

Owen Reed interviewed by John Lane, 14 December 1977

Schooldays	1-2
Oxford	2-3
Acting career	3
Applies to BBC for job as an announcer	3-4
Appointment board	4
Drama productions in 1930s	5
Lance Sieveking	6-7
BBC in 1930s	7-10
(Percy Edgar)	8-9
BBC station in Birmingham, 'The Microphone at Large'	10-18
Ethical questions about truthfulness of radio effects	18-19
Reed's return to acting in 1937	19-21
George Dixon	21-2
The Cassons	22-3
Reed joins Old Vic tour of Mediterranean in 1938	23
Joins Royal Armoured Corps	24
Recording at Iron Bridge during phoney war	24-5
Reed drafted into BBC office at Cairo	25-8
Makes recordings for European Service hook-up	28-30
Joins underground forces working in Yugoslavia	29-33
Seconded to BBC Balkan Service	33-4
Bush House at end of war	34
Joins BBC in Bristol	34-6
Post war 'swan song' of BBC Regions	36-8
Frank Gillard	38-9
Reed's drama productions in Bristol (including TV)	40-1
Television comes to the Regions	41-3
Freda Lingstrom asks Reed to succeed her as Head of Children's Programmes, Television	43-4
Applies for position and is appointed	44
Freda Lingstrom's great interest was programmes for younger children	45
Reed's first meeting with Cecil McGivern	45
Reed told his job was to win back children from ITV	45
Reed's battle for better facilities for Children's TV	46
<u>Blue Peter</u> and <u>Playschool</u>	47
Beadle becomes Director of Television	48
Kenneth Adam joins Television	49
Effects of ITV competition	49
Rise of 'paedophobia' in TV service	49-50
Stuart Hood and Donald Baverstock appointed	50
Children's Television loses drama wing	51-2
Drama Department's first production for Sunday Serial, 'Oliver Twist' causes protests because of violence	52
Reed discusses his difficult position with Gillard	53
Becomes Head of Staff Training	54
Television Training poorly equipped	54-5
Developments in Staff Training during Reed's time	55-6
Problems for central departments created by McKinsey reorganisation	56
Greatest moments of BBC career	57

2.

(we had twelve in a row on Exmoor) and all that kind of thing, and fishing. And this curious, rather late in my father's life, interest in motoring which ended up in his first car which I taught him to drive. In fact I was thirteen when I taught my father to drive. He bought the car when we were on Exmoor but couldn't drive it back to London without some technical help so I was his driving instructor on the way back to London.

LANE: Did he have the same fear that my father had, my father rode a bicycle with one of these enormous wheels and leaped on from the back, did he have the same fear of pedestrians and things like that on the road that you must give them plenty of berth in case you knock them off?

REED: Oh very much so, and the fear which was drummed into me at a very early age were trams, trams and tramlines because cycling in London in days of wooden block roads and cobbles and tramlines was far, far more dangerous than it is now and Lord knows it's dangerous enough now. My father too was a penny-farthing man, ~~and~~ he was a Durham Chorister and was very much concerned with the life of Durham Cathedral and on his penny-farthing he rode all over the North Country and got to know it intimately.

LANE: They certainly had a most fantastic time in those days because it was all so quiet. But then you went up to Oxford, what did you read and what College did you go to?

REED: Well my Oxford career I look back on really as a most terrible mess. I read classics which was what I specialised in really at school and in the middle of my honour moderations exams, which is the sort of big first hurdle ^{after} of the first two years, I collapsed, and I collapsed for ^{the} very obvious reasons ^{that} I'd been trying to do everything simultaneously, fly aeroplanes, act in the **ODDS** and get a first and so forth, and it was just too much for me and I passed out, and vanished from the scene for a couple of terms while I got myself fit again, came back and all the momentum had gone out of things. I'd fiddled around with medicine for a time and found that I'd come back to Oxford absolutely determined to act and really not do anything else, all my interests had by then focussed on acting. So back to the **ODDS** I went, played a couple of leading parts and managed to get myself seen, got an offer from a repertory company, from the Little Theatre in Hull, abandoned my career (which after my father's devotion to me and my education you can imagine must

3.

have been an awful blow to him, he never said a thing. He just let me go my way) And I left Oxford - blush, blush - with no degree, and followed my bent in the theatre. But when I look back on Oxford ~~it~~, it's an extraordinary sort of love/hate set of memories that I've got. I think I was simply swept off my feet by the place coming from a London dayschool. I didn't know where to stop. I tried to do everything all at once.

LANE: But it's something you wouldn't have missed under any circumstances because I entirely concur with that. But it was ~~apt~~ ^{at Hull} how in fact ... you suddenly started to get a sort of itch to do what you ultimately did and go to the BBC and John Gielgud comes into the picture there ?

REED: Well yes. After Hull I bummed around in various reps., and then got a job in the latter stages of ~~the~~ ^{the} run of a play called Richard of Bordeaux in which Gielgud greatly added to his rapidly growing fame. And I held a spear and I understudied various parts and so forth. I won't say that at that stage I'd any real thought of going into the BBC at all. I'd done the inevitable audition, which Lance Sieveking I later discovered heard, and I remember later on when I was on the staff I rummaged around and I found my own audition card and I was terribly tickled by it. I got a part from it too but ~~my~~, at that stage in my early theatre days I never dreamed of the BBC at all. The reason why I started dreaming of the BBC was a very practical one. I got married on the strength of my £8 a week in Richard of Bordeaux and the next part that I was hoping to get I didn't get in the Gielgud empire. On the rebound, in a state of disgust ~~about~~ which I now realise was panic really because the money wasn't coming in, I thought to myself well ~~the~~ ^{the} theatre won't do, I need something more stable than this. I'd better be an announcer, anyhow until I see which way the wind's blowing - we'd set up a household and so forth. - So - I think it must have been in 1933 sometime, I breezed in to ... I'm a bit foggy about these dates I breezed literally ⁱⁿ to the entrance hall of Broadcasting House, where we met this morning, said to the receptionist how do I become an announcer, (it was a male receptionist) and he grinned at me and said well you're about the thirty seventh who has been in this morning. Then he looked at me and said do you know anyone here and I said not a soul, not a soul. Oh but wait a minute I believe that there's a young announcer in Birmingham called Alvar Lidell, ~~and~~ I was at school with Alvar Lidell and he said yes he has recently joined us as an announcer, ~~He~~ said well just as a start you could try writing to him. So (this is rather a disgraceful story really.) I wrote to Alvar and said how do I become an announcer like you and he was

4.

absolutely marvellous, he said well it can't kill you or me but if you would simply write me a letter I know who it ought to go onto, and see what happens. And I did and almost instantaneously (this must have been a matter of pure luck) I was drafted into a sort of mass audition of announcers in which I was one of a huge mob of people who assembled, and to my amazement a day or two after that I was summoned back again and there were then only two of us and I remember the other one was Lionel Marson, and he got the job and I didn't. But really I owe - and this is perhaps indicative of how things went in those rapidly building days of the BBC, I owe everything, my whole starting point, to Alvar who was only in a few weeks ahead of me. But I suppose the fact is that really there were very few guidelines for the BBC in those days about who they chose and who they didn't choose and any kind of a lead was better than none. I mean starting with a mob of people in your front hall how do you pick the one whom you're going to have as an announcer? As it turned out I wasn't an announcer because, it was very funny really, the first audition was nominal. I think the only thing I had to read was names of composers like Beethoven and so forth which I knew how to pronounce. The second one was much more searching and I realised that I was trembling on the edge of my available knowledge of foreign languages. And when I was summoned, as I was a few days later, to an interview there was a formidable body of men among whom I remember, in the chair, Admiral Sir Charles Carpendale (Carps), ~~of Carps~~, a very fierce and daunting gentleman, and with him Lindsay Wellington and Benjie Nicholls, and I think Godfrey Addams. And the first thing that happened was that Carps looked at me, very fiercely, he said you want to be an announcer. So I said well that was the expectation sir. He said - speak up I can't hear you! So I said, that was the expectation sir! Don't shout! So by now I was a dithering wreck and he said well if you want to be an announcer you've got to read some foreign languages, read this. And he threw at me across the desk, or passed to me, threw is a bit rude, a bit of very heavy daunting-looking ~~gothic~~ German in gothic lettering and I realised that I was beaten and I said I'm afraid I can't read that. So he looked at his colleagues and said well there's no point in making this chap an announcer is there. They wagged their heads sadly and one of them said to ...Carps ..what about making him a producer, why not send him to Birmingham? Well that was what happened. I wasn't capable of being an announcer for obvious reasons so to Birmingham I went and that was how I got my first job.

LANE:

That whole episode really brings to light two things I'd like

5.

to ask you about, firstly auditions in those days were something terribly impersonal because you sat in those studios which were remotely controlled on the third floor doing your auditions, talking to someone who was, Heavens knows miles away perhaps one gets used to it later in life, but I think the first facing up under those circumstances is absolutely fear-making to a degree.

REED: Yes I never forgot that and of course later when I came to do drama work I, I never forgot what it felt like and I always had enormous sympathy even on the most dreary audition days with the people down there in the padded cell, out of sight and feeling incredibly lonely. I remember very vividly before I had anything to do with applications for jobs and things the one job I got from Lance Seveking as a young actor. It was in a play called The Hero. This must have been sometime in 1932 I should think. And of course those were the days when the new Broadcasting House had just been built. It was full of every sort of acoustic marvel that any producer could imagine. So that any drama production was treated as an excuse, indeed as a challenge, to achieve something in the way of an enormous acoustic experiment. You used as many studios as you could and as large a cast as you could. It was the multivoice age. (This was the DC6 panel ... that Archie Harding was very fond of is it?) That's right as far as I remember that is so. And also if you really were a super producer you played your own, your own as it were three manual organ, you gave a great digital climax performance on top of the work of the actors, you know, reaching across the panel and looking at the ceiling for inspiration and so forth, a great, great mystique. I remember that particular play. I was cast as third Frenchman and voices. And it started with a read-through in the Council Chamber round a huge table and there seemed to me to be about 80 actors there with this great figure of Lance, his huge nose sitting at the end, and I was terrified, and I was finally told to go to Studio..whatever it was ...8E, where I was by myself. And I was by myself for the whole production. We rehearsed for five days. I had not the faintest idea what was going on until finally the loud-speaker in the studio clonked and Lance's voice said - Frenchman I'm not hearing from you. When you get your flick you must react to the line on such and such a page. Well in fact I'd been reacting to this line ever since I'd got into the studio, I started in my own time and I went on and on and nobody ever told me to stop. It was only then that I realised what a flick was. I was as cut off as that, and I remember so well he said you've got to invent a line for yourself it's not in the script. All the

6.

action took place in a hotel that was on fire. He said you've got to shout out, let the world know that you can't escape. So I said, I can't escape ! He said no, no, no you're a Frenchman. So I said C'est impossible de s'echapper d'ici. C'est impossible de s'echapper. ~~d'ici~~. ⁷⁰ That's fine, clonk, and his voice disappeared and I waited for the light. I shall never forget it, the tension, the apprehension as I waited for the light to come on again with my one line. And that was my first job as a professional actor.

LANE: Can we just look at Lance very briefly what sort of, I mean he was the ~~deus ex~~ machina almost so what about Lance as a person ?

REED: Well I venerated Lance. People used to laugh at him because he ~~p~~ersued acoustic interest to the ultimate. For instance when he was working in Bristol he became famous because he put a notice saying "out of order, reserved for transmission" outside one of the gentlemen's loos, because he'd found a particular ~~ac~~foustic, with the ^{Reiss} ~~Rice~~ microphone slung up on the cistern above the lavatory pan, which interested him, and in there the selected actor or ~~actors~~ ^{actresses} for all I know went, and that was what he wanted. Now in many ways I think the passing of this extreme interest in ~~ac~~foustics is sad. It is still ~~p~~ersued of course as a high, ~~as a~~ refinement of ~~the~~ very erudite kind of radio drama. But in those days it applied to everything. Any play that went on the air was ~~was~~ given this feeling of ~~ac~~foustic adventure. And it's not surprising that Guthrie and people like that, - Guthrie I remember wrote a play called "The Flowers are not for you to Pick" which was a montage of sound, of repeated voices ~~for~~, to explore a character ~~in~~ ^{and} an emotional situation. And it was brilliant. But I also think it was a cul de sac and of course in many ways the kind of thing that Lance was working for, and which was fascinating to work with him on as an actor, absolutely fascinating (you might very well find that you were called upon to act with your head in a kettle drum, upside down, and you never knew what was going to happen to you) - it was irrelevant because of course the quality ~~of~~ the receiving end was so mushy and variable, ~~sort of~~ Crazy old parsons in country rectories and so forth who were the radio addicts of the time, they probably couldn't distinguish accurately most of the ~~ac~~foustic effects that Lance was pumping out through the transmitter. Never mind. It made it a very exciting adventurous world to work in.

LANE: So how do you assess Lance's contribution to broadcasting ?

REED: Oh very high, Certainly as a producer he was an avante-garde man of extraordinary originality. As a writer he had a sense of the whimsical

7.

the absurd, sometimes the macabre, which he pursued with enormous imagination. I would put him down as one of the founder-figures of radio drama and an absolutely major personality.

LANE: One of the other people you mentioned, of whom we've heard very little is B.J. Nicholls.

