"I defy anyone to sit in the chair of the Director-General and not be moved by a sense of history."

Ian Trethowan

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INTRODUCTION

YOU MAKE IT WHAT IT IS

JOHN REITH

1922-1938

CRINOLINE DAYS

JOHN REITH
CRINOLINE DAYS

THE FORGING

John Reith, later Major the Right Honourable Sir John Charles Walsham Reith, still later the first Baron Reith, was born on the 20th of July, 1889, in a place that couldn't sound more Scottish if it yelled its name through a mouthful of salted porridge while punching a Sassenach: Stonehaven, Kincardineshire, in the rugged northeast of the country, just shy of Aberdeen. Out of the seven children of the Reverend Dr George Reith, he was the last, with a ten year gap between him and the sixth that left him somewhat isolated as a child. His father was a Presbyterian minister of some standing and prestige - rising to become Moderator of the Free Kirk Assembly - and was by all accounts a man of fearsome authority at home as well as at the pulpit, directing the young John's life as if to a timetable he himself had drawn up. After attending Glasgow Academy - nearby to where his father was chaplain - John was

enrolled at the Gresham's Public School in faraway Norfolk, which did little to mollify his sense of isolation. He eventually survived being the only Presbyterian Scot in an institution full of farmers' sons with comedy accents via the classic method of becoming good at games. His budding six-seven frame will have come in handy here.

John had aspirations of making it to Oxbridge, but the Reverend Dr flatly refused, plucking him out of Greshams at seventeen in 1906 (precluding university altogether in favour of technical college) and manoeuvering him instead into an interminable apprenticeship in engineering with the North British Locomotive Company. What followed was several years of tedious, grinding shop work: up at 4.45 am to catch slow, noisy, bumpy tram to start work at six. Then ten hours of tedious tinkering with machinery, enlivened by brief pauses for breakfast at 8.45 and lunch at 1. Then back on the tram at 5.30 pm for home, or in Reith's case more often evening classes for a further three hours. Repeat until spirit crushed. Reith later looked back on his experience as a living nightmare:

*"..[T]he prospect of five long, weary years in shops, with bits and pieces of machinery, with the ghastly hours and the squalid circumstances – it was nauseous and unbearable. I decided to bear it; to go through with it; somehow go through with it."**

This vast resolve, tooth-grinding stoicism, stone-faced patience and willingness to endure absolutely anything for as long as it took to stop - forged in a crowded but lonely childhood among much older siblings and unknowable Norfolk farm-children - was here refined into Reith's defining characteristic: the iron will, the unshakeable self-belief, and the capacity to simply stare down the entire population of the world, no matter the circumstances, until they bent to it.

A bit of light relief was finally provided in 1914 with the outbreak of World War One. By now Reith had escaped the Glasgow railroad and was living in London, against the wishes of his father. Contrary to the Reverend Dr's conviction that he'd "come back with his tail between his legs", Reith, with the experience of all those grinding years behind him, had no trouble at all in finding work at Albert Dock. As it happens he wasn't there long, but only because of the outbreak of hostilities. Reith's commission in the Territorials (with the 5th Scottish Rifles) saw him packed off to the trenches of the Western Front to experience an even more nightmarishly grinding lifestyle than he had on the locomotives.

At the front, his extraordinary self-possession started to border on insanity. An unshakeable confidence in one's ability to achieve almost anything is all very well in peacetime - admirable, even - but standing literally yards from the enemy on the front lines of a war where thousands upon thousands are dying every day,

actions like calmly taking a stroll along the tops of the trenches in broad daylight, or nipping off for a piss in No Man's Land can have negative effects on group morale, to say the least. Not only did both of these incidents genuinely happen, but they were recorded by Reith himself in his published war memoirs. That is how self-possessed he was: enough to do insanely dangerous things like these, but also enough to record it for public consumption with no embarrassment whatsoever.

Inevitably, Reith (by now a Lieutenant) got himself shot in 1915, a single bullet in the cheek providing what many soldiers will have considered a golden ticket out of the trenches and into the Royal Engineers, and later the Royal Marine Engineers. By the time the war ended he was a Major, and even more convinced that he was a man of destiny. He spent a couple of years after the war back in Glasgow as General Manager of - what else - an engineering firm, before moving back to London in 1921 to work as secretary with the capital's Conservative and Unionist MPs in preparation for the following November's General Election. That campaign end up with a place in the history books as the very first time the election results were broadcast over the radio, thanks to a little startup called the British Broadcasting Company.

PRIMORDIAL SOUP

It's hard to imagine British broadcasting before there was a BBC, partly because in the event, such a thing turned out to be more or

less impossible. By contrast, in America, commercial radio stations broadcasting to the general public existed by 1920, under licence from the Department of Commerce. This was an example of old-fashioned Adam Smithian capitalism functioning as it was supposed to, with supply and demand working hand in hand with technology, and ultimately the public interest. Such notions were entirely alien to the British establishment at the time. The General Post Office essentially owned the concept of radio broadcasting and they were extremely reluctant to let commercial interests anywhere near it. For the years immediately after the First World War, the only stations they allowed on air were explicitly "experimental" in nature, a toe dipped in the waters of the new technology. Most prominent of these was a licenced transmission by the Marconi company from their own radio factory - the first such in the world - of Dame Nellie Melba performing a couple of arias on factory floor.

Dame Nellie's trill was heard - by those few who had the capacity to hear it - around the country, throughout Europe, and even as far away as Newfoundland (although the best they could make out was a couple of vocal oscillations and a bit of Italian). Further experimental broadcasts were just as popular, and sales of wireless receiving sets kept growing. It really couldn't be ignored anymore: this was a new frontier for humankind. Wireless communication was here and it wasn't just for bellowing orders on the battlefield anymore.

The British armed forces begged to differ on the latter point. Claiming at all this opera and such was clogging up the airwaves and intervening with military communications, the army made the GPO withdraw all licences for commercial broadcasting and shut the whole system down in 1920. Despite this, wireless sales stayed healthy - now accompanied by dozens of letters to the GPO begging for something to actually listen to again.

Eventually the military relented, and the in 1922 the GPO were allowed to issue licences to broadcast again, and Britain got its first ever regular entertainment radio stations. First on the bandwagon was Marconi, who broadcast every Tuesday from a shed just outside Chelmsford under the call sign 2MT ("Two Emma Toc, this is Two Emma Toc, Writtle testing, Writtle testing"). Shortly afterwards came 2LO, also from Marconi, which transmitted the very first live sports broadcast: the notorious Light Heavyweight fight between Kid Lewis and champion Georges Carpentier (Carpentier retained the title by a KO achieved by smacking Lewis while the Referee was talking to him).

Not a week later, Manchester got its own radio station via the Metropolitan Vickers Company ("Metrovick"). 2ZY came with its own specially-formed Orchestra, performing the works of then-contemporary British composers like Holst and Elgar for the wireless owners of the North. There was patently no stopping it now. Wireless broadcasting was a thing. The genie was out of his itty-bitty living space. So the GPO considered their strategy. The

main (and indeed for practical purposes only) point of comparison was America, and being rugged individualists with no regard for such British concerns as rules, their burgeoning wireless industry was one hot mess of competing broadcasts jostling for position amid hundreds of transmitters and thousands of wavelengths with no regulation or co-ordination whatsoever.

This would never do. Not in Britain. Everything in its right place. Clearly what was needed was a system, some way of cleanly dividing all the airspace and doling it out fairly to those who deserve it - whilst keeping an eye on them all to make sure they don't misuse this great power. So, under GPO auspices a committee was formed of the big six wireless companies - Marconi, Metrovick, General Electric, Western Electric, British Thompson-Houston and the efficiently named British Radio Communications, plus (at the GPO's insistence) a representative of all the smaller manufacturing companies. These seven were tasked with hammering out a system of broadcasting for the future of Britain.

The talks, at first, didn't go brilliantly well, and for a while it looked like there were going to have to be two BBCs. The GPO actively prepared themselves for the necessity of writing out two separate broadcasting licences, but warned the gang of seven that two was the absolute maximum and that one was preferable by several orders of magnitude. After several months of bickering which very nearly necessitated the introduction of Marquis of

Queensbury rules, a plan was finally agreed upon which would require only one licence to be issued. The licence-holder would be an entirely new company, with each of the big six companies owning one-sixth of the shares. This company would have the exclusive right to operate broadcasting stations within the United Kingdom for an initial period of two years. It would have £10,000 to play with; six grand of that would come from the Big Six companies at a grand each, the remaining four would come from the smaller manufacturing companies and, later, the dealers - any one of whom could become a company member and own at least one share for a fee of £1. The GPO breathed a sigh of relief and drew up a licence for the British Broadcasting Company.

THE CANDIDATE

Even after all that effort, the BBC had still not yet been born. Merely conceived, and now it was gestating. The original BBC was formed in April 1922, but not yet registered. Everything had to be sorted out before it could go live as a company. Which stations it was taking on, for instance. 2LO and 2ZY survived, but 2MT was dropped, rationalised out of existence before such a term had even been coined. Shortly after those two went national, the nascent BBC set up 5IT from Birmingham and started drawing up plans for a future national network.

They also had to put together a backroom staff, including a board of directors consisting of the managing director or equivalent

of each of the Big Six companies, overseen by a hand-picked establishment man to act as Chairman. For this role they picked the right honourable Lord Gainford of Durham, or Jack Pease as he had once been known, a former Liberal politician who served under Asquith in multiple cabinet positions, including a year as Postmaster General. His job was to be in charge of the board of directors, guardian against inter-company bickering, ultimate stop for bucks, wielder of absolute authority when necessary. But he wasn't tasked with actually running the company on a day-to-day basis, overseeing the stations themselves, their transmission and their content, getting involved with the actual business of broadcasting. That was to be the responsibility of the Managing Director. And for that role, the nascent BBC needed an outsider, and even more of one than captain of industry and former Treasury Secretary Gainford. So they threw the net as wide as they possibly could by advertising the role in national newspapers. One of these was the Morning Post, the paper taken by the young John Reith.

With the 1922 election now won for the Conservatives (albeit at a loss and with a new party in opposition), Reith was at something of a loose end. He considered going into politics, encouraged by both Austen Chamberlain and Lloyd George, but that wouldn't have been as fun as managing a company. While kicking his heels in Tory HQ, he spotted a job advertisement in the Morning Post: a managing director was needed at some new

London-based broadcasting company. Reith didn't know the first thing about broadcasting, had no idea how a radio worked and had no conception of what the job would ultimately involve, but that didn't matter to the hyper-self-possessed Scotsman: he believed himself to have the credentials necessary to run any company in any field. He may even have been right. It still behooved him to do a touch more research than he did.

It was only after he'd posted his application letter that he looked up the board members in Who's Who and discovered that the committee was chaired by Sir William Noble - like himself, a proud, straight-backed Aberdonian. If only he'd known before he wrote the letter, he could have dropped numerous references to his own windswept porridge-eating upbringing and ancestry in the shadow of the Mounth, and thereby found a way, even subliminally, into the chairman's favour. Nothing if not pragmatic, Reith actively fished his application letter out of the mailbox and wrote and mailed another, this time making careful reference to his childhood in Glorious Aberdeen, or near it at least.

Whether or not the fetishisation of the granite city actually made a difference is, naturally, impossible to say, but whether due to his CV or his origins or both, Reith was called in for an interview. Naturally, he did little or no preparation for that either. As he explained with his usual remarkable candor:

'They didn't ask me many questions and some they did I didn't know the

meaning of. The fact is I hadn't the remotest idea as to what broadcasting was. I hadn't troubled to find out. If I had tried I should probably have found difficulty in discovering anyone who knew.'

What he did still possess was that forceful personality and unshakable faith in himself, second only to his faith in God. He might not know anything about this new-fangled broadcasting thing, but he knew how to run a company, and believed himself capable of running just about anything from a cornershop up to all three of her Majesty's armed forces at once. The technical details he could learn on the job.

The Broadcasting Committee clearly agreed with him, because less than 24 hours after the interview they contacted Reith to offer him the role of Managing Director. The final piece of the puzzle was put in place at last, and on Monday the first of January 1923, the BBC - in its original incarnation as the British Broadcasting Company - was finally born. Reith being Reith, he was already at work from 9am on Saturday the 30th of December, drawing up his backroom staff, replacing various top-hatted majors with people he already knew and trusted and making sure he was surrounded by people who actually knew anything at all about broadcasting.

John Reith was in place to become one of the most important individuals of the twentieth century, almost entirely by chance.

COMPANY MAN

It didn't take long for Reith to find some sort of context for his new position: he was the heir to William Caxton, creator of the printing press. A whole new way for humans to communicate with one another had been created, and he was at its vanguard. The Caxton comparison occurred to him on his first day of work after his introductory dialogue with William Noble. As he related:

*'"We're leaving it all to you. You'll be reporting at our monthly meetings and we'll see how you're getting on." Leaving it all to me. I thought of what that "it" involved. He misunderstood my silence. "That's all right, isn't it?" Quite all right.'"***

The Broadcasting Committee were a collection of businessmen. Their interest was in the profits to be made from this all-new concept of sound transmission, much more than in the infrastructure behind it. Fortunately for them, any such infrastructure had yet to be conceptualised, and they could quite easily and even reasonably park the whole responsibility with a single managing director. Just like Caxton when he industrialised the printed word, Reith had to basically invent a new concept out of thin air - the concept of the BBC. Or at least a prototype of it.

No problem for Reith, who had made it this far already by first assuming his ability to succeed, if not excel, in any given scenario, and then sweating blood to prove himself right. Being put in absolute charge of the building and maintaining of the BBC was daunting but perfect. Once Postmaster General Neville Chamberlain issued the Company its broadcasting licence - the final legal piece of the puzzle - Reith was off and running.

Immediately he was faced with a multitude of issues he'd never heard of before: Marconi patents, copyright law, performing rights - all being yelled about into his face simultaneously by dozens of associations and unions of performers, manufacturers, writers, composers, music publishers and the like. At the same time, he had to invent dozens of new jobs almost from scratch: radio announcers, transmission engineers, a whole new kind of news reporter.

And then there were various events that needed covering, at least to Reith's mind. The Royal Opera House let their microphones in, but they were the exception. There was a Royal Wedding in the spring; Albert, Duke of York to Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (who would come to be better known as King George VI and the Queen Mother respectively). Though Albert, as the King's second son, wasn't the biggest name in the Royal family at the time - he would be, one day, but almost by mistake - this wedding was a fairly seminal one as Bowes-Lyon was a commoner. Not that she wasn't twice as posh as anyone you'll

ever meet, but she wasn't a member of a Royal Family - Albert wanted to marry her because, by all accounts, he genuinely loved her as a person - and that made this wedding unusual and quite modern. So naturally the opportunity to make it even more modern by turning it into the first such event broadcast on British radio - albeit recorded rather than live - was too big for Reith to turn down. Herbert Edward Ryle, the Dean of Westminster, granted him and the BBC permission to record the service, but unfortunately his chapter disagreed and what turned out to be the future King's nuptials went unrecorded.

Reith also wanted to record the ceremony of the Cenotaph that November, but once again he and his BBC were rebuffed. As a consolation prize, the Lord Mayor of London allowed him and the Company to broadcast speeches from the annual banquet that same month. He was even invited to attend in person, but turned it down when he saw the seating plans placed him in some anonymous corner a long way from the Right Honourable Lord Mayor himself.

Another question for Reith to solve was promoting the schedules - after letting the people of Britain know that there was such a thing as a regular radio service in the first place, of course. That, like almost all the BBC's teething problems, was solved personally by Reith himself with the words "The Radio Times". He even coined the name. But even establishing the Bradshaw of Broadcasting took genuine struggle on Reith's part. The

newspapers' opinions on the BBC - up to this point the sole media in the country - veered from wary to outright hostile, and the idea of them setting up their own print publication horrified them. As if it wasn't enough to run a whole new form of media to replace print, this upstart BBC was now hedging its bets and muscling into their territory anyway. Unbelievable. They insisted the only moral model for promoting the BBC's schedules was as paid advertising in their own publications. Gordon Selfridge invited the Company to print their schedules inside the regular Selfridge's adverts in the Pall Mall Gazette.

Whatever Selfridge or the newspapers expected, it probably wasn't for the presence of the BBC schedules to boost the Gazette's circulation by an impressive degree and thereby finally convince Reith to launch The Radio Times. The magazine was finally launched in September and became a colossal success, selling out its initial print run of 285,000 - fairly impressive now, a remarkable achievement in 1923 - and bringing in such vast profits it probably single-handedly ensured the BBC's survival for and even past its initial licence period. The Committee - or the BBC Board of Directors, as they were by now - were duly impressed, and suggested rewarding Reith for coming up with the idea by offering him a share of the Radio Times spoils - which would have essentially amounted to a quadrupling of his salary. But John Reith was as solid a Presbyterian as anyone who ever lived, and perfectly aware of the narrowness of the needle's eye.

