**File:** **LR003208 - Alfred Bradley (interview 14) - no date.wav**
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START AUDIO

Interviewer: A history of north regional broadcasting, interview number 14, Alfred Bradley. Radio's very first play was broadcast from Station 2LO London on the 15th November 1922. The day after Broadcasting England first began and it was heard in the children's programme but the north region can probably boast the first adult play written for wireless.

L. du Garde Peach was the author. It came from the British Broadcasting Company's Metrovix studio and was broadcast by Station 2ZY. By the start of the 1930s far more Northerners were hearing plays than seeing them in the theatre. They were produced by the likes of Jan Bussell, Cecil McGiven and by Edward Wilkinson. The radio dramatic feature became the invention and hallmark of Geoffrey Brideson and Frances Dillon, Olive Shapley and Joan Littlewood all working from North region.

By the 1940s James R Gregson had started a school for Radio Playwrights at the Leeds Studios. No history of North Regional Broadcasting would be anywhere near compete without BBC Regional Drama's most distinguished name, that of Alfred Bradley who's with me now.

0:01:19 Alfred you joined in 1959?

Alfred Bradley: Yes, I came from a strange job. I was drama advisor in Leicestershire. I suppose I started off wanting to be an actor and I grew out of that very quickly. Found I was better at directing than acting. I couldn't be bothered to remember the lines. I couldn't really just get down to the basic stuff of acting enough. Luckily now I don't want to do it anymore. I went from drama school into Rep and produced, at one time, 50 plays in a year, weekly Rep, churning stuff out. Longing to do new plays, we did Murder on the Nile, Murder on the Second Floor and I would slip in Murder in the Cathedral and the management would go mad, you know, because they hadn't realised it was Elliott and not Agatha Christie.

I just wanted to do new writing. I thought, "Well if the professional theatre can't afford to do this I'll do a job with amateurs because they won't have the needs of box office that we professionals have." I got a job as drama advisor for Leicestershire which was a very go ahead authority and a very nice place to work and I enjoyed it. I found the amateurs, again, were doing the same old plays. Now you mentioned L. du Garde Peach at the beginning of the story.

L. du Garde Peach wrote a play called 'The Six Wives of Calais' for Women Institutes and I saw that play so many times and I'm sure when I'm dead L. due Garde Peach will be found engraved on my heart, you know, it was that. So when the job was advertised here I thought, "Ah well radio, I mean obviously you have a big output and you can't go on doing all the old classics so there must be a chance for new writers." I went to Leeds, the job was advertised there. It was a little tiny studio which was the old Quaker meeting house and one part of me I think said, "Oh well once I'm in the BBC I'll do Leeds for a year or two and then there might be a job at Bristol,

somewhere nice." I got to Leeds and I loved it there. There was a great upsurge of new writing, after the war and it was all happening there.

Interviewer: 0:03:24 Do you remember your very first play production?

Alfred Bradley: Yes, I sat for a few weeks. Vivian Daniels, my predecessor was very good but he'd gone off to television and he's been away for a year or more so there was no script in the building. I ran around like a blue bottom fly looking for something to do and kept producing plays, giving them to Graham Miller who was my boss saying, "What about this one Graham?" He said, in his funny old way, "No, no, no, Bradders I mean there'll be something better than that come along."

I did a little nativity play which wasn't very good but was a chance to break myself in. I think about the second play I did was the one I really remember which was, 'There is a happy land'. I was an innocent. I was absolutely naïve about how the studio worked, the grammar of it all. 'There is a happy land' was written by Keith Waterhouse who was an unknown author. He hadn't written 'Billy Liar' then. I got Kevin Billington to adapt it. Kevin was working in the studio in Leeds and we had the most amazing cast. I was thinking about it the other day. Henry Livings was in it playing a man who only said quack. David Jones was in it who eventually, of course, became one of the Monkeys. Robert Powell, who became Robert Powell. Brian Truman, George Leyton and I hadn't realised how difficult it was and the story that's told about me, which is absolutely true is that I wanted the sound of a bicycle falling over and Albert Aldred who was our lovely odd job man, did everything at Leeds. He was supposed to change the

water but he actually built and re-built the studio found an old bicycle for us to use for effects.