REED: I didn't see much of him. My BBC career became centrifugal almost immediately. My first job was in Birmingham. I met Benjie both at the time of that disastrous first interview, or successful first interview I suppose as it turned out, and as a man who was consistently kind to me on the rare occasions when I came up to London. And another such man whose kindness I always remember was Lindsay Wellington. These were men of quality as I remember them. They had the extraordinarily difficult job of identifying and defining the sort of talent that the BBC ought to be recruiting at that point. And this was a time, in the early thirties, of very, very rapid development. Most of the essential technical obstacles were being cleared out of the way, the public were there, they'd bought their sets, the whole world was wide open to development and adventure and the whole business of broadcasting was settling down into areas of departmental enterprise. Music was sure of its direction, drama was sure of its direction, the whole of the Gilliam world of the documentary which ~~...you know which~~ led to the birth of the Features Department which was in itself an enormously exciting development. All that was on its feet and looking for new horizons and new targets and with a great sense of aim and purpose. The back-up figures to all this, including of course Reith himself, the people who had to decide the policy and find the men (Beadle, Gerald Beadle is a very good example of this) - they were in many ways looked at askance by us young revolutionaries who were pursuing our creative aims. It was awfully easy to regard them as the administrators who made the rules and therefore who stood in our way. Looking back on them I reckon they were a very considerable body of men and the proof of that I think is although they might occasionally query your T & D or rap you over the knuckles if you were guilty of a piece of stupid public behaviour - and rightly, because this was a very sensitive area of public exposure after all, when it came to anything requiring kindness, consideration, and above all freedom to pursue your own thing they were extraordinary. And I myself think that Reith himself was never given credit for the amount of liberty that he unleashed among people like Lance Sieveking and Laurence Gilliam, the people who were the imaginative creators. I've no doubt they had their irritations with Reith and his other

8.

senior administrators. ~~But~~ look at the freedom that they enjoyed as well. Now this didn't come by chance. It came, I'm sure, to some extent by the sort of 'old boy' introduction that I had through Alvar Lidell and was very lucky to have, and one could I suppose nowadays query the justice of that. But in those days it did at least lead to a kind of infection of enthusiasm from man to man. So and so did well, he reckoned so and so would be a good recruit, let's have so and so. And in comes so and so and is given his chance and so the thing built up, by contact, by introductions, I suppose in certain cases by nepotism, but nevertheless it was finding and marking its standards as it went along very firmly. And I look back on the ~~the~~ Nicholls/Wellington/Beadle type of early administrators as a wise and sympathetic lot of men to whom one owed one's position and above all one's freedom. And certainly in the regions in the sort of area where I spent my first three years the trust that one enjoyed was quite extraordinary. It's popular now to ~~to~~ look back on those days (journalists love doing this) as days of extreme fuddyduddyism when little rule books were passed around to Light Entertainment artists and so forth. In my area of drama and documentary, and of adventuring on the end of long miles of telephone lines with a microphone on the end of them to some obscure village, what one did at the end was left entirely to one's self. One made the most appalling mistakes, one was very rarely rapped over the knuckles for making an error of programme judgement. If the intention was creative and enterprising and adventurous one was almost always given the benefit of the doubt. So I don't look back on that period as one ~~was one~~ of restriction and unnecessary rules at all.

LANE: Those men of course have been regarded and indeed have been referred to as I suppose the founders of what's been sometimes called the 'best club in the world' perhaps that is the way to bear it out, but amongst those founders was one other man who you worked to directly of course, that was Percy Edgar ?

REED: Yes, well I suppose I ought to retrace my steps if I'm telling my story, very briefly, over what happened to me before I met Percy Edgar. ~~I had in fact~~ I was working on, working out the very tail-end of my contract with the Gielgud management, because I remember that Richard of Bordeaux went to Birmingham and I called, I suppose knowing by then, I must have known, that I was going to Birmingham, I called on Percy Edgar and on his Head of Programmes John Dunkerley. So I knew ~~them~~ in advance. They were extremely affable + amiable. But then I had to be trained. Well this reminds me of how extremely rudimentary

9.

the ideas of training then were. I was intended to be what was called an Outside Broadcast Producer and one of a new breed. Really this was looking forward to the days of the recorded documentary which came of course later. At that time there were no recording facilities available at all for transmission purposes so my training consisted of being posted to Gerald Cock who was in charge of Outside Broadcasts in London. He didn't know what on earth to do with me, I sat I remember with ~~///~~ Max Muller in an outer office. ~~He~~ he was another new recruit - while people charged importantly in and out, and I hadn't the faintest idea what was going on. I think I was sent with Howard Marshall to see how a Test Match at Nottingham was handled. That was all the training I ever got. Birmingham couldn't wait for me so in the end I was simply sent to Birmingham and thrown straight in. There was no other way of training one in those days. I did a bit of announcing in Birmingham just to get the feel of the studios, and of course it was then I first met Percy Edgar and I was enchanted by him, a man of very great charm and quite obviously, what I'd not expected, a showbiz man. Later when I got to know his story of course this was, ~~///~~ to be expected and it was very revealing of the kind of way that the BBC grew up in the provinces. All the regions I think derived from little rudimentary manufacturing concerns with experimental aerials strung up between a couple of factory chimneys and Birmingham was no exception. It grew out of General Electric.

Well as they began to make noises and put out programmes they had to find people who could make appropriate noises and who better than Percy Edgar, who was famous in Birmingham as a raconteur, an impersonator of Dickensian characters and an entertainer, and who better to have alongside him than Harold Casey, baritone, the famous Pat Casey who became his administrative officer. So in they came as raconteur, ~~///~~ Bransby Williams type Dickensian impersonator, and a jolly good forthright Peter Dawson sort of baritone, in at the foundations.

LANE: Can I just interrupt you there because this seems to me to perpetuate what happened in that ... Sir John brought in Carps and the naval atmosphere prevailed here very much, the quarter deck at the front entrance, and so you go to Birmingham, you get Pat Casey, ex Sergeant Major becomes Head of Administration and therefore it would seem to me they were applying the military rule there ?

REED: I think there's some truth in that, yes. I think the services, all the services were a tremendous asset to the BBC in those days. They must have been. The Civil Service, obviously the Civil Service tradition was firmly

built in, in all the BBC's staff structures, staff administration structure and has remained so ever since. All the sort of salaries and increments and pensions and a great deal of the disciplinary procedure and so on was all really a carbon copy of what was conventional in the Civil Services. And for seeing that the rules were obeyed and keeping the place tidy senior officers of the fighting services came in very handy and I think on the whole did very well.

LANE: Before we go on to people who were in Birmingham can we just try and remember ... what Birmingham was like, what a region was like in those early days of broadcasting as opposed to London ?

REED: Yes. Very very small. The little set up in Broad Street was perched over the ~~the~~ I never remember which canal it is, is it the Grand Union Canal? - and I remember the announcers' office there ~~which~~, where I had my first desk (I had to be given a corner somewhere) ~~which~~ literally looked out over the canal, and we used to exchange words with the " bargees as they passed up and down. We also used to be invaded by rats for the same reason. ~~The~~, Nowadays the smallness I think is what would strike you. But also with it the proximity to the life of the town itself. This of course was in pre-war days and Birmingham was still ^a higgledy-piggledy mass of little village communities with a quite small town centre. The influence of the Prince of Wales Theatre and the pub next to the Prince of Wales Theatre was very strong. The pub was our local. ~~What~~ went on at the theatre seemed in a way to sort of colour what went on on the other side of the street. We had, ~~as~~ as I recall, only five studios and all of them small. And the thing which was missing was the whole business of recorded programmes. That I think is what would strike one now as the ~~the~~ great omission. There was always the sound of music. ~~Any regional studio had its regional station had its small musical combination which provided, as the centre did, the sort of mainstay of programme output. So a great deal of one's life at an early-stage programme employee was spent in relief announcing with the Midland Singers or the Midland Light Orchestra or whatever it was that made the noises. What Dunkerley was interested in as an incoming Head of Programmes was how to get the region looking out into itself, because what was focussed in Birmingham was not the Midlands, and I'm sure, in fact I know, from one chance remark that I made, a lucky remark at my interview with Carps. Somebody asked me, as it had been decided that I couldn't be an announcer, what it was that I really wanted to do in the BBC.~~

And of the top of my head I remember I said, my dream would be to have a camera and a crew and be turned loose to wander round the Midland shires simply shooting film of anything that interested me.

LANE: And of course that was the way you wanted to use the microphone ?

REED: Well yes and also it was awfully lucky because I heard later from Dunkerley that when he went up for the post that I occupied (I suppose for the money for the post) he was asked what sort of chap he was looking for and he used exactly the same phrase. He wanted the sort of man who would be interested to wander round the Midland shires with a film camera, spotting things that would interest him, and then translate that into Radio form. Now this was providential because it was by pure chance that I described my ^{self} and I hadn't really any idea ~~really~~ what I wanted to do. I'd used the same phrase. So that John Dunkerley and I took it up from there, and while I was doing the odd bit of announcing (and the odd acting, because as a young actor I was seized upon by Children's Hour in Birmingham - which if I may digress ^{just} for a moment, was run by an extraordinary lady called Dorothea Barcroft, Aunt Dorothea, who had no money to run her programme on at all and did it all almost entirely on forced labour from members of staff, so I was acting for her before I knew where I was) - ~~but what~~ ^{what} John Dunkerley and I got down to was how to translate this idea of ~~just~~ wandering round with a film camera into radio, which of course meant the development of what was in those days called the "microphone picture". The microphone picture, a typical rather strained, forced sort of radio concept, was nevertheless quite a real one. It was subject to ~~a~~ frightful technical limitations because the only way of getting to the places and the people ~~,,,~~ who held the interest was by booking GPO lines which were laid, it seems incredible to think of this now, they were laid for miles over hedges and ditches and through trees and orchards and things, to get one ^{piece} ~~piece~~ microphone into a back parlour of a pub in Chipping Camden so that you could make the assembled multitude eloquent in their own terms. And so one began to contrive ways in which the richness of England could be projected in radio form. John felt, and he was absolutely right, he had a lot of showbiz sense although as an ex-education officer this wasn't really his professional field ~~he - was an educationist, nevertheless~~ he realised that the importance of the title was pre-eminent. You had to get the right title to focus ^{your} ~~one's~~ own objective and to carry some sort of image through the Radio Times to the public. And between us we hatched up the title 'The Microphone at Large! And it was a good title. This was literally what the technique of the situation required.

It was a microphone carted out to remote places, and there one had to find some way of encapsulating the native richness of the place in authentic terms, which led one straight to a search for the really significant and colourful characters. And here of course one's diplomatic difficulties began because as we all know so well when you get down to Smoke Town or Sludgebury and you make the necessary contacts and you pay your respects to the mayor and to the vicar and so forth the people who they think are the most interesting and appropriate spokesmen are not likely always to be the people who you think are the best spokesmen. So I learned from some appalling early blunders the need for walking very tactfully and carefully where local feelings are concerned.

But the extraordinary thing ^{was} when we began to go out and do our reconnaissance and to list the sort of places that would be richly rewarding, or which we felt most likely to be, it was a pure matter of chance where one stuck the pin on the map because any place would do. There was no place, as with Down Your Way now, no place which didn't qualify and arouse one's expectations. We started largely by chance with Chipping Camden because I'd heard of Chipping Camden and we couldn't, we couldn't go wrong there, as indeed it proved. The most wonderful North Cotswold dialect, the most wonderful traditions and characters and people. I had no idea in those days that you needed anything like a formal script. I thought that people simply talked spontaneously, so I landed myself in that first of the Microphone at Large series with the hair-raising situation of a room behind a pub, myself as a sort of conventional visitor asking questions about Chipping Camden, and barrels and barrels of beer, and an open door to the community. So everybody came in. There were certain rehearsed items - I remember we had a team of mummers who'd been up to the Crystal Palace or somewhere and they'd won the first prize - they had to be worked in, and one or two songs. But for the most part it was simply conversation that had to be started and kept warmed up on beer, unscripted, and live. Well now anyone who knows Camden knows the difficulties involved in this. It's a very forthright and colourful spoken sort of a town and we weren't halfway through before one chap interrupted another in the excitement of the moment and apologised, and the way he apologised was to say 'Oh Jesus Christ I've a-bugged it' - well I thought that was the end of my career, my first important programme, this unforgiveable word had gone out over the air for everybody to hear, I would be sacked the next morning. I wasn't. Now this was the kind of thing which Reith took in his stride. If we were going to go adventuring with youngsters like me this was the kind of risk that had to be taken. In fact it sold the whole series. It, it was England coming to life

13.

on the air and wherever one went one had the same extraordinary sense of adventure and hazard. I always remember that particular ~~... that particular~~ programme because it taught me another thing - I've mentioned already the awful dangers of putting a foot wrong when you're surrounded by the susceptibilities and the sensitivities of a ~~... a~~ remote area. The chap who'd made this gaff realised that this was unparliamentary behaviour and next day when I was sunning myself in the quite unexpected success of this programme the vicar rang up and said 'Oh Mr. Reed I think you ought to know that so and so didn't come home last night'. And he hadn't, he couldn't face his own family, nor could he face the town. He'd disappeared, and the first thing I had to do was to go back to the vicar and go in search of a chap who could no longer show his face in his own town because of the position that we'd put him in, in making a piece of rural entertainment, and this was a fearful shock to me because I realised that we were handling a very powerful medium, much more powerful than the mere exploitation of 45 minutes of national air had led one ever to expect. And I think it's a lesson never to be forgotten. We all learned it in one way or another.

LANE: This of course really was the advent of recording which led to the opening of that field of feature documentary which ultimately led to Jack Dillon and Country Magazine and many things like that, you'd agree I'm sure ?

REED: Yes indeed, indeed. Well all this awaited the arrival of some sort of reliable transmittable ~~... a~~ recording apparatus which I think didn't come in until the Watts Disc at the beginning of the war. You would know this better than me.

LANE: Well it was in before.

REED: It was in in the late 30s was it ? By that time I'd lost touch because I'd gone back to the theatre again.

LANE: Can we just before we leave Birmingham look at the people who peopled it, who were the population of the BBC in Birmingham particularly I think Charles Brewer ... ?

REED: Oh yes. One has to remember, and I was very much aware when I got down there, that this was no amateur set-up, although nowadays some of its methods would be regarded as rudimentary. On the engineering side for example,

it was very very highly skilled. ~~As~~ in all the BBC the starting point was ~~the~~ ~~the~~ range of the facilities made available by your own engineers and the Post Office engineers. That was what you had to work with and the engineers there I ^{wish} remember. ~~Dear Tim, Timberley,~~ ^{Timbury} we all called him Tim so I've forgotten his ~~Christian name~~ ^{Christian name} he was the outside broadcast engineer so as the O.B. creative ~~man Timberley~~ ^{man Timbury} and I and his wife and my wife travelled everywhere together, his car or my car. We shared every sort of trouble every sort of set-back, every sort of disappointment, we were absolutely hand-in-glove and we had to be, ~~and~~ whether we were covering light entertainment shows, concert parties in Skegness, test matches, Christmas Day broadcasts. My goodness there's a story here ^{the} I think is very highly revealing of all sorts of things. One of the first things I had to do ~~was~~ soon after the Chipping Camden thing, was to make the key contribution to one of those famous Empire hook-ups that took place at dinnertime, Christmas Dinnertime and were world-wide. ~~This enormous Empire, live Empire hook-up with poor King George VIth and his dreadful stammer as the culminating point, the whole Empire waited for this pronouncement and he poor man couldn't possibly expect to enjoy his Christmas until he'd got it over with.~~ And normally it was the tradition that some ordinary member of the public - this was slightly sentimental ~~or~~, perhaps slightly condescending - but nevertheless it worked. Some ordinary member of the British society would actually speak the lines that led in to the talk from the King. The selected chap then was a man called Walton Handy also from the North Cotswold area, he was a shepherd and he kept the last remaining authentic, thoroughbred flock of Cotswold sheep and he was a famous man.

LANE: Came from Ilminster I think.

