

BBC ENTERPRISES PRESENTS THE

BBC

RADIO S·H·O·W

EARLS COURT
19
OCTOBER
1988



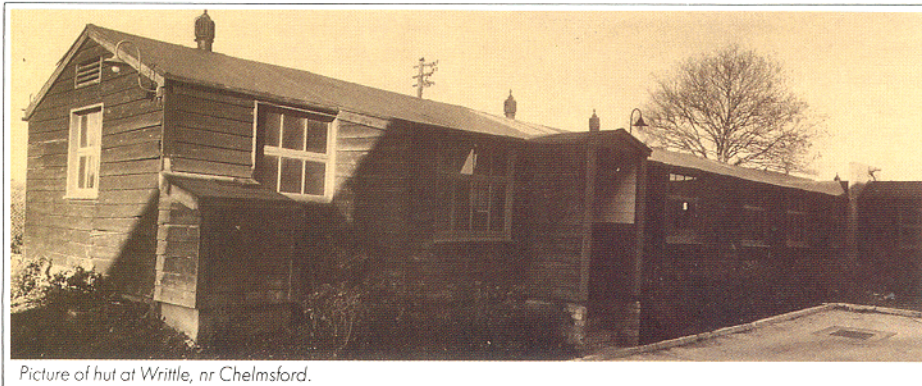
THE STORY OF RADIO

Glyn Worsnip

There are hundreds of thousands of men and women in Britain today who can remember when there was no such thing as radio. Certainly not the kind on which you could listen to programmes.

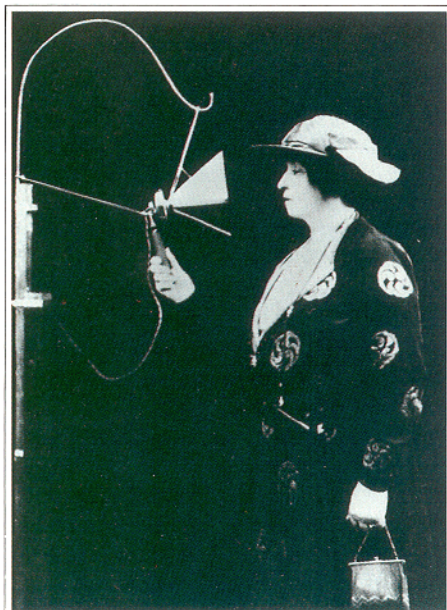
Those who were alive in the first twenty years of the century were probably aware from the newspapers that scientists were experimenting with sound waves and morse code, under the general heading 'wireless telegraphy'.

In an edition of the 1988 *Brain of Britain* quiz on Radio 4, competitors were asked from which location the first public British radio programmes were transmitted. They guessed at all the larger provincial cities in turn, but every one of them was wrong. The correct answer was Chelmsford. To be more precise, a hut at Writtle near Chelmsford. It was from there that Guglielmo Marconi began two daily programmes in February 1920.



Picture of hut at Writtle, nr Chelmsford.

Four months later on June 20th came the great turning point in public awareness of broadcasting. Dame Nellie Melba gave a special concert in English, Italian and French, sponsored by the *Daily Mail*. The event (also from Chelmsford) was broadcast all over Europe, and even in parts of North America. Radio, as a means of entertainment, had arrived.



Dame Nellie Melba with improvised Peel Connor microphone, broadcasting from the experimental Marconi Station at the Chelmsford works of the Marconi Company.

H. M. Dowsett, who could manage to write two thick volumes called *Wireless Telephony & Broadcasting* as early as 1923, summed up the occasion thus:

'The renown of the singer, the world-wide attention which was given to her performance, the great distances at which good reception was obtained, all combined to give the Melba Concert the atmosphere of a great initiation ceremony, and the era of broadcasting for one public amusement, of which this was an ideal example, may be said to have completed its preliminary trials and to have definitely launched on its meteoric career from this date.'

The 'preliminary trials' had been in progress for almost sixty years, since 1864, when a Professor of Experimental Physics at Cambridge, James Clerk Maxwell, presented his theory of the existence of electromagnetic waves. Thereafter scientists made waves on both sides of the Atlantic. In the 1880's Edison showed that an electric current could jump through space; and Hertz, that you could catch the waves with a receiver called a 'resonator', and that they could be reflected with a metal sheet like a mirror. In 1890, a Frenchman, Edouard Branly, designed a detector of wireless waves. Four years later an Englishman, Sir Oliver Lodge, improved this 'coherer' and used it while sending messages in morse code, thus inventing 'wireless telegraphy'. In 1897 he discovered how to select a chosen transmitting station by means of 'tuning' with his 'Tuning Inductance Circuit'. But it was the Italian Marconi who put these elements together. Within the next few years the tireless Marconi sent morse code for more than a mile;

came to England and patented his system; formed the first commercial company manufacturing radio apparatus, (The Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company); saw his system adopted for ship-to-shore morse communications; and eventually (1901) received a pre-arranged morse code signal (the letter 'S') transmitted across the Atlantic.

Work by J. A. Fleming in England, and Lee de Forest in America led to better amplification, and much purer radio waves of more stable frequency. Fleming's 'Diode' – a two-electrode valve detected and 'rectified' the incoming high frequency alternating currents picked up by the receiver's aerial, and changed them into direct current for the headphones. De Forest's 'audion triode' included a third electrode which made possible transmission over far greater distances.

By 1910 not only were radio messages between land stations and ships commonplace, but air-to-ground radio contact had been established from an aircraft.

In 1913, A. Meissner of the German Telefunken Company made the first valve transmitter capable of sending steady continuous waves.

In 1918 a radiotelegraph message from the Marconi long-wave station at Caernarfon in Wales was received more than 11,000 miles away in Australia. Radio had, in more senses than one, come a long way; but what was to be most revolutionary, and ensure that radio was of huge significance to the general public, was the broadcasting of speech and music.

Previous experiments had shown that speech *could* be transmitted by radio. As early as 1902 the American R. A. Fessenden working at Pittsburgh University succeeded in using wireless waves to carry the human voice. Four years later, on Christmas Eve 1906, at Brant Rock, Massachusetts, he transmitted 'the first broadcast programme in history', containing both music and speech, over several hundred miles. It was not, however, until 1914 that Marconi began to experiment from London, and by then the Americans were well ahead. In 1915 the American Telephone and Telegraph Company sent speech signals from Arlington, Virginia, to Paris, a distance of 3500 miles. Later they sent speech 5000 miles to Honolulu.

In Britain, while Europe was engulfed in the Great War, wireless engineers were concerned with military applications of the new technology, and it was not until 1919 that a Marconi engineer was heard across the Atlantic from Ballybunion in Ireland.

In 1916 David Sarnoff of the American Marconi company, had recommended

that stations be built for broadcasting speech and music, and that a 'radio music box' be made for sale to the general public.

'This device', he wrote, 'must be arranged to receive on several wavelengths with the throw of a switch or the pressing of a button. The radio music box can be supplied with amplifying tubes, and a loud-speaking telephone, all of which can be neatly mounted in a box.'

He would have been astonished at the size of the box such receiving apparatus can be contained in these days; and even more at the television receiver we now casually refer to as 'the box'.

By the time 'radio' reached the general public, many individuals had contributed to the new science. P. P. Eckersley, an engineer, and head of



Captain P. P. Eckersley.

Marconi's experimental radio station before becoming one of the most enterprising and imaginative pioneers at the BBC, said this:

'Neither Marconi, nor anyone else, invented wireless. Michael Faraday found out all about electricity. And then James Clerk Maxwell worked at Faraday by maths. Afterward Hertz in Germany read Maxwell's maths paper, and so was able to send electric waves – what you call 'wireless', you know, – across his laboratory. Marconi and Lodge – don't forget Professor Lodge – repeated Hertz's experiments on a large scale, and sent messages over long distances.'

Even Eckersley somehow seems to have failed to remember the American contribution.

The two methods by which the public received broadcasts were the 'crystal set' and the 'valve' radio.

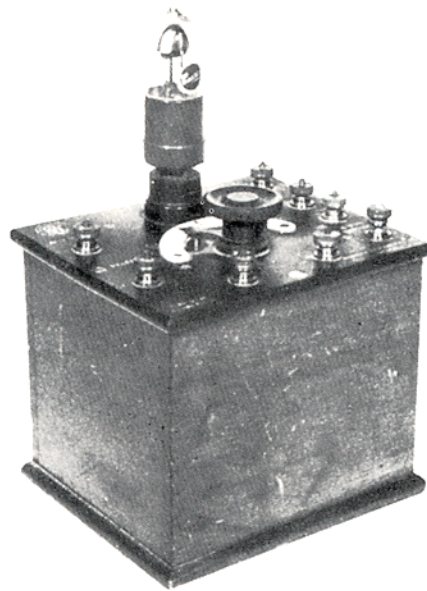


THE CRYSTAL SET

In 1906 H. H. Dunwoody discovered that crystals of carborundum could 'rectify' high frequency wireless waves, enabling the signal to be heard on headphones. This led to the realisation that other crystals (eg: iron pyrites, silicon, and zincite) could do the same when in contact with a piece of wire; hence the Crystal Set, to which most people during the pioneering days of broadcasting in the '20s 'listened in'. It was cheap to buy (as little as 10/6 [52½p]) and simple to operate. Many advertisements showed children operating it. There were no batteries to buy and keep charged, and no valves to replace when they got burnt out. The power came directly from the transmitted waves picked up by the aerial. But the aerial was up to a hundred feet long and specially constructed on the roof or over a garden shed. New listeners were prepared to go to any lengths to get good reception if this advertisement of 1923 is anything to go by, with masts costing 4, 6 and 8 times more than the set itself. With one set, an aerial, and a good earth wire you could pick up a station 20 miles away! Before a signal could be heard the cat's whisker had to be adjusted so that it just touched the crystal in a position where it produced a loud click in the headphones. The pro-gramme was then tuned in with a tuning knob, and once on a station the cat's whisker again adjusted to get the loudest signal.

