

The newspaper for retired BBC Pension Scheme members

PROSPERO



BBC
PENSION
SCHEME

April 2025

2024 valuation completed

The Chair of the Trustee Board explained in the 2024 Summary Report that the Trustee of the Scheme and the BBC had agreed to carry out a full actuarial valuation as at 1 April 2024.

The valuation was completed on 13 December 2024 and showed a surplus of £296 million, meaning that the value of the Scheme's assets was higher than its liabilities. This is a significantly improved position since the April 2022 full valuation, when there was a funding shortfall of £841 million.

As part of this latest valuation, the BBC also agreed that it would amend some existing measures which were originally put in place at the 2022 valuation. Those measures trigger payments to the Scheme in some circumstances in order to protect the Scheme against potentially adverse events. Those amendments have now been implemented and improve the security of members' benefits in the Scheme.

More information about the results of the 2024 valuation is available at bbc.co.uk/mypension/documents/scheme-documents/valuation-report



Scan me!



PENSIONER TRUSTEE DIRECTOR VACANCY

What does a Trustee Director do?

The Board of 11 Trustee Directors:

- looks after the assets of the Scheme and ensures that benefits are paid at the right time to the right people
- makes decisions on investment policy to help sustain the Scheme financially
- ensures the Scheme is governed in accordance with its Trust Deed and changing legislation.

Who can apply?

Applications are welcome from UK-resident pensioners who:

- are former contributing members of the Scheme
- are dedicated to helping ensure the success of the Scheme
- want to make a difference to former and current members of BBC staff
- have a basic understanding of pensions and are willing to learn more
- have attended an information session about the role (see below).

You don't have to be a pensions expert or have a background in finance or investment. Having a variety of skills, perspectives and experiences amongst Trustee Directors helps the Board to work effectively for all Scheme members.



Find out more

Term of office: 1 January 2026 – 31 December 2031

Time commitment: Approximately 25 days per year

Look out for an invitation via email or post at the end of May. More information will be posted on the news section of bbc.com/mypension



Information sessions

3 July 2025 10.00-11.30 / 23 July 2025 14.00-15.30

In person at London Broadcasting House and virtually via Microsoft Teams.

To book a place, please contact the Scheme Secretary, Rachel Hallett (rachel.hallett@bbc.co.uk).



Pensions in payment annual increase

Under the Rules of the BBC Pension Scheme, pensions in payment are reviewed annually and guaranteed increases are awarded on 1 April based on the Retail Prices Index (RPI) or Consumer Prices Index (CPI) for the previous calendar year ending 31 December, subject to a cap.

The published RPI for the calendar year ending 31 December 2024 was 3.5% and the CPI was 2.5%.

CAB 2011 Members

Pensions in payment are guaranteed to increase by the lower of CPI and 4%.

Old Benefits, New Benefits and CAB 2006 Members

Pensions in payment are guaranteed to increase by the lower of RPI and:

- 10% for Old Benefits pensions;
- 5% for New Benefits pensions; or
- 2.5% for CAB 2006 pensions.

If you started to receive an Old Benefits or New Benefits pension in the last year you may receive a proportion of any increase awarded, to reflect the number of complete months from the time you left service to 1 April.

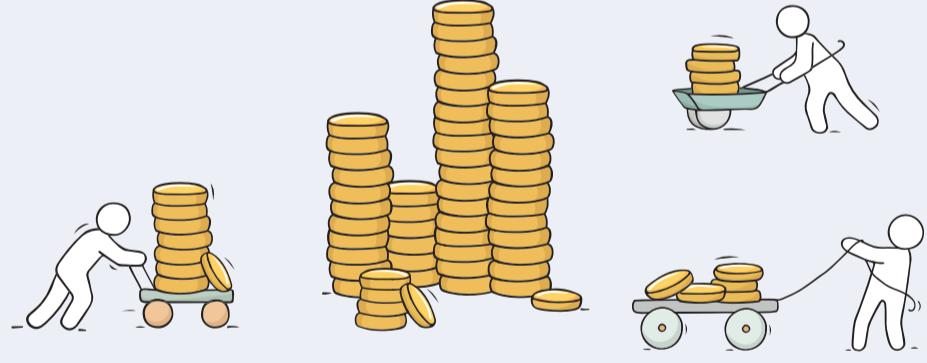
NOTE: Old Benefits members who elected to participate in the Pension Increase Exchange (PIE) exercise receive future increases only on the non-exchanged element of their pension.

Pension increase letters and P60s

We'll tell you about the increase in your pension in April. If you're registered with myPension Online, look out for an email from BBC Pension and Benefits Centre in the first week of April to let you know that your Pension Increase letter and P60 are available for you to view online.

If you don't have an account on myPension Online, your pension increase letter and P60 will be posted to your home address later in April. The fastest way to find out about your pension increase is to register for myPension Online by going to mybbcpension.co.uk and clicking on the 'Register now' button.

With myPension Online, you can tell us if you've moved home or if your contact information has changed, and you can also update the bank account that your pension is paid into. You will have access to your pension payslip information, previous years' annual pension increase letters and P60 statements, and information about your tax code.



Applications are now open for the Grace Wyndham Goldie (BBC) Trust Fund

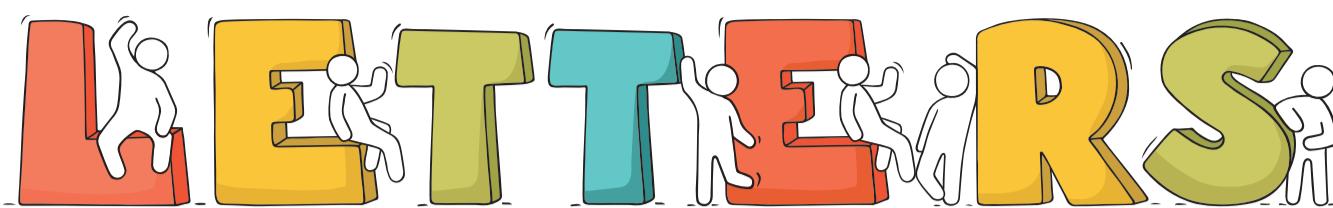
The Grace Wyndham Goldie (BBC) Trust Fund was created in memory of Grace Wyndham Goldie.

The Trust provides financial assistance for people currently or previously in broadcasting or an associated activity, their children and dependants, with the Trustees considering all the applications received in September each year. (Applications must arrive no later than 31 July.)



At the Trustees' discretion, help may be given towards educational costs or grants to relieve short-term domestic hardship not covered by help from other sources.

Application forms are available to complete online or to download from: bbc.com/charityappeals/appeals/grants/grace-wyndham-goldie



Not quite what it says on the tin

It was, with interest, that the article in respect of the Prospero Society's visit to Maida Vale caught the eye as it promised to bring back many memories. Indeed it did, although there was sadly a disappointing omission. Keen-eyed observers will have noticed that in the accompanying photograph there is a 'blue plaque' proclaiming famous residents who had been associated with the building.



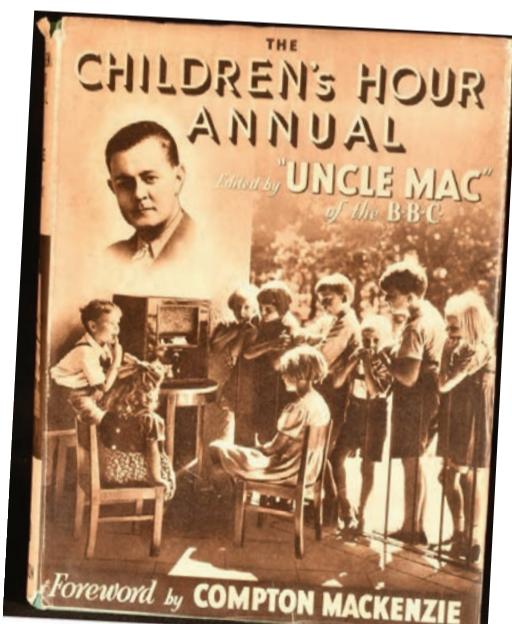
Once inside, many of these were mentioned and treated with due respect and reverence by the visitors. Sadly, it was surprising that no mention was made of one group, whose presence over 30 years or so, also helped to maintain the building's claim to fame, namely the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. Admittedly, its six studios were scattered along the top corridor and few visual remains are to be found today (unless you know which cupboard or sub-staircase storage area to look in).

However, it still made pleasant reading, and did bring back happy memories to all that had the opportunity to be part of the Maida Vale experience.

Dick Mills, on behalf of all RWS incumbents

Can you help: Children's Hour Annual

Glenn Reuben wonders if anyone knows who took the original photo of Derek McCulloch ('Uncle Mac') or the children around the wireless, for the dust jacket front cover of the 1935 *Children's Hour Annual*? It's for some research he's doing on children's annuals and magazines related to radio and television.



Can you help: Mary Marquis

John Escolme, the BBC's history manager, is trying to get in touch with Mary Marquis. She was a BBC Scotland and network TV presenter, who did anything from news reading to daytime programmes, often out of Glasgow. John would love to interview her for the BBC Oral History Collection. Might someone know where she is and could put him in touch?