REED: He came from Ilminster and my job was to go with him. ~~He~~ was in the middle of his winter lambing, ^a most extraordinary scene on the hills up above Camden, ~~Snow,~~ ^a little shepherd's hut, the lambing going on, and the inevitable post office line leading ~~across~~, miles across the fields to get into the little hut with Walton Handy where we were crouched in the freezing cold with cue light, microphone, and ^a little lantern. And he spoke his piece beautifully and I remember he finished by saying "I've a brother in New Zealand and I wish he'd write to I" and that was the last thing...

LANE: Can I just correct it to the point and say - "I've a brother in New Zealand and if he be listening I wish he'd write to I" - I was listening

to the recording the other day.

REED: Well I'm near enough to it, I'm speaking from memory ~~from~~, from that time. And he did. Fancy you having picked this one up, But what happened was not so funny and perhaps it's one of the ~~///~~ bits of this retrospective talk where I may need to crave a little mercy, but nevertheless it's revealing. It's revealing of the society at the time and the kind of atmosphere that we encountered and the social levels under which one operated. Tim was an engineer, therefore regarded by ^{high} society in the North Cotswolds as "other ranks!" Mrs. Tim, likewise. I was an officer and my wife was an officer's wife. This was the assumption made. At the end of that famous broadcast Christmas dinner was waiting for us at the local manor. We went to the local manor and I will never forget the greeting, There was the big log fire inside the hall, the welcome, the waiting drink, Oh Mr. Reed what a wonderful broadcast, we've just heard the King, it went so well, now come in, come in Mrs. Reed, come and enjoy your Christmas dinner. Oh and yours, (looking towards the waiting colleague, Tim and his wife) yours is in the kitchen. And I've never forgiven myself for not making my stand. It was my chance to say that we do not have rank in the BBC. I shirked it and I blush at the recollection of that ever since. And Tim bless his heart never held it against me but my golly I hold it against myself. ~~It was,~~ ~~it was quite~~ It was a shocking incident but one that I remember as significant of those days.

LANE: I think something that has been reflected in the BBC in many ways ever since, the engineers very often have felt themselves to be a lesser breed for no right reason.

REED: Oh that is absolutely true. It goes very deep. It continues and it has spelt all sorts of trouble. I think the war very largely put it right and I think recently, in the early years of the age of television you know, awards to camera crews who have shared dangers and opportunities with ~~with~~ programme men, have brought the thing into focus. But I know that the inhibition still exists inside the BBC. Certainly it did up to the time that I left and it's a tragedy.

LANE: But what about the personalities in the region ?

REED: Well Birmingham had been going for ten years ^{or more} and it had established a very professional tradition for itself. ~~One~~ became aware

of this immediately. For example there was Brewer, Charles Brewer who in many ways I regard as the father of the radio documentary and of course he was famous, then and later, for masterminding the Scrapbook Series which I think made a really ~~very~~ crucial contribution to the development of radio on the programme side. He was a regional man. ~~His~~ father was the organist at Gloucester Cathedral, ~~My~~ wife who came from the Cotswolds, knew all about the Brewers and they were people held in very high esteem and right in the middle of creative musical life, the world of Elgar and so forth. Charles came from all that, deeply embedded in rural tradition, rural history, rural interest, contacts of every kind on every kind of level - and he had been working there for some years, ~~and had~~, I don't think we actually overlapped, I think he'd gone by the time I arrived, but everyone referred to him, his mark was on the place, he was a constant point of reference and later when I met him and got to know him I could see why.

LANE: And of course there is one other person who I suppose is legendary in Birmingham that I can think of, a man who was responsible for the Durbridge serials and of course for particularly Paul Temple, Martin Webster ?

REED: Oh yes. The thing I remember so well about Martin was his extraordinary generosity and kindness to a youngster like me blundering in. ~~He~~ was my senior in the theatre. ~~He'd~~ worked in the theatre, particularly in Scotland and had a very distinguished reputation ~~there~~ as a theatre man. ~~He'd~~ already professionalised, he and Brewer between them had professionalised - the whole of the studio production side of things in Birmingham so that I, when I came later to do drama and began doing the dramatised documentary as well as the outside broadcast documentary, I had to invade Martin's territory and he could very well have not greatly enjoyed this. - ~~The~~ reverse - he taught me everything that I knew about the art of radio production, he and a delightful - "balance and control we called them then - a delightful man called Joe ^{Loughlin} ~~Lookind~~ who was a cellist. ~~He~~ balanced music programmes primarily but he moved in alongside people like me on the panel and became as so many of them did a drama virtuoso, and there one got that marvellous marriage of minds that one always had at the panel with an absolutely brilliant panel operator. ~~One~~ also operated it oneself when ~~one~~ felt brave enough. I learned everything from Martin by observation, by friendly hints, midday drinks at the Crown across the road where I met his highly professional group of friends and I was also linked with Martin because at the O.B. end

I went in ^u pursuit of the same sort of concert party artists and Light Entertainment people that he looked after on the Light Entertainment side. Because this was the wonderful thing about the regions, and still is in many ways, that because of the small size of the staff one had to be an all-rounder. Martin was the light entertainment and drama chap, brilliant at both, I was the O.B. man and later the features man ^{who involved} that dramatised documentaries which put me both in the studio and outside the studio. - ~~We~~ were always any of us the announcer on duty if we had to be. ~~So~~ indeed were the engineers. ~~If~~ an announcer had, ^{failed to turn up} his taxi had broken down and he didn't make his programme date the senior ^{engineer} on duty was the announcer. ~~So~~ we all took in each other's washing. But I have ~~all~~ the warmest memories, ^{of} the professional generosity of all these people. Another man who I look back on as a very live-wire indeed and a contemporary kind of man, ^{was} Dennis Last, ~~He~~ was the talks producer and I want to make a point here because it's often said of the BBC in those days that it was excessively cautious, it didn't dare risk giving offence in any direction. ~~The~~ reverse is the truth.

Dennis Last was an immensely courageous, adventurous, revolutionary man. I remember he did with a speaker called Geoffrey ^{Boumpfley} ~~Dumphy~~ a series which I shall never forget on the evils, perils, dangers and catastrophes of bad rural and town development. And this man simply sailed in with both fists and the telephone buzzed with protests from offended councillors, mayors and goodness ^{it} made no difference at all. ~~It~~ was done without fear or favour and I shall never forget how that series of talks set the whole of the Midlands tingling. And this was characteristic of the adventurousness of regional life in those days. ~~If~~ you made mistakes then maybe you had to apologise and you learned from them but ,, one took one's cue from the adventure of the moment and I think this applied to all the producers and certainly to the engineers who worked with them.

LANE: It has been said - I think perhaps somewhat unkindly - that when the BBC in Birmingham expanded it expanded up to Carpenter Road and to what had been a blind school and what more suitable place could there have been, I think that's rather unkind.

REED: Well I wasn't involved in the expansion to Carpenter Road but blindness I think is symbolic, because often when I look back on the radio of those days and the radio today, one can define it rapidly, or redefine it oneself if one wants to get back into focus quickly, as the world of broadcasting as far as you can go ,, into it with a blind man. And it's a ,,,

18.

a useful hint to remember. Of course there were nonsenses in those days as there still are today. Radio has always defied its own limitations. In those days we used to go in for concepts, silly Radio Times titles like ...I remember for example, I actually did a programme called 'A Literary Tour of Birmingham' with a man called Walter Allen who later became a distinguished critic, ^{he} was a distinguished critic and publisher. And his idea which he sold to us was that we would be creatures in an aeroplane, I would be asking questions, he would be looking over the side of the cockpit saying - ah yes down there I can see the house where Dr. Johnson was born, down there by the Cathedral at Lichfield, you see, where the road turns round ...yes yes I see and is that really the house down there where he was born? Yes that's the house where he was born. And programmes of this kind where you are constantly saying "you see", to people ^{of whom the one certainty was that they} whom ~~they~~ ^{they} could see nothing. They could only hear. This goes onto this very day. I mean the radio nature trail thing which I listen to with great interest and enjoyment is built out of people sloshing through mud. You never know if the mud is real or isn't, you never know whether the chap's saying to the other chap, "you see that thing there" is really looking at it or not. But the public will swallow it. The readiness to suspend one's disbelief with radio remains pretty total. In those days it was absolutely total.

LANE: Do you not think though that this is a justifiable ruse, I'm thinking really in terms of when Sound Archives started to record they began looking round for people who had done marvellous things, now one of the recordings I can think of is Marconi describing how he sent his signal from Poldhu in Cornwall to Newfoundland and this was in 1899 and it was in point of fact recorded in 1935 now he described the whole thing in complete detail, if he hadn't done so, in point of fact I think it was done for one of Brewer's Scrapbooks, but if he hadn't done that we'd have lost that piece of history for ever and ever and isn't that ruse the same as the one you're talking about?

REED: Well it's a fascinating debating point and in fact later on in my broadcasting career ^{there} happened to me in Cairo a classic example of this dilemma which if we have time I'd like to tell you about because I think it does focus attention on what is ^a very very interesting ~~as a~~ point. But perhaps I'd better leave it out for now. In those days microphone licence was absolute because there wasn't anything else, there was no television actuality with which to compare things so if you said to people here comes the coach galloping down the high street and in fact you had four people

on their knees in the effects studio going clippety clop, if the public believed it okay. But I don't know. I remember years later in television a contemporary of mine from earlier days in radio who was working in Schools Dept., as a Deputy Head, had had a tremendous row with a producer who had done a documentary for schools on the factory floor and when she, the boss, saw the rushes of the film that he'd made she recognised one of the production assistants from her own department dressed up at a lathe, dressed up in overalls and working at a lathe and answering questions about operating a lathe. She said but this is so and so, that's not the real chap at all. Oh yes we couldn't get him, it doesn't make any difference, doesn't make any difference, the audience won't know that that's Johnny Smith. Well how far do you go? It's a conundrum. But the odd thing is that it doesn't seem to arouse frustration when people on the radio nature trail say to each other, just look at the marvellous colour on the tip of that redwing's tail, they don't stamp in their kitchens with rage and frustration saying show me this bird I can't see it, they assume that they can and that I think is the - it's this willingness of a listening public to ^{SUS}spend its disbelief which gave the whole adventure of radio in those days, its impulse.

LANE: There is always the risk, is there not, that you can be right 99.9% of the time but there's the 0.1% when you can't. In other words if you say that a train left Victoria at 9.31 you can be quite sure that someone will write in and say no it didn't I was there that day and it left at 9.32 $\frac{1}{2}$

REED: Yes, yes, what damage does it do to your credibility? This is the great problem and of course but we were much more voracious, we had to be voracious and truthful and strictly with the minute and the hour. If you said I am standing on the railway bridge at Evesham you were standing on it because there was no way of saying that you were standing on it, on disc, so that at least was an extra element of truth which was guaranteed in the pre-recording days and had all sorts of news and aesthetic and programme implications. The real problems, the dilemmas in terms of 'on the air' veracity and the importance of it arose with recordings.

LANE: By 1937 you'd got to the stage where I think probably the theatre was getting a little bit too much?

REED: Yes, I'd, I always realised that ...radio was not my prime choice, it was a wild adventure from which I learned a prodigious amount

and every moment⁷ which I enjoyed and which I look back on with great gratitude but I had this hankering for the theatre all the time and ~~so~~ the one chap I wanted to get in with was oddly enough a man who I've mentioned as having ~~earned his~~, won his spurs in radio, Tyrone Guthrie who then was at the Old Vic, I was now terribly rusty because I was four years out of date with my early repertory experience so I went back to acting. I left the BBC and it was not easy to do this for various reasons. There was great emotional pressure on people like me not to. For instance I remember when I went to dear Percy Edgar who was the kindest of men and said Percy you will be the first one to understand because you've been an actor yourself, I want to go back to the theatre. He looked at me with real concern and counted a pause of at least four and then went slowly over to his sherry cupboard and got out his sherry bottle and poured me a stiff glass of sherry and said now Owen we'll talk about this, was I feeling all right, had I a grievance of any kind. He couldn't believe that I really wanted to go back to the theatre. Nor could the senior administrators in London. And Reith, when I insisted the time had come to move on, his opinion was that he didn't think Reed was one to desert the ship. And there was this curious thing - if you owed a sort of over-riding loyalty as if you were a Benedictine Monk you know, you'd taken your oath to the BBC.

So it was difficult to get out. Once out, again I look back on a wave of gratitude because people like Lance Sieveking who went to work in Birmingham for a short time to fill the gap, one suddenly reappeared reading novels which one was only too thankful to to be able to read ^{him as} with producer. And one learned, re-learned all sorts of wise lessons that one had started to learn as a young actor with that same producer. I remember for example, you see I thought by now that I knew everything. I produced plays, I'd given other people the right inflexion and the right tone of voice, day in and day out, so I thought that reading a novel would be child's play and I breezed briskly through part one of a 13 part adaptation of a novel of Francis Brett Young's, a Black Country novel - and at the end of it Lance came in and said yes, that's all right, very efficient, very efficient, and I knew at once that it was a miss as far as he was concerned. Yes it was very efficient, clean, bright, clear, but he said dare I say this - I said yes do say anything you like - it was not reading aloud at 10.30 at night. When you're reading a book at 10.30 at night dear Owen you must sound sleepy. And I realised that I'd been bright and brisk and sort of charged through this story like a commentator at a ... race meeting, no mood or reflectiveness or quiet or .. atmosphere in it at all and I remember saying to him, for God's sake we've got forty five

minutes left, take me through it again. And I realised this man knew his job.

Other people, the Schools Dept., ~~were~~, were marvellous, they paid for my year of refreshment training in the theatre, I really worked as a radio actor for Schools and the Midland Region while I worked my way through acting school.

LANE: This was while you were at the Acting School at the Embassy at Swiss Cottage and working with people like George Dixon ?

REED: Yes indeed. I did an audition for George and became one of a sort of Schools Rep., acting for Schools is a very specialised business, particularly in those days you had to be able to sound excited and give the impression of pace while actually going at ~~a~~ classroom speed, echoing classrooms and so on, dictated that one could not go too fast and this was a very useful discipline. And the group of people that George had built up round himself, I was proud to be with them because these were the cream of radio actors, Carleton Hobbs, Stephen Jack, Norman Shelley, people of that kind, were permanently in and out of the studios doing it for three quid a time, it took two and a half hours, you were off the air by lunchtime and they were glad to do it and my golly so was I. And George coming into Radio Drama from the world of music as Charles Brewer did, the world of Cathedral and Church Music, he was a chorister like my dad, was a disciplinarian of no mean order.

LANE: George Dixon of course had been a singer in very professional terms before he came to the BBC, what sort of man was he ?

