind, and because I felt that at this point the programme needed a story which would really tell the viewer what detection was all about and what was really in the mind of a good detective. I wrote it in a weekend because I felt we needed it to restore the balance of the series and it certainly wasn't any worse than any of the others we were doing. After that I wrote three or four more and then we got into another area of politics where I got browned off with all kinds of things and decided when the whole structure changed with the arrival of Sydney Newman that I wanted out. Not that I had any quarrel with Newman, his tradition in Canada was a documentary tradition and fundamentally a 'realistic' one and he wasn't against us but the structure when it changed to series, serials and plays was and is, in my opinion, a nonsense - certainly in terms of staff you really want, which are primarily your directors and supporting staff. Producers you can push in anywhere.

My reason for maintaining the social realism was really all to do with 'class'. I am the son of a Welsh miner. Straight

realism is amongst the things that television does best, and at that time it was doing far less of it than it does nowadays yet it was clearly so close to the experience of the audience and I believe in writing for an audience and not becoming self-indulgent and confusing them with the story-telling techniques."



## APPENDIX 74

Robert Barr: Origins of Z Cars : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer : July 1973

"Elwyn had been up to Lancashire to meet Bill Roberts and had sent Troy Kennedy Martin to Lancashire - after first getting permission from Donald Wilson - and Troy's report on his visit went into a file and nothing further was heard.

Then one day Elwyn passed it to me and said would I mind reading it and seeing if I thought there was a series in it. So I read Troy's piece and said that I did think there was the making of a series in it. Elwyn asked me if I would go up to Lancashire then and meet Bill Roberts and his chaps would take me around in Police Cars so that I could see things for myself and get the feel of it. When I got back I was more convinced than ever that we could do a series on the basis of what I'd seen.

Elwyn then asked me if I would arrange it. I said I would but that I would need the help of Allan Prior, whom Elwyn never really got on with. Allan had been born in Blackpool, worked as a newspaper reporter there and so really knew the area - which Troy certainly did not. The first thing was to send them both up to Lancashire to stay in a hotel and get down to the writing. I put Allan under contract for three scripts even if we didn't use them, and they both had to write two scripts each anyway. I remember that I phoned the Hotel after a week and spoke to Allan and said, "How's Troy getting along?" and he said, "he hasn't written a word but walks around most of the day and night saying," "I can't do it, I can't do it." Well I'd already taken a twenty-six week commitment on this series and there was the deadline to meet so I told them both they had just better get on with it. I wrote a letter to Allan, as I'd arranged with him, thanking him for his first script, and had him show this to Troy to make him get a move on with his, and it worked because I got my two scripts from Allan and one from Troy and I was then only one short so I sat down and wrote this myself as it really was the only way to get it in on time.

The title Z Cars was really mine. I used it first of all as a working title. The planners, of course, laughed and said, "Surely that's not what you're going to call it?" "It will never sell in

America", they said, "because over there Z is Zee" - however, I left it there - after all the cars were called this anyway - and before long they would be calling me up and saying "About your new series Z Cars....!" and very gradually they all started using it quite naturally as the title.

I remember the day after the first transmission the front page of the Daily Mirror carried a banner headline 'Z Cars Outcry' - it was then that I knew we'd arrived."



## APPENDIX 75

Description of a Z Cars Production : Alan Hancock :

The Small Screen : Heinemann, 1965: P 24-40.

The Script.

The day after finishing transmission of Z Cars No.21 the director has a meeting with the series' producer David Rose and the writer of script number 26 A Place of Safety, which will be transmitted live in five weeks' time, from Studio 4 at the BBC Television Centre. The writer is John Hopkins.

The plot of this episode - based on casebook material supplied by ex-Detective Sergeant of the Liverpool City Police, Bill Prenderghast - runs as follows:

Sadik, a West Indian, lives in a slum house with his Indian wife and his two children. While a summons is being served upon him for not paying arrears of rent, he attacks the serving officer so violently that he falls down several flights of stairs and fractures his skull. Sadik locks himself and family into their single room, until he is finally persuaded to come out by Chief Inspector Barlow. Once he is in the cells, Barlow spends the rest of the night trying to get the full facts of the case (the serving officer has a reputation for vicious behaviour towards coloured people), while under considerable pressure himself for being 'over kind' to coloured people. Jock and Fancy are occupied in trying to find a home for Sadik's wife and children who have now been evicted. The script (which both producer and director agree is one of the best they have seen) underlines the particular tensions which exist when the police are dealing with coloured people. But it brings out the confusion of motives in the minds of both police and public in a situation where racial prejudices are involved : Barlow, in particular, is drawn more personally into this case than he would like.

At this preliminary script conference the producer, writer and director are anxious to establish the motives behind the different characters' behaviour. They also want to clear up any points where the colloquial Z Cars dialogue does not make itself completely clear, and to check various details in the script for

authenticity. From their discussions it is clear that a certain amount of re-writing will have to be done: in particular they find out that the Liverpool area does not have a 'warrant department', and the setting has to be changed to the bailiff's office. These re-writes are carried out quickly, and the revised script goes off for typing and duplication. In the meantime, there are several other people besides the director who are waiting to begin work on the script. In particular there is the designer.

### Design:

The director and the designer meet very early to discuss the settings. They have to consider not only the style of the sets (whether they are realistic or not, the sort of houses and backgrounds involved), but also a number of physical demands made by the action. It is likely, for example, that some back projection will be required: for scenes apparently set in one of the Z Cars, the actors sit in a stationary car and moving film is projected on to a screen behind them, so that the viewer is given the illusion that the cars are actually driving down a street in Newtown. In this script an unusual design problem is posed by its demand for three flights of stairs in the main slum house setting, with Sadik's room at the top. This is far too high to build in the studio: it would interfere with the lights, and would be completely inaccessible to cameras. So it must be broken into two units, with the first set containing the hall, the first flight of stairs and the first-floor landing (together with a few steps of the second flight), and with the second set containing the second-floor landing, third flight of steps and the landing at the top of them, with Sadik's front door and the interior of his room. These two sets stand side by side. The way that the script has been constructed helps (since the writer is experienced, he naturally took this into consideration when drafting the episode). Any character making his way from the hall to the top of the house is seen going up the first flight of stairs. Then comes an intervening scene on another set. From this the action returns to the same character climbing the third flight of stairs. This is practicable simply because during the short intervening scene the actor has moved quickly from one set to another.

All the landings and Sadik's room are on 12-feet-high scaffolding and wooden platforms, or rostra. Three cameras and



two sound booms are kept permanently on the top level, with the same number on the studio floor. A third of the studio floor will in fact be 'built up' to a higher level.

In all television presentations space is a vital factor and in this one, more so than usual. It is not just a question of positioning the sets, but of allowing maximum freedom of movement for the cameras. Besides the house, which is the main requirement of this script, the episode also calls for sets of Barlow's office and a corridor outside, a bus shelter, a cell and corridor in the police station, the interview room, the bailiff's office, a room in a hostel and a Z-car with back-projection facilities.

The designer is equipped with a scale plan of the studio floor, and by cutting out the shapes of the sets on transparent paper, he can juggle with these on the studio plan, trying out different arrangements. The layout has to take continual account of actor's moves from set to set, and of all camera moves. For example, to save space, designer and director finally decide to put Barlow's office up on to the top level. It is clear from the outset that this will be an expensive production, and the producer has to be consulted on costs, to see if extra money can be made available for the design effort involved.

There are other problems. The opening of the script is highly dramatic: a man has to fall backwards down two flights of stairs. Probably a stuntman will be needed for this scene, and it will have to be pre-filmed ahead of the studio production. Where will this happen? Z Cars likes to use as many genuine locations as possible, and a real house is considered. But for a scene of this nature, with violent physical action taking place on a narrow staircase, the problems would be too great, and instead a set has to be built on one of the large 'stages' at the BBC Film Studios in Ealing, where it can be filmed under properly controlled conditions. As filming takes place a fortnight before transmission, the designer has to move fast.

There are endless details to discuss. Which way will the doors be hung; do they need to lock; are the windows 'practical' (i.e. do they open and close); must some of the walls be put on hinges, so that they can be swung aside to admit a camera; are the corridors wide enough for a camera to move along them? Are we sure that Barlow can get from the cell on the studio floor to his office (which is

perched aloft on the top level) in the thirty seconds available? Drawings and models are made, and the setting gradually takes shape.

#### Casting:

In this episode there are ten parts to cast, as well as the regular performers, together with a large number of extras or walk-ons.

Some of these parts are cast very quickly, but others take more time. Quite apart from his own knowledge of actors, the director can draw on the experience of the different theatrical agents who handle bookings for actors and actresses, and consult the theatrical directory, Spotlight, which carries photographs and details of hundreds of different performers. He auditions the ones he thinks are likely, checks the fees which they charge for a television performance, and their availability during the period of rehearsal and transmission. Certain parts prove very difficult to cast, in particular Sadik's Indian wife, Nana. There are not many Indian actresses working in this country. However, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art suggests the name of a girl who left drama school a year ago, and with some difficulty she is traced. To the director's relief she fits the part perfectly.

The two children in the script also present a difficult problem. In the script they appear to be about five years old, but television cannot use child actors under twelve. Most of the coloured children who are auditioned prove too big for the part, and it is only half a day before filming begins that two suitable children are found.

In the end fifty-four actors take part in this episode, either on film or in the studio.

#### Filming:

There are eight separate film sequences in the programme. A girl production assistant tours London in her car, looking for suitable locations, and takes the director out to inspect anything which seems likely. Some of these sequences are being filmed on location, and permission has to be obtained from the police and local authorities for it to take place. The scene in the bus shelter is difficult. It has to be filmed at night, but the only suitable shelters which the production assistant can find are on



main roads, and the police cannot permit night filming to take place here because of the danger of film lights dazzling passing cars. Eventually a hired shelter has to be erected on some soft ground, in a secluded street in Brentford.

For the scenes which are to be filmed in the BBC Film Studios only a day and a half of filming time is available, and the shooting has to be worked out very precisely to fit into this schedule. The sequence with the stunt man has to be carefully rehearsed (he is well padded under his raincoat). The make-up girl is on hand with her bottle of 'blood' for the fractured skull. Sadik's brow is decorated with heavy sweat from a glycerine spray.

Jock and Fancy are unfortunately not available for filming: they are already booked for another episode, so doubles have to be used and the shooting can only show their backs.

Eventually two and a half days of shot film goes off to the editor for cutting. It will produce three and a half minutes in the final programme.

#### Planning for the Studio:

Now that the sets have been finalised and outside rehearsals are ready to begin, the technical planning for the studio has to be started. A rough plan for cameras and lighting is prepared and the technical, lighting and sound supervisors for the programme meet to discuss the script. The director works through it stage by stage, describing the action and the ways in which he proposes to move the cameras. There are a number of technical problems to be solved, and for this meeting the models of the sets are very useful. What will be the key positions for the lights? Will any special lenses be required for the cameras, to provide unusually wide or close shots? How will the cables from each camera be routed? It is understood that some modifications will take place as rehearsals begin, but the biggest problems must be settled right at the outset.

#### Rehearsals:

Z Cars goes into the studio for only two days at the end of its rehearsal period; the two days immediately before transmission. For the rest of the time rehearsals are held in the main hall of a boys' club, rented by the BBC. All the sets are marked in coloured tape on the floor, to their exact studio dimensions, and the actors

must work within these limits. Essential items of furniture are brought in or improvised in some way, so that the actors can become used to them.

On the first morning the whole cast assembles to read the script. The director explains the two-unit set, with the aid of the designer's models. As the reading continues, the production secretary takes a first timing of the show; timing is very important to television, as programmes cannot overrun without disturbing a whole evening's schedule, and if necessary, cuts will have to be made in the script. There are only nine days available to rehearse the episode, and not a minute can be wasted.

At first, isolated scenes are rehearsed out of order. Then short sequences are built up, followed by longer sequences, until the programme begins to take shape. There are many arguments and discussions about the characters. Why do they behave in a certain way? Is some of the reasoning, or motivation, wrongly thought out? The actors move round the sets, still carrying their scripts, and their moves are carefully plotted, as the shots taken by the studio cameras will depend for their effect upon these movements being made very precisely.

For a programme like Z Cars the rehearsal schedule is often very complicated: Watt and Barlow are rehearsing several episodes at the same time, continuing between two rehearsal rooms. At the director's side are his production assistant and the assistant floor manager. During the course of rehearsals the camera positions are being made final, and the P.A. is preparing a final camera plan, on which every camera position is drawn in and given a separate letter for identification. The A.F.M. is making up a 'prop' list of the various items, or properties, which will be needed in the studio: This has to be submitted to the BBC Property Department well in advance of the production. In spite of these difficulties the characters are beginning to develop and the script begins to move. In the evenings, after rehearsals, the director writes his camera script.

Three days before the move into the studio, the episode has its first complete 'run-through' which is attended by the producer of the series and by the technical staff. The producer can see how the script is working out in a more objective way than the Director (who has been working on it intensively for so many days).



The technical staff watch the run-through, following it with camera plans and checking to see that any modifications in the use of cameras, lighting and sound booms, which may have been made during rehearsals, are feasible. Further timings are made. The weak points in the episode are given extra rehearsal. Finally, on the last day, the walk-ons arrive - ambulance men, police constables and so on - and they are told what is required of them, so that they can take their part in a last run-through. On this final day before the studio rehearsals begin, the actors break early in the afternoon. They have a short breathing-space before the hectic rush of the next two days.

For the last run-through the director has with him an advance copy of the camera script, which he can now check finally against the action. It runs to 122 pages: with 83 scenes and 254 shots. As you can see, studio rehearsal-time cannot be wasted if the transmission is to run smoothly.

#### The Studio:

Throughout Monday night and Tuesday morning, scenery is being erected in Studio 4. The designer is at hand the whole time, to supervise all this activity. There is a heavy load of scaffolding to put up, and it must be ready by 2 p.m. when the camera rehearsal begins.

Early on Tuesday morning, the production assistant and the A.F.M. come in to see that furniture and studio properties have arrived and are in place. They tour the sets, making a comprehensive check and looking for unforeseen snags. By the time the director arrives, the setting is taking shape. For the first time he sees in reality what has up to now been a matter of working drawings and models. But the designer is still working - and continues to do so throughout the studio rehearsal - making small changes, 'dirtying' the slum sets (which, like most sets on television, look far too clean to be authentic).

Camera rehearsal begins at 2 p.m. The camera crew work regularly on Z Cars, and they are very experienced: they know the actors well, and they can often offer improvements on the shots which the director has worked out. They have their camera cards clipped on to the side of the cameras, listing, describing and numbering every shot which they will take. The director is up in the control room, with the row of monitors in front of him, giving

the picture available on each of his six cameras. He is working from a camera script, as are the other technicians in the control room, and in the separate lighting and sound cubicles. As the camera rehearsal progresses the production secretary calls out the number of each shot, and her voice is relayed to the different camera men, through their headphones.

In the early stages of rehearsals (called the 'stagger'), things move very slowly. Each shot has to be gone through with care, and modified until it suits the director's requirements. Changes are continually being made in the camera script; the vision mixer and the director may see better points at which to cut from camera to camera; new shots which have not been foreseen may be suggested by the cameramen and accepted. By 10 p.m. at the end of the first day of studio rehearsal, only three-quarters of the script has been covered.

When camera rehearsals start the following day at 11 a.m., everyone in the studio is conscious of the pressure of time against them. In the morning, the first job is to rehearse and to record four short scenes on to videotape. Z Cars is one of the few remaining pieces of live television (the producer is very anxious to keep it as a 'live' show, as he feels that a weekly sense of occasion is invaluable, particularly in a continuing series - the immediacy, the awareness of an audience, and the possibility of reaction stimulates all concerned).

But even here, videotape recording is necessary to cover points where scenes move faster than cameras or actors can manage: either there is not time for cameras to get to the next set, or for the actors to get there. These sequences can be recorded in advance, and played in during the evening's 'live' transmission.

After lunch, camera rehearsal on the main script is taken up again, and finished. Now the 'run-throughs' begin. Problems emerge that can only show themselves once the episode is running continuously, difficulties in timing, camera movements that are too fast to be practicable unless carefully rehearsed. After the first complete run through, other sequences may have to be re-rehearsed individually, to solve these last minute problems. Very likely, the director will have to go down on to the studio floor, to sort out the finer points with his cameramen themselves.

At 5.30 the final run-through begins. It is a kind of dress



rehearsal, with eight film inserts and four videotape inserts all needing to be cued into the programme by the production secretary. From a miscellany of individual shots and sequences, a single, unified, fast-moving programme now emerges.

Then comes dinner. The time for transmission is getting close. At 7.30 the director gives notes to the performers, making suggestions based on the last run-through. The cameramen may also have small points to clear up. There is a good deal of tension in the studio.

The final minutes of the preceding programme - in this case The Third Man - are viewed in the control room. Its credits titles fade away, and the presentation studio cues Z Cars to begin. The sound of 'Johnny Todd' (the programme's opening music) comes through on film, and the episode is under way. It goes well, and runs to time.

The next day, another script is waiting for the director. This one involves a week's filming on location in Liverpool, and requires two hundred boys as extras. A Place of Safety is already forgotten.

## APPENDIX 76

General Information on the first series of Z Cars (1962)  
from the files of the BBC TV Script Unit, London.

The first script was originally titled The Finding of the Crews but this was changed later to Four of a Kind. The series as a whole was first called Crime Patrol but later changed to Z Cars.

<u>No:</u>	<u>Title.</u>	
1	<u>Four of a Kind.</u>	Written by Troy Kennedy Martin. Directed by John McGrath January 2, 1962. 8.30 - 9.15 p.m.
2.	<u>Limping Rabbit</u>	Written by Troy Kennedy Martin. Directed by Morris Barry Tuesday 9 January, 1962. 8.30 - 9.15 p.m.
3	<u>Handle with Care.</u>	Written by Allan Prior. Directed by Shaun Sutton. Tuesday 16 January. 8.30 - 9.15 p.m
4	<u>Stab in the Dark.</u>	Written by Robert Barr. Directed by John McGrath January 23. 8.30 - 9.15 p.m.
5	<u>Big Catch</u>	Written by Allan Prior Directed by Morris Barry January 29. 8.25 - 9.15 p.m.
6.	<u>Friday Night</u>	Written by Troy Kennedy Martin Directed by John McGrath February 6. 8.25 - 9.15 p.m.

In the first play by Troy - Barlow and Watt are introduced as well as the four other Policemen about whom the series was written. This first story concerns the death of a Policeman and the decision to acquire crime cars - "the finding of new teams for the Crime Patrol presented no problems. All four men asked to volunteer did so with enthusiasm." (John Watt's lines from the first script).

Crews: Jock Weir (Joseph Brady)      Fancy Smith (Brian Blessed).  
Bob Steele (Jeremy Kemp) P.C. Lynch      (James Ellis)



## APPENDIX 77

Robert Barr: Organisation plan for a new Series: Letter dated August, 6th, 1973

"First there is the writer. If we are dealing with the organisation plan let's be more accurate. First there is the Producer. He is the man within the organisation who puts wheels under things and makes them move. He is the man who can obtain the money - called the budget or allocation - and he has the authority to block-book studios, book film effort, and he has the authority to contract writers and others. But first he must have an idea.

He may find the idea in a book he has read or it may be put to him by a writer. Let's say it is put to him by a writer. If it is an idea for a series it should suggest an area or environment in which certain happenings can take place, and it should suggest the characters who will make such things happen.

Since we will later be talking about formats let's make a possible format, or the beginnings of it, and follow it through.

For the sake of the exercise we will say that the 'idea' suggests that the environment is the square mile of Soho with it's several layers of life. All the layers from the theatres and expensive restaurants down through the film colony in Wardour Street, the advertising agents and underground press publishers in Dean Street, the girls in Greek Street, the sleazy bookshops, the porn photo studios, and down to the shabby strip clubs and the criminals. The main character will be a man who knows all of the layers and all the rackets and who knows a load of 'secrets'.