Email: John.Escolme-PRESENTATION@bbc.co.uk

PROSPERO

Prospero is provided free of charge to retired Scheme members or to their spouses and dependants.

Prospero provides a source of news on former colleagues, developments at the BBC and pension issues. It is available online at bbc.co.uk/mypension/prospero-online

Please send your editorial contributions, comments or feedback to:

Prospero, BBC Pension and Benefits Centre, Central Square, Cardiff CF10 1FT

Email: prospero@bbc.co.uk

Please make sure that any digital pictures you send are scanned at 300dpi. Please also note that the maximum word count for obituaries used in the print edition is 350 words (although those published online do not have a limit).

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Prospero October 2025
The next printed issue of Prospero will appear in October 2025. The copy deadline is Monday 1 September 2025.





The Brighton Pavillion studio.

In praise of... BBC remote studios

By Charles Runcie

The revolution in broadcast technology over the last decade, combined with the way people now use mobile phones, has hastened the decline, but not yet death, of one of the BBC's most humble but useful facilities: the remote studio.

From tiny ISDN (or Post Office pre-1984) junction boxes to purpose-built radio studios, whether situated in a council office or off-site venue, or housed in a smart BBC regional centre, these remote inject points or studios have provided a welcome sight for decades, either for reporters trying to file stories in quality when radio cars were unavailable or out of signal, or down-the-line programme interviews to LBH or elsewhere. The recent closure of so many of them marks the end of an era in BBC local broadcasting. The NCA studio network in the main local radio buildings are still active, but having used many of the more remote ones in my BBC career, I wondered – ‘what stories could they tell?’.

A request for information before the passage of time robs us of these stories filled my inbox with memories, part funny, part sad, but always entertaining. I uncovered gems that perhaps could only come from the BBC – weird inject venues, strange studios and even stranger stories. I've split these into two distinct parts – firstly, the

humble BBC inject points and remote studios, then for another article those larger studio and district office set-ups. This is not a comprehensive history, but hopefully this will give you a flavour of their place within the BBC, and a smile from those who used them.

Patchwork quilt

It's a stretch to say that, other than the basic NCA network, it's ever been a single managed system. Over decades, a patchwork quilt of studios and inject points opened for many reasons, not just for news or events. Local radio stations in England were the backbone of the network, with remote studios in outlying towns helping to augment their county coverage. Large counties like Cumbria, Kent, Sussex, Devon and Yorkshire had them based in geographically remote towns, usually situated in council buildings. Editors would always stress control of content and usage rested with that station and the BBC. I am sure if you add up all these strange rooms, nooks, crannies and cupboards, it would be an extraordinary amount of real estate.

Not all are easily accessed. A familiar scenario was in Hampshire, where there was an NCA studio in a basement on Winchester High Street. You had to get the keys from a British Gas shop over the road, hoping it was not the town's shopping half-day. In East Sussex, there was a remote studio at Haywards Heath, which the BBC's late cricket correspondent, Christopher Martin-Jenkins,

often filed from. It had a single button to use, which often proved one button too many for a technophobe like CMJ. He was therefore excited when the new Horsham studio opened, because it was much more convenient for him, being five minutes from his house.

Some inject points were situated in very odd places indeed. Radio Lincolnshire's Spalding studio was in the local swimming pool, in a room underneath the foot bath, and which leaked. Every few months the station's engineer had to drive over and clear the mould off. A temporary studio was in a disused mortuary in Sandown on the Isle of Wight, set up for the week-long coverage of an attempt to rescue a man from a crumbling well. The local engineer admitted later: 'Network paid. I got quite adept at squeezing money out of them for lines. The studio somehow became permanent. The man died.'

Window ledge broadcasts

Peter Gore, ex-BBC staffer, wrote to say: 'My father Sydney was the engineer at the start of BBC Southampton at Southwestern House. He always told me he'd installed a broadcast point on the window ledge in a hotel room of the Globe Hotel in Cowes on the Isle of Wight. It was in a room overlooking the sea, and was simply a terminal into which the output of a broadcast could be plugged. It was used mainly for OBs during Cowes Week in the early days. I don't know if it's still there, and sadly my father died some years ago.'

A temporary studio was in a disused mortuary in Sandown on the Isle of Wight.

Facilities were basic. Radio Merseyside's remote studio in Chester used a mixer from one of the main studios made obsolete by a refurbishment. Had the engineers 'forgot' to send it to the redundant plant department?

A weakness was that the equipment was too complex for any member of the public to self-operate, so unless the Chester producer was in situ and willing to help there was no way a local might contribute to the output.

A different story though if it was a network programme. The eventual move to digital ISDN enabled direct connections to other places, but prior to that some jiggery-pluggery would have been required. Cheshire's PR man, who knew how to work the kit, earned a lot of beer money by 'meeting and greeting' contributors to the *Today* programme, *Good Morning Wales*, etc. Even Radio Merseyside might have taken a cut!

There was even a remote studio in the old TV Centre reception in Wood Lane. Guests could be directed to it by the receptionist. Inside there was a phone, mic and headphones, with instructions on how to contact the radio station's programme. Very handy for getting hold of visiting politicians and celebs on air, it was specifically positioned there to avoid having to use a costly 'meeter and greeter'.

Meeter and greeters

'Meeter and greeters' were and still remain a vital cog in the operation. Coming from all walks of life, mostly non-broadcasting, they are on permanent call to ensure a sometimes-nervous guest is met, installed and able to operate the studio for their contribution, then lock up afterwards. It's a part operational, part ambassadorial role, and they're proud to do it. One is the BBC Carmarthen keyholder, Gwynne Bowyer (pictured below), who died in the summer of 2024. A fervent Welsh patriot, he was the 'meeter and greeter' from its opening in 1993.



'Meeter and greeters' were and still remain a vital cog in the operation.

My old BBC colleague Lawrence Hourahane paid this tribute: 'Completely reliable, one of those people who make programmes happen. I'd never met him, but week after week he'd agree to open up for our sports reporters and camera staff. Programmes wouldn't have got on air in their entirety without him, and others like him the length and breadth of the UK.'

Surely the most splendid BBC remote studio was situated in one of the domes of the Brighton Pavilion (pictured on the previous page). An Unattended Studio (as it was called then) opened there in May 1959, connected directly to Broadcasting House in London, and its first programme was *Town and Country* on the Home Service.

There were secret emergency studios, but they were not much use to us for interviewing people.

The only BBC studio designed by John Nash (?), in order to fit in with its grand surroundings special furniture was constructed, including an acoustic screen and a regency table with headphone sockets. The equipment room was in the outer area through the door. Once local radio became established with Radio Brighton, the Unattended Studio was moved into the basement of their building and the Pavilion studio closed.

Even the microphones were top class. They're known as 4038s, designed by the BBC in the 1950s and originally built by STC. They are now still being made by Coles and are one of the most revered of all ribbon microphones. No other microphone is still being made almost 70 years later to the same original standards. They are used extensively in high end recording studios and cost around £850.

Efforts were made to capture all this information. Jeff Cohen got in touch to reminisce. In the 1980s, I compiled a list of these studios for News and other network producers, to know where they were, the equipment, access arrangements and local help contact details. There were a huge number, some from the Second World War. Local radio wanted them all to be better known, as it relieved the pressure at the main stations if their remote studios were used for down the line interviews.'

Circuits were uncovered in Durham Cathedral unused since the 1950s, and even a bit of self-operated OB equipment (a COOBE) was found in Sir Bernard Lovell's office at Jodrell Bank that hadn't been used since the Sputnik era! Some were technically problematic, others pretty well exclusively used by the local reporter and doubled as their office. Jeff adds, 'There were secret emergency studios, but they were not much use to us for interviewing people. They weren't on the list, but were probably known to the local radio engineers.' One could have been a studio in a county council bunker in Easingwold, North Yorkshire, where the UK's National Emergency Training Centre was situated.

Green Books?

Another ex-BBC staffer, Dorothy French (née Lan Shearer), who left the BBC in 1986 and is still in good health in her mid-90s, emailed to say: 'I worked in the Radio Newsroom for 20 years and compiled a so-called 'Green Book'. I was even allowed to travel across England to get all the details as well as keep the local radio stations sweet. No such co-operation from BBC's Scotland or Wales though.' She never kept a finished copy, which annoys her to this day! I wonder if any still exist?

I hope this gives a flavour of some of the studios and inject points used for so long, possibly the 'unsung heroes' of the BBC's technology world. If anyone has any other stories or memories, please email them to me for another time and article. In my second article, I'll travel back down memory lane to uncover stories from the larger BBC remote studio and district office set-ups, involving more royal connections, local shopping, the Cold War – and another morgue.

In the next instalment, Charles remembers a valued part of the BBC's regional set-up, now largely vanished due to technology and budgets – the district office. It's available online at bbc.co.uk/mypension and we'll publish an abridged version in the next paper copy.