REED: A musician, first and foremost. There's a point to be made here again and I think is a terribly important part of the overall texture of the BBC pre-war, the way it took its...it had to create its own professionalism and it fed this into itself, and I'm sure that Reith and his henchmen must be given credit for this. It drew this from ~~the~~ surrounding profession, so that you got really professional theatre people like Val Gielgud coming in from the theatre and professionalising Radio Drama. From music you get people like George Dixon who came in under the, the aegis of Walford Davis he was a bright, young, Walford Davis recruit and a recommendation from Walford was not to be sneezed at, so that was how he came in. His own professional discipline was that of having been a Templar, Chorister under

22.

under Walford, an impeccable singer, a man of enormous humour and humanity but with that feeling in the back of every actor's mind who worked with him that you could take the twinkle in the eye with George and the leg-pull and the send-up and so forth to a certain point but my goodness when he wanted to wrap the baton he knew how to do it. And he had to be a man who could operate in that way with so little time at his disposal, just time for one run through of a ~~Road of Power~~ ^{Road of Power} World History, or something, no time for anything other than things that needed to be remembered. And so he became a revered figure among all the sort of professional acting element in and around the BBC. I remember him with enormous affection.

LANE: You of course went from your scholarship at the Embassy to the Old Vic but you had behind you two very distinguished figures who are or were relatives of yours, the Cassons.

REED: Yes, I come from the fringe of a theatre family, my mother was the sister of Lewis Casson, they all grew up together in Denbigh in N. Wales and they were an extraordinarily interesting family and I became infected because my Casson cousins were nearer my age than my own brothers and sisters were. I tended to pop across the river to Chelsea on my bicycle at every opportunity and largely grew up with them. But I didn't in fact work ... I knew them simply as very colourful and thrilling relatives to have, a marvellous uncle and aunt, with a sort of magic in their presence and their household that one never found anywhere else, a glow of warmth and excitement and laughter. But it wasn't until much later that ... just on the brink of war that in fact I worked with Casson as a producer and realised as one realised with George Dixon the.. the force behind the man, the professionalism.

LANE: Your aunt of course will always be remembered for playing St. Joan in the Bernard Shaw. Do you remember her own reaction to it at all ?

REED: To St Joan ? (Mm) Oh she was..she was transported. I think it raised her to ... ~~you see~~ it crystallised so much of her own religious experience. And while at the same time reflecting so much of her husband's scepticism. She was always a woman of unlimited faith and vision. He was always a Socratic kind of man with a very finely poised sceptical, analytical approach to life, which of course was exactly the dichotomy of Shaw himself. Shaw undoubtedly was yielding to a measure of inspiration when he wrote St. Joan which he himself would never admit to.

And so he surrounded his key figure with the sceptics of his own imagining who discussed the case as they went along. Well this was precisely Sybil's own life it was a kind of transcendental ... version of her own experience and her own existence, It was made for her.

LANE: This was her high peak of all time ?

REED: I don't know if she herself would ever admit that, probably she would, probably she did in fact in, in recorded talks and things, admit that. To me she went higher and higher and higher up until she dropped dead, she never seemed to me to have a pinnacle, she just went up a kind of ladder of experience which never went down again, even in extreme old age and frailty.

LANE: Of course you were moving then in the Old Vic circles with Lewis Casson and you started on a spring tour of Europe.

REED: Yes this was a wonderful break really ~~as a~~, for an actor. We went on what was really the first of the British Council tours of the whole of the Mediterranean area and it was a kind of yearning I think to do something to stabilise ~~the~~ the tottering peace of Europe, Munich was over, it was in the aftermath of Munich that this tour went out. We took about eight plays with us and one of our objectives was to celebrate when we got to the farend of the tour to Cairo, the nuptials of King Farouk and his first Queen, Farida. So there we were giving a gala, six week season in the Opera House of a celebratory kind and that was an experience in itself. But on the way out there the atmosphere was much more sinister and fraught. In Lisbon for example one could see the sort of strutting and posturing outside the German Embassy, you could see ~~the~~ the building tension of the Portugese public and their gratitude for an English company particularly a national kind of company coming out at that juncture. When we got to Italy where we played I think in four towns including Rome the population seemed to be really almost falling on their knees and grasping us. The little Munich had then happened, Mussolini had entertained Chamberlain after ^{Chamberlain} Chamberlain had done his famous journey to Munich he went out to see, he did a sort of Little Munich with Mussolini, and the only thing the public wanted to know was that there wouldn't be a war and it seemed that a tour of eight plays, some Shakespeare ^{old} things from the Old Vic was proof of the fact that there wouldn't be.

LANE: But of course in point of fact there was and it was at this

stage that you went to the Royal Armoured Corps.

REED: Yes. Well I meant to go in the R.A.F. because I spent my first two years in Oxford flying and the R.A.F. wouldn't have me because I had had rheumatic fever as a result of being OB producer for the BBC at Birmingham and driving all round the shires in a £10 second hand open car, I'd been very ill. And so they wouldn't have me. So I had to recoil upon the Schools Dept., while I waited for the Army machinery to operate. They considered that I was physically A1 so into the Army I went and became a tank bloke.

LANE: So what happened to you after that ?

REED: Well there's a very brief interlude just before that that I think it is ^{perhaps} worth recalling. I was in the very final stages of my temporary contract with the Schools Dept., before I actually joined the Army, when I received a strange message from the.. somebody in Manchester who turned out to be in charge of the then, very small allocation of recording cars, ~~and~~ ^{I think} ~~of course~~ ^{there was} one recording car which was allocated in the area of Manchester, Midlands, Evesham and somebody was at work, I've never discovered who, in the same kind of archival business that we are concerned with at this moment. And what he wanted was before the war swallowed us all up for me to go back to the Iron Bridge in Shropshire, to re-record an interview that took place in the second Microphone at Large programme way back in the Birmingham days with an extraordinary man, a coracle man called Harry Rogers. And thereby hangs quite a short story which I'll keep as short as I can - I got leave off from Schools Dept., I got on a train, ^upersued a strange, it was during the sort of phoney war period, strange journey by small country trains, arrived in pitch darkness with searchlights up in the sky all round me, rather late, at the Iron Bridge on the River Severn, too dark to see anybody. But I discovered the recording car which was operating with the aid of a tiny little pilot light in the back and it was manned by a wonderful character known to us all as 'Chig'. Chignall, ²the recording engineer, one of the very first, who joined the Desert Unit later with Dimbleby and Gillard. Well we found Harry Rogers who was identifiable as a voice only. ^IIn pitch darkness I re-recorded what I could remember of the interview, we shook each other by the hand, I never saw him, it was too dark, and then there began one of the early sort of exploratory air-raids. There was total blackness everywhere, I'd not yet seen Chig. Together we went in search of a bed.

25.

And we arrived at what turned out to be Bridgnorth and there we knocked on doors and Bridgnorth was manned by the Homeguard and goodness knows what and was very much at action stations, we found a door, we found a pub, we tumbled into bed, neither of us yet having seen the other and we awoke in the cold light of dawn and I always remember this - I woke up and he woke up and we sat up in bed together like Ralph Lynn and Tom Walls and he said to me, you must be Owen. So I said yes I am and you must be Chig. He said yes I am. And I always remember that as a sort of hark back to the days of the Microphone at Large.

Well Chig I was to meet again in later circumstances. After the Battle of El Alamein in the autumn of 1942 I was not the only one to get jaundice I was one of the very few left in my .. very battered armoured regiment and I found myself mounting guard over nine captured Italian generals at the Royal Armoured Corps base at ~~Arassia~~ ^{Abrassich} and being driven mad by post-hepatitic depression and nothing to do. And to my astonishment I'd received a summons to go to GHQ Cairo and report to what called itself the Middle East Broadcasting Unit. Well as a dusty more or less sort of serving soldier I ~~couldn't~~ ^{didn't} believe ~~the sort of things~~ ^{such a thing} the Middle East Broadcasting Unit could exist, but it did exist. There they were in their might assembled, a staff captain and various other ranks and it was the campest army office that I think I've ever met in my life and they said to me oh you're Owen Reed so I said yes I am. Oh Frank Gillard wants you. So I said who is Frank Gillard? Oh he's, he's the BBC War Correspondent he wants you to go and run the Cairo Office but before you can do that you've got to join us because you're in the Army and we're the only Army people who can do this and what are you? So I said I'm a ... 2nd Lieutenant. Well that won't do we've got to do you a captain straight away, so they did me a captain with the aid of sort of ^{various} mysterious bits of paper and I left this extraordinary office, reported to No. ... was it 7? ADDRESS IN EGYPT where I found a distracted Frank Gillard who had just arrived on the heels of Richard Dimpleby to take over in Cairo and he had found an extraordinary situation. The staircase was literally thronged with readers of the Koran, sheiks of various orders of seniority and infuriated Arabic prima donnas of various shapes and sizes who had been recording Arabic music for the BBC and had not been paid. And this was more than Frank liked to think of coping with so, somehow, I've never known how Frank discovered that I was rotting at ~~Arassia~~ ^{Abrassich} with those nine Italian generals but he got me transferred and I became the Administrative Officer and No.2 War Correspondent of the BBC in Cairo for a limited period which I will never forget.

The priorities were remarkable, Frank's one interest of course was to get up in the Front with .. with ~~a~~^{the} recording unit and get the hot news from the Front where things were tense.

LANE: Can I just interrupt there for a moment because this was the first time which the war had been brought directly to the home side ?

REED: I think this is so. I mean I don't know how long the mobile recording units had been operating but I think the one with the 8th Army was the first if I'm right.

LANE: Of course this was actuality recording as opposed to reporting ?

REED: Oh absolutely. It was up as far as Army or indeed Divisional Headquarters as a matter of common practice and the recording engineer in charge of this was the wonderful Chig with whom I was now reassociated and who is one of my closest friends, a wonderful man and he and Dimbleby had been everywhere together and he and Gillard would continue to go everywhere together. For the time being he was static at base and BBC base in Cairo is worth a short backward look. It was the scruffiest of offices, it had a studio about 8 feet by 6 feet hung with Nile grass matting and in this we recorded all sorts of extraordinary things, and two things had to be done. The first was to unscramble the disastrous state of BBC finances in the Cairo office whose previous occupants had simply vanished, believed to have gone to S. Africa but we didn't know. So starting with Barclay's Bank ... and with Frank's kind encouragement I set to work to clear the Augean Stables and everything began to happen. The first thing that began to happen was that Arabic music ~~appeared~~, of which I knew nothing, less than nothing, appeared suddenly to have assumed immense importance and understandably as soon as one began to study the subject because clearly the way to the Arabic heart in the whole of the Arabic speaking world is through music and the Germans were hell-bent to get the latest sort of top 20 or the equivalent via neutral countries like Turkey and the BBC as a counter to this was hell-bent to get the same thing through ~~the~~ Egyptian State Broadcasting and I found that my priorities apart from the money which exposed my absolute limitations as an accountant, very rapidly, the other priority was to get to know the world of Egyptian and Arabic music and to record all the most sought after singers, Oum ~~Kalthoum~~^{Kalthoum} and all the greatest stars, ~~Muni Nurideen~~^{Mounir Noureddin} from Turkey, and get them on disc really at any cost. A soft palated, soft voiced, soft faced I think Persian who really was a sort of Caruso for the Middle East,

27.

and I remember being rung up by dear friend Sami Shawa who was the music man at Egyptian State Broadcasting to whom we owed an awful lot in those days in tones of immense excitement to say that ~~Munir~~ ^{Mohbir} was in Cairo and there was an opportunity—he'd actually persuaded him—to record some discs for the BBC. We had nowhere to take him, we couldn't use the ESB studios and we took him in the middle of the night when all was as quiet as it ever is or was in Cairo into our little grass-hung tiny studio at the top of the building and we'd all sorts of problems, one of them was the fact that frequently confused phonetically with the BBC were the premises of Madame Fifi on the floor above us whose clients came and went right through the night so that any recording session in the BBC's studio was liable to be interrupted by drunken Australians in search of a night out and ..and in search of Madame Fifi. We had to stave them off at all costs. In came this expensive gold bedecked man, he was absolutely charming and he sang, I must say, very beautifully his selection of songs which for all I know ... are still in the BBC's treasured collection but certainly they were greeted when they got back to London, by bomber, with acclaim. The difficulty was that ~~John~~ ^{Chig} who was recording him in the filthy little recording cubicle adjacent to the studio had to do so in the company of Madame ~~Munir~~ ^{Munir Nouraddin} ~~Nouradeen~~ who was a very flirtatious lady indeed and I always remember Chig and myself sitting inside listening to this beguiling soft sound coming from the studio next door while dramatic interpretations of the meaning of the lyrics was being acted out for us by Madame.

Well this was a period of some ^{4 or 5} ~~45~~ months of pure fantasy and it didn't really work for me because although I found this world of Arabic music fascinating it wasn't what I joined the Army to do and daily I was pestering GHQ Cairo for a posting which would reunite me with what I'd been trained to do. And I was out of luck. ^I It took me some time to do this and in the meantime Gillard went on with the 8th Army to Tripoli and Godfrey Talbot arrived to take over the Cairo end of things and the Middle East establishment blossomed and a new Middle East Director was appointed and Assistant Director...(this was Living) ...this was ^{Living} Ted Living who used to be controller or director whatever it was North Region when Percy Edgar was in Birmingham. And with him Jim Penny^ethorne Hughes an old friend of mine from radio days in Bristol and elsewhere who later of course became Head of Staff Training and whom I succeeded as Head of Staff Training. Well there wasn't really very much for them to do and organising receptions and things for them wasn't really awfully rewarding and finally I got the posting that I was after but not before there had occurred an event which I won't ever forget because it seems to me to pinpoint in a very dramatic form the

the ultimate moral dilemma that radio is in in keeping faith with its audience it all happened because of the Allied Occupation of Tripoli which had been of course the be-all-and-end-all of the war in the desert for so long and there were great parades and celebrations and shouts of triumph all over the free world and I received from some production chief at Bush House a telegram, super urgent, would I be ready that very same evening to make three key contributions to an all Empire or Commonwealth hook-up in celebration of the Allied Occupation at Tripoli. The three items required from me in Cairo at various points in the programme were A. an eye witness account of the Battle of El Alamein from somebody who had taken part in it - B - a message from the commanding officer of one of His Majesty's ships of war approaching Suez, the Gulf of Suez, the long way round by the Cape - and C - a description of a marchpast of all allies through the streets of Cairo and all this had to be rehearsed, dress rehearsed on the beam to London, sometime in the afternoon and then we had - oh - what about 24 hours in which to organise these three items.

LANE: I take it this was one of Laurence's dream-ups ?