And the studio managers didn't seem to be making the right noise and I thought I could do it better than them, as new boys do and I rushed out and said, "Leave it to me. Leave it to me. Got hold of the bicycle and banged it on the ground and thumped and put sticks in the wheels and made all of the noises that I thought that would be right. And a little man came rushing out from round by the back of the Friends Meeting House where the studio was and said, "That's my bike." I'd got the wrong one and I've never tried to do sound effects since. I've let [my betters 0:05:27] to do it.

So that stays in my mind.

Interviewer: 0:05:32 We've mentioned James R Gregson and L. du Garde Peach, both writers as well as producers, particularly the latter. Alfred you've probably discovered and by that, I mean encouraged at the very outset more distinguished writers than the rest of us put together in BBC Radio drama. Tell me about some of them?

Alfred Bradley: Well I suppose the programme with which I've been associated for a long time was the Northern Drift. That was a programme dreamed up by Alan Plater and me. Alan had written a couple of radio plays. He was a failed architect really. He wasn't a good architect. He was designing extensions to go on people's houses and the leaked and he was very unhappy about it. He wrote a couple of plays which we did. Then in conversation we said, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to do a radio review." We wrote to one or two established, good writers.

People like Bill Norton and Sid Chaplain, I remember, and John Brain who'd just written 'Room at the Top' and said, "Would they like to write something for us?"

Graham said we could have six weeks to try the programme out as a North Region opt-out. The programme in fact ran for ten years and within two or three weeks of the thing starting, so many people were writing material we had to say, "It's a bit embarrassing lads but no we don't want any more from Bill Norton and the established people." It became a new writing programme. So obviously with ten or twelve names in every programme, some of them are going to be successful. Alan Plater of course now writes everything, apart from the news. Henry Livings became a very well-established writer and a performer. I'm just trying to think.

I was looking at a book of pieces that we picked out from old programmes. There was a piece by Carla Lane who went on to do 'The Liver Birds'. Barry Hines, of course, who wrote 'Kes'. Trevor Griffith and Alex Glasgow wrote a lot of songs for it. So it was a good nursery slopes programme for new writers.

Interviewer: 0:07:35 — You started the Northern Drift in...? When Alfred? Was it 1964?

Alfred Bradley: — It must've been about that, yes.

Interviewer: 0:07:43 — And then it went into the Talkabout Series?

Alfred Bradley: — That's right, which was on Sunday morning live. That was

good fun because everyone knew we were there and so writers would drop-in who were just going through Leeds, most people were going through Leeds on a Sunday morning. They haven't anything to do. They used to drop-in and it became a sort of writers club. One hears about the New York gang meeting at the Algonquian.

The old Leeds studio was a little bit like that. Sometimes there would be more people in the cubicle than there were out in the studio performing. We used to go out afterwards and have chicken curry and chips and all talk our heads off. I used to go home at about 5 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon and say to my wife, "I've just done the programme." She said, "Yes, I know I heard it just before the 1 o'clock news." It was a 3 or 4-hour gossip shop after that. It was a good programme to do.

Interviewer: 0:08:31 I notice in The Radio Times of that period it shows Alan Ayckbourne as an occasional producer?

Alfred Bradley: Yes, Alan came in a funny way. I went to see his agent who was a very famous agent, the most famous literary agent in the world, I suppose, Peggy Ramsey. I was talking to her about a play I wanted to write and Alan came up on the phone and he'd just had a play done in London which had closed after two nights. Been done with a very starry cast and I'd seen some of his work at Scarborough with Stephen Joseph and when he was on tour.

I knew Alan's work and liked it very much and Peggy instead of talking to me jabbered to him on the phone. Quite right because he'd just had a big flop, his first big flop and was going on and on and on. After about half an hour I said, "Why

don't you tell him to apply for a job there's one going in Leeds?" She did and he got it. The funny thing was that I had to interview him before the panel and when I went in to see them afterwards they said, "Who do you want?" And I said, "This man." Somebody said, "But he only earnt £400 last year." They thought that was quite in for a dig. Alan turned up with a couple of tea chests with the children's clothes in and didn't have a penny in the world, really. I mean he was a very poor actor at that time.