Thanks to all those former BBC engineers and technical staff who helped contribute to these articles.

charles@charlesruncie.co.uk



Focus on some Connect Clubs

It's the perfect time of year to enjoy the great outdoors! Here are some ways you can get involved with some of the special interest groups within BBC Club.

Golf Society

The Golf Society is the oldest of our Connect Clubs. The calendar of events start in April with golf days at some prestigious courses. Each day is fully catered and there are prizes for the winners. Membership is now open for both new members and renewal of membership. bbcclub.com/connect/golf

Ariel Rambling Club

Why not join the Rambling Club for the chance to socialise and have some fun while enjoying some gentle exercise? Rambles (usually circular) of between six and 12 miles are organised monthly at the weekend in the Home Counties. Lunch will be at a local pub or bring your own. Longer breaks/holidays are regularly on the calendar – 2024 saw visits to Malta and Gozo; 2025, in contrast, will see a trip to the Outer Hebrides! It's only £5 per year for Club members and all abilities are welcome! bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/rambling

BBC Yacht Club

BBC Club's yachts, *Ariel* and *Prospero*, are now out of dry dock and ready to hit the seas. If you have never sailed before, full instruction is available and there are special 'newbie' sails for novices. As an approved RYA sailing school with qualified instructors, we run RYA practical courses: Competent Crew, Day Skipper, Yachtmaster Coastal and Yachtmaster Offshore, in addition to some less formal practical training courses such as Boat Handling. bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/yacht

Canal cruising

This year, our canal boat, *Savoy Hill*, is based at Whitchurch Marina, Shropshire, near Nantwich. Sleeping up to seven people in three separate cabins which can be configured as single or double berths, it has two flush toilets and a shower and is fully equipped with a microwave, conventional cooker, fridge and central heating. Canal cruising members get a massive £250 discount off seven nights and £500 plus a further 5% discount off 14 nights. All BBC Club members can join canal cruising for just £12.50 per year and booking is available now. bbcclub.com/clubs/connect/canal-cruising

Prospero Society

We're looking forward to a number of gentle walking adventures in 2025: Covent Garden, Samuel Pepys' London and discovering the evolution of gardens at Regent's Park. There's also a private tour of Chelsea Physic garden along with some trips indoors too! Prospero Society membership costs £20 annually. To join, you can call the BBC Club Hub. bbcclub.com/connect/prospero

BBC Club Hub

BBC Club Hub deals with all aspects of membership. Having recently moved, our new postal address is: BBC Club Hub, Floor 6, Zone D BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA. The phone number is now 0207 765 3620. The email address remains the same: BBC.CLUB@BBC.CO.UK

There's no place like Hulme

'There's no place like Hulme' was a notice which appeared in the control room of the BBC Playhouse in Hulme, Manchester. Indeed there was NO place like Hulme - the theatre, with its rather dour appearance, was situated in what looked a bit like a bombsite, some three miles from the centre of Manchester. Vandalism, and theft and damage to cars, was a regular occurrence, so production staff were ordered to get taxis to and from the theatre for their own safety!

In spite of all this, the theatre was extraordinarily successful and home to two of the BBC's most famous orchestras – the Northern Dance Orchestra (NDO) and the Northern Radio Orchestra, which did sessions five days a week (the weekend being given over to light entertainment, usually with a studio audience and a full theatre).

The amount of high-quality music and light entertainment produced here for network was enormous.

Among the NDO's exceptional musicians was trumpet player, Syd Lawrence. He featured in many of the band's recordings as a soloist.

Syd was born in Frodsham, Cheshire in 1923. His musical apprenticeship was with Geraldo, Teddy Foster and Cyril Stapleton.

In 1967, Syd became disillusioned with regularly having to play arrangements of hit songs of the 60s with the NDO. His passion was Big Band Swing and the music of Glenn Miller, not pop.

Despite advice from many members of the band, Syd left the NDO and formed his own exceptional band, with some of his colleagues from the NDO.

This move was extremely successful. The first public concert in Sheffield was a sellout, and within six months, the band had played in every corner of the UK, and in all of London's major venues, culminating in a Royal Command performance at the London Palladium.

Syd signed a recording contract with Philips and made his first LP at Strawberry Studios, Stockport, in 1970. This was a double album of Glenn Miller classics (Philips 664017), which sold over 100,000 copies, and was eventually released with a different compilation on Philips 884827 as a CD in 1990.

This album was premiered by the late Alan Dell, and when he played 'American Patrol' on his show on the radio, the audience reaction was huge.



Yorkshire TV gave the orchestra a regular spot on the comedy show *Sez Les* – Syd knew Les Dawson from his time with the NDO, and the shows were very well received.

Syd was a charismatic figure and 'took no prisoners' with his musicians – anyone less than exceptional didn't stay in the band very long. He always 'led from the front', and his trumpet solos were always superb. This was a band that played from the heart, and it made them very special.

In the 1980s, Syd decided to do less touring and only covered the local venues, whilst pianist Bryan Pendleton conducted in his absence and covered the more far-flung locations. The band was still playing to packed audiences five days a week!

In 1996, Syd finally retired, and the band was taken over by trombonist Chris Dean, who is still touring with his excellent band – the Chris Dean Syd Lawrence Orchestra. In 2011, the band was voted 'the best big band in the land' for the 11th consecutive year.

It was our delight to meet up with Chris and the band for three days of Big Band music at Alveston Hall earlier this year – an amazing stay in the company of what I regard as the best Big Band in the UK. Listening to such good musicians and vocalists live really does lift the spirits!

Syd sadly passed away on 5 May 1998, but in the music library he collected, including many of his own arrangements, he created a legacy which continues to benefit and be enjoyed by future generations of young musicians and music lovers alike.



Now you might think that this is the end of the story – far from it!

In the middle of 2024, I got a call from my colleague David Fleming-Williams, regarding some tapes he had found in his loft. He asked if it would be possible for me to digitise them, and I suggested he bring them round and join us for lunch. When he arrived with a box full of 10-inch tapes, I was a little surprised!

After lunch, we started to listen to what he had brought, and they were sensational! Perfect reproduction and superb sound, even on modern broadcast-quality speakers.

What David had brought were the complete recordings Syd Lawrence had made in the Playhouse Theatre from 1969 (mono) to 1986 (stereo).

We both realised that there was something very special here that should not just be with us, but put in the public domain for everyone to enjoy. **This was history!**

After digitising the tapes, we had around 129 perfect recordings, every bit as good as anything released by Syd on CD – some would say a lot better!

It included around 12 extremely rare tracks of Syd's concert orchestra – the band augmented with strings.

The Playhouse was important to Syd in his NDO days, and a perfect acoustic for any Big Bands recording there. Okay, it did have its quirks – the roof leaked and the heating did not always work – but it was still well loved!

It is my opinion that the acoustics of the Playhouse and David's mixing skills produced the finest music and sounds that I have ever heard from any band in the Theatre.

I talked to my contact in BBC Licensing and the MU, and they were happy to give me a licence to initially produce a six-CD set of this music, with the aim of getting it into the hands of broadcasters, any public sales being made for the benefit of music-based charities. But it doesn't end there!

Subsequently, more recordings surfaced, including a digital copy of a performance which Syd did of a series of three live concerts – these were also licensed and released, taking the total number of tracks released to 171!

The NDO project sadly is now coming to a close – old age and a lack of more usable music being the main reasons!

With some 16 double albums under our belt of all the regional BBC orchestras and finally Syd, it may be time to quit!

We are thrilled to celebrate, in the year which would have seen Syd celebrate his 101st birthday, some truly amazing recordings brought back into the public domain, and to remember his exceptional skills as a musician and band leader.

Indeed – there's no place like Hulme!

Ian C Reed (NDO project)
northerndanceorchestra.org.uk

Obituaries

Colin Bowler – Assistant Chief Personnel Officer, Engineering Division



Colin Bowler, a long-serving member of the former Engineering Division, sadly died on 8 August 2024 at the age of 87.

Colin joined Kingswood Warren, home of the Engineering Research Department, in 1952 as a General Clerk and then served time in the RAF, leaving in 1956. Thereafter, his BBC career took off when he joined the Equipment Department in Balham, working in the Buying Section, later becoming a Senior Storeman at Avenue House, Chiswick. Next came a move to TCPD in Henry Wood House in Progress and Records Standards.

At this point, Colin's intelligence, plus his equable and sympathetic temperament, came to the fore as he was given an attachment to Engineering Personnel Department (EPD) as a trainee Personnel Officer. This was evidently a springboard for what was to become a distinguished and lengthy career in that department, rising through the ranks as Senior Personnel Officer, Head of Administration, Head of Transmission (Personnel) and thence promotion to Assistant Chief Personnel Officer, culminating in a period as acting Chief Personnel Officer, the post from which he retired in 1992.