He is an ex-Detective from West End Central who once had Soho and its criminals as his patch. He also had friends and informants on each layer. But he became too involved, too friendly, and he was framed on a bribery charge and sent to prison. Five years. He also has 'friends' he met in prison. And he is a bent cop.

Whether he was framed by criminals or cops or both, he doesn't know. On release from prison he returns to Soho to look up some old friends and to find the men who framed him. There can always be a doubt as to whether he was framed or whether he is just looking for the men who turned him in.

There are few who want to know him. The only one he can trust is a prostitute who had once taken a liking to him. Now that he is a bent copper and an ex-con she feels she has a chance. At first we are working in the lower layer. His ex-colleagues at West End Central hear that he is back



and treat him as a renegade, warning this-one and that-one to keep clear of him.

His particular enemy is a tough Chief Inspector from West End Central CID who appears in person. There is a tough confrontation which bodes ill for our man: the anger and power of his ex-colleagues towards a bent cop. Our man finds, however, that he still has two friends in CID. They are of junior rank and can't afford to help him, but they have some sympathy. And we can add to the list of friends and prison 'friends' who come on release to see him.

In this sort of environment, and in his search for revenge, he picks up criminal information here and there and passes it on (for a future price) to the two junior lads in CID. The information is genuine and does them a power of good. The tough Chief Inspector suspects who their informant is and one day (we are in the third episode) he comes to our man to recruit him as an undercover man in Soho. Our lad tells him to get lost. The tough CI is determined, to the point of blackmail, to use our lad for his own advancement, and our lad is equally determined to use the CI. We now have two really hard men.

Our lad gives the CI a good tip-off. It is genuine information and important arrests are made. The CI gets a commendation.

Slowly we begin to see our lad's plan. He is using the police to make a series of arrests to clear the way to the men who framed him. With each episode and each arrest he is moving nearer to the top layer, the big money crime. This kind of format can go on for ever with the hero always in danger. And even when he does get even with the men who framed him - he has made other enemies, or knows too much. And so on.

The first step in such a format is to do some solid Soho research, to get to know about Soho people, to know the type of homes they live in, to know what lies behind the upper facade of Greek and Dean Streets, to know what the backrooms and the clubs look like. For this the writer has to find and 'buy' at least two 'research' helpers : say, a Soho criminal and a West End Central CID sergeant. The writer must 'buy' them both e.g. pay them in cash or entertainment for background information. And assure them of future payments if the series is accepted.

In the introduction to the format the writer will describe this background with all its colour and characters. He will describe the main series characters and he will keep them to a minimum for economy. And with the format he will offer the BBC his two experts: one on the criminal side and one in CID. From then on if the series is accepted the BBC will pay them as advisers.



To be precise, the Producer will pay them.

If the Producer likes the format he will take it to his Head of Department and try to sell it. If he is a successful Producer that is half the battle. If the Head of Department is interested he will take it to the Controller and present it. In the BBC he has the choice of two Controllers: BBC 1 and 2. Let's say that BBC 1 is interested.

The Controller next takes it to the quarterly planning meeting and discusses it with his own equals and bosses. It is considered together with all other ideas for future schedules. At this planning meeting all sorts of things are discussed: like availability of money, squeeze or expansion, the success or failure of present series, programme ratings, the competition from IBA, the similarity of other ideas. In our case they will talk about there being too many Police programmes, but this one may look new and fresh.

If the Controller likes the idea he will fight for it, if he fights for it he usually gets it. But what he will get at this quarterly meeting is simply an overall allocation of money for the ideas he has fought for.

The Controller then meets with all Heads of Departments and tells them which ideas he is prepared to accept. And he asks each one for a more accurate costing. The preliminary costing will have been no more than a loose estimate that it will cost 'no more than' a similar series like Softly or Z Cars. Or they will have suggested that it might cost less.

Our Head of Department then sees our Producer and tells him that the planners like the idea but its acceptance will depend on cost. It will also happen that our Head of Department has had three such ideas accepted and he will know from experience at this stage that only one will survive; with luck, maybe two. In effect three producers are now fighting for one new series.

Our Producer goes off and does a detailed costing for his new series. This will include location filming in Soho, star casting and so on, but fortunately there will be no expensive costumes or furnishings as in an historical series.

He will have a talk with the format writer about the kinds of sets required, likely cast for each episode, the weight of filming required and in the end he will estimate the cost of 13 episodes.

So three Producers will put forward three budgets and they will go up to the Controller again. Note we are talking about a future quarter and the three Producers are likely to be busy with other series.

Other departments are also putting in their costs for new programmes and the Controller will try, as always, to get the producers to trim their costs. He will do this because he knows that if he gets a successful series the cost will rise. It's safer to start low. We are talking about a run-of-the-mill series.

If the controller begins to lose a bit of faith in one of the ideas he may ask for a pilot programme. If he does he will put up the money for the pilot. Producers hate pilots.

The day comes when the Controller makes his choice and our Producer is told to go ahead. He may be given a transmission date for the first of the series or he may be told that he will get it later. He is given an allocation of money to cover the 13 episodes, but he can touch only part of the money as yet. He is also given authority to book studios and rehearsal rooms and film effort. This he has to do in competition with other Producers. It calls for a great deal of negotiation. He may be told he can have all of his studio requirements if he agrees to record weekly in Birmingham (as happened with Spy Trap) or take a smaller studio if he insists on London.

He can now use some of his money to put a script editor under contract. He then, and for the first time, puts the writer on contract both for format royalties and an agreed number of scripts. The format writer ideally should write the first script to show the format in action.

The Producer and script editor then agree a list of suitable writers and the script editor begins to phone them and have meetings and discussions and hopes (and it is not always easy) to find good writers in the genre who are not already on contract to someone else.

Meantime, the Producer is trying to find Directors. Like writers, most of the television Directors are freelance and he has to find suitable directors in this genre who are free on the dates when he needs them. If he is a well-liked and successful Producer it is easier.

Having found his directors he has then to find good studio managers for rehearsals and so on. Each Director must have a



studio manager, stage manager, and a secretary. He must also have an office for the duration of his 'episode'. He must also have an assistant studio manager and so on.

For a series of 13, four such 'teams' may have to be found and contracted. And Office accommodation booked. All of this is done in the pre-planning stage and in competition with other Producers. In practise, a busy Producer has a sort of prior claim to office accommodation and a list of directors etc., who like working with him: if they are free.

The Producer has also to find a good film director, and a good set designer. Some set designers are excellent but tend to build costly sets, others are brilliant and can do wonders on next to nothing. The latter are seldom free.

At the same time the Producer is casting the main characters in the series., and none of the cast he has in mind is free. Bad casting in the principal parts can kill a series. The Producer has his troubles.

In time, the Producer has his team around him; script editor and writers, directors and studio managers, film director, and crew, designer and workshop effort. And he has his studios booked, recording sessions booked, film locations found, film editing sessions booked, film director and crew booked. And, we hope, he has the main characters for the series cast and firmly booked. The latter is seldom easy because some Actor's agents like to hold up the contract to the last minute on the pretext that there is a chance of a big film part. The Producer has to consider the delay against the value of the actor in the particular part.

The script editor has chosen his writers and agreed the plots and the first of the scripts is due in. It has to be read carefully and edited to fifty minutes precisely. And edited not only for timing but for cost i.e. for number of characters, number of sets, amount of film. Some scripts have to go back for re-writing and skilled ways have to be found around the problems of cost and studio practice.

The series begins with the format and the episodes begin with the scripts.

The first script has to be edited and ready at least eight weeks before the first recording date: to be precise, eight weeks before the first studio rehearsal. The eight weeks (it may differ with

different companies) is to allow for the longest service process. And the longest 'process' is the designing and building of the sets.

For example, the designer has to read the script and get the feeling of it. He then meets with the Producer and Director and discusses the problems. He has then to design the sets (perhaps six or seven big sets) with an eye for all the action and camera angles. When the sets have been designed there is another meeting with the Producer for approval. Not until the sets have been designed and approved can they go to the workshop to be built, and not until they have been built can they be painted.

Not until the sets have been designed and approved can another department choose and hire the furnishings. And a careful designer usually spends at least a couple of days with the furnishing buyers. Everything has to be done and the sets ready to be erected and furnished on the morning of the first 'studio rehearsal' of that particular episode. I think this is really the process that takes the longest time.

Copies of the script, together with notes from the Producer, will also go to various other departments: wardrobe, make-up, film department, and to Head of Department, Controller, Planners, Studio Facilities, Engineering, T.V. Camera crew, Lighting Manager and so on. All sorts of Departments have a script together with notes on the particular facilities that may be required. For example: some episodes may require moving back projection, or still back projection, or special lighting effects, and others may not. All have to be paid for. If they are not required they are not booked.

The service departments then send their own costings back to the Producer's office. The costings may be above or below earlier estimates. The Producer then makes this money available, out of his budget. You will note that the Producer never actually handles money as such: he re-allocates it to other departments including accounts department for the payment of artistes and writers.

When each episode has been recorded and edited and put in the can the Producer's Secretary then completes a lengthy form called a PasB. In my day it meant Programme as Broadcast and I



think they still use the same term today. On this form is listed everything used in the episodes that has to be paid for: even down to the royalty that has to be paid on incidental music or background music used in the programme. The recording number of the music has to be given and the duration of each piece of music given in seconds. I mention this only to show how the allocation of money for a programme is eventually and carefully re-allocated.

I mentioned that the first script must be ready eight weeks ahead of recording. But do remember that in each of these eight weeks, successively, another script is coming in. So, in these eight weeks before the first recording the Producer has been through this same intricate palaver with design, casting, contracts and so on eight times. Eight very busy weeks. And now he gets busier.

Three weeks before the first recording date: the location filming starts for episode one. Two weeks before the first recording date: episode one goes into rehearsal and filming starts for episode two. One week before the first recording date: episode one is in second week of rehearsal, episode two is in the first week of rehearsal and filming starts for episode three.

Add to this that the Producer must be seeing the film rushes, seeing the edited film, must attend tape recording sessions, arrange a showing of each completed episode for Controller and Head of Department. A busy man! But he still gets busier.

Let's take Episode 6. In that week he has the final script (no.13) coming in for editing, costing and casting. He is also discussing the penultimate script (No.12) with the designer. He is discussing episode 6 with the Director. He has episode 5 being filmed on location. He has episode 4 in its first week of rehearsal. He has episode 3 in the studio. He is tape editing episode 2 and showing it to the Controller. All of this in one week.

In practice, he has an assistant producer who can take a bit of the weight but none of the responsibility. And he has a very efficient secretary who does the paper work and makes his timetable. In a week like this he is just being shunted from place to place: from location filming to rehearsal, from rehearsal to studio, from studio to editing and viewing rooms, and sometimes

he has a moment to look in at the office. His secretary sees that none of the bookings overlap.

Then it is beginning to run down. All scripts are now in and so from episode 7 the script work is minimal excepting for the finer points at each read-through and rehearsal. From episode 11 there is no more location filming since it's done three weeks ahead. By episode 13 there is only the one episode in rehearsal.

After the final recording there is a little party for all the cast and the writers and directors and the 'teams'. The Controller and Head of Department come to the party. The Controller makes a nice little speech thanking everyone and saying how successful the series has been. The Producer relaxes. The Controller strolls over to him and with a little smile says: "Congratulations. We're taking another 13 - when can you start?" Collapse of flaked-out Producer.

Next morning the Producer learns that his script editor is off to pastures new. His three best writers have signed up with Commercial Companies. And because of the success of 'Soho' the agents are on the phone asking more money for the cast "who were so very good, old boy, weren't they?"

He begins to budget for the new series. He is back on the treadmill.

That is a rough idea then of the organisation plan for a new series. Now we can talk about formats, and for the moment, let's be 'historic'.

In the beginning all our television dramatised-documentaries were single programmes, and all that was needed was a single script. It was only when the weekly series became possible that some sort of format was necessary. A format is no more than a guide-line to ensure that the stories and characters in the series will stay true to type. There are several ways of ensuring this and I will mention only three.

The first is to have the series written by a single writer. I have done this often myself. So have Colin Morris, Duncan Ross and so on. It was simple when series were of only six or seven episodes and of thirty-minutes. A variation on this is to choose a published book in which the novelist, the single writer, supplies the plots and characters. This becomes the 'format'.

The second is to have a script editor who knows what is wanted and who will advise the writers and see that the characters and



plots stay in line. A variation here is where the format writer is contracted as script editor. This does happen.

The third way is to have a format such as our SOHO or as in Z CARS and so on. A virtue of a good format and a firm editorial hand on the scripts is that it assures the Controller and Head of Department that they will get what they 'bought' and it assures the Producer (despite the many problems of production as described) that he can provide the series as offered to the planners. I'll give you an example of the problems.

In the Spy Trap format I laid it down that the character named Anderson was aged 35 and that he had married at 26 and had two children, a boy aged 9 and a girl aged 7. One writer found it 'necessary' that Anderson's son should be 16 (born before he was married, no less!) while another writer wrote into his plot that Anderson was divorced and childless. And a third writer who wanted to make Anderson a security risk had him unmarried and having an affair with a foreign woman. You can see how a series can become a shambles unless there is a firm hand. In fact, the format provided characters for each of these plots. RYAN is a bachelor. ANDERSON is happily married. RANKIN is divorced. The format goes even further in providing characters for any good plot in the genre. Ryan is public school, university, bachelor. Anderson is naval college, career, married to an Admiral's daughter and likely to out-climb Ryan by family pull. Rankin is working class, grammar school, was a POW in Korea and learned the spy trade in a communist indoctrination camp. The writers were either lazy or hadn't been shown the format.

An example of the use of the format and a firm editorial hand.

The simplest format is the already published book. Two examples. First we take MAIGRET. The first appearance of Maigret on BBC-TV was in a single play adapted by Giles Cooper called 'Maigret and the Young Girl'. It was a great success and because of the many other Maigret stories it suggested a series. For information: Rupert Davies did not appear in the play. He was 'approved' of by Simenon for the series because he looked like Simenon's own idea of his detective. So here we have the example of the characters and an abundance of plots laid down by a single writer. We call it the format-simple.

Next in the format-simple we take DR.FINLAY. The environment and main and subsidiary characters laid down by a novelist, the single writer. But here we have a variation. The novelist had written only one book set in Tannochbrae. When the stories were exhausted the writers continued to construct new plots, with the



author's approval, but the book still provided the guide-line.

I explained how, before videotape recording we were able to do weekly series despite being two weeks in rehearsal: using several directors.

At first I reached for published books. I did two series from books written by a Harley Street specialist: THEY CAME BY APPOINTMENT (1955) and A RING AT THE BELL, and then followed some stories from FABIAN OF THE YARD.

A longish time later, when I returned to the BBC, I reached for another book and did SPY-CATCHER (1959). It was quite a success and when I had run out of book-stories there was another variation. I asked Colonel Pinto if he could write me some additional spy stories, true ones naturally, and this he did. So this was a case of the single writer providing the plots and another single writer(myself) adapting them for television. There are several ways of skinning a cat.

You could say, very loosely, that there are two kinds of format. Adapting the stories and characters from published books we can call the format-simple. Then the format-financial in which a writer constructs a television format and leaves it to a script editor and other writers to get on with it. As example : I no longer write for my own formats : Hadleigh and Spy Trap.

Reflecting back to the moment when the Producer is looking for an idea for a new series. There are times when the Producer has an idea and gets a writer to work it out. The format of THE EXPERT was jointly owned by the Producer, Gerry Glaister, and a writer, Norman Crisp.

So.....what should a format be? I think it should first provide an 'area' or environment of interesting activity. We can instance the family doctor's house in Tannochbrae, the strange space craft of Dr.Who, the sub-divisional police station in a slum area for Z Cars, an emergency hospital ward called Ward 10, of the square mile of Soho for our own mock format.

It should then provide the principal characters who will make the stories work in this special environment. It should provide a small but complete set of principal characters together with reasons for the friendships or conflicts according to whether the stories should be cosy or astringent. Ideally, it should draw the characters in depth - as a novelist does, but in summary - and, if necessary in giving the writers an understanding of the



characters and their conflicts, it should give a brief history of birth, education, marriage, family, hobbies, strength and weakness. I gave an example in Spy Trap of how busy writers, or lazy writers, or writers working in isolation can collectively make a nonsense of a principal character.

To be helpful to the series writers a format should provide a set of characters and conflicts to suit all sorts of plots within the genre. And the format should be capable of engendering its own growth and change to suit new demands. With changing police methods the original Z Cars grew into Regional Squad and then into Task Force. The seeds of change were in the format. Another example: Hadleigh started as the wealthy young owner of a country estate who had also inherited a provincial newspaper. This provided the producer with both the social side of country life and - through the newspaper and its staff - with the seamier side of town life and local politics. It could have encompassed the Poulson affair. It also provided for Hadleigh losing interest in his newspaper and for him marrying and enjoying the high social life. In the present series he has lost interest in the newspaper and is married. If required he can again take an interest in his newspaper. Mainly he has wealth, social position, and influence. All the parts of the meccano set are in the format.

In summary, a format is a guide-line that tells the Controller what he is buying. It can be sharp or soft, tight or loose, everything or nothing, so long as it provides an environment and the principal characters and is capable of inspiring unending plots and situations.

To my mind it should be tight, disciplined and provide the inspiration for other writers to construct plots. Troy's Z Cars format provided immense inspiration. Television writers were clambering over each other to write for it, it inspired John Hopkins to devote two years of his writing life to it.

A format is a copyright. At its best, it is a gift to other writers. It is as though Simenon were to say to other writers: "I have invented Maigret ...now you can use him." Or if Creasey had said: "I have made Gideon....now you can use him."

Now let me make one final but very important point. The sustained success of any series lies increasingly in the aptness of the casting of the main character. Edward Woodward as Callan,

Alfred Burke in Public Eye, Rupert Davies in Maigret, and many others. And not forgetting Barlow and Watt, and Steed of The Avengers. Which brings us back to the Producer and the organisation plan for a new series."



## APPENDIX 78

Ted Willis: Television and the Dramatist : Plays & Players.  
1965. P 50

"I should like to turn to the subject of series.....it is in this area that the dramatist is chiefly employed. It is difficult to generalise about series because they cover such an enormous range. At their best, as in The Planemakers, Z Cars, Probation Officer, The Defenders, the Quatermass serials, anthologies like Love Story and some of the adaptations like The Count of Monte Cristo, they offer the writer an opportunity to deploy all his professional skill, to unfold aspects of character and human relationships continuously, week by week, and to explore social problems in a way which might appear to be too obvious in a single isolated play.

Below these we have a descending stairway of lesser work where the formula is imposed more and more rigidly, until we reach what is known in the business as the 'bash-bash-bang-bang' series. As we move down, the demand for talent and originality in the writer shrinks.

Make no mistake, even the most superficial series calls for a great deal of expertise and experience, and the people involved are usually solid, case-hardened professionals. But it is assembly-work rather than authorship. It uses marionettes in place of characters, jargon in place of dialogue and the jig and mould in place of the pen and the typewriter. The skills required have only a fleeting resemblance to those which are demanded of the dramatist. But they are skills, nevertheless, and these series fulfil the same function on television as the thriller, or the romance in literature. It is on this basis that they ought to be judged.

The steady increase in the quantity and quality of series on television has affected drama - in the sense of the single play - in a number of ways.

One of the most important considerations is financial. It is impossible, except in rare cases, for a dramatist to earn an adequate living by writing individual plays. The only really continuous income he can hope to make comes from writing for

series; so, inevitably, many of the best writers have gravitated towards them. This partly explains the improvement in the series and the partial and, I hope, passing, decline in the quality of drama.

Does constant work on series blunt the talents of the dramatist? To a great extent this depends upon the individual. We have the example of a man like Giles Cooper who is amazingly prolific and whose plays, both on television and in the theatre, show no indication that his abilities have been frosted by his work on series. On the whole, however, I would think that Cooper is one of the rare exceptions.

For series-writers fall victim to their own success. In the beginning, a series can be fresh and exciting to work on but, after a while, its limits and attitudes are established and routine takes the place of creation. The characters are fixed, and the exploration has been done. It all becomes a little too easy and the iron, the sharpness and the sting, tend to disappear from the writing.