Of course, he did very good work. He loved the mechanics of radio and he still does. I mean his house is full of tape recorders. He's probably got more compact disc players than anybody else. All that stuff he just loves mucking about with all that junk. We each had keys cut to the old studio in Leeds. It used to be locked up in the evening and then we used to go back and unlock it and sometimes stay there all-night working, just like playing with your toy trains.

Interviewer: 0:10:13 It was a great advantage being away from Manchester Headquarters, I imagine?

Alfred Bradley: Well we looked on Manchester like Manchester people looked on London, I think. We were the opposition. It was good being over there and if you… It was only an old building. It was falling down, it's always been falling down and I think they're propping it up again at the moment. If you wanted to change the acoustic you hammered a bit of hardboard on the wall. You didn't have to ask anybody to come and do it for you.

Interviewer: And going back to the early 1960s it was our BBC Newcastle

0:10:40 colleague Gillian Hush who persuaded the BBC's then Head of Talks, Lord Archie that the word 'Bugger' could be a term of endearment. Was it Gillian who encouraged you to introduce even shorter words on radio drama, Mr Bradley?

Alfred Bradley: I think I got saddled with this. I didn't use a lot of difficult expletives at all I just thought that there should be real speech in radio plays. You know, we'd had 'Look back in anger', there was a new time in the theatre. There was a lot of very realistic writing and we were still going round saying, "Blooming." I don't want to shock people, I don't want to frighten the audience away but I thought there was a danger that we'd lose the younger audience if we didn't change it a bit. I put up 'A Taste of Honey' as a suggestion to Val Gielgud who was then the Head of Drama who said, "This is a shocking play and it's immoral and it goes out over my dead body." He thought it was a terrible play.

Now Val had been married five times. He didn't regard that as immoral at all but because the boy in the story was gay, he found it offensive. It was done, of course, and I've done two productions of that. I think it's the only play I've ever produced twice.

Interviewer: 0:12:00 Well language apart you also fought, as I recall, to get the old Leeds drama studio equipped for a stereophonic play production?

Alfred Bradley: That was because stereo suddenly became the rage. Under Martin Nesten there was a time when new technical devices seemed very important. Everyone was talking about

quadrophony and the [Kunskoph 0:12:17] head recorder and particularly the forms of sound. I mean modern things like digital recording weren't in but there was a lot of experiment going on in that area. There was a suggestion that we should start making stereo plays.

Well obviously, they were going to be done in London and Radio 3 was moving over to stereo very quickly. So Geoff Wilkinson who was the senior studio manager in Leeds and I got together, with Doug Manby who was a very good engineer and said, "We'll see if we can do our own thing." We bodged up a stereo desk. WE had to borrow loud speakers from somebody. We only got little tiny bookshelf speakers. I bought my own, a Goldring turntable in from home which had a stereo pick-up on it. We forged the number because tapes all have numbers and I think our number was always TLS. We changed it to SLS which meant Stereo Leeds and did a play called 'The Fishing Party'.

It was a terrible bodge-up thing done with a couple of U2 batteries, this thing. Luckily it won The Writer's Guild Award that year and I phoned Gillian Reynolds on The Guardian and said, "You're not to know anything about how this was done Gillian but if you'd like to mention it…" She did of course, she said, "I congratulate the BBC management on pouring money into the regions," having heard this play. Ian Trethowan rung me up and said, "You bugger." He said, "I know how it was done and I know what you did." He said, "Alright…" Little men came up in bowler hats and found out what we were doing and improved on it and I think Geoff and Doug and I got £100 each bonus.

So Aunty reacted rather nicely in the end.

Interviewer: 0:13:55 It was a marvellous play. You had Wilfred Pickles…

Alfred Bradley: Yes, lovely.

Interviewer: 0:14:00 Who else?

Alfred Bradley: Stephanie Turner played the awful landlady. I can't remember who they all were now. Wilfred was excellent he was like Bottom in Midsummer Night's Dream really. He was telling everybody, being very big headed and knowing all the answers. Lovely actor and good performances.

But the fact that it won the prize was just great, good luck. They couldn't say, "Oh well it wasn't done very well," and so we were allowed to go ahead and do stereo productions. Which I mean is now taken for granted, of course.

Interviewer: 0:14:35 Yes, did you find in your career Alfred that it was a job to get facilities and equipment?