The more the sets of headphones, the weaker the signal. The earth wire led to a mains water pipe or a metal plate buried in preferably damp ground. Keen gardeners had the advantage since they could water their radio earth at the same time as their plants. So, one length of wire went to the aerial, one to the earth, and a third to the headphones. Crystal clear it may have been, but wire-less it was not!

All the same, during the first half of the twenties there were four times as many crystal set users as users of electrical valve sets, and there were even crystal sets for the blind, with easy-to-manage spring-loaded cats whiskers, and dial markings in braille.



THE VALVE SET

When the wireless was called a 'set' they really meant it. It was made from a number of items all linked together, and with a mass of complicated controls. The valve 'set' was powered by high tension batteries. The valves were known as 'bright emitters' because they lit up enough to read by; but they were costly (a guinea each) and tended to burn out quickly. The filaments of the valves were powered by an 'accumulator' which had to be re-charged every two or three months. 'Receivers' with two or more valves could power a horn loud-speaker, which meant more than one person at a time could hear it, and earphones were not needed. The family had to sit facing the set, much as they were later to do with television.

By 1922 wireless apparatus were already being disguised to look like other more familiar objects, such as lacquer-work china cupboards and bureaux, and good valve sets cost about three times the average month's wages – between £12 and £25. For the first couple of years manufacturers could protect themselves against foreign competition by becoming a 'member' of the BBC. All sets sold in this country had to be of British manufacture, tested and approved by the Post Office, and stamped with the BBC stamp. By 1926, the first self-contained sets were on the market. They could be plugged straight into an electric light socket; expensive batteries and accumulators were no longer needed, they used an internal aerial, and had only three knobs to operate on a vertical rather than horizontal deck.

Crystal sets were on their way out, and the wireless, instead of being a Heath Robinson piece of scientific equipment, had become part of the living room furniture.

THE FIRST RADIO SHOW

Before the BBC had even been formed there had been two Radio Exhibitions by wireless manufacturers to promote the exciting new trade. The International Radio Exhibition & Convention was held at the Central Hall Westminster in September 1922. On display were component parts for amateur wireless builders (of which there were many), lectures by experts, and at least four wireless magazines. From the start the wireless was seen as potentially a social service. Visitors were given examples, for instance, of the use of wireless in tracking down criminals!

Before the month was out there was another exhibition in Westminster, an all-British affair, this time at the Horticultural Hall. The 'wonderful new wireless' had well and truly arrived.

TRIAL AND ERROR

Wireless was still something of a mystery to both producers and performers. A distinguished Italian tenor could not be persuaded against the firm belief that the louder he sang, the more people could hear him. Eventually the overburdened microphone had to be carried into the corridor. P. P. Eckersley, then still with Marconi at Chelmsford, was the first DJ, introducing gramophone records with impromptu comments. Later he presented an opera programme in which he sang all the parts himself.

The first drama also came from Chelmsford – an amateur reading of *Cyrano de Bergerac*; and when the station finally closed down the sound of a cork being removed from a bottle was made with a primitive special effect – a pop gun.

Meanwhile, in early 1922, Marconi himself had moved to the big city, London, and the most famous early station of them all had begun broadcasting – 2 LO. It was allowed to broadcast only between 11 and 12, or 2 and 4. Since 1904 the Wireless Telegraphy Act had made it mandatory for all transmitters and receivers to hold a licence. Initially no music was permitted, but when it did start in the evenings the reproductions were so unsatisfactory that the first listeners' complaints file was opened. Other companies were also broadcasting in 1922 – 2ZY in Manchester, 5IT in Birmingham, and 2WP in London. There was considerable confusion over wavelengths. Emergency channels were blotted out by music programmes, questions were asked in parliament, and everyone began to realise the dangers of 'an undisciplined cacophony' of sound on the airwaves. Eventually, at a meeting of representatives from over 200 companies, the

British Broadcasting Company was formed, with the aim of getting a licence from the Postmaster General to broadcast 'news, information, concerts, lectures, educational matter, speeches, weather reports, theatrical entertainment, and any other matter permitted'. In early 1923 the licence was granted, and the BBC began broadcasting on a regular basis. It was still a profit-making private company. Its General Manager was a Scottish clergyman's son, a 33 year old called John Reith, with experience in an engineering company. The salary was £1750 a year and in his diary he wrote 'I am profoundly thankful to God for his goodness in this matter. It is all His doing.'

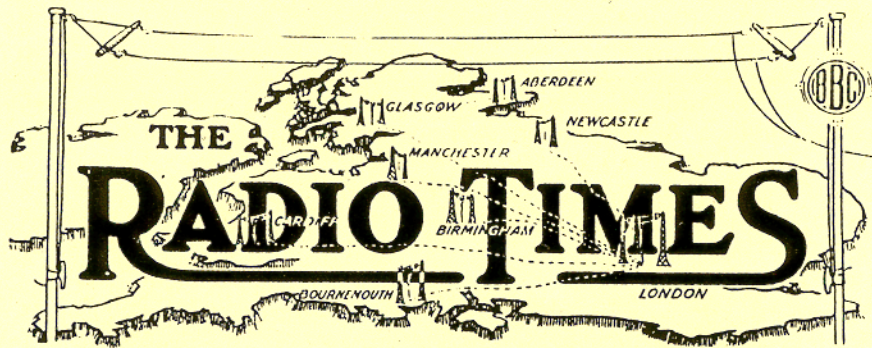
SIR JOHN REITH

Reith has been accused of acting as God in the matter of broadcasting. Paternalistic he certainly was. His policy was to give listeners what he felt they ought to hear rather than what they actually wanted to hear, but his part in the setting up of broadcasting was monumental. The result was, in the words of Derek Parker, one of the many writers on radio history, 'arguably the best informed public in the western world' – particularly in classical music. Moreover he stoutly defended broadcasting against the jeremiahs and the sceptics, the politicians and the press. There were those who said that cinemas and theatres would be forced to close, that people would stop talking to each other, stop thinking for themselves, that



Sir John Reith. The BBC's first Director-General.

church services and concerts would become unattended, that bridge parties would be interrupted . . . but Reith was as unshakeable in his belief in the necessity of broadcasting as he was in its importance. He was not greatly



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For the Week Commencing SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30th.

LONDON CARDIFF
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LORD GAINFORD'S MESSAGE TO LISTENERS.

P. P. ECKERSLEY ON "SIMULTANEOUS BROADCASTING."

A SONG OF ANCIENT CHINA.

GOSSIP ABOUT ARTISTES.

WIRELESS HUMOUR.

THE "UNCLES" CORNER.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS.

WHAT'S IN THE AIR?

By ARTHUR R. BURROWS, Director of Programmes.

HULLO, EVERYONE!

We will now give you *The Radio Times*. The good news first. The Broadshow of Broadcasting.

May you never be late for your favourite wave length.

Six of 100,000 miles per second; five-hour non-stop.

Family season ticket: First Class, 10s. per year.

[All this, presumably, is "by the way" and not "In the Air."—Edison.]

So I am instructed to write about programmes and not "talk like an Uncle."

Let me tell you all about our plans.

Well, though! I—I'm just a little bit meany. My predecessor in the broadcasting business made a mistake of this character with painful consequences.

You probably remember the incident.

A Company, with distinguished Directors, having lofty ambitions, established a power-station at Westminster. Despite quite a stirring programme there were no oscillations, owing to Government intervention. The Director (Gullo Hawke) and his colleagues somehow lost their heads, and the long anticipated report failed to materialize.

When WE broadcast Parliament—and it's bound to happen this century or next—the process will be a more dignified one than that planned in 1905. The fate of the vulpits may be another matter.

Perhaps, after all, it is by stepping clear of the pitfalls of ancient and modern history that British broadcasting has got so far without any serious mishaps. (Touch wood!)

Do you know that from November 14th last year until now, with only six out of eight projects in operation, and despite oppo-

sition from some of the

"Big Names" in the entertainment industry, we have shaken the ether of Great Britain for approximately 8,000 hours and have transmitted roughly 1,700 distinct evening programmes.

How this ether-shaking process has been carried through so uninterruptedly is for my unrepentant colleague, Captain Ekersley, to tell (possibly with Morse and reactive obligations). The fact remains that if our plans for the next twelve months go through, even in their present basic form, we shall add to this record 2,500 other distinct programmes, consisting of 10,500 hours of ever-changing musical, dramatic, and instructive entertainment.

Two thousand five hundred distinct programmes!

[Perhaps it IS as well that your comments are inaudible.]

And some folk, pressing for a six-hour day!

Have you ever played jigsaw?

At 2, Savoy Hill, London, W.C.2, is the biggest jigsaw puzzle yet invented, railway time-tables not excepted. It goes by the name of simultaneous broadcasting, a process which comes into existence so far as our musical programmes are concerned on Monday next, October 1st. For some weeks now the writer and others of the same Department, all in varying states of mental distress, have pored over this latest brain-teaser, trying to coax a refractory twiddle-bit into some time-space for which it was never intended.