Colin's progress through his several promotions gives testament to his professional skills and the estimable contribution he made both within EPD and further afield across Engineering Division. Colin was well-known and respected by his colleagues at all levels, from the more junior to the higher echelons of management. He was unfailingly courteous, cheerful and always a gentleman. At our EPD Retirees' lunches, he kept us entertained with his 'finds' from antique shops, drawn out of his briefcase as if from a conjurer's hat! He was also a music lover, enjoying opera and classical music, and in retirement was an active member of the Prospero Society and a Pension Visitor, whilst also finding time to travel to many unusual destinations.

Outside work, Colin was essentially a family man, devoted to Pamela, his wife of 57 years, and his son Grayson and family. He was proud grandfather of Harrison and Alexander. Sincere condolences are sent to all the family.

Dorothy May and Tim Burrell

John Carter – Senior Technical Development Manager, TSPR

John joined BBC Television in 1964, reporting to the Training Centre in Evesham to attend Technical Operator's Course no.18. Working in both Camera and Sound Operations, he gained experience on a great many productions, before becoming a Vision Supervisor.

By the late 1970s, he had progressed to Technical Manager, soon specialising in (the increasingly complex) sports programming.

He was promoted again to become a Tech Ops Vision Manager, before re-organisation of the department took him into the role of Senior Technical Development Manager.

An innovator, John was at the forefront of the advancing developments in colour TV, digital systems, digital effects, international satellite links, stereo sound, widescreen TV, CCD cameras, touch screen control panels, etc., working with a great many contacts in other departments such as TV OBs, Radio, TV News, Regions, other Engineering specialists, and outside suppliers.

He led the complex refurbishments of TC6, 8, 3, 4 and TC5 (the main sports linking studio), also the BBC's largest studio, TCI. John was an authority on sport coverage techniques. He worked on many major international events and broadcasts.

Although JC, as he was known, was a very experienced development manager, it was not all about work. John was keen to socialise and loved his holidays, particularly in Switzerland.

John retired in 1998.

A number of colleagues from the 'old days' stayed in touch through evening pizza meetings, the annual 'London Lunch' and, later, Zoom. The loss of his beloved sister hit him hard, and his health had not been good for some time. That said, he delighted in his supportive family contacts in Yorkshire. Of huge importance to John were his family, his Church and his friends, in increasingly difficult times.

It must be emphasised that John was a man of integrity, a gentleman, modest, considerate and charming. He was very highly respected and well-liked by all his talented associates.

Like so many of us, he looked back to his old BBC days with great fondness and with great memories. Wonderful times.

A friend, John Carter was a particularly outstanding colleague who was crucially important to many of the BBC's finest broadcasts. The BBC was fortunate to have him.

John Lightfoot

Richard Craig – Head of Personnel Television Engineering*

Richard (Dick) Craig died in Devon on 24 August 2024, aged 102.

Born in Birmingham, Dick attended King Edward VI Five Ways Grammar School (1933–38), followed by a year at Birmingham Wireless College. He joined the Territorial Army in 1939 but was invalided out in 1940.

After a year with the Radio Gramophone Development Company, Dick joined the BBC as a Junior Maintenance Engineer in Birmingham (Broad Street). This marked the beginning of over 40 years with the BBC (1941–83). He was posted to the Monitoring Service (Evesham), transferred to Caversham in 1943 and seconded to OEID in Broadcasting House in 1946.

Between 1946–48, Dick represented the BBC at International Short Wave Allocation Conferences in Geneva, Mexico City and Paris. He returned to Caversham and became an SME on operational shifts. In 1961, following a training attachment, he transferred to the Engineering Establishment based in The Langham, moving to Television in 1963 where he remained until 1983.

He rose through the ranks, eventually becoming Head of Personnel Television Engineering and deputy to the Personnel Controller. He formally retired in 1981 but remained on special duties until 1983 to deal with the staffing and Union negotiations. He continued to work on various projects, including BBC Engineering Recruitment and the Faraday Lecture Tour until 1991.

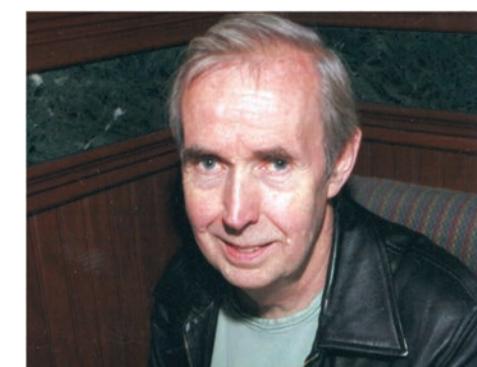
After leaving the BBC, he worked on the Youth Training Scheme in Hammersmith and on Equal Opportunities Groups. He was also a member of the North London Industrial Tribunal Service until 1990, with a special interest in race relations.

Dad was interested in politics all his life and was elected as a Town Councillor in Reading in 1958. He was also a keen cricketer and founded the BBC Caversham Cricket Club in 1943. He often recalled the challenges of putting a team together, made up of monitors and technical staff from all over the world, several of whom hadn't a clue about cricket!

Dick Craig, our Dad, leaves behind his family of four children: Alexis, Malcolm, Susan and Julia. He was also grandfather to Finlay, Hollie, Thomas, Natasha and Laurie and had four great-grandchildren.

Sue Craig-Stewart

Patrick Tunstall



It is with great sadness that I am writing to advise you of the passing of **Patrick Tunstall** on 4 October 2024. He was incredibly proud of his many, many years of service working for the BBC and of being a continued member of the BBC Club. Pat had many friends and acquaintances through the BBC and I know many of them would like to know about his passing away.

Karyn Brennan

David Mason Thomas – Technical Duty Manager, Wales



David Thomas died peacefully at home, surrounded by family, on 9 February 2024 at the age of 92, after some years of ill health.

David's BBC career started in September 1952 in Short Wave Transmitters, stationed at OSE8/9 Penrith followed by OSE10 near Ludlow. He was quickly transferred to Television OBs Wembley, joining the Radio Link Unit.

David was sent on attachment to the PID Radio Links Section as part of the European Television Exchange based in Cassell, Northern France – the first Franco-British Television Programme Relay. British and French television operated on different standards and moreover, the signal had to be transmitted from Paris to Great Britain live – no hope of VTR in those days!

On his return in 1955, David joined the Radio Link Team based in Cardiff serving Wales Television OBs and was the first member of Television staff to arrive at the Cardiff base on 18 January 1955, leading the Radio Link convoy. I'm quite sure this is where he first acquired the nickname of 'Dai Links'!

In 1979, David was attached to London Features and given the opportunity to produce a film of his own on amateur radio – a lifelong passion of his.

On returning to BBC Wales Communications in 1980, David acted as CPE and Duty Engineer Wales;

Obituaries

as Communications Permanent Circuits Engineer, he re-engineered permanent audio and television circuits throughout Wales. In 1983-84, David formed a development team to engineer sound on subcarrier systems, enabling sound to be superimposed on video signals for use in Wales PSC news injection terminals. The final product was well accepted, culminating in the roll-out across other regions.

1985 saw David's promotion to Technical Duty Manager, Wales until 1990, when he finally retired after proudly serving the BBC for some 38 years.

David leaves his wife of 64 years, Celia (also ex BBC), his children Karen and Adrian, grandchildren Alex, Holly, Jonathan and David, and his great-granddaughter Frankie, with whom he shared a particularly special bond. He will be greatly missed by the family and everyone else who knew him.

Karen Thomas

Ashley Hill – Planning Manager, BBC2*



In 1978, **Ashley Hill** joined me from being Organiser Television OBs to a brand new job, Planning Manager BBC2. On arrival, Sir Huw Wheldon, MD of BBC TV, bellowed at our wives, 'What's it like being married to a planner?' Both seemed to like it, and Ashley became the most admired planner and scheduler in the business.

The job involves helping to choose the programmes to commission or buy and then deciding when and where they should be shown. Michael Grade – no mean scheduler himself – said, 'Ashley's bright, breezy countenance masked a razor-sharp brain; he was simply the best.'

At the end of the LA screenings one year, it was Ashley who spotted that the comedy pilot about five friends might just be a winner.

Born in Cardiff (a Welsh heritage he never allowed anyone to forget) to Charles and Eileen, Ashley attended Howardian High School for Boys in Cardiff and then graduated from UCL in 1968 with a law degree.

As President of the Union, Ashley had honed his skill at public speaking. He was booked to sum up at the end of one biennial RTS Conference – a forbidding gig in front of the world's top broadcasting bosses. Unlike one BBC speaker, Ashley had no need of a comedy scriptwriter to help him out. The man who influenced so many people from backstage was even more impressive centre stage.

It was this mixture of warmth, fun, common sense and integrity which endeared him to so many. He enjoyed life and especially wine, food, theatre and cricket. Often the rain-affected games were the most enjoyable because the chat was so good.

In later life, he had the misfortune of a bad fall, which affected his mobility – but this did not keep him away from his large collection of luncheon groups, and he dealt with his condition stoically and never with self-pity.

Pauline, his wife of 56 years, and their three sons Christopher, Stephen and Peter, with their five grandchildren, are his legacy. For the rest of us, he leaves a hole in our schedule which will never be filled.