Alfred Bradley: There was a bad time during broadcasting in the '70s when there was talk about the regions being shutdown altogether and we had to put up quite a pitch battle there. Lots of people who'd worked in the region were very good friends to us, wrote letters to the papers and so on.

When all that was over and we were told we were going to be able to carry on. The studio still got more and more run down. There was always a suggestion that Leeds would move to

Manchester, which of course it did in the end. Our studio got very, very miserable to work in and there is a funny thing about… The difference about being a director or producer in the BBC and an administrator I think, is that the administrator never seems to have a date. He never seems to have a final production date. Now you and I know that if we're doing a play and it's going out next week we have to cast it and we can't get the person we want and we try for someone else. I'm in the middle of that now. I've tried about six people for a part and it's a very particular thing I want but it has to go out. I can't say, "Oh there'll be an hour's space instead."

The administrators can do that and it used to madden me that you'd see four or five-gram decks sitting in a corridor in Leeds for a year because no one had got the right plugs to put on the end of them. I shouted and screamed and stormed the Bastille. I went down to Broadcasting House and thumped the table and we were given money to refurbish that studio and that cubicle.

Then of course, eventually, we came over here. We came over to Manchester, we knew we would have to. Tony Cliff by then had joined me. He took over when Alan went and we were very unhappy about leaving. Obviously, this seemed like a big factory by comparison with our little cosy place there When we knew we'd lost the battle we said, "Well we'll go in with flags flying." Tony organised a play competition. I did a series of new plays called 'A Bunch of Fives' and we bought in, you know, our best author. So we set the thing with a bang over here. We didn't want to come in moaning. There was no point.

Interviewer: A shame in a way because almost from the word go, I mean

0:16:43 Leeds was the North Region drama centre. It had always stemmed from there and we did certain things over here, I mean a lot of the Children's Hour drama we did in old Broadcasting House, Manchester but the peak listening, evening listening all came from Leeds.

Alfred Bradley: Yes, I mean it's a strange thing. I don't know why it works like this but it always seemed to me that the writers came from Yorkshire and the actors came from Lancashire. I mean you've always had a tradition of light entertainment over on this side of the Pennines. You've had all the great comics seem to come from Liverpool or Manchester, don't they? Or, Oldham and this area.

Over on our side we had all the Keith Waterhouses and ___[0:17:27] and David Mercers and so on and the actors were over here because the theatres were here and because of Children's House. You had people like Billy Whitelaw who were learning their jobs as kids, which doesn't happen in the same way now. So there was often a problem for me when I was doing a play written by David Mercer and I started to cast it. He said, "Well I don't want all these Lancashire accents." You had to say, "Don't be so provincial David. You get the best actors you can."

It was a very odd difference. It seemed to be from that dividing line right down the middle of England to me.

Interviewer: 0:17:59 I think you'll agree that the success of any of us as producers rests to a very large extent on our working relationships not only with the local bosses but also with our London Lords and Masters.

Alfred Bradley: Yes, I think people like Graham Miller who were here were underrated in a sense. I mean Graham was very good to me. Right at the beginning he encouraged me to stay calm, not panic and do bad plays because I felt that I wasn't working if I wasn't doing something. He said, "Who are the people you've looked at and read about?" I said, "Well there's a man called James Handley." He said, "Well, go and see him." I said, "Well he's gone to Wales." He said, "Well go and see him in Wales."

I came back with a great parcel of novels by James Handley and we did a serial called 'The Furys' and things like that. We did some good plays in fact. Colin Blakely and Michael Caine played small parts in one of them and when they asked us to redo it for the World Service or transcription later and said, "Could we soften the accents down a bit but do a new recording." I said, "Well not with that cast anymore." We couldn't afford them.

Graham was very good to me. I was there at a time of change. Douglas Cleverden helped me a lot at the beginning but Val Gielgud was there as the Head of Drama and under him as script editor were Michael Bakewell, Donald McWhinney was deputy and Barbara Bray, of course, who did a lot of Radio 3 programmes. Now they were the sort of AvantGard and Val was still in the world of theatre. I mean he liked things being called Wednesday Matinee and Saturday Night Theatre - I think a lot of that came from him. Repertory in Britain, live productions.

