LINES OF SUCCESSION

The new charter era starting in 1952 was, in personnel terms at least, little short of a full regeneration of the BBC, with new faces coming in on every level, up to the Director-General and beyond, above even him, with the Board of Governors undergoing a major reshuffle. As well as the addition of representatives for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there was a new Chairman in Sir Alexander Cadogan. By now Winston Churchill was Prime Minister once more, and given his long-standing antipathy towards the BBC, dating back to the Company days, it's hard not to believe that Cadogan was a deliberately perverse choice on his part, being a career diplomat who had (by his own baffled admission to the PM himself) no qualifications for the job whatsoever, having never seen a British television broadcast in his life and disliked what little he'd experienced of the medium via America.

Then again, maybe Churchill's anti-BBC sentiments had evolved. Cadogan was dispatched to the Corporation over his own objections and with an extra piece of unsolicited advice. "I see you will have to appoint a new Director-General. That is of course entirely a matter for you and not me. But I would have no objection to your appointing my old friend Ian Jacob." Subtlety and discretion were not Churchill's strongest suits. Fortunately, Ian Jacob - Edward Ian Claud, all told - was already the leading candidate before Cadogan's appointment. The previous board of Governors recommended him shortly before giving way to the new lineup.

He was an obvious choice in many ways. While not a BBC lifer (which will have eased the minds of some of the more suspicious members of Parliament and industry, even without the Churchill endorsement) he had significant experience there. His real background, however, was in the armed forces. The Jacobs were (and remain) a distinguished military family, with the family tree speckled with Lieutenants, Colonels, Major-Generals and even a Field-Marshal. Ian's branch had served in India since at least 1817, and three generations since had been born there, including Ian himself. Most notably, the aforementioned Field-Marshal was his father, Sir Claud Jacob, who came by his rank via service in World War I at both the Somme and Passchendaele, among other horrors.

Ian naturally followed him and his ancestors into the army. Fortunately he was born in September 1899, meaning that by the time he came of age and joined the Royal Engineers, the First World War was practically over. By 1932 he had qualified as an officer (with record marks) and was a Colonel by the time World War II broke out. Any hope of emulating his father in the field was dashed, however, when he was headhunted by the War Cabinet to serve as Military Assistant Secretary. It was in this role that he first became close to Churchill, becoming one of his most

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trusted henchmen for the duration of the War.

Thanks to Churchill, he entered peacetime a Lieutenant-General, but one without any practical experience of commanding troops in the field, which limited his military prospects considerably. So instead he turned to the skills he learned as Churchill's effective PA, handling his communications during the PM's rare excursions abroad. The BBC was the obvious place to put such talents to use - and his Churchill connections sweetened the deal further - and he arrived at the Corporation in the dying days of the War (pausing briefly to accept a knighthood for his service in the War Cabinet) to take over the European Service. Two years later it was absorbed by the Overseas Service, and he was appointed its Director.

He remained there for the duration of the Attlee Government, laying the foundations for the Service's later incarnation as the World Service and becoming instrumental in the formation of the European Broadcasting Union (he was its President until 1960). He only left because, in 1951, the Conservative party won the General Election.

This, of course, resulted in Churchill returning to the office of Prime Minister, but less well-remembered is the fact that he also appointed himself Minister for Defence - this is as distinct from War, which was another department in those days - a role he'd created specifically for himself on first taking charge back in 1940. Attlee had relinquished it after a year, but now Churchill was back and he was reintegrating the role. As such, he specifically asked William Haley if he could have Ian Jacob back, this time as what effectively amounted to Chief of Staff at the Ministry of Defence.

So, with just a touch of reluctance that was easily overwhelmed by loyalty and friendship, Jacob left the BBC to resume his duties as Churchill's henchman. It soon turned out not to be the same without a war, however, and the Prime Minister soon realised that without any actual conflicts going on, the Defence brief was mostly paperwork. Rather than start a war to relieve the boredom - which would have been impractical, expensive and probably quite wasteful - Churchill relinquished the role of Defence Secretary after a mere handful of months to Field Marshal Harold Alexander, Earl of Tunis, a bona fide war hero twice over. Alexander was aloof, poker-faced and ultimately unknowable, and Jacob enjoyed working with him far less than he had Churchill. So it was just as well that, just three months later, the announcement was made that Jacob's old employers were looking for a new chief.

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