Keith S Clement

Michael Stickler – Deputy Head Television Planning & Installations Dept

It is with great sadness that we write to share the news that our dear dad, **Michael Stickler**, died aged 95 on 24 June 2024 after a very short spell of ill health.

Mike joined the BBC after gaining his degree in electrical engineering from UCL in the summer of 1953. After a few years in Radio and Television operational posts, he transferred to the Planning & Installations Department, where he became involved in a wide range of project activity, including the initial commissioning and subsequent development of the BBC Television Centre, the introduction of colour television, and the planning and standardisation of digital systems.

Mike held successive management posts, including as Project Manager for the modernisation and re-equipping of the BBC's External Services Radio Production Centre at Bush House in the early 1970s, before being appointed Deputy Head of the Planning & Installations Department in 1986.

In the latter years of working with the BBC, Mike travelled extensively, representing the interests of the BBC at meetings of organisations such as the European Broadcasting Union. In 1987, he had the honour of being elected a Fellow of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, in recognition of his work with remote control and digital video interface standards.

Mike left the BBC in 1989 and many happy years of retirement followed with his wife Eileen, with time spent holidaying in Europe and North America and involvement in a variety of U3A activities. Mike also immersed himself in family history, and his detailed written accounts have given us a rich and often very amusing insight into the way things were for him and our family in times past, always carefully set in the context of unfolding events in the country and the wider world.

Two phrases have been repeated over and over again in describing our dear Dad and Grandad: 'such good company' and 'a true gentleman'. He never lost those qualities in all his 96 years!

Alison Paton and Verity Gibbons (daughters)

Robin Stubbs – costume designer*

Robin Stubbs, who died on 20 September 2024, was born to James and Winifred Stubbs, in Redditch, Worcestershire.



On leaving school, where he did well, he started an engineering apprenticeship but, dissatisfied, moved on to a haulage company.

Music played a big part in Robin's life, and he regularly wrote a jazz column for *NME*.

Prue Hanley recalls: 'Robin was my assistant on *How Green Is My Valley*. We had so many laughs. He told me that he met Jacqui, four years his junior, when she was working at Birmingham Rep. Robin was a delivery driver for BMC Longbridge, driving a huge 6/8-car articulated lorry. His uniform was a navy boilersuit worn with a shirt and bow tie, can you believe? They married in March 1963 and moved to London, where Robin later found a job with the BBC working initially as a dresser.'

Amanda Monk says: 'Rob was a big influence in my life. I shall always be grateful to him. I hold wonderful memories of assisting him on *Only Fools and Horses*. It was hard work but with his wicked sense of humour and a twinkle in his eyes, it was always fun; I drove at speed with Eric Clapton blasting, and I still make a delicious "Rob's salad". He was also a tremendous support for me through a difficult time.'

Caroline Hutchings remembers: 'Robin was a dresser and I was the costume assistant to Elizabeth Waller on *Play of the Month* "Don Quixote", 1973. Robin was an excellent photographer and gave me loads of his black and white photos, including many of Rex Harrison.'

Along with an equally new make-up artist, Gillie Thomas, we three did a location filming called *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* in the Outer Hebrides, a primitive but hilarious 'baptism of fire' that cemented a lifelong friendship.

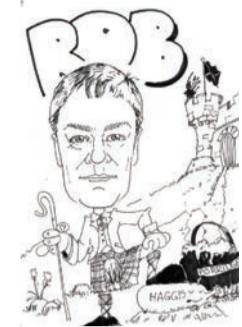
Robin and Jac later emigrated to New Zealand, remaining in touch via their annual newsy 'round Robin'. Rob sadly suffered Lewy Body Dementia, and finally a cyanotic episode.

His work included: *Only Fools and Horses*, *Tenko*, *Ripping Yarns*, *Eastenders* and *Porridge*.

Maggie Partington Smith

Robert Foster – Sports Rights executive*

Robert Foster died peacefully at his home in the Cotswolds on 4 September 2024, aged 56, having lived with cancer for 20 years.



Born and raised in Glasgow, Robert started out in 1988 in the news library at New Broadcasting House, Manchester before heading south and joining the Sports Library under Phil Gibson in Shepherd's Bush. He moved into Sports Rights in the early 1990s, working initially with Roger Moody and Dave Keir and from 2001 until 2013 with David Murray.

Always the first to arrive and often the last to leave, a barstool at the BBC Club at TVC was his personal office space – he had hollow legs. When BBC Sport moved to Salford in 2010, he stayed behind. He was an amazing networker and was in his element roaming the bars and restaurants of London doing deals, clutching a paltry financial hand in the face of the Murdoch millions. He got on with pretty much everyone, even boxing promoters. He was always doing deals and delivering great value for the BBC, a consummate mover and shaker not always appreciated by the internal BBC machine. A highlight was his deal to create the London Olympics 2012 DVD, the UK's best-selling DVD since *Star Wars*. The proceeds funded the BBC's Olympic Sports strategy for a number of years.

He left the BBC in 2013 to set up with Murray a new sports consultancy, FozMuz, with its sights set on developing 'less popular' sports.

He first knew he had cancer in 2004 and was initially given four years. He was never defined by his illness. Always the life and soul of any gathering, he effortlessly mixed humour, sarcasm and cheekiness and loved talking films, politics, music and even, occasionally, sport.

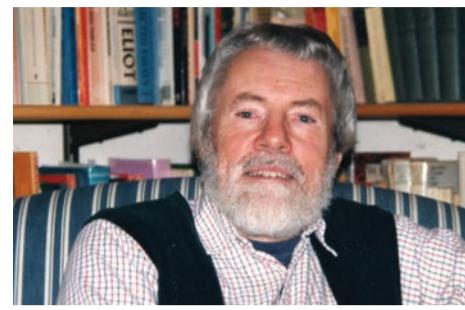
His dry wit, wry humour and happy drinkable companionship will be sadly missed by a raft of friends.

In mid-September, his ashes were scattered out at Bass Rock beyond North Berwick where he is now fighting off the gannets. For all his sociability, he once said he loved the idea of living in a lighthouse. He's out there now.

Joe Keaney and David Murray

*Obituaries marked with an asterisk have been edited down to 350 words for the print version of *Prospero*, but are available online in full at bbc.co.uk/mypension/prospero-online

David Arscott – Champion of ‘the local Radio Four’*



With the death of **David Arscott**, aged 81, Sussex has lost one of its best-known voices. It was a voice that chronicled and praised his beloved county for half a century, in BBC radio programmes and over 40 books, in talks and readings from Rye to West Wittering.

A producer and presenter on Radio Brighton, later Radio Sussex, David always said that although he loved his writing and days in newspaper journalism, radio presenting was the best job he had ever had. He joined the station in the mid-seventies and left in 1991.

He started in journalism as a 16-year-old on the *Investors Chronicle* before going to the *Evening Standard* City desk and the *Daily Journal* in Caracas, Venezuela. He then went to Hertford College, Oxford, as a mature student, graduating with a degree in English Literature.

Then his radio days began, at Brighton. As soon as he could, after about two years and a World Service attachment at Bush House, he moved from the newsroom to general programmes.

For him, the job was a local Radio 4, not a chance for prattle ‘n’ pop. He loved interviewing those with a good story to tell, an interesting job or a passion, mainly in the studio, but often in outside broadcasts as well.

His first book, *Hidden Sussex*, was published by BBC Radio Sussex and co-authored with historian and Crawley solicitor, Warden Swinfen. It sold very well and had to be reprinted over several years. Three more in the series, looking at the county’s people, towns and yearly round, followed. David also wrote 20 light-hearted histories on national subjects ranging from *A Very Peculiar History of the Blitz* to *A Very Peculiar History of Sex*, which – puzzlingly to him – didn’t sell very well. There was also fiction and even a guide to punctuation: few things riled David, but a misplaced comma certainly did.

David Arscott leaves four children from his first marriage, three from his second, and ten grandchildren.

Jill Arscott

Dan Zerdin – producer*

Dan Zerdin, who died on 1 November aged 98, was a well-known and much loved producer/senior producer in Bush House for around 30 years, first in the European English Service and then in more general Talks and Features.

In his years with the BBC World Service, he interviewed musicians such as Daniel Barenboim and Jacqueline du Pre. His session with Leopold Stokowski, a childhood idol, ended when Stokowski stormed out after a personal question. An accomplished studio producer, Dan was called on for big occasions such as the World phone-ins, when leaders such as Lee Kuan Yew and Margaret Thatcher took live questions from around the world.

Despite increasing deafness, he loved music late into life and (as mentioned in last October’s edition of *Prospero*) published an anecdotal book on the Proms at the age of 97.