They were fighting, they were talking about all the up and comings. They were looking at Pinter and people like that and doing plays like 'Waiting for Godot' which Val didn't understand at all. But in recent years Martin Esslin who was an intellectual

giant by BBC standards and Ronnie Mason who was the last Head before John Tidyman. Ronnie was the kindest man you could ever work for. He was particularly good to me and they were all very good people. They all backed me a lot. I found that the thing about living out in the sticks was to have a relationship there and a relationship here and the thing got, the two ends joined up.

If you didn't have that you were asking Graham Miller or somebody to go down and sell your programmes for you which I don't think works very well.

Interviewer: 0:20:34 No, it's second-hand, isn't it?

Alfred Bradley: Yes.

Interviewer: 0:20:35 If you're asked to explain.

Alfred Bradley: And we have far more meetings now. We have regional producers meetings where you do meet every quarter and people have to explain why they haven't placed a particular programme in the schedules. In the old days things could wait for years.

Interviewer: 0:20:51 Well selling programmes, programme ideas that's one thing. We've talked about getting production facilities what about programme allowances Alfred, I mean when you had and you

wanted the stars, were you given the money?

Alfred Bradley: Yes, actors don't cost a lot, really. I mean I've never done plays with huge casts. I think that radio works best with six or seven people normally and I've never been restricted with a budget. I'm very mean. I'm very careful with money I mean I'll start at 11:00am in the morning if it saves an extra overnight because I regard money going to British Rail as a waste. It's rather like when my kids telephone at 5:50pm, that's money down the plug as far as I'm concerned, 6:00pm is the time you start to phone or 1:00pm, not 12:50pm, 5:50pm. So I wouldn't waste money.

I've also said to young producers when they say, "Well what do I do about the budget it's going to be a few pounds over." There is never a notice in the Radio Times on your billing which says, "This wasn't very good but it came in under budget." I think if you go over budget and win the prize the BBC are delighted. They spend more money on the dinner afterwards than you've never spent on the programme.

Interviewer: 0:21:59 I remember when new Broadcasting House Manchester was opened. We opened it with a Saturday Night Theatre called 'The Dark Windows of a Room'. I had in it as many of the people that I could who started in the North of England so…

Alfred Bradley: Very famous cast, weren't they?

Interviewer: We had a pretty famous cast, yes. The only person who wasn't there was Robert Powell and he was going to play a police

0:22:18 constable. Unfortunately, he was just about to portray Jesus Christ on film and Lord Grade turned to one of his subordinates and said, "This boy is married, isn't he?" They looked at one another and he said, "You don't mean to tell me he's queer?" They looked again and he said, "You mean he's living in sin?" The outcome was that it was that Saturday that Bob actually went and got married to his lovely lady wife and so couldn't be in our first play. That was the unofficial opening.

Now Alfred you, as I remember very vividly, yours was the play production that the Prime Minister on the moment he just said, "I declare this new building open," we brought him along to the drama studio and there you were and I was recall, you were producing a play by Ken Whitmore.

Alfred Bradley: That's right.

Interviewer: 0:23:22 Ken's play was about local government as I recall. It was for Radio 3 and I took the precaution, knowing you Alfred of saying, "Now which part of this play are you going to be rehearsing when the Prime Minister, when we bring him through?" You said, "This bit." I said, "Oh no you're not Alfred." Because I knew we had, for example, we had the Town Clerk of Manchester, The Lord Mayor. We had Sir Michael Swann our Chairman.

Quite a few dignitaries and of course the lines in your play, Ken's lines were being about local government, one local government fellow in the play saying to the other, "Well of course the Town Clerk's a creepy little fart." Anyway, so I said, "No, you'll do page 8, 9 and 10." "Meany," you said to me. Anyway, so Mr Callahan sat down and listened to it all and as

he got up I thought, "Well thank goodness now he can go through and meet the cast, your cast." Then you suddenly jumped to your feet and said, "Oh Prime Minister this is the bit we really wanted to rehearse."

Alfred Bradley: No, it wasn't quite like that he said…

Interviewer: 0:24:24 Yes, it was and you turned Alfred. Let me finish. You turned and you showed me page 18 with all these wicked words and he looked at it over his rimless glasses and he said, "Is this the sort of thing you broadcast on Radio 3?" He said, "I'll have to listen a little more often." Now deny that.

Alfred Bradley: Well it was something like that.