"...[T]he trade had put me in office; expected me to look out for them; there was a moral responsibility to them. I would have thought it hardly proper to accept the money."

And so he turned down the fattest paycheck he would ever see, ensuring that the growing Company would keep as much of the Radio Times revenue as possible. Work, to John Reith, was its own reward. After all, back at the railyard, it almost had to be.

STRIKING THE BALANCE

Over the next couple of years, the Company went from strength to strength. New relay stations from Aberdeen to Plymouth provided radio coverage for almost the entire nation by the end of 1925, and the staff roster gradually increased from the initial complement of four, Reith included, to 658. 1926 would be one of, if not the most important years in the BBC's history, and for multiple reasons.

For one thing, it was the year that the original broadcasting licence drawn up for the then-theoretical British Broadcasting Company finally expired. Now was definitely not the time to piss off the Government. There was, however, little anxiety at the outset of the year about whether or not the licence would be renewed, as the BBC headed into its final year as an unqualified success. The Company was making cash and bringing culture and

information into the homes of thousands for whom it had previously been inaccessible.

By this point, Reith was a towering figure figuratively as well as literally. Within the BBC itself, his was the one and only will. More than that, his was increasingly the only personality. The Company was being shaped in the image of a giant, almost pathologically self-assured Presbyterian. The phrase "educate, inform, entertain" wasn't original to Reith - it was coined by one of his American equivalents, David Sarnoff - but he made it a way of life, carved it into the Company's central nervous system, until it became synonymous with himself. Reithianism: to educate, inform and entertain, in descending order of importance and with a yawning chasm between those last two. Entertainment was a means to an end, a way of smuggling in the educating and/or informing content. It was never to be considered an end in itself. Pure entertainment, with nothing enriching mixed in, was tantamount to prostitution. Reith was taught the meaning of power as a child by watching his father declaiming from the pulpit. He saw the power he now wielded, the newly created power of broadcasting which he had been tasked with taming, in the same terms. To Reith, the radio was the pulpit of the 20th Century.

He started 1926 by introducing the infamous announcer's dress code. After all, the singers, musicians and actors were usually performing in full evening dress. It was just poor form, even borderline disrespectful, if the announcers weren't doing the same.

The mere fact that no amount of starch could render a tuxedo audible from a few feet away, let alone over radio waves, was of course irrelevant. This was about principle - Reith's principles, which were unquestionably and automatically also those of the Company.

In mid-January, the BBC faced its first major controversy, after Father Ronald Knox pre-empted (and indeed inspired) Orson Welles' War of the Worlds by twelve years with a broadcast that depicted full-blown revolution on the streets of London. A program of live music from the Savoy Hotel was swiftly interrupted by the hotel's destruction with trench mortars. The workers of London proceeded to tear London apart while Knox provided an appalled running commentary on the flattening of the Houses of Parliament and gutting of its clock tower, and ultimately the lynching from a lamp-post of the fictional "Minister for Traffic". In an time and place when drama was melodrama and the artifice of fiction was usually explicit, such realism (admittedly in the depiction of an over-the-top satirical scenario) was a recipe for trouble, especially when events conspired to make it seem disturbingly plausible. There wasn't a revolution in London that evening, but there was a heavy snowfall that made the newspapers - the primary and, even with the proto-BBC, practically sole source of hard news information - inaccessible for a few days. There was a minor panic outside of the capital when people genuinely weren't sure whether it was real or not.

The other thing that made it seem plausible was the seething tensions between the newly Unionising working-classes - coal miners in particular - and the Government, which were to boil over in the spring into the nine-day General Strike. From the 3rd to the 12th of May 1926, 1.7 million workers walked out, including Trade Union Congress members in solidarity with the embattled coal miners, who thanks to the machinations of the pit bosses were suffering the pointy end of World War One's impact on the coal industry. This was arguably the first truly massive, historical event of the BBC's lifetime - the first test of this whole new news medium.

The Company dutifully reported both sides of the debate, without editorial comment and as equally as they possibly could in the delicate circumstances. Which turned out to be "not very much", considering the imbalance of power between the two sides, TUC and Government. When Reith attempted to arrange a broadcast from the Labour Party - by now Her Majesty's Official Opposition, and naturally on the side of the strikers - the Government swept in and squashed the very notion. Ramsay MacDonald himself - Labour leader, former and future Prime Minister and later Nick Clegg of the Jazz Age - tried and failed to change Reith's mind, unaware that it wasn't his mind that needed changing. When MacDonald was turned down, it led to the very first ever use of a classic phrase that would be repeated countless times down the decades whenever anyone couldn't get what they

wanted out of the national broadcaster: "BBC bias".

It didn't help that Reith had worked for the Conservative Party immediately before getting the BBC job and was a personal friend of the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. Philip Snowden, MacDonald's former Chancellor of the Exchequer eventually wrote an open letter to the Radio Times complaining about the biased BBC "misleading the public" and "caus[ing] pain and indignation to many listeners". He ended his letter with the first recorded ideological begrudgement of the licence fee: "Personally, I feel like asking the Postmaster General for my licence fee back." And thus was history made.

Reith immediately composed a reply for the following week's issue. In it, he explained that the BBC had lacked what he put as "complete liberty of action", and that his Company had attempted, and to his mind succeeded, to state the case for the Trade Unions within the limits imposed by the Government. He also made the chilling point that a Government is naturally going to look out for itself, no matter who they are:

*"We do not believe that any other Government, even one of which Mr Snowden was a member, would have allowed the broadcasting authority under its control greater freedom than was enjoyed by the BBC during the crisis."****

It hadn't just been Labour who were denied broadcasting

space: Reith had even been forced to turn down the Archbishop of Canterbury and his idea for a peace treaty that he and other church leaders had drawn up, which would have ended the strike with no wage cuts and a restoration of Government subsidies to make up for it. Not a result the Government were after. Of course, with the Church of England being a much more powerful institution at the time than the Labour Party, it would have been politically inexpedient for Baldwin to veto this broadcast altogether as he had MacDonald's. Instead, he demurely told Reith and his Company that he wouldn't stop the broadcast, but he'd really much prefer it if it didn't go out - effectively smearing the buck in superglue before passing it to Reith. As he put it: "A nice position for me to be in: between Premier and Primate, bound mightily to vex one or other.".

In the end, the choice was made relatively simple. The Chancellor of the Exchequer - one Winston S. Churchill - had been suspicious of the BBC since day one and was repeatedly lobbying Baldwin to let him take it over and convert it into a full-fledged state broadcaster. If Reith had allowed the Archbishop to broadcast his peace appeal, potentially leading to a humiliating defeat for the Government, it would give Churchill the perfect excuse to effectively send in the tanks and commandeer the BBC. Faced with the dismantling of the Company he had built from scratch with his bare hands (and also some other people), he turned the Archbishop down.

The strike ended after a week and a half when the miners finally ran out of resources and returned to work without a deal, or having really achieved anything. Those who didn't lose their jobs faced wage cuts and longer hours. Sympathy strikes and mass picketing were swiftly made illegal. Reith was to eventually admit - to his staff, not to the public - a great regret over the lack of Labour and TUC voices making their own case on the airwaves. The BBC had come through its first historical flashpoint changed, but ultimately stronger. Thanks to Reith's unbending stance, the Company had gained the reputation which would endure into its reincarnation as the Corporation and beyond, for prioritising impartiality above all else.

THE BBC AND THE BBC

1926 wasn't done with the BBC yet, however, nor indeed its stone-faced giant of a figurehead. The licence was still due to expire with the year, and it was in the gift of the Government whether or not it got renewed. Reith's friendship with Baldwin and (albeit grudging) actions during the General Strike had done nothing to harm the Company's chances. However, the run-in with Churchill had worried him a little. His beloved extension-of-himself Company turned out to have enemies. He considered the Chancellor's plan and 'My conclusion was that it would have been better for me, worse for the BBC and for the country.'** Not one to place himself

before a society he increasingly saw it as his job to protect, Reith looked to the end of the BBC's licence and considered.

There was no denying that the BBC, and Reith as managing director in particular, was a roaring success. Radio equipment was selling like water in the desert, the affiliated wireless companies were making money hand over fist, and the Company was well on its way to carving out its own immutable place in the centre of British existence. And John Reith was a huge part of that success. Even so, as 1926 crept toward its end, Reith worried about an uncertain future. Churchill's plan to annex the Company and turn it into a state propaganda network - effectively nationalising it through martial law - may have failed, largely because it was considered a good idea by no-one except the wilderness-headed Churchill himself. But that wasn't to say that no-one agreed with his basic premise that the Company couldn't necessarily be trusted to act in the Government's best interests at all times. Sure, they behaved themselves during the General Strike, but those in Government could feel the Company - and Reith in particular - snatching at the bridle for its precious impartiality.

Having taken the job of BBC Managing Director as just another opportunity, knowing nothing about broadcasting, Reith had, to his mind at least, essentially invented the whole concept from scratch. In fact, what he'd created was public service broadcasting, and as its father he was fiercely protective of it. It was unthinkable that the BBC, or at least the infrastructure of British

Broadcasting that had ossified around it, would survive after 1926 in some form. But the end of the licence, and with it the period in which anyone was contractually obligated to behave in a certain way, provided an opportunity for that infrastructure to be reformed, streamlined, expanded - almost anything.

The BBC itself was successful and popular enough to probably be more or less safe - although that was still far from a given - but there was more than enough space among the country's airwaves for a rival service. To Reith, this was the most terrifying prospect imaginable, because his Platonic ideal of public service broadcasting required the BBC to have a monopoly. Competition meant compromise, and under Reith's philosophy, such a thing was unthinkable if broadcasting was to have a shred of integrity whatsoever. Whether or not it had ever been anyone's intention, the BBC, and therefore John Reith, were now the watchmen at society's vanguard, and to Reith society and God were inseparable. Among the many duties he had taken on for himself, as leader of this new front in British culture, was to maintain the nation's spiritual health. With the new medium of broadcasting, he could ensure Britain's faith in God (specifically the Presbyterian God) not only never wavered but even grew stronger. For Reith as a Presbyterian, this largely revolved around the Sabbath and keeping it holy. This became his greatest fear surrounding the possible introduction of competition. He knew perfectly well from long days cowering before his father's pulpit that the worship of God is

no fun at all, and therefore given the the choice of something, anything, else to do at the same time, God would almost always lose. But he also knew - his father had made it clear often enough - that it was of vital importance to the material health of the nation and its people that they follow the word of God in all things. Almost by accident, it had become his duty to ensure that very thing. Provision was one thing, and the BBC were doing that alright. Protection was another, and the existence of a broadcasting monopoly was vital. Without it, Reith later mused in his memoirs:

"*The Christian religion and the Sabbath might not have had the place and protection they had; the place and protection which it was right to give them…. One day in the week clear of jazz and variety and such like… Almost everything might have been different. The BBC might have had to play for safety; prosecute the obviously popular lines; count its clients; study and meet their reactions; curry favour; subordinate itself to the vote."***

So to Reith's mind, the BBC needed to be strong, immutable and free of the spectre of competition, lest Britain tumble towards a new Gomorrah. It was the very first argument to centre around what we now call "dumbing down", albeit on an entirely theoretical basis. Reith had to figure out a way that such a fate be avoided, even as the BBC's contract ran down.

Reith wasn't the only one pondering the future of British broadcasting, of course. Before the General Strike interrupted

everyone's attention, the BBC was eagerly awaiting the report of the Crawford Committee into broadcasting - one of many such commissions and committees charged with taking the pulse of the industry, and not even the first. (That had been the Sykes Committee, ordered by the Postmaster General only a few months into the BBC's life to try and sort out its various teething problems). The Crawford Committee's report was published in March 1926, and was still being pondered by the GPO when the General Strike began six weeks later and provided the BBC with its first defining moment.

When the Company, and in particular its leader, came out of it largely smelling of very expensive and highly cultivated roses (at least as far as the sitting Government were concerned, and they were the important ones), it served to underline and solidify the Committee's main recommendation. That recommendation was that, despite all its success - even before its handling of the General Strike cemented its place in British culture - the British Broadcasting Company should be wound up for good - and immediately replaced with a new public service corporation, under Royal Charter, with a protected monopoly on all broadcasting in Britain, explicitly and forever free of direct Parliamentary control and with a licence to run at least ten years. After the dust cleared from the General Strike, the GPO took stock of the situation and gave the go-ahead to the end of the BBC and the creation of the British Broadcasting Corporation. And as for someone to run it,

there was only one possible answer: John Reith.

The new BBC was near-enough exactly what Reith had been striving towards. The all-important monopoly was preserved, saving the collective souls of Britain from potential damnation at the hands of commercial interests who might have found it fiscally inadvisable to keep the Sabbath holy. And thanks to its Royal Charter, the Corporation would avoid the road of Mammon for itself, instead being funded entirely by taxation. No advertising, and therefore no compromising their (ie Reith's) principles in pursuit of advertising revenue. No need to sell radio sets to make money any longer - no connection to the electronics manufacturers. Reith actually got on well with the representatives of Marconi, General Electric and so on who made up his bosses, but was acutely aware that a change in personnel, or even in the business climate, could change all that in an instant. The new Corporation was to have a similar structure of a Managing Director - or in the new coinage, a Director-General - answerable to a committee of old men technically in charge of the show. But the old Board of Directors was to be replaced with a Board of Governors, representing the public interest rather than that of a collective of profit-driven companies.

There would be a charter and remit for the new Corporation that made them answerable to the public, but not the Government - who were permitted no direct influence whatsoever, and certainly couldn't come in and commandeer the entire operation the way

Churchill had wanted. And in charge of the whole thing, of course, was John Reith - swapping his old title of Managing Director with the fresh new style of Director-General.

That wasn't the only new title he was getting. As a capper to the tumultuous, transformative year of 1926, the New Year's Honours List included the name John Reith as recipient of a shiny new knighthood. It was the gleaming French polish on his dazzlingly successful year, and typically of Reith, it wasn't shiny enough. Yes, it was a knighthood, but then of *course* he was being knighted. That just stood to reason, given his towering achievements and all. Knighthood was a given. But this was just a standard, entry-level knighthood. He'd expected to be made a Knight of the Garter at the least.

*"I should have been surprised if it had not come, but was by no manner of means pleased. I am not keen on titles anyhow and a KG would not have been too much for what I have done…. An ordinary knighthood is almost an insult."***

Affronted, Reith toyed with the idea of turning it down flat, and while there wasn't really very much danger of that (he wasn't completely stupid) he did prevaricate for long enough that Stanley Baldwin eventually rang him up to command him to make up his damn mind. Of course, he accepted the honour, woefully inadequate as a mere knighthood was for someone of his stature

(literal and metaphorical). Happily, he did eventually make it into the Order of the Thistle - the Scottish equivalent of the Order of the Garter - a couple of years before his death. Not, of course, that he cared much for titles anyway.

REITH INCORPORATED

On the 31st of December, 1926, the British Broadcasting Company ceased to exist. The 773 employees' contracts were terminated, the shareholders were paid par rate and all assets, premises and copyrights held by the Company were transferred to the Postmaster General. On the 1st of January, 1927, those assets, premises and copyrights were transferred back to the newly formed British Broadcasting Corporation, along with those 773 employees. The new Corporation adopted a coat of arms featuring two eagles, a lion, a helmet and the planet Earth itself, and a motto: Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation. Such deliberate pomp and heraldry were, of course, the idea, and in many ways a reflection of the personality, of the Corporation's leader: Sir John Reith, now the first man to hold the title of Director-General of the BBC. He was now a giant in every sense of the word, director of British culture and communications and (to his mind) keeper of the nation's eternal soul at the head (chairman notwithstanding) of an organisation largely of his own design. This was Reith's pinnacle, and as we all know, from such a place there is only one possible

direction. Inevitably, it was here that his troubles began.

He was now free of the board of profit-driven directors that had been his employers at the Company. In their place came the Board of Governors. It would eventually come to number twelve, but under the first ten-year Charter there were five: four men and, in what was then a rather modern touch, one woman. In the absence of shareholders, these Governors were appointed by the Government (nominally by the monarch under ministerial advice). Like the original Directors, they had responsibility for the hiring and firing of Reith - and, at first, much of his team. They were beholden to no-one but the King (ie the government) and the Corporation, in that order.