What is more serious is that the writer is scarcely, if ever, aware of what is happening. He continues to turn out good, honest work to the utmost of his ability, but he no longer works under the creative tension which sharpens his vision and pushes him to the frontiers of his talent and even beyond them.

If he hangs on too long, he becomes what Vicki Baum described as a 'first-rate second-class' author. If he comes to terms with this, well and good. We have need of his professionalism, his honesty and his talent, and he can console himself with the thought that he is not alone. Not everybody can be an Arthur Miller.

But the threat to original drama which comes from the series is not one that should be ignored."



## APPENDIX 79

The Impact of Z Cars: Comments from the Press on the Series and the Writers.

Yorkshire Evening Post: 3 August, 1962

"The BBC's controversial crime series Z Cars is given high praise today - by the Police. The programme has been consistently under fire from many quarters including the Lancashire and West Riding Police. But today the journal Police Review says: "This is not merely the best-written and best produced of all the police 'documentaries' but about the best weekly documentary of any kind since the important discovery that television is watched by grown-ups". Accusations that Z Cars presents Police life at "to high a shriek" that it is unlike reality and that the Police are shown to be disregarding all the rules when questioning prisoners could be true - but they do not detract from the real virtuosity of the scripts and the faultless production."

Brighton Evening Argus: 4 April, 1962

"After watching a BBC TV programme Z Cars - which dealt with the activities of a pyro-maniac, a 17 year old youth went off and set fire to a barn at Tunbridge Wells, it was stated at Sussex Assizes at Lewes today."

Manchester Evening News: 16 February, 1962

Z Cars was today blamed for 'copy' break-ins at North Salford Secondary Modern School, Leicester Road, and the Cromwell Secondary School, Broughton Road, both in Salford.

The Headmasters' studies and metal workshops were broken into. In this week's Z Cars instalment raiders used a motor-cycle travelling from school to school, breaking into Headmasters' studies and taking tools from workshops.

"Z Cars has been going for some weeks, so youngsters, I think, have taken it into their heads to imitate the activities of the criminals," said Mr.D.Kelner, Headmaster at Cromwell.

"It certainly appears that this week's instalment concerning breaking into schools has been copied," said Mr.A.R.Target, Headmaster at North Salford, "television programmes of this type have a very bad influence on some youngsters."

"Where did the BBC find the catchy tune which introduces Z Cars? They found it at a 'Scousers' concert organised by a Liverpool music group.

Name of the tune is 'Johnny Todd' a local air.

The recording sold 150,000 in two months - and went into the Top Ten!"

"A Methodist Minister demands a clean-up on TV after watching the BBC's top crime series Z Cars. He condemns the programme because of bad language used by some of the policeman characters, pub scenes and unnecessary violence. "It's about time there was a clean-up on T.V. I don't like hearing 'bloody and hell' intruding on the oath-free atmosphere of decent homes."

Daily Herald, 10 Dec. 1962.

Leonard Williams - who played Sergeant Percy Twentyman - died suddenly on 15 November, 1962.

Troy Kennedy Martin - who created Z Cars quits in 1962 -

"I wanted to do a series about Northern life but the BBC wanted a series on the mobile police - we compromised and Z Cars was the result.....I devised it, but the way some of the BBC's production chiefs spoke, you would have thought it was their idea!"

Kinematograph Weekly : Tony Gruner : 12 April, 1962.

"Drama Documentary department of the BBC has always been a great creative spawning ground of talent. The eye and fancy of the critics and public alike have been caught by such shows as the 'Spy Catcher' series, 'Jacks and Knaves' , the 'Scotland Yard' series, and the taut Colin Morris - Gilchrist Calder feature dramas on advertising, break-up of marriages and take-over bids.

But the biggest success the department has enjoyed since its foundation under Robert Barr, its bustling writer-producer head, is 'Z Cars'. This 50-minute weekly police show is the most talked about programme on the air today and is the only programme



to have broken through Granada's jealously defended TAM stronghold to land six in the top ten for the Northern region.

No BBC programme according to TAM has ever done this to Granada's ratings before. And no documentary drama series has ever enjoyed such a meteoric success as this series about the life and work of a police force in the north.

'Z Cars' with its thick Irish, Welsh and Liverpool accents is just as popular in the south as it is in the North. Last week it was fifth in the top ten network programmes, with the southern stations placing the show sixth in East Anglia, second in the west of England, fifth in South Wales and seventh in the highly sophisticated London region.

Fourteen weeks ago 'Z Cars' started as a cautious six-episode experiment by the BBC. Since then, viewing figures for this programme have jumped from nine million to sixteen million, an increase of about a million viewers a week.

Yet the programme defies every definition. It is neither a completely documentary series, nor could it be said to be original drama. 'Z Cars' is not filled with the physical action of 'NO HIDING PLACE' or any other conventional crime series, nor does it pander to the millions of viewers who enjoy the 'heart-warming' genialities of 'Dixon of Dock Green'.

'Z Cars' unlike almost any other mass viewing show on television, draws its strength from an objective yet dramatic picture of northern policemen living cheek by jowl with a hard, plain-speaking community.

Robert Barr, the man responsible for getting 'Z Cars' on the air, says : "In London with its thousands of foreign visitors, Buckingham Palace, ceremonial occasions, the House of Commons, and the scores of embassies, the Metropolitan bobby must make politeness his watchword. If he didn't, there would be a big storm of protest in Parliament and the press."

"Moreover, most of the police attached to London divisions tend to live in barracks, isolated from the public, and there is naturally a sense of isolation from the social life of the man in the street. In the North it's much different. There are many places like our Newtown in 'Z Cars' which have police officers who have been brought up in the same area as they patrol."

"Many of the constables live in working-class quarters. Some of the sergeants do better with perhaps a semi-detached, while the inspector could occupy a house in the better parts of the suburbs.

"But the police in the north all have roots in the community, and 'Z Cars' has had to reflect this important quality in its programmes. Our police may appear to be tougher than most, but in the north this sharp but not unkindly attitude to the public is accepted by a population who are pretty rough speaking themselves."

To the southern viewer 'Z Cars' has provided a vicarious thrill in meeting a new type of policeman but the atmosphere and sense of authenticity is so powerful that the programme achieves a greater quality of immediacy and realism than any other 'fiction' series on the air. But the show that pleases 16 million viewers including Peter Black, Maurice Wiggin and Maurice Richardson, has still its quota of critics.

Last week 'Z Cars' policeman Fancy Smith lumbered into a lodging house seeking a small-time crook. There was a sudden noise and, not wishing to be observed, he ducked into an open door on the landing. It was a lavatory with the chain and cistern clearly indicated. Said Barr: "That's the kind of scene we get irate letters about."

He received more criticism after the first episode of the series when of the four main constables introduced for the series one appeared to push his wife around, another stopped motorists to find out racing results and a third was seen jiving outside a dance hall to get himself warm.

"We don't say that every policeman does this sort of thing," says Barr. "But the establishing episode meant to indicate that our police are not fictitious dummies, but men of flesh and blood who like a drink, back a horse and sometimes quarrel with their wives."

Actually the episode was a brilliant example of television exposition, for it revealed the distinct personalities of the four main characters.

'Z Cars' is produced in London, and not in the north. Every seven days a 50-minute episode is transmitted live (Barr doesn't approve of recording, says it stifles the actors' adrenalin).

He keeps the series continually fresh with duplicate casts for every main character. This also enables him to tackle last minute



emergencies if one of his leading actors suddenly falls ill. Sometimes the same character may be seen in two episodes running, like Inspector Barlow who may have a walk-through part one week and a major role in the following episode. Usually the leading characters are seen every other week.

Thanks to the use of back projection, travelling matte, and the skill of the executive producer, David E. Rose, in providing rich production values, 'Z Cars' looks an expensive series. It isn't.

In spite of its large cast, excellent scripts and between 10-15 per cent. of exterior shooting it comes out at less than £3,000 a 50-minute episode. Even the filming is conducted mainly around London and particularly within a stone's throw of Television Centre.

'Z Cars' is taped while being transmitted, but Barr doesn't think the programme will ever sell overseas. "Our wild Liverpool and Irish accents might be too difficult for viewers in Australia and Canada, although it seems that the south understand the show as much as the north."

Barr, a brilliant drama documentary man in his own right, will be resting the series soon to allow the cast a six weeks' holiday. Then the series will start again early in the autumn and by the end of the year, will have run for nearly 50 episodes. Barr believes that the success of 'Z Cars' is no accident, but a pooling of the creative brains of his department.

"We have worked for many months with the Lancashire police in getting a composite picture of police life in the north," he says. "When Colin Morris and Gilchrist Calder wrote and produced 'Who, me?' we got a fresh look at police methods outside London."

"The drama documentary department has presented many programmes which have found favour with viewers apart from this type of series. We have done programmes on selling rackets, spy catchers, epidemics, secondary modern schools and doctors as well as Scotland Yard."

"Drama documentary means honesty in reporting, but keeping the script dramatic as well as objective. The stories may not necessarily have one sort of ending. The directing of drama documentary is equally important. Some plays on television have tackled a case at the Old Bailey, but they don't always seem convincing. The drama documentary department could stage you a

trial at the Old Bailey that people in the know would say was authentic and yet would still be good entertainment."

Barr himself is a prolific writer, and in addition to producing 'Z Cars' and writing some of the episodes he has during this year (1962) written a six-part serial, THE DARK ISLAND which will be shot in the Hebrides, is producing six episodes of THE NET a new series dealing with Customs, two further series which will go into production later this year, a half hour television programme devoted to the 25-year anniversary of BBC Television, a 45-minute play DEATH TO A SPY dealing with the Maginot Line and several other documentary drama subjects. Last year he wrote 26 episodes for the SPYCATCHER series, as well as 13 for the SCOTLAND YARD series.

According to BBC Enterprises, the department responsible for selling programmes overseas, no fewer than 46 of Barr's programmes have been sold to countries in Europe and the Commonwealth."

Tony Gruner: Kinematograph Weekly: 12.4.62

'The evolution of Z Cars is a classic example of the interplay between supply and demand in the mass medium. It all grew out of a documentary called 'Who, Me?' by Colin Morris. This was an immensely effective piece, centered on the interrogative methods used by a tough and wily detective, played by Lee Montagu. We hadn't seen anything like it.

The success of 'Who, Me?' created a demand. It is an axiom in the business that there is no such thing as an explicit demand - until it has been met. In colloquial terms: "The public don't know what they want." Until they get it.

There exists no genealogical tree deriving 'Z Cars' from 'Who, Me?' but the paternity has not been seriously challenged. Colin Morris's 'Jacks and Knaves' (and Robert Barr's series on Scotland Yard) took the idea several stages further, and when at last 'Z Cars' burst upon us it seemed a real break-through, in fact it was; the most gripping and apparently realistic series ever done on police work. Personally I thought it was kept on for at least one series too long; mechanisation set in. It was replaced by Softly, Softly, which retained Barlow, Watt and Blackett but shifted its territory from Merseyside to the Middle



West Country. This grew into a police series in its own right, of consistent quality - but many still yearned nostalgically for 'Z Cars'.

So last week it was resurrected, in the form of a twice-weekly soap opera; with Colin Morris in charge of Production.

So what began as a luminously brilliant stroke of individual play-writing has gone through all these metamorphoses, throwing off various by-products on the way, and ends up as a conveyor-belt item coming off the treadmill, or production line; streamlined, like Batman to the exigencies of the twenty-five minute serial format.

Nothing fails like success:

Maurice Wiggin: Sunday Times: 12.3.67

' "That's The Way It Is" is the apt title of the last edition - the 170th - of 'Z Cars' on BBC1 at 8.00p.m. From 'Z Cars' is springing a new programme, 'Softly, Softly' starting, January 5, which will deal with a highly specialised and new branch of the police, the Regional Crime Squads.'

Coventry Evening Telegraph. 21.12.65

Of 170 'Z Cars' programmes, 163 were transmitted live  
The Writers who contributed most scripts were:

John Hopkins	....	....	52	Robert Barr	....	....	11
Allan Prior	....	....	31	Troy Kennedy Martin	....		8
Alan Plater	....	....	18	Eric Coltart	...	....	6
Elwyn Jones	....	....	13	Keith Dewhurst	..	....	5

Twelve other writers contributed between one and four scripts each.

Of 45 Directors, the ones who did the most episodes were:

Shaun Sutton	....	....	24	Eric Hills	....	....	12
Robin Midgley	...	....	10	John McGrath	..	....	8
				Michael Leeston-Smith	....		10

W.R. Roberts, former Detective Chief Superintendent and Head of Lancashire C.I.D. remembers the series:

'Having been present not only at the birth of Z Cars but also

at its conception, I knew what the series was to strive for - fiction with a strong background of authenticity. The purpose was to depict the 'ordinary policeman' going about his everyday work - work which is for the most part monotonous, very often soul-destroying, and in which there is very little glamour.

Looking back over some 170 episodes to the time when B.D. sent the first messages over the air to 'Z-Victor One' and 'Z-Victor Two' I think it fair to say that David Rose and his excellent production team have succeeded in what they set out to do. The public has been shown that a policeman's work is not just walking about the streets in a smart uniform, or riding about in a nice-looking car. They have been taken behind the scenes to be shown something of the heartbreak and frustration of young constables trying to reconcile 'duty' with personal feelings, trying to shape some sort of private life between spells of public service. Above all they have been shown that policemen are human, have weaknesses, and are just as capable of being fed up as anyone else.

One aspect of Z Cars made me extremely happy - it has never glamorised crime. It has tended to show crime in its true form - dirty and ugly. Neither has the series tended to glamorise the police ; if it has done so it has been accidental. (I think the death of P.C. Sweet (Terence Edmond) - the manner of it and the sight of his dead body in the water - attracted a tremendous wave of sympathy for policemen.)'

Radio Times: 'Goodbye Z Cars' 16.12.65



## APPENDIX 80A

Videotape Recording

There had been a need since the introduction of television broadcasting for a reliable method of storing picture information which could be reproduced immediately the recording had been made and before artists and studio personnel dispersed. In America, where several time zones exist, it was also desirable to store a programme first transmitted on the East coast and delay its transmission to other areas until a more suitable time.

Prior to the videotape recorder the method of recording programmes used by various broadcast companies was to produce film by telerecording methods. This usually involved a film camera looking at a picture monitor and filming the screen. The results generally were not of a standard which would be acceptable today. Delays were in film processing and if anything went wrong technically there was little chance of repeating the programme.

The first successful magnetic recording equipment was developed in 1900. In that year Valdemar Poulsen patented his Telegraphone in the United States. He had produced a magnetic wire recorder in Europe but its output was very low and noisy. By 1906 Poulsen and Pederson had discovered that by pre-magnetising the wire in their Telegraphone a greater output could be obtained but the system still suffered from a very poor signal-to-noise ratio.

In 1927 two engineers, Carlson and Carpenter, discovered that by using alternating current as bias for the tape the results were superior in every way and they patented their system in the United States.

In Germany, Dr. Pfleumer in 1928 patented a plastic tape having many of the required mechanical properties and on this he coated a powdered magnetic material. This was improved in 1935 by patenting iron oxide as the magnetic material, and the year also saw the introduction in Europe of the first magnetic tape recorder. This was the first time tape instead of wire or plated ribbon had been used and consisted of a paper or plastic base which was impregnated with the iron oxide.

During the second world war considerable progress was made in Germany and systems were developed which gave results comparable



to that obtained with disc and film.

After the war, in 1948, a small company under the leadership of A.M.Poniatoff, in Redwood, California, which during the war had been making electric motors, produced the first magnetic tape recorder in the United States. This company was shortly to revolutionise the broadcasting industry with its invention of the videotape recorder. For many years after its introduction broadcasters, when making a recording, would refer to the operation as to Ampex a programme. It was in 1956-57 that the first commercial video recorder was introduced; this was the VR 1000 which, together with the later models up to the AVR-1, won major prizes and awards in engineering for its inventors and for the company.

The VTR revolutionised television broadcasting within a few years of its introduction. Live shows almost became a thing of the past. Production techniques altered to make use of the fact that shows did not have to be produced in one period of time and when editing became reliable and simple, the television producer had a better tool than his cinema counterpart with which to make quick sophisticated productions.

Broadcasters, because of their ability to standardise television engineering, were able to make the two producers of the broadcast machines (RCA and AMPEX) standardise the important parameters of their machines so that there was compatibility between the recorders, and tapes made on any machine could be replayed on any other.

Recording the signal from a television camera onto magnetic tape is a great deal more difficult than recording a sound signal; an impracticably high tape speed is required if a conventional form of recorder is to accommodate the rapid oscillations that occur in a television signal, and this speed must be held to an impracticable constancy if the reproduced picture is not to wobble.

Both these difficulties were overcome by the Ampex company. Their machine was first used in Britain by Rediffusion in 1958. This uses a tape 2 inches wide, running at 15 inches per second. The recording is laid down as a succession of narrow tracks across the width of the tape by four heads spaced around the rim of a wheel, which spins rapidly in a plane perpendicular to the tape's length; a guide curls the tape around the rim so that recording is continuous. By this means, a recording speed about a hundred times faster than the tape speed is achieved, and is stabilised by the inertia of the wheel.



The Ampex machine produced negligible loss of picture quality, and eclipsed a recorder of more conventional design that the BBC had developed to the stage of service trials.\* The specification of the original Ampex recorder has remained the basis of subsequent generations of videotape recorders for broadcast use, though simpler types, in which the recorded tracks lie almost longitudinally, have been evolved for less exacting applications.

Videotape recording has been used by the BBC since 1958. Although few people foresaw its potential importance when it was introduced, the fact that more than half of all BBC TV programmes are now recorded on videotape or have used the system at some point in their preparation does not provoke any surprise nowadays.

The BBC bought two of the American VTRs and installed the first at Lime Grove Studios. Official transmissions began on 1 October, 1958 with a three minute trailer for A Tale of Two Cities. Very soon, more ambitious projects were being covered, including complete schools programmes and various sporting events. In January, 1959 the second machine was installed, an operator shift-system was started and it could truly be said that the BBC's Videotape Section had been launched.

These early efforts indicated a tentative approach which seems quaint judged against today's streamlined arrangements. Each recording was booked by separate memo and transmission was frequently backed by a film telerecording as a safety measure. Clearance of programmes for tape erasure was a particular problem; with a total of only a few dozen tapes available for use, there was no chance of storage for the future.

The first machines were equipped with basic necessities only: there were no such extravagances as tape-timers or rewind facilities. Also rather surprisingly was the omission of a machine erase head. Bulk erasure was the only method of removing previously recorded signals. This meant that, even in an emergency, it was not possible to go back and record over a part of the tape that had just been used. If there was insufficient tape to re-record part of a programme the only alternative was to use a fresh tape and because of the limited supplies available the decision to change tapes was not one taken lightly.

\* VERA : Vision Electronic Recording Apparatus.



With the opening of the Television Centre in 1960 came two more VTR machines which were initially operated in what is now part of the Presentation Studio complex, but were later moved down to the VT's present home in the Centre basement. Subsequently, a further four machines with various design improvements were installed in this area. Counting the two early machines at Lime Grove, the section now had a total of eight operational machines. Additional units incorporated in the new recorders made it possible for them to be fed to studio mixers as synchronous sources. These developments established the VTR once and for all.

Another advance was 'electronic' editing of videotape. This meant that instead of physically cutting and joining the tape electronic counting circuits arrange that the machine is automatically switched from replay to record at the end of one section of previously recorded programme so that there is no loss of continuity in the video, sound, or control signals on the tape. On replay the transition appears as a studio camera cut. When a section of the programme already on the tape is to be replaced with material from another source, the same mechanism can subsequently produce a timed switch-back to the replay mode so that the result appears as a cut into and out of the other material. All this is accomplished without any visible mark being made on the tape. A further advantage of this form of editing is that it can be carried out during the recording session; thus, because the actual timing of the cut can be controlled from the gallery, the programme director or producer is closely involved in the process which has hitherto been regarded as an engineering activity.