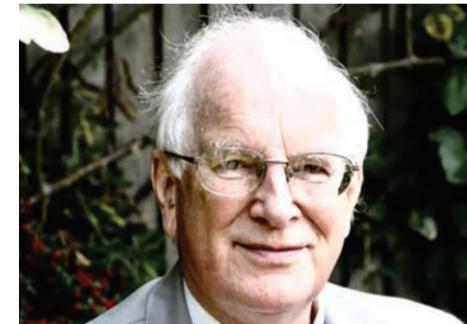
He had a wonderfully calm and equable personality, and few who met him could have imagined his early life. His mother died in an Oxford Street fire when he was seven months old. Before antibiotics, he almost died himself at the age of 11, from a severe attack of impetigo in Brazil, where his father was involved in the mica business. His father Noah found comfort in spiritualism after Dan’s mother’s death and became well-known in that field. Some 70 years later, Dan discovered séance recording discs in the family garage, apparently the voice of his mother. He used these (with Noah’s grand-daughters) as a basis for the 2002 Radio 4 feature, ‘*What Grandad did in the Dark*’.

The hidden parts of Dan’s life continue to surprise. He went to RADA, where he trained with Roger Moore and Adele Leigh. His National Service was in India at the time of partition. Radio had been an intense love since the 1930s, and it was radio through Bush House which led to his marriage to Hilary Osborn and the birth of two remarkable children, journalist Judith and the ventriloquist Paul Zerdin.

It was a great life Dan, and it has been a privilege to know you.

Ian Gillham

David Page – manager in the South Asian Services*



Warm tributes to **David Page**, former Urdu and Sinhala programme organiser and manager in the South Asian Services, have come from all over south Asia since his death on 11 October 2024, aged 80.

Apart from his 22 years in the BBC, they have reflected his work as trustee and for 10 years chairman of the leading development NGO, Afghanaid, his published writing on Pakistan’s history and on the media in south Asia and

Afghanistan, and his seminal work on media freedoms in the Commonwealth.

David joined the BBC External Services in 1972. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, David was given the task of setting up a Pashto language service. No British university had a teaching post in Pashto at the time. So, for advice both on recruitment and language style, David had the assistance of a redoubtable and much respected retired Pakistani Pathan officer, Colonel (later Brigadier) Yusuf.

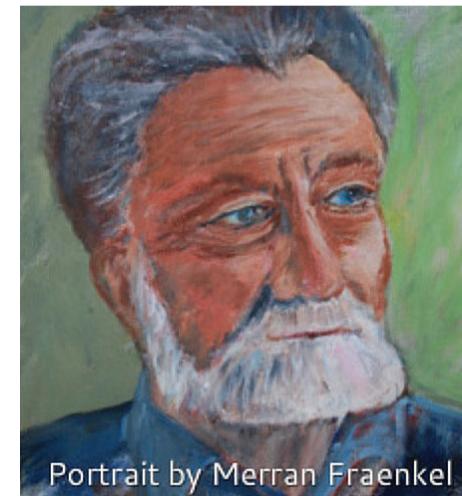
With Gordon Adam, he helped set up a Pashto and Dari (Afghan Persian) soap opera, *New Home New Life*, based loosely on *The Archers* and still on air 30 years later. He commissioned original cultural programmes in Urdu. He worked as closely with successive Sinhala language broadcasters as with his Urdu service colleagues and from many visits knew Sri Lanka well and was much respected there.

In our book on the Sri Lanka media, our co-editor, the journalist and human rights lawyer Kishali Pinto Jayawardena, forcefully promoted a Right to Information law for Sri Lanka. One of the first acts of the Sri Lanka parliament after President Mahinda Rajapaksa was ousted in 2015 was to pass such a law unanimously, an early and unforeseen fruit of her advocacy. David’s work with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, the Commonwealth Journalists Association and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative made a major contribution to the adoption of revised principles on Freedom of Expression at the recent Commonwealth summit in Samoa – a significant legacy.

Sadly, his partner Ruth Kirk Wilson died just a few weeks after him. He leaves his sister Janet, to whom we extend our sympathies.

William Crawley

Peter Fraenkel – Controller, European Services*



Portrait by Merran Fraenkel

Peter Fraenkel was born in Breslau, Germany, on 7 December 1926, to Hans, a tax officer, and Margot. They were Jews, but considered themselves to be German – Hans had fought in World War 1 and been awarded the Iron Cross.

The Nazis came to power in 1933, but Hans continued to think they were German and that normal life would return.

It was Kristallnacht in November 1938 that convinced him that they had no alternative but to flee. They settled in Lusaka, in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. Hans Fraenkel opened the town’s first dry cleaners. Peter went to school in Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia and then on to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg.

After graduation, Peter returned to Lusaka and joined the Central African Broadcasting Service. It broadcast to Africans in local languages. The broadcasters became very popular and Peter celebrated several of them in his book, one of the first about early African radio broadcasting – *Wayaleshi* (‘wireless’ in local languages).

In the early sixties, Peter joined the BBC in Bush House and wrote features for translation, showing much originality. In the mid-sixties he became Greek Programme Organiser and, during the Colonels’ regime with its media censorship, encouraged his colleagues to cover events creatively. In the seventies, Peter became Head of the East European Service, and achieved major programme advances, motivating his Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian and Yugoslav staff to originate more programmes. He was, also, closely involved in investigations after the murder of his Bulgarian colleague, Georgi Markov.

Peter’s final job, before he retired in 1986, was Controller of European Services. In this, he continued to encourage broadcasters to think differently. Throughout his BBC career, he inspired many. As Austen Kark wrote after he retired: ‘Full of enthusiasms, rich in ideas, adventurous in spirit, Peter was always a radical, questing intelligence. He was an originator, a preserver, and an encourager of excellence.’

In retirement, he wrote his autobiography, *No Fixed Abode*, and many short and long stories, which are online. And, just weeks before he died in December, his first novel, *Return of the Wolves*, was published!

Graham Mytton and Peter Udell

Sally Hulke – set designer

We would like to report the sad death of **Sally Hulke**, set designer, on 21 December 2024. Sally married another BBC employee, Barry Peterson, and they moved to Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol, when she was asked to do the set design for *Casualty*. Sally received a BAFTA for Best Design in 1979 for *Testament of Youth*.

There will be a memorial service for Sally later this year in Westbury-on-Trym. If anyone wishes to come to the service, please send an email to spmemorial@yahoo.com to be put on the list to be contacted when a firm date (likely to be in the early summer) is known.

Penelope and Paul Nicholson

Obituaries

Sheena Bawden



As the BBC celebrated the 50th anniversary of the launch of Ceefax last September, we said farewell to one of the journalists involved in its early days.

Sheena Bawden, who joined the service in 1979, was a former newspaper journalist with the *Birkenhead News*.

She had pursued a journalistic career in the footsteps of her father, Rex Bawden, who worked on newspapers for many years before becoming manager of BBC Radio Merseyside from 1970 to 1981.

When Sheena saw the advertisement for Ceefax, it appealed to her as a method of distributing news and information even faster than traditional services. It was the world's first teletext information service and a forerunner of the present red button service.

She often recalled the excitement of moving swiftly to post new developments and found the possibilities for sports reporting particularly exciting.

Unfortunately for Sheena, her BBC career was cut short when she was diagnosed with MS (Multiple Sclerosis) and she had to retire in the eighties. She faced many years of fighting the illness, including some major operations.

Aged 72, she died in Wales, where she had moved from Merseyside to be closer to her son, Nick and grandchildren, Mollie and Ethan.

Roy Corlett

Geoffrey Whitehead – Deputy Political Editor



Geoffrey Whitehead, who died on Christmas Eve aged 90, came to the BBC in 1968 after a period as Whitehall Correspondent for Reuters.

He was a hard-nosed, news-gathering reporter who fitted in well with the six-man team packed together into a small office in the Commons Press Gallery. There were three lobby correspondents and three Parliamentary correspondents. As Deputy Political Editor to Hardiman Scott, Geoffrey worked hard to find good political stories and cultivated a circle of senior MPs and cabinet ministers.

Born in 1934, he attended Steyning Grammar School and a school in Northumberland, leaving at 15 to work on regional newspapers. Later he acquired two degrees. He did National Service in the Fleet Air Arm, being commissioned as an Observer flying in Fairey Fireflies and US Avenger aircraft over the Eastern Atlantic.

In his time, he covered for Radio and TV News Harold Wilson's visit to Rhodesia, Britain's early attempts to join the Common Market, and the years of the Heath government.

It was a great surprise when in 1974 Hardiman Scott announced to us, his fellow correspondents, that Geoffrey was going off to New Zealand to be Assistant, and later Director-General, of Radio New Zealand. He told me that in his annual BBC interviews he had never been considered suitable for management!

We were sorry to see him go. He lived in Brighton, but he didn't seem to mind the considerable train journey each way.

After making many changes in New Zealand, and turning a loss on RNZ's commercial stations into a healthy surplus, Geoffrey was appointed to Managing Director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Again, he implemented many changes, but had a tough time and only served half his contract. He went back to New Zealand and for seven years was Director of the NZ equivalent of our National Trust. He lived in the South Island with his second wife, and partner of nearly 44 years, Faith Barber.

Geoffrey was driven by his ambition and by a strong belief in public service broadcasting.