All this was a much better way of running a national broadcaster, as Reith himself had advocated, but had the unexpected side-effect of making it a lot less fun (inasmuch as Reith appreciated "fun") for the Director-General. The new Governors might not have been profit-driven, but that just meant they actually had ideas about how Reith should be doing his actual job. Reith already had plenty of those, more than enough to be going on with - chief among them being the idea that he was in charge and everyone else should obey without question. As long has he was making money for them, the old board of directors were more than happy to give him that kind of freedom. It was only now that Reith realised that the sole guarantor of that situation was the same motivating factor of profit that led - or could potentially have

led - to the despised compromises with the forces of Mammon he was so adamant about preventing.

Lord Gainford was still around, but was now Vice-Chairman. Reith's ultimate boss was now George Villiers, 6th Earl of Clarendon. The Villiers were (and remain) of one of the oldest aristocratic families in Britain. The fifth Earl had been Queen Victoria's last Lord Chamberlain (and by definition therefore Edward VII's first), while the fourth was Foreign Secretary on three separate occasions and President of the Board of Trade on one. One could trace the Villiers family all the way back to the Norman Conquest and the chances of finding a single (legitimate) member doing any sort of vaguely hard labour for a living are almost as low as finding a cricketer in the De Gaulle family tree. Reith didn't trust him an inch, often dismissing him (though never to his face) as a "silly ass".

The first Board of Governors was intended to represent some kind of vague cross-section of Britain, and to that end they represent an interesting set of choices. Below the near-incomprehensibly aristocratic Clarendon and the broadcasting-expert-by-default Gainford were Dr MJ Rendall, a former headmaster of Winchester College (the oldest Public School in the country); Sir Gordon Naime, late of the Bank of England; and private citizen and female lady Ethel Snowden, wife of Phillip Snowden - the same former (and future) Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer who was the very first to accuse the BBC of bias during

the General Strike. Not, of course, that she should be defined entirely by her husband; had she married anyone or no-one, the former Ethel Annakin would still have been a formidable activist and advocate for socialism, feminism and temperance. In the cross-section of Britain the original Governors ostensibly made up, she was both the token lady and the token leftist, in this strange new world where Labour had emerged from underground to displace the Liberals as the Tories' Opposition. She also, almost immediately, took up the position of Reith's sworn enemy.

Happily for Reith, Clarendon turned out to be a fairly weak man, easily cowed by the formidable will of the giant Scotsman - or indeed that of Snowden, if she managed to get to him first. Unlike Clarendon, the Scarlet Woman (as Reith privately dubbed her) was well in Reith's weight class, and soon took up a starring role in Reith's diaries as primary antagonist. "A truly terrible creature," he described her in entries written half in ink, half in adder venom. "ignorant, stupid and horrid"†. Not that she had better words for him, calling him "a man whose overwhelming egoism is as distasteful as his character and ability are overestimated."**

Snowden's main issue with Reith was his running of the BBC as an autocracy. There were no internal staff associations at the new Corporation - any complaints went straight to Reith. His was the sole oversight. Reith was perfectly open about his effective dictatorship, both believing it to be the best way to run things (since he was always right) and assuming everyone else bar Snowden

either felt the same or daren't speak against him. If the old Board of Directors had frustrated him, the newly quasi-democratised structure of the Corporation - which in real terms amounted to Reith having to occasionally work with others, or worse yet explain himself to the odd committee - was a source of constant boiling frustration.

Reith preferred a more streamlined form of corporate governance, in which he gave the orders, planned the strategy and basically was in charge of absolutely everything, and the entire population of the world then did as it was told. After all, he and the BBC (to the extent they weren't synonymous in Reith's mind) were the keepers of the nation's conscience - more so now they were funded by public money. His sense of duty to that responsibility was tested and illustrated by the extramarital antics of his chief engineer.

RECKLESS ENGINEERING

Peter Eckersley was a veteran of British Broadcasting from the very beginning, before even Reith had got involved. His was the voice cheerfully announcing "This is Two Emma Toc, Writtle Testing" on the already-forgotten 2MT back in the pre-BBC days. Though the station didn't survive the formation of the Company, he kept its legacy alive as the Company's chief engineer, a position he retained in the Corporation. He also had a wife named Stella. And then, in

1928, he met Dolly Clark.

Technically Dolly - it was short for Dorothy - was also married, to Edward Clark, the BBC's chief conductor and programme planner. But their marriage had been over on all but paper for a while, and Edward was actually more than happy to help facilitate her and Eckersley's extramarital affair. Reith was less impressed, particularly when Eckersley and Clark were seen boldly stepping out as a couple at the Savoy, and even in of all places Brussels - on supposedly official BBC business, yet - without either one having divorced their spouses, or even in Eckersley's case to have visibly broken up with her. In fact, poor Stella wasn't even aware of the relationship until Muriel, Lady Reith broke it to her while her husband consulted the Governors.

Snowden was all in favour of kicking Eckersley firmly in the balls and sending him on his way out of the Corporation, no questions answered. Reith, though broadly in agreement about the kick in the balls, sounded a note of caution - Eckersley was, if only by default, the best and most experienced broadcast engineer in the country, possibly the world. There was a reason that he was, alongside Reith, one of a handful of people in the Company to retain their exact position, or equivalent thereof, in the Corporation. His moral laxitude and lack of faith to Stella disgusted Reith, but not to the point of overriding his harsh, almost Darwinian business sense. Eckersley would be very difficult if not impossible to replace, so Reith wanted to put that inevitability off

as long as possible. And, of course, there was the fact that Eckersley was a long-term colleague and friend, which Reith was smart enough to leave unspoken but Snowden smart enough to pick up on anyway.

Most of the governors, and even the Chief Constable of the Metropolitan Police (consulted extracurricularly by an uncharacteristically doubt-ridden Reith) agreed broadly with Snowden's position that Eckersley be sacked forthwith. Clarendon, as had become usual by then, sided with Reith, possibly out of fear. Ultimately a deal was struck with Eckersley: he agreed to call it off with Dolly and offered Reith his resignation, effectively handing all the loose ends to the Director General to tie up. Reith turned it down on the condition that he not be bullshitting him about calling it off with Dolly and returning to Stella, patching up the marriage and restoring the contract he had entered into in the sight of God. And so he did, for about three months, until at a party in April 1929 Eckersley and Clark found themselves in the same room together for the first time in months and the marriage was abruptly detonated on the spot.

There was no coming back from that, of course, and Eckersley re-drafted his resignation letter, which Reith, with a heavy sigh, this time accepted - although his near-unique broadcasting expertise meant the Corporation still let Eckersley hang around for a year as semi-official consultant. More incredibly, the Governors voted to give him a £1000 kiss-off - an incredibly

hefty sum in 1929, roughly equivalent to over sixty grand in 2018 money. One assumes Snowden voted against it. As a footnote, the BBC probably turned out to be better off without Eckersley as the thirties dawned, as he and Dolly, who inevitably became his wife in 1930, travelled cheerfully down the rabbit hole of fascism and full-blown Nazi sympathising, becoming cosy with the likes of Oswald Mosley and Hitler Mary-Sue slashfic writer Unity Mitford, attending at least two Nuremberg Rallies and building the transmitter used by their good friend William Joyce as Lord Haw-Haw.

RELATIONSHIP OF COMMAND

Back home, Reith was still struggling in his relationships with his Governors. The first meeting after the departure of Eckersley went surprisingly smoothly, to such an extent Reith even mentioned it in his diaries. Then he found out that, as soon as he'd declared the meeting over and left, they'd all buggered off to Clarendon's house to hold another, unofficial meeting without him and with much behind-his-back grumbling about his dictatorial manner, often ending with a Reithless lunch at the Savoy. Worse, this was standard practice at this point. "What a miserable lot they are", he grumbled to his diary.**

In February 1930, Clarendon was tempted away - although it would seem unlikely he took much tempting - to take over as

Governor-General of South Africa. Reith could barely contain nor conceal his glee, at least in his diary. "What terrific news!" he exalted to it. "We could not contain ourselves and did not know what to do to show our delight."*** The Chairman's departure was revealed to Reith in a private meeting with the Prime Minister - something else Reith had enjoyed more several years earlier, because then the Prime Minister had been his friend Stanley Baldwin. Then an election had happened, as they often did, and resulted in the exhausted Tories narrowly losing out in a hung parliament to a Labour Party led by Ramsay MacDonald, who found himself leading a tottering minority Government for the second time. Hs previous encounter with the BBC was as Opposition Leader, being told he couldn't address the nation during the General Strike - a compromise Reith made against his will for the BBC's sake, not that MacDonald cared about such equivocation. At least he was a fellow northern Scot - even more so than Reith, in fact.

Second priority at that meeting was to gather Reith's thoughts on a replacement chairman. One outstanding candidate in particular immediately leaped to the Director-General's mind, although he didn't voice it aloud at first, possibly out of Christian modesty. His actual initial out-loud suggestion was his old friend Jack Pease, Lord Gainford, of late Clarendon's deputy and previously the Chairman of the original Company. If it had been up to Reith, Gainford would have carried on as Chairman after

incorporation and Clarendon would have been his deputy. Gainford would have been much more of an ally to him against Snowden, and his will over the Corporation would have been closer to absolute. Better late than never, Reith reasoned.

However, Gainford had just turned seventy (and would retire two years later) - far too old, MacDonald reasoned. It was then Reith brought out his real first choice: himself. He was already getting bored of the post of Director-General, with its duties increasingly limited by the ever-expanding bureaucratic system below - a system he himself had created, as evidenced by its efficiency, in imitation of its creator. So efficient was it, and he, that he had increasingly little to do as Director-General (at least by his workaholic standards), and so it seemed irrefutable logic to Reith that he take over as Chairman, without of (course) giving up the former role.

For some reason, however, that logic escaped the Prime Minister. Never one to allow a little thing like flat refusal deter him, Reith campaigned for his own Chairmanship throughout the winter of 1930, petitioning in writing not just MacDonald but his Postmaster General Hastings Lees-Smith and his Lord Chancellor Baron, later Viscount, John Sankey. All to absolutely no avail. The Chairmanship was destined to remain out of Reith's reach. Reith proclaimed himself disgusted, and the next time he saw MacDonald - at a funeral service - he "directed a glare of malevolence", as if attempting assassination through sheer force of

will. At least according to his diary.

As it happened, however, things worked out fairly satisfactorily for Reith. It took until May for a new Chairman to be appointed. It transpired that Lees-Smith had all but driven himself mad trying to find someone who both could and would take the job on. Reith's reputation as a terrifying stone-faced tyrant by now preceded him. Lees-Smith had gone through almost every Privy Councillor in the nation and they'd all turned him down, until finally he reached John Henry Whitley towards the end. He was a veteran Liberal politician, a former Speaker of the House of Commons and a pioneer of industrial relations. The only reason he had neither a peerage nor a knighthood was that he didn't want one. And most fortunately, Whitley was already an acquaintance of Reith's.

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Whitley was as hesitant as anyone at the prospect of working with John Reith, let alone as his theoretical superior. Lees-Smith's best advice was that Reith surely was not going to be at the BBC much longer "because he will end up in a lunatic asylum".** In the event, Whitley and Reith would get on famously, and his tenure as chairman, though destined to be brief, would be the happiest time of Reith's career at the Corporation.

John Whitley was almost Reith's opposite in temperament: relaxed, calm, diplomatic and open. In his way, was as self-assured as the Director-General, but in him it manifested as a serene self-

comfort rather than an unshakeable self-confidence. He'd turned down various honours, including a knighthood and a peerage, despite the latter being the due of every Speaker of the House of Commons for the previous 139 years. He was content to be J. H. Whitley. Of course, he didn't know any more about the newfangled science of broadcasting than Clarendon had, but he wore it much better: where Clarendon was almost paralysed at times by fear of Reith, Snowden or both, Whitley was fresh from seven years as Speaker of the House of Commons, in which role he had to command the likes of Churchill, Lloyd George and George Lansbury to sit down and be quiet. He was accustomed to wielding authority over men theoretically (or even actually) more powerful than himself. Not that he ever had to put his foot down with Reith: he was careful to get off on the right foot with a friendly note of greeting which read, in part:

"May I say with what pleasure I look forward to being associated with you in the great work of which you are the creator. I hope our association will be mutually helpful in the service to which you have given such unstinted devotion and to which I will bring my very humble contribution in the spirit of an admirer and a learner."‡

Reith could barely believe what he was reading. A chairman with an open mind who was happy to sit down and discuss a philosophy of broadcasting with the medium's leading global

authority (ie himself)? He couldn't have prayed for a greater contrast with Clarendon, whose almost involuntary response to Reith's aura of intimidation was to immediately assume an adversarial position. Whitley, though, claimed to be actually looking forward to his working relationship with the fearsome Director-General. And he even seemed to mean it. His admiration, not to say incredulity, only grew after their first face-to-face meeting, of which he told his diary:

"At our first meeting we discussed broadcasting policy. At the end of it he said he had come prepared to approve what we had done and were trying to do; now he knew he did...Was he actually saying all this, or was it a dream? There might, perhaps, have been a greater contrast between him and his predecessor; but one could not imagine it...it seemed that a had been suddenly hushed to calm. In fact, he brought, immediately, by his very coming, peace."‡

Finally Reith had an ally in his Chairman instead of a nuisance at best and an adversary at worse. With Whitley happy to step back and let Reith go about his business (and Ethel Snowden increasingly distracted by looking after her ailing husband) he finally had breathing space to set down some basic philosophies about the Corporation upon which he had been ruminating for some time. In particular, he could canonise his ideas about the relationship between the Director-General, the Governors and the

Government - the bizarre love triangle at the heart of the Corporation's machinery, and the root of most of its future troubles.

Reith knew he wouldn't be at the BBC forever. He was the kind of man who arrived at an organisation or project, perfected it to his own vision of perfection, and left to make something else perfect. He could feel that he was coming to the end of the second stage at the BBC. He'd made the company so efficient that he, as Director-General, had less and less to do all the time. Frankly, he was starting to get bored. It was time to think about his legacy. So Reith sat himself down and drafted a mission statement, at his chairman's urging and with his oversight, detailing an almost Jeffersonian view of the multiple branches of the BBC's structure. The resulting document came to be known as the Whitley Memorandum, after its credited author, and went out as a memo across the Corporation. Here, in black and white, was Reith and Whitley's vision of the BBC's governance. The salient points read:

"The Governors of the BBC act primarily as trustees to safeguard the broadcasting service in the national interest. Their functions are not executive. Their responsibilities are general and not particular. They are not divided up for the purpose of departmental supervision. The suggestion sometimes made that Governors should be appointed as experts or specialists in any of the activities covered by the broadcasting service is not regarded as desirable."

The Governors, in other words, are the keepers and protectors of the BBC - even representatives against its enemies - but they don't actually get into the nitty-gritty of broadcasting. In Reith and Whitley's vision, they were more like constitutional monarchs, albeit with some powers beyond the purely ceremonial. They might have evolved out of a board of directors, but they definitely were no such thing now. With the latter two sentences in particular, the Memorandum definitively divorces the theoretical Governor from the necessity of having any broadcasting experience either before, during or even after taking on the role. This was not a broadcasting job, this was a business appointment.

So if Reith and Whitley didn't want (or at least need) the Governors to be or even become experienced broadcasters, who did they want?

"The Governors should as far as possible be persons of wide outlook and considerable experience of men and affairs, preferably with previous public service of one kind or another; and there should be included also a person or persons with financial experience [...]

With the Director General they discuss and then decide on major matters of policy and finance, but they leave the execution of that policy and the general administration of the service in all its branches to the Director General and his competent officers."

And there it was canonised for what Reith and Whitley hoped would be the rest of the Corporation's life. The Governors were to be businessmen, not professionals in the field of broadcasting, radiography, engineering or even the performing arts. Though some knowledge of any of these was a bonus, it was far from essential. What was essential was an open mind, some form of worldly experience and (especially) impeccable business credentials, preferably in the same public service sector they were joining. As for their role within the Corporation, it was simply to balance the books and decide general policy - in discussions with the Director General, of course. But it was the DG who actually carried that policy out; him and the self-chosen squadron of officers that made up his staff.

The Whitley Document was immediately accepted as holy canon at the BBC, and would loom over the Corporation for at least a couple of decades to come. It stood as the culmination of Reith's creation of the BBC and of British broadcasting in general, an achievement only partially self-perceived. He had helped mould Britain's nascent post-print media in his own image. Unfortunately, that image, to the general public, was of a joyless despot - in an age with no shortage of joyless despots for comparison.