One of the early problems facing the crews as they sought to establish their claim for serious consideration was the annoying presence of the tape 'drop-out' which gave tell-tale white flashes on the screen. Prevention rather than cure was first thought to be the answer. All new tapes were initially polished by passing them through a recorder fitted with a special headless drum; the tapes were then inspected for remaining drop-out by recording a blank-screen signal (constant black level) throughout the tape-length, and subsequently watching for white flashes during playback: for sheer tedium this task had no equal. Various methods of automatic drop-out measurement have since been developed but the modern practice is to accept the fault as an almost natural hazard,



and to compensate for it electronically during play-back.

Today the Videotape Section at Television Centre maintains a programme tape store room of nearly 12,000 separate items and mounts some 400 recordings, play-backs, or editing sessions each week. The non-engineering staff are responsible for organising bookings, maintaining the supply of new tapes and looking after the store of recorded programmes. The Television Centre is not the only place where videotape recording is carried out: there are also regional videotape sections whose task differs only in scale from that of their London colleagues.

Taken together then, the autocue (teleprompter) and video recording machines have decisively changed studio drama and current affairs and extended interviews and chat shows. With recording, the strain of appearing on television diminished and a wider variety of faces began to appear. But one curious effect has been to reverse the order in which a show was put together. When it was 'live' it was a matter of trying to create a shape in advance. A recorded programme is put together afterwards, by cutting out the dull or superfluous bits. On the live show a speaker was, within reason, master of his material and could say what he wanted, if he could remember what it was. When he was recorded control passed into the hands of the producer, not always to the Speaker's advantage.

## APPENDIX 80B

Norman Swallow : The Use of Videotape Recording in Drama and Documentary : Transcript of part of a tape-recorded interview with this writer, August, 1973.

"The main reason why videotape came so late into this particular field was the difficulty in editing it, for unless and until it could be edited with something like the precision of film, it was never likely to satisfy the director whose effects depended so largely upon his creative work in the cutting room. In Britain it was not until 1963 that one of the commercial companies Granada television, made a modification to the normal videotape equipment, that it was possible for recorded tape to be edited with accuracy to within a tenth of a second. The first producer to exploit this new development was Denis Mitchell, whose programme The Entertainers was shot and edited entirely on videotape. A few weeks later I made the second British videotape documentary, A Wedding on Saturday.

The first advantage of videotape is that of being able to shoot for up to an hour without stopping. This avoids the necessity of having to change the magazine just when a speaker is getting into his stride. To obtain a usable minute or two of a man or woman talking, 60 minutes can be recorded, if necessary, without disturbing the flow of talk or without worrying about the cost of it. For videotape, like ordinary sound tape, can be wiped and used again. When someone is trying to express their own feelings and their own view of life in their own words, it is obviously a big advantage that they should be able to go on for so long without interruption. The longer they go on, the less conscious they become of the camera.

The second advantage is that the rushes can be seen immediately after the scene is shot. The tape is recorded on location, and it can be played back at once. If the result is not satisfactory, the scene can be shot again, eliminating the suspense of waiting until the next morning, after the film has been processed, before knowing what it is like. This also means, of course, that those who took part in particular sequences can see what they did, and therefore see their own mistakes.

The third advantage is that much less light is needed because



electronic cameras are more sensitive than ciné-cameras.

The fourth advantage is that excellent night shots are possible. This can be done genuinely, taking shots in the middle of the night and under conditions which in film would be totally impossible, or a realistic night effect during daylight can be created by electronic means, and without any delay whatsoever.

The fifth advantage is that, if necessary, more than one camera can be used. There were sequences in Manchester clubs in The Entertainers which were shot on three cameras, all linked to the same tape, and John McGrath cut from camera to camera in the normal manner of a television studio. This is a big advantage in set pieces of this sort, when a great deal of action is going on in a big area. The extra cameras can also be used to save time in setting up the next scene. In The Entertainers most of the shooting was done on one camera, in various rooms of a boarding house. Because there were three cameras available, and therefore the crews of three cameras, it was always possible to set up one scene ahead of whatever was being shot - leap-frogging about the house, in fact. This is an obvious saving of time.

The sixth advantage is that all the sound is automatically synchronised on the same physical tape as the picture.

The disadvantages as I see them are video recordings relative lack of mobility. The cameras must be connected physically with their control vehicle; the process of recording the tape needs the space of approximately half a vehicle; holding the camera by hand is out of the question; the crew is a large one and both the crew and their equipment are extremely conspicuous. To 'snatch' shots is normally impossible. Indeed, as far as the technical equipment is concerned videotape is as cumbersome as film used to be some fifteen years ago. The fluidity of shooting which the latest ciné-cameras have made possible is quite out of the question. To the director who insists on shooting life as it goes on about him, without technical restrictions, videotape seems to be a form of self-imposed paralysis. Work of the *vérite* kind is impossible. Everything has to be planned beforehand."

## APPENDIX 81

Shaun Sutton : The Royal Television Society Journal :  
 Vol. 15 No. 5 September/October 1974 : 'Evolution of  
 Television drama production methods' Pp180-181.

Film versus Videotape.

At a recent drama experts conference at the BBC TV Centre, where drama productions from all over Europe were screened, it was particularly interesting to see how the thoughts of the drama makers of different European countries were marching in line. The use of lightweight video tape units to replace the film operation was being tried out everywhere. How do we stand in this country?

Well, for years drama has a little tentatively been experimenting with the making of plays and series episodes on electronic 'tape cameras', entirely or partly on location. At first we had to borrow the heavy four-camera OB units normally used for sports and public events, and record already rehearsed productions over a number of days shooting. Such drama included The Love Girl and the Innocent, shot on a disused RAF camp in Norfolk, Midsummer Night's Dream and, more recently, Twelfth Night. There was at first, no corps of OB cameramen and engineering managers familiar with drama; there was however, a very great enthusiasm, which was as good as experience.

On other occasions we would borrow reduced units to shoot excerpts from drama series that would otherwise have been secured on film.

This was a beginning. But it became apparent that a lightweight mobile control room unit (LMCR) was essential, not to replace filming exactly, but primarily to take the place of the heavier, more cumbersome four-camera, heavy-cables colour mobile control rooms. Lighter cameras, thinner cables, smaller vehicles, mobility and speed of movement were needed.

A unit was produced; and with it we have gone through a lot of work. Complete 50 minute plays, 30 minute plays (one, by Rhys Adrian using a sort of one-camera-long-takes technique) and a whole mass of inserts to plays and series have been produced, securing what would have been the pre-film content of these



productions.

There is nothing new about this, of course - we are all at it, and we are by no means home and dry, we are still in the experimenting stage. Clearly, we need yet more compactness, more miniaturisation, more mobility, more lightness. But we are on the way, and excitingly so.

Let us remind ourselves of the advantages first. As I see them they are (1) Productivity : You can beat the film product hollow, getting ten, twelve, fifteen, on one occasion seventeen minutes per day. (2) You can see what you have got at the time, technically, and artistically; the actors can have a look and be happy, or otherwise. (3) It matches better with the studio. (4) You cut down on development and printing costs. (5) Because you can shoot longer scenes you are not so slavishly bound to changes in light; if the sun pops in and out mildly during a scene, no matter. It is all in the course of a single take. And if, in a modern play, a jet goes by in the distance; well that saves us the trouble of dubbing it in afterwards for luck.

What about comparative costs? Comparisons are deceptive. No two plays have the same conditions, no two plays have the same size cast, the same weight and cost or casting. No two plays have the same balance of interior/exterior shooting. Some plays must travel further to tape or film than others - then there will be transport and travel and hotel bills and feeding actors to bedevil the accounts. However, with reservations, here are some comparative costs. Let's take my nearest guess first. The 50 minute plays from our series, 'Sporting Scenes', one all-film, one almost all-studio, one-all LMCR:

The all-film production cost £65,000 but this was an unusually costly production.

The Studio production cost £25,000. The LMCR production cost £21,000 (four days) but it had a very tiny cast and was only concerned with two basic locations, the main one contained in a snooker hall.

On this surface valuation you'd say that the tape production was cheaper than both; cheaper by a little than the studio; by a lot than the film. Or from the Play of the Month series (2 working weeks), two-hour classic play)

The Changeling : All-Studio, almost two hours: £57,000

Recruiting Officer: All-location-tape : £94,000

But the basic expenses of these two productions were not comparable from the start. Moreover, The Recruiting Officer used the heavy four-camera unit.

A comparison of two 30-minute plays from the Masquerade series seemed to indicate that the LMCR project was more expensive. But had both plays been in the studio, the one shot on LMCR would still have been more costly; because it was simply a more costly piece.

We have also recently completed a modestly mounted Play for Today on the LMCR; modest in that it was contained in an interior area. The comment here was, 'It is fair to say that the LMCR operation can be cheaper than the studio operation provided that you are working in controlled conditions. Once you are involved in staying away from base and travelling between locations you inevitably erode any savings in the man hours or materials of the studio production. The studio expenses are overtaken by travelling, subsistence, catering etc.' Same story. So cost-wise we are not much wiser. We can say with certainty only that the all-film technique remains far and away the most expensive; with studio and all-tape location fighting it out for second place.

Nevertheless, I have an irrational faith in tape for the future. If we can miniaturise and compact it enough, it will be invaluable for complete productions. Not tomorrow, but later. Meanwhile, we can with efficiency and profit use the present equipment for inserts to studio productions that would otherwise be shot on film. In the end, the main advantages productively, and the elimination of printing costs, may win the day. Particularly productivity, for that is money."



## APPENDIX 82

Romney Sutton: Revolutionaries in a Sea of Convention:

The Langham Group: The Stage & Television Today:

25 February, 1960

"Within the portals of the BBC - miles away from the nearest television camera, I might add - is a group of men bursting with energy and ideas. They are revolutionaries! But not in the accepted term.

Rather they are geared to the exact meaning and requirements of the television medium. These men are called The Langham Group and they are led by Anthony Pelissier, who is a producer. Other members are: Assistant Producer, Mervyn Pinfield; Writer, Thomas (Tom) Clarke; Audio, John Stape; and Designer, Tony Abbott.

What is the purpose of The Langham Group? The answer is simple. They want to stop theatre concepts being applied to television. The Group sees dramatic quality in terms of carefully composed pictures, effective lighting control, shapes and sounds rather than a reliance on the spoken word.

The technique - to my mind a true television technique - was prominent in their last production called Mario.

Admittedly this went to the extreme of their art and I am not saying I would want to see this kind of production every week but it did show that this Group had a new approach in presenting drama on the small screen.

This being the case Pelissier and his group should be encouraged and not discouraged.

Yet, I understand that after showing Mario, a piece of pompous machinery came down on The Langham Group, who, after all, was at least supplying something new and fresh.

The BBC by its very composition, is in the advantageous position of being able to experiment. And on a scale which no ITV company would dare to match. The BBC doesn't have to present commercial drama. It can afford to put on plays like Mario or a modern conception of Torrents of Spring even though it may only appeal to a limited audience.

This being the case, then a field in which new ideas and concepts grow should be helped. But is it?

The Langham Group is hidden away - not at the White City of Shepherds Bush, as you might expect - but under the threatening shadow of Broadcasting House. Not only that, Pelissier has to work on a shoestring. He has to fight for every penny. If there's need of new equipment the cost has to be justified. Ideas are at a premium in television today. Ideas should be cherished, fertilised and developed. The Langham's contribution to television, therefore is valuable. Give them the chance! Give them the money! I say that the BBC is not helping them enough.

Firstly, because the sound side of the Corporation has too much control over vision.

Second, not enough people working in television are genuinely in love with the medium. I have known for a long time that the BBC has on its payroll producers and directors who don't even like television. Men who still live by the theatre.

The BBC's current series Twentieth Century Theatre is a case in point. The title is enough to betray the kind of thinking existing in the Drama Department. Whereas ABC-TV's Armchair Theatre is not synonymous with its content, the BBC is only too consistent. I am not saying BBC-TV necessarily produces inferior drama. What I am saying is its policy is not a virile enough one where new ideas and concepts are concerned. The Langham Group has an important place in the television industry. Its ideas should be allowed to permeate through the BBC's Drama Department. This would create a greater awareness of television's potentialities. Unfortunately this is not happening. When I tell you that Pelissier is not even allowed to talk to the Press about his plans, you can imagine just how frustrated these five men must be."



## APPENDIX 83

Replies to Troy Kennedy Martin's attack on naturalistic television drama: Encore: May/June 1964.

Sydney Newman

"T.K.M. says 'Granada had got it and didn't know what it was. The BBC have got it and don't know what to do with it.' In fact, we do know what to do with it. I appointed James MacTaggart (Producer: Storyboard, Studio Four and Teletale - all praised by T.K.M.) Producer of our First Night series long before T.K.M.'s piece appeared."

Michael Barry.

"The danger in setting out a working analysis of this sort lies in the creation of a new set of labels even before the argument against the old ones is complete. Wretched catch-words, that are on the face of it valuable short-cuts to understanding, end by providing handles for opposition and obscuring the good sense in the body of the matter. It would be a thousand pities if this should happen again, as it did, for example with DRAMA-DOCUMENTARY (a first realism?), 'Kitchen-sink', 'Langham Group' (for which I was responsible, to the irritation of those concerned, in the seconds between meeting a critic's questioning eye across a room and attempting a verbal definition).

I believe that naturalistic drama is in danger of misleading T.K.M. to throw writers, including Harold Pinter, against the true substance of his argument and that New Drama may well create opponents of his spiritual allies.

The important fact remains that this statement has been made in March, 1964. Late in the day, it may seem, because some of the thoughts have long been held, but remain unfulfilled. They are freshly seen by a writer of sufficient skill and experience to put them into a clear perspective. For this there can be thanks."

Dennis Potter: (Critic)

".....even granted almost all the vices and irrelevancies of stodgy old naturalism, Kennedy Martin's conception of the 'enslavement' produced by talking faces is still too brusque a dismissal of the kinds of experience which can be well conveyed

by this means, providing the dialogue is good enough and the writer genuinely has something to say.....What you want to say still comes first.....you can say nothing in all sorts of ways.

Splendid, the narrative method opens up new perspectives. The writer can begin to pick out a priority among objects and feelings and human speech. But this way too, people can get so entangled with things and bits of things that we get utterly dehumanised art.

For if, as Kennedy Martin suggests, even 'wild editing of random objects' can give us those 'pictures in the fire' (alarming phrase), the temptation to say nothing elaborately becomes over-whelming. It might be a perfect formula for decadent art.....and there are enough people looking for it.

But even the mildest sort of revolution produces its traitors, and no one can formulate a technique which beats the dishonest for good and all."

#### Ken Taylor: (Writer)

"Kennedy Martin is a dramatist writing for television and very properly has an approach to his art and cares about it passionately. As a writer addressing himself to other writers, his article was splendid - provocative, committed, stimulating. Anxiety begins when he seems to be attempting to convert the heads of television drama departments to his dogma. And at this point one begins to remember where one has heard all this before - for the search for a television drama which is intrinsically of the medium and nothing else is not a new one. It was a dogma of the BBC's in those far off days before television drama was created by ITV - unnoticed by anyone including the Pilkington Committee - and it was a dogma inherited from the parent art of radio. The ideal radio drama was - by definition- a drama which could not exist in any other medium. A play which took place in the imagination of a blind man was thus by definition better radio drama than a piece of Chekhov. It was real radio - its essence being that it existed in sound alone. What then was the essence - the essential nature - of television drama? For a long time the old radio men clung to the dogma that real television was 'live'. It was all happening. The viewer was continually involved because at any moment an actor might dry or the camera break down.



I don't know if anyone ever actually wrote a television play in which the actors dried and the cameras broke down as part of the essential action. They probably felt at the BBC that this would have been cheating. It happened quite often anyway. Till finally the technicians came along with a tape machine which could record both sound and vision cheaply - and the dogma died. All anyone could ask for after that were plays that were good as plays and could exploit the medium's considerable adaptability.

I am quite sure that good plays can be written in the narrative style which T.K.M. wants us to adopt. But it is a curious fact - the more you think about it - that this new televisual drama seems to have so much in common with old steam radio. The use of sound as in radio, he tells us, will be one of its new ingredients. The freedom from time and space conventions is another feature common to both media. The device of a narrator - that dear old narrator so rightly cherished in radio drama days - is the foundation for the new technique. What is intrinsic television drama then? Radio with pictures?"

#### Philip Mackie (Producer)

"T.K.M.'s article on television drama is a splendid hotch-potch of sense and nonsense. I applaud his discovery that naturalistic drama is dead, though I thought this had been common knowledge for a couple of years now. I'm only sorry he has flamboyantly flung in a number of statements which are partly or totally balls.

His analysis of the rise and fall of naturalistic drama is excellent, but it skips too lightly over some significant points, such as:-

1. Naturalistic drama would have happened here even without Chayefsky and Newman. It was part of a general vogue in novels-plays-films (Wesker, Sillitoe, Waterhouse, Hall, Storey, Barstow, Old Uncle John Osborne and all). Lots of cross-fertilisation here, with TV doing some of the fertilising. Strong signs that the media have much in common, at least on a naturalistic level; e.g. Exton's No Fixed Abode (quoted by T.K.M. as an example of 'a television theatre that can stand on its own feet') was originally written as a three-act stage play.

2. Naturalistic drama is a natural for television, which by its nature is (John Whiting's phrase) visual journalism. The News, the documentary - that man who says he's the Prime Minister really is the Prime Minister. The boxing - real boxers, real noses, real blood. The play, sandwiched between the two - and the easiest condition of acceptance is that it similarly shows 'real' people behaving in a 'real' way against 'real' backgrounds.

3. Anyway, the great British public has always liked just-like-you-and-me entertainments: hence the success of working-man music-hall comics, kitchen comedies in Northern Reps. The Archers, Coronation Street, and that BBC series about Liverpool policemen, which I can never remember the title of. Just-like-you-and-me plays are necessarily naturalistic: in fact, they're a special branch of naturalistic drama. They will continue to be popular, therefore TV will continue to put them on. T.K.M. spares them the axe by classifying them as folk drama. He's probably right, and I congratulate him on his neatness in getting us out of that corner.

Nevertheless, I entirely agree, naturalistic drama is dead. It died of a surfeit: too many too often. And it died of a decline: the third-raters learnt the trick of writing it, and the third-raters got produced too."

#### Tony Garnett (Actor)

"Each new dramatic form, like each new style in acting, justifies itself in terms of greater reality, objectivity, truth. It wishes to break away from the conventions into a new freedom; and the only boundaries to this freedom which are not freely chosen are the technical limitations of the medium, and these are being constantly extended by the artist. There have not been any qualitative changes in television drama for years.

"There should no longer be any school, no more formulas, no standards of any sort: there is only life itself, an immense field where each may study and create as he likes," writes Zola.

It is the rest of television which makes this quotation still live. Nearly all the memorable television I have ever seen has been in the fields of documentary, news or just plain talk - the Cup Final, Whicker in Mexico, the Nixon-Kennedy confrontation. The shooting of Lee Oswald on television would have satisfied even Zola - what



need of art indeed?

Eisenstein went as far as this in his excitement: "..... rapid as the glance of an eye or outburst of thought....(television) will be able to transmit to millions of listeners and viewers directly the artistic interpretation of the event at the unrepeatable moment of its occurrence, at the moment of the first and extremely exciting meeting with it."

After any of these programmes, as an actor one can only say wryly to oneself, "Well cap that, then." The answer, of course, is that we shouldn't have to try. In a medium which is rich and crowded with natural Naturalistic material, and uniquely so, then those responsible for its drama should get themselves de-Naturalised as soon as possible. It's a sign of maturity to know when you're licked. I wonder if Drama Departments ever try to examine their work in the general framework of the other programmes. So many plays seem to be examining in a stilted, caricatured, pseudo-realistic way, totally within the dead naturalistic conventions the very problems which Trevor Philpott has disposed of with breathtaking depth, brilliance and parsimony two hours before....

On the one hand television is obsessed with its false dependence on theatre and its equivocal attitudes towards films; on the other, it refuses to grapple with the real problems of its own existence. The result is an inability to define itself in any way which will encourage independent creative work.