Peter Hill

Chris Doggett – SM and sound engineer



Chris Doggett, a former SM, gifted sound engineer and devoted husband and father, sadly passed away in April 2024 after a complex and difficult illness.

Chris grew a passion for audio from an early age, often accompanying his father, Sid, who was a BBC balance engineer, to music sessions in the Light Music years of the Light Programme.

Chris joined the BBC as an SM in 1970 and thereafter followed an audio-related career, working as Deputy Chief Engineer in both Local Radio and Television facilities before launching his own broadcast consultancy and training company.

Chris built his own compilation studio at home, where amongst other things he facilitated live contributions into Radio 4 as well as recording a vast variety of artists, from full choirs and bands to individuals and solo musicians. Chris regarded his work as an expansion of his hobby, but in reality it was a life-long passion.

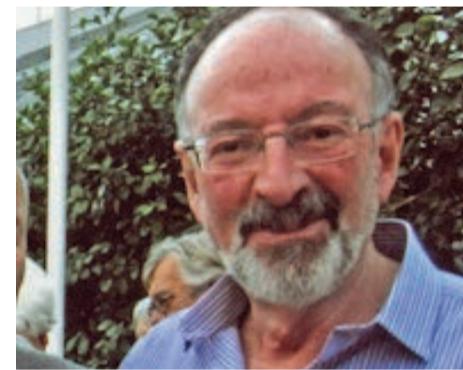
As a pre-retirement plan, Chris and Sue moved to Cornwall where again Chris set up his own compilation studio and was soon recording the rich vein of local artists that Cornwall has to offer. After many happy and productive years, the Covid pandemic prompted a move to Devon, where, again, Chris began to build his own compilation studio and to put out feelers with local bands and choirs. Sadly, he became seriously ill before completing the studio and was unable to fulfil the dream of recording artists in his new location.

Chris is survived by his beloved wife, Sue, a former SM, who was constantly at his side throughout his career and, indeed, throughout the time of his illness.

He will be deeply missed by Sue and their two daughters and four grandchildren, and all those he helped through his expertise and deep-founded knowledge as a sound engineer.

Sue Doggett

John Smith – stalwart of Children's Television*



John Smith, who has died at the age of 74, was a stalwart of Children's Television in the eighties and nineties.

John was born on a farm in Staffordshire but was never destined to follow in his father's footsteps. At a very early age he acquired a cine camera and filmed anything and everything, including his mother's collection of Royal Doulton figures, which were used to illustrate his stories. His mother and father, Rene and Jack, and his sister, Sheila, used to wait in high anticipation for the four-minute reel to return from the lab where it was processed.

John was educated at Chaucer House School (until he was 11), Alleyn's Grammar School in Uttoxeter and finally Bristol University where he read English and Drama.

His first job on leaving university was at the Northcott Theatre in Exeter as Assistant Stage Manager.

John joined BBC Studio Management in the mid-seventies and worked his way from Floor Assistant to AFM to Floor Manager. Having been involved in numerous programmes during this time, he found himself drawn to Children's Programmes, cutting his directing teeth on *PlayAway* before what must have been his dream job, *Grange Hill*, where he directed 32 episodes.

From there he moved to directing numerous drama series within the department: *Alfonso Bonzo*; *Billy Webb*; *Kevin's Cousins*; *Kevin & Co.*; *The Boot Street Band* (with a very young Idris Elba playing a minor role); *Agent Z & the Penguin from Mars*; and, as a freelance in the nineties, several episodes of *The Worst Witch* for ITV.

Although John was a very private person, he was highly respected professionally among his colleagues, writers, actors, crews and others who worked with him, and he made some lasting friends.

John's great passions were travelling, fine dining and the theatre. He was a member of the National Theatre, RSC and Chichester Festival Theatre.

He is much missed by his sister, Sheila, and warmly remembered by friends and colleagues.

Angela Beeching

John David Gilbert – cameraman and recording engineer

Sadly, John passed away on 28 January 2025 in Spain, where he had lived for over 20 years.

He had worked for the BBC for many years, a lot of the time spent at *Pebble Mill*, working on *Top Gear*, *All Creatures Great and Small* and *Poldark*, among a lot of other TV series.

John had many happy memories of working with friends and colleagues at the BBC and this is to let them know of his passing away.

Louise Brown

Stasha Spoliar – BBC Monitoring Service

My father, **Stasha Spoliar**, was a Senior Monitor at the BBC Monitoring Service at Caversham Park, where he worked for the best part of 40 years, starting in the 1950s.

He was proud of the BBC's work in this area and set high standards for the Serbo-Croat Team, while also being happy to mentor younger members of staff.

A Croat, he was born on 3 September 1926 at Valjevo in the Sumadija region of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He died peacefully at Manor Court, Henley, on 3 February 2025, aged 98.

Nick Spoliar (Dr)

Roger Burgess – BBC Newcastle TV producer*

Roger Burgess was born in 1932 in Manchester and died peacefully in Newcastle on 14 January 2025. He was a well-regarded north east TV producer and active member of the Royal Television Society.

Roger started with Auntie acting in Radio's *Children's Hour* and moved into Television after graduating from Oxford University. He made many groundbreaking television programmes in his time at the BBC in Newcastle.

He created many dramatized historical documentaries – which the BBC North East region was unused to. Some of the annual dramas which he wrote and produced included *Those Delavals*, *Sinker's Row*, *Farewell, Jobling*, *Darling Grace*, *A Slight Case of Poison*, *Mr Swan's Electric Light: The Story of a Great Inventor*, *Keelmen*, *The Mike Neville Show*, *Heroes*, *Geordierama*, *Townscape* and *Grundy Goes*.

Roger was one of the founders of the open air Tynemouth Pageant (and co-writer of the first one) – celebrating the 900th anniversary of the building of the Norman priory. He was also a well-loved director at Tynemouth Priory Theatre. During his time there, he transformed his *Those Delavals* family history into a musical production (again with Bob Jeffrey), at Priory Theatre, and then brought it back 'home' – to a full house no less – being performed in the Delaval family home at Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland.

Andy Burgess

*Obituaries marked with an asterisk have been edited down to 350 words for the print version of *Prospero*, but are available online in full at: bbc.co.uk/mypension/prospero-online

Colin Thatcher – International News Editor, Bush House*

Though he was born in Bromley, **Colin Thatcher** grew up in Bognor Regis, West Sussex. During the Second World War, he would cycle the five miles to RAF Tangmere to watch all the planes: the Typhoons and the Spitfires, including one flown by Wing Commander Douglas Bader.

To satisfy his National Service requirement, Colin joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) and served from January 1956 to February 1958. Most of that time was spent in the Outer Hebrides – a most forbidding and wind-swept existence. When asked about his job with the RAF, Colin liked to say that he learned to 'fly a Remington'. He could touch type up to 60 words a minute!

When Colin returned to civilian life, he got a job with Southern Rail at the Dorking Audit Office. Though he loved trains to the end of his life, the Audit Office was not a good fit for Colin. In 1963, he became a Teleprinter Operator with the BBC Monitoring Service located at Caversham Park.

Two years later, Colin travelled to Francistown, Botswana as part of a group that was sent to establish the Central African Relay Station (CARS). On his return to the UK, Colin moved to the BBC's Bush House in the World Service Newsroom. He moved up to become one of the International News Editors for that radio service; a long and distinguished career spanning 31 years. Colin always said that he never had a bad day at the BBC!

Colin was a long-serving member of the Thames Valley Chorus. Joining the Reading Barbershop Harmony Club in 1978, he soon became involved in quarteting and even named the 'Southern Comfort' quartet which he helped to found. In 1985, they won the Senior Quartet Gold Medal!

In 1966, Colin married Shirley Brown, whom he met when working for Southern Rail. They had two boys, Andrew and Duncan. He is survived by the boys, two granddaughters, Helena and Caitlin and his younger sister, Sylvia.

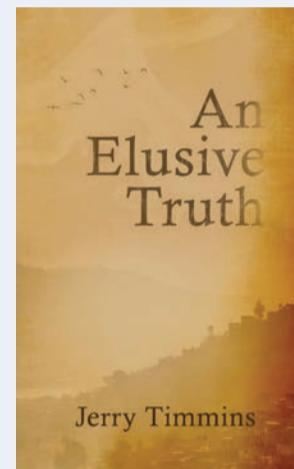
Colin is also survived by his second wife, Kay, whom he met through his love of barbershop singing. They married in 2013.



Follow the story, no matter where it takes you

A review of *An Elusive Truth*, by Jerry Timmins

For anyone who has set off determinedly with a microphone to get that difficult interview, there's a bit of Lucas in us.



Lucas is a main character in the novel *An Elusive Truth*, penned by former BBC manager Jerry Timmins. In his time at the BBC, Jerry has served, among other roles, as Caribbean Section Head and Head of the World Service's Americas and Africa regions.