FACE THE PUBLIC

If you asked him, Reith would probably have said he didn't care what the public thought of him, just as he didn't care much for honours and titles. It may even have been true in this case, but either way there was little he could do to change the public's perceptions of him. They were largely cemented in 1929 at the election which replaced Baldwin with MacDonald. After a couple of hours of results coverage, Reith got wind of a handful of telephoned complaints that the announcers were somehow showing their bias for one party or another via the tones of their voices. Rather than looking into the matter at all, even just to check that these claims might have had any basis in reality whatsoever, Reith's typically forceful response was to kick all the professional announcers in his employ - who had spent the past several weeks rehearsing for this very night - out of the building and host the remainder of BBC's coverage himself. Within minutes of Reith taking over from the previous announcer, the BBC's phone started ringing even louder, this time with baffled listeners who couldn't understand a word he was saying, asking him to slow his speech down and enunciate, or just do something to make his speech clearer, because this is worse than before.

After a (relative to 1929) inundation of such calls, they really couldn't be ignored any longer and someone would have to step up and actually face the Director General, and tell him he was doing it

wrong and could he please slow down. That someone turned out to be the Senior Announcer Eric Dunstan. As a former diplomat, he was a pretty good choice for the job, not that his qualifications ultimately helped. In Dunstan's own words:

*"I did my best politely to inform him of the position, but all he said was: "I will not read any slower; I am going on announcing" and he turned his back on me."***

An enraged Dunstan immediately stormed straight out of Broadcasting House. By the morning, the BBC had a new Senior Announcer. And Reith had a freshly reinforced public image as a miserable tyrant, which he never managed to shake, all attempts causing it to cling ever tighter to him.

As the thirties wore on and more and more of Europe fell to one dictator or another, Reith found it harder to so much as cough without attracting a comparison to Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, or occasionally Stalin (for variety, although he had much less in common with him than with any of the others). George Lansbury said he would have made an excellent Hitler. Nancy Astor, after meeting his mother, asked him to his face if she was the source of his "Mussolini Traits". Hastings Lees-Smith - the same Labour MP who had advised Whitley of Reith's impending institutionalisation - went even further and called the whole BBC "the nearest thing in this country to Nazi government that can be shown,"** which was

surely belabouring the point. Then again, Reith didn't do his own image much good with his occasional statements in praise of the Hitler administration, largely for a couple of traits they and Reith had in common: efficiency and a loathing of jazz. (The former turned out to be an illusion - Nazi Germany was a nightmarish bureaucratic conga line of knives in backs, which Reith managed to avoid for the BBC).

Another issue that pursued Reith throughout the thirties was the idea of a Staff Association - a soft trade union - to give "factory floor" employees more say in events and policies which affected them. The idea had first been raised, unsurprisingly, by Ethel Snowden in 1930, in the last months before Whitley took over from Clarendon. Reith, of course, wouldn't have the idea in the house, but the Governors had at this point little interest in what he thought, and besides, Labour were in Government now - Snowden was now lady resident of 11 Downing Street, and perfectly capable of ringing around the cabinet for some heavyweight endorsements. For example, Permanent Secretary of the MInistry of Labour, Horace Wilson. With his encouragement, Snowden drew up a plan for a Staff Association consisting of five councils, all of whom could bring their grievances directly to the Governors - bypassing management, ie Reith himself, entirely. The very notion naturally enraged the Director-General (given his and Snowden's relationship, the possibility exists that this was at least partially the desired outcome).

A compromise was reached: they'd look into it - Lord Gainford, as a former Postmaster General and Parliamentary Secretary Treasury, would research how banks and the Post Office ran their respective Staff Associations while Reith - already hyper-sceptical about how the BBC could possibly take a template from the banking sector - turned inward and asked his BBC management whether such a thing was even needed in the first place. In all cases the response was that the staff were very happy in their work, morale was high and everyone appreciated the Corporation's "personal approach". Head of Entertainment Roger Eckersley (brother of Peter) wrote back: "It has always been my own policy to beg staff not to bottle up their grievances, but to be open and direct about them, and I always encourage a policy of direct access upwards."††

This was enough to put the issue to bed, but only for a while. The idea of a staff association would recur throughout the thirties, and Reith's running of the BBC would be called into question again and again. It reached its peak in 1934 when Labour MP (and future Prime Minister) Clement Attlee casually suggested that, in the absence of a staff association, Reith ruled "a little by fear". Reith immediately hit back:

"Unless the awareness and respect which a subordinate should feel of and for his chief is to be called fear – the fear a man should have of not doing as well as he might; of letting himself down; of letting his chief down."

This may not have done a lot to change Attlee's mind. By 1934, with the newspapers taking every possible opportunity to nibble at his flesh like piranhas, Reith was summoned in front of the 1922 Committee, the semi-legendary organisation of Conservative backbench MPs. Expecting a confrontation over his record on staff relations, he pre-empted them with a letter signed by 800 staff members reading:

"The undersigned members of the staff of the BBC, thoroughly disgusted with the false and malignant statements about the director-general being published in certain newspapers, wish to record their detestation of the newspapers concerned, and to reaffirm their loyalty and gratitude to the director-general."

Game, set and match to Reith. At least for now.

ONLY VOICES OUT OF THE AIR

Reith's last great action at the BBC was the creation of the Empire Service. Having brought the new broadcast media to Britain itself, it was obviously time by 1932 to move forwards and look toward bringing the BBC to the greater Britain that was the Empire. As had become usual, Reith's idea had some trouble getting off the ground, and also as usual that trouble was largely bureaucratic and

centred around the Government. Not that anyone in Parliament had any great objections to the idea, on either side of the chamber (by now Ramsay MacDonald was token Labour Prime Minister in a Tory-dominated Coalition, thereby achieving the impressive feat of detonating his own legacy before it had even been written). Quite the contrary; everyone in the Government thought it was a splendid idea. They just weren't entirely certain of how it was going to be funded. None of the Departments of His Majesty's Government particularly felt like footing the bill, and they kicked the can around themselves for so long that Reith finally lost patience and launched the damn thing himself as a full subsidiary of the BBC, funded by the licence fee.

The Empire Service broadcast on shortwave where the rest of the BBC was on long, and at the start was explicitly aimed at the likes of Australia, Canada and New Zealand - all of whom had the Union Jack in their flag at the time, but were also newly autonomous or semi-autonomous and therefore in need of reminding of their place in the Empire, why Britain was so great, and why they should be grateful.

It was launched on the 19th of December, 1932, just days before King George V delivered the very first Christmas address. In it, in words written for him by Rudyard Kipling, the monarch discussed the marvels of this new technology that could send his voice across the world, to all four corners of his Empire:

“I speak now…to men and women so cut off by the snows, the desert or the sea, that only voices out of the air can reach them..”

In this way, he acknowledged the BBC and in particular its new Empire Service. Australia and company were cut off by the sea, but now, thanks to this marvellous new technology and the people running it, were no longer as distant as they were. Thanks to radio broadcasting, they were more British than ever - the ability to call themselves British of course being the greatest of the many gifts the Empire had provided them, if only in the Empire’s head.

The first voice heard on the Service naturally belonged to Reith, who gave an opening address five times over the course of fifteen and a half hours so it could go out live at the same hour around the world. Here, Reith’s businesslike mind reach some kind of apotheosis, as he used the historic first regular international BBC broadcast to actively warn the audience that this new service wasn’t actually going to be worth listening to, at least not yet:

"Don't expect too much in the early days; for some time we shall transmit comparatively simple programmes, to give the best chance of intelligible reception and provide evidence as to the type of material most suitable for the service in each zone. The programmes will neither be very interesting nor very good."

In other words, the whole thing was still in its proof-of-concept phase. Perhaps partly because of Parliament's reticence on funding the damn thing - and the concomitant lack of both funds and confidence - the Empire Service would remain an experiment until the BBC could ascertain that it actually worked at all. Of course, history tells us that it did, and within a decade was broadcasting all around Europe in every major European language, necessitating a name change to the Overseas Service. It was, of course, also coming in very handy at that point for propaganda purposes, with most of the world by now on fire one way or another. But by then, it wasn't Sir John Reith's problem anymore.

YES, IT'S THE CATHODE-RAY TUBE SHOW

Reith's departure from the BBC had an air of inevitability about it, even if the details were and are shrouded in mystery. The newspapers, though they'd settled into this new world where current affairs could fly through the air straight into the population's ears, still didn't like him very much. Aided and abetted by them, the public saw him as the stonefaced human frown in charge of the BBC, a tyrant looming eerily behind all the voices on the radio, ready to hurl them off their announcing stools if their received pronunciation (which Reith had rigidly enforced

for so long by now that it was also called "BBC English") faltered for a nanosecond. Occasionally he came forward to take the microphone himself, on truly important occasions like the abdication of Edward VIII. Reith personally directed this broadcast himself, pointedly introducing the non-monarch as "Prince Edward" before handing him the mic. In the process, the former King accidentally kicked the leg of his chair. In the absence of pictures, and with their mental image of the Director General by now quite sharp and detailed, much of Britain assumed that the resulting thud was the sound of Reith leaving the studio and slamming the door.

Edward's demotion from King to Prince happened in the autumn of 1936. By now, Reith was getting tired of his role at the BBC. He'd created a well-oiled, well-structured and laudibly efficient corporation, but the unfortunate side effect was that his job at the top of the totem pole was increasingly limited. He had nothing to do. Frankly he was becoming bored out of his mind. That was the problem he would often complain about, to his diary and out loud, and it wasn't untrue, but it probably wasn't the whole story either. He may have made the Corporation run like clockwork, but the Director General still, and always would, have far more to do than simply rubber-stamping his department heads' memos. There *were* challenges remaining for Reith at the BBC and probably always would be. In fact, one of the biggest in the BBC's history was right in front of him at the time; he simply had no

interest in it.

Television had been steadily developing since the primordial era immediately after World War One, through the birth of the British Broadcasting Company and its transition to Corporation. The first experimental broadcasts in 1930, curated by John Logie Baird, soon evolved into a semi-regular service and finally became a regular arm of the BBC in 1936, with daily broadcasts from Alexandra Palace. There was a minor format war in the thirties: for the experimental early transmissions, the BBC had tended to use Baird's patented all-mechanical 240-line system, and his company. By 1936 it had already been superseded by the relatively crisp and streamlined electronic 405-line one from Marconi. Out of loyalty, they alternated between the two for the first few months, but eventually the cumbersome Baird system became too much of a pain in the arse and Marconi's 405 lines became the standard from 1937.

All this drama was, by and large, studiously avoided by the Corporation's Director-General. When something important was happening in the burgeoning television industry, Reith always seemed to manage to be somewhere else. Although he was smart enough to know it was the future and he couldn't stop it, he wished it weren't so. He simply couldn't be doing with the thing himself. There are many theories about Reith's disdain bordering on active hostility toward the new audio-visual medium, but the most persuasive is that as with a lot of things, it came back to his

religion. Asa Briggs, the father of British Broadcasting history, believed he literally saw television as a threat to British society, if not the nation's collective immortal soul. Reith's concern (by this theory) is very specifically Presbyterian, returning once more to what might have been the dominant image of his life: his father at the pulpit, delivering the Word - and because it was a Presbyterian pulpit, the Word was all you got from it. No stained-glass, no stone pietàs, no elaborate crucifixes, not even a tasseled bookmark in the jet-black Bible. An absolute minimum of the sort of lavish decoration typical of the now-banished Catholic Church. All that Roman foofaraw was tantamount to idolatry, and served only to distract from the Word, which was the really important thing - indeed, the most important thing in the universe, and the only important thing when it came to worship.

One can translate this way of seeing things into broadcasting terms, especially given Reith's philosophy of using the medium as a tool to educate and inform the public, to maximise the number of people exposed to what he called "All that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavor and achievement", the Word of God included, if not paramount. Over the radio, there was nothing but the Word. The images on the television screen were the equivalent of the jewel-encrusted solid gold ornamentation that the Catholics loved so much, unnecessary decoration that only served to obscure the message and encourage the worship of itself instead.

Reith's last major event at the BBC was the Coronation of

George VI (as a consequence of his brother's abdication) in May 1937. It was to be the first significant, large-scale outside broadcast in British history (with only the newsreels and radio allowed inside Westminster Abbey), and the BBC, with its Television Service now five months old, was offered the opportunity to co-ordinate the whole of the filming. Reith turned it down. But he knew even then that television couldn't be stopped, even though he was determined to offer it as little support as possible; and even if he hadn't, the response to the Coronation coverage would have brought it home to him. The unprecedented sight of the King being crowned in one's own home made the nation's collective jaw drop in wonder. As the Daily Mail put it:

"*When the King and Queen appeared the picture was so vivid that one felt that this magical television is going to be one of the greatest of all modern inventions."***

Whether Reith liked it or not, it was here to stay. Almost.

FLIGHT

The exact nature of Reith's departure from the BBC is clear: he handed in his resignation in 1938 to take up an offer from the Government to run the struggling national airline Imperial

Airways. The reasoning, however, remains in debate to this day. In an interview with Malcolm Muggeridge towards the end of his life, even he seemed stumped. Muggeridge pointed out that he had been one of the three or four most powerful men in the UK, and had given it all up, seemingly out of the blue. All Reith could give him by way of response was how the Corporation's efficiency translated into boredom, that he felt there was nothing left for him to achieve there - and most notably that it was "a dreadful mistake".

In her biography of him, his daughter Marista admits that "Rationally, John had no idea why he was leaving"‡, but suggests that rationality may not have come into it as much as her father's personality - his constant need to prove himself, his worth, his talents - his need to state "Sir, I exist" to the world, the nation, his family, his father's ghost, God - but most importantly to himself. By 1938 he had exhausted the resources of the BBC for this purpose, or so he felt. Having not only embedded his flag on this peak, but built an entire hyper-modern ski resort complete with mechanised gondola lift, off-piste cocktail bar and four-star hotel with tapas restaurant - and, to his mind, done it all single-handedly - he needed a new mountain to conquer.

Of course, this is all from a speculative version of Reith's perspective. Whether he genuinely felt that way or not, the reality was that the BBC still offered plenty of new and exciting challenges, and through its nature always would. But for the most part they were not challenges Reith had any interest in. The ones

that were new and fresh were generally to do with television, or some other innovation he wouldn't have in the house. The rest were variations on themes tackled and successfully overcome already in the past fifteen years. Reith would still have had plenty to occupy him, but nothing he would have considered to be of actual interest, or even worth.

There was still the possibility that he was pushed. The press didn't like him, and the nation's politicians were increasingly sick of him. Such a possibility, however, isn't even hinted at in Reith's own diaries - in which he wasn't known to be shy or circumspect. He had, in fact, offered his resignation a year earlier to coincide with the first charter renewal, so the BBC could go into its second decade as a Corporation with a fresh face. How seriously he meant this is impossible to say, although he was far from the sort of person to make such a decision lightly. In any event, he was turned down, which suggests that if any pushing at all were going on, it wasn't from the Board of Governors.

But there was always the Government, now Tory majority once again and led by Neville Chamberlain. While the Prime Minister had nothing against Reith, certain longer-serving members of his cabinet were starting to look wistfully at the BBC and imagine how much easier their lives would be if it were led by someone who would do as he was told occasionally. Whether this had anything to do with Reith's departure is as much a matter of conjecture as any other theory about why it happened.

The facts are these. In early June of 1938, Reith was called in to see Sir Horace Wilson, who even then was legendary as Chamberlain's right hand. Wilson told Reith that the chairmanship of Imperial Airways was currently vacant (which he already knew), and that they wanted him to fill it (which he suspected), at his earliest convenience - by which they meant tomorrow, if at all possible. Reith being Reith, he insisted on being interviewed by Neville Chamberlain himself first. So was arranged what must be one of the most surreal, circuitous, indirect job interviews ever held, as neither Reith nor the Prime Minister were prepared to actually state their own intentions or meanings. According to Marista Leishman Reith's biography of her father, the most pertinent exchange went roughly like this:

REITH: Are you instructing me to go?
CHAMBERLAIN: I am not using that word.
REITH: Do you want me to go?
CHAMBERLAIN: This is really too strong a word. But if you went to Imperial Airways, I would be glad.‡

On 30th June, 1938, Reith - of his own free will - left Broadcasting House for the last time. At his request, there was no ceremony, the minimum of fuss - as if he'd be back the next day same as usual. Just a farewell dinner in Droitwich in the shadow of the national transmitting station. Once dinner was completed,

Reith drove out to the station to close it down personally. Signing the guest book "July 1st, 1.10 am, John Charles Walsham Reith - late B.B.C." he left in tears. Ceremony without ceremony; Reith went out the only way he possibly could: on his own terms.