Even within television, other fields have made excellent progress by using new techniques and by an irreverent attitude towards traditional programme content. It seems only a decade ago since peak viewing hours were taken up with the deliberate mistake and Mr. Harben cooking rice. It is significant that most of the rubbish now is assembly-line dramatic-series production. Whatever qualities the post '56 Naturalistic boom had, and they were many, it contributed nothing to the development of television drama as such. No richer use of the medium has resulted, because these plays were not really written for television at all. The only concessions to television were of the order: only six sets can be got into the studio; minimum of location filming for atmosphere; remember close-ups and the value of quiet introspective speeches. Watch the bulk of the work shown now and see how far we have progressed. There has been very little attempt to explore new



territory: the English are long-suited on convention, and short-suited on theory, whatever game they are playing. Our directors seem to spend their professional lives perfecting and extending the simple rules learned on their trainee courses. These rules are important. We are not concerned here with belittling them. The contention is that directors are imprisoned in the role of technologist, whereas they should be concerned with fundamental research. All along the continuum between the dully competent journeyman to the flashy, obtrusive virtuoso, their work is becoming more arid and repetitive. Lifeless naturalistic plays are dishonestly brought to life by meretricious photography: the by now familiar "shoot it through the workings of a clock" nonsense. This work is brilliant, professional and uncreative. Only a precious few directors can escape these strictures.

The young writers and directors are at war with the television establishment, and television drama is the only sure casualty. Most of them see television as both a stepping-stone and a meal ticket: their real ambitions lie in the theatre or the films. They hope to use television, and then get out before it sucks them dry. There is no artistic bar, except talent, to working in all three media. The sadness is that, like the innocent virgin, they are unwittingly sitting on a goldmine.

Even taking the situation now, television drama has enormous potential qualities. By any sane standards, a large audience is assured even for a low rating programme; its output is considerable and continuous, provided by permanent institutions which are able to follow through long-term policies. Yet drama departments seem to be moving round in ever diminishing circles now that they are at the tail end of the naturalist boom.

The escape can only be through initially wasteful freedom: to give writers and directors enough rope and hope they don't hang themselves: a higher failure rate would be better than the present slow death.

The tasks ahead for those who wish to see the creative development of television drama are threefold. Firstly, the deadwood of naturalism and the confused dependence on the theatre must be cleared away. Secondly, by refusing to countenance any taboos the first steps towards a definition can be made by asking the right questions, and by attempting to answer them by taking



creative and technical risks, actually on the screen. Thirdly, out of this work, a theory of television drama will gradually emerge which will provide terms of reference for the critical attention it will then deserve.

Those who work in television drama need a doctrine. Let them not be afraid. A doctrine is worth having if it is, to quote Engels, "not a dogma but a guide to action."

## APPENDIX 84

Tyrone Guthrie: 'Theatre Versus Television' : In Various Directions: Michael Joseph, 1965 : P.122-124

"When you try to consider television drama, as a whole, the worthy offerings, alas, slide out of sight down in the morass of trash. This state of affairs will continue for two reasons. First, the supply of top-class work never has, and never will, keep pace with the demand. Television has created a demand for dramatic material unprecedented in history. A gallant attempt is being made to meet that demand; but, inevitably, very little of the enormous output attains a higher standard than popular journalism. Second, there is no reason to suppose that the public wishes a higher standard than it is getting, and every reason to suppose that what most pleases the largest number of people is what can be assimilated with least trouble. Drama of any consequence cannot be assimilated with effort.

We are informed by audience-research organisations of the enormous, the truly awe-inspiring, numbers of people who form the audience for a popular television play. I cannot regard these figures as significant except in a commercial sense. Fifty million people may be tuned to a programme, and there is no evidence whatever to say whether in the long-run - not just tomorrow, but over a ten-or twenty-year stretch - it has more or less influence than another programme which was heard by no more than a few hundred. I do find it significant that so few sponsors dare risk several successive performances of the same dramatic programme. It must be perfectly obvious that this would ensure a far higher standard of performance. The reason against repetition can only be that the sponsors believe their audience only to be concerned with the plot of a play, and that once this is known there will be no further interest. I assume that sponsors and their advisers have good reason for this belief. That being so, one can only assume, as they have done, that the Television public, as a whole, is a great, dull, unsophisticated monster for whom theatrical trash, presented with plenty of fanfare, will do. Obviously there are exceptions - tens, maybe hundreds, of thousands could, and would, appreciate better stuff. But when you are thinking in tens



of millions so inconsiderable a minority must go to the wall. They must accept the mass-distributed article designed to please the largest number of people. Pleasure, like jam, gets thinner as it is spread over a wider and wider area. If you want your taste to be pleased then you must expect to take more trouble, to pay more; and, if this is not possible, then you must be as satisfied as you can with what is distributed to the masses - not for their education or improvement, but to lure them to buy commodities.

Now I suppose there may be a possibility that the live theatre will succumb to the grave economic pressure to which it is being subjected. What then? Would Television drama and the movies collapse for want of trained talent? Not at all. Much of the writing, directing and acting is at present amateurish. Deprived of the leadership of theatrically-trained people it would become more so, and almost nobody would notice.....Would this matter? I think so. But I guess I am prejudiced, and anyway the general question of "do good taste, expertise, and traditional values matter?" is beyond the scope of this piece. Is the live theatre likely to collapse? In my view, not at all. Those who foresee its imminent demise in the face of the competition of mass-distributed drama assume that the theatre does not change.... But the theatre, like its rivals, is not static, but active. It changes all the time. And the more intense the pressure the more dramatically does it change, not only artistically but technically and administratively.

Not all change is for the better; yet in many ways I think our theatre is being changed for the better, and, paradoxically, some of the healthiest changes are being wrought by Television. From Television we are getting a transfusion of new ideas; we are being forced to more flexible ideas about scenery and grouping. We are being - already almost have been - forced out of the dreary rut of society comedy. Most important of all we are getting a transfusion of new talent, not just actors, who if they are technically masters of their trade can move perfectly easily from one medium to another, but writers and directors."

## APPENDIX 85

Peter Black : Daily Mail: 22 August, 1968

'I wish the BBC wouldn't go on about the Wednesday Play's "Deep concern with man's predicament in a rapidly changing society." The temptation to switch over to something lighter becomes almost irresistible. The new series opened with a very worthy and competent documentary drama by Tony Parker, Mrs. Lawrence Will Look In.

The plot was as simple as the production was ingenious. Mrs. Lawrence, a working-class widow, keeled over in the street. In hospital she mumbled about 'my children'. The Police found 14 of them, all under five, alone in the house. The child welfare officers and the local Press moved in. On their discoveries, Parker hung the characters and motives of the people who had used Mrs. Lawrence's one-woman baby home.

It was tape recorder and camera and scissors drama rather than artistic distillation, and though a note at the end said the incidents were taken from recent case histories, the writing was nevertheless subjective. It conveyed the views of the writer.... John Mackenzie's direction established a style as authentic as newsreel. The script found some vivid and touching scenes.....It was one of those TV events that make the average viewer count his blessings and wonder sleepily why somebody doesn't do something. In technique, it was another example of the TV social play's return to the dramatised-documentary as invented by the BBC in the days of Duncan Ross, Robert Barr, Colin Morris, Stephen McCormack and others.

The only things that have changed are the machinery (now they do it on film), the language (it is franker) and, above all, the point of view, which is now that of the victims of society, rather than their helpers. It uses the old documentary device of not naming the actors until the end.'



## APPENDIX 86

Tom Clarke: Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer, October 1972.

"Television Drama covers a tremendously wide range from Coronation Street to Play of the Month and between these two extremes is the single play which is the nearest thing I suppose to the sort of fiction drama which the cinema developed. So that if Television Drama is going to be a popular art that really is the form it will have to develop from. But does the single play have to be popular? Yes, because if it wasn't it would simply freeze up and die. In the United States no single plays are produced at all with perhaps a few notable exceptions and in this country single plays are produced with a good deal of reluctance. Graham Greene once wrote:

"The best work has never been produced in complete independence of the public. Popular taste makes a thoroughly bad dictator but the awareness of an audience is an essential discipline for an artist."

Television audiences are generally regarded as a huge faceless mass. It certainly is a mass, but it is not faceless. It is made up of people of varied intellectual, social and cultural groups. And drama appeals to everyone - no one group more than another - everyone likes a good play. So instead of worrying about whether your play reflects a particular section of this audience or not, what one should be concerned with is its intelligibility. To write a play that is intelligible to this mass audience no matter what their social status, environment, intellectual level and so on, is. By intelligible I mean that the images, sounds, pictures etc., must appeal to an audience that is considered by most makers of Television programmes to be an illiterate one. I think that that's not a bad thing, for literacy is the curse of the drama, especially Television drama.

We live in a society which is traditionally 'literate' but the technology of that society is not a literate one at all - it is an audio-visual one.

Therefore to be considered cultured you have to be considered literate - so everyone who is connected with the drama is assessing their product in terms of literacy because if it isn't literate it isn't cultured, and this affects the way people think about



television drama - the pressures on them are to produce a literate product. In fact any 'literary' agent - and note the very name! - will tell you that you cannot make a reputation for yourself as a writer if you simply write plays for television, you've got to write a stage play, or you've got to write a novel, only then will people start to take you seriously. In this field literate really means 'theatrical' because the theatre is a medium that depends on the word - the dialogue in a stage play synthesises the action and the emotion and it passes messages to the audience which allows them to use their imagination to fill in the bigger picture which the play is trying to transmit.

If you abandon literature - the word - or the theatre, as the basis of your drama you have to put something else in its place. I'm not saying of course that words are dead, far from it. What it really requires is a change of emphasis, a re-thinking.

As a writer I can't make assumptions. I may write a play about people living in a high-rise block of flats, but I must not assume that the audience knows everything there is to know about high-rise blocks of flats. What you have to do is to transmit in your play all the information which is relevant to the social situation of your characters.

The theatre for a long time has been content to simply speak to the people who already understand the message - whilst on television one is speaking to people who don't understand the message and so you have to make it plain for them. By that I mean that the channel of communication in television drama is experience. It's not intellectual, or social or environmental common ground, it is in fact basic human experience - the context of the play is a shared experience - by that I mean - knowing what it is like to be alive today - you might call it reality in the sense that the play, in order to be meaningful, must reflect a reality which the audience can recognise. For example: Dr.Finlay's Casebook was immensely popular - not because everyone knows what it is like to be a country doctor, but most of them do know what it's like going to see country doctors and sitting in their waiting rooms and wondering what the other patients are talking about. What the series does is to tell you what is going on in the surgery whilst you are waiting outside. So there is a kind of experiential link between you and the drama.



What I mean in wider terms is best explained if I quote from Jean Paul Sartre:

'Any individual possibility', that is to say when you as a person are faced with possibilities which you have to choose from, 'is nothing more than the interiorisation and enrichment of a social possibility.'

What Sartre means is that we experience ourselves and our lives as an interaction between ourselves as the subject and the society in which we live.

A man is inseparable from his environment and his environment is constantly changing and he recognises himself in it by stopping as it were - although he continues living - and taking stock through totalisations. This is to say that at any given moment when it is necessary and you are called upon to identify yourself you make a summing-up, a totalisation, of all the different influences which are affecting you. The story of your life is your history, which is made up of a series of totalisations - a series of moments in which you can identify yourself as being, as experiencing something - you can in fact tell yourself the story of your life as you are living it so you are conscious of making your own history. You are making up a life-time of these small totalisations, recognitions or identifications of yourself. A play is then a totality of totalisations - therefore the sort of play that I am interested in writing - the experiential play - sets a man in a situation in which he is faced with certain choices - which lead to other choices and to new situations - so what you get is a series of scenes which express these critical moments in his life during the play.

This is different from the traditional play which is generally speaking a narrative in which the scenes are connected 'causally' one to the other, whereas my plays are 'experientially' connected. Let me illustrate this by quoting from my own work.

In my play Stocker's Copper - which incidentally I wanted to call 'Poor Bugger Jacker' but Radio Times said they couldn't print a title like that! - there's a moment when the striker, whom you've already identified, comes home and goes into his kitchen and he finds a policeman standing there and he has to decide there and then whether he's going to make a fuss and get rid of the policeman or whether he is going to let him stay. Now, in order to illustrate this, what I did was to try to think what the factors



would be which would influence him in making up his mind, which would be immediately intelligible to a non-literate audience - in other words I wasn't going to have a bit of explanatory dialogue where his wife says, "This is P.C. Griffith he has come to be billeted on us because ....." people lose interest in television when they aren't finding things out for themselves and are simply being told them in terms of words. So what I tried to do in the play was to show on the screen all the factors which help to make this striker decide whether or not he is going to let the policeman stay in his home. These factors are: his wife, twelve bob on the table, the sort of kitchen they are standing in (as it happens a neat and tidy one which indicates that he is a law-abiding sort of a chap and unlikely to make a fuss) the behaviour of the Policeman, the presence of the children, the fact that there is a strike on and the children have to be fed which makes them a sort of family pressure group. The Policeman incidentally is nervous because he's out of his normal situation. He is there in fact as a sort of official guest and certainly not as a threat to the striker, and so on. Now in this way the audience can say to itself, 'Looks as if he's a poor sort of a chap, the money's meaningful to him, there's his wife standing there looking at him, here's this shambling policeman and he doesn't look too bad. What I would do, says the viewer, is to say "Oh, all right, he can stay". Or alternatively, they might say, "If I were Manuel, I'd kick the bugger out of my house". But either way they've come to a decision and the fact that the character in the play doesn't necessarily reflect their decision doesn't matter - as long as they've gone through the 'experience' of all the factors connected with making the decision, for themselves.

What is really important in writing for television to my mind, is that the writer realises that he hasn't got to argue with his audience and convince them that such and such a thing is right because he says so. What he's got to do is to imagine all the intelligible phenomena which can be got onto the screen. In this way you avoid writing an old-fashioned theatrical drama.

Though what is written down looks like stage directions and the real meat is in the dialogue this isn't true in my case because the meat of the thing is in the pictures and the dialogue is there to perform its function of vocalising the thoughts of the characters - which after all is what speech is all about.



In television drama speech is not required to carry any burden other than its natural one. It is certainly not required to carry plot and narrative as in other media. For example in Stocker's Copper out of about 120 pages of script there are only between 50-60 pages of dialogue. Also I never write shots in because directors only cross them out straight away because they feel that they haven't any work to do if you've written them in for them. What I am careful to write is an exact description of everything of significance in a scene together with all relevant sounds - I think that is most important. My ears were opened to the world of sounds when I worked on documentary in South America with Cavalcanti! As to commentary, well that simply helps you to interpret what you see on the screen.

Remember, you can't write television. But what you can do and what you are required to do is to produce scripts from which a Director - and I've always been lucky recently in having a man of the genius of Jack Gold for my plays; we see eye to eye - can interpret your ideas and meanings in a televisual form.

Stocker's Copper is a documentary drama and this mixture is a good example of the cross-fertilisation process which works so well on television. This is how I came to get the idea for the play.

Stephen Peet, a Senior Producer with the BBC Documentary Department produced a documentary entitled The White Country in 1970 as one of his series Yesterday's Witness (people and events of yester-year). This one was about the China Clay Industry of Cornwall and included interviews with elderly clay workers and a policeman - long since retired - who remembered the Clay Strike of 1913.

I saw the transmission in March of that year and as I live in Cornwall at the moment I was more than interested by what I saw. In particular I was fascinated by the words of the Policeman interviewed in the programme who described how he was billeted on a striker when he went to Cornwall.

\*Sergeant William Knipe: 'When we got to Nanpean (Cornwall) there was rather a pleasant surprise awaiting for us because we thought that we would be billeted in some old shed or some old church halls, but lo and behold two of us were detailed off for one billet, two for another billet, and we were billeted with the strikers and a fine lot of people they were. We enjoyed ourselves immensely there.'

Since I am also interested in examining the solidarity of a



cultural group of people - as these are constantly being split by social forces - I realised that here you had in the miner and the copper two working-class, culturally and ethnically related people, a Welshman and a Cornishman - who happen to be living together in the same cottage. Now what happens, I ask as a writer, to these two men, who having made friends, then have to start performing their respective roles. That was the thought that for me triggered off the idea for my play. That statement of Knipe's in Stephen's documentary. Having seen the programme I asked Stephen for a copy of his script and also the transcripts of the original interviews from the production file. I used practically every word of Knipe's for the speech by my Policeman, Herbert Griffith, in the play. I only added 'we were punchin' up the niggers a little bit down there', he says, grinning. You see what I was doing was taking what had been taped in an interview as part of Stephen's research - a long speech spoken to someone who was interested in hearing what happened and I took it out of context and used it in quite a different way. I used it in a context of people who didn't want to hear what was happening. So you see this is an example of how fiction can use fact to transform it. What interested me about that speech - because I also went to see the Policeman and heard it again from his own lips - was how he could stand up there and say, 'By damn it was lovely, hitting those buggers over the head' - knocking people about was his job but he really enjoyed doing it, and I wanted this in the play. When I first started thinking about the garden scene (No.18 in the shooting script) I thought well he can hardly talk about that but then I realised that this is just the sort of person who does talk about that and what's the effect going to be on the people who are listening to him. What he's saying to them in effect is - here I am ready to bash you up - and so you get a meaning arising which is altogether beyond the literal meaning of the words.

So in the documentary on one hand you have in fact the recording of an interview with an actual Policeman who took part in the events of 1913. Listening to him talk you realise that he was not at all ashamed of what he did, and your reaction might well be, "So that's the way the Police treat people is it?" But when it's in the play - I am using it as the raw material for a scene which is quite different from that. It's saying a great deal more. I'm using



this raw material to describe several things; the character of the Policeman, the reactions of his listeners, and also I am telling the audience what's going to happen, because when they hear the Policeman talking in this way they are going to realise that for the striker, it's as if he's got a bomb in his house which is ready to go off any minute.

The way you might properly define the difference then between drama and documentary is to look at the purpose each one serves, rather than trying to describe either analytically. The different aspects of reality should be recognised as different aspects of reality,, and as Edward Albee says in his play Zoo Story "fact is better left to fiction."

## APPENDIX 87

Jack Gold : Sight and Sound : International Film Quarterly : Summer 1974 : 'Getting Close' : Interview with Paul Madden and David Wilson : P.134-137 (quoted in part).

Q : When you are filming for television, do you work it all out beforehand - the set-ups, the angles and so on?

Gold: It varies. With the very first things I did I was almost storyboarding, but I got rid of that very quickly. With The Lump (1967: Written by Jim Allen and produced by Tony Garnett) we tried to film as though it were an actual strike situations and we happened to be there - a bit like the Peter Watkins method. For much of The Lump we just set the actors into the scene and said, 'Right, that's the situation, there's the scene, you know the words,' and then we just manoeuvred the camera round - a cinéma vérité situation. But I knew I was going to do the scene that way, the fight scenes for instance.

Q.: Is it simply that you have a working method which you prefer, or does it have anything to do with all the work you did on Tonight, where you're told you have a subject, go out and film it, and the format is to a large extent determined by the personality and style of the reporter?

Gold: I suppose about 95% of the stories I did for Tonight were with a reporter, with Alan Whicker or Fyfe Robertson. So you knew basically what the structure was going to be like. Logistically it had to be an interview situation, where you could film in a day or cut in a day, and this almost necessitated a certain style of shooting. Obviously it's easier to film an interview with just one camera set-up. I was an editor on Tonight before I started directing. What Tonight and Donald Baverstock and Tony Essex taught me was that there was nothing you couldn't find a way to shoot. You learned to shoot from the hip. There was hardly any situation where you couldn't find a way of constructing a little film story, with or without an interviewer, and this gives you enormous confidence. So when now you have a script, a crew, actors, all under control, you



feel totally on top of it.

We did some quite advanced technical things on Tonight. It was when the lightweight camera and the transistorised recorder were just coming in. Before that it was all plodding along, having to set up situations and before the fast film stock came in, so it was very much like a reconstruction of an event. And then we started developing the *vérité* situation.