REED: No it was not it was Gibson Parker from Bush House, it was entirely a Bush House venture. I got back at once and said are recordings acceptable in place of live ? And the answer came back saying yes they were. So I rushed to find Chig and I said Chig we've got to get into the recording van straight away and do this, I said I can do the eye-witness account of the Battle of El Alamein because I know where I was, I know my map reference, I know where my old brigade headquarters was, we'll go there for a start and I'll cast myself in that role. Then we've got on our way back we've got to find somebody in Alexandria who will do this thing from one of His Majesty's Ships of war. And Chig looked at me with a look of, a very long-suffering look and he said look this is lunatic, this is going to take us hundreds of miles, we've barely got time to do it, why don't we just go out to, to you know just beyond Mina House, the hotel by the Pyramids, and all we need is desert silence and we'd do the whole thing there. So I said it won't do, if I'm going to start by saying I'm standing on the very map reference on which I stood on the night of October the so and so I must be there, even if it's a recording and I only stood there a day or so before, I must at least be on that spot. So he said okay, okay, you're mad by okay. We drove there, a very very long way from Cairo to the battle field of El Alamein, we did a long hot dusty journey, I solemnly got out of the van and Chig fixed the microphone for me with nothing there but deserted minefields and one or two camels and burntout tanks and I stood

there and I said my piece, as I stand here on the site of this now famous battle etc etc., length $4\frac{1}{2}$ minutes, disc finished, pack it up and away to Alexandria where we arrived at crack of dawn, Suez was out of the question and in any case the Mediterranean was now open so the idea of going to Suez to find a warship was nonsensical. So we found, no we went actually to Suez there must have been more time in this than I remember, we went all the way back to Suez and there we discovered that there was nothing at all, nothing and we were routed back to Alexandria so all the way we went back from Suez through Lower Egypt to Alexandria where we found that there was a warship and the warship was in fact a clapped-out destroyer which was lying around for repairs and we got on board, we got ourselves put on board and I said to the commanding officer who had to be dragged out of his bunk, look this is what we've come to do, are you willing to say this piece. But he said I'm not this sort of chap at all, I'm only in charge temporarily while so and so is getting his teeth seen to ashore. And he said I can't say this it isn't true, I'm not the commander nor am I looking out over the scene that you picture for me approaching the Gulf of Suez, we're in Alex., we're not approaching the Gulf of Suez at all. So I said we can alter the script but will you say it? He said no, I'm damned if I'll say it. But if you want one of His Majesty's Ships of war HMS Nile which is the naval barracks at Alex., is technically a warship in the strict meaning of the act, you go ashore and knock up old so and so he'll do this for you, he'll be so...with a hangover from the night before that he won't know what he's saying anyhow but that's the only way I can think of to do it. So we went and we knocked up the chap in charge of the barracks and the end of it all was, we took him down to a tarmac area looking out over the blue waters of ..of the harbour and he stood there and he read rather heavily the piece that I'd written for him ...I'm commander of one His Majesty's Ships of war and as I stand here looking out over the wide Mediterranean waters my mind goes back etc etc., that was band no.2 of our contribution. We still hadn't got the marchpast of all the allies through the streets of Cairo and we had I suppose about 8 hours to go.

By this time Chig was totally despairing and convinced that I was out of my mind. But I had somehow to keep faith with what I promised to do. So back we went, Cairo was nothing but a lot of sort of people with broken legs and the riff-raff and left-overs of of the long campaign. We rustled up the Band of the Egyptian Fire Brigade and a job lot of mainly convalescent soldiers of various Commonwealth units and some effects discs and we clunked clunked clunked them through the streets of Cairo to the sound of Colonel Bogey and that was our third band and we put it all on

the beam and I shall never forget hearing it played back, we had a dress rehearsal played back to us in Cairo with God knows whom, John Gielgud or Lawrence Olivier or somebody or other doing the introduction to all this and a great huge build-up, a rhetorical build-up and so we travel across the green fields of Europe, the mountains and so forth, across the blue waters of the Mediteranean to the site of that great battlefield, disc, cue, and there was my own voice recorded only a few hours before, I stand here in my old brigade headquarters and so forth - and I thought to myself what is the sense of all this, where does radio begin and where does it end.

And so it all, as far as I'm aware went off perfectly well we got a cordial congratulatory telegram at the end of it all and I'd been left wondering to this day, whether that journey was necessary, whether it added anything in the way of veracity, or moral truth or whether it was all just a load of nonsense. I do not know.

LANE: This of course is the negation of everything that you had grown up with if I may put it that way. In the early days about live radio and all the rest of it, but as far as you yourself were concerned that just about brought your Cairo days to an end because I've always wondered how you landed up in the Balkan section at Bush House ?

REED: Oh that was because I made such a nuisance of myself at GHQ that in the end some Colonel to whom I was talking put on a very special look and he said oh, well there is just one thing for which you might be considered but I can't give you the details. It's so hush hush I can't talk about it, all I can tell you, this is absolutely true, is that after 9 o'clock this evening if you like to go to No. 100 so and so, so and so, so and so, street, knock on the door three times and ask for Colonel so and so, they may be able to tell you more. Well I couldn't wait and I went along and it was the full sort of corny film works, a grill in the door slid back, revealing bars and an evil oriental face appeared and I identified myself and heavy padlocks were undone and the door creaked open and inside was a very agreeable man in a colonel's sort of army uniform, colonel's rank, and he said well I really can't tell you very much about this, all I can tell you is you'll have no identity, it is extremely secret and really you have to hand yourself over to us in a quite unqualified way. If you're interested in pursuing this further come to address so and so tomorrow morning and ask for me again. So I did this and the next time I saw the same colonel he was in naval uniform and surrounded by people sort of going in and out,

some of whom were civilians and some of whom were R.A.F. and some were Army and I thought well this is ^a strange // set-up. And it turned out, to cut a long story short that this was one of the various organisations that were penetrating occupied Europe. S.O.E. was the best known. ^{This} was a less well known but more classic organisation. And I signed on. I was given very hasty coaching in basic Serbo-Croat from which I made the fairly obvious deduction that I was destined for Yugoslavia. I learned how to handle double transposition code and I was then set to ~~Darna~~ ^{Derna} where there had been a desert R.A.F. Station to stand by for despatch with a wireless operator and a Canadian Serbo-Croat-speaking native ~~///~~ interpreter. When we got to ^eDarna we were told that there was not the slightest prospect of any further despatches for the next four months we'd better go and have a swim in the sea, so we went and had a swim in the sea and we hadn't been in ten minutes before somebody came running down the beach saying you're off. It's tonight. And there ensued a ludicrous // series of sort of comedy quick-changes, grabbings of equipment, we were caught completely on the wrong leg. We got into an aeroplane, a Liberator, the three of us, and we took off without the faintest idea of what our destination was. ^{we} knew what our code name was, we knew what our code was and we had a little wireless set and I had a few words of Serbo-Croat and that was the lot.

We hadn't been airborne ten minutes before I asked a rather obvious question, I said look where are our parachutes? We had been sent hastily away to // Palestine for very brief parachute training and done a couple of drops, ~~our~~ parachutes were not on board. So with a full load of fuel and all our gear we had to land back at ^eDarna again in order to find our parachutes and put them on board and we finally got airborne. ^{Fiume} (FIUME) And we were dropped in the end in the mountain district back of ~~Fumey~~ ^{Fiume} (phon). in Northern Croatia on the borders really of Croatia and Slovenia. It was very exciting, it was such a romantic and extraordinary journey, ending in a tremendous mountain storm. ~~that~~ ^I it was so exciting one wasn't even frightened.

LANE:

So you landed near ~~Fumey~~ ^{Fiume} and you were dropped near ~~Fumey~~ ^{Fiume}, let's be fairer about this, and you spent two years in Trieste I think little can be said of that except that you were involved with Fitzroy McLean and various Yugoslav partisans and you have said that it was sometimes dangerous, I wouldn't ask you to divulge anything which is still classified but would you like to make any short comment?

REED:

I don't think any of it is classified. My organisation

was purely concerned with intelligence, with discovering what German movements were and I think they were there because for reasons of pride and politics they didn't want to be left out of the picture. The official liaison machinery of course was Fitzroy McLean's, he was based in Bosnia some hundred^{of} miles South East of where I was, I was really mostly on the sort of Austrian Frontier area and I was the only Allied officer in, over a very wide area in contact with the Croatian headquarters of the Army of National Liberation, so I carried a double brief. When McLean was able to make contact with me through Cairo he nominated me as his bloke and so was able to get me cleared with Tito as a suitable man to be there and I became as well as, well I remained an intelligence officer primarily trying to get information about the identity and movements of German units which of course involved the whole of the partisan army as a kind of pair of binoculars. They had the information, they were in a position to watch all the key roads and railways and so forth, I was the spider enjoying their hospitality in relatively safe ~~sort of~~ headquarters areas, passing all this stuff on to Cairo. Which of course reunited me with radio as a prime consideration in life because there was Paddy Ryan, my wonderful wireless operator, a minute little set, carried in an attaché case, a little crystal transmitter, a little charger motor for which we had to beg, borrow or steal petrol in order to keep our batteries charged and once we had established our position ... to begin with we were under house arrest, we were persona non grata, but when we were okay with Tito via McLean our job was that of passing information about German movements. The Italians had just capitulated, ~~and~~ The other priority of course was normal military liaison and the obtaining of stores, supplies, anything we could get, ammunition, medical stores particularly, the needs were desperate, so that Paddy and I spent all our lives right through the ~~night~~ ^{night} encoding and decoding messages and the faint wavering little morse signals that we managed to get from Cairo were our life-line for this part of our work. Then when the war opened up in Italy our headquarters moved to Bari, the incoming signal became a good deal stronger, our interpreter had joined the partisans which he'd been determined to do from the outset and I was learning Serbo-Croat as fast as I could in order to keep my head above water.

I came out actually in the summer of 1944 because it was clear to me then as an Intelligence Officer that a very difficult situation was going to arise in the Trieste area. Of course one of the commonest slogans, ~~and~~ you could tell all the partisan intentions from their slogans, was *"Naša je Trst"* which is "Trieste is ours." Well I knew very well that the Allied Forces when they'd cleared N. Italy and were coming round into the Istrian Peninsular would jolly well regard Trieste as theirs for

33.

the time being and Italian thereafter and there was the danger of a very unpleasant collision and this ugly situation as the Winter of 19..43/44 dragged on, we were being very badly punished because there was a hefty German counter offensive to clear their lines of communication through the Balkans after the Italian capitulation, we had a very uncomfortable winter and there was this ugly situation brewing behind it, and I was recalled. And so I had one of those extraordinary journeys back to London to report and all my carefully encoded diaries and photographs and everything that I'd carefully treasured were lost on the journey, they never re-appeared again, to my considerable grief, but at least I saw my family again in the Summer of 1944, they having no idea that I was back in the country.

It was a fascinating period. ~~the next~~, I had to go back a month or so later having made my report and this time into Istria and Slovenia where I did my second tour of duty and I was there and in Croatia until VE Day and finally into Zagreb which I'd always seen as being over the other side of the hill as a sinister German stronghold.

LANE: A fascinating period of your life, of course that accounts for why you came ultimately back into the Serbo-Croat Section of Bush House.

REED: Yes I did. Relations weren't easy with the new government of Yugoslavia, I think they regarded the Allies as a bit of a 5th Column in spite of what we had in one way or another managed to do for them, it was a sad period and my credibility I think had been destroyed. I remember a period when in liberated Zagreb I sat down with the French Consul who was a Vichy Government appointee and regarded with deep suspicion, to look at the whole problem of starving, sick people and this great milling mass of refugees and it was then from then on a straightforward UNRA job and soon as we got an UNRA man to look after the relief supplies and so forth there was no further point in my remaining there, so after a period of, as military consul in Zagreb I went back home and was immediately posted to the Foreign Office who seconded me to the BBC, Bush House, as temporary Head of the Balkan Service, so I was back with the old parent firm again though still in Army Uniform, and this I wouldn't have missed for anything because it gave me a belated glimpse of that extraordinary world of Bush House and all the United Nations going on inside it which I was very thankful to have.

LANE: Did you see anything of PWD, the political welfare department at that point ?

34.

REED: No not really, I mean I was aware of them but I was more aware of the straight business of getting programmes ready per day and of sleeping on the premises overnight. ~~And~~ thereby hangs another extraordinary story.

One night when I was on, I was sleeping on the premises in order to be there in the early morning for the news in Albanian or whatever it was, I had a call of nature in the middle of the night and went in search of the loo and got lost and wandered into the part of Bush House which was in the hands of the Air Ministry and was flung out into the street by an Air Ministry policeman in my pyjamas and I had hells own delight in getting back inside the building because the BBC night commissionaire wouldn't have an apparently drunken individual in pyjamas walking into BBC premises. So I could get neither in nor out. I had great difficulty in regaining my own bed.

LANE: What was Bush House like at that time, I mean it was very much occupied by escaped personnel so to speak who would obviously sooner or later be on their way back to their own countries ?

REED: Yes it was a curious atmosphere, they weren't altogether happy. I met again two very old friends Harmon Grisewood who was boss of the show and his administrative right hand was old friend John Dunkerley who had been my programme head way back in Birmingham. But they had a tough job on their hands. ~~They~~ They were tired, I think all the foreign language speaking staff were tired, and feeling deprived and getting a bit dogged, sometimes in some cases a bit difficult. I wasn't altogether sorry to be relieved of that job ... I loved them all dearly and I loved the job but it was going to get me and them nowhere, I was simply a chap from the Army temporarily looking after them and a delightful man, Gordon Fraser of Christmas Card Fame, came into take over from me and I went back to the Army simply ^{in order} to be demobilised and that was the next thing that had to happen to me.

LANE: Now you say that was the next thing that happened to you but in fact the next thing that happened to you after that was that you became features assistant in the West Region, in Bristol and with you was that man Desmond Hawkins who at that stage certainly hadn't become the nature fiend that he subsequently became and developed the Natural History Unit, what about Desmond ?