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND

"When I leave a thing, I leave it." Reith said to John Freeman in 1960, claiming to have listened to very little radio since his departure (and to never have owned a television in the first place). Freeman was the unseen host of the the infamously unforgiving talk show-as-forensic-interrogation Face to Face, broadcast - naturally - on the BBC. It was one of the few times the now Lord Reith had returned to what he still saw as his province, albeit fallen into disrepute since his departure. Strolling past some maintenance work, he made disapproving note of the propensity of the decidedly unChristian pin-ups the workmen had hung about the place - apart from the one which was of a Henry Moore sculpture. "A Third Programme carpenter, forsooth." In the interview, he complained of feeling unfulfilled in his post-BBC life, with nothing he'd done since then stretching his talents to the same extent.

As it turned out, Reith's own terms for leaving involved hanging around for a long time afterwards, as if to underline in blood the fact that he never wanted to leave at all. The newly bereft Corporation remained largely resistant to his attempts to cling on,

however, refusing to allow him to join the Board of Governors on the grounds that it would be terribly unfair to his successor to have his massive shadow looming quite so literally over his head. They also deliberately shut him out of the process of choosing that replacement for the same reason.

Reith had wanted an internal appointment, with one of his underlings moving up the ladder - possibly his old cohort Charles Carpendale, his deputy in the old Company days and holder by Reith's departure of the calculatedly vague title "Controller of the BBC". Carpendale, however, was fifteen years Reith's senior and retired from his own role at roughly the same time. The Board of Governors had their own ideas, and didn't permit Reith to intrude on them. As a peace offering, they did request that Reith himself contact their eventual choice and ask him for interview. That choice was the Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, Sir Frederick Woolf Ogilvie - a fellow Scotsman and Presbyterian. Reith's opinion? "*A man of fine character and outlook; of personal charm….not the man for the BBC.*"**

He did nothing to prevent Ogilvie's ascent, however. He was the Governors' choice and he respected that. That didn't mean he wasn't going to criticise his successor's every move, at great length and in public. He probably spent more of his tenure at Imperial Airways thinking about the BBC (and the many ways it was going wrong without him) than he did thinking about aeroplanes. His legacy at Imperial Airways was the creation, out of a merger of

with its more successful rival British Airways, of the British Overseas Airways Corporation - a near one-to-one application of the BBC principle to the airlines.

He wasn't there long, however, as in January 1940 - a few months after the outbreak of World War II - he was once again headhunted by Neville Chamberlain and joined the quasi-technocratic War Cabinet as Minister for Information (also becoming MP for Southampton to smooth the process). He barely had time to have any impact whatsoever in this role before Chamberlain resigned in favour of Reith's old nemesis Winston Churchill, who promptly replaced him as Minister for Information with his friend and ally Duff Cooper, reshuffling Reith, first to Transport (for approximately 43 minutes), then First Commissioner of Works, giving him responsibility for the rebuilding of most of Britain's cities after the Blitz. He stayed in this job for two years (during which his job title changed twice) before Churchill sacked him from the Cabinet altogether in 1942 for mysterious reasons. It may have been a knee-jerk reaction to the fall of Singapore, with Reith in the role of Churchill's stress ball. More likely it was connected with the letters of complaint Reith was starting to generate thanks to the clash of bureaucratic philosophies.

The British Civil Service wasn't the best fit for him (at least not with a war going on, precluding any attempt at serious reform) being bloated, inefficient and creakingly slow - all the things Reith

made sure the BBC wasn't. What's more, it liked it that way. That was the way it had always worked. Even if Reith had actually had the time to change the system, it didn't want to be changed. And then there was Churchill, who was already in Reith's "never forgive" ledger for his coup attempt in the twenties. Reith's time in his Cabinet simply dug the hole even deeper. Shortly after his ejection, the role of Lord High Commissioner to the General Secretary of the Church of Scotland became available - the official representative of the King to the Church during the week in May it meets in General Assembly. It was a role Reith had coveted almost from birth. It was offered to him in a letter signed by the Prime Minister. In agony, he turned it down on general principles.

He saw out the war with the Royal Navy, where his organisational genius helped coordinate D-Day. In peacetime, he bounced around various British industries, needing to keep working or he'd go out of his mind. Between 1946 and 1966 he led, or could be found on the board of, the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board, the Colonial Development Corporation, the National Film Finance Corporation, Tube Investments Limited, the ludicrously named British Oxygen Company and more. In 1955, commercial television was instituted in Britain despite Reith appearing in the House of Lords to denounce it in no uncertain terms:

"Somebody introduced Christianity into England and somebody introduced smallpox, bubonic plague and the Black Death. Somebody is

minded now to introduce sponsored broadcasting ... Need we be ashamed of moral values, or of intellectual and ethical objectives? It is these that are here and now at stake."

As the sixties wore on, the world zoomed further and further ahead of Lord Reith, the straight-backed Presbyterian who insisted his radio announcers always wear a dinner suit, enforced the sanctity of the Sabbath with an iron fist and saw entertainment almost entirely as a means to an end. The old Lord looked upon the increasingly liberalised, permissive society and could do nothing more than wearily shake his head. If only he'd seen it coming back in the thirties.

In 1967 - by which time Churchill was dead and buried - Reith finally accepted the role of Lord High Commissioner and so became, for a week, the effective Regent of Scotland. He even finally got the extra-special Knighthood he felt he'd deserved all those decades ago when he was inducted into the Order of the Thistle - Scotland's equivalent of the Garter - in 1969. Having achieved almost everything (everything feasible, anyway), and increasingly frail, he finally retired to a Grace and Favour home in Edinburgh. It was here that in May 1971 he had a bad fall, shattering his thigh and landing him in hospital, where on the 16th of June he finally lay down his burden for the last time - and almost the first. He was 81. That same day, Glasgow's last gas lamps burned for the final time before the future finally arrived in

the form of electric lighting, a piece of symbolism that would probably have infuriated Reith himself.

The BBC immediately went into mourning for its father. In accordance with his wishes, his ashes were buried among ruins, those of Rothiemurchus chapel in Reith's native Inverness-shire. It was a low-key resting place for one of the most influential individuals of the 20th Century, but then Reith never would, never could, be anything but himself - the stubborn Presbyterian who thought he knew exactly and to the tiniest detail the correct method of doing absolutely anything, and would usually be right. Which is just as well, given that there was no way anyone could question him or change his mind. Despite his best efforts, the chapel remains in ruins.

F.W OGILVIE

1938-1942

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

F.W OGILVIE

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

THE FALL GUY

An exercise: visit the sports section of Waterstones (it's a bookshop, ask your parents) and count the number of books about Sir Matt Busby and his time at Manchester United. There'll be dozens. Then see if you can find any about Wilf McGuinness. If you're lucky, you might find one, his autobiography. Following up a legend is usually a hiding to nothing, unless by a million-to-one chance you happen to be a legend yourself (which is why Manchester United is the canonical example and not Liverpool). Wilf McGuinness, though a good man, a talented player in his day, and a decent coach, was not a legend. And neither was Lord Reith's immediate successor, Frederick Wolff Ogilvie.

Ogilvie was born in 1893 in Valparaiso, Chile to a pair of London Scottish ex-pats. The family made their way back to Britain during his childhood in time for the young Frederick to attend Packwood Haugh Prep, followed by the progressive (for its time), science-focused Clifton College, and finally Balliol College,

Oxford to study the famous Literae humaniores course, because an exhaustive study of Classics was all but mandatory for anyone of his social class at the time. Despite this, economics turned out to be his real strong point, and probably his next port of call had his studies not been interrupted.

He just had time to complete the first stage of his Lit. Hum. degree when World War One broke out. He signed up within two days to the 4th Bedfordshire Regiment and soon found himself in the vicinity of Ypres. The Battle of Hill 60 in early 1915 was long, bloody and got no-one anywhere, much like the war itself. Ogilvie was there. His left arm still is. This would seem to be a textbook example of a Blighty wound, but Ogilvie seemed to disagree. The Army certainly did, because he continued to serve (albeit somewhat further from the line) throughout the war, finally being demobbed on the great return in 1919 as a Captain.

He immediately returned to Balliol to finish off his degree, before hopping across to Trinity to take up a role as an economics lecturer. He became a fellow of Trinity a year later, and in 1926 was poached by the University of Edinburgh to effectively run their Management School of Economics. His specialty was the economics of tourism, something he was among the first to even contemplate. With the development of the motor car, holidays were becoming longer, and further from home, for lower income brackets, than ever before, and a whole new money-making industry was opening up. Ogilvie recognised the opportunities

early, and eventually wrote a whole book on the subject, one of the first to point out that, in tourism in particular, spending money is a good way of making even more back.

His reputation as a solid economic thinker grew throughout the thirties, and he was eventually employed as a special adviser on Youth Unemployment and Adult Education to the National Government. His final move before the BBC came knocking was to the University of Belfast, where he served as Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Political Economy. That was in 1935.

Four years later Reith left the Corporation he'd built, and the Board of Governors - after exhaling heavily - set about finding a replacement. How they settled on Ogilvie is uncertain, particularly given his complete lack of broadcasting experience - not that there was anywhere to get such experience except at the BBC (hiring an American was obviously completely out of the question), which was one reason Reith advocated a promotion from within, although no-one was listening to him. They were undoubtedly attracted to his solid financial credentials, however. It's even possible they considered his instinctive understanding of the new economic power that was tourism and thought, or hoped, that he could navigate the even newer one of broadcasting with similar, or even greater ease. Reith, of course, thought he was completely the wrong choice, but invited him to interview anyway in a symbolic gesture dreamed up by the Governors.

And so F. W. Ogilvie was appointed the second Director-General of the British Broadcasting Corporation, in the summer of 1938. Ideally for Ogilvie, he would have had a nice quiet transitional period to get his bearings in his new job, and perhaps decide on its future direction under his hand. Unfortunately, as mentioned, it was the summer of 1938. Shortly before his appointment Hitler annexed Austria; shortly after, he began the absorption of Czechoslovakia. Ogilvie had just been thrown in at the deep end.

THE LONG SHADOW

When he got the job of Director-General, Ogilvie was 45, almost shockingly young at the time for such a major role. The idea was that he would be there for some time to come, for one thing, and also that his youth and vitality would rub off on the Corporation as it entered its second decade and its horizons expanded, both geographically and technologically.

One of the reasons Reith had to go was his steadfast refusal to embrace the new artistic medium, and inevitable future of broadcasting, that was television. His disdain for the thing was already holding back the Corporation, and with it British broadcasting in general. One of Ogilvie's main duties as the new DG would be to act as midwife to the nascent BBC Television

Service - as opposed to Reith's role of reluctant, disinterested doula -by-default. Hopefully he could eventually make up for time lost by the original DG's stubborn refusal to do much more than admit that television was a thing that existed.

The BBC Television Service was humming along by 1938, which in this context means it was successfully running on a daily basis, broadcasting to London and its environs. A typical day's broadcasting when Ogilvie joined the Corporation might start at noon with a talk from C. H. Middleton from the Olympia theatre about gardening; the open-mic variety show "Come and be Televised" (the original Britain's Got Talent, famous for giving Bruce Forsyth his first break); a "television visit" to such as Regent's Park Zoo or some other London landmark, purely on the basis that outside broadcasting was impressive in itself; more variety, music-hall and big bands; a film from Gaumont-British; yet more big band music; some ballroom dancing; a ten minute interlude and, to close, a short news bulletin - in audio only, simulcast from the BBC radio service, having graduated from bought-in Movietone News in March.

At this point, this nascent service was viewable by a mere 25,000 people in the London area. It was little if at all more than a fun modern novelty for the privileged, the equivalent of Google Glass, and everyone at the BBC and beyond knew it would be years, decades before it grew into any kind of national service. It was hoped that Ogilvie could be the groundskeeper to help

cultivate television to this end. Despite the fact that he knew more or less nothing about television, or indeed broadcasting in general.

His predecessor didn't help. Ogilvie's first year at the BBC was largely spent wading through the bureaucratic structure Reith left behind, which was wonderfully efficient as long as it was being run by someone who really knew what he was doing. Reith, as its designer and a natural-born engineer, logistician and leader of men, obviously did. Ogilvie, an economic theorist and professional academic, was unfortunately rather lost.

Even that might have been survivable, had Reith proved himself capable of keeping his mouth shut. The chairmanship of Imperial Airways provided him with enough of a public podium from which to constantly snipe at Ogilvie for every single move he made, or didn't make, as his successor. It had been vaguely hoped among the Board of Governors that, as a fellow Presbyterian with solid Scots roots, Reith would be reasonably well-disposed toward him. In the event, that went as far as the compliments he paid him in his memoirs - "character and personal charm, not the man for the BBC" - and certainly didn't extend to forgiving him for the crime of simply being his successor. There were times when he seemed more invested in hurling relentless criticism at Ogilvie and the Corporation than in running an airline, which was supposed to be his job by now.

It wasn't terribly helpful to Ogilvie's morale, to say the least. What he really needed was a nice smooth bedding-in period, a few

years where everything was nice and boring and simple. He got the exact opposite. 1938 was a relatively quiet year as far as developments within the BBC were concerned - the World Service grew on apace; early in the year (technically under Reith's watch)q it added its first branch to broadcast in a language that wasn't English (specifically Arabic), before launching the full-fledged European Service (broadcasts in French, German, Italian and later Portuguese and Spanish once the latter's Civil War was finished) in September under Ogilvie. Finally, the launch shortly before World War II broke out of BBC Monitoring - the arm of the Corporation which, to this day, views and collates the world's media output. In its early days during the War, it was basically the espionage branch of the BBC; keeping tabs on foreign propaganda and gathering invaluable intelligence that the military couldn't have done. It was probably the most important legacy of Ogilvie's Director-Generalship. The fact that it got done before war broke out probably has a lot to do with its success.

THIS FUNNY WAR

It's not as if the Second World War came as a complete surprise to anyone. Nevertheless, the outbreak of hostilities saw the Government, the BBC and their relationship in general go up in various shades of panicked flames. No-one could really decide on the nature of that relationship during wartime, despite desperate

negotiations during 1939 between the Corporation and the Government - who swiftly set up the Ministry of Information to fight their corner in the Broadcasting sector - on the subject. The Government's position was, broadly, that in the event of war - which became increasingly inevitable throughout 1939 - they would effectively seize control over the Corporation, and they'd just have to take it. This had been their position for several years by now, and naturally John Reith was less than enthusiastic.

Shortly before his departure he'd met with his counterpart at the Royal Mail, Sir Thomas Gardiner, to try and hammer out some kind of an understanding. They had decided that in the event of a war, the BBC's Board of Governors would, in their term, "go out of commission" - in practical terms, be reduced to two: the Director-General and his Deputy. How much this had to do with Reith's autocratic tendencies is open to question, but any concession to those was obliterated by the other major part of the deal, the carefully ambiguously worded mandation of "regular contact" between the Director-General and the Minister of Information "for other than censorship purposes.††" This deliberately unspecific language left plenty of room to manoeuvre as regards the full meaning and nature of this contact. The Government, effectively, could use this as an excuse to exercise almost any amount of control, just short of complete and total, over broadcasting policy.

Possibly Reith had hoped that war would break out while he was still in charge and could therefore exercise a certain amount of control of the scenario. But ultimately he resigned in peacetime - if only just - and the consequences of the Reith-Gardiner plan fell on his unready and unsuited successor. Complicating matters was the unanticipated damp squib of a war having been declared before anyone was actually physically prepared for it - cette drôle de guerre, the French called it. The BBC was reasonably prepared for war, but not a Phoney War.

Immediately, the Corporation's operations were cut down to two wavelengths and a single radio station - or rather, "programme", as the term was at the time. The burgeoning television service was abruptly murdered with no warning whatsoever two days before the war was even declared, famously immediately after a Mickey Mouse cartoon - disturbingly cutting to black with no message, no explanation, not even an acknowledgement that anything was happening. The reasoning was that television used UHF technology, which could be picked up by German radar and thereby used for target practice - rather undermining the blackout which had been announced even sooner.

All this happened almost automatically, at the behest of the Ministry of Information, the Post Office or occasionally the Governors, leaving Ogilvie a baffled middleman desperately trying to cling on to his place in the narrative while decisions were made all around him.

