File: **LR003267 – Ted Wilkinson (CASSETTE side 1 - 4)**
Duration: **0:46:22;0:10:38; 0:44:02**
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START AUDIO

[Start of CASSETTE side 1]

Interviewer: A history of North Regional Broadcasting, interview number 27, Edward Wilkinson.

I think that Edward Wilkinson must surely have a unique role in the history of North regional broadcasting, in so far as he arrived pre-war, was the programme director during most of the war, and then spent a further 20 years in the service of the region before retirement.

0:00:26 To be begin at the beginning, Ted, tell me something about your childhood and what first took you into the glamorous pre-war world of the theatre?

Ted Wilkinson: I was the sixth son of a poor parson. My father got an open scholarship to Oxford, at Queen's College. A very good degree.

My mother was also Lancashire, but she was Manchester. The Dale family settled in Manchester in about 1810.

Her great-grandfather in fact opened a shop in Market Stead Lane, which is now called Market Street. The firm prospered for over 100 years, owning the eastern side of [Cannon 0:01:22] Street, and my great-grandfather, Thomas Dale, is remembered by Thomas Street and Dale Street in Manchester.

He was the first chairman of the Manchester School Board. I still have the silver [trowels 0:01:42] and things with which he laid the foundation stones for the earliest schools in Manchester.

All our family were noisy, extrovert I suppose, and we did regular plays. We always had family plays. Large stone vicarages have a lot of rooms.

I sang a great deal for charity, in my little Eton jacket, my hair brushed down, in the First World War. A lot of singing. Quite a lot of acting at both my schools.

We moved to London after the war, as my eldest brother had come back from India, and we wanted to make a family home again. We settled in Golders Green, and I went to University College School.

My English master was a chap called Mordaunt Shairp. Mordaunt Shairp was a successful playwright. He wrote a number of plays in the West End.

He, I'm sure, encouraged me to take my musical and other talents into the theatre. At that point I decided to try for the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, RADA. I auditioned, and I was accepted straight away, and I had two really happy years there.

We had quite a lot of work in the West End in Sunday night play-producing societies. We walked on I think almost unpaid in various productions.

Including one I remember when theComédie-Françaisecame to London, to the New Oxford Theatre, which is now Lyons Corner House on the corner of Tottenham Court Road.

We were the crowd saying, “Ooh,” and, “Ah,” to theseI thoughtterrible actors.

The Comédie-Française had a very stilted type of acting in those days. I imagine it's all gone now.

The play was The Taming of the Shrew, which they called [Non-English speech 0:04:18], but it was Shakespeare alright.

At the end of my time at RADA I entered the theatre, and my first professional job was with the newly formed Pinero Repertory Company, which was formed to revive the plays of Sir Arthur.

You will know Trelawny of the 'Wells', Dandy Dick, The Magistrate, Sweet Lavender, The Second Mrs Tanqueray, and several more.

We toured four of them, and it was in Trelawny of the 'Wells' that I made my debut at the Opera House, Cheltenham, in September 1923.

My second job was with the Ben Greet Players. Old Ben Greet ran companies, primarily Shakespeare. He invented the open air play. It wasn't invented in Regent's Park. It was invented by Ben Greet.

In the summer we did schools, and colleges, and theatres. The one thing we dreaded was that we would do the same play two days running, and that the first day would be wet, because the costumes had to come out of the baskets, wet, and be put on.

Old Sir Philip, seeing the storm clouds gathering, said to the headmistress, I think it was Caversham, now a BBC building, "I think it's going to rain. We've got the school hall ready with the lighting and curtains. Don't you think we should…?" "Oh, it's quite alright, Sir Philip. The girls have their sou'westers and mackintoshes."

Later I went to Paris with the English Players. This was the first time that an English company had been in Paris, as it were, in

rep. All together I made about four visits to Paris, covering about a year in all, and that was definitely fun with a capital F.

All this time I was acting as advance manager, business manager, the rest of it, for old Ben Greet, who was quite an old man, and so were a few of my colleagues and friends.

We also ran summer rep in Seaford, of all places, in Folkestone, and in the West Country.

We were the young men who were mentioned in The Times the other day, in the article on the Oxford Playhouse. Because the three of us took over from Fagan when he had got tired of running the old Oxford Playhouse.

The three were Stanford Holme, who was married to Thea Holme. You may remember Thea. I was their best man. Arthur Brough, known as Peter.

So at the age of 28 we took on the Oxford Playhouse, which as you know in Fagan's day had really been a university theatre in all but name.

We were determined to reverse that, and quite deliberately we put on farces. Ben Travers. We put on [Barrie 0:08:20]. Even Shaw.

This continued for four years and was a very tough time, in that entertainment tax took about a quarter of the takings, and the theatre was very small. It only held 200-odd. The result is unless you packed out you lost money.

Well, every play couldn't pack out every night. The successful ones would perhaps play to capacity four nights out of six, and you just cleared your expenses, but you lost on all the others.

After four years my mother I think encouraged me, and so did the backers of my colleagues, to throw it in.

The problem then was to find a job. Primarily somebody who would pay me, because I had been paying for everybody else, leaving nothing for myself, for years.

My eldest brother suggested I try the V&A, the Victoria & Albert, who were looking for guides, when I got a letter from the BBC in reply to another – naturally I was writing all around – shortlisting me for the job of Senior Drama Producer, North Region of the BBC.

I dropped the other one and went to this interview, in I think the October of 1934. Shortlisted were a young man whom I later found to be Jan Bussell, Dick Gregson, who I met in the waiting room there for the first time, and I.

[Benji 0:10:16] Nicholls was in the chair, as Reith was in South Africa, opening the new broadcasting system there. John Watt was there. Archie Harding. Val Gielgud. And a lot of other people who I later knew quite well.

Anyway, I didn't really know anything about broadcasting. We hadn't got a radio at home. The best people never had in those days. The same they hadn't of course a television later. You didn't admit to having a television set.

The following day I got a letter from Benji Nicholls, Sir Basil as he later became, Director of Home Broadcasting and Reith's deputy, to say, 'Thank you for coming. You haven't got the job. Good luck. Yours sincerely…'

But in longhand he had scribbled, and it was a scribble, it was worse than my writing, 'Proximeaccessit'. Fortunately, I had a classical education, and I knew that meant to try again.

And within a fortnight an advertisement came up in The Times. The BBC wanting a producer for Belfast Variety Department.

Now, my variety experience was really minimal, but I could sing. I was always picked for plays where there was a solo to be sung, as a baritone. And I had a little experience ___[0:12:00].

Anyway, I tried again. This time a much smaller group of people. Three of four only. And I got the job.