REED: Well how did we meet, I suppose that's point one, this of course was Frank Gillard who had just got the Head of Programmes job which was the key one. My family all through the war had been sharing a household with the Secretary of the Schools Broadcasting Council, Dickon Steele, very old family friend, whose wife was the successor to Dorothea Barcroft at Birmingham in charge of Children's Hour and they were eight miles from Bristol, Frank asked if I was interested in being what I think was officially called Drama & Features Producer with Desmond Hawkins, so I said yes, I'm on, nowhere I'd rather be. So I fell far more luckily than I ever deserved slap on both my feet. We already occupied the house that were to go on living in for the next ten years because Steele moved back to London with the School Broadcasting Council, the tenancy was vacant and we simply took it over, couldn't have been luckier. And there were the nicest collection of people, the most creative, invigorating, delightful set of people I think I've ever been with in my life ^{and} that is saying a lot. My particular close associates ^{and} friend other than Frank who of course I'd had indelible links with through Madame Fifi and ^{Sheria Gameh Sharikas} ~~Charles Gamasharkas~~ ^(phon) and Chig and all that in Cairo, ^{was} ~~with~~ Desmond whom I hadn't met before except as a contributor to schools programmes. And we had, we were in fact, although he was supposed to be ^{down} strict documentary and actuality work and I was supposed to be doing the studio dramatic work, he was a brilliant drama producer and he took over in Bristol that side of Lawrence Gilliam's empire which related to the dramatised, actor type of documentary and which is in effect a play. Equally I had running rights over the areas of actuality that interested me when I wanted so that we all overflowed into each other's territory. And Desmond and I worked together for ten years very closely ^{and} this came to fruition particularly when Desmond who was a great authority on Thomas Hardy, I suppose the greatest living authority on Thomas Hardy, began to dramatise, first the Mayor of Casterbridge and later Tess of the Durbervilles, Far from the Madding Crowd, I was his producer, he was the scriptwriter. ^{We} were inseparable, with wonderful Gerry Bloomfield who was then our senior studio manager and this was one of the most satisfying periods in the whole of my life, I simply loved it.

LANE: The output from the regions of course was increasing steadily at this time because it was felt, Haley had said and it was carried out in 1946 I think, may have been '45 - September '45 I think is the fair date but there would be three services by then and sure enough there were. So the regions had to contribute very considerably.

REED: Oh very much. ^{The} Home, what became the Home Service, with

the opt out facility so that we had our money to spend in our own right when we wanted to be little BBCs on our own which was a priceless talent & idea hunting privilege really which has never come back. I mean this was a golden age. I always think of those ten years after the war as a kind of regional swan-song. It couldn't go on forever because there wasn't going to be enough money for radio in the regions to keep this sort of perfectionist experimentalism going. I mean if I wanted to do King Lear in the West Region with West Regional people for the West Region I jolly well did it and nobody could say me nay. It was simple for Frank and later for Desmond when he became Head of Programmes to find the space and the money and I did it. So that ideas were bought as quickly as one had them.

LANE: You say that that was a regional swan-song, but don't you think that the writing was on the wall certainly but that radio still had a long way to go ?

REED: Oh yes, you see the position was extraordinary. Television wasn't yet ready to march into the regions, nobody had really made up their minds about the policy and in fact at the centre in London there was still this great civil war going on in the BBC between radio which was in an enormously grand and sort of world-conquering position at the end of the war, and television with this extra element, fighting for its own identity. This bitter problem hadn't touched the regions yet, the regions were still free to enjoy their marvellous thing which was really that of finding a creative authentic voice both in writing and in acting and in performance generally, the same thing happened in music. As in the old days in Birmingham we rather used to strain after a regional context in order to do things that we wanted to do. For example we would find that a very brilliant writer of verse drama who was born three miles west of Swindon had written a marvellous play about the 13th Chinese Dynasty. We would use the fact that he was born three miles west of Swindon as an excuse to make this a West Regional drama. Well there was a certain amount of nonsense of that kind, but far more important than that was the discovery in really professional terms of a true Wessex culture. It was there in the literature, Eden Philpotts, Thomas Hardy, Charles Lee, people of this kind there was a body of writers who really had made this eloquent. There were people like Desmond around and his colleagues who had the ability to translate this brilliantly into radio form. The actors, well there were the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers left over from pre-war days, discovered

by people like Cyril Wood who'd done very important pioneering, years before, but - and this is the critical thing - joined by people like Barbara Jefford, Paul Rogers, Tony Britton now well known star names in the professional theatre National Theatre calibre players, all ~~are~~ West Country people who rejoined the local butchers, bakers & candlestickmakers in a sort of fraternity of performance.

LANE: Owen of course, in my view and I'm a London chap basically, the regions and particularly West Region went grabbing for land, I mean they really did, they, you talked about being West of Swindon, they end up East of Brighton, now this I think caused a lot of hurt in London.

Reed; Let me tell you that in my Birmingham days it, this is very characteristic of the mood of that time, I'm talking now of the 34s, 35, 36s - we had tea in the Boardroom at 4.30 every afternoon and it was sensible to be there if you were around, you know, it was in noway compulsory, there was dear old Percy with the latest story from the cycling club and oh warm and cheerful and comfortable. One day Percy was a little bit late he came in with a face like death and Martin, I think, said to him, Percy what ever is the matter? He sat down heavily, poured himself out a cup of tea and said we've lost Gloucester. And I who was new to regional broadcasting thought to myself, we've lost Gloucester what the hell does that mean, what's Gloucester to us and us to Gloucester. We had lost Gloucester, somebody had decided probably the Head of the Lines Dept., or somebody or transmitters or ... had decided that Gloucester was more sensibly included in the West Region than the Midland Region, we lost it. And this was not the sort of thing ... I would have roared with laughter at that now but it was deadly serious at the time. And who had the right to what in terms of regional boundaries was quite an area of bitter contention and it remained so to some extent in this halcyon period that I'm talking about after the war. There was a certain amount of jealousy I mean I would not have been happy as Head of Drama and Features Bristol, if somebody from the London Features Dept., had come swanning in the way the Panorama does for example without a by your leave from anybody, I would have taken a very dim view of this, if suddenly somebody started producing an Eden Philpotts play in supposedly authentic Devonshire voices without my knowing anything about it. This was got round very sensibly. People like Val Gielgud and Lawrence and his successors were very sensible .. they after some hurt feelings, they recognised the valid as well as the neurotic nature

of regional pride and used to consult us if they were going to do a Thomas Hardy or Eden Phillpotts, they would ring up and say look we're going to do this, who do we have to do it? And this of course gave us the touch of flattery as experts in particular kinds of culture that we reckoned belonged rightly to us and it was sensible for them anyhow because we knew a thing or two having studied it and so the differences were ironed out. But there's no doubt that that jealousy between region and region, oh my goodness, you remind me of something. There was the terrible time during Frank's headship of the programme side in Bristol when I think in the days of Herbert Morrison when he was Home Secretary it was decided that Midland and West would be merged, and Frank's first action - it shows how patriotic we were in those days - was to go straight to the Director General and ask what his rights were as a West Country citizen to lobby his own MP. Having got a ruling that it was okay for him to lobby Victor Collins the MP for Taunton he went and lobbied him. Meanwhile Pat Casey from Birmingham arrived with staff and a ruler and started measuring up for new curtains and the end of the West Region was in sight. That wouldn't do for Frank, he lobbied that MP and other MPs and started a hell of a thing going while remaining Head of Programmes, you know, he was an interested party to this dispute, and the whole Governmental decision was up-ended and the West Region retained its identity, but I think the whole staff would have resigned en masse if this had happened. Except perhaps me because I had some rights left in Birmingham!

LANE: Talking of Frank before we go onto the next phase of broadcasting in the West particularly and your subsequent career, how do you assess Frank. He started as a schoolmaster, he then started little contributions, my first memory of him was doing the ^{Baedecker} ~~Vatican~~ raid on Exeter and he ended up I mean a very skilled and able man and still is. How would you like to assess him?

REED: I assess him as a practitioner of radio of the very very highest calibre and the most wonderful organiser of his own time. I never knew a man who could work faster. In those rather desperate days when he arrived in Cairo and got me in as a totally untrained administrative right hand, his decisions were quick and immediate and one didn't, one didn't wait to ~~to~~ ponder them, one jolly well went and did them. I've never known a man so fast. He had to size up the whole political situation, he had to get level with ^{the} ~~the~~ situation where his war despatches, before he could beam them at Midday, and there were two beams to London each day over the air, for

39.

his despatches. I think he had to get them past the political censorship, the Egyptian State censorship, the ESB censorship, the military army, navy and airforce censorship, each one ^{with} separate rubber stamps, he had to move with the speed of lightening and with great determination. Now what I've never, I must ask Frank sometime, I've never understood is what converted Frank from the shy schoolmaster that I remember in 1939, rather tentatively broadcasting about pondlife and this determined, ambitious, kindly, fast-moving, natural leader of 1942 in Cairo. I don't know what happened, I suppose the War Reporting Unit did some magic to him.

LANE: Can I pick up, looking at Frank's later life, on the word you used, ambitious, is that really what you mean ?

REED: Oh yes. I mean ambitious in the right sense. I think that Frank had it built into his nature to want to be a major communicator and insofar as lack of opportunity, lack of rank, lack of facilities, lack of anything held him back from being that he would want to break those obstacles down. That's what I mean by being ambitious which means I think that as Managing Director, Radio, he ended up in exactly the job that he had dreamed of.

LANE: It has been suggested and I say this in all honesty knowing that you're a friend of Frank's that there was some nepotic action on his behalf, on his part once or twice. Would you agree that this was the case that certain appointments when he became right in the top directorate that those appointments were made with nepotic action behind it ?

REED: I can't say. I know that he was very loyal to old friends. He was very loyal, it may well be that it was felt that he was favouring me in offering me the job of Drama and Features bloke in Bristol, there were other contenders. It is possible that he could have been guilty of over-kindness, over loyalty - if there is such a thing - to old friends, but I only have my own case to quote from, I'd no others that I know of. I mean we all have our weaknesses, but you see I've never operated near the centre of power, not until I finally came into Central Staff Administration really at the end of my career, I've always been a bubble on the perimeter. So I have never been able to judge people like Frank when they really got into the 'Vatican'. I've always worked as a 'parish curate'.

LANE: In 1952, of course TV started pushing outwards and it went to Wenvoe and this was where Desmond really came into his own to some extent with Tess of the Durbervilles which was one of the very early Reed transmissions ?

REED: Well not actually so. No it worked differently. This was the Bristol Old Vic which was one of our prize properties. I'd long before with Val Gielgud worked out an ambitious regional scheme for regular airings of good provincial repertory companies on home radio and this had worked out some extent. ⁵ So I'd done the very best I could in Bristol with the Bristol ⁵ Little Theatre and the ⁵ Old Vic and oh, Bournemouth, you know, various worthy reps that had a long struggle to keep going, the Bristol Old Vic was obviously the most prestigious of these and they had done, when Hugh Hunt was its director, a version of Tess of the ⁵ Durbervilles (d'Urbevilles) by Ronald Gow, husband of Wendy Hiller, who played the title role. ⁵ And when we had to pick a major article to produce in celebration of the opening of the Wenvoe transmitter I, in a very rash moment, suggested we might do in television terms from the stage of the Theatre Royal in Bristol this version of Tess of the ⁵ Durbervilles which I'd already done for radio with a local artist. And this idea commended itself and we ended up with one of those extraordinary hybrid things, you know rather in a way what we used to do in Birmingham and we used to go into a dressing room at Coventry Rep., and say 'we take you to Coventry Rep., for a performance of so and so' in fact we were simply turning a little dressing room into a fit-up studio. ⁵ In the same way to make this rather grandiose claim 'we take you to the oldest most famous theatre in Britain, to the stage of the Theatre Royal for Tess of the ⁵ Durbervilles' it wasn't Desmond, Desmond's Tess came in later in his radio adaptation tradition following on Far from the Madding Crowd and the Mayor of Casterbridge and so forth and a beautiful job he made of it. This was a stage version of Tess and quite an efficient version too and with a great struggle because the stage of the Theatre Royal is not an ideal television studio and with marvellous help from Michael Henderson and the London OB Dept., which moved down en bloc to cover this thing, we in one way or another did it, with a theatre full of celebrities and mayors and sort of old distinguished people of one kind or another, but it was a, it was a tremendous effort and strain.

LANE: Of course you were operating with very, well by our standards nowadays very primitive cameras with two fixed lenses weren't you and this risk of getting cables tied up over each other, it must have been one dickens of a job your first flirtation with television ?

41.

REED: It was, it was shot from the auditorium of course with fixed camera positions rather as one would shoot a football match, we didn't build tracking platforms and that sort of thing, there just wasn't room for it, but I had to produce it to find an interpretation which was suitable in football match terms with four cameras in fixed positions around the auditorium (interrupts), no zoom lenses, whatever the turrets carried, two, three or four lenses, I don't remember which. **B**ut if I hadn't had Michael Henderson with me and calling the shots in the scanner actually directing the transmission I'd never have done it. I did the work with the artists and worked out the basic script and hoped that when he moved in with his cameras it would be shootable and roughly speaking I'd got the angles correct.

LANE: It's a long call from there to here in the 1970s but in those days your first I suppose you first flirtation with television brought you into contact with people like Freda ^{Livingston} ~~Links~~, Michael Barry, Royston Morley and you were becoming a practitioner in the art of television production instead of radio, how hard did you find that transition and what did it ultimately lead to ?

REED: It's a major transition. **T**here's a broad parallel. **I**f you take the world of radio, sound radio as we used to call it as equalling the army, **T**hen television equals the R.A.F. And anyone in a position of eminence of experience, of authority, of pride in radio had to face the very awkward question, do I now take time off to learn to fly an aeroplane and my God what do I'd if I'm found unfit to go solo. / And there were very big names in the world of radio, classic names and I hesitate to mention any of them but I think it might be fair to say Val Gielgud and Lance Sieveking were among them. Val I had very great admiration for. **H**e professionalised radio drama he found the basis of unity between the traditional theatre and this new medium but his and Lance Sieveking's early expeditions into television were very unhappy. **T**hey hadn't felt it possible ~~with~~, at their point of authority, to go back to square one and learn all over again how to fly an aeroplane and you had to do this. And people like Frank Gillard began to nudge one. **A**fter a time it was clear that the regions, whether they were going to have television ^{of their own} studios, or not, had to have staff who could be used for this. **A**nd first Desmond went up on one of Jim Penny^ethorne^e Hughes and Royston Morley's courses, with a rudimentary exercise at Alexandra Palace. **W**hen he came back **f**rom that I said to him, I was trembling in my shoes by now, I said to him, Desmond how was it ? He said well.. it's rough. It's rough but they're awfully good. **T**hey'll see you through in one way or

noisy so that any technical interruptions were picked up at once, little clicks and camera-lens changes and so forth. But once again one comes back to this same old thing of the indebtedness of the programme man to the engineers, because just as I remember being hauled through my first London television production by Colin Clews and his marvellous crack camera crew, so the OB boys when we opened up in Bristol saved one again and again from ~~from~~ disasters. They would contrive ways out of technical problems, they would foresee mistakes one was going to make and head them off, and an abiding proof of the professionalism of the studio manager fraternity, which in any record I ever made of life in the BBC I would want to devote a chapter on its own to, the sort of RPA and programme engineer, balance and control, studio manager element, they moved from technical command of the radio floor to technical command of the television floor as to the manner born - professionals all the time. And this was an absolutely major factor and it's not surprising for that reason to find that people who won their spurs as studio managers in radio, that the bridge job between the engineering side and the programme side, should move into television as widely as they have, often as administrators, you know and managers of technical resources and so on.