(Continued in column 2, page 2)



MR. ARTHUR R. BURROWS.

liked, but his staff were loyal and did as he asked. They weren't tolerated if they didn't. His insistence on religious and moral principles seems absurdly stuffy nowadays. The story goes that he once caught an announcer 'in flagrante' with a BBC secretary. He kept him on, but only on the understanding that the announcer would never again read the Epilogue. Reith ended up a bitter and disappointed man. He had often had difficulty with Governors, and when in 1938 he resigned to become Chairman of Imperial Airways, the man who made the BBC was not consulted about who was to succeed him. He turned in his BBC radio set, and, it is said, walked out through the front doors in tears.

There were clashes too with press and politicians. *Plus ça change*. Already the Marconi Company had been accused by the Daily Mail of using radio for political purposes. But the first Royal broadcast—the Prince of Wales speaking to boy scouts—had had an enormous impact; newspapers now felt bound to begin publishing the times of broadcasts in advance, although proprietors were as antagonistic as they are today,

perceiving the new medium as a threat to circulation. Indeed, up until the 2nd World War they were able to prevent the BBC broadcasting news until after 7.00 in the evening and even then it was confined to a factual, bald, and unconvincing narrative drawn from the press agencies, who were credited with copyright.

1923 saw the first 'outside broadcast' (*The Magic Flute* from Covent Garden); the first transmission from the BBC's new studios at Savoy Hill — ('quite the most pleasant club in London' said Gale Pedrick, one of the most influential of radio critics); the first broadcast chimes of Big Ben; and the first issue of *The Radio Times*, which did what it could to defend broadcasting against the attacks which were already being made upon it. Husbands, it confidently asserted, would make sure of being at home early in the evening; music would be available to those who could not go to concerts; news would reach the people faster; minds would be opened, and horizons extended.

Certainly people were listening. By 1924 2000 letters a day were reaching

the BBC offices, even though reception was not normally possible more than 30 miles from the transmitter. By 1925 Reith had 550 overworked staff (every one of whom he interviewed personally) in unsuitable and cramped conditions. Staff and visiting artistes carried germicide and nasal sprays, and there was an official rodents officer forever in search of mice in the old building. Fears were justified. In 1925 a mouse succeeded in putting 2LO off the air for nineteen minutes by taking up residence in a transmitter.

Provincial BBC stations in Manchester and Birmingham were also on the air, the latter having pioneered in 1922 what was to become one of the best known of all wireless programmes – Children’s Hour, for which the first ever radio play was written, the first story told, and the first orchestral piece played especially by a BBC Band. “Schools” programmes were broadcast in the afternoon from 1924, and there was a lot of dance music from such as the Savoy Orpheans and the Savoy Havana Band. The BBC broadcast nothing that was not authentic; chorus



Adolphe Menjou and his wife at 2LO. May 1928.

lines of dancers were recorded, and once there was a record produced containing ‘the actual sound of Fred Astaire dancing’. A somewhat less foot-tapping, but enormously popular, style came from Albert Sandler and his orchestra at Eastbourne’s *Grand Hotel* – a programme which survived for half a century. Percy Pitt, who became Director of Music in 1924 encouraged the formation of the first BBC Orchestra, which Elgar and Richard Strauss later conducted.



Savoy Orpheans July 1926.



Sir Walford Davies and the Temple Church choir boys who took part in the first schools broadcast.

Talks accounted for a good deal of broadcasting – interviews and reminiscences especially. Under the pseudonym A. J. Alan, a civil servant called Leslie Lambert became the most famous broadcaster of his day. He developed a much admired style of story telling. He would paste his script to cardboard to prevent it rustling and destroying the illusion of spontaneity. He always brought a candle into the studio in case the lights failed when he was only half way through his script, and he was said to avoid smoking and drinking for at least a week before he broadcast.

The abstemious Reith was particularly keen on broadcast prayers. England was after all a Christian country, and the Epilogue (1926) and the Daily Service (1928) became firm favourites over the decades. Reith was no less rigorous in insisting that proper use be made of the English language. 'BBC English' became famous, or infamous, depending on which way you heard it. The poet laureate Robert Bridges, Rudyard Kipling, and Bernard Shaw (who certainly didn't speak BBC English) were all members of the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English; advising on such topics as whether programmes were 'broadcast' or 'broadcasted'.

By the end of 1924, King George V, opening the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, had made his first broadcast; so had the first nightingale accompanied by a cellist (Beatrice Harrison); Compton Mackenzie had made his debut as the



Sir Compton Mackenzie.

BBC's first disc jockey; a million licences had been issued; and Ramsay MacDonald had given the first broadcast election address. Much had been achieved in a very short time.

1926 was a very important year for broadcasting – and not just because the announcers began wearing dinner jackets to read the news. It was the year



Miss Beatrice Harrison, accompanying a nightingale with her cello. August 1926.

of the General Strike, and there was a rush for sets, not least because there were no newspapers. Two and a quarter million listeners possessed the 10/- licence by November, and heaven knows how many more were what Reith defined as 'listeners-in'. The wireless became a must for those interested in the news and events of the day. Reith was not afraid of controversy, and insisted on presenting both sides of the argument. He seemed very much an establishment figure, (and personally announced the end of the strike on the one o'clock news) but his stubborn efforts to prevent the BBC becoming a mouthpiece for the government set guidelines for a battle which has continued to the present day.

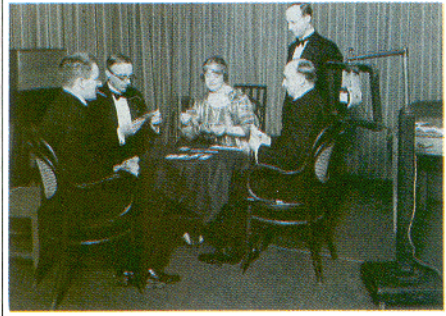
By a curious chance, 1926 was also the year politicians and businessmen realised that broadcasting was far too important to be left to broadcasters. One of many committees on the future of broadcasting, the Crawford Committee, reported, and its recommendation accepted by Parliament. On the last day of December the British Broadcasting Company ceased to exist, and became a public corporation; the British Broadcasting Corporation, with a chairman and a board of governors. Sir John Reith, as he became in 1927, was its first Director General.

During the next ten years the wireless became the most important medium of news and entertainment for most people in Britain, despite the advice to listeners contained in the 1930 Year book to 'give the wireless a rest now and then'! Even Sir John Reith, despite his mission 'to educate, inform, and entertain' conceded that part of BBC policy was to offer 'relaxation'.

'Mitigation of the strain of high-

pressure life, such as the last generation scarcely knew, is a primary social necessity, and that necessity must be satisfied.'

Sports coverage was obviously one way of mitigating the strain, though the strain it put upon BBC staff and resources in the beginning was considerable. Among many 'firsts' by the outside broadcasts team during that first year of the Corporation was a commentary on four peers playing bridge, a commentator being held

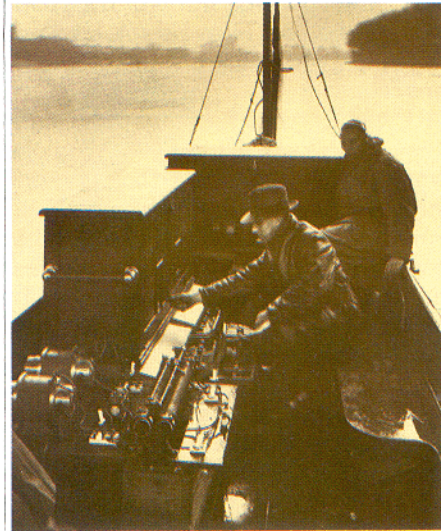


hanging over a stand roof while he described events in the Derby unsaddling enclosure 60 feet below and John Snagge commentating on a football match without knowing who the players were. Nevertheless the BBC was now allowed to broadcast full commentaries on sports events, and rugby, soccer, The Grand National, The Boat Race, a golf championship and Wimbledon were all covered in the first year. It was the start of a tradition of outside sports coverage in which the BBC has always reigned supreme.

Outside broadcasts were by no means confined to sport. In 1927 too there was a chamber concert from France, a debate between Bernard Shaw and G. K. Chesterton, a Royal Variety performance, and a performance of Beethoven's Mass in D from the Royal Albert Hall. Right from the start, even though it was finding its way in an entirely new medium, the BBC was thinking big.

The thirties was the decade of the dance band, which became an essential ingredient in the staple diet of broadcasting. The bands which appeared at

the Savoy Hotel played a major part, probably because it was so easy for the broadcasters at Savoy Hill next door to record them. There had been 'live' music from the Savoy since 1923 but the next fifteen years saw a large number of reputations made through wireless – Lew Stone, Roy Fox, Ambrose and Jack Payne, the leader of the BBC's own band, which as well as playing provincial dates and studio dance band programmes, provided music for variety



Oxford/Cambridge Boat Race. Testing equipment.



Football: Corinthians v Newcastle United at Crystal Palace. BBC motor van with relay system.



Geraldo and his orchestra.

shows and even incidental music. The band was so popular that all attempts by the hard-pressed BBC staff to keep up with the fan mail were abandoned. Probably the most famous and best-loved bandleader was a former Salvation Army bandsman and cinema pianist, Henry Hall, who's catch phrase 'This is Henry Hall, and tonight is my guest night' is remembered to this day.