Belfast in those days was in an old building. The new Broadcasting House of course had not been built around the corner. But it was extremely comfortable.

Under George Marshall, the very impressive controller, were [Southeray 0:12:4] as programme director, Harry McMullan, Raymond Glendenning [as OBs].

Peter Montgomery, of the Montgomery family of course, the famous Ulster family, as one of the conductors of the Northern Ireland Orchestra.

Sam Bullock, an ex-linen merchant, who was drama producer, but he dealt only in full-length dialect plays. Everything else came to me.

We also had a first-class set of studio assistants and managers, notably George Willoughby and Sam Denton, who is probably the best studio manager I've ever had, I would think, without a doubt.

I inherited some musical comedies from my predecessor, who was a composer as well, and I found myself doing variety acts of course. Dialect. Old men. Old women.[Mad Mulcahy 0:13:48] from County Down. And Mrs Rooney. She was really quite a posh, rich lady, but she did a very good charlady accent.

I was put in charge of [Echoes of 0:14:05] Ulster, which was [In Town Tonight], every Saturday night, and of the preview programme.

Anything that was not a full-length dialect play came my way.

There was quite a good local rep, semi-amateur, semi-professional. I went to see it the first week I was there. A very handsome young man came on in white flannels, and I swear to him, and he won't accept this, and never has, that he said, "Anyone for tennis?" But his name was David Porter.

David's mother, Kathleen Porter, his father had died, he was a sea captain, was one of my regular actresses, and a very good one too. I used to go out to Helen's Bay to see them quite often.

I remember the whole family, including a glorious old grandma, in their mansion there. A rather dilapidated mansion but still a mansion.

I was lucky. I had a number of more than adequate script writers and review script writers, and I was able to put on a full-scale review, with orchestra and choir, every six weeks.

I also put on musical comedies, alternating, because again I had inherited a series of them waiting to be done.

These were repeated the following day on the national programme, in the daytime, and The Observer once picked out one of these as being the best programme of the week. The Observer critic was a lady who I hadn't met at that time called Joyce Grenfell. So she helped my career.

I was due to go to the school and learn something about radio.

0:16:08

Interviewer: That's the BBC training?

Ted Wilkinson: The BBC training school, which was known as St Beadle's, the first head having been Gerald Beadle.

I had a fascinating time, but I also had the opportunity of spending some days at Alexandra Palace, television having started that year, just a few months earlier.

This was quite fascinating. The programme I thought was the best was one called Picture Page, which was the topical programme. It was very well done indeed.

The control room was in the centre, facing both ways, left and right, and one week it was the left-hand studio and the other it was the other one. Apparently the BBC had agreed that for two years they would try to do the EMI one week and John Logie Baird the other.

Now, Baird's system gave the better picture, but was cumbersome, in the fact that everything was filmed. The camera filmed, and then in the control room it was made into television.

Interviewer: Processed and transmitted, yes.

Ted Wilkinson: Whereas the EMI system was directbut not as good quality.

However, the war came, and of course that decision never had to be made, or if it had been made it was in favour of EMI, and today we don't photograph the result. We take it straight through into the set.

I was also lucky to be wanted by John Watt and Eric Maschwitz. Eric Maschwitz who is the composer of A Nightingale in Berkeley Square and so on. A very nice fellow.

They called for me every time there was anybody ill. I went down three times, I think, in the course of those two years.

So I had acquired quite a wide range of skills, both in the production of plays, of reviews, and of musical comedies, but also in variety proper.

I was looking for a house, and I went to the controller and said, “I'm thinking of moving on the 1st of the month. Can I use your name as a referee, a reference?” He said, “Certainly not. You're moving to Manchester next week.” (Laughter)

0:19:07

Interviewer: That was a bit of a shock, wasn’t it? (Laughter)

Ted Wilkinson: It was somewhat of a shock, but as I was ready to move house it wasn’t quite so much of a shock as it might have been. I said, “How’s that?” he said, “Jan Bussell has whipped off to television with his puppets, and you're now Senior Drama Producer, North Region.”

Interviewer: Ah. A job that you had applied for before.

Ted Wilkinson: A job which I had applied for three years previouslyand proxime accessit. No doubt somebody had a little note about me somewhere.

I was of course quite used by this time to the train and the boat, and the journey to and from the mainland. This time it was for good. Although I have been back many times of course.

I arrived in Manchester early one morning, straight off the boat train. It was so early I remember the only place I could get breakfast was in Woolworths next door to Broadcasting House.

Interviewer: In Piccadilly, yes.

Ted Wilkinson: Yes. So into Broadcasting House, Piccadilly, I went, with a view of the streets named after my great-grandfather.

0:20:31

Interviewer: North Region of course has always enjoyed the reputation of being a region which has produced an enormous amount of drama, radio drama.

The original BBC repertory company in London was, I discovered, disbanded in 1931, Ted, because listeners had become tired of hearing their voices.

But Dick Gregson, I also discovered, went ahead and founded what he called the Yorkshire Radio Players, who from the Radio Times were going strong from 1934 onwards.

The cast lists give such names as Philip Robinson, one of our wartime overseas announcers. You knew him when you arrived in Manchester pre-war. Philip of course later in charge of outside radio broadcasters in the North.

The players included Dick's wife, Florence, and Jane [Tairn 0:21:28].

Ted Wilkinson: His daughter.

0:21:29

Interviewer: His daughter. It was almost a family affair then, wasn't it?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes.

0:21:33

Interviewer: I see also, looking through Radio Times, that your work as a drama producer was often heard on a national basis, on the national wavelength as opposed to the regional.

The Good Companions wasn't your first drama production though from Manchester.

Ted Wilkinson: Oh, no. It came after 20 or 30 productions. We were producing, you might say, a play a week. Not all by the same producer.

The Good Companions was a mighty effort and a very good adaptation by Dick Gregson.

He did what a lot of radio and television adapters should do and don't. He read the book until he was dizzy. Then he locked it upand went away and wrote the play without being able to

keep running back to the book. When he had finished the play he ran to the book and got the lines right and the detail right.

He saw, and I've heard this argued many times in various companies, that an adaptation must have the theme and the feel. You must marry [the original off as 0:22:57] ideas in some way. You must tread in its shoes. And this cannot be done by having the thing in front of you on the desk or on the dining table.

So he read it until he knew it backwards, and then he locked it up and went away and wrote the play, and if ever there was a justification for that method it was in his adaptation of The Good Companions.

Interviewer: Well, you not only had a very thoroughly prepared adaptation of The Good Companions. From your point of view, your side of it as the producer, you did some rather nice casting I think.