Interviewer: 0:24:48 You never conformed?

Alfred Bradley: Well people tell me that. I mean I joined the BBC. I'm Arethean at heart, I was educated by radio. I mean my parents were ordinary working people. My mum switched the radio on in the morning during the war at 6:30am for the weather forecast and the early news and it went off when it went off in the evening and it stayed on all day long.

So we heard the news in Norwegian. I think I can still say, [Non-English speech 0:25:17] where you'd learn bits of Norwegian. You suddenly heard Sibelius for the first time. It was all that odd chance of hearing things that you wouldn't normally have heard in that house. It's rather going to the

library and finding that there is a book called 'Alice in Wonderland' which your parents have never told you about. They didn't have that sort of world.

All that was very important to me and I've in a way always been against the idea of streaming programmes. I mean that's happened in the last few years more and more and I understand why but I think that's rather sad. I haven't been a rebel. I've enjoyed being in opposition rather than in government. I mean I would be a bad administrator, I know that. I'd be alright for a fortnight and once the balloon wore off people would say, "Well he's worse than the gamekeepers." I don't think I could do it very well and I really like the job I do.

I don’t know what I can say about the BBC I don't know how it's changing now. I mean obviously we are in new times and it's going to change very rapidly because of all the, new competition but that may be good for it.

Interviewer: 0:26:31 Given the choice now would you've come in earlier in your career into broadcasting?

Alfred Bradley: No, I'd of come in I think at the same time because I feel it was good to have worked in the theatre first. I knew a lot of plays, you know, I really had produced hundreds of plays of full length plays, a couple of hundred in the theatre in Rep all over the country. Then hundreds of amateur plays. So I was very familiar with the writers. I wouldn't choose to do that. I think I'd of got out earlier. I mean I left when I was about 56. I had the feeling that if I wasn't careful I'd stay and retire and then just drop off the end of the world and I don't want to stop work. I

mean I like work and I think now I see what fun it's been I would've gone a few years earlier if I could, to be free of the administration.

Interviewer: 0:27:21 We've talked about the stable of thoroughbred writers you gathered around you. You also had a very good band of actors. It was almost the Alfred Bradley repertory company.

Alfred Bradley: Well, you'd probably remember because radio in the old days from the regions relied a lot upon the semi-pro, didn't it? I mean the people who were playing aunties and uncles in Children's Hour are often played parts on radio. I can remember as a producer coming in for you and reading questions on a children's programme or trying to be a quiz master, I was disastrous. So we weren't really all pros and I felt very quickly that I wanted to change that. I can remember that I used to work a lot at weekends and still do because you can get actors from theatres on Saturdays and Sundays, they're delighted to come, sometimes on Mondays if they're in a long run. You can get people from The Palace Theatre who are doing a show every night but they'll nip in here and do a few lines.

I mean recently I've worked with Bob Hoskins. Get him on a Sunday or get him late at night and he doesn't mind that he's a famous film star, he'll still come back and do it. Especially if you suggest he play it as a good-looking tall, blonde man, play the part like. I found that some of the old-fashioned chaps who were there. There was one guy said, "We're doing a play on Sunday," and he said, "Well I can't come on Sunday because I

work for the Co-op Undertaking Service and on a Sunday people always come round and view the bodies."

So I thought, "Well funny reason to not be able to act." So I really pushed out those people I'm afraid. With one exception and that was an actor called Geoffrey Banks who's one of my favourite actors who was a school teacher and he was an Equity member. He's proved himself and he's stayedon teaching for a long time and doing lots and lots of radio. He's a wonderful actor and he's now, having finished with teaching a full-time professional actor outside and, in fact, very useful to people.

In general I wanted to get the professionals in. So I went to the theatres, I mean I can remember going to York Rep one night and seeing The Sleeping Beauty and in the second act Beauty wasn't on, she was asleep all through that act and she didn't see her. I nipped round backstage and there was a young across called June Barry. Jimmy Beck was in the Rep there who became the spiv in Dad's Army. There were so many good actors looking for work that I felt they had to be looked after.

I know I've got some favourite ones people like Bernard Cribbins, Bernard I think has a great imagination. Victoria Wood but there are a lot of unsung radio actors people like David Calder, Liz Bell who were in the John Arden play that I did, 'Pearl' who are not very big names outside but are marvellous actors.