LANE: Taking an analogy to that of course it looks as though you also won your spurs because one of the people you'd been working with at some point was Freda Lingstrom who at that time was Head of Childrens' Television, let's just take a look at Freda first and then say you moved to become Head of Childrens' Television.

REED: Yes in about 1956 when we first, '55 I suppose, I was very happy I didn't want to be disturbed, I'd a country home, children at school blissful in my radio work, very happy in my television work and ^{the} one was coming along beside the other and I didn't want anything to intrude on this, and by one of those curious accidents that happens - because I'd done a war story for Freda Lingstrom for schoolchildren, a Yugoslav story, I thought of asking her to talk to our local parent teachers' association at our daughter's school on the edge of Bristol and she came, and she was terribly late, her train was held up with snow and goodness knows what and all the parents were waiting, she rang up from the station and I went down to get her, met her and said thank God you've arrived, we're more than half an hour late for your talk, let's buzz back as quickly as we can. And she said no. So I said what do you mean? She said before we, before I say a word to your parents at school I must have a drink. So I said okay. Took her into a pub for a stiff brandy and she said to me, I don't, it's

not the drink I need but I've got to talk to you, I'm retiring and you have got to be the next Head of Childrens. So I said well I haven't the faintest knowledge of children's programmes or any wish to move. ^TThis is a nonsense you've got to come back and give your talk. She said it is not a nonsense I've sowed the idea in your mind, you must think of it. She was staying that night with us, out in the Mendips and opened up on the same tack with my wife who said that neither she nor I were going to be ordered around by Freda and I absolutely agreed and back she went. ^AAnd this wretched idea stuck in my mind and I thought well is this point, I can't go on producing blissfully in this lovely part of the world for evermore, I shall become an old producer which is a dangerous thing to be. ^IIs this the sign that I've always dreaded? Right at the last moment, the sort of expiry of injury time as it were in putting in an application, I belatedly applied and Gerald Beadle, dear wise counsellor and adviser, Gerald Beadle, my Controller in Bristol, before this went off saw me and he said you know if you apply for this you may get it. I'm not saying that you will ^{because} but I know what the rest of the field is. ^BBut you may, ^Aare you prepared for this thought? And I sort of ^{brashly} said oh yes, yes I've thought about it, not thinking I would ever get it at the moment. I thought I'd satisfied my own, my own scruples but that I wouldn't ever get it. Well up I went to the board and I did. ^AAnd I remember coming back feeling like a man going to the scaffold, I just did not want to go and do this strange job. And I was sent for by Beadle when the result came through and he said to me well I warned you, ^Hhave a glass of sherry and let me tell you one thing, well two things, he said good luck, he said, I shall need some too because I'm going to be your new managing director, I'm on my way up to television, so I said well thank goodness for that. And he said the other thing I have to tell you is, your days as a producer are over. So I said oh no, that's **not** true, at my interview Cecil McGivern promised me personally that I would continue in operation as a drama producer, that's the basis of my interest in the job. And he said nevertheless you will find when you get there, Owen, ^{that} your days as a producer are over.

LANE: And sure enough of course they were, (they were) this I think is a natural in fact, but also you were appointed with a view to taking Children's Television out of the rather 'Twee' possibly area of Andy Pandy and things like that which was effectively what Children's Television consisted of, it wasn't in any way looking at the middle range of children, it was tending to look more at the younger end, you were now put into the position of carrying it into the next decade and advancing the age at which Children's Television could attract people ?

REED: Well I think in fairness to Freda I ought to remove, if I may, the word 'Twee' from that straight away because the one thing she was the enemy of was the 'Twee'. But she was intensely interested in the younger age group. She was a .. her great passion in her life was her Watch with Mother series of films, Andy Pandy, Flowerpot Men, Woodentops and so on, which, given the budget that she worked on, were little works of genius. I mean they've never died, they won't lie down. Andy Pandy is ~~the~~ a household word. Some of them have now been withdrawn, some of them would now be considered slow and a bit sort of clumpy in terms of puppetry, but when you think what the standard of puppetry in Britain was then, and indeed mainly now still is, what she introduced from her own natural abilities as an artist, and don't forget she was a writer, is a writer, and a pictorial artist, a very good painter, a sculptor, as well as a very experienced educationalist and BBC administrator and creative programme woman, an extraordinary woman, and also a very strong and determined and loved departmental head, she was quite a woman to follow. But her bias was towards the younger children. And I knew which side my bread was buttered at my first interview with Cecil McGivern which I will never forget. He had me in. This was, you have to remember the time, this was 1956, I should think sort of middle of '56. And the rival transmitters had just been built and were just operating and the BBC's Audience Research system had just been built up so that we knew what the impact of the 'Battle Casualties' now was. And this was terrifying, I mean our audience particularly on the childrens' side was deserting the BBC en masse. Now McGivern poured me a very stiff gin and I said to him what is my brief from you? He said it's very simple. You have got to recover the lost child audience without sacrifice of standards. And I said well how is this to be done because Freda has very strict standards, always start with the youngest, then go onto the next age group and then end with the oldest, with Jane Eyre or whatever you like to do. Never start with the oldest. And Cecil said well this is the problem because unless you start with your strong card, which is usually the oldest card, the audience have gone anyhow so we've got to turn Freda's standards upside down. And from then on Ursula Eason her number two, ^{she was} and also my number two, and I wrestled daily with this frightful problem of how to win back, how to be competitive without in fact dropping overboard these scrupulously careful and informed standards which involved among other things the "toddlers truce", you remember that between 6 & 7 there was the switch off, to clear the air between what was right for children and was beginning to be right for grown ups, so that if the first news story at 7 o'clock was a child rape case

in Epping Forest you didn't have a great built-in inheritance of children all exposed to it, you had an hour of protective silence before this happened. Now in an ideal world I think this is absolutely admirable and many people in the present sort of phase of worry about violence and so forth would be the first to agree that the toddlers truce is not a thing to deride at all but was a piece of very sound programme policy, very responsible programme policy at a time when there was no competition. But when you had to choose between losing the audience and with it the ability to do any good at all, or sticking to your standards, which is going to give way ?

Well we wrestled with that and in fact you have to strike a compromise. There's no other answer and I think Freda was very grieved with some of the things ^{that} we had to decide to do, including leading with your trump card. So that now you'll find that ..brought in by me .. you'll find the strongest thing, your Blue Peter or whatever it is, kicking off first and you'll find that Jackanory comes at the end.

LANE: If you were to be able, fairly dispassionately to compare the 1960's and the 1970's Childrens Television you've mentioned Blue Peter perhaps that's a case in point, how do you rate the comparison ?

REED: It is enormously better now. My life was spent in my seven years was it, as Head of Children's Programmes, in shouting for film because children need action and you cannot cope with the middle age range of children, the inky eights to twelves, they're active, fidgety, action-demanding children, they must have film. If you do an adventure serial for them some of it can be in the studio but not all of it can be in the studio. In a tense psychological adult situation everything can be in a double bed as we well know, ~~Not~~ for children. They have got to be out and about rushing around, action, horizons, chases. This is why of course we had to fall back on the western and still do. Well those who came after me in Children's Television for one reason or another came by that film so that you'll find that Blue Peter is for instance built up on magnificent film projects, journeys round the world and chasings of whales and, you know, visits to the Antarctic and goodness knows what. In our time we just didn't have the money because the children's area was considered not sufficiently competitive to require that amount of film. We had to make do with a static studio situation and it was very difficult to do this.

LANE: What do you consider was your most successful move in Children's Television, what did you put as your primary objective and

what in point of fact did you achieve that you think was best ?

REED: Two things. One was a programme called Blue Peter, which now is Blue Peter, which was an all interest, active, action-based programme for children and adults of all ages, and which has been superbly realised ~~ent~~ beyond my wildest dreams. This is why John Hunter ^{Blair} ~~Gray~~ and I invented that title, why we introduced the programme. It was a much more modest programme in the days when it had no film because it had all to be in a studio set. **B**ut now that it has won its spurs and it's film it is able to be the thing that we dreamed of and it does it and all honour to them.

The other thing which I'm proud of, I think even more proud of in a way than Blue Peter is Playschool. It seemed to me that there was a desperate need for a programme for little children at home slightly older than the Watch with Mothers, waiting to go to school, or back home from a morning at school, to be helped, entertained and at the same time helped on their way by simple narrative problem situations and pictures of the kind that I think Playschool does terribly well. **C**ertainly my grandchildren love it, they never miss it, at that age. But you have to remember that children grow up terribly fast and they grow up increasingly fast and it's very difficult accurately to gauge what is a Watch with Mother audience, and what is a Playschool audience, what is the Jackanory audience, what is a Blue Peter audience, and finally what is a Jane Eyre audience. **B**ecause this - and you must remember that it was Freda Lingstrom who introduced and reigned over the family **S**unday **S**erial, and this reached out into the things as difficult as Jesus on the Cross, I mean Jesus of Nazareth showed torture on the screen which is never ever done by children's normal standards, nevertheless in this cause it was done. **A**nd classic serials like Jane Eyre of very great depth and intensity were done for older children by Freda and done like mad by Shaun Sutton and Rex Tucker and me while we had a drama wing to operate with, that was axed later for reasons of economy alas, alas. **B**ut nevertheless while we had the means to do it we kept that tradition going and it is vital in my opinion that you should because this is the bridge between .. it's what I call the post-pubic child audience, when children are really growing up and are reachable in adult terms, in the right way, at the right time and with the right juxtapositions.

Now all the different cuttings and curtailings and hardships that poor old Children's Television has been subjected to during this fierce competitive period, it's this very careful accurate planning which has had to go by the board, in the aid of audience figures, to some extent, to some extent.

LANE: Owen at this stage there was a change in the directorate in television which wasn't, I think, to your advantage ?

REED: No. I think it's fair, I've thought a great deal about this because it's always, you have to think carefully when you know that in fact you have been fairly fiercely treated, and I was. And I hold, I cherish no grievances over this because the people who so treated my department and me were themselves under tremendous pressure, they were under the pressure which was very succinctly summarised by Cecil McGivern when I first reported for duty. We had got to regain the lost audience without sacrifice of standards. Now this directive was re-iterated by Gerald Beadle, my old Bristol boss when he became Managing Director of Television, He had us all together in the Television Theatre, all the programme staff, and he said - "We are in a dire situation in which we have got to be able to prove to the next governmental committee" - which turned out to be of course the Pilkington Committee in the early sixties, he said "By the time we get to that we've got to be able to prove that it is the BBC not some new consortium of independent companies that will get the third channel and colour. There is only one way in which we can prove this, we have got to do the good thing because we are the BBC, we have got to prove that we are popular or we shan't survive, we have therefore got to make the good thing popular and the popular thing good, and that is your directive for the foreseeable future."

Well this put a tremendous force of argument behind the work of the audience research department. In tragic circumstances which were very courageously stated in, on the television screen by Huw Wheldon, and all honour to him for this. Cecil McGivern was removed from the scene. He was the, oh one could talk for hours about Cecil, He was a man of radio who became a whole-hearted man of television who sacrificed himself on the altar of television to a degree which I think was almost masochistic, but who was unbelievably kind to his staff, interested in his staff and dedicated to his job. For one reason or another it was felt that it was time for him to go and so he was removed into a sinecure post, which I think is the cruelest way of getting rid of any important man, and made Deputy Director of Television under Beadle, and Kenneth Adam was brought in as Controller Programmes.

Now it was clear straight away that Kenneth, who I knew very well, way back in the Birmingham days he used to come and sleep on our spare hearthrug as we used to say when he was doing feature stories and things for me in the Midlands. It was absolutely clear that, that there simply was no common wavelength between poor, kicked upstairs, McGivern and Kenneth.

Nor did there seem to be any real lines of communication between Cecil and Beadle. So that the power axis now increasingly became Beadle & Adam with McGivern on the sidelines, which tended to put all the McGivern appointments like myself in a difficult position. We'd had our brief from him and one didn't know to whom one was working. In titular terms McGivern was supposed to be over and above Adam but as there was no liaison between the two of them one worked to one's immediate boss with a miserable and sick McGivern watching from the sidelines. It was a wretched situation, I don't think probably Kenneth enjoyed it anymore than the rest of us did. But what really altered the position of the Childrens Department then and myself was the growing influence of the audience figures and the report, as it were, of casualties day by day from the battlefield at the weekly programme meeting; where the touchstone for everything, for virtue, for success, validity of programme effort, everything, turned more and more on what audience figures were reported back by Robert Silvey and his boys from Audience Research.

Now this is part of what one has to think about but where children are concerned it is most certainly not all of what one has to think about. And obviously if you're doing a Jackanory or a Playschool type of programme you don't expect major figures. But what was very difficult to argue against was unfavourable comparisons with the rival programme at the same time, and there appeared on the Wednesday morning conference table in an awful sort of atmosphere of doom, week by week, what were known as the graphs in which one graph going up and down through the evening showed where the BBC pulling power was and the other graph in contrast showed where the ITV pulling power was. And if ~~any~~ at any point of time the programme at that moment showed up unfavourably one was judged unfavourably almost automatically with a sort of awful, neurotic, round the table gasp of breath. My God what are we to do, Children were doing Crackerjack and look what happened to the graph! And there built up as a result of this unfavourable judgements about the departments and people against which there was really no defence because no defence on grounds of philosophy or intent were listened to, it was figures, figures, figures all the time. And because figures tended to be weaker on the Children's side, because of our wretched lack of money and our lack of film and maybe our lack of ability for all I know, I don't know, but mainly lack of resources, there was a wave of what I can only describe as paedophobia, a sort of horror of anything labelled with the name of children, swept through the Television Service in the late 50s and the early 60s which was directly the opposite of the Lingstrom tradition. And whether I was right or whether I was wrong I went with this to a certain extent. I recognised that the word children was possibly a weak major title

and probably an individual title like Blue Peter would be stronger by itself. **B**ut this made it all the more important for the children's purpose, the children's philosophy, the children's intent to hold solid at a declared time of the day, if one was going to lose the title of Childrens Television.