Ted Wilkinson: It was, I think you might say, the Northern RadioRep really. It was all our best actors fitted into the parts that they would do the best. But by that time, having been in Manchester for over a year, a year and a half, I thought I knew pretty well their capabilities. Some were cast slightly out of their normal shape and character, but it came off in the end.

And Violent Carson, Doris Gambell, and Muriel Levy singing,“We are the good companions,” and practically doing the high kicks to go with it – they couldn’t avoid that because of that atmosphere of the song and of the play – will long remain with me. It was great fun.

Norman Partridge, who was an excellent stage actorand a more than useful radio performer. He had been with Frank

Benson, and with the Old Vic, and many others in his time. He was, I suppose today you would have said, the old actor, the old Shakespearian type of fellow, with the voice and so on. He was the nicest of men and a very modest and gentle man.

Eileen Draycott. An excellent actress.

Violet I think I've mentioned.

And an actor whom I had myself picked, and given his first opportunity of stardom, also played a leading part, and his name was Wilfred Pickles. The story of how he came to stardom can be told now I think.

It was the morning I arrived in Manchester. Having had my breakfast, I went next door and found my office. There sitting was the chap who had been holding the fort for a month or two in the interregnum, Cecil McGivern, to whom I was introduced. We didn't know each other.

Who, after my settling down, went back to Newcastle and became one of the team of drama and feature producers in the North Region for the next few years, until the outbreak of war.

He said, "You had better go and find some digs or something. Come back at six o'clock. I've called a casting session."

So I came back at six o'clock. Saw the script. I had never seen it before. There were 10 or 11 parts, and he called 22 or 24 actors and actresses. So it took all night of course.

I staggered out, having been travelling all night on the boat and so on, at about ten o'clock, and went back to my digs.

Which were the notorious Acker Street, the old theatre digs street. A lovely old landlady, whose husband was head porter at the Midland Hotel. The front room was the star room.George Robeywas living there. We were in the back.

Next morning, bright and early, I came to the office, and Cecil said – he was already there, we had chairs opposite each other at the same desk – “Can I see how you got on last night?” I said, “You’ve set me a devil of a problem, so many people.” He said, “Let me see it.”

So I unlocked my drawer and gave him the sheet of paper. He said nothing, but he unlocked his own drawer and produced a similar piece of paper. They were identical. I had cast it exactly as he would have done, knowing the people.

From that moment onwards Cecil and I were great friends. I could do no wrong. Even during the time whenmany years laterhe was controller of programmes, television, Cecil would come up and talk and unburden his soul to me.

Cecil had a name of being a difficult man, as no doubt he was, but he was also highly efficient, highly intelligent, and a good friend of mine.

That’s how we met, and from that moment onwards there was an enormous amount of scripts rolling in. Everybody in the North of England seemed to write radio plays, or thought they could.

I think, looking back, I would say something like a play a day came in, about 365 plays. Every time you had a journey you took three or four with you and did your best to catch up.

Probably, apart from Dick Gregson, the outstanding playwright was a bank manager from Hull, whom I later knew quite well and became a good friend, Maurice Horspool.

Maurice, his father was the Mr Chips of an old grammar school in Yorkshire. A grand old man. An art master. I have one of his paintings.

Next door to them lived Winifred Holtby and her family. So I met them. There was a whole literary group around there, including the [Hydes 0:30:27]. The Hydes were great authorities on the Yorkshire dialect and that sort of thing.

Had the war not come I probably… I only found Maurice Horspool a year before the war. I produced half a dozen of his plays. I think he would have become a major playwright. But of course after the war the radio play was on the down, and the television was on the up, and he might not have made it.

0:31:02

Interviewer: Tell me, Ted, when you arrived Jan Bussell had just left, as you said, for television, joining his wife Ann Hogarth for the famous Hogarth Puppets. Now, Geoffrey Bridson, he would have been here.

Ted Wilkinson: Yes. He was very much the features writer, working of course to the programme director on the one side and to Laurence Gilliam in London on the other. I will go into that pattern later on if we have time.

The setup at that time, under the controller John Coatman, of whom I will talk later, was Henry Fitch, in charge of administration, John Salt, a quite outstanding young man.

I would say John Salt and Tony [Rendall 0:31:57], who was controller of programmes, television, at the same time, just before the war, both of them alas died quite young and never had the chance to fulfil their promise.

They were the only two people I think in the BBC, apart from Hugh Carleton Greene, that were director general material.

Hugh came and was the first staff man coming up from the ranks to be director general. Poor John and poor Tony fell by the wayside.

I worked very closely with John for many years, and of course with Olive, his wife, and we had a very happy and warm, affectionate relationship.

In charge of talks were Donald Boyd, from The Yorkshire Post, a first-class man, and Roger Wilson, a brilliant scholar, who later became secretary to the Society of Friends in Euston Road, and made a new name there.

Victor Smythe was in charge of OBs, assisted by Richard North, who did a little studio work too. There wasn't a great deal of studio variety in those days, in Manchester or anywhere.

Geoffrey Bridson was in charge of, and was writing of course his own programmes as features producer. A quite outstanding name in the history of radio of course.

The editor in charge was Frankie Williams, who for some reason was known as Fergus but his real name was Frank. And his assistant was our old friend Basil Vernon, whom you will remember.

Frankie Williams had a similar experience to me. I was talking to him. We lived in the same suburb in Bramhall, and I was saying to him, "Where are you going for your summer holidays?" He said, "London." I said, "How do you mean?" He said, "I've just heard I'm being transferred there on Monday."

Into a high-up job. It was the number two or number three job in engineering in London. But again the wife was left to sell the house, take the children from school, and organise the removal. (Laughter)

The BBC was very high handed in that way. You were moved around. I was, and he was, to mention two of them. It didn't worry me, but I think it worried him.

Richard was a very humorous man. When he married he had a recording made so that when he opened the front door a voice said, "Where the hell have you been?" (Laughter)

Interviewer: He was really using radio. (Laughter)

Ted Wilkinson: Oh, yes. Victor was an amazing man. Very much the professional in his field.

Of course, there were 28 theatres in the North in those days. Now there's one. I suppose the Tower Blackpool is probably the only one left.

But every town had its music hall. Newcastle would have two. The Empire and the other one. Gateshead would have one. Middlesbrough would have one. And so forth. Every town had a music hall.

They didn't all have theatres but most of them had. In the theatre, you see, the number one tour of big cities was 26. You could work for half a year just going around the big cities. At the time we're talking about this was on the way out, this pattern, and repertory was coming in, and the little theatres.

One of the things that I did, over and above, as I say, my department producing about a play a week, aided by other producers as well as myself, I invented a series around the northern repertory companies.