Q: Did the *vérité* approach influence the way you filmed the longer television plays, like Mad Jack (1970: written by Tom Clarke) or the crowd scenes in Stocker's Copper (1972: written by Tom Clarke) ?

Gold: Possibly in some scenes in The Lump which lent themselves to that approach. But Mad Jack was very carefully constructed, in the way the flashbacks were worked in with the poems. All that was very thoroughly worked out, right down to the eye movements. Stocker's Copper was freer, in some scenes. All one is trying to do is to use a filming style which makes you believe that those events are happening, and to a certain extent having a camera close to a situation, going with the subject rather than the subject going for the camera, is a sort of *verite* approach. But again the crowd scenes in Stocker's Copper were carefully worked out. You know they are going to work in a certain way, you've given the cue. You've bunched up a crowd, and they are going to walk where you have told them to walk. Then you move the camera in to record it in the most dynamic way. As opposed to standing back and letting them approach in a wide angle, you actually come back with them. When you have filmed on Tonight for so long, you know when the event is real or apparently real as opposed to the lit shot and the carefully framed camera set-up. I spend a lot of my time now destroying composed shots. I often like to think there aren't any memorable shots in my films.

Q: Does it bother you that television is generally less well regarded than film?

Gold: It bothers me less than it used to because I think people know now there is nothing marvellous in itself in a film being

shown in a cinema with a bigger screen, I have always believed that. I'm not sure how much of it is rationalisation - coming from television and working mainly in television - but even now, when I've done four feature films, I think the best work I have done has been for television. I think that the average television week offers you more interest and illumination and entertainment than the average week in the cinema. There is more talent at work in television than there is in the British film industry, at any time.

Q: But there is still a feeling that television is wallpaper. It just happens, and there is very rarely a sense of occasion.

Gold: I don't know. Has any feature film in Britain in, say the last ten years had anything like the emotional and intellectual impact of Cathy Come Home? That wasn't an occasion, it was just a Wednesday Play. It became an occasion afterwards. But I really don't know the answer to this. Because my programmes go out and people talk to me about them - not television people, real people! - about things I have done which they have remembered. It would be very interesting to do some proper analysis, if you could measure it, of the impact of something seen in the cinema and something seen on television.

Q: You prefer working in television?

Gold: I enjoyed making films. But there are always pressures in the areas round making a feature film...like who is in it, will it work in America, is the accent too thick? When you work in television, you have a script and the head of the Drama Department says, "Here's the money, you have four or five weeks to shoot it, go away and make it." And that is all that happens.

You can be limited by the scale on television sometimes. But with Stocker's Copper, for instance, it was like doing a Western. We had two hundred extras. It didn't look thin, I don't think, as regards the size of the crowd, and we came in under schedule, in 18 days. There was nothing missing which I wanted to put in. Two hundred people was plenty, three hundred wouldn't have made any difference, and I didn't think



I needed any more time. So everything was perfect as far as I was concerned. The subject matter can also be a problem in television. I am sure there are areas which have to be looked at carefully in terms of script....but the gestation period in television is so much less wearing. The half-hour film I've just done took fourteen weeks from being given the script to the dubbing, which is marvellous. To know that you're going to have a piece of work, with a very high standard of technical proficiency apart from anything else, wrapped up and under your belt in less than six months is very different from the situation on a feature film..... If you wanted to do something about the miners' strike, for instance, as a feature....by the time someone has put up the money for someone to do the script and by the time that script is written and has gone through the various committees of distributors, and by the time they've decided whether Michael Caine is going to be in a miner's helmet or a policeman's helmet.....I mean, we go out and make Stocker's Copper."

## APPENDIX 88

Stephen Peet: BBC TV Documentary Producer : Transcript of a tape-recorded interview with this writer, October, 1972.

"The idea for a documentary began for me when I visited the home of a friend of mine, Kenneth Hudson, who was the Industrial Correspondent for BBC Bristol. He had been writing a book, The History of English China Clays (David & Charles, 1969) and he showed me an old photograph of a line of Policemen, with big handlebar moustaches, holding their bicycles, who were the force of strike-breaking policemen sent to Cornwall in 1913. Ken also had a tape-recorded interview with one of the old Cornish miners, who described how they had sent in 'foreign' police from Swansea to break their strike and it was these two things which prompted me to see if there was anyone else still alive who would remember what had taken place at that time. In fact there was one Policeman (William Knipe) who had been in the Tonypandy riots and described being hit over the head, in a tape-recorded interview we did with him in Wales. Tom Clarke's 'Policeman' in his play recalled the same incidents.

What you must remember also when comparing the documentary and the play is that the 'dialogue' in my documentary was created artificially also, from one old man who had been a striker and one policeman. Each one described the events - the policeman from the point of view of how he had enjoyed it and the striker from his memory of the strike and how the police had bashed them about and all the rest of it, and this I have cut and edited using the relevant bits, or dramatic highlights. For example one man saying, "There we were heading for the mine going at the double when on the horizon we saw a party of policemen" CUT TO the policeman who says, "We were rushed along to head the strikers off...." in this way you have an artificial dialogue made with scissors, which is very similar to the dialogue Tom has in his play but there they are talking to each other, though filmed separately. With mine they are filmed separately and then made to appear to talk to each other. I suppose this is rather a suspect way of working. One can in fact make up a dialogue, create an artificial drama quite wrongly by using pieces which really don't relate in the first instance."



## APPENDIX 89

BBC STAFF LISTS.Television Service : April 15, 1947.Direction and Administration:

Head of Television Service	(H.Tel.S.)	M.A.C. Gorham.
Programme Director.	(Tel.P.D.)	C. McGivern.
Administrative Officer.	(A.O. Tel.)	J.A.C. Knott.

Programme Planning:

Programme Organiser.	(Tel.P.O.)	C. Madden.
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Productions:

Senior Producers:	Mrs. M. Adams.
	G. More O'Ferrall.

Producers:	A.W. Anderson.
	I.R. Atkins
	R. Barr
	M. Barry
	P.A.T. Bate
	J. Bussell
	H. Caldwell.
	H. Clayton
	E. Fawcett
	S. Harrison
	J. Irwin
	J. Glyn Jones
	A. Miller Jones
	M.H. Mills
	R. Morley
	D.H. Munro
	F. O'Donovan

Presentation:

Studio Productions Manager	(Tel.S.P.Man)	I. Newbiggin-Watts.
Assistant Studio Productions Manager.	(Tel.A.S.P.Man)	A.Ozmond.

**Presentation: (Cont'd..)**

Studio Managers .	B.E. Adams.
	W.D. Allen
	K.M. Buckley
	F.E.T. Clark
	B. Edgar
	T.L. Jackson
	D. Mair
	S. McCormack
	R. Price
	B. Rawes
	I. Ward.

Announcers : Miss. W. Shotter.  
D. McDonald-Hobley.

### Outside Broadcasts and Film Units:

O.B. and Film Supervisor (Tel.O.B. & F.S.)	P.H. Dorte.
O.B. Manager (Tel. O.B. Man.)	C.I. Orr-Ewing.
Assistant O.B.Managers.	K.D. Rogers
	H.L. Cox.
	P.H. Dimmock
Film Manager (Tel. Film M.)	W.del Strother
Film Assistant (Cameras)	A. Lawson
Film Assistant (Editorial)	D.A.Smith.
Film Cutters.	Miss. C. Corke.
	Miss J. Dixon

Design:

Design Manager.	(Tel. D. Man.)	P. Bax
Assistant Design Managers.		B. Learoyd
		S. Mortimer.
Senior Artist.		W.C. Woods
Master Carpenter		T. Edwards
Property Master.		G. Veitch.

### Make-Up and Wardrobe:

Make-Up and Wardrobe Manager. Miss J. Bradnock



Music:

Assistant to Music Director.

J.W. Hartley

Engineering Division:

Chief Engineer. C.E.

H. Bishop

Head of Research

H.L. Kirke

Total Staff listed numbered 73 excluding secretarial staff.

Television Service : April 15, 1948Direction & Administration:

Controller , Television	(C.Tel.)	N. Collins
Head of Television Programmes	(H.Tel.P)	C. McGivern.

Programme Planning:

Programme Organiser.	(Tel.P.O.)	C. Madden.
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Productions:Drama

Head of Television Drama	(H.Tel.D.)	R. MacDermot
Senior Producers.		G. More O'Ferrall
		R. Morley
Producers.		I.R. Atkins
		M. Barry
		J. Bussell
		H. Clayton
		E. Fawcett
		J. Glyn-Jones
		S. Harrison
		F. O'Donovan

Light Entertainment:

Head of Television Light Entertainment.	(H.Tel.L.E.)	P. Hillyard
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Talks:

Head of Television Talks.	(H.Tel.T.)	Mrs. M. Adams.
Assistant in Dept.		C. Doncaster.

Documentary & Magazine Programmes:

Producers.		R. Barr
		S. McCormack
<u>Script Writer</u> (Documentary)		D. Ross.



O.B. & Films

Head of Television O.B. &amp; Films.

P.H. Dorté

Design:

P. Bax

Chief Engineer:

H. Bishop

## Note:

Division into Departments - No Head of Documentary -  
D. Ross's arrival as script-writer.

Television Service : April 15, 1949Direction & Administration:

Controller, Television.	N. Collins
Head of Television Programmes.	C. McGivern

Programme Planning:

Programme Organiser.	C. Madden.
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Productions:Drama:

Head of Drama	R. MacDermot.
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Light Entertainment:

Head of Light Entertainment.	P. Hillyard.
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Talks:

Head of Talks.	Mrs. M. Adams.
Producer.	G. Wyndham-Goldie
Assist.	C. Doncaster.

Documentary & Magazine Programmes.

Producers .	R. Barr.
	S. McCormack
Head of T.V. O.B. & Films.	P. Dorté
Head of Design	P. Bax
Chief Engineer.	H. Bishop.



Television Service : October 15, 1950Direction & Administration:

Director of Television	(D.Tel.)	G.R. Barnes.
Controller of Television Programmes.	(C.Tel.P.)	C. McGivern.

Programme Planning:

Programme Organiser.	(Tel. P.O.)	A.E. Sutherland.
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Productions:

Head of Drama.	V.H. Gielgud. O.B.E.
Light Entertainment (Acting Head)	R. Waldman
Head of Talks.	Mrs. M. Adams.

Documentary & Magazine Programmes:

Producers.	R. Barr
	S. McCormack
	Miss. C. Doncaster
	W.F. Small
Script-writer	D. Ross.

Children's Programmes:

Head of Childrens Programmes.	C. Madden (Temp.)
Head of Outside Broadcasts.	S.J. de Lotbinière
Head of Films	P.H. Dorté

Film Documentary & Sequence Section:

Film Doc. & Sequence Manager.	J.H. Elliot
Head of Design	P. Bax
Make-Up & Wardrobe	Miss J. Bradnock

## Note:

George Barnes Director - change of title from Controller.  
 Head of Drama : Val Gielgud : Caryl Doncaster joins Documentary from Talks - Documentary staff increasing but still no Head of Department. O.B. separate Department, new film sequence section and Children's Programmes begin with the new studio in Lime Grove.

Television Service : April 15, 1951Direction & Administration:

Director of Television Service.

G.R. Barnes

Controller of Television Programmes.

C. McGivern

Assistant to C. Tel. Programmes.

C. Madden.

Programme Organiser.

A.E. Sutherland.

Productions:Drama

Head of Drama

M. Barry

Producers

J.R. Morley

E. Fawcett

K. Sheldon

D. Allen

I. Atkins

H. Clayton

S. Harrison

C. Logan

Script Assistants:

W.P. Rilla

G.F. Kerr

Light Entertainment (Head)

R. Waldman

Talks (Head)

M. Adams

Documentary & Magazine

Head of Television Documentary (Vacancy)

Producers:

R. Barr

S. McCormack

Miss C. Doncaster

W.F. Small

Script Writers.

D. Ross

(Vacancy)

O.B. (Head)

S.J. de Lotbinière

Films (Head)

P. Dorté

Note: Barry Head of Drama, Documentary advertising for Head.  
 Script assistants for Drama.



Television Service: April 1, 1952Direction & Administration:

Director of Television Service .	G.R.Barnes
Controller Television Programmes	C. McGivern
Assistant to Controller	C. Madden
Programme Organiser	Mrs. J.R. Spicer

Drama

Head of Drama	M. Barry
Drama Organiser	N. Rutherford
Script Supervisor	Miss H. Wilkinson
Script Adaptor	G.F. Kerr
Assistant	Miss V.B. Silk

Light Entertainment (Head)Talks (Head)

Head of Documentary	(Vacancy)
Producers :	

R. Waldman
Mrs. M. Adams

R. Barr
S.McCormack
C. Doncaster
F. Small

## Script Writer:

D. Ross
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Television Productions Manager.	
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O.B. (Head)	
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Film (Head)	
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A.J.M. Ozmond
S.J. de Lotbinière.
P. Dorté

Note: Script Section developing in Drama : No Head of Documentary.

Television Service :      January 1, 1953

Direction & Administration:

Director of Television Service.	G.R. Barnes
Controller of Programmes	C. McGivern
Assist. to Controller	C. Madden
Programme Organiser	Mrs. J.R. Spicer.

Productions:

Drama (Head)	M. Barry
Organiser	N. Rutherford

Script Supervisor	Sir Basil Bartlett, Bt.
Script Writer/Adaptors	G.F. Kerr (2 Vacancies)

<u>Light Entertainment</u> (Head)	R. Waldman
<u>Talks</u> (Head)	Mrs. M. Adams

Documentary Programmes (no mention of )  
( magazine )

Head of Documentary (acting)	R. Barr
Producers	C. Doncaster S. McCormack W.F. Small
Script Writer	D. Ross (Vacancy)

Note: There is a second list for this year published in October.  
Bartlett now script supervisor for Drama - Barr acting  
Head of Documentary.



Television Service :    October 1953

Direction & Administration:

Director of Television Broadcasting	Sir George Barnes
Controller Programmes, Television    (acting)	S.J. de Lotbinière
Assist. Controller	C. Madden
Programme Organiser	Mrs. J.R. Spicer

Production:

Head of Drama	M. Barry
Organiser	N. Rutherford
Script Supervisor	Sir Basil Bartlett
Script Writer/Adaptors	G.F. Kerr
	G.S. Cooper
	N. Kneale
	A.J. Shaughnessy
Head of Talks	R.L. Miall
Producers:	Mrs. Wyndham Goldie
	P. Johnstone
	A. Miller-Jones
	G.H. Noordhof
	D.F. Attenborough
	D.L. Baverstock
	I.M. Peacock
	H.G. Wheldon OBE, MC
<u>Head of Documentary</u>	P. Rotha
Organiser	R.A. Whitworth
Producers:	R. Barr
	A.G. Calder
	C. Doncaster
	S. McCormack
	W.F. Small
	N. Swallow
Script Writer/Producer	D. Ross

Note: Rotha's arrival: Mrs. Goldie as Producer introducing Attenborough, Baverstock, Peacock and Wheldon. Giles Cooper and Nigel Kneale now script-writing.

Television Service :      October, 1954

Direction & Administration:

Director of Television Broadcasting.	Sir George Barnes
Controller Programmes	C. McGivern    C.B.E.
Assist. to Controller	C. Madden

Production:

Head of Drama	M. Barry
Assist. Head of Drama	N. Rutherford
Drama Organiser	E. Jones
Script Supervisor	D.B. Wilson
Head of Talks	R.L. Miall
Assist. Head of Talks	Mrs. G. Wyndham Goldie
Head of Documentary	P. Rotha
(Same Producers)	
Head of O.B.s	P.H. Dimmock

Note:

Elwyn Jones arrival - Mrs. Goldie's ascent - Donald Wilson as Script Supervisor replacing Sir Basil Bartlett.



Television Service : October, 1955Direction & Administration:

Director of Television Broadcasting.

Controller

Assistant Controller

Assistant

Sir George Barnes

C. McGivern

S.J. de Lotbinière

C. Madden

Production:

Head of Drama

Assist. Head of Drama

Drama Organiser

Producers:

M. Barry

N. Rutherford

E. Jones

I. Atkins

W.D. Allen

A.G. Calder

R. Cartier

H. Clayton

Miss C. Gibson

H.S. Harrison

C. Logan

A. Rakoff

J. Royston Morley

Producer/ Script Writers.

Miss E.B. Burnham

A.H. Swinson

Central Script Section.

Script Supervisor

Assist. to Supervisor

Script Writer/Editor

Script Writer/Adaptors

D.B. Wilson

C.H.R. Wade

C. Morris

R.G. Furnival

W.A.G. Steven

F.V. Tilsley

M. Voysey

Talks

Head of Talks

Assist. Head of Talks

Talks Organiser

R.L. Miall

Mrs. G. Wyndham  
Goldie

C. Jackson

Producers:

D.F. Attenborough  
 D.L. Baverstock  
 E.R. Cawston  
 A.C.J. de Lotbinière  
 P. Johnstone  
 J. McCloy  
 A. Miller-Jones  
 R. Moorfoot  
 I.M. Peacock  
 J. Read  
 H.P. Wheldon  
 S. Hearst  
 S.C.C. Wheeler

## Producer/Script Writer

N. Swallow

## Production Assistants

R.H. Burnett  
 Miss C. Dove  
 J.R.L. Furness  
 Mrs. N. Thomas  
 H.D. Wheeler

**Note:** There is no mention of Documentary because it had been dissolved. Note the move of some personnel to Drama and to Talks - others left for ITV. Talks now very powerful and in many ways will shape the future of BBC TV over the next decade. Central Script Section firmly established with Donald Wilson in command - Colin Morris joins. Drama has young producers too who will make their names - Alan Rakoff, Gil Calder, Campbell Logan.

By 1955 the total staff employed in the Television Service, excluding secretaries was over 300.



## APPENDIX 90

BBC Year Book 1932 : BBC Publication : P.183

Drama

"One of the most interesting innovations of the past year was the broadcasting of what the BBC has for internal convenience called actuality programmes. The first of these, entitled Crisis in Spain was broadcast on June 11th and was intended to give an account of the events of the Spanish Revolution in the speeches of the protagonists and the actual words of the news messages by which the world was informed at the time. The story was told without comment, the facts being allowed to speak for themselves. Music was used to act as a connecting link between the scenes, the Spanish royal anthem being used as a recurring motif. This was not the first programme to contain actual speeches delivered on important public occasions, a notable earlier example being the delivery of part of Mr. Asquith's speech in the House of Commons at the declaration of war in 1914 in a commemorative programme broadcast a few years ago. It was the memory of this, perhaps which suggested the second actuality programme, that broadcast on Armistice Day, when the events of the early days of the Great War were made to live again in the actual words of speeches and documents which have passed into history."

BBC Year Book 1947 : BBC Publication : P 79

Television Service : Drama

"Among studio programmes, plays have come first in popularity. Casting a wide net, the producers brought in dramas, comedies, thrillers - Shakespeare and Shaw, Oscar Wilde and Edgar Wallace. Besides Shaw's St. Joan, Ian Hay's The Middle Watch, Eugene O'Neill's Anna Christie and many other established successes, demanding the utmost resource in studio accommodation, scenery and costumes, viewers saw numbers of plays specially written or arranged for television, among them J.B. Priestley's new play The Rose and Crown and the well-known stage and film story Thunder Rock.

Engineering.

The present service area is restricted to a radius of roughly forty miles of Alexandra Palace though there are many reports of good reception at much greater distances. How many television receiving sets are in operation is still a matter of conjecture and estimates vary between 15,000 and 25,000. "

BBC Year Book 1948 : BBC Publication : P.99

" The Television documentary began to evolve a technique of its own, with I Want to be a Doctor as one of the best examples. Visual talks covered a multitude of topics, including Radar explained and demonstrated by its inventor, Sir Robert Watson-Watt; Speaking Personally by Bertrand Russell; and Film History recounted by Roger Manvell, with the showing of films going back to the old 'silents'.

Engineering

Arrangements have been made to obtain outside-broadcast equipment of improved design, and in fact an improved camera became available just in time to be used with great success for the Royal Wedding. This camera known as the C.P.S. Emitron was invented by EMI before the war, but its development like all television research, was suspended during the period of hostilities. Studio Lighting technique has been improved and new lighting sources have been employed.