Nat Mills and Bobbie. May 1937.

The second major ingredient in the staple diet of broadcasting in the early years was Variety. In the twenties there had been fierce opposition from the Society of West End Theatre managers who thought that audiences would dwindle if comedians' material was widely broadcast, but by the thirties they had begun to appreciate the value of the publicity thus gained. The other obstacle was the BBC itself, who's view of comedy was somewhat more esoteric than that of music hall audiences. Will Hay, Wee Georgie Wood, Burns and Allen, Gracie Fields, Sophie Tucker and Elsie and Doris Waters (Gert and Daisy) provided what the BBC called 'the broader type of performance', while Tommy Handley, Ronald Frankau, Jack Hulbert, Gillie Potter (the sage of Hogsnorton), Jose Collins, Layton and Johnson and Beatrice Lillie provided a more sophisticated type of humour, which incorporated cabaret and operetta. Difficulties of copyright and engineering made it difficult to broadcast musical comedy, which was very much in vogue, but the BBC overcame this by producing its own. Eric Maschwitz, who had been editor of the Radio Times, wrote 'Goodnight, Vienna' which was so successful that it was filmed as the first British Musical 'talkie', starring Jack Buchanan and Anna Neagle.



Miss Gracie Fields. October 1935.



'The Charlot Hour': Miss Beatrice Lillie.



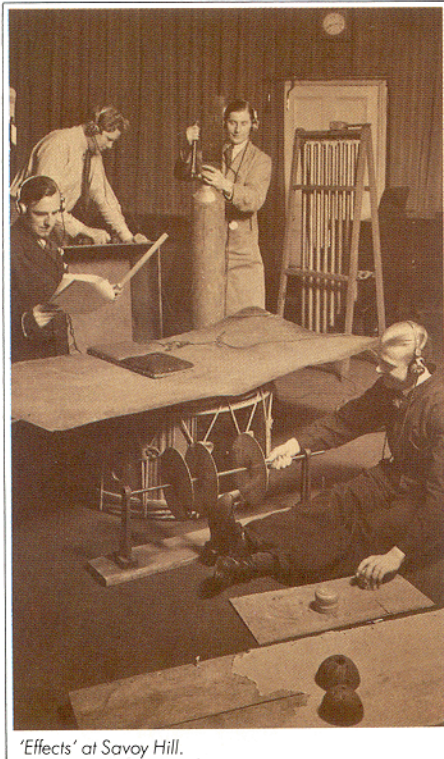
'Coronation Party'. Doris and Elsie Waters. May 1937.



'Rats to You'. Georgie Wood and Will Hay.

BROADCASTING HOUSE

In 1932 the five millionth licence holder paid his fee, and the BBC moved from Savoy Hill to Broadcasting House in Portland Place. The new building was immediately compared to an ocean liner sailing down towards Oxford Street. The image wasn't such a bad one. 'BH' was indeed to become the flagship of broadcasting. It had the most up-to-date air conditioning, a special studio for variety performers fitted with spotlights and seating, to make them feel at home, and the drama studio was equipped with 'a large tank for water noises; a wind machine, a railway noises group; various types of floor material for floor effects; special doors for opening, shutting, slamming etc, and drums of various sizes'.



'Effects' at Savoy Hill.

The listeners, who still only paid 10/- (50p) for the licence, now had a choice between national and regional programmes, though both stations offered 'mixed' schedules – news, classical music, variety and revue, poetry, Epilogues etc. Sir John Reith stubbornly held to the view that any intelligent listener should be able to enjoy such a mix, providing the programmes were good enough; though whether that tied in with his assertion that 'most listeners do not know what they want, still less what they need' it's hard to say.

Drama, which took up less than 2% of listening time in 1930, became increasingly important after the appointment of Val Gielgud (Sir John's brother) as Production Director. He launched a 'World Theatre' series, and commissioned plays from Tyrone Guthrie and Lance Sieveking which put Radio Drama firmly on the map. Plays were now



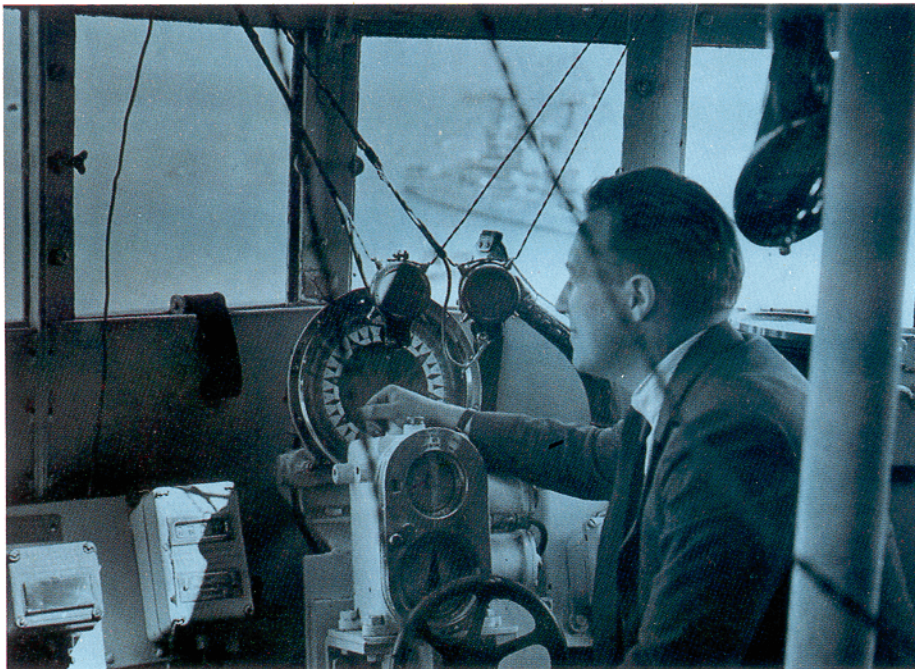
Ghosts by Henrik Ibsen with Marie Tempest (Mrs. Alving) and Terence de Marney (her son Oswald).

produced on radio after their runs in the West End, and included everything from Edgar Wallace to Ibsen, who was considered very controversial. It was Gielgud too who introduced the first ever soap opera, *The English Family Robinson*, which eventually led to successes like *The Archers*, *The Dales*, and *Citizens*.

Under Lance Seiveking and Laurence Gilliam, there began a department which created, if not a new art form, at least a new way of educating, informing and entertaining, all at once. Using the new medium to the full, and employing such writers as Louis MacNeice, D. G. Bridson, and Stephen Potter as writers, it produced what we would nowadays call documentary features. Afficionados of the BBC Sound Archives will know that today they sound very dated and peculiar – with actors often unsuccessfully portraying 'the working classes', or the rustle of scripts as interviewees haltingly read the answers carefully written for them, in what were represented as impromptu interviews. The often



Val Gielgud, with pipe, Lance Sieveking at panel control. June 1932.



Royal Review Spithead, Commentator Lt. Commander Thomas Woodroffe in the Foretop. July 1935.

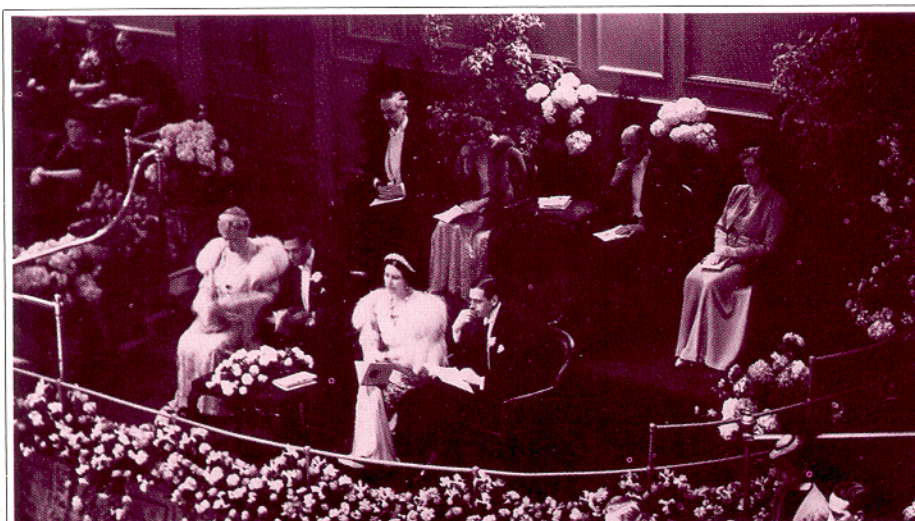
patronising tone reflected the class-consciousness of their times, but the subjects were wide-ranging, the style literate and informative, the techniques new and inventive, and they did much to introduce the people to the people.

The 'broadcast talk' was very much a feature of wireless in the thirties. Foreign correspondents like Vernon Bartlett, men of letters like Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, Harold Nicolson and Max Beerbohm, were given plenty of airtime. They said some controversial things, and not for the last time the BBC was accused of bias by both right and left. Lord Beveridge, the Liberal peer, was charged with left-wing bias as a result of a series of talks on unemployment in 1931, and someone called Sir Waldron Smithers asked the Postmaster General whether the BBC couldn't be stopped from using its monopoly to promote socialist propaganda.

For the first time the public were able to meet the Royal Family, almost in

person. From 1932 King George V, who handled the microphone well, broadcast to 'the peoples of the Empire' on Christmas Day; and when he was dying in 1935 the BBC took all programmes off the air, and every few minutes Stuart Hibberd, the senior announcer, read the message 'The King's life is moving peacefully towards its close'.