This involved of course agreeing a play with the director of the theatre. Then I would adapt it overnight. It was pure cheek and

self-confidence, because obviously I must have made a hell of a mess of most of them. (Laughter)

The northern reps that I'm talking about of course were headed by the Liverpool Playhouse, by far and away the most important. Manchester in a tram shed. Not very good. Sheffield Playhouse, pretty good. York Theatre Royal, good. Newcastle Playhouse, moderate.

Of the northern reps perhaps only three were really very good, but the little theatre movement had caught on from America of course. I had first met it when I was in America. This had grown during the 1930s.

Phyllis Bentley in Halifax was a notable case, and of course produced Wilfred Pickles, among others, from that experience.

L. Du Garde Peach, Laurie Peach, The Great Hucklow Players. You remember him and his wife?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ted Wilkinson: He later became a member of our advisory council. He wrote a few plays for me, as well as his work for Children's Hour.

Interviewer: Castles of England.

Ted Wilkinson: Yes. Sladen-Smith was probably the cleverest of them all. A funny little man who ran the Unnamed Society of Manchester. One of his best actresses, I always thought, was a girl called Doris Speed, who you know.

Interviewer: Yes. A very good actress too.

Ted Wilkinson: Excellent, yes, and classical as well as modern.

The People's Theatre, Newcastle, was absolutely first class, and of course produced not only the uncles and aunts for Children's Hour, in the earlier days, but such later stalwarts as Sal Sturgeon and Esther McCracken, who of course is a lifelong friend of mine.

I haven't mentioned the administrators, but Tom [Heeney 0:39:23] was the famous cashier. Wilfred Barneswas his number two. Wilfred died. His daughter Audrey Barnes joined the BBC. You would know Audrey.

Interviewer: Yes. [Mother].

Ted Wilkinson: He was succeeded by Sam [Hodgson 0:39:38], who among other things started the Association of Broadcasting Staff, of which I was the original member. Because I happened to be in the next office, and he came to me with a bit of paper and said, "Sign this."

On the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the ABS there was a big do in London, and I was one of the leading speakers, for being the number one member. (Laughter)

I think it's worth explaining thatas Bridson was nominally responsible to Gilliam so I was responsible to Val Gielgud, and to his deputy, [Murray Maclaren 0:40:20], a Scottish poet. A most amusing man.

I had known the Gielguds of course for a long time in his other fields, but I met him as my boss when I became a drama producer.

[There were a lot of 0:40:39] regular meetings of departments, from all over Great Britain, in London, that you evolved. This duality of responsibility to your department in London for standards, and to your department in the region for your money, your bread and butter, and your regional standards. Which were two different things from the professional standard.

This pattern continued more or less happily, but of course after Munich we all knew there was trouble brewing. While sandbags were being filled the BBC's pattern of regionalism was being copied by everybody, including the government.

We were the first people to invent regions, and they were invented primarily to meet the coverage of the new giant high-powered transmitters.

Before that there were, I think, 24 or 26 local stations all over Great Britain, each with their uncles and aunts. Uncle Mac was not unique. He just happened to be in London. My cousin, Eric Dale, was Uncle Eric of Manchester Children's Hour and so forth.

Reith comes into it very much here, because Reith realised, I think, that he had good professionals in charge of his departments in London but not men of affairs.

Now, the weakness was, you see, that there were no controllers representing Scotland, Northern Ireland, the North, or anybody else. They were picked on quite another basis.

Reith picked forthe controllers, gradually as the vacancies arose, five or six outstanding men. They as a body, and

individually, exerted an enormous influence on the BBC, which I don't think it's ever recaptured, because the pattern has changed again and again.

From Scotland, Melville Dinwiddie, a distinguished soldier, DSO, MC, OBE, etc., Provost of Aberdeen Cathedral, a parson, became Controller, Scotland.

HopkynMorris,the QC, later a member of parliament for mid-Wales, Welsh.

Gerald Beadle, who had been director of broadcasting in South Africa, appointed to West Region.

Benji Nicholls himself of course,[on the staff of 0:43:40] Gallipoli, and Secretary of the Carnegie Trust and so on. The only man apart from Reith with this sort of standing I'm talking about, to whom we [worked] in London.

George Marshall, who had been secretary to Toronto University, and later had been station director at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and Belfast. He had the lot. He was a founder member of the Society of Antiquaries, and he was a first-class musician.

Then we had John Coatman, who arrived soon after I did in Manchester. John, who was a Mancunian, and also an Oxford graduate, had joined the Indian Police, and later he became a professor at Delhi University.

He was secretary to the Round Table Conference,, which eventually evolved the pattern of two Indian, India and Pakistan, as we know them today.

He was the author of many books, mostly upon India. And of course he was a commander of the Order of the Indian Empire.

He was also for a short time a professor at the London School of Economics. Very much an all-rounder.

Now, these men left it to their programme directors and their engineers to get on with the job, and they represented their regions and Britain in the BBC. They were men of affairs.

I always remember going to John Coatman to complain about something. Something had gone wrong over the civil defence arrangements. He said, “Oh, this is nonsense. Get me the Home Secretary. Herbert, what the hell are you doing?”This is true, you see. (Laughter)

This simply underlines the fact that although there were no governors, as we have today, for the regions and for the nations of Great Britain, the regional controllers were men of such power that their opinion evolved not only the wartime pattern but the post-war pattern.

[End of CASSETTE side 1]

[Start of CASSETTE side 2]

Ted Wilkinson: They were a far heavier team than [London 0:00:08] could muster. Yes. I mentioned civil defence. Along with the national industries and the rest of it, civil defence was regionalised very much on BBC lines almost identically. In the last region we were very fortunate in having a very outstanding man as controller of the region’s civil defence, Hartley Shawcross. Working through town clerks, cities, counties and so on, a whole pattern of war-time living was evolved, so that when the war broke out somebody, at least, was ready for it.

0:01:01

Interviewer: What preparations, Ted, had Manchester or north region made regarding the programme, knowing that war seemed to be imminent?

Ted Wilkinson: On the programme side, very little. We just knew that certain transmitters would come down. The engineers tell you this sort of thing. We knew that they would be grouped and so it proved. We knew that there would be only one national programme. We knew that television would close down because of its directional-finding ability.

But how to cope really, the principles had been evolved, but the detail had to come out in the wash. Of course, that was very hard work coming as it did amid bombings and shortages, refugees and the rest of it. One of the things I didn't enjoy being was a censor. I was the north regional censor. Every word that went out I had to okay and had to be typed in advance. Nobody could ad lib. The D-notices from [admiral 0:02:21], the director of war time…

Interviewer: Public affairs.

