

SERIES LEVEL DESCRIPTION
RADIO TALKS (R51)

Introduction

Definition. Radio Talks are all non-music radio programmes (except news bulletins and drama productions) e.g. eye-witness accounts, running commentaries, lectures, discussions, debates, poetry recitals, readings, etc.

Background. During the period c.1922 until the start of television, Talks department had been an important cultural influence, and central to the ideas advanced by John Reith (Managing Director of the British Broadcasting Company and first Director General of the BBC), of broadcasting as an instrument of public good. Talks also reflected social changes - the range of subjects covered revealing the concerns of the time, e.g. unemployment; post-war reconstruction; nutrition; imperialism; birth control; economic migration. Speakers ranged from such major figures as Ernest Bevin, David Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, G.B. Shaw, E.M. Forster, to ordinary members of the public in series such as *I Was There* (1936); *The World We Hope For* (1943); *Men Talking* (1937). Later Talks series included *From Our Own Correspondent*; *Woman's Hour* and *Week in Westminster*. By 1927 Talks were second only to music broadcasts in transmission hours.

Organization. Talks programmes were made by Talks Department for broadcast in the National, Regional, and Overseas services. They included news talks (in Home and Overseas Services); news sports talks, music interval talks; adult education talks, Regional talks; Overseas talks (English and vernacular) and magazine programmes.

Regions. The Regions carried National Programme talks and also produced their own talks series. These were often included in the National Programme, for example *Designed for Women* which was made by Midland Region and placed on Home Service from October 1946. Regions also contributed single talks to series carried in the National programme, e.g. *People On The Move* (c.1937).

Overseas. Overseas Services carried domestic output talks such as *On Young Shoulders* (c.1947), a series produced primarily for home consumption which was recorded and rebroadcast in the Eastern and African Services, the Pacific Service and the North American Service. Talks produced by the (British) regions were also carried in Overseas Services e.g. the *Islands of Britain* series (1947). Overseas Services produced their own talks as well e.g. the General Overseas Service (GOS) discussion series, *Serious Argument* c.1950, and Eastern Services talks for Arab listeners *The Mirror of the East* (c.1947).

Modes of Production. Early talks, even discussion programmes, were scripted and rehearsed before being given (usually live), the manuscripts being edited by Talks Producers (called Talks Assistants in the early days) "to sound as if they were spoken to a person and not delivered to an assembly" (Matheson, *Broadcasting*, 1933). Later talks could be unscripted e.g. the North Region series *Why Do You Believe That?* (c.1938). During the Second World War the Ministry of Information (MOI) scrutinised all scripts for references of potential use to the enemy, such as current weather

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conditions or descriptions of landmarks, and for this reason wartime talks were almost always scripted. Post-war talks were often scripted too, even when ordinary members of the public were giving their opinions, as in the Services Educational Unit series *Parliament and Its Works* (c.1946).

In the beginning talks were almost always 'live' but later talks could be recorded, in particular for rebroadcast in the Overseas Services. Vernon Bartlett's talk *The World and Ourselves*, for example, which was given on the opening day of the Empire Service in December 1932 had been broadcast on the National Programme in October 1932 and recorded onto wax disc for later reuse.

Scope & Content

The papers relate to the creation of radio talks, potentially covering items from initial proposals through commissioning of scripts; engagement of speakers; negotiations concerning fees; criticism & editorial control; final broadcast and critical reaction. In addition to correspondence they can include such items as policy directives, research notes, draft scripts, programme schedules and occasionally audience research reports.

The papers come from the following sources: Director General; Controller Programmes; Controller, Regions; Controller, Overseas Services; Director of Talks; Assistant, Talks (i.e. Talks Producer); contributing writers and speakers; government departments e.g. Ministry of Information; outside bodies such as academic institutions, societies and commercial organisations.

Archival History

The papers were filed in Central Registry - successor to Filing Section which was set up following the formation of the British Broadcasting Company Ltd in 1922. Working papers were originally kept in filing cabinets, managed by a filing clerk in Magnet House. In April 1923, on the company's removal to Savoy Hill, the files were placed in the Filing Section corner of the general office. In 1927 the section was reorganised by Lieut