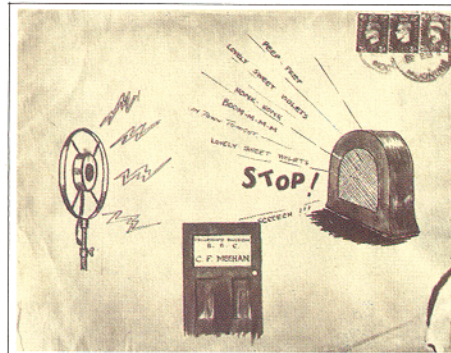
Because of radio, people were becoming better informed than ever before, and in 1934 the BBC abandoned the practice of relying on the press agencies for news and set up its own department. Reporters could increasingly be 'at the scene of the crime'. Mobile broadcasting and recording equipment became available, having much the same sort of effect as the arrival of video cameras half a century later. Reporters like Richard Dimpleby, Wynford Vaughan Thomas, Michael Standing ('Standing on the Corner') and the former navy man Lieutenant Commander Tommy Woodruffe, became



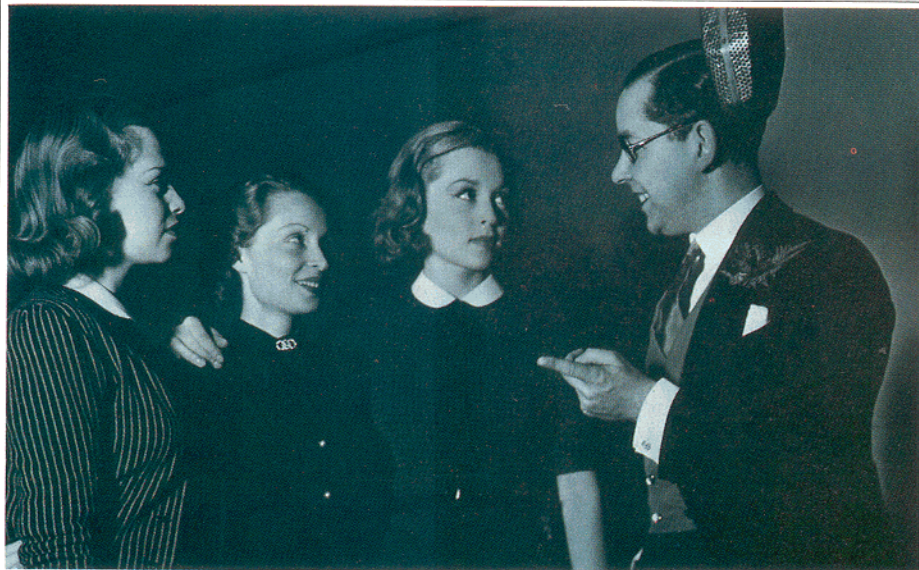
Queen's Hall. The King and Queen at the BBC Symphony Concert given by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Toscanini. H.M. Queen Mary, H.M. King George V, H.M. Queen Elizabeth. May 1939.

'personalities', despite the fact that the BBC still preferred its immensely popular announcers and newsreaders to remain anonymous. Perhaps Tommy Woodruffe would have preferred to remain anonymous after his notorious and hilarious (and still much played) commentary on the Spithead Review of 1937 – when both he and the Fleet were distinctly 'liddup'.

There was much more in the way of comment and analysis, and a mingling of news and chat show, not least the programme which 'stopped the mighty



Envelope addressed to Mr C. F. Meehan, producer of 'In Town Tonight'. Feb 1934.



'In Town Tonight'. The Palmer Sisters, Hilde Palmer, Irene Prador, Lilli Palmer with Lionel Gamlin. March 1939.



Miss Hammond (flower girl) and Mrs Wyatt (onion peeler), Jan 1939.



Miss Kay Hammond rehearsing with Mr. C. F. Meehan (left) and Mr. Michael Standing. March 1939.



'Punch and Judy Show': Miriam Ferris as Judy.

roar of London's traffic' to meet some of the interesting people who were *In Town Tonight*.

Meanwhile independent, or more properly, commercial radio, which did not have the 'mission to inform' which the Reithian BBC had, was gaining both ground and British audiences. It was discovered that during talks and educational programmes, huge numbers of people were turning off. Or rather, over



A perennial radio favourite visualised: Toytown: Mr. Growser and Larry the Lamb.



Gordon Crier (at back). Left to right: Richard Murdoch, Arthur Askey and Vernon Harris. 'Band Wagon' 1939.

– to Radios Luxembourg, Hilversum, Normandie, and Toulouse among others, which stuck firmly to 'popular entertainment'. Even the commercials became hits. People still sing the jingle 'We are the Ovaltinies, little girls and boys'. The BBC responded by creating a new 'Variety' department, incorporating the old 'revue and vaudeville' section. Audiences were won back, and it was later found that more than half the listening public switched on *all* the variety and music-hall that were broadcast. Programmes like *Music Hall* and *Songs from the Shows*, revivals of musical comedies, variety programmes like *Monday Night at Seven*, and later *Monday Night at Eight*, through to *Band Wagon* (which made stars of Arthur Askey and Richard 'Stinker' Murdoch), won back large audiences.

Reith's attitude seemed to be 'get 'em young', and great importance was attached to *Children's Hour*. Of all the 'uncles' and 'aunties' Derek McCulloch (Uncle Mac) was the most famous. Children's presenters were no less conscious than comedians and band leaders of the importance and popularity of the 'catch phrase'; and Uncle Mac's 'goodnight, children (*pause*) – everywhere' is still indelibly etched on the minds of those of us of a certain age. The rumour that, not realising the micro-phone was still switched on, he once followed it with 'that should keep the little buggers quiet for another day' may or may not be apocryphal. 'Uncle Mac' also played Larry the Lamb in S. G. Hulme Beaman's *Toytown*, which caught the imaginations of children right through to 1963, with Denis the Dachshund, the Inventor, and the unforgettable Mr Growser – ('It ought *not* to be allowed'). Worzel Gummage, Winnie the Pooh, Just William, Norman

and Henry Bones the boy detectives, were as real as real life people like 'Romany' (the Rev Bramwell Evans) and 'The Zoo Man' (David Seth-Smith), who metaphorically led us by the hand to share their delight in the wonders of natural history.



Listening to BBC Children's Hour.



Derek McCulloch, Uncle Mac, March 1941.

MUSIC

The broadly based policy on serious music, ranging from the classics through modern composers like Bartok and Stravinsky, with more than twenty symphony concerts in a year, and conductors like Thomas Beecham and John Barbirolli, was begun by Percy Pitt, and continued during the thirties by the charismatic conductor Adrian (later Sir Adrian) Boult, with the newly formed BBC Symphony Orchestra. It won high praise for its musicianship from Elgar and Toscanini who both conducted it; and even, grudgingly, from Beecham, who had originally described broadcast music as 'the most abominable row that ever stunned and cursed the human ear'. The BBC's great achievement however was the saving and broadcasting of the Henry Wood promenade concerts at the Queen's Hall. The 'Proms' have become as much an annual British institution as Henley or Wimbledon. Reith himself negotiated a state grant for Covent Garden, as well as ensuring financial help and patronage for The Sadlers Wells, the Carl Rosa Opera, and Glyndebourne.

WAR IN THE AIR

When war was declared in Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's famous 'I have to tell you now . . .' speech broadcast in 1939, the BBC's principal weapon of defence and encouragement appeared to be the BBC Theatre Organ, with Sandy MacPherson at the keyboard. Following government advice, broadcasting was immediately restricted to one wavelength (the Home Service), which, apart from Sandy Macpherson and a large number of gramophone records, consisted chiefly of public announcements and ministerial pep talks. The press and the public didn't like it. The leader of the opposition, Clement Atlee, commented 'At times I

feel depressed when I listen. You should not be depressed by listening in.' Winston Churchill, still First Lord of the Admiralty, said that the armed forces 'would prefer a policy of complete silence.' As it was there had immediately been some censorship by government. The Ministry of Information became responsible for broadcasting to allied and neutral countries, and 'EH' (Electra House), a government organisation financed by secret vote, controlled propaganda to occupied and enemy countries. The BBC's attitude was very simple, as expressed by R. T. Clark, the News Editor at the time: the hastily augmented news staff were instructed 'tell the truth . . . that's our job.' The truth was not always easy to come by.



The Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill.
June 1942.



Wartime announcer Bruce Bellfrage. March, 1940.



Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery of Alamein KG, GCB, DSO.



The Cavendish Three, Pat Rignold, Dorothy Carless and Kay Cavendish. October 1939.

Wartime gave the relatively new medium a tremendous opportunity to compete for two reasons; at first, cinemas, theatres and concert halls had been closed down and newspapers were restricted by a shortage of newsprint. With families stuck at home, radio became the principal medium of both entertainment and information. The BBC fought back against somewhat hasty restrictions imposed on it, and programmes returned to something more like normal. Demands from the newspaper barons that items like Richard Dimbleby's reports on military activities in France be held over until morning were ignored. Music, variety, features, drama, children's and schools broadcasting were evacuated to places like Bristol, Manchester and

Evesham; but news remained stubbornly at the flagship, Broadcasting House.

As well as the expansion of the news department, the BBC's Foreign Service grew very quickly. At the outbreak of war it had used six languages. A few months later it was fourteen, despite the difficulties of finding qualified staff.