Ted Wilkinson: Yes, were of course very frightening and depressing. It's only in recent years, I think, that people have realised… Although I certainly did myself what a parlous state we were in in the first two years.

This was not helped, of course, by our so-called friends. We had the American ambassador, Joe Kennedy, telling us all how wonderful we were, but telling Roosevelt that we hadn't a

chance in hell. So much so that Roosevelt sent over his wife to this country to act as his unofficial ambassador, obviously not being willing to accept his ambassador's advice.

She toured the country and she finished up in Liverpool and at 12 hours' notice broadcast to the nation. I was in charge as usual, "There's poor old Ted put on these things, nobody else to do it." I still have her script with my annotations. I really must send it to the archives, mustn't I? It shouldn't be sitting in my desk.

She was very charming and when she got home, we now know, she reported very differently from Joe Kennedy. The New Yorker cartoon, which was very famous at the time, tells the whole story. There's a barber shaving a customer and the barber is saying, "Well, see brother. They tell us this is an emergency. Okay, when do we emerge?"

Roosevelt went on the air for his monthly fireside chat that night and he told that story again and within a fortnight America was in the war. These things, I'm not giving cause and effect. They are coincidences if you like. But…

0:04:49

Interviewer: Now, of course, at this point Ted, you were the programme director?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes.

0:04:56

Interviewer: When were you made...? When were you appointed to that post?

Ted Wilkinson: Just before the outbreak of war. For three or four days before. To my surprise I was called in and told I was it. I remained there. John [Salt 0:05:13] went off with, who is it? [Marriott] and Andrew Stuart and many others went off to the Ministry of Information. Brendan Bracken was the head man there. Later John went to America and to a United Nations conference and so on at San Francisco. So it was six years before John and Olive came back and I, quite happily, stepped down. I had done it all the time that it was a war-time appointment.

0:05:47

Interviewer: Now at the beginning of the war, I suppose your staff were dramatically reduced. You must have been a pretty busy programme director?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes indeed. From a staff of 18, we were reduced to about 9. Most of them were either sick men, in one way or another; men with one leg or one arm or one eye. I think I was the only fit man. The amazing thing is that I kept fit throughout the war. I think after the war I mentally collapsed. It was, of course, very stimulating as well as very hard work.

We produced, in that time, though it was a national programme, but it was, of course, fed from the regions and we produced some 12 hours a week into the national programme, of which quite a lot would be orchestra. So it isn't quite as much office work as it sounds. We also produced six hours for overseas, [Bush 0:07:10], Empire Service and the rest of it.

We, of course, recruited quite a lot of people on a war-time basis to help out otherwise there was nine producers, we'd be down to four or five of us trying to turn out quite a big output, in fact, if you look at the figures.

0:07:29

Interviewer: Was it because of the amount of radio drama that the radio had been doing pre-war that it was decided that the BBC drama department at the outbreak of war should move to Manchester?

Ted Wilkinson: No, it was simply who had the room and were there beds there to sleep on. Variety went to Bangor wrongly as it turned out because they later transferred to Bristol. Drama came to Manchester. Religion went to Bristol and so forth. It was just like the kids being evacuated. It didn't really work out. There came a point where most of them dribbled home.

They were enormous fun to have them there and of course they contributed a lot to morale of the place. It was injection of cheerfulness which was very valuable. The General Officer commanding Western Command once phoned to say he was coming to see the controller. There wasn't a home guard in the place, so they wrinkled up Jack Livesey, one of the actors, and they shoved him in a uniform, gave him a gun and put him on the front door. He stamped and he switched his head about left and right and the rest of it. The General on his return congratulated us on our very smart home guard. (Laughter) He was one of those that had never even troubled to put on a gas mask in his life.

0:09:21

Interviewer: Of course the BBC started the Repertory Company again, didn't they?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes.

Interviewer: You had such well-known war-time drama voices as Gladys Young, Philip Wade, Laidman Browne, Ivan Sampson, Valentine Dyall because-

[Break in audio 0:09:35]

When I joined, of course, the drama department had just returned to London. I was working with them for Val and others doing the effects, the sounds effect. Gladys Young and those I've mentioned were still talking about Manchester and their experiences and I used to think, "Gosh." To me, there was only one BBC and that was in London and for the first time there were people talking who had been in a BBC region.

Ted Wilkinson: Yes. Most of them fitted very well. Occasionally, of course, somebody didn't or had a London view of things. One girl said Margaret Peyton, the librarian, "Oh Margaret, I don't know how you stand it to live here. Where on earth do you buy your shoes?" To which Margaret Peyton replied, perfectly accurately and correctly, "Oh, I always buy mine in Paris."

[End of CASSETTE side 2]

[Start of CASSETTE side 3_4]

0:00:11

Interviewer: -contributing of course to the national programme in those days, in output was Nan McDonald and children's contributions.

Ted Wilkinson: Indeed. A steady and strong contribution. The pre-war actors must have been very glad Nan was there because there was no regional drama going out in the war time. So Nan's productions gave them the foothold which they needed.

Many of my actors and many, of course, newer ones flourished in those days. We also had an enormous music output. Morris Johnston, Arthur Spencer and we had a very active contact which kept to quite ___[0:01:03] with Western Command in Chester and Northern Command in York, with the various air fields.

It was not only a matter of contacts of our war correspondents working to them and with them, but it also resulted in programmes, either reflecting life in the Forces or, of course, when the Polish army and the US army arrived. Again, lashings of programmes, two-way you might say, on that subject.

So the PROs of the commands and so on became regular friends – Alan Simpson, Vernon Noble, was PRO at York at one time. I first met him when he was in uniform. We did a lot of programmes with US army; band and choir and song when they arrived. The polish army choir, looking out of the window, and I saw an army marching across Piccadilly. There were hundreds of them.

This was the Polish army choir. A famous conductor from the Prague Opera and so forth… Funny little man in dirty khaki who was a distinguished musician at his time and they tramped in and they came on and on until… I'm very surprised that the ___[0:02:46] Manchester ever recovered. Two hundred and eighty soldiers tramped into that studio. Far too heavy. It could have murdered the bank manager down below.

0:03:02

Interviewer: What about the propaganda side of output, Ted, during the war? I mean, I'm thinking particularly of Bridson and his series like Billy Welcome?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes. That would be the only propaganda which a region really did direct. The rest would be done through our contributions to the Overseas Service and so on, if you like to think of that as propaganda. "That all is well and we are flourishing and we are going to win."

Bridson and the future's producers [generally 0:03:38], Cecil McGivern, did produce naturally programmes just as a talks man would produce a programme representing his own ethos and his own viewpoint.