So I suggested to Kenneth Adam we should lose this title but asked that ~~in~~ ^{there} that all the more authority and importance should be attached to the aim of children on their return from school between 5 & 6. Well what happened was that shortly afterwards Beadle left, Adam became Director which of course removed him from the possibility really of influencing the programme situation and in came a new Programme Controller, Stuart Hood, a brilliant man of enormous intellectual capacity and very great cultural, European cultural background and a distinguished war record, from the quite alien world of Television News. **H**e'd come into Television News from Bush House. **A**nd with him the success, the Kenneth Adam success man of the moment, Donald Baverstock of Tonight fame as Assistant Controller. Now both these men were brilliant, both of them had to prove their ability to carry out the Beadle directive of making the popular thing good and the good thing popular and of translating these all-important, all-dominating figures into a safe situation. In fact, for my money it was the most miserable leadership to work to, though one has to think very carefully before one says this. There were two reasons about this. Both Hood and Baverstock I think suffered, certainly Kenneth Adam did, from horror of children to an advanced degree. I've heard Stuart Hood, for example, say at a European Broadcasting Union meeting when we were discussing and reviewing childrens' programmes that he himself had no use for them, this was said in front of me. So it was clear that ~~was~~ my department was now handicapped by having me as its head because I was an unpopular champion. **A**nd everything came to a head when after a year or two of very great misery when I was trying to sell programme ideas which were immediately shot down, when there were sighs and groans and whistles at the Childrens' figures round the table every Wednesday morning, and when I found that I was dealing in Baverstock with a man who never stopped talking and in Hood with a man who never talked at all, one never listened and the other never talked, that one was in a schizophrenic world, ^a paranoid world ^{where} with people drummed with their fingers and appeared to be frightened of ~~the~~ the whole environment of television and the threats that were then operating on it.

It was a most extraordinary atmosphere of fear and tension. **A**nd I knew that in one way or another Childrens Television was heading for trouble. Our producer strength up to the point I'm thinking of had been about 13 of whom 8 were wholly concerned with childrens plays, which ^{had} reached at their best a very, very high standard. The Sunday Serials and the

51.

the Christmas Shows for example that Rex Tucker and Shaun Sutton, Dorothea Brooking and people of this kind, Joy Harrington, did, were though I say it a very high standard, I inherited it, I didn't make it, we were very proud of it.

^{There}~~Then~~ arrived, to my astonishment one day, in my office a junior personnel manager who said to me, "Owen I have been asked to consider with you for the year ahead" - we always used to look, and do still I've no doubt, well ahead in programme planning resources - "the staffing implications of a programme pattern of the following kind" - and it contained Blue Peter Playschool, Jackanory, perhaps one or two other static things, no drama at all. And this of course obviously was a way of telling me that my eight drama producers were about to be axed. So I said to this messenger man, "this is unbelievable. ^{If} this were to be so my Programme Controller who I saw only yesterday on our forward plans would at least have told me that this was in view". He said "no²". "He hasn't told you this?" So I said "no he hasn't told me". He said "well I can only repeat. ^{This} is what I've been told to discuss with you". So I said "well obviously I can't discuss this with you, you're not the right chap I've got to go straight back and say what I think."

So back I went, ^{And} there was nothing to be done about this, ^{The} decision had been made and you can never query the decisions of the ^{general} above you in a military situation, this is something that any soldier knows, you accept it. So obviously I had to accept it, my problem was what on earth to say to, and do with my eight splendid drama people who had in one way or another to be sold off to the Drama Department. Some were axed and some found their way into new lives in the Drama Department. ^{Some} have come back, like Dorothea Brooking at this very moment, to reprove the validity of exactly the thing that I'd been arguing ~~along all, arguing~~ for all the time. You see the thing, the paedophobic phase, was wrong-minded to an extraordinary degree. I heard, Stuart Hood once said to me when, I think at the meeting when I was protesting against these cuts, he said you're quite wrong about all this Owen, the days of the classic serial are over, the audience will never again want to see actors in costume.

LANE: Well of course obviously he was wrong ?

OWEN: Well.. he had to be wrong, ^{It}'s ridiculous to sort of wish away the whole tradition of the adapted Victorian novel and the classic English play just really for reasons of rationalisation of the economy. ^{It}, it was an impossible point of view to take and everything that has happened since

of course has proved that it was impossible. But it was, I'm afraid, the death knell for the childrens Sunday Serial as managed by the Children's Department, and the property passed to ~~my~~ old and great friend Michael Barry and the main Drama Department. And as soon as I was told by Stuart Hood that this was what was going to happen to ^{the} Sunday Serial and that it was going to be treated as a major competitive property, I said to him "well that's your decision which you're wholly entitled to make, but I do beg you to consult with my colleagues and myself because we do know the pitfalls. Whether this passes into the management of another department or not, the audience will be the same and the dangers will be the same at 5 o'clock on a Sunday. So let your producer collaborate with Joy Harfington, with Rex Tucker, with Dorothea Brooking, with me with the people, we who have burned our fingers and know where the danger points are, or there will be trouble." Well my advice wasn't taken and the first title for the next Sunday Serial that went into the bill was of all things, Oliver Twist. Now in the Children's Department we had ransacked the classic catalogues for the right stories to do and we'd always ruled out Oliver Twist on the grounds that it is in fact an exercise in the macabre at certain points in the story which if treated validly, that is in the sense in which Dickens meant them to be treated, would be far too dangerous and difficult to do at 5 o'clock on a Sunday with a lot of children waiting - unless it was handled in a very careful way - I was thinking particularly of the murder of Nancy by Bill Sykes. Well again this advice wasn't taken. Poor Drama Dept., to whom I think no blame attaches for this, went ahead and did it and there was a horrific treatment of the ~~my~~ battering out of Nancy's brains and the slow oozing of blood over the ~~end~~ edge of the table which produced nightmares and protests and a fearful rumpus next day. And among the children who were kept awake the following night and woke screaming were the children of the Director General who wanted to know what had been going on. And there was - there was an inquest but it made no difference in the event.

LANE: The decision had been made ?

REED: It made no difference because the decision had been made and I must emphasize the fact that it was a perfectly valid decision for any Controller of Programmes to make. I just happen to think that it was a crucially wrong one. I think it was made in fact for a political purpose. It was made to rob the Children's Dept., and its Head of any further opportunity to exercise any power or influence or to assert their right to a substantial existence. Because without our drama side we really were without weapons to fight with in a competitive situation. And it became more and more clear

53.

to me that as I had feared earlier I was no longer the right champion for the cause of children because I think I was regarded as desirably expendable.

LANE: It seems to me that this shows a remarkable parallel to what happened to Children's Hour in radio who were slowly destroyed ten years earlier roughly, by very much the same tactics, in other words removing from them OBs, drama, one thing and another and saying the outside departments will provide this ?

REED: Yes I think it was exactly the same. It all goes back, I invented a word for it - the sort of paedophobic thing, a fear of studying children as a particular area of opportunity and a need, whether you call them children or whether you don't - and I quite understand the arguments for not calling children children. The older ones don't respond to that particular appellation and I understand why. But that doesn't in any way affect the need for specialist attention, specialist advice, specialist conscience and care. And all the development of Children's Television in the BBC since has proved that ~~the~~ the return to these principles was essential.

LANE: So really you were a very unhappy man by then and there was only one thing to do either the triumvirate, I suppose, of Adam, Stuart Hood and Donald Baverstock had to go or you had to find some way out of it and there was obviously no choice ?

REED: Well, as things so often turned out, I happened to be in Bristol and I happened to find myself having coffee with, ~~with~~ old boss Frank Gillard to whom I told the story of my uneasiness and also of my fear because - and this was very valuable to me ~~in~~, when I moved next into ~~Staff~~ ^{Administrative} training and ~~administration~~. ~~When~~ you know that you are for the chopper, that you are marked for administrative assassination and the signs are perfectly clear, they were certainly made quite clear to me, you can either stay there and fight it out and endure, or you can look for a way of getting out and saving your skin, it's not your own skin, it's your family and your children's skin in mid-educational career that you immediately think about, ~~And~~ I was afraid. I was at that point a particular ~~the~~ point of educational crisis where we were just managing to find the money to pay for one school or another or this that or the other trip abroad, ~~And~~ I couldn't afford to be without a job at the level I'd reached in the BBC, ~~So~~ I was very thankful when Frank said to me "Well Owen, why don't you go and talk to Oliver Whitley", of whom I had never heard, and I didn't know who he was or what his post was.

But I was given to understand by Frank that he was responsible for the re-settlement of senior members of staff, So I went to Oliver who as always was very thoughtful and patient and calmed down my wilder indignant statements, and soon after tipped me off that the post of H.S.T. was shortly going to be vacant and that it might be worth my while to apply, No more than that. And I did, eagerly, and I got it with very, when I heard I had got the post I had very mixed feelings, It was my first departure from direct programme and studio involvement and my first move into the middle of the BBC and the Staff Administration side of the BBC, and I didn't look forward to either with any great degree of appetite because I'd always managed to avoid them. I'd always operated on the perimeter, mostly as a one-man-band and very blissfully happy and in the process. Running Childrens Television had been a pretty harsh indoctrination into the ardours of departmental administration, and you know housekeeping and money and staff management and problem cases and so on - and the final business of being extinguished. But a move into the 'Vatican' into the Curia itself was something quite new to me and I viewed it with apprehension.

LANE: And yet you went and I think you moved not only department so to speak but you also moved house because you moved to the Langham and the Langham was hardly equipped as a Staff Training Area for Television ?

REED: No. Television had always been the poor relation, It's easy enough to equip rough and ready radio studios, which of course the Langham had, not adequately sound-insulated but good enough to prove a workshop situation could work in the training of programme staff and to demonstrate the ways in which you get particular results and the ways in which you use actors and so on, and this was a pretty well-run-in department. Jim Penny^ethorne Hughes had seen to that, and various very distinguished heads of radio training, Archie Harding and Ted Livesey and people of this kind who'd been there with him. Television was a different kettle of fish, it had never had a training studio, and we had in fact the ridiculous situation in television training which for all I know may still exist - where we had managed to scrape together the money for an overseas television training workshop, an actual studio with cameras and, you know, a sort of do-it-yourself-studio where you could prove the validity of what you'd been taught, the principles you'd been taught, we had this for overseas students coming from Zambia and Ghana and so on, but not for our own staff. Our own staff had a complicated mixture of administrative and technical training in the lecture room with which were combined introductions to various departmental staff, a rather long unwieldy kind of

twelve week course, with at the end of it a move into half a studio day of practical studio exercises in which you, this really was your solo flight. And it was terribly important as it had been in my old training course years before, not to come unstuck on that because if you came unstuck on that that was your one chance and you might never get the onward career in your department that you had hoped for. But nevertheless it was a highly professional course and some very very good people took part in it, and Andrew Miller Jones who was in charge of the Television Course when I became H.S.T. was of course one of the most knowledgeable men in the whole of BBC Television. He'd been in it absolutely from the ..from birth and had himself introduced some very big and important titles, Panorama I believe was one of them. But the main thing that I found myself involved with was the, the whole business of learning a new professionalism. I'd realised very rapidly that mere professional knowledge of how to handle a radio production or a television production or an interview situation was not the business of training, the methodology of training and how you apply it to girl clerks being trained and electric typewriters and you know teleprinters, how you apply it to managers, to personnel managers, junior, middle and ... workshop managers, charge-hand type managers, manual workers as we called them, senior managers at the end where the eye of C.S.T.A. was upon the thing. I found that I was in an immense new world of fascinating interest and that the business of how you pass on knowledge was clearly going to be my preoccupation for the rest of my working time in the BBC, not how you get things across to the audience at home, but how you get things across from one area of knowledge in the BBC, one branch of know-how where the know-how exists, how you get that across to an area of know-how where it is needed and how you select people, how you judge them, in a training situation.

LANE: This really is the basis of what the BBC is all about isn't it, communication? In those nine years do you think that you in point of fact did manage to advance that cause?

REED: Yes I'm sure we did. We certainly moved much more in the direction of workshop training and away from the lectures. ^{The} stand up lecture was the enemy of staff training and in the field of creative output, programme output it is a bore, and people from radio or from the theatre or from elsewhere in television who want to be television directors don't want to listen day after day to departmental talks about ~~the~~ the costing procedures ~~of~~ of television scenery or, you know, appointments ~~of~~ procedures ~~of~~, job opportunities, this comes into it and in ^{as} rest and relief ought to be added to the mix,

but the one thing they want to learn is how to fly the flaming aeroplane. And the parallels with flying in television constantly recurred to me. Rather odd that Andrew Miller Jones was in the Oxford University Air Squadron flying at the same time as I was. We recognised each other. And we both of us found that there was an enormous similarity, less so perhaps in radio which is a rather cooler, more literary medium, but the same raising of the pulse-rate, the same need to be quick in one's sort of reflex judgements and I found the deeper I got into this the less and less I realised I knew about it and then when you'd finished with this in the hugely complex professional // directorial BBC situation you started all over again with the other half of HST's job which was the need for know-how overseas.

LANE: You acquired your wings to continue the metaphor in the theatre, in radio and in drama, do you think you've now passed out as a qualified pilot ?

REED: I don't know, I find that curiously enough that, that I'm still learning. I think the need to learn is the need for life. You know as long as you have any appetite for life you have to go on learning - I'm now being trained, and have been for the last three years, in the art of elementary gardening and garden maintenance, recognition and observation and so forth, by my wife who is an expert. She has the know-how, I have not and it is flowing rather slowly from the one into the other.

The thing that I found .. I found it very interesting coming into Staff Training to look at the BBC from the inside, and I left it with I'm afraid a sense of failure because Staff Training, like Appointments Dept., and Staff Administration and so forth, is part of the central edifice of the BBC. And I could see no answer to a BBC problem which had been left behind by McKinsey and the business of decentralisation and the passing of the money and the control to the Managing Directors, the new super directors, because it left the problem of how in an organisation which is pledged to a central creed and a central authority, a central philosophy, how do you preserve that central authority when you have off-loaded all the effective weapons, the money, the decision-making and so forth, to the surrounding directorates. What does the centre then consist of, how does it maintain its authority for training and the rest of what it has to do, when it has constantly to go cap in hand to the Managing Directors to ask for the money with which to serve them. This seemed to me to be a very dodgy situation and it was left unsolved when I retired.

LANE: In one brief sentence Owen, over just about 40 years on the BBC staff one way and another with certain breaks, what do you consider was your greatest achievement very briefly, your best achievement the thing which pleases you most ?

REED: I would say ... in terms of amazement that I ever survived it, my first television production. But really I suppose in terms of what one is proudest of, the production of the first episode of Desmond Hawkins Mayor of Casterbridge which raised my pulse-rate higher than it's ever been in my life, Probably would kill me now.

LANE: Would you then rather be a radio man or a television man ?

REED: Television I'm afraid because all the time I come back to the theatre. And I do not believe that radio acting, remarkable and brilliant though it can be is really the art of acting. It's not it's something else. It's a ... branch of the theatre which employs some imaginative and splendid and brilliant people but it is not the whole business of theatre communication. Now I would like to go back to the rep., where I started and play old butlers if I had my wish.