Competition from commercial stations, British owned, but operating from France, soon impelled the BBC to set up a second wavelength, especially for the British European Forces. It did a tremendous amount for morale. The heavier type of programmes (classical music, religion, and drama), were



'In the Canteen Tonight'. C. F. Meehan, who presents the show, with two A.T.S. girls.



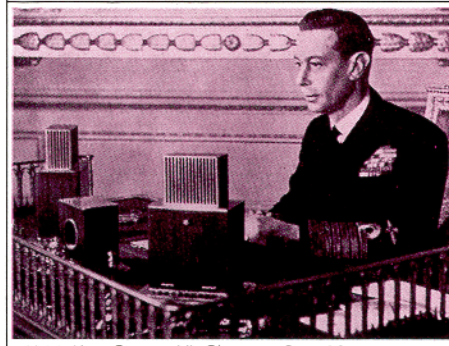
PHILIPS



1940s gramophone records presenter Christopher Stone.

found to be unpopular in wartime, and the lighter programming designed for the troops became so popular at home that many listeners preferred it to the more tightly controlled Home Service, and regularly tuned in. The BBC may have taken its cue from the competition, as it was to do again in the sixties, but the commercial stations' 'American' style of presentation was never permitted. 'The announcers', said the deputy Director General 'should be obvious gentlemen.'

After Dunkirk, the BBC found and organised a special team of 'Free'



H.M. King George VI, Christmas Day, 1944.

Frenchmen to broadcast *Ici La France*, in which General de Gaulle and others kept up the spirits of occupied France. Later it was the BBC who initiated the 'V for Victory' campaign, whose symbol, the letter V, began appearing on walls and placards all over Europe. It was matched in Morse by the opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth symphony which became the symbol of victory in Europe, a radio call sign, and it was adopted by Winston Churchill, with his famous V-sign. At home, a series of rousing speeches by prime minister Churchill were almost matched for impact by the Yorkshire tones of the writer J. B. Priestley, of whom the *Daily Mail* wrote 'as the hours grow darker, so he grows brighter; and his common sense and Yorkshire stoicism reflect the real and everlasting spirit of our race'.

TONY STILL HADN'T DISCOVERED PHILIPS MOVING SOUND.



SEE THE PHILIPS MOVING SOUND RANGE ON THE MOVING SOUND BUS, OUTSIDE ON THE FORECOURT.

PHILIPS
**MOVING
SOUND**





'ITMA'. Tommy Handley with Left, an 'old girl' Jean Capra, and two 'new girls' Mary O'Farrell and Michelle de Lys.

The initiative of BBC producers kept the Corporation at the centre of the war-effort, both at home and abroad. *Kitchen Front* was just part of 1,196 broadcasts about how to use the meagre food supplies to best advantage. *The Radio Doctor*, then anonymous, but later discovered to be Dr. Charles Hill, who eventually became Chairman of the BBC, kept people fit and chuckling. *Music While You Work* helped keep up production. The BBC's wartime role was so crucial and extensive that eventually there were 11,000 staff, many of them sleeping in their offices to ensure that the BBC was never off the air. News was moved to an underground bunker, and when a 500lb bomb hit Broadcasting House, killing seven people, the news reader Bruce Belfrage made only one slight slip as he carried on reading. The nightly nine o'clock news became almost mandatory listening. Even ten years after the war, a friend told me, his father would still refuse to let anyone answer the telephone if it rang between quarter to nine and nine. 'Don't people know that this is the time every decent Englishman is settling down to listen to the nine o'clock news?!', he would thunder.

On New Year's Day 1941 the BBC broadcast the first edition of the *Brains Trust*. It was to become extraordinarily popular. The questions and answers were factual, philosophical, and sometimes extremely erudite; but Dr. C. E. M. Joad the philosopher, Julian Huxley the zoologist, and Commander A. B. Campbell a no-nonsense merchant naval officer, were the core of a discussion programme which was listened to by almost a third of the population. It was as well established in wartime listeners' minds as the fast talking comedy show *ITMA* (It's That Man Again), with Tommy Handley, the first really great radio comic, and *Sincerely*



Dr Charles Hill wartime Radio Doctor who later became BBC Chairman.

Yours, the showcase for Vera Lynn 'the forces sweetheart'.

Under its second Director General, F. W. Ogilvie, the BBC was having less success in the higher realms of management than it was in the lower reaches of programme making. The squabbles with government, ministries, and governors over policy were innumerable; chiefly because of the government's wish 'to ensure more effective control'. It was Churchill himself who described the BBC as 'an enemy within the gates, doing more harm than good' – a phrase borrowed recently by the present Prime Minister. Meanwhile the rich tapestry of programmes continued on both the Home and the Forces' networks: Sir Adrian Boult and Victor Sylvester; Doris Arnold with *These You Have Loved*, Cyril Fletcher, Tommy Handley, and Rob Wilson, (whose lugubrious monologues tapped so much humour from the average chap's wartime predicament); the soprano Isabel Baillie; John Dickson Carr's *Appointment With Fear*; *Saturday Night Theatre*; a newcomer, Roy Plom-

ley, with *Desert Island Discs*; and Dorothy L. Sayers' religious play cycle *A Man Born to be King* all maintained the standard of popularity, controversy and independence which had been established under Reith. And although they were confined to a continual roll-call of 'new disasters', the extremely popular announcers were at last freed of their anonymity. It was John Snagge who persuaded the powers that be that, since the Germans were broadcasting fake news bulletins, each day's news should begin with 'Here is the News, and this is Alvar Liddell reading it.' Or Frank Phillips, or Lionel Gamlin, or Freddie Grisewood, (later long time chairman of *Any Questions*) or even, heaven help us, Wilfred Pickles, with his Northern accent!

Towards the end of the war the BBC made plans to have special correspondents in the principal cities of Europe. Norman Macdonald flew to Stockholm in early 1944, and Thomas Cadett to Paris a year later. Today we take it for granted that we'll constantly hear from a team of foreign correspondents all around the world, not only in the daily news, but in special programmes like *From Our Own Correspondent*. In addition, when D-Day came in 1944, and the allied forces returned to Europe, the BBC had an exclusive team of war correspondents ready to record 'actuality' reports, instead of relying on official dispatches and eye-witnesses. The BBC provided them with the very latest equipment, a portable disc-recorder weighing only 30lb and easy to work. Wynford Vaughan-Thomas used one at the battle of Anzio and was the envy of the American correspondents. This 'War Reporting Unit' was directed first by Howard Marshall, (who had introduced the annual link-up with the Empire at Christmas, and also been a principal cricket commentator), and then Frank Gillard, who is still broad-



Freddie Grisewood. 1944.

casting today. The reporters were sharply reminded that their first loyalty was to the Corporation and to no-one else, and that their reports would be broadcast on their merits, with no other criterion. As the allied armies liberated successive cities, the war reporters of the BBC, whose voices had gone before them, were greeted enthusiastically as old friends, Chester Wilmot, Godfrey Talbot, and Stanley Maxted, (who greeted a paratrooper at Arnheim only to find it was his own son), contributed to the success of the first real news magazine programme, *War Report*, listened to by 15 million people in Britain.

On VE Day Broadcasting House was floodlit and decked in flags. 'BH' had survived the war and the politicians bloody but unbowed. Thanks to the massive collection of discs and tapes in the BBC Sound Archives, the story of those times is still preserved, and even now provides plenty of fascinating programme material. Sifting through it, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the Corporation had 'a good war'.



Quiz Master Wilfred Pickles, invites two Cresswell Colliery miners to 'Have A Go'.

POST WAR



Later 'Brains Trust' members included, l. to r. Lord Samuel, Kingsley Martin, Bertrand Russell, with Gilbert Harding, Question Master. 1948.

Immediately after the war, when the BBC had taken salutes from all over the world for its impressive wartime role, there had been an almost immediate switchover. Sir William Haley, now the Director General, was keen to ensure that BBC programming went right across the cultural spectrum. The Home Service continued as the 'middle of the road' and the principal speech channel, but much more in the way of alternatives was on offer. Regional broadcasting was restored; the Forces network was maintained and renamed the 'Light' programme; and a third programme was added which some listeners found very heavy indeed, but others delighted in, for its unswerving dedication to highbrow excellence. With startling originality it was named 'The Third Programme'. Sir George Barnes was its first controller, and Harman Grisewood its second. Its motto appeared to be 'keep it long'; uncut versions of operas and plays were broadcast, everything from Shakespeare to Samuel Becket, via Sartre and Shaw. Early in its life there was an eighty-three part series called *The Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*. Perhaps it's due for a

repeat. There was humour from Joyce Grenfell and Stephen Potter, and a specially commissioned translation of Goethe's *Faust* in six parts by the poet Louis MacNeice. New playwrights (like Harold Pinter and N. F. Simpson) were encouraged, and old ideas questioned. Bertrand Russell even questioned the existence of God. The Third, like other channels, benefitted enormously because talks, interviews, and debates were no longer always scripted.