Among many programmes which Geoffrey Bridson produced, was the idea of Billy Welcome. The little unemployed man looking for a job. This was simply a way of getting into factories and workshops and so on and revealing their problems through the eyes of a little man. It's a good standby and, of course, it helped to make [Woodford Pickle's 0:04:24] more than famous in his time.

0:04:29

Interviewer: We haven't mentioned his predecessor, Frank [Nichols]. Now you must have worked quite a bit with Frank?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes, when I evolved that first cast list, after that point, Frank Nichols had almost automatically been the leading man. Frank being a man in his 50s, Wilfred being a chap in his 20s or early 30s. Certainly no more.

So that night, I reversed gear and poor old Frank was on the down. This, of course, was not deliberate. I didn't know the man from Adam. He continued to give sterling performances. He was an excellent radio actor. He, like a great many of the radio actors, had no stage experience. It was evolved and picked up.

He was a good reader. He had good timbre of voice, he had a quick ear for dialect and the nuances of speech and so on. It's quite different from the theatre background that most actors, well, in radio or television did have – the professionals.

In a way, the amateurs were often better because they were just being themselves. Frank Nichols was one of them. He was a fine little actor, a fine little radio actor. I don't suppose he would have been any good at all – I may be doing him an injustice if he'd been shoved on to a stage.

Another thing that isn't realised is that in order to counter the effects of bombing on our major cities, there were standby transmitters and studios throughout the country. The standby studio for Manchester was Penketh, near Warrington, near Burtonwood. The engineer in charge there was [Mack Hillon 0:06:49]. He was in [IC] in Penketh. In this part of the world in Northumberland, I took the schoolhouse in the village of

Ponteland, which is still there on the corner, opposite the pub. This was laid out as the standby studio.

It was, of course, connected to the transmitter so had Newcastle been bombed, programmes could have continued to go out from there within the hour. This pattern was common to the whole country but I can only speak for the two that I was involved in finding and starting.

There was a firm conviction that Hitler would invade and that he would overrun the south east of England probably a line from The Wash to the Bristol Channel. So we spent a lot of time evolving alternative programmes. Not only did transmitters go up and down in different groups to confuse the bomber, but we evolved a complete alternative programme based on the north of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Many meeting of course, to bring these up to date.

Fortunately, it was never called on, but it was there on paper and it could have been… We could have kept going for six or eight weeks without London. The transmitter network, of course, was geared accordingly and could do the same. I can't speak for the engineers but, obviously, we wouldn't have wasted our time doing this if it hadn't been engineeringly possibly.

We were full, of course, foreigners of all kinds. I've mentioned the Polish but, of course, the Americans came over in enormous quantities. We had permanent refugees, not only Jewish refugees from the Continent and so on, this country has always been host to, but we had half the Channel Islands living in the north of England.

So we evolved programmes for them and about them and to them. When the war was finishing, and of course we had fairly good notice of this, every Channel Islander who wanted, was

able to come into the nearest studio and record a message back home.

These tapes were flown on V-Day, were flown into the Channel Islands, the various islands and played in the marketplace to the assembled ___[0:10:10]. That would be the first time they knew their uncles and aunts, children and friends, were still alive. So it was very moving.

The same sort of thing applied, of course, to all message programmes and two-way programmes of that sort. This one was extra moving. When I see fictional programmes about the Channel Islands, I'm always reminded of this day or this week when all that was brought about. I'd been on duty for three days and three nights. I walked out on my 41st birthday, May 8th 1945.

I walked home, it was a beautiful day, and I walked 15 miles home through suburbs and factories and finally golf courses out to Bramhall where I lived. I collapsed in the garden with a rug over me and slept for two days in the open air. I was absolutely finished.

Those people who had been away in the army and so on had their ups and downs. Of course, some of them had terrible experiences, but they hadn't had the sheer monotony of keeping going as the people on the home front did. So in a way, I had quite a tough war.

0:11:51

Interviewer: Well, Ted, we've come to the end of the war. January 1946, a former Yorkshire journalist named Bob Stead comes out of the Navy and into the BBC as a senior talks producer. By this time, [John Salt 0:12:07] was back from America with his wife, Olive, who became the north's assistant head of programmes. Did it take long to get regional broadcasting going again?

Ted Wilkinson: The reverse. I think we had two and a half weeks, which was the time it took to set the Radio Times in type and printed and circularise it. So you might say, really, that we had a day to turnaround and start again because the systems had to be made within literally, the week, after the end of the war as to how we should tackle the new pattern of the BBC Home Service and the rest of it. And the regional opt-outs that would exist.

John Salt came back as you have said in perfectly good health to begin with. His good health lasted a year or more before he had any deterioration. The new staff came in – Bob Stead, you've mentioned. A handsome sailor with a peaked cap in uniform when I first met him. Barker Andrews joined us and Alec Hayes also in the variety world. Charles Groves came in. He'd been a conductor of the BBC Chorus. He came in as another conductor to the orchestra.

John Salt and I, working as a team and in endless discussions – we enlisted and we evolved deliberately a regional policy which we called 'Showing the Flag'. Practically every programme toured. This put an enormous strain of course on the outside broadcast engineers and people. All the BBC orchestras toured but ours toured the hardest.

We toured programmes, we toured variety, Gardeners' Question Time and so on, and Dick Kelly and his Barn Dance

and the other programmes which he did on Newcastle. Yes, I think everything toured except drama.

We decided to take on and extend the building at Woodhouse Lane. This enabled us to find six more offices. So we were able to put drama there and a branch of variety by ___[0:15:02] when he finally came, as well as talks producers and music producers; Frank Wade who had been in Newcastle came down to Leeds.

There wasn't the same shortage of accommodation in Newcastle as there was in Leeds, but this is how it was solved. That is how Leeds became a very active area in the immediate post-war era. In regard to [Bowker 0:15:31] Andrews who was a keen and useful chappie, he took some persuading, but eventually we persuaded him to go out to Capri and see Gracie Fields.

They hit it off straightaway and he came back a week later with a series in his pocket and, again, we toured Gracie. She was very uncertain having married an alien, Monty Banks, and more or less had been out of it during the war. She was very uncertain how she would be received.

So we opened the tour in her hometown of Rochdale and this was an enormous success and her series and her farewell song, 'Now is the Hour' and so on, became a fixture spread over three or four years and brought her right back into the front of English artists and English singers.

0:16:40

Interviewer: And indeed to the hearts of the people?

Ted Wilkinson: Indeed, yes.

Interviewer: When I arrived in north region, Ted, in 1949, there you are; a nice wide smile to welcome a new and a very young and totally inexperienced producer. I remember you telling me that, “I gather you’re going to be working with Nan McDonald with Children’s Hour?” And you said, “A very excellent, but a very firm lady.” (Laughter) Well, by Jove, I learned a lot from Nan about children’s programmes and tried to reach something of her standards.