BBC Year Book 1949 :

BBC Publication : P 110

### Engineering

Transmission time has averaged  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours daily, seventy-five per cent of which has come from the two studios at Alexandra Palace. Two notable improvements have been the introduction of a continuity room, resulting in a more polished method of programme presentation, and the provision of means of instantaneous cutting from one camera to another which has speeded up the production of certain kinds of programme. New cameras also have been brought into use, experimentally, during the year.

BBC Year Book 1950 : BBC Publication : P.105

### Engineering

On the technical side, the year saw the introduction of new and more sensitive cameras equipped with such refinements as rapidly interchangeable telephoto lenses mounted on turrets and the zoom lens, which magnifies objects into close-ups without even a lens change. A new system of direct recording from the screen is being developed by BBC Engineers. Teleciné equipment working on new principles greatly improved definition and tonal gradation. New studios at Alexandra Palace will, it is hoped, relieve pressure on space in 1950.

### P.106

Drama: Programmes from Alexandra Palace increased in scope and resourcefulness despite studio handicaps. Plays continued to lead in popularity, and their producers exploited every available artistic and technical device. Lear and Macbeth each utilized every square inch of two studios; Irwin Shaw's The Gentle People introduced into the studio a replica of a New York pierhead and a harbour with real water. More plays had their first public performance on television, among them Beverley Nichols's Song on the Wind, Ben Travers's Potter and C.P. Snow's The Ends of the Earth. An increasing number written specially for the medium included the Nicholas Tophet series by Duncan Ross and G.Gordon Glover, and Re-Union by John Pudney.

### P.152

In the studio a new form of theatrical production, widely removed

from stage, film and sound radio, yet owing something to all three, is now firmly established. (Documentary).

BBC Year Book 1951 : BBC Publication : P.55

### Engineering.

The two studios at Alexandra Palace were developed in 1936 from two ballrooms. Until recently they were the only sources of television studio programmes and they have given good service both before and since the war. Their size, each 70 x 30 x 27 feet high, is completely inadequate for large-scale productions, a fact which was realised before the war -

The acquisition by the BBC in November 1949 of the Rank Film Studios at Lime Grove, Shepherds Bush has provided a very satisfactory immediate solution to the urgent need for studio expansion. Of the five studios at Lime Grove, one measuring 84 x 65 x 24 feet high was brought into service in May 1950 for the Children's Hour Programme and another 114 x 56 x 33 feet high, towards the end of 1950, mainly for Light Entertainment. Two other studios will be equipped and brought into use at a later stage.

### P.129

The need has been felt for some time of a means of recording television programmes, both picture and sound. Apparatus for this purpose which has been developed by BBC Engineers has now been installed at Alexandra Palace and the process has been named telefilm recording.

BBC Year Book. 1952 : BBC Publication : P.107

It was perhaps in the field of talk and documentary that the sense of adventure was most apparent. That the cut-and-thrust of controversy made such good television material surprised many. In the News with its unrehearsed debates, has gained an ever-widening audience; so has Christopher Mayhew's International Commentary. No documentary series has excelled The Course of Justice; a close runner up was Matters of Life and Death, impressively rounded off with A Hundred Years of Medicine.



BBC Handbook 1956 : BBC Publication : P 82

Documentary programmes are composed of both film and studio scenes, occasionally supplemented by Outside Broadcasts. They range from large-scale dramatic productions undertaken by the Drama Department with the help of professional actors to programmes in which individuals appear as themselves, under the auspices of Talks Department. In all cases these documentaries are strictly based on the facts of real life.

BBC Handbook 1957 : BBC Publication : P.79

The output of about 120 plays a year from the television Drama Department contains with increasing occurrence the names of writers who have established themselves upon the small screen; Philip Mackie, Nigel Kneale, Berkeley Mather, Iain MacCormick, Anthony Steven and Francis Durbridge; these names recur and signify the authors' firmer confidence in the use of television. Behind this development lies the script unit's growing ability to service the output, not only by advice and the editing, where necessary, of original work, but in adapting existing or theatre material. This unit has grown during the past two years and provides the means for young writers to become acquainted with the requirements of the small screen.

#### P.80

From the Spring of 1955 responsibility for part of the documentary output came within Drama Department. The programmes in question are the dramatised form of documentary of which Colin Morris's Strike, Woman Alone, and The Unloved are examples.

BBC Handbook 1958 : BBC Publication P 87 - 88

The Dramatised Documentary Group working within Drama ..... it has been said that the scripted re-creation of factual matters is less valid than direct reportage, but such programmes as Tearaway - about intimidated witnesses - and Without Love - prostitution - were examples of the way in which the method can be used to focus attention and bring comprehension to subjects of this kind.

The Script Unit remains, of course, at the root of the television drama operation.

BBC Handbook 1959 : BBC Publication P 93

Dramatised Documentary Group - retaining its autonomy of purpose within Drama Department has presented programmes on a variety of subjects including the U.N. Organisation, NSPCC, Alcoholism, Deep Sea Fishing, and Loneliness. These scripts continued to present in dramatised form a survey of the subjects concerned, which although controversial, embodied a statement of the facts as they exist.

BBC Handbook 1960. : BBC Publication P.69

Dramatised Documentary programmes were produced on the subjects of advertising, divorce, how the manifold routine procedures of the police may help to solve a major crime, a capital crime, seen from the new reporter's point of view, the flying ambulance service in the Outer Hebrides and the GPO medical service to ships at sea. This programme Medico won an award under the Italia Prize for a telerecorded television documentary.



BBC Handbook 1962 : BBC Publication P.116-120

BBC Television was brought within reach of nearly 99 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom by the main network of stations.

Five studios are now in operation at the BBC Television Centre (White City). Four more studios, including a second presentation studio, have been built in shell form and will be equipped later.

The Television Centre is so designed that such developments as the introduction of colour television and of a second BBC television programme can readily be undertaken. Space is also available on the site for further development, including the provision of additional studios.

Building work started on a further larger building at the Television Centre, to be known as the East Block. This will be the centre for engineering and house services maintenance for the whole of the Centre, and will include stores, offices, and a suite for experimental television.

#### Television Recording:

The use of video tape recordings is fully exploited for the international exchange of programmes as well as for the day-to-day running of the BBC Television Service. Standards conversion equipment designed by BBC engineers enables recorded programmes to be exchanged with European countries and also with the USA, where not only the number of lines per picture but also the number of pictures per second differs from that in the United Kingdom and in European countries.

In each region mobile video tape recording equipment is provided so that in conjunction with existing outside broadcast units it is possible to present programmes from any point in the United Kingdom to which a vehicle can be driven.

#### Outside Broadcasts

A second radio camera is now in service, thus increasing the occasions on which cameras can be carried into areas inaccessible to normal television cameras and without the handicap of trailing cables. The vision signals from a radio camera are sent to a

convenient receiving point by a radio transmitter which is carried on the cameraman's back. BBC engineers designed and brought into service a new transmitter for use with the radio cameras which improves the range and reliability.

### Camera Design

There were important developments in television camera design and operating techniques. Cameras installed in the new BBC Television Centre were built by the manufacturers to a BBC specification, with the result that electrical stability has been so improved that the score or more of operational controls for each camera were reduced to only two. The remainder of the controls can now be pre-set and left untouched throughout the transmission period. In consequence, only one operator is now required to control the technical performance of as many as four cameras, whereas previously it was necessary to have one operator to each camera.

Following the successful application of remote control techniques by BBC engineers to the panning and tilting movements and the control of the zooming, focusing, and iris setting, of a television camera, a complete installation of remotely controlled cameras was brought into operation at the Alexandra Palace Television News Centre on 10 June, 1961. Even with the complex operations needed in Television News programme production, four cameras can be completely controlled remotely by two people in the studio control room.

On 27 August, 1960 a prototype camera incorporating a folded zoom lens, produced by BBC engineers in co-operation with the lens manufacturers, made its debut at a BBC television outside broadcast. With this camera, not only can the whole range of shots be covered by a single zoom lens, but the lens itself is accommodated inside the body of the camera. This results in a very compact camera and avoids the need for either a lens turret carrying a range of lenses, each being brought into operation as required by rotation of the turret, or of the more conventional mounting of a zoom lens on the front of the camera. Extensive trials are being carried out on outside broadcasts and in studios to obtain the fullest information on the characteristics and potentialities of cameras of this novel design.



## APPENDIX 91

BBC Annual Report 1951-1952 : (Cmnd 8660) HMSO London: P 32

Documentaries

In trying to convey interesting and reliable information in an entertaining way, the documentary scriptwriters continued to build their programmes around a story. Great importance was attached to accuracy and authenticity and, to this end, advice and information were sought from authoritative sources. The BBC enjoyed the fullest help and co-operation from all sorts of bodies - legal, scientific, medical especially. Organisations concerned with social work were also helpful. The Home Office and Scotland Yard gave valuable assistance. Most of the documentary programmes were in preparation over periods of many weeks of research and writing. Typical programmes were, To Save a Life - a description of a night's work in a big London hospital; Women at Work - a survey of conditions responsible for the present-day employment of women in commerce and industry; The Suffragette - an account of Mrs. Pankhurst's struggle to achieve women's suffrage; The Loch Ness Monster - an enquiry; I Was a Stranger - a reconstruction of the conditions governing the employment of Displaced Persons in this country; and Rising Twenty - a survey of the teen-age viewpoint. I Made News was a series of ten experimental weekly programmes based on true newspaper stories.

Plays - P.30

The year was an important one for Drama Department for three special reasons. In the first place, a beginning was made with the systematic pooling of information and ideas on the subject of plays for television. The stock of available theatre plays is not inexhaustible. The rate at which plays are used is very high; over 100, of full-length, are produced annually at present. Nor would it be desirable to rely exclusively on theatre plays for television. New plays by living playwrights are a great need. The Script Unit that has now been formed is able to deal thoroughly and expeditiously with all plays submitted to the BBC for television. It is expected in due course to develop a wider and more creative function in the preparation of scripts suitable for the screen.

The second noteworthy point is that it was possible during the year to bring an added vitality into the work through the engagement of a number of guest producers to supplement the work of the regular staff.

Thirdly, before the year was ended, it was possible to transfer the seat of drama productions from the Alexandra Palace to the studio centre at Lime Grove. Here there was a studio to work in, twice as large as the ones left behind in North London, also the latest type of camera and other up-to-date equipment, including a back projection screen. An immediate improvement was noticeable in the quality of the production.

The first plays produced at Lime Grove - Dial M for Murder, Music at Night and Mourning Becomes Electra - showed this. Other notable productions included Shout Aloud Salvation by Charles Terrot and Michael Barry - specially written for television.



BBC Annual Report 1953-1954 : (Cmnd 9269) HMSO, London : P.28

### Documentary.

Programmes of the documentary type attracted a wide and appreciative audience. As each programme called for the preparation of an original script, based on a thorough enquiry, the output of documentaries was necessarily limited, but over the year it averaged one full sixty-minute programme every two weeks.

Some established series were continued. In London Town viewers were introduced to further unsuspected facets of life and work in the Metropolis, as well as to some of its more familiar aspects. The same formula was used successfully in the wider field of About Britain, which alternated with London Town. Special Enquiry had its second series and covered such diverse subjects as the East-West refugee problem, old age, Britain's roads, the work of the U.N. International Children's Emergency Fund in Yugoslavia, and freak weather.

As a variation of the standard documentary method, problems of real life were treated in dramatic form with the aid of a professional cast; subjects handled in this way included the re-adjustment problems of the ex-convict and the work of the Salvation Army's Missing Persons Bureau. In two programmes an experimental technique was tried by which the camera, instead of playing its normal objective role, became as it were, the eye of the subjective human observer. The new technique was applied with some success to the study of human nature in a visit to a Seaman's Mission in London's dockland, but less convincingly later in a reconstruction of a typical scene in a doctor's consulting room.

### Drama (P.29)

The growing fund of producers' experience and the gradual improvement in technical facilities were again reflected in the dramatic productions. Thus the use of deep-focus in, for example, a production of Tovarich created an unusual impression of depth and amplitude in the picture transmitted, while a production of The Deep Blue Sea was notably successful by judicious use of camera mobility and close-up, in transferring to the screen the full value of fine individual performances.

Of the four specially-written serial plays produced, one, The

Quatermass Experiment, was the original work of a member of the BBC's Script-Writing staff. The Script Unit was formed two years ago primarily for the purpose of adapting both plays and potential dramatic material, such as novels and stories, for television. Its work, though it is not always readily identifiable by the general viewer is gradually winning recognition among playwrights and writers outside the BBC.



BBC Annual Report 1954-1955 : (Cmnd 9533) HMSO, London : P22

The output of plays runs to an average of three new productions a week. The Television Service was able to mount successfully productions of the magnitude of Ibsen's Peer Gynt, Orwell's 1984. It commissioned the young Australian writer Iain MacCormick to write a cycle of four full-length plays, The Promised Years.

P.111 Documentary Drama - a select list.

Seeing Both Sides - a documentary on personnel management and industrial welfare; Mock Auction - study of a 'racket'; Can I Have a Lawyer - on the free Legal Advice Service ; Medical Officer of Health - the story of a smallpox Epidemic; The New Canadians - a report on emigration, with film taken in Canada.

BBC Annual Report 1955-1956 : (Cmnd 9803) HMSO, London : P119

Dramatised Documentaries - a select list.

Those Who Dare - the founding of an 'open' Borstal Institution; The Unloved - the problems of children who have been deprived of parental love; Strike - a reconstruction of the facts behind an unofficial strike; Woman Alone - the problem of the unmarried mother.

BBC Annual Report 1956-1957 : (Cmnd 267) HMSO, London: P.41

An important and fruitful development was the adaptation by BBC Script writers of literary classics - Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, Vanity Fair and Kenilworth - as television serials. The scripting, acting and design of these productions earned high favour with viewers and professional critics alike.

Recent years have seen a steady advance in drama scripting and production technique. The increasing use of outside film shots skilfully blended with studio scenes - as in the four serials just mentioned - has added a new dimension to television drama which, at its best, now more and more approaches the freedom and fluidity of cinema film.

P.122 - Dramatised Documentaries - a select list.

Quiet Revolution - a study of a city priest; Tearaway - the making of delinquents; The Man from the Sun - West Indians in London; Without Love, on prostitution; The Barrier, on the impact of blindness; The Wharf Road Mob - a study of Teddy Boys.

BBC Annual Report 1957-1958 : (Cmnd 533) HMSO, London : P.44

An extensive range of contemporary topics was covered in documentary programmes. In Prison an impression of life in Strangeways Gaol, Manchester and Night in the City were outstanding examples of the documentary technique in which the camera becomes as it were, the eye of the human observer. Social documentaries of a more orthodox kind, some in dramatised form, were devoted to such matters as the life of foreign communities in London, the work of the RSPCC, New Towns, Alcoholism, Loneliness and the impact of Open Cast Mining operations on a village community.

P.117 Dramatised Documentaries - a select list.

The Bloodless Arena - on the East-West clash in the U.N.; Rock Bottom - on alcoholism; Take Over - on take-over bids; The Challenge - on the Outward Bound School; Black Furrow - on open-cast mining and its effect on a village community.

P.45 Drama:

The drama output was larger than in any previous year. It included 104 full-length and 37 shorter plays, 15 serial pieces and 9 documentaries in dramatised form. The proportion of plays, specially written for Television was again high - plays by 23 writers new to the BBC screen were presented during the year - and it was also significant that no fewer than 38 network drama productions came from Regional studios.

BBC Annual Report 1958-1959 : (Cmnd 834) HMSO, London :

Drama : P48

Television Drama made history this year in that over 50% of its material was specially written for the television screen. The contributors included 31 writers new to television. A part of the new writing was grouped in a series presented on Tuesday



evenings under the general title Television Playwright.

Several of these first plays showed great merit and promise, notably Yesterday's Enemy by Peter Newman and Incident at Echo Six by Troy Kennedy Martin.

A great deal of the credit for the successful influx of new writing belongs to the BBC's Television Script Unit, which affords skilled professional advice and help to writers lacking experience of the medium.

#### Documentary : P.49

The Drama Documentary is a form that the BBC has been developing for some years past. Examples of this genre in the year under review are shown below. The form was given a new turn in the series You Take Over, which sought to give the viewer a subjective insight into the problems and situations confronting men in positions of great responsibility, e.g. The Traffic Controller of an Airport.

#### Dramatised Documentaries - a select list. P. 124

The Golden Egg (John Elliot) - on advertising ;

The Brittle Bond (Colin Morris) - on divorce; Medico (Robert Barr) - on the Post Office Medical Service to ships at sea; They Made History (Bill Duncalf) - on the pioneer use of anaesthetics at University College Hospital; Body Found (John Prebble) - on a newspaper handling of a murder story.

#### BBC Annual Report 1959-1960 : (Cmnd 1174) HMSO, London: P.59

##### Documentary:

Among drama documentary programmes, Who Me? illustrated the method of interrogation of suspects used by a particularly gifted detective-sergeant. It aroused such interest in police circles that a request was made for it to be shown privately to senior officers of the force.

##### Drama

36 Plays were specially written for BBC TV and their writers included several new names of promise - A.C.Thomas, Jack Pulman, Thomas Clarke, John Hopkins and Terence Dudley. Advice and help to new writers inexperienced in the medium is given through the BBC's Television Script Unit.

Dramatised Documentaries - a select list . P.129

Mock Auction - on Mock auction sales; Fireground - the story of a Fire; Who, Me? - on CID interrogation; The Black Spot - on road accidents; The Case Before You - a series on the work of Magistrates' Courts; Spycatcher - two series recreating the wartime experiences of Lt.Col. Pinto of the Netherlands Intelligence Service; Man at the Door - a series illustrating the work of a bailiff, a debt collector, a planning officer, and an education welfare officer.

BBC Annual Report 1960-1961 : (Cmnd 1503) HMSO, London. P.124  
List

Point of Return - about mental illness; King's Hill Modern - about education in Secondary Modern Schools; Who Pays the Piper ? about symphony orchestras; Scotland Yard - a series about the Metropolitan Police; They Made History - a series on notable achievements; Spycatcher - episodes from the casebook of Lt. Col. Pinto.

Drama: P. 43-44

74 Full-length plays - each of an hour and a half or more; of those 32 were specially written for television.

The production of the complete cycle of Shakespeare's Historical plays was a long-felt ambition. By 1960 the development of studios and technical resources \* had brought it within the possibility of achievement in television and the whole cycle was televised in 15 parts under the title An Age of Kings produced by Peter Dews.

Another major drama series of the year was based on Georges Simenon's Maioret stories - the first selection of thirteen episodes, pre-recorded \*\* by an electronic process newly developed by the BBC, justified the temerity of translating the famous French detective in television terms.

65% of the total drama output was accounted for by new works.

Engineering :P.83

BBC Engineers constructed a television camera which incorporated a zoom lens inside the body of the camera itself. Focal length can

\* Television Centre 'White City' was opened on 29 June, 1960.

\*\* Ampex Video Tape Recording.



be varied continuously from 2 inches to 40 inches giving corresponding viewing angles from 32 degrees to 1.6 degrees. (See also BBC Handbook entry (1962) Appendix (90) )

BBC Annual Report 1961-1962 : (Cmnd 1839) HMSO, London : P.20

In a country which invented the detective story it is not perhaps surprising that the thriller and the crime serial continued to draw large audiences. A second series of Simenon's Maigret stories was even more successful than the first, attracting a regular Monday evening audience of some 12 million people. Larger audiences, still, followed the adventures of the police crime patrols in Z-Cars, a series which owed much to its gritty Northern quality, its human but unsentimental delineation of character, and its catchy signature tune.

Drama Documentary : P.119

After the Crash - about the Accidents Investigation Branch of the Ministry of Aviation; The Move Up Country - a day in the life of an Army Officer; The Net - about H.M. Immigration Service at London Airport; Struck Off - about a doctor who is struck off the Medical Register; Our Mr. Ambler - a series about an Insurance Investigator; Z Cars - a series about Police Patrol Cars in the North of England.