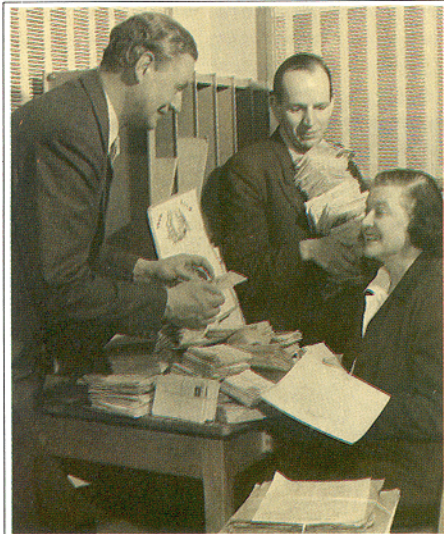
The pride of the Home Service was the Features department, which consistently won the Italia Prize for drama between 1947 and 1955. There was an unrivalled generation of radio actors, including Laidman Browne, Carleton Hobbs, Preston Lockwood, Richard Hurndall, Marjorie Westbury, Gladys Young, Mary O'Farrell, Grizelda Harvey, and many many more. Dylan Thomas, who had already done many broadcasts for the Welsh region, became probably the best known poet of his day, and made some outstanding contributions to radio, such as his talk *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, and possibly the most famous and successful play for radio, *Under Milk Wood*.



The poet, Dylan Thomas, who wrote 'Under Milk Wood' for radio January 1954.

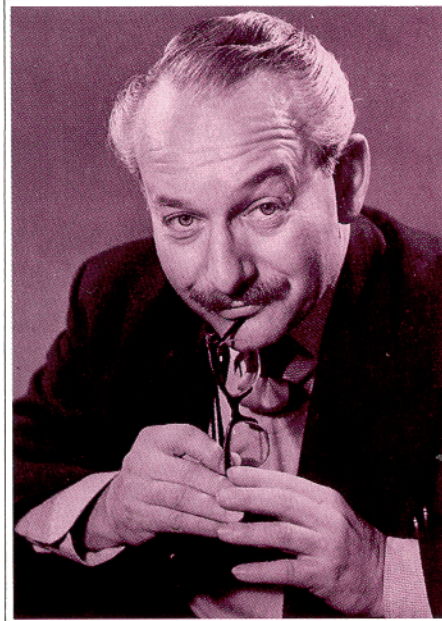
The Light programme, which accounted for half the listeners to radio, produced *Family Favourites*, *Housewives' Choice*, *Woman's Hour*, and, from 1949, *Mrs Dale's Diary*. The crooner Donald Peers ('In a shady nook by a babbling brook') became for a while almost as well-known as Vera Lynn. The Light programme brought panel games to radio; *Twenty Questions* with Gilbert Harding and Anona Winn, and *What's My Line?*, chaired by Eammon Andrews. Other spectacular successes were the nightly thriller series *Dick Barton, Special Agent*, and later, in the fifties, *Journey Into Space*, starring the present MP for Warley East, Andrew Faulds, David Kossoff, and in a

porary issues, and *Radio Newsreel* which ran dispatches from all around the world and had eye-witness reports on major news stories like the assassination of Ghandi. But for all it embraced drama and current affairs, the Light programme's principal expertise was to be in 'variety'. The fifteen or so post war years were to be the golden age of radio comedy.



Robert MacDermot, Anna Instone and Denis Jones sorting out the 'Housewives Choice' March 1956.

smaller part, David Jacobs. But the Light Programme had its more serious side too. It broadcast symphony concerts and other classical music, a book programme, a discussion programme, *Topic For Tonight*, designed to interest Light Programme listeners in contem-



David Kossoff 1957.



David Jacobs circa 1976.



Dick Barton - Special Agent. John Mann (Snowey White), Noël Johnson, (Dick Barton), Alan Tinvern (Limpy) and Alex McCrindle (Jack).



'Take It From Here', left to right: Jimmy Edwards, Joy Nichols and Dick Bentley, October 1950.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO COMEDY

When the war was over, and the initial euphoria had died away, we were left with a dull, austere, and still rationed Britain. The country needed all the laughter it could get. The BBC had become expert in this area, and provided it. The wartime's favourite comedian, Tommy Handley, had died, but some of the wartime hits continued. Eric Barker's *Merry Go-Round* navy show became *Waterlogged Spa*; King George VI's favourite, *Much Binding in the Marsh* with Richard Murdoch, Kenneth Horne, Sam Costa, and Dora Bryan, simply



Eric Barker.



Much-Binding-In-The-Marsh. Richard Murdoch, Sam Costa. Sitting: Kenneth Horne, Maurice Denham

continued as a peace time Air Force base, and Charlie Chester's *Stand Easy* was army orientated. These were quickly followed by *Take It From Here* with Joy Nichols, Dick Bentley, 'Professor' Jimmy Edwards, and somebody called Herbert Mostyn. His identity was not revealed, but Herbert Mostyn was in fact the two middle names of the up and



Charlie Chester and Arthur Haynes 'Stand Easy'.



Lonnie Donegan and his Skiffle Group. December 1956.

coming scriptwriters called Frank Muir and Denis Norden. The show won the Daily Mail's national radio award as the best show of 1949. Kenneth Connor, Patricia Hayes, Bob and Alf Pearson, John Hanson, Charles Leno, Graham Stark and a young impressionist, Peter Sellars joined a former gypsy violinist who had called himself both 'Nedio' and 'Hugh Neek' before he became Ted Ray, for *Ray's a Laugh* which ran for thirteen years from 1949. But the show which took the country by storm was, on the face of it, an unlikely success. It starred Peter Brough and Archie Andrews – a ventriloquist and his dummy! After 12 weeks *Educating Archie* had a 12 million audience. It co-starred Peter Kavanagh, (the voice of them all) and was written by Sid Colin and Eric Sykes. Also involved during its long run were a phenomenal list of small part players – Robert Moreton, Hattie Jacques, Max Bygraves, Tony Hancock, Alfred Marks, Gilbert Harding, Beryl Reid, and Harry Secombe. It was the first occasion on which a BBC radio show was really exploited commercially. There were Archie Andrews lollipops, and soaps, comics and

annuals. Tee-shirts were not yet in fashion.

As well as comics like Frankie Howerd, then making his way, Jewell and Warris, Al Read, and Arthur English, there was everything from the sophisticated and up-market *In All Directions* (with the two Peters, Ustinov and Jones) to the show which really broke the mould of radio comedy, the increasingly zany *Goon Show*. It has been too often repeated, too often talked and written about, and The Prince of Wales's fascination with it too often publicised for there to be anything new to say about it. Tribute should be paid to the producer Peter Eton, who led the goons



Ted Ray pacifies Patricia Hayes in *Ray's a Laugh*.



'The Frankie Howard Show' with Frankie, Billy Ternent, Shani Wallis and Gladys Morgan.



The Goons just love the microphone. Reading from the top: Michael Bentine, Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers and Harry Secombe.



Scriptwriters Marty Feldman, and Guild of Television Producers and Directors Personality, and script award winner, 1968.



'Take It From Here' scriptwriters Frank Muir and Denis Norden, alias Herbert Moslyn, 1959.



Peter Brough with 'himself' in 'Educating Archie', 1956.

even further along the madcap path they had chosen; to the sound effects person for their timing and invention; to the BBC mandarins for spotting its potential and persevering with it after the first very unsuccessful series, which attracted only 1½ million listeners at the most. Spike Milligan still maintains that the BBC hierarchy were so unfamiliar with it in the early stages that it was referred to as the Go on! show.

Technically it broke new ground too. In 1953 it became the first show to be recorded on tape. It meant the artists were free to improvise knowing that

what didn't work could be cut. It meant that the theatrical tension of first night nerves was gone, but that they could

experiment with impunity.

Television was beginning to take over. It paid more for good scripts, and it was to attract greater audiences. For twenty years it was much more fashionable. But before it took over, there were two more radio shows which took comedy into new territory. With scripts by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, and with support from Sid James, Bill Kerr, Kenneth Williams and Hattie Jacques. Anthony Aloysius St John Hancock, of 23 Railway Cuttings, East Cheam, developed an insecure, snobbish, prejudiced but lovable persona which captivated radio audiences, and has done ever since, through numerous repeats. After an initial success in television, Tony Hancock tried to break new ground, using new material, in television and films. It never worked as well, and in 1968, distressed, disappointed and drunk, he died of an overdose at the other end of the world.

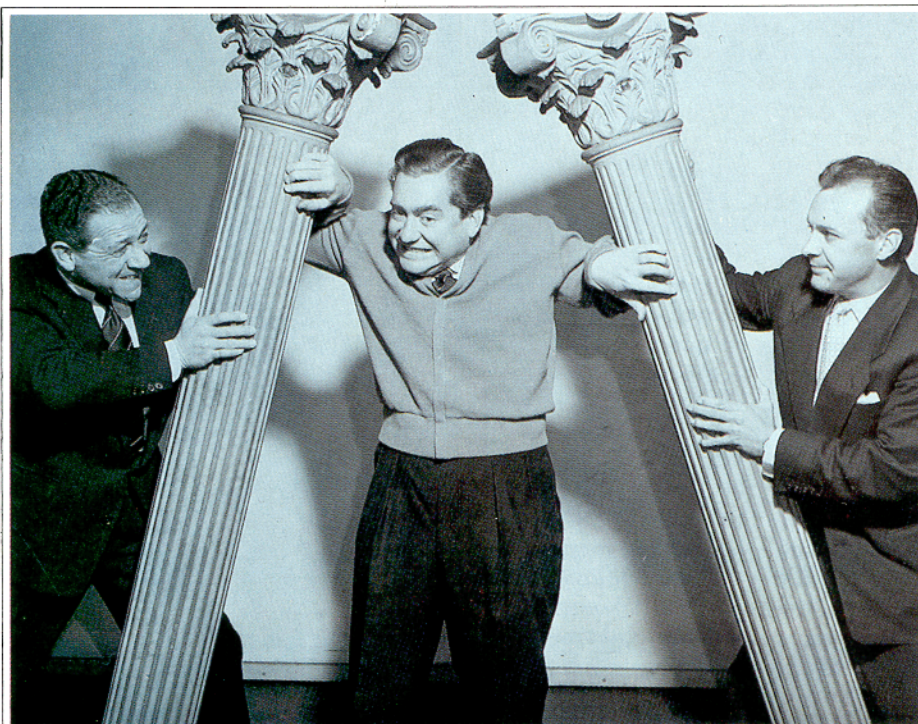
Kenneth Williams, master of outrageous and high camp, was also involved in *Beyond Our Ken*, and later, *Round the Horne*, written by Marty Feldman and Barry Took. Kenneth Horne was the perfect foil to the eccentricities of Williams, Hugh Paddick, Betty Marsden and Bill Pertwee. It was the first time that radio really exploited the obviously, but indefinably vulgar, the studiously suggestive. It seemed like a string of good dirty jokes that you weren't sure you'd heard. It was the kind of vulgar postcard humour which has always appealed to the British middle class. Radio times had changed. But would Lord Reith have understood the jokes?