Interviewer: Magic, yes.

Alfred Bradley: I've been working today with Nigel Anthony and Kate Binchey. Nigel Anthony playing 28 parts, 28 people and a cow, very good at the cow too.

Interviewer: 0:30:17 Well talking about 1 person playing 28 parts, you did a lovely series with Brian Thompson for us when Children's Hour folded Alfred and it became either Junior Time or Fourth Dimension.

Alfred Bradley: It was Carol Hayman and John Franklin Robbins who played all the parts. It was about a man who was inventing something to make his plants grow taller and he spilt it and the budgie eat it and it became a four-tonne budgie. That was basically the first story, Mr Poskett and they played all the parts, including the budgie, yes.

Interviewer: 0:30:50 Who squawked, "How about a cup of tea, a cup of tea." I remember that.

Alfred Bradley: Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: 0:30:58 You mention Geoffrey Banks as an actor, I mean there again somebody who could play so many parts and it's something of course you cannot do in any other media. You can't do that in the theatre. You certainly can't do it in television. You can't do

it in films. So radio does have that magic about it.

Alfred Bradley: And actors like doing it of course. They love playing more than one part.

Interviewer: 0:31:17 Yes, well it really stretches them, doesn't it? Now, what about Alfred Bradley the author of children stage plays?

Alfred Bradley: Well I always felt that when I worked for the BBC that I couldn't write for radio. I did a couple of plays in tandem with other people and one or two adaptations but I felt that I shouldn't really be writing for radio and working with writers. They'd always get annoyed if I had one of my plays on and they didn't have one of theirs. I'd always been interested in writing for children. I have six children myself, quite a big family and I'd worked in Leicestershire with a children's theatre company and I adapted 'The Wizard of Oz' when I was with them. I went on, I've written a sequel recently about the scarecrow called 'The Scatterbrain Scarecrow of Oz' and I did one or two others. I did the Hans Anderson play, 'The Nightingale and the Emperor'.

Interviewer: 0:32:06 You did 'Paddington Bear'?

Alfred Bradley: 'Paddington Bear', Michael Bond's famous Paddington.

Interviewer: You have a new play on at the moment, children's, do you?

0:32:10

Alfred Bradley: No, I don't but I'm working on one but I'm not going to talk about it now because it's still in my head.

Interviewer: That's bad luck.
0:32:17

Alfred Bradley: Yes, but I have got a new, one I'm working on at the moment, yes.

Interviewer: Well we're now in the 1990s, you're living in the lovely city of
0:32:24 York but not in retirement, judging by the number of times I've seen you around Broadcasting House. You're doing things in the theatre but you're still doing quite a lot of work for the BBC.

Alfred Bradley: Yes, I struck a bargain that if I want early, this was with Michael Green and David Hatch that I wanted to go early and they said, "Why not stay on?" I said, "Well I'd rather go early and work part-time." I've been doing that. I'm not going to tell you how old I am now but for a long time and I felt in a way that if I'd left and came back as a freelance I could work forever.

Now I worked for the drama department for about four months of the year. I also do things, I've been concentrating on writing. So I've just done a music series about the '20s for the music department here, for Radio 2. I've been doing adaptations of children's stories for Cat's Whiskers. I've done adaptations - Roald Dahl, Penelope Liveley and a Willis Hall play recently, 'The Reluctant Vampire' and we're going to do a sequel to

that. I sometimes work for the Archers. I'm a locum for The Archers. If they're desperate I go down to Birmingham, you'd have to be. If I'm desperate I go to Birmingham but I love doing the Archers because some of the girls who are in that who are now character ladies. I remember when they were in their gym tunics and I like to think of them like that, it's good fun.

Interviewer: 0:33:49 You rather liked them at the gym tunic stage didn't you Alfred?

Alfred Bradley: I like innocence. I like innocent young people, yes.

Interviewer: 0:33:56 Well you passed on some lovely young ladies to me for drama, I must say. You certainly did. You've never been on to sit back and free wheel within the BBC, have you? You've always earned your money.

Alfred Bradley: Well I hope I have. I think it's an organisation which trusts its staff, the BBC. It has to because you can't check on people they come in late at night. They work sometimes through the night. You can't say, "What are you doing, it's 10:30am in the morning?" Because that person's probably been on an outside broadcast the day before and there are people who take advantage of that. I think that is terrible actually. I don't like people who fiddle and I don't like people who take advantage of it. So I've always enjoyed working.