0:17:19 It didn’t seem very long after my arrival that you left Manchester and were put in charge of Newcastle?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes, there was this vacancy and I said I’d like to have it. The reasons go back a long way. I’d known Newcastle as a city all my life, as a touring actor and so on. I’d worked here regularly producing plays. I always produced from all three centres, equally. I never became a Manchester man in that sense.

I consider Newcastle one of the finest cities. Edinburgh, Bristol and Newcastle are the only three cities in Britain, for me. Each of them have an awe of distinction and character. I was a regular visitor, as assistant head of programmes, one or two days a month. So I was well in touch and had the feel of the place.

By stories, I always used to go to the [Eldern 0:18:40] and tell all my latest stories. Sure enough, they all appeared at the Sunday Sun, the gossip column the following Sunday because John [Polwarth] used to write that as a side-line. (Laughter)

John was another one who died prematurely. He went to Canada as a Canadian representative, came back and died

very shortly as a young man. So there's another promising man in his 40s that we lost. He was certainly a first-class journalist and a very good talks producer. Of course, he also found Dick Kelly who was in the army and came in and submitted scripts for record programmes. When Dick came out of the army, he was shortlisted and appointed as BBC producer. Of course, shortly afterwards, he married Pat.

For all these reasons, I was anxious to come to Newcastle, which in spite of everything, the excellent people here, had definitely fallen back in its importance. Anyway, I needed a stimulus and I thought of all the things I'd like to do. I've always longed to make something of Newcastle.

So I came and saw and, in some respects – conquered – but not as much I would like. The main weakness in the situation in those years, in the early '50s, was the shared wavelength. This was due to our weak-kneed representatives at the Madrid Frequency Convention when they gave away one wavelength which the BBC needed.

The result was, they came back with six when we needed seven, or whatever it was. Since the north already had one, the powers that be – not recognising the size of the north or its diversity – decided that the north of the north should share the same wavelength as Belfast.

This caused endless problems, of course, notable in the field of public relations. The fact that people in the north east of England had to listen to items about Northern Ireland with which they were not at all interested and vice versa. It worked both ways. It did, however, enable me to keep in touch with my friends in Northern Ireland because two or three times a year, we had meetings when they came here or we went there.

So my happy relationship with many of the people I've mentioned before, and others, continued. That in itself was on the plus side. New staff were recruited. Yvonne Adamson was discovered and she took the place of Pat [Glocksy 0:22:17], who was the Yvonne Adamson of her day. That is to say, a reporter that could turn their hand to anything, literally. Arthur Appleton came in as a football man and sports, generally, and many others.

Apart from refurbishing studios and the rest of it, the next most important thing I achieved was a mobile recording outfit based here. Within the year, static recording, which was- Manchester hadn't even got one. We were ahead there.

0:23:02

Interviewer: When you say 'static', Ted, you're referring now to tape? Static tape channel?

Ted Wilkinson: It was tape, yes.

0:23:08

Interviewer: You had ordinary disc static, of course, didn't you?

Ted Wilkinson: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, I used to use it.

Ted Wilkinson: The old DC room or Dramatic Control panel, first door on the left, was scrapped and became a recording suite. Indeed, stayed as such until the building was vacated a year and bit ago. They came here to the new building where we are sitting now.

I also managed to get some money to add extensions to the building. We needed badly, more office and canteen room and storage space and garaging. The problem was, when they started digging, we found there was a river underneath Broadcasting House, and still is of course, under that building.

Newcastle, which appears to be flat streets, running east to west and so on, north and south, is in fact – that is artificial. Underneath it are quite a number of fast-moving streams running into the Tyne. There's one that goes under Newbridge Street.

So it was quite a problem to build that. Having built it, it enabled us of course not only to house our staff properly but to have good canteen facilities and to be ready for the outbreak of television.

First of all, we had to get on to television. This was, again, one of my major problems. I'd early realised that to be any good in the job, I must know everybody. By the time I left, I was sending 600 Christmas card. I knew every Lord of Tenant, every town clerk, every editor, every Lord Mayor, every vice chancellor; Christian name terms all the way around.

Being present at Rotary, Newcastle helped because it meant that I could go anywhere in the region and find a platform to make a statement at a day's notice on any subject under the sun if I wanted to. Perhaps I shouldn't have used Rotary in this way but it was very useful.

When television came up to Holme Moss the signal was, as you probably know, transmitted by [saucer to saucer 0:26:01] as it were. There is a saucer – you'll still see it if you drive up near the Cleveland Tontine Hotel, on the hillside.

Now that saucer fed the signal from Birmingham and Manchester and all stations north, up to Black Hill in Edinburgh. That's the next hill to Arthur's Seat there, standing above the city of Edinburgh.

It passed right over our heads here. We never had it. The rest of the north had it, Scotland had it. Scotland is a nation and has – how many MPs? Sixty or seventy MPs. A little corner of England hasn't that pool.

However, I decided that would be put right and here's a little story that I don't think I've told before, certainly, not publicly and I think I may safely tell it now. A certain town clerk rang and said, "Ted, this is absurd. Scotland have had it for nearly a year and there's still no sign and the government say it's not technically possible, etc." He said, "I'm going to put my MP up to ask a question in the House. How should I phrase it?"

So I phrase it for him. The next day, the secretariat rang up from London. "We've got an awkward question in the House tomorrow. What's the answer?" So I phrased – I gave them the answer too. (Laughter) So I'm probably the only BBC person who's both given the question and answer to the House on the same day.

The gest of it was, of course, that the extension to the north east of England was agreed within two or three months. I think it probably stems from that and, of course, the pressure of MPs and others and editors and newspapers and so on, over many months. When the go-ahead came, there was very little

time left. Always short of time and the team – they came many times looking for sites and buying land and so on.

Eventually, there were two sites chosen for the north east of England. One was Maiden Law, near Lanchester and the other was Pontop Pike, near Stanley. The Stanley Urban Council, by far, more go ahead. Had a first class engineer. When we'd bought the site and before we even had time to think who to put in it or what to put on it, the local authority had made half a mile of road, tunnelled through some rock and generally showed exactly how to do it. A brilliant bit of work.

As a result, Pontop came up on time and when I say 'on time', it was the second year running when Newcastle United were the finalists in the Cup. Nobody had given the public any inkling because we didn't know we were going to be ready so quickly.

A few thousand people must have had sets or borrowed them in the knowledge it was coming. The transmitter wasn't really ready. (Laughter) The coverage of the Cup final that day, which Newcastle – by the way, through Jackie Milburn – won the Cup again for the second year running.