Full disclosure up front: Jerry was a key player in re-establishing a Caribbean Service at the World Service in Bush House in 1988. He ran it for some time before being promoted to Head of the Americas region – passing the head of service mantle to regional veteran Hugh Crosskill. Hugh was a silver-voiced Jamaican presenter, much admired around Bush House. He is clearly the character on whom the

book's Courtney James character is based. And that's where I came in, recruited by Jerry and Hugh as a producer at the Caribbean Service, eventually becoming its head following Hugh's departure in 1998.

You don't need to have specialist knowledge to enjoy the journalistic journey to Haiti and back to Bush House that Jerry has produced in his book. However, it does take an insider to outline the intricate network within Bush House that governed relations between its newsroom, its intake desk and its Caribbean Service. It also takes a particular love of the Caribbean (which Jerry delves into in depth) to describe the enigma that is Haiti.

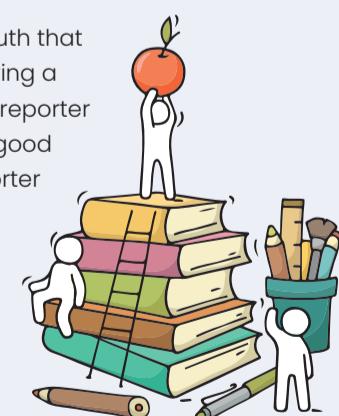
An Elusive Truth describes the complexities that lie beneath the stereotypical portrayal of coups, power, corruption and voodoo. In fact, the book gives you a ringside seat as events unfold in this fictional version of Haiti. It has all the drama, powerplays and colour that real-life Haiti has to offer, in the past and, sadly, still today.

In the chapters based at Bush House, Jerry manages to capture the strong women who often drove the World Service agenda in the newsroom and its other departments. Carla, the smoke-where-I-like character, would be familiar to anyone who served there at the height of Bush House's much-prized autonomy.

Don't look for an easy read. This adventure-filled romp offers the painful face of corruption and brutality in a small country. If you've been out in the field, this will revive memories of gathering your heavy bag of equipment and following the story, no matter where it takes you.

Jerry Timmins explores that elusive truth – the truth that journalists seek to establish in their reporting during a fast-moving event. Whether you've worked as a reporter in the field and a correspondent or not, this is a good read which takes you back to your younger reporter days and the glory Bush House days of the World Service. But then Jerry Timmins does work with that great maxim: write about what you know.

A full version of this book review is available at bbc.co.uk/mypension/prospero-online



Debbie Ransome was a correspondent for CANA/Reuters in the 1980s before joining the BBC's Caribbean service and heading it up from 1998 to 2011. She then worked with the Commonwealth Secretariat. Today she works with the Commonwealth Round Table think tank, serves on the executive of the Commonwealth Journalists' Association and manages the website Caribbean Intelligence.

Look East 60th reunion

The reunion held at the Sprowston Manor Hotel, Norwich, on 28 September to celebrate the 60th anniversary of *Look East* was a huge success.

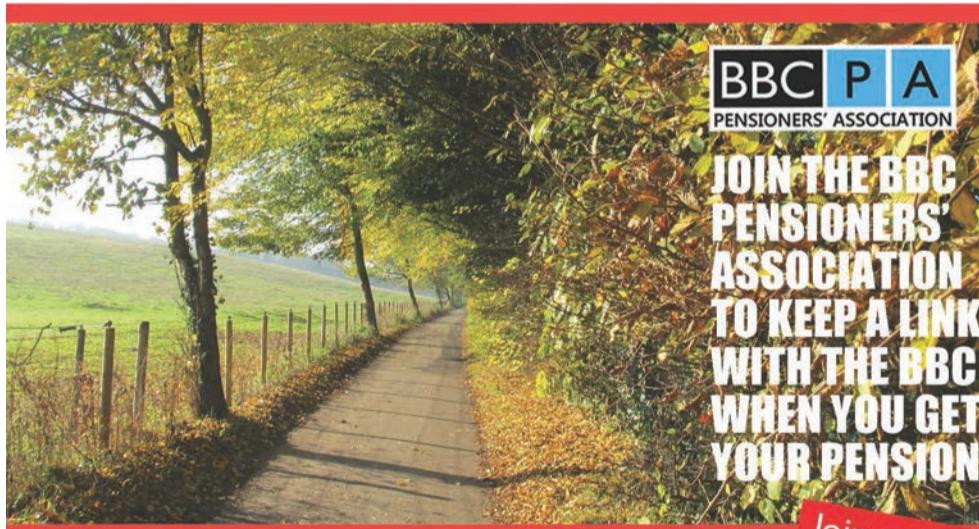
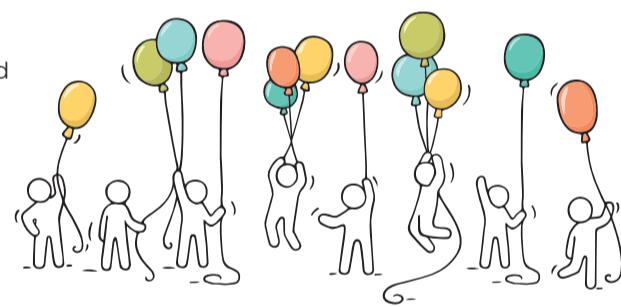
Four of those who had worked on the first programme were among the 120 guests: June Lewis and Cynthia Harris (Production Secretaries), Keith Clement (Director) and John Lewis (Film Editor). Also attending was Susanne Hall, the first female *Look East* presenter, who in addition did regular live cooking spots from a very basic studio 'kitchen' before moving on to *Nationwide*.



Three couples who'd met their partners while working in the Norwich newsroom were among the numerous staff and freelance journalists who were present: Roger and Vivienne Maynard (who'd come from Australia), Steve and Helen Clinch, and Ron and Vivienne Trickett.

A slide show compiled by Terry Wooller covering BBC East activities since its birth triggered memories as guests saw themselves and former colleagues on the screen, which prompted lively conversations during the excellent buffet.

As the afternoon was drawing to a close, there was a hearty round of applause for Maria Todd, Andrew Holland, Linda Carr, Terry Wooller and Chris Carter in recognition of the six months of hard work they'd put into organising the event.



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2025 anniversaries

You probably know that *EastEnders* went live earlier this year to mark 40 years on air – but what other notable anniversaries can we look forward to?

It's been 20 years since *Doctor Who* returned to British television screens, on 26 March 2005, after a 16-year hiatus. Over 10 million people watched the first episode, starring Christopher Eccleston as the Ninth Doctor. That same year saw the debut of the topical comedy quiz *Mock the Week* (on 5 June 2005), casting rising star Frankie Boyle as one of the team captains alongside the more seasoned Rory Bremner.

Following on from Rachel Reeves' Spring Statement last month, do you remember when the Budget Speech was first televised live? It was 35 years ago – on 20 March 1990 – and was delivered by Chancellor of the Exchequer, John Major. Major spoke for 84 minutes, but the *Budget 90 Special* programme – acknowledging its historic nature – offered comprehensive news, reactions and expert analysis for the best part of four hours.

Going back further (but staying political), it was 45 years ago that the satirical sitcom *Yes Minister* was first broadcast, on 25 February 1980. The comedy was based on the premise that real power was held by civil servants rather than ministers (so not much has changed!).

Did you work on any of these shows? We love hearing your stories so please write in to the address on page 3 or email prospero@bbc.co.uk

Contacts

Queries

For benefit and pension payroll queries, call the Service Line on **0303 081 2848** or email mypension@bbc.co.uk

Prospero

To remove a name from the distribution list, ring the Service Line on **0303 081 2848**. *Prospero* is provided free of charge to retired BBC Scheme members only. *Prospero* is also available on audio disc for those with sight impairment. To register, please ring the Service Line. Alternatively, it is available online at bbc.co.uk/mypension/prospero-online where it is updated monthly.

BBC Club

The BBC Club in London has a retired membership costing £3 per month or £36 per year. Members can also add friends and family to their membership for a small additional cost. Regional clubs may have different arrangements. Please call the BBC Club London office on **020 8752 6666** or email bbc.club@bbc.co.uk for details, or to join.

Financial Assistance Fund (formerly Benevolent Fund)

This is funded by voluntary contributions from the BBC, and its purpose is to protect the welfare of staff, pensioners and their families.

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Prospero Society

Prospero Society is the only section of the BBC Club run by and for retired BBC staff and their spouses. Its aim is to enable BBC pensioners to meet on a social basis for theatre visits, luncheons, coach outings, etc.

Prospero Society is supported by BBC Club funds so as to make events affordable. If you would like an application form, please contact:

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London W12 7TP

Tel: **020 8752 6666**
Email: bbc.club@bbc.co.uk

BBCPA

The BBCPA was founded in 1988 to promote and safeguard the interests of BBC pensioners. It is independent of the BBC. Download a membership form at bbcpa.org.uk

BBC Scotland reunion

The annual BBC Scotland retired staff lunchtime reunion will take place this year on Friday 24 October at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Glasgow, just across the River Clyde from BBC Scotland's headquarters at Pacific Quay.

If you haven't already received an email notification of this, then you're missing from our list – so please contact us via exbbcreunion@googlemail.com or andrew.longbottom@outlook.com for further details.