Hattie Jacques.



Kenneth Horne (centre) with L to R: Kenneth Williams, Hugh Paddick, Betty Marsden, Patricia Lancaster and Bill Pertwee get down to some serious rehearsing for 'Beyond Our Ken', 1959.



'Hancock's Half-Hour'. A trial of strength between Tony Hancock (centre), Bill Kerr (right) and Sidney James (left).

REGIONAL RADIO

Regional Radio too had always had its own following. There was a huge public outcry when the West of England Home Service (after being dubbed by one critic 'The Worst of England Home Service') was threatened with merger with the Midlands. The plan was dropped. The West, under Frank Gillard, invented one of the most successful radio programmes ever, *Any Questions*; the Midlands created *The Archers*; and the Northern Region, Wilfred Pickles' little bit of 'homely fun', *Have A Go*. Elsewhere the brochure describes the present day regions and the successful development of Local Radio.

NEWS

Gradually during the sixties the BBC perceived that the demand for immediate and constant news and news analysis had grown, until eventually by the seventies there developed a whole new style of broadcasting, with news magazines morning, noon, and night. These programmes created their own stars, and not always because of their skills in broadcasting! Jack de Manio became much loved despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that he never seemed to know what time of day it was. Indeed a later programme of his was called *Jack de Manio Precisely* because of his notorious failure to read the studio clock; and he even survived the occasion when at the time of Nigeria's independence he misread his script and introduced a talk on the subject as 'The Land of the Nigger'. William Hardcastle, an ex-Fleet street editor, brought all his news expertise and bluff no-nonsense questioning style to *The World at One* and *PM*, (echoed nowadays in the work of his daughter Sally for *The World Tonight*). While more recently Robert Robinson and John Timpson attracted devoted followings on the early morning *Today* programme.

BLUNDER

There's no question but that in the early sixties the BBC made something of a boo-boo. It later made amends, but 'Auntie' either missed, or ignored, the enormous appetite and demand among young people for Pop Music. The result was Pirate Radio. On Easter Sunday 1964, from a ship moored at sea five miles off the east coast, Radio Caroline began broadcasting pop music continuously from dawn till dusk, with disc jockey Simon Dee the first man at the turntable. Other 'pirate' stations soon followed, and claimed between them an audience of seven or eight millions, all of whom were happy to break the law by tuning in to unlicensed transmis-



Jack de Manio.



Jack Archer plants out his chrysanthemums.



John Timpson

sions. BBC Radio had missed the boat.

Huge sums of money were involved in the pirate stations, and stories of the financial and political feuding between rival stations as well as between the stations and government, did not make pretty listening. The fact that radio distress signals, and wavelengths allotted to Radio Astronomy were interfered with, provoked a powerful lobby demanding government action. Eventually the pirates were boarded and suppressed when the Marine Etc Broadcasting (Offences) Bill became law in August 1967. A month later the BBC launched its counter offensive; and to some old fashioned listeners, offensive it certainly was . . .

SEA CHANGE

The Home Service, the Third, and the Light programmes became respectively Radios 4, 3, and 2. A new channel, Radio 1, was to be devoted almost entirely to pop music – and in exactly the manner which had been used by the pirates. Indeed the Disc Jockeys were mostly the unemployed pirates themselves.

Names like Simon Dee, Dave Cash, Tony Blackburn, Alan Freeman, Stuart Henry, Pete Murray, Dave Lee Travis, John Peel, and Emperor Rosko took the airwaves by storm. Never again would the BBC demand that all its presenters sound like 'obvious gentlemen'.

In the same year 1967, BBC Radios Leicester and Sheffield opened up; 'local' rather than 'regional' broad-



Emperor Rosko.

casting was really with us. The BBC's monopoly had of course long since gone. In future BBC Radio would be in fierce competition with commercial local radio of the calibre of Capital Radio in London, Radio City (Liverpool), Radio Clyde (Glasgow), and Piccadilly Radio (Manchester). Times have changed. So too has the range and expertise of the BBC, catering for every possible

taste. Quite what Lord Reith, who died in 1971, made of it all we shall never be certain. But the Reithian qualities, of rugged independence, 'public service' broadcasting, and the ruthless search for excellence are still very much alive among the programme-makers in the corridors of Broadcasting House and BBC premises all around the country.

For a quarter of a century Radio has been regarded very much as the poor relation of Television. Yet, as the outline on other pages of what is on offer at both national and local level indicates, Radio is no longer content to be labelled second best. What's more, the arrival of the transistor and the walkman; the popularity of the car radio; the declining novelty value of 'the box', coupled with the return to radio of many stars who've made their names in television; the formation of the Radio Academy; the remarkable strides in technology; and the return of the Radio Show to London after 22 years, are all clear indications that Radio not only lives, but is undergoing a significant resurgence.

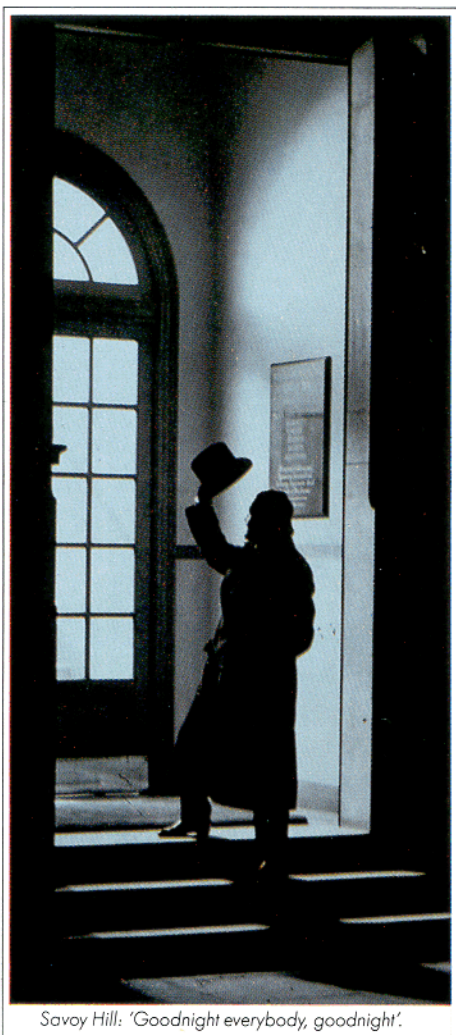


Pete Murray.



Tony Blackburn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Savoy Hill: 'Goodnight everybody, goodnight'.

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- BBC Handbooks*

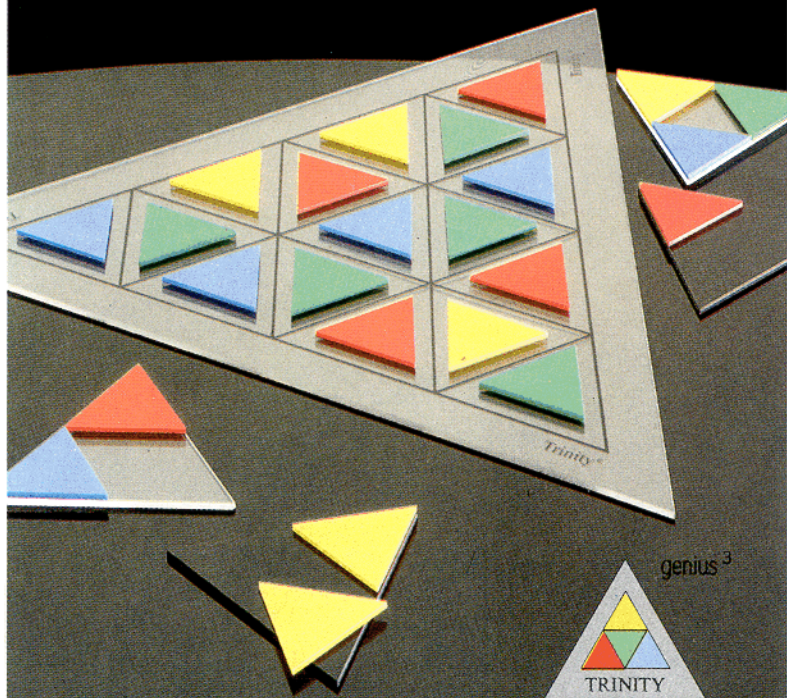
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