The EIC and his assistants had Pontop literally held bits of wire together with their hands for two hours in order that the thing could go out, if only to a very few hundred people. The same story applies to the fight for a programme output. I mentioned the strength of the BBC in its controllers. Its great weakness, pre-war, was that we produced everything except news.

Here we were with the Scotsman and Yorkshire Post, Liverpool Post, the Birmingham Post – half the great papers of Great Britain – and no news bulletins.

[Break in audio 0:31:10]

All news was centred in London so that really is weak point number two of the BBC as I see it, looking back. By Jove, we needed some strong men as those controllers and programme directors because otherwise I think we'd have been steam-rollered [sic].

A similar fight, anyway, took place in order to achieve live programmes from Newcastle. It was two years behind the Manchester operation. Again, when it was ready and built and the Radio Times – nobody had time to find any staff. Or, if they had they were in the process of being shortlisted.

So what happened was, the Manchester newsroom was denuded as to 50% of its staff who were whipped up here and kept the thing going until our own men were recruited, trained and arrived, and found a place to live. So the staff that came up and the news editor, there were among others; David Coleman, Jim Entwistle and many more whose names will be more familiar to you than to me.

Our own team arrived within a few weeks and proved very strong under an excellent young news editor, John [Tisdall 0:33:10] who later became assistant controller of the spoken word – or unspoken word. I think the last time I heard, was in charge of broadcasting of television in Hong Kong. I'm sorry, I lost touch with John.

The DG, who I think by this time was Hugh Carleton Greene, an old friend of mine from Oxford, by the way. He was at New College when we were running the Playhouse and was a regular friend and visitor. He came to watch the programme and we also, indeed, had a meeting at the board of governors in my office. Had quite a week of it.

He said, it was on about its third night, "This is the best so far which I've seen in the regions. This is superb." So that cheers

us up and I was very glad to see that, only the last few weeks, the regional news here in Newcastle has been voted the best in the regions on some other basis.

In looking for presenters and announcers, through a contact, a man working for ICI in the legal department was mentioned, and he was asked whether he'd be interested. In having passed the audition, he accepted it and his name was Frank Bough. It was Frank who was the first anchor-man of 'News from the North' or '5:00 to 6:00' or whatever it was called in those days.

The audition of the Playhouse actors resulted in our finding of an absolutely first-class man who has served the BBC well and royally and with distinction ever since, Tom Kilgour, who I see is still performing and still with us.

I had seen Tom act in various parts in the theatre, had a high opinion of him, and when he joined we became good friends and I think we still are, although we very rarely see each other these days. When Frank went to London, we had already one or two runners in hand to take his place and Mike Neville was the one who eventually took over the chair and has held it ever since.

Interviewer: And very successfully.

Ted Wilkinson: With great distinction, yes.

You can't really put these stories in a nutshell because the number of directors and producers, not to mention journalists and reporters and so on, that have gone through the doors since then, is legion.

A very good start was made, as I say, under one of the best men ever in the regions, in John Tisdall. I think tribute should be paid to him at this point.

0:36:34

Interviewer: How did you view the coming of local radio as a BBC operation, Ted?

Ted Wilkinson: I personally had a poor opinion of local radio based on my misconception, perhaps, of the pattern of the 1920s. When Frank Gillard who had been my opposite number in west region turned his attention and his mind to this problem and persuaded the powers that be that a revival of local radio was called for, I personally at that point, didn't fall for it.

I thought the day had passed and that television was the vehicle of the future and so forth. Well, I was wrong. I made amends later on in my retirement when I was chairman of the advisory committee for the Metro Radio, a commercial station. (Laughter) I've never made amends in the other sets.

We were the first region to carry out a test, a three-week test and we were also the first region, I think, to make it permanent in Durham. I may be wrong there but, certainly, we were chosen by Gillard to carry out the test here in the north east.

You see, there was no demand for it. The demand had to be invented or reinvented. The present pattern of service, etc., had never been part of the BBC's thinking. This is all new and fresh and highly successful and obviously well-needed. Of course, copied to a certain extent by the commercial stations, of which I've just mentioned.

The only other thing I think I should mention about my years in Newcastle was the contacts that one had. For instance, every member of parliament was entertained. I, of course, invited the controller up, [ops head 0:39:00] whoever it might be. But every year, either in London or here, we got to know them. I used to take a building in Whitehall Court and this was convenient for the House of Commons, and entertained them there.

These were the things that mattered very often. In local affairs, I worked very closely with Dan Smith, T. Dan Smith. The fact that Newcastle today is a quiet town, with clean Georgian and Victorian buildings… but burrowed underneath is an electric railway system, an underground system, and a series of modern roads and bypasses, just missing the town centre.

All this is Dan Smith and his town planner Wilfred Burns. He brought a touch of genius I think. He saw what he was starting to do in Coventry, to rescue Coventry and he brought him up here and, naturally, broadcasting had a lot to do with a man like that.

The fact that Dan got it wrong and paid for it is very sad. He was a man of original thought, very original thought. He was quite a cultured man. Keen on music and the arts. He and I, among others, founded Northern Arts together, the first regional arts association.

He would invite all the most interesting people anywhere near this country, to Newcastle, and convert them if he could. I remember, for instance, chairing a dinner in my office to Willy Brandt, the mayor of West Berlin, who was on a visit to this country and Dan Smith had invited him to a dinner before he realised that he had nowhere to take him and he said to me, “Can you lay it on?” I had 24 hours’ notice. Four ladies at the

canteen couldn't cope because there were not only local MPs and worthies to be there, but also Special Branch and so on.

There were serious young men in [Mackintosh's 0:41:49]. However, I mention that as one of many occasions when the job of running this station was far wider than you'd imagine. The Royal Agricultural Show came twice in those five years to the town weir.

Again, the BBC had its own pavilion, just like anybody might have at the ___[0:42:22], where you entertain and you meet people.

I have gone on too long.

0:42:28

Interviewer: No, Ted, if you had to pick a period in your long BBC career, which you thought was the zenith, when would that be? Would it be in those war time years when you had so much on your own shoulders?

Ted Wilkinson: I think it must be. To say that it was enjoyable would be not true. Although I'm personally a cheerful person, I'm a pessimist in these things. Having seen two world wars, lived through two; remember I was a schoolboy right through the First World War. The shortages and not to mention the deaths and the tragedies.

So, yes, I suppose really my most valuable contribution to the BBC was during the war, keeping the thing going, under great odds and I can only thank God that I was given the strength and good health to see it through, which is why I'm still here today. (Laughter)

[Break in conversation 0:43:39 – 0:44:02]

[End of CASSETTE side 3_4]

END AUDIO

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