Naturally, there was a great and ravenous desire for news throughout the country, especially after the Germans invaded Poland. Unfortunately, the various outlets for it didn't trust each other and didn't really know what they were doing. The Ministry was running in circles, the traditional press thought they and the BBC were going to fast-track their obsolescence, and the BBC themselves were just flailing about in between. Having been created by Reith as a central hub for very important art, culture and (especially) religion, the news was something they hadn't really thought terribly heavily about in depth. Which is not to say they hadn't tried, but Reith wasn't that interested and, his will being the corporation's will, while he was in charge the BBC weren't that interested either. The result was that now a cataclysmic global conflict was upon them and - despite the existence of the World Service - they had precisely no foreign correspondents, no foreign service for them to work for, and precisely one overseas recording unit, under Richard Dimbleby in France, which wasn't ready yet and didn't make its first broadcast until a month after the declaration of war.

They tried broadcasting hourly news bulletins right through the dead of night, but packed that in after a couple of weeks because so little was happening that all they were achieving with such regular news broadcasts was to depress and panic people. Besides, the newspapers took a dim view of the BBC broadcasting too much news too often; there was a gentlemen's agreement that

they wouldn't regularly do it at all before six in the evening or after two in the morning except in extraordinary circumstances and the war wasn't holding up its end of the bargain in that respect.

The main idea coming out of the Director-General at this point concerned the BBC's foreign broadcasting - which was naturally in a kind of limbo at this point - and amounted to Ogilvie suggesting, in all seriousness, that the BBC broadcast a recording of nightingale song to Germany "as a token of Britain's peace-loving intentions"††. What the Germans, or anyone, might have made of such a broadcast remains unknown as, unsurprisingly, it never happened. Ogilvie may have been the man in charge of the BBC, but in this situation he was just one authority figure amongst several, lost among equals.

He attempted to assert himself as the BBC's representative with a broadcast on the 8th of September 1939 aimed at reassuring listeners (and bereft viewers) that the Corporation would go on, providing comfort and entertainment throughout the conflict and promising a "truthful and objective" news service and religious broadcasts that continued to "bear witness to the things of the spirit". Unfortunately, such self-congratulatory rhetoric - inadvertent as it might have been - didn't go down terribly well with the populace, who were simply confused at the BBC suddenly self-decimating, detonating the television service and reducing itself to just two radio stations mostly playing news and gramophone records. Britain just wanted to know what was going on, and it

wasn't entirely the BBC's fault they didn't. The Ministry of Information was understandably keen on near-psychotic levels of absolute secrecy, which stretched to not telling the people of Britain where the hell their radio and television went.

The confusion spiralled down to the various departments of the BBC. Programme controllers suddenly found themselves rendered all but impotent by mysterious ministerial fiat, while entire sectors of the Corporation were reshuffled or abolished outright according to whatever version of the Reith-Gardiner plan people were using at this point. In the middle of the whirlwind sat a mild-mannered former University lecturer and economist who knew little about Government, less about journalism and next to nothing about broadcasting, desperately trying to reconcile all three while the Government made constant structural changes to the Corporation of which he was nominally in charge, while fending off almost his entire staff's complaints about the BBC's independence being eroded away. He shared their misgivings, but had to bear the brunt of them as the theoretical stopping point of the buck - even though he was effectively powerless against the Ministry of Information, even if that was partly due to his own lack of grit. (Reith would probably have ignored any naysayers and barreled through with his own policy, safe in the knowledge that it was absolutely correct).

There was little Ogilvie could do but complain down the phone (to the young R.A. Butler, then Foreign Under-Secretary, in

December 1939) that the BBC had been receiving "contradictory advice from different departments of Government, or even different sections of the same department"††. By then, however, the process was starting to cool down. A wartime schedule that pleased, if not everyone, then as many people as possible was finally settled upon. and by the end of the year the Ministry was assuring him that everything was now running much more smoothly and he would have a lot less work on his hands to please the Government. This cheered and calmed Ogilvie even as he continued to wonder just what on Earth he'd got himself into.

AN ORATOR CALLS

Wartime broadcasting soon settled into two main functions: morale and propaganda, with, of course, plenty of overlap. Ogilvie's BBC took it upon itself to commission a raft of "rousing popular songs" so as to keep the British people's spirits up - under the faulty assumption that they weren't capable of doing so for themselves. (The Corporation's almost frighteningly detached attitude to the listeners was best illustrated in a letter by Sir Richard Maconachie, head of what was then called the BBC Talks Department, to Home Service Controller Patrick Ryan:

"The difficulty of the problem is obvious, ie hammering at a theme, but without the public knowing that it is being influenced."††

A statement that becomes more sinister the more you think about it.)

They also commissioned articles and radio broadcasts from various famous journalists, and these were far more popular and successful. The Postscript broadcasts of the young (34 year old) J.B. Priestley in particular became something of a national obsession as the war ceased to be phoney and came to our shores with a vengeance in the form of the Blitzkrieg and the Battle of Britain. As the sky filled with barrage balloons, then bombs, then dogfights, Priestley's trademarked Yorkshirean combination of stone-faced stoicism and deadpan wit was a comfort and inspiration to the nation, and his Postscripts provided some of the first evidence of the power of what he called "the broadcast word".

The winter of 1940 and 1941 was the darkest period of the war in more ways than one, as what seemed like all of Europe fell to, was absorbed by or joined up with the Nazis and their allies. The enemy had already commandeered the radiowaves (with the help of Peter and Dolly Eckersley) with the gloating voice of the loathsome William Joyce, the broken-nosed propagandist and traitor most heavily associated with the name Lord Haw-Haw. For the first few months of the war Joyce and his chortling cohorts on Germany Calling was, horribly, one of the only sources of hard

behind-enemy-lines information, and was therefore listened to through gritted teeth and tears. Priestley provided an Allied alternative that was markedly more uplifting and less interested in rubbing the listener's faces in sewage while cackling. The very first Priestley Postscript was on the subject of the Dunkirk evacuation, and he all but created the legend on the spot.

Unfortunately, that man Churchill was Prime Minister by now, and he was distinctly unimpressed by certain aspects of this demonstration of the power of the broadcast word. The parts where Priestley uplifted the spirit of the nation were fine, but as the series went on he became bolder and bolder in promoting his political beliefs - which is to say, staunch Northern Socialism. Citing the post-World War I pledge of the then Government to build "a land fit for heroes", which ultimately amounted to universal suffrage and little else, Priestley started to appeal, increasingly frequently, for the same pledge with greater follow through. Over the course of the Postscript, as well as cheering the country amidst the Blitz and the Battle of Britain, and spinning the mythology of the War in real-time, Priestley introduced much of the country to the idea that everyone was equal, and to concepts such as the welfare state, then merely theoretical but actively being planned by people like Clement Attlee, Ernest Bevin and Stafford Cripps - now in the Coalition War Cabinet, and soon to be leading lights of the post-War government that made the welfare state a reality.

None of this was what Churchill wanted to hear, or any of his equally furious Conservative colleagues in the War Cabinet for that matter. And not just politicians: the sackfuls of mail the Corporation received started to include naked abuse about "turning the classes against each other". Having proved the power of broadcasting, questions started being asked, even by one of Priestley's BBC superiors in Talks Department head Sir Richard Maconachie:

"[Priestley has] definite social and political views which he puts over in his broadcasts, and through these broadcasts, is, I think, exercising an important influence on what people are thinking. These views may be admirable or otherwise, but the question which I wish to raise is one of principle, whether any single person should be given the opportunity of acquiring such an influence to the exclusion of others who differ from him merely on the ground of his merits as a broadcaster which are, of course, very great."

Whether this principle would have occurred to Maconachie, or anyone else, had Priestley's social and political views been more in line with those of Churchill and his party is a moot point.

The stuff about stiff upper lips and the Germans being arseholes whose defeat was basically inevitable was, however, unimpeachable, and kept both Priestley and the BBC from serious censure until 1941, when the Battle of Britain was finally won, the

bombing died down and the tide of the war turned, and the Postscript was cancelled by Governmental fiat. Throughout the controversy, the BBC mostly kept its own collective nose clean, the personality and iconic status of Priestley looming large enough that the entire corporation was left in his shadow, and not unhappy there to be.

THE EXPANSIONISTS

With the War clearly not going anywhere anytime soon, 1941, and much of 1942 - the remainder of Ogilvie's tenure and beyond - would be dominated by a massive sprawling argument over the Corporation's foreign policy. The Ministry of Information first became concerned in the autumn of 1940, when it first became apparent that the amount of foreign-language broadcasting coming out of the BBC was in serious danger of falling - and not just because more and more of the rest of the continent was speaking German. In fact, that was part of the problem: more and more of Europe was falling to the Nazis, and the broadcast word (to use Priestley's term) was the only way for the Allied world to communicate with most of them. And there was still an Empire to hold together through the chaos. As Britain gradually became very nearly the only non-Nazi country left in Europe, foreign-language broadcasting was more important now than ever.

Hence the policy of "Triple Expansion" - an attempt to increase the BBC's overseas output by a factor of three. To achieve

this would have been ambitious in peacetime: it required the building of around eighteen new transmitters throughout the war-torn continent, thousands of new staff to run them and dozens of huge new buildings to put them in. With World War II raging through the continent, and the consequent labour shortage, this was going to be a tricky sell. A conservative estimate was that it was going to cost at least £500,000 - which today would translate to around £25 million. The Ministry's main representative in considering these proposals was Sir Walter Monckton, a lawyer and proto-PR man who'd helped Edward VIII through his abdication and was now directing propaganda at the Ministry.

It was Monckton who had the idea of selling Triple Expansion through the notion that it might shorten the war by a month or more - and also to lobby separate parts of the Cabinet, both to make the cost seem smaller by partitioning it out, and hopefully to tangle the policy up between departments such that some progress was unavoidable. With a bit of prodding from both Monckton and Ogilvie, the Treasury eventually approved the plan, and Ogilvie now had to figure out how to actually get it done.

The Overseas Expansion committee created for this purpose - headed by Ogilvie's deputy and BBC lifer Cecil Graves - went ahead and ordered the new transmitters and started drawing up schedules, but immediately faced difficulties in getting the buildings and workers together. Once again the BBC and Parliament were at loggerheads, although this time the Ministry of

Information was on their side - or, at least, the Minister himself thought they were. From 1940 to mid 1941 this was Alfred Duff Cooper (always known simply by the latter two names), former War Secretary until his resignation over the Munich agreement. Now Churchill had made him Minister of Information in succession to Reith, partly in order to keep him around, although he had no idea what he was doing there and disliked the job immensely. Still, he had nothing against the Corporation, and when its representatives complained to him that the Government still wasn't recognising the importance of broadcasting to the war effort or doing anything to help them out, he readily agreed. Upon taking it back to Parliament, he discovered that many MPs were even more annoyed at how long this was taking than the BBC themselves were, but clearly believed the whole thing was the Corporation's fault more than their own. Chief voice against them was Labour's Philip Noel-Baker, who stated in Parliament:

"Our whole propaganda energies, especially through wireless, should be multiplied tenfold at whatever cost."††

With which the BBC and Duff Cooper were in agreement, and indeed had been saying themselves. The difference was that Noel-Baker shifted the blame back on to the BBC themselves, with a long (and largely justified) rant about working conditions that

included the term "black hole of Tooting Bec" being used to describe the cramped, overcrowded Overseas Service headquarters at Bush House (which incidentally is not located in Tooting Bec; Noel-Baker named it such for security reasons: "that is near enough for Field Marshal Goering").

For whatever reason, the BBC took Noel-Baker's statements, and in particular his attitude, personally, as an attempt either to sabotage them in some way, or at least to embarrass Frederick Ogilvie, against whom Noel-Baker presumably had something unspecified. It was certainly a challenge that required, even demanded a response in their own defence.

They started by listing what they'd already achieved in the 20 months since war broke out: forty-eight new premises built or bought, mostly in London, and the Overseas Service staff increased by a genuinely impressive 560%. Next, they acknowledged the problems while simultaneously shifting the blame:

"The whole initiative and pressure in the matter of the provision of new stations and transmitters before and since the war has been taken by the BBC, and they have been met month after month with delays and adjournments - some, no doubt, inevitable, but not attributable in any shape or form to the BBC."††

Finally, the Chairman made a point of rallying around his director-general, warning Noel-Baker against "say[ing] that Ogilvie

is unfit for his job," warning that any explicit attack on him would be "strongly resented by the Governors".††

For his part, Duff Cooper, in his own Parliamentary response, attempted to grant the BBC something close to complete plenary absolution of all sin, citing a lack of accommodation in Central London that managed to be simultaneously suitable and available to the Overseas Service, and pointing out that the BBC, unlike the people he was addressing, had to pay for itself. "They are doing their best, and the difficulties are very great."††

Parliament were ultimately less than convinced. On 17th July 1941, Duff Cooper sadly told the Governors that he had failed to make the case for broadcasting to the people "in high quarters" and that maybe those on the board with friends in such places should consider making the most of such connections? He was speaking like a man on borrowed time, and indeed just three days later he was put out of his misery at the Ministry of Information and moved to the Duchy of Lancaster.

His successor was Professor Yaffle template and close Churchill ally (and indeed, sidekick and disciple) Brendan Bracken, who would remain as Minister for the duration of the War in Europe. He immediately staged a massive clearout of the staff he'd inherited and turned his attention to the ongoing row over the Overseas Service and Triple Expansion. The BBC's hackles warily raised. Bracken was famous even then, not only as a Churchill loyalist (almost to the point of osmosis) but as a slippery political

grifter who couldn't be trusted to call twelve pence a shilling. Irish at a time when that was politically inexpedient, he invented an entire backstory for himself involving an Australian upbringing (he lived in Victoria for five years), a bushfire, and a never-clarified connection with the headmaster of Winchester College. Between that and his closeness with Churchill - the man who'd tried to seize the BBC back when it was still a company and he the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and still wasn't over-fond of it as Prime Minister - the Corporation was not expecting the extension of a warm hand of friendship.

But as it turned out, Bracken was actually sympathetic to the BBC as an institution, probably more than Churchill was banking on and certainly more than the Corporation expected. He did have severe problems, however, with the way it was being run. With the war costing more and more every second, the Government's resentment grew over the BBC's spending of what was, after all, still public money. As Bracken saw it, the heart of the problem was the Corporation's administrative structure, still largely the same framework erected by Reith, but rendered dysfunctional by the ravages of time, by piecemeal renovations and revisions that amounted to the business admin equivalent of haphazardly hammering a new gearbox into an old car, and ultimately by the lack of its architect and guiding hand, John Reith - or at the very least, someone of similarly forceful personality.

Triple Expansion was finally killed off in September 1941, when a leaked memo made two things apparent: first, that money had become so tight that the Government was all but commanding an increasingly panicked BBC to close down anything and everything that they and/or the nation could safely do without. Second, that the BBC's initial estimate of the potential cost of Triple Expansion - £2.3 million, around £115 million in today's money - were apparently so arbitrary they might as well have been pulled out of their collective backsides. And the estimate had only got bigger since - more than doubled, in fact, up to a full £5 million, £168 million or so in modern coinage. As the Corporation ran around desperately trying to come up with an equation or logarithm that made this acceptable, it became painfully obvious that the old systems of management and organisation, dating back to the Reith years, was no longer adequate. They were creaking fit to crack from what expansion had already been achieved. A new approach was needed, a new system - and ultimately a new Director-General.

MOVING ANXIETY

Since the problem was monetary, Bracken brought in a businessman to help sort it out. Robert W. Foot was a general manager at the Gas Light and Coke Company, the main progenitor to the nationalised and then privatised British Gas. Naturally he

knew nothing about broadcasting, but he hadn't been hired to pore over the Home Service schedules. Initially he was hired for a strictly temporary placement as "General Adviser on War-Time Organisation", a title Bracken plucked out of the air for the purpose. What this would involve was a thorough investigation of the Corporation's circulatory system, its administrative and financial framework. This was scheduled to take three months, at the end of which, Bracken promised, Foot could "go back to his bloody gas".

Foot's first day on the job was distinctly alarming. First he discovered that the Corporation had just appointed a new Controller (Finance) in Thomas Lochhead, which was actually helping to solve a lot of the problems he was there to check out. Then, almost as soon as he set foot in Broadcasting House, he received an unexpected telephone call from the now Lord Reith. The giant Scotsman was still finding it hard to leave the BBC behind altogether, although he would never admit it. The purpose of his call to Foot was to offer his advice about reforming the Corporation, which being Reith he put in the form of a blunt and inarguable statement of reality. If Foot wanted to tidy up the BBC's organisation, Reith explained, it was really just a one-step process. All he needed to do was sack the Director-General. Foot took it under advisement.