BBC Annual Report 1962-1963 : (Cmnd 2160) HMSO, London : P.26

A greater amount of time has been devoted in the year under review to dramatic series and serials. Maigret, Z Cars, Dr. Finlay's Casebook and in the later part of the year Moonstrike have all been popular with large numbers of viewers. In their different ways, each attained the highest standards of writing, production and performance.

BBC Annual Report 1963-1964 : (Cmnd 2503) HMSO. London : P.22-23

#### Drama

Television Drama, in the more limited sense of the latter word, continues to present problems and these were seen in their clearest form in two new series which were inaugurated during the year. The first of these presented under the title of First Night, plays written specially for television by the best of the younger

British writers on themes of contemporary relevance. Like all experiments it was not invariably successful but it produced some distinguished plays e.g. Terence Frisby's Guilty and Alan Sharp's Funny Noises with their Mouths.

The other series entitled Festival was designed to provide a wide variety of high quality plays for the 'specialist' viewer of television drama. Aristophanes - to - Chekhov and Sartre.

There have been criticisms of the content of some of the individual plays in these two series. These criticisms will not make the BBC abandon its policy of presenting established plays by established playwrights about the problems of sex and violence in human relations, which have been the very stuff of drama since it was first written. Nor will it change the BBC's belief that the serious writers of today must be allowed to say freely what they feel about the society in which they live. But they have made the BBC think very carefully about the ways in which television drama should be presented.

The BBC cannot ignore the predominant literary mood of estrangement and loneliness, but it is faced with a very real problem insofar as contemporary writers have tended to concentrate on plays of hopelessness and on certain aspects of domestic tragedy. If by accident or inadequate planning it allows plays of a certain type to be bunched together so as to create an impression of nihilism and ugliness in its own approach to life, then that is a fault which can and must be remedied. If at any time there is too gross or too intimate a presentation of sex on the screen this too is something which should be corrected.

This is not the same thing as ignoring the realities of sex and violence.

Plays which may by their themes shock some and move or please others will continue to be shown. But the BBC will try to ensure that they are plays by writers of honesty and integrity, that scenes which assault the emotions are kept to the minimum necessary to establish dramatic points and not included merely for the sake of sensationalism and that there is an overall balance of style, period and content.

#### Series : P.23

Television Drama series held their own successfully. Z Cars maintained its established high level with an audience of fourteen million and a Sunday afternoon repeat audience of 8 million.



Dr. Finlay's Casebook achieved audiences of between 12 and 17 million and the third and final series of Maigret drew even larger audiences.

BBC Annual Report 1964-1965 contained no account of particular note on Drama.

BBC Annual Report 1965-1966: (Cmnd 3122) HMSO, London .P.22

#### Drama:

In the large output of dramatic programmes of all kinds, single plays, especially those concerned with the contemporary British scene, provoked the most comment and controversy.

The Wednesday Play series, in particular, gave opportunities to new writers and young directors to break fresh ground in styles of production. Not all of the specially commissioned plays proved entirely acceptable, especially to older members of the audience, sometimes because of their themes or the frankness of the language used.

Z Cars continued up to the end of 1965 when it was replaced by a new series, also produced by David Rose called Softly, Softly. The series gained in popularity, but by the end of the year it had not commanded the devotion which Z Cars enjoyed in its heyday. 660 dramatic programmes mounted by the Drama Group in the course of the year.

The Wednesday Play included: (P.155)

And Did Those Feet by David Mercer.

Up the Junction by Nell Dunn

Stand Up, Stand Up for Nigel Barton by Dennis Potter.

A Game Like - Only a Game by John Hopkins.

#### Documentaries and Features: P.22

The re-organisation of the Television Talks Group in April 1965 resulted in the formation of a new Documentary Department devoted entirely to the making of films. For the first time the BBC TV Service has had a production department exclusively concerned with film-making. The evolution of documentary film production advanced considerably during the year within this new framework. The use of the new light-weight, sound-film cameras, of 16mm film and of the so-called televerité techniques became common place,

and this not only benefited the style of documentary but made it possible to make film more cheaply and quickly throughout the world, in circumstances where a few years ago, for practical reasons, it would often have been out of the question..... controversial films like *The War Game* - the fact that this film was ultimately found unsuitable for transmission indiscriminately into television homes is one of the prices that the BBC has to pay from being in the vanguard, and for being prepared to sponsor experiments rather than to rely on established and acceptable subject matter and treatment.

BBC Annual Report 1966-1967 : HMSO, London: P.14-15

The Wednesday Play - Cathy Come Home by Jeremy Sandford and Kenneth Loach.

The Wednesday Play provided perhaps the most natural outlet for original writing for Television. Here plays of recognised distinction were created by such writers as John Hopkins, John Mortimer, Dennis Potter, Jim Allen, David Halliwell, Simon Gray. These and others are not only writing for BBC TV but are increasingly helping to nourish the theatre and the cinema. So too are the growing band of directors, producers and actors who were brought up in Television and are now more and more making the running in the plays and films produced in this country. One writer whose Wednesday Play became famous over-night was Jeremy Sandford. His Cathy Come Home (1966) was, on the surface, no more than a simple, rather tragic story, of two young people who married and became homeless when trying to bring up children in a large town. When first shown in November, however, the play, brilliantly handled by Tony Garnett and Ken Loach, started an immediate debate on whether the story was a piece of special pleading, or whether it was an accurate version in dramatic form of what can happen to some families in Britain today, despite the amenities of the Welfare State. Some viewers outraged by what they saw, even offered a room in their own house to any homeless couple. Several local officials thought the programme misleading; but others were especially vehement that some kind of private showing should be made compulsory for all social workers. In January, in response to deep public interest, the BBC repeated the programme. It has been calculated that, in all, 19 million viewers saw one or other of the showings, while 5 million appear to have watched it twice.



Cast: Cathy - Carol White, Reg (her husband) Ray Brooks,  
The children - Sean and Stephen King.

P.140

The Wednesday Play - a series of plays about life today -  
(included)

Cock, Hen and Courting Pit by David Halliwell.

Where the Buffalo Roam by Dennis Potter.

The Head Waiter by John Mortimer.

Everyone's Rich Except Us by Thomas Clarke.

In Two Minds by David Mercer.

## APPENDIX 92

Some Trends in BBC TV Drama 1937-71 : BBC TV Script Unit, London.

- 1937-39 - Mainly Stage Plays.  
 Among the first:  
     "The Man with the Flower in his Mouth"  
         (Pirandello) 20.7.37.  
         Produced by Royston Morley.  
 Last pre-war production:  
     "The Happy Hangman" (Harold Brighouse) 30.7.39
- 1946 - Dramatisation of Novels - among the first post-war productions, e.g. "The Silence of the Sea" (Vercors) 7.6.46  
 Adapted by Cyril Connolly.
- 1946-48 - Drama Documentaries on social problems, pioneered by Michael Barry, Robert Barr and Duncan Ross, who wrote the "Magistrate's Court" series, produced by Ian Atkins.
- 1950 - BBC successfully resists pressure by some M.P.s to stop transmission of "Party Manners", a political comedy by Val Gielgud.  
 (See correspondence at Written Archives Centre, Caversham).
- 1951 - The Coming of Serials :  
     The first Classic Serial :  
     "The Warden" (Trollope), dramatised by Cedric Wallis.  
     The First Thriller Serial:  
     "The Broken Horseshoe" by Francis Durbridge.
- 1952-62 - Training for Television:  
     Many new writers attached to Drama Script Section to learn about television techniques and to teach other writers.  
     First results:  
     "The Quatermass Experiment" by Nigel Kneale (1953), who, a year later, successfully dramatised "1984" (Orwell)  
     Other staff writers included Giles Cooper, John Hopkins, Leo Lehman, Philip Mackie, Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath and Anthony Steven.
- 1955 - Central Script Section formed under Donald Wilson, controlling all professionally written



scripts throughout the Television Service.

(Commercial Television begins)

- 1955-60 - Section enlarged to Television Script Department.  
First volume of BBC Television Plays published by Michael Joseph.  
'The Langham Group' formed under Anthony Pelissier to experiment with TV Drama techniques.
- 1959-62 - The New Social Realism:  
First Documentary Drama about (only human) police: "Who, Me?" by Colin Morris. (This was repeated on BBC-2 in April, 1964, the first drama on the new channel).  
  
Developed into 4-part series:  
"Jacks and Knaves" by Colin Morris (1961)  
  
Developed into series:  
"Z Cars" by Troy Kennedy Martin and others.  
  
Increase of 'journalistic' approach to drama leads to formation of Documentary (Drama) Section under Elwyn Jones.
- 1960 - True Grit from the Regions:  
  
Italia Prize-Winner and one of the first plays to be telerecorded:  
"Soldier, Soldier" by John Arden.  
  
Notable debut:  
"The Train Set" by David Turner.
- 1960-61 - 'The Television Playwright' - This was the title of a series, the first of its kind, of 20 plays specially written for BBC TV. Much influenced by the American success of Paddy Chayevsky, British playwrights tended towards the domestic interior - especially the 'kitchen sink'. Contributors included John Hopkins, John Osborne and John Whiting.  
  
Debut of TV's most serious and socially-conscious dramatist:  
"Where the Difference Begins" by David Mercer. 15. 12. 61.  
  
The first big long-running series:  
"Maigret" (Simenon), dramatised by Giles Cooper and others.  
  
Further experiments with simpler story-telling techniques;

"Storyboard" series, produced by James MacTaggart.

1962 -

Popular Tele-Drama.

First BBC successful 'Soap Opera' :  
"Compact" (Adair/Ling), which runs  
for 373 episodes.

First of:  
"Dr.Finlay's Casebook"( Cronin/Tilsley)  
which runs off and on until 1971.

First "Largest Theatre in the World" for  
Eurovision:  
"Heart to Heart" by Terence Rattigan.

1963 -

Sydney Newman arrives: After successfully  
producing ABC's "Armchair Theatre",  
Newman does a channel-crossing and  
creates BBC TV Drama Group, with 3  
separate departments: Series,  
Serials and Plays.

Some of Script Department's functions  
taken over by the Group's new Script  
Editors. Remaining script  
responsibilities handed to newly-  
formed Television Script Unit.

First Newman innovation:  
"Dr.Who" and "The Daleks" (Terry  
Nation).

1964-65 -

BBC-2 Arrives : Drama programmes increase rapidly  
as the new channel enlarges scope.

Classic Serials divided into 'the  
family serial' on BBC-1 and 'the  
more adult serial' on BBC-2,  
starting with:  
"Madam Bovary", dramatised by Giles  
Cooper.

Serials of this sort and the new  
writers' new nursery slope, "Thirty  
Minute Theatre", have remained a  
regular ingredient of BBC-2 drama.

N.B. "Portrait of a Lady",  
dramatised by Jack Pulman (1968)

1964-68 -

Dawn of "The Wednesday Play".

A new group of young TV enthusiasts  
begins to emerge with "Diary of a  
Young Man", a six-part serial



1964-68 cont'd...

written by Troy Kennedy Martin and John McGrath, produced and directed by James MacTaggart and Ken Loach.

Soon after, MacTaggart takes over (from Peter Luke) "The Wednesday Play" and gives a frank new look to social realism. "Up the Junction" (Nell Dunn) is followed by Dennis Potter's two plays about Nigel Barton.

Tony Garnett joins the circle in 1966 and produces "Cathy Come Home" (Jeremy Sandford). It wins Italia Prize. The tape-recorded naturalism of the treatment blurs the boundaries of drama and documentary more than ever.

Other notable Garnett productions in this style: "The Lump" (Jim Allen) 1967.  
 "In Two Minds" (David Mercer) 1967  
 "The Golden Vision" (Smith/Honeycombe) 1968

The day of the anti-establishment anti-hero.

The audience begins to ask: "Why are television plays 'sordid'?"

From now on, the single play in jeopardy - Newman champions the need to keep the Single Play slots as training grounds for original playwriting.

#### Aiming At The Art-Form

Two other views of the purely tele-visual play, with un-topical themes :

"Silent Song" - play without words, dramatised by Hugh Leonard from a Frank O'Connor story. (Italia Prize-winner).

"Talking to a Stranger" - John Hopkins' multi-viewpoint tetralogy, his major work, exploring four characters in depth.

Other remarkable deep character studies (in 1968):

"Charlie" by Alun Owen.

"Let's Murder Vivaldi" by David Mercer.

1967

Crest of the Drama Wave.

Colour arrives on BBC-2

'Thirty Minute Theatre' is the first drama series in colour.

- 1967 cont'd.... - Donald Wilson produces "The Forsyte Saga".  
 Nearly 1,000 drama programmes  
 transmitted this year (including  
 repeats) - the most ever. BBC is the  
 biggest purveyor of drama in the world.
- 1968-70 - More Tele-Films.  
 Some plays now all on film:  
 e.g. "The Gorge" (Peter Nichols).  
 "The Lie" (Ingmar Bergman).
- 1968-71 - More Frankness .  
 Heterosexual (with violence):  
 "The Year of the Sex Olympics"  
 (Nigel Kneale).  
 Homosexual (with pot):  
 "Circle Line" (Stephen Gilbert)  
 Winner of Student Play competition.  
 Jesus Christ:  
 "Son of Man" (Potter)
- 1969-71 - The Biographical Back-Lash - and escape  
 into costume drama - a possible  
 reaction to too much contemporary  
 significance? :
- Notably:  
 "The Six Wives of Henry VIII")  
 " Elizabeth R" )Pro-  
 "Casanova" (Potter) )moted  
 "Cider with Rosie (Lee/ )by  
 Whitemore) )Gerald  
 Savory.  
 "Voyage Around My Father" (John  
 Mortimer)  
 "Mad Jack" (Tom Clarke)



## APPENDIX 93

List of Major BBC dates: BBC Handbooks : BBC Publication :1922

14 Nov. Daily broadcasting began from the London Station of the British Broadcasting Company (2LO)

1923

28 Sep. First issue of Radio Times published.

1927

1 Jan. The British Broadcasting Corporation constituted under Royal Charter for ten years.

1928

30 Oct. Inauguration of experimental television transmission of still pictures by the Fultograph process from Daventry.

1929

16 Jan. First issue of The Listener published.

1932

2 May. Broadcasting House, London, opened.

22 Aug. First experimental television programme from Studio BB Broadcasting House, 30-line system : Baird process taken over by the BBC.

25 Dec. First Round-the-Empire Christmas Day programme and broadcast message by King George V.

1936

2 Nov. High-definition Television Service from Alexandra Palace officially inaugurated.

1937

1 Jan. Royal Charter renewed for ten years.

12 May. Coronation of King George VI : First Outside Broadcast by Television Service.

1939

1 Sep. Television Service closed down for reasons of national defence.

1946.

- 16 Apr. BBC Quarterly first published - discontinued 18 Oct. 1954.
- 1 Jun. Broadcast receiving licence increased to £1 for Sound ;  
licence for Television and Sound introduced at £2.
- 7 Jun. Television Service resumed.

1947

- 1 Jan. Royal Charter renewed for five years.

1948

- 11 Oct. First television Outside Broadcast from No.10 Downing  
Street: Commonwealth Conference.

1949

- 17 Dec. Sutton Coldfield television transmitting station  
opened.

1950

- 27 Aug. First television Outside Broadcast from the Continent  
(Calais).
- 30 Sep. First 'live' air to ground television broadcast (from  
an aircraft in flight).

1951

- April. Lime Grove Studios opened.
- 12 Oct. Holme Moss Television transmitting station opened.

1952

- 1 Jan. 1947 Royal Charter extended for six months.
- 14 Mar. Kirk O'Shotts television transmitting station opened.
- 21 Apr. First direct television from Paris (experimental)
- 5 May First School television programme (4 weeks experiment)
- 1 Jul. Royal Charter renewed for ten years.
- 8 Jul. First public transmission in the UK of television from  
Paris.
- 15 Aug. Wenvoe television transmitting station opened.

1953

- 2 Jun. Coronation ceremony televised for the first time.
- 15 Jun. Television relayed from ship at sea for the first time  
during the Royal Naval Review.



1954

- 1 Jun. Broadcasting receiving licence for sound to remain at £1; television and sound combined licence increased to £3.
- 6 Jun. - First European exchange of television programmes with  
4 Jul. eight countries taking part.

1955

- 2 May. First VHF Sound broadcasting transmitting station opened at Wrotham.
- 15 Sep. First section of permanent two-way television link with Continent completed.
- 10 Oct. Colour television test transmissions began from Alexandra Palace.
- 20 Oct. Demonstration of colour television to members of the press.
- 17 Nov. First 'live' television programme from Northern Ireland.

1956

- 28 Mar. Crystal Palace television transmitting station opened replacing Alexandra Palace.
- 3 Apr. First public colour television test transmission from Alexandra Palace.
- 27 Apr. First ministerial television broadcast (Prime Minister)
- 16 Jun. First 'live' television broadcast from a submarine at sea.
- 4 Aug. First television transmission from a helicopter.
- 5 Nov. The first series of experimental colour television transmissions to include 'live' pictures from Alexandra Palace studios and Crystal Palace transmitter began.

1957

- 30/31 Jan. Demonstration of colour television reception to members of both Houses of Parliament.
- 1 Aug. Sound and TV combined licence raised to £4 (i.e. £3 plus £1 excise duty)
- 24 Sep. BBC TV for Schools began.
- 30 Sep. Re-organisation of sound radio programmes - Network Three began.
- 29 Oct. First BBC unattended TV studio brought into use at St. Stephen's House opposite the House of Commons.
- 11 Nov. Experimental television transmissions started in Band V on 405-lines from Crystal Palace.
- 25 Dec. H.M. the Queen's Christmas broadcast televised for the first time (heard simultaneously on sound)

1958

- 13/14 Jan. Stereophonic test transmissions from London transmitters - 11/17 May from transmitters throughout the U.K.
- 8 Apr. First public demonstration of VERA (Vision Electronic Recording Apparatus) for magnetic recording of TV pictures. First programme used on 14 April.
- 5 May Experimental television transmissions started in Band V on 625-lines from Crystal Palace.
- 1 Oct. Ampex VTR - Broadcast recording of a three minute trailer for the production of A Tale of Two Cities.
- 28 Oct. State opening of Parliament televised for first time.

1959 BBC Purchase second Ampex VTR.

- 1 Mar. Third programme/Network Three VHF transmissions began from Wenvoe.
- 17 Jun. First public demonstration of transmission of films for television by transatlantic cable; first programme used 18 June.
- 1 Jul. New Post Office Eurovision link across English Channel opened.
- 19 Dec. New BBC television standards converter (European to N.American standards) used for first time to produce 525-line tapes of Western Summit Conference in Paris.

1960 (Granada Television perfects electronic editing of video-tape)

- 27 Mar. First transmission of colour television between Paris and London demonstrated at the Institute of Electrical Engineers in London.
- 1 Jun. Report of Television Advisory Committee 1960 published.
- 29 Jun. Television Centre (White City) opened. First programmes transmitted from Studio 3.
- 8 Sep. Pilkington Committee on the future of British Broadcasting.
- 19 Sep. Television for Schools; morning transmissions began.

1961

- 8 Jan. Studio 4 at Television Centre brought into service.
- 14 Apr. First television broadcast from Russia seen by BBC viewers of welcome in Moscow of first 'space man' Major Gagarin.
- 10 May. Studio 2 at Television Centre brought into service.
- 10 Jun. The first 'live' television broadcast from London to USSR - The Trooping of the Colour.
- 8 Jul. First television broadcast London to Hungary - Wimbledon tennis.
- 22 Aug. First BBC demonstration of 'live' colour television to public at National Radio Show.



1961 Cont'd.....

29 Aug. Studio 5 at Television Centre brought into service.

1962

17 May. Royal Charter extended to 29 July 1964.

11 Jul. First exchange of live transatlantic programmes by  
Satellite 'Telstar'

22 Aug. BBC 625-line colour pictures demonstrated at Earls  
- 1 Sep. Court Radio Show.

3 Sep. BBC TV field trials on 625-lines VHF bands began from  
Crystal Palace.