I remember when I joined, the Head of Features who was a great man called Laurence Gilliam who died sadly within the first year of me joining. I said, "Have you got any advice?" He

said, "Yes, lad." He said, "Regard the BBC as a hermaphrodite. Suck its tits but kick it in the balls all the time as well." I think that was very good advice.

A story, if you can't use that one which I'll give you as well was Frances Dillon who was… Jack Dillon who had that very funny voice, oh high-pitched voice like that. He was a great director and he told me a story about a young producer who turned up during the war to work with them and it was a time when you did all sorts of programmes, you know, you took the high and the low programmes. You didn't only do Radio 3 or Radio 4. Louis McNeish, say, would be writing 'The Dark Tower' at one point or 'East of the Sun and West of the Moon' and then would do a simple little feature about the bombing of Buckingham Palace.

This young director turned up and for the first few months he said, "Oh that's beneath my dignity, I couldn't do that." Then the next few months he said, "Oh that's too difficult. I can't do that." It went on for a long time with him not doing anything. Jack Dillon was heard to say, "Look lad, you've accepted the 30 pieces of silver, for God's sake betray somebody." I feel like that. You've got to work, you are paid and it's a good organisation to work for, most of the time.

Interviewer: 0:36:08 I get the impression Alfred you derive just as much excitement from being a producer today as you did when you first joined us in North Region?

Alfred Bradley: More now because I don't have any of the paperwork, really. Yes, I think it's a magical medium to be. If you're Richard Eyre and you're running The National Theatre, that sounds like a

smashing job but you get blamed for everything, don't you, if the bogs get blocked up. Poor old Richard is the one who gets the letter. He has to arrange the whole planning. He has to keep everything going for months. He's got to keep a company of people happy for years on end.

We have a few actors come in, they're excited about doing a play, a lot of them haven't worked together before so there's a lot of electricity in the air. Even if the play isn't a great play, you're not saddled with it. You're not going to watch it night after night for the next three or four months like poor old Peter O'Toole playing the Scottish King in misery after the critics had torn it to pieces. We do it and it's quickly over.

Yes, I'm doing some of the things I did at the beginning. I suppose I'm doing a series of 16 pen to paper programmes. That's a sort of grandson of The Northern Drift which I'm doing with Liz Rigby who used to be the editor of The Archers. They are about 10 or 12 poems or bits of prose in each programme and you hope you're going to turn up some new people. Yes, I like being with writers and I admire actors. I admire their courage. I can't think of anything better to do.

Interviewer: 0:37:33 Well, before we sign-off this History of North Regional Broadcasting as far as you're concerned, just tell me about two books you did before you retired. The one I know about because Margaret and I have a copy of it.

Alfred Bradley: Ah yes well I wait Kay Jamieson who was originally my production assistant and then became a producer here and we did a lot of morning stories and we just put together a couple of books. The first one was a book about childhood and if

you're looking for famous names I'd look through the list. These were all stories about young people - Keith Waterhouse, Ken Whitemore, Rachel Billington, Stan Barstow, Barry Davis, Brian Thompson, Peter Turson, Beryl Bainbridge, Don Howarth, Peter Hawkins, Norman Smithson, Alan Sillitoe, Elizabeth North, Sid Chaplain, David Parnoe, Alan Bleazedale, Barry Hines, Valery Georgeson, Bill Norton, Jan Webster, Leonardy Barrett, Peter Tinniswood, Jim Andrew. It's not a bad score, is it?

Interviewer: 0:38:32 That's 'Standard Lying Clocks'?

Alfred Bradley: That's Standard Lying Clocks and the other one was about love and marriage called 'Loving Couples' and that has some of the same people but Frances McNeil, Leanne Hawkin, John Wayne, Sid Chaplain, Alan Richards, Ann Spillard, Robert Furnivole, Paul Allen who's now Kaleidoscope of course. David Cheeseby who is now director with the BBC here. Jo Gill. Sadly, writing a book called 'Loving Couples' you find that nearly everyone wants to write about divorce, there isn't a happy story in it.

END AUDIO