He and Lochhead ultimately struck up a harmonious working relationship, and quickly came to a conclusion not dissimilar to

Reith's. The BBC badly needed reorganising on a major and even fundamental level. Ogilvie, for his part, didn't exactly make his own case when he explicitly pointed out to Foot that he had no experience and less interest in business management. Still, he agreed to be part of a three-pronged committee also consisting of Foot (naturally) and his own faithful deputy Cecil Graves (once he was back on his feet from his prolonged illness, which might as well have been called "foreshadowiosis").

This committee just about had time to come up with something resembling a plan of action before Ogilvie finally broke and resigned from the Corporation on January 27th 1942. The final straw had been an ongoing row on the potential of moving the headquarters of the Monitoring Service - which was quite symbolic, as this was (and arguably remains) Ogilvie's sole major contribution to the BBC. At that moment, the Service lived in the stately home of Wood Norton, Evesham, Worcestershire, but (it was feared) was starting to outgrow it, which was an especial worry as the same site was planned to be the main transmission centre should London ever fall, and the Monitoring Service was increasingly getting in the damn way of such a contingency.

So the decision was made in principle to move out to Caversham, Reading. This turned out to be an extremely unpopular move with the workers at Wood Norton, who didn't much fancy moving themselves and in many cases their families out to Reading, where they suspected the living conditions would

have been lower. The situation developed into a standoff between the Director-General and the three main "officers" in the Monitoring Service: its director, the ludicrously named R. d'A. Marriott; the Chief Monitoring Supervisor, Oliver Whitley (son of former Chairman J.H.) and head of Monitoring Y Unit John Shankland. These three - who were quickly branded "rebels" - argued that many if not most of their best and most important staff members were simply unable to make such a move, meaning that vast swathes of talent would be effectively amputated from the Monitoring Service, right at the height of a World War. Furthermore, they protested, even the ones who stayed would have had a job on their hands trying to find adequate accommodation in Caversham, and all for a place with, they believed, far worse reception than Wood Norton - despite what Ogilvie's yes-man engineers had told him.

Ogilvie, however, stuck to his guns, vowing to push ahead with the project despite the protests of people like Graves and Overseas Service Director J.B. Clark telling him that the three rebels were also experts who knew their subject like no-one else and whose opinions carried genuine weight. "Decisions are not open for reconsideration, without fresh evidence, simply because they are disliked by the particular parties concerned."†† the Director General explained. When Ogilvie visited Wood Norton to explain the situation to the workforce there, he made sure Whitley

and Marriott were excluded from the meeting. This did not help defuse the situation.

Inevitably it eventually reached the Board of Governors. One of the freshest was the Honorable Harold Nicolson, formerly official Censor in the Ministry of Information before being moved to the backbenches (on the grounds that Labour wanted greater representation in the Coalition) and given a Governorship as a consolation prize. Nicolson sided with the rebels, stressing how important the Monitoring Service was, particularly during wartime - so much so that the Government might well accuse the BBC of obstructing the war effort, should anything go wrong. Partly due to this argument, the resulting conclusion of the Board's deliberations was carefully non-committal - running to some mumbling about hierarchy and proper procedure - but in no way could be interpreted as supporting Ogilvie's authoritarian stance on discipline.

TOO NOBLE A CHARACTER

The Director-General's gambit had backfired. He had tried to emulate his predecessor's two-fisted approach to management, but discovered to his cost that it only works if you really are as tough as blackened teak. Reith was a genuine hardman. No-one would have rebelled against him. Ogilvie tried to play the part, but didn't have the natural authority. Over the course of the winter of 1941

through to 1942, all three rebels resigned from the BBC and signed up in the armed forces. Shankland was ultimately killed in action, but Whitley and Marriott would return to their careers at the Corporation in peacetime. As for Ogilvie, he resigned in exhaustion on the same day as Marriott, his position having become, one way or another, untenable. The governors were at pains to clarify that he had, indeed, resigned rather than been sacked, but had he not jumped they would have had to push him, as evidenced by a diary entry of Harold Nicolson's describing a meeting two days before Ogilvie's resignation at which it was decided to "retire" him in favour of a diarchy of Cecil Graves and Robert Foot. To his diary, Nicolson confessed his moral dilemma:

*"I am sure that this is right, as Ogilvie is too noble a character for rough war-work. Yet I mind deeply in a way. This clever, high-minded man being pushed aside. I hate it. But I agree."****

Nicolson might have assuaged his guilt by reflecting that Ogilvie was never really comfortable in the job and was probably, if privately, at least partly glad to be shot of it and returned to academia, though not immediately. He was given a knighthood shortly after his departure as a sort of unofficial compensation, and soon accepted an invitation to join the British Council and spearhead its new white propaganda project to promote British culture overseas. Following that, he joined Jesus College, Oxford,

where he was much happier. Over the next five years as Principal he pulled it back to respectability from a position as something of a backwater (at least by Oxbridge standards). He remained in this office until his death in 1949 at the age of 56, spending much of his spare time criticising the direction the Corporation had taken in the meantime. Not that many people paid particular attention to his opinions on broadcasting.

Over a near century of history, there's inevitably no shortage of forgotten men or women in the BBC, and Ogilvie is one of the most paradoxically high-profile. He took on a job he was ill-suited for at one of the most turbulent times in its and the world's entire history, and was inevitably doomed from the start. Even the BBC Chairman who appointed him would later reflect that he had every ability necessary for the role "except that of being able to manage a large organization, the one quality which was indispensable"♯ . He is one of the only 20th Century DGs not to have an official portrait commissioned to hang in Broadcasting House. The other two were his successors.

CECIL GRAVES & ROBERT FOOT

1942-1944

PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE AMMUNITION

CECIL GRAVES & ROBERT FOOT

PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE AMMUNITION

FOR YOU, THE WAR IS OVER

The new Directors-General were a combination of the obvious choice and a totally leftfield outsider thrown into the role by circumstance. When Robert W. Foot was hired by the Ministry to, essentially, audit the Corporation, it wasn't a stealth overture to conquest. There may have been a sense that Ogilvie's time was numbered, but there were no plans on anyone's part for Foot to actively take over the BBC, even as one half of a two-headed chimera with Cecil Graves.

Graves was the obvious choice to take over from Ogilvie, with or without Foot, and not just because he was Ogilvie's deputy. Born in 1892, son of a future editor of both The Spectator and Punch and nephew of a Foreign Secretary, he certainly had the necessary establishment chops for a Director General. Not only did

he go to public school - which almost went without saying in those days anyway - but he went to the exact same public school - Gresham's, in Norfolk - as John Reith had, and was a well-liked figure there, often returning to participate in sports days or trophy presentations.

He had been with the BBC since shortly before incorporation, joining in 1926 as an administrator. From these humble beginnings he rose to become Assistant Director of Programmes by 1929, then was entrusted by Reith to direct the nascent Empire Service from 1932 to 1935. Finally he became Controller of Programmes for the rest of Reith's tenure, and was heavily tipped to take over from the Great Man. That would have been fine by Reith himself - though not his very first choice, Graves was at least a healthy second behind the aging Charles Carpendale. The fact that he also hailed from the environs of Aberdeen did nothing to hurt his chances; his status as a fellow Old Greshamian even less.

This might have been what scuppered his chances in the end, however; the last thing the Board wanted to do was pander to Reith now that they'd finally got rid of him. They deliberately went with an outsider, and it's safe to say it didn't pan out. Now Graves finally got his chance. Unfortunately, by now he was extremely ill.

Graves had fought in the First World War, but only briefly; serving as part of the British Expeditionary Force in France, he had the dubious honour of becoming one of the conflict's very first POWs, captured barely more than a month after hostilities broke

out, and thereby spending almost the whole of the War in the nightmarish conditions of the semi-improvised prototype Stalags. He survived, but like many of his fellow prisoners took with him an involuntary and unwanted souvenir, in the form of tuberculosis.

So upon finally acceding to the throne (or half of it) as the BBC's equivalent of Antonin Chernenko some forty years early. He was the obvious choice for the role, but he'd been even more so the last time it was vacant, when he wasn't deathly ill. He'd already totted up a vast amount of sick leave during the course of his BBC career due to his raddled lungs, and was almost at a point where on any given day he was as likely to be absent as not.

However, it's far from certain that his health issues, extensive and notorious though they were by then, actually had any bearing on the unusual job structure the Governors chose for F.W. Ogilvie's replacement. Instead of one Director-General in charge of both pursestrings and artistic output, there would be two. One to control and direct programming and the practicalities of broadcasting, and one to administrate the financial and business side of things. Graves, the BBC lifer, was the former. The latter was the slightly bewildered Foot.

A year earlier his concerns had been coal, coke and natural gas, and the most efficient ways to extract them from the earth and then distribute them to the nation. Then a temporary advisory job, essentially helping the Corporation out with their spreadsheets, had spiralled out of control and ended with him, almost inexplicably, as

Director-General of the BBC. Admittedly, he was only really half of a DG, and had an experienced broadcasting head alongside him to take the other half, but unfortunately that broadcasting head had lungs like Swiss cheese and was increasingly unable to discharge his duties. Oh, and there was still a world war going on. It all made for a less than fruitful period for the Corporation.

DEE AND DUM

At least Foot had some clear idea of what he wanted to tackle first: the sheer number of Controllers under his employ (and he had to get used to that idea fast). Since the outbreak of war the number had doubled from the relatively supple and comprehensible four - Administration, Programmes, Public Relations and Engineering, essentially covering the main concerns of the BBC at the time - to a confusing and often overlapping eight, in three subdivisions just to make things harder. These were officially designated as Geographical, consisting of Home, European and Overseas; Functional, consisting of Co-ordination, Engineering and Programmes; and the hopelessly unhelpful General which split into Administration and Finance, which happened to be Foot's specialties. This sprawling, complicated system had greeted him when he arrived in November 1941 as a consultant. Now, though God knows how, he was in charge, at least of this part of the Corporation. As such he was determined, now he had the

opportunity, to change the damn thing back into something that worked and made sense.

For this purpose at least, the new setup was perfect. The division was summed up internally as between "machinery" and "output". Foot could concentrate on the financial and human resources side of things while Graves worried about the programming. Foot maintained the manufacturing machine while Graves was responsible for what went in and came out. That was the plan. The idea was inevitably subjected to its fair share, or more, of derision in the bowels of the Corporation, with Graves and Foot being surreptitiously nicknamed "Tweedledeegee and Tweedledumgee", but if nothing else the theory was sound - no pun intended. Foot retrospectively defended the diarchy qua idea in an unpublished autobiography later quoted by Asa Briggs:

"Together Graves and I commanded more confidence both inside and outside the BBC than at that time either one of us alone would have been able to command - he with his long and successful experience in the control and direction of BBC programmes of all kinds - and I with my equally long, and I hope equally successful, experience in management of a large Public Utility [..]"††

The Government were also much happier to work with Foot and Graves than with the ultimately unknowable Ogilvie - not least because it had been the Ministry of Information's idea to involve

Foot with the BBC in the first place. The first communications between Foot as joint DG and the Minister of Information Brendan Bracken was almost shockingly smooth compared with certain exchanges between their respective predecessors Oglvie and Duff Cooper, and ultimately resulted in Bracken deciding to ease off a little from the Ministry's close scrutiny of the Corporation's affairs and running, trusting in both Foot's organisational abilities and the plans he'd already drawn up.

The first step was to prune back those sprawling branches of the BBC's internal structure, beginning with the abolition of the post of Controller of Administration. Given the nature of the diarchy, Foot reasoned, it was redundant, as indeed was the idea of the whole Administration Division, which swiftly followed its Controller out the door. The ruthless efficiency installed by Reith - which largely relied on his iron will - had long since mutated into a thicket of committees reporting to other committees about other committees, often in circles. Ogilvie hadn't really known what to do about it, and it had worsened under his Directorship. Cecil Graves wasn't truly equipped to solve the problem either, and so the Diarchy justified itself: only a businessman could tidy up the BBC, and it happened to be Robert W. Foot.

The keyword for Foot's reform was to be "decentralisation". Instead of a sprawling mass of veins and arteries spreading out from a central heart, with everything and everyone subordinate to and reporting back to the Director (or in this case Directors)

General, causing constant logjams as multiple iterations of the same basic process or information tried to make their way to the top simultaneously, the Corporation would be divided up much more neatly into self-running and self-regulating Divisions.

The other side of decentralisation was regionalism. The regions, as a concept, was given its own division consisting of six departments: one each for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and three for various subdivisions of England. Except London and its environs, which had its own four-department "Area Office" amounting to a separate division altogether, because London is special. This made perfect sense at the time, and was at least more rational than the gordian knot of corporate structure it replaced. Besides, the intention as far as Foot was concerned was to give the other regions some sort of a boost towards, if not exactly meeting, London's exalted heights, so as to prevent the Corporation from

"becoming a top heavy and remote organisation looking at its policy and its performance with what I might call the eyes of the Londoner."††

At the start of the war, the regions had understandably fallen in importance, partly because of the sharp reduction in physical wavelengths. Now, the tide of the war was slowly but surely turning with the entry of the United States, and it was now reasonable to look to a possible post-war broadcasting landscape and consider how that might look, what it might need, and what

part the BBC could play in it - or more accurately how it could continue to play its assumed role, which was of course the main lead. With the airwaves presumably freed up once again in peacetime, the regions would naturally return to some level of prominence, and Foot's plans anticipated that, in a sort of general sense influenced by his not knowing the first thing about broadcasting itself, but knowing how to organise a sprawling Corporation.

The most important and long-lasting effect of the "decentralising" reforms was the creation of the News Division. Beforehand, there were four separate news services within the BBC, all managed independently and constantly bumping into one another despite sharing a single co-ordinator. Now, Home News, Empire News and News Talks were all merged together, although European News was to remain separate for war-related reasons. The old co-ordinator, A. P. Ryan, would be transformed into a much more powerful and hands-on controller. This was the start of the BBC's maturation as a news provider in its own right, partially forced on them by the war. It would continue under Foot and Graves' successor (at least for a time).

The problem with Home and Empire being separate departments was that Home News had to double-check every line, dot, comma and whimsical kerning decision with just about everyone you could think of: the appropriate branch of the armed forces, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of

Information and some chap called Bernard, and if any of them disapproved, it was back to the office for painstaking redaction. The Empire News service, on the other hand, only had to do this on the odd occasion at the editor's discretion. Foot's new system, largely suggested and supported by Ryan, brought both departments together under a single common policy.

The Government also agreed to bring News policy into the sole remit of the Ministry of Information rather than forcing the Corporation to go cap in hand to every single relevant or semi-relevant Government department, one after the other, plus whichever branch of the three fighting services is involved in the story (and more often than not it was all of them). The new structure and greater freedom was a great relief to Ryan and to that sector of the BBC in general. It did, however, have one drawback: it helped foster old resentments between the Corporation and the Press, who now saw the BBC as receiving preferential treatment, and not for the first time.

LISTEN FOR VICTORY

Meanwhile, Cecil Graves was busy working on the BBC's output. There was a case for saying that this was the more important side of things anyway. In a sense, the buck stopped with Graves and the programming; the average listener (and theoretically viewer, should television ever become a thing again) was hardly likely to

judge the Corporation based on its newly rationalised departmental corporate structure and highly efficient organisational ethos. Their image - the public image - of the BBC was always going to be based on its end product: the radio service and the programmes thereon. Graves was faced with dilemmas ranging from the seemingly petty - whether or not Harry Korris' popular comedy and variety show "Happidrome" had a place in the Forces Programme alongside the religious service - to the nakedly existential, as newspapers from The Times down to the Prescott and District Reporter actively questioned the necessity of such programming at all, if not the very existence of the medium. "This constant radio listening is rapidly destroying our powers of original thought." claimed the latter in January 1943, in an article that ultimately recommended that radio listening should, like food, soap and fuel, be rationed.

This idea did not catch on. The Ministry and the Corporation themselves both knew perfectly well just how important the radio was during a protracted world war. Not only was it vital for up-to-the-minute information propaganda purposes, it was almost the only thing keeping up the morale of an embattled country surviving on powdered egg and coupons. There were still shows and newsreels at the cinema, but even if you could still get to one it was still a matter of you going to it, whereas the BBC, via your radio set, instead came to you. In many cases, the BBC managed to achieve both at once, as when they made a star of C. H. Middleton.

Mr. Middleton, as the entire country referred to him, had had a series of what were then called "radio talks" on the subject of gardening since 1931, which even by 1940 was being listened to by an astonishing three and a half million people up and down the country, from seasoned horticulturalists to sad urbanites who could only experience things like lawns and rhododendrons vicariously through the radio. Before long, the Ministry of Information were getting involved, alongside the Ministry of Agriculture, and Mr. Middleton became the voice - and, via an animated caricature, occasionally the face - of the Dig for Victory campaign. Possibly he would even have remained a star after the war, had he outlived it by more than six months, but his place in history is assured as not only the first of many celebrity gardeners, but one of the very first celebrity anythings, other than just plain broadcaster - someone not just recognised or celebrated, but famous - a brand in his own right - for his expertise at an ordinary job. A whole new concept had been invented.

Mr. Middleton's success with "Dig for Victory" was downright inspiring to both Graves and the Ministry, and the Corporation and Government continued to work closely together for the war effort, doing all they could to maximise manpower. Or, increasingly as the War went on, womanpower. As the supply of men in their twenties to forties diminished over the course of the forties, the focus of programming increasingly shifted across to Rosie the Riveter. Fortunately, Graves and the BBC had Janet

Quigley in their corner as the Corporation's unofficial Minister for Women, and she was keen to stress that "no single factor is at the present moment more important for the war effort than getting the call-up of women to run efficiently and happily"††. To this end, she oversaw regular "talks" aimed directly at women, often with her own input into the content - not at her own insistence, in fact she preferred to defer full control to the talker, but simply because of her own expertise. Quigley's influence would ultimately lead to the creation of Woman's Hour shortly after the war, of which she is still considered essentially the creator despite not joining in an official capacity until five years into its existence.

Aside from digging for victory, other campaigns the Government were keen to have the BBC undertake included the Fuel Economy Campaign, for which the Ministries of Information and Labour had an extensive plan that they brought before the BBC as a fait accompli. What they called "practical hints on fuel economy" would seeded throughout programming from housework magazine Kitchen Front all the way down to Children's Hour, and even in the continuity announcements. Particularly during blackout hours, just to rub it in. The BBC took it under advisement and ultimately ran a somewhat more subtle version of the campaign.

IT'S BEING SO CHEERFUL AS KEEPS ME GOING

The most popular programmes during the war were, inevitably, the News. Running a close second was its exact opposite. While first priority was hard information about the War, or as hard as could be safely and accurately broadcast, second priority was something, anything, to take the population's minds off the damn thing. Necessity being the mother of invention, this resulted in the pace of programming speeding up, so the listener couldn't dwell or be distracted by the harsh war-torn powdered-egg reality around them.

The most famous such programme, to the extent that the very name has become iconic, was It's That Man Again - ITMA - a half -revue, half-sitcom starring Tommy Handley and often extrapolating its absurd plots from the latest war-related news. Handley was the (relatively) calm centre for comic chaos with a host of recurring characters, most armed with catchphrases: from alcohol-soaked Colonel Chinstrap ("Don't mind if I do"), Hattie Jacques' voracious Sophie Tuckshop ("But I'm alright now") to glum housekeeper and striking example of nominative determinism Mona Lott ("It's being so cheerful as keeps me going"). ITMA was appointment listening before the term was invented, with tens of millions tuning in on a regular basis, famously including King George VI himself and family.

Not as well remembered post-war, but almost as important during it, was Monday Night at Eight. Specifically conceived as an exercise in "pure radio", Monday Night was a cross between a variety show and a sort of World War Two equivalent of The One Show, consisting of several items, none allowed to run above six minutes, stitched together for an hour to appeal to everyone. The items included (but were by no means limited to) the very first ever radio quiz ("Puzzle Corner"); various running comedy sketches, including the proto-Munsters "The Dooms" (with Alfred Marks and Hermione Gingold) and the wildly popular monologues of Richard Golden as Old Ebeneezer; an interview slot where the subject could be almost anyone as long as they had six minutes' worth of interest in them; anecdotes and shaggy dog stories from the likes of Arthur Askey; five minute bursts of light music; a bit where Kenneth Horne has someone on whose birthday is that week and gives them five minutes to do what they like; and at the end, a detective serial, initially in the Inspector Hornleigh Investigates series (replaced with Dr. Morelle when Hornleigh's actor S. J. Warmington was killed in the Blitz).

Finally, slightly closer to the "news" end of the spectrum than the "entertainment" one, was The Brains Trust, wherein a panel of intellectual heavyweights of considerable calibre - including the likes of Violet Bonham Carter, Isiah Berlin, Jacob Bronowski, Aldous Huxley, C.S. Lewis and even Will Hay, an astronomer as well as a comic - would answer random questions

put by members of the public. The questions could, initially, be about almost literally anything, from nature trivia ("how does a fly land on a ceiling?") to basic quantum physics ("what is the fourth dimension?") or aesthetics ("what is the most beautiful phrase in the English language?", which ultimately led to the canonisation of "Cellar Door"). Initially they had questions on current affairs (ie the war), politics and religion too. Those subjects did, of course, have a tendency to result in heated argument, but it didn't take long for the BBC to realise that enraged bickering was entertaining in its own right - a genuine breakthrough for the future of entertainment. In fact, the whole programme was unrehearsed and unscripted - far from unheard of in those days, of course, but the deliberate absence of polish was relatively innovative.

Inevitably, the Brains Trust was wildly controversial. Some accused it of vulgarisation, in the way it inevitably favoured volume over content. Others, mostly in the Government and the Church, complained about religion and politics being included in the programme at all - with such effectiveness that they soon weren't anymore; by 1943 Controller of Programmes Basil Nicolls was painstakingly sorting through the postbag to find and remove anything with the potential to cause "irritation in Parliament", while religion was right out. This appeased the Cabinet and the Archbishop of Canterbury, but then the show came under attack from other quarters for having become dull. Still, ratings remained healthy throughout, with almost 30% of the listening public tuning

in by the end of the war and the show making a successful transition to television by the fifties.

LISTEN FOR VICTORY

All of this and more came under Cecil Graves' bailiwick as co-Director General. Of the two of them, his responsibilities made him more like a modern-day BBC chieftain, ordering the programming, setting the tone and overseeing the content, while his fellow DG maintained the structure in which he did so. Foot in particular saw it as a relationship between an editor-in-chief (in Graves) and an administrator in himself. It was a decent idea. Its flaw was how heavily it relied on people - specific people. One of whom was a sufferer of chronic tuberculosis.

Foot and Graves actually got on rather well. The yawning gap between the broadcasting experience of each must have helped: Foot the outsider from the Gas Board was happy to defer to Graves the BBC lifer on output, since he knew he had no grounds to argue (except in the unlikely event of a coal-powered radio programme). They both attended a recording of the controversial "Music Hall" show - in which the country's most available variety stars would trot out their acts for an hour - to check out its content for evidence of the "vulgarity of the modern comic" that the newspapers were needling them about. Not only did they pass the content, they both reportedly laughed like drains.

Sadly, Graves' prison-camp souvenir continued unabated, and the stresses of his role hardly soothed his troubled lungs. His absences from work became longer and more frequent, until his actual presence at Broadcasting House was apt to cause genuine shock. Eventually his tuberculosis became the bacterial equivalent of a sale at DFS - the gap in between severe instances having shrunk to the point of near-invisibility. By June 1943, eighteen months into the ostensible joint reign, Robert Foot had effectively been sole Director-General for the vast majority of that time, including almost all of 1943 itself.

Graves finally had to make a hard decision between his beloved BBC and breathing. He reluctantly chose the latter, finally giving in to the inevitable and retiring from the Corporation entirely in September 1943. It was a source of constant regret (to himself at least) that he hadn't got the job in 1938 after Reith's departure when he had a greater lung capacity. He had been Reith's choice for the role (after Charles Carpendale proved to be far too old and proved it by retiring) - which might have been the very reason the Governors overlooked him in favour of a complete outsider in F. W. Ogilvie. As we've seen, that didn't really work out, and by the time the Corporation had got through that mistake it was too late for Graves.

This is not to suggest that everything would have been great if Graves had taken over in 1938 instead of (half) in 1942. The Second World War would still have happened - the influence of the

BBC, Cecil Graves, or indeed Ogilvie was not that great - and it would have proved a major headache for whoever was in charge. In practice, Graves as Director General in 1938 would probably not have lasted much longer than Ogilvie had, if only because of his lungs.

He wouldn't even necessarily have done that much better; he had the broadcasting experience to understand the role from the start instead of needing to learn as he went, but he was also highly Reithian in his outlook - deploring popular music in particular almost to the same extent, with a particular venom for crooning (which he called "this particularly odious form of singing" and had outright banned when Controller of Programmes under Reith) and a particular loathing for Vera Lynn which seethed away unrelieved as she grew into a star of unprecedented magnitude over the course of the war. Such sentiments were almost calculated to put off the Governors in 1938, looking to make as clean a break from John Reith as possible.

Foot was left in sole charge, hurled in at the deep end of the Broadcasting Industry, and at a crucial point in history, with the War starting to turn. He had outdone even the Peter Principle in rising beyond his own incompetence into a position he barely even understood. The course of action was obvious: run.

Not that Foot panicked. An extraordinary and unlikely set of circumstances had deposited him in the role of Director General of the BBC - a role for which he was barely qualified, and which he had only agreed to fill specifically because someone else was going to do the actual BBC-type stuff while he sorted out its corporate structure. Unfortunately that person was actively dying by degrees (although ironically Graves, freed of the BBC's weight on his shoulders, ultimately lived a further fifteen years) and his ability to fulfill that function had decayed over eighteen months before absconding altogether, leaving his half of the buck to stop where the other already did.

He couldn't stay in the role alone, that was certain. His only use to the BBC was as an administrator, a corporate director, and in that role he'd already accomplished his main goals with the reformation of the Corporation's structure. Beyond that, into the realms of actual broadcasting-related matters, he was completely lost. He had to pray that Graves was replaceable, otherwise he'd be following him out the door sooner rather than later.

In truth, he might still need to do that anyway. He was out of his comfort zone and there was no guarantee that he could fashion himself a new one. But he wasn't going to leave the BBC in the lurch. The transition from Reith to Ogilvie had been bumpy, and the one from Ogilvie to Graves and himself had been downright

tempest-tossed. Foot was determined, at the very least, to leave in as orderly a fashion as possible. To that end, he took a firm hand in both finding Graves' successor and getting him ready for the job.

The great Tweedledeegee/Tweedledumgee experiment had stalled on the runway; only Minister of Information Brendan Bracken expressed vague support for a continuation of the diarchy structure, assuming Foot could find the right partner. The Board of Governors, however, were unanimous behind their Chairman that the dream was over and Foot should instead find and appoint an "Editor-in-Chief", similar in most ways to Cecil Graves' old job, but subordinate to the Director-General rather than his equal.

The obvious area in which to hold the search was the journalistic sphere, and the Corporation ended up in the offices of legendary news gatherers Reuters, to meet one of their directors, William J. Haley. Haley was also Joint Managing Director of the Manchester Guardian and Evening News Ltd, and a newsman to his marrow. The first meeting between him and Foot was conducted in a hurry, but managed to include an important statement from Haley on his Press credentials:

"It seems to me that the functions of broadcasting and the Press are complementary. They both have their highly important parts to play in modern civilization."

It may have been brief, but in Foot's words "long enough to convince me without any doubt that he was the man I was looking for." Not least because he expressed willingness bordering on eagerness to take on the role, which from the first of September 1943 was his.

The new setup of Foot as sole DG and Haley as his Editor-In-Chief was unveiled the same day to both the press and the rest of the Corporation. The latter were reassured that he was "in no way a nominee of the Government" and that Foot had been involved in every step of his hiring. The former were treated to an interview with The Times in which Haley set out his guiding principle: "that the BBC by its very nature has one over-riding duty to all spheres: to give its listeners the best in the world".

To this end, one of Haley's first assignments at the BBC was to visit the front, in Italy, and interview the Allied Generals posted there, chief among them Harold Alexander, future Field-Marshal and Earl of Tunis, who apparently had some questions he'd been wanting to put to a BBC man for some time. These - whatever they were - he managed to put to the new Editor-in-Chief, but Haley's main concern in Italy was not with him but with the rank and file, canvassing the opinions of the regular British post-Tommy under fire in a faraway land.

The information he gleaned from this experience - mostly that they were understandably concerned with links to the home front, with information and messages going to and from - fed into

the first of many innovations Haley brought to, or at least midwifed for the BBC: the revamp of the Forces Programme as the General Forces Programme. Such a change was already on the cards when Haley arrived at the Corporation, by request of General Dwight Eisenhower. By now there were GIs stationed all over Britain, and their tastes in radio were very different to the rest of us here on the home front. They were unused to the genteel dramas, polite parlour games and deadpan absurdist satire of the likes of ITMA or Monday Night at Eight, had no interest in the Brains Trust and their unscripted cerebral chit-chat, and would much rather tune into the hot swing jazz of Count Basie or Duke Ellington of an evening than Vera Lynn. Given the choice, they'd just as soon switch the radio off and go out and impregnate a few 19-year old British girls. The new General Forces Programme was a conscious effort at some kind of wireless prophylactic.

ITMA, the Brains Trust and the rest remained - there would have been mass uproar if they hadn't - but they were now joined by several brasher entertainments, explicitly aimed at those American soldiers used to the likes of the Jack Benny Program, Abbott and Costello and the two-fisted adventures of Doc Savage or Tarzan. In amongst the British music and comedy - some of which were so incomprehensible to the foreign ear they might as well have been transmitted in code - there were little islands of home, such as recitals from Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra, or a comedy half-hour with Edgar Bergen and (ostensibly, although what use the

actual doll himself was on the radio is anyone's guess) Charlie McCarthy. The BBC even eventually managed to import episodes of the Jack Benny Program, albeit spelled with an extra -me on the end. Don't want the GIs to completely forget what country they're in, after all.

Alongside all this home-from-home material, thanks to Haley taking the time to talk to the rank and file in Italy, were a host of programmes aimed at providing a link between the home front and the actual front. These included regular news bulletins, various magazine programmes centring, in one way or another, around the four corners of the war-torn globe, from Palestine to South Africa to Canada, and "Greetings From" programmes in which actual British soldiers were able to speak directly to their loved ones back home, if only briefly.

Foot was impressed. He looked forward to a potentially long and fruitful working relationship with him, followed by Haley's inevitable accession to replace him. In the event, only half of this dream would be fulfilled, as early in 1944, the Mining Association found itself in need of a new chairman. The coal industry was at something of a crossroads. The war was still a long way from over (France hadn't even been liberated yet), but with the entrance of the Americans, the exit (and subsequent side-switching) of the Italians, and the German army in tatters after its disastrous invasion of Russia, an end - and even a victorious one - was actually within sight at last. The future of coal in a notional post-

war world was up for grabs, with Labour increasingly enthusiastic and vocal about the socialist programme they hoped to implement once peace was achieved - and, of course, ultimately did, including the nationalisation of the coal industry. The Mining Association wanted to be prepared for such an eventuality. They wanted someone who knew coal back and front, and had a proven track record as an administrator. They wanted Robert W. Foot.

After much careful consideration on his part, they got him. Ironically by now he was settled in at the BBC and didn't necessarily want to leave; but at the same time he couldn't shake the feeling that coal was his true calling, and that the industry truly needed him. And so at the end of April 1944, Foot - to the surprise of the Governors and the Press alike - stepped down as Director-General of the BBC and finally moved back to the fossil fuel industry where he'd made his name. He stayed until 1952, unsuccessfully fighting against nationalisation and eventually rising to the title of President. He would go on to manage collieries in South Africa and Rhodesia, and ultimately died in Surrey in 1973 at the age of 83, content in his achievements but all but forgotten by the BBC. Like Ogilvie before them, neither he nor Graves have an official portrait in Broadcasting House. Their successor, however, does. For the first time, the Director-Generalship passed on with absolutely no fuss whatsoever. William J. Haley was hired from the start as a future successor. The future had arrived sooner than anyone was expecting.

WILLIAM HALEY

1944-1952

DON'T FENCE ME IN

IAN JACOB

1952-1959

BRITANNIA RAG

HUGH CARLETON GREENE

1960-1969

LET THE SUNSHINE IN

CHARLES CURRAN

1970-1977

THAT SAME OLD FEELING

IAN TRETHOWAN

1977-1982

KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU

ALISDAIR MILNE

1982-1987

THE BITTEREST PILL

MICHAEL CHECKLAND

1987-1992

WISHING I WAS LUCKY

JOHN BIRT

1992-2000

EXTERMINATE

GREG DYKE

2000-2004

THE TIME IS NOW

MARK THOMPSON

2004-2012

DRY YOUR EYES

GEORGE ENTWHISTLE

2012

SOMEBODY THAT I USED TO KNOW

TONY HALL

2013-2020

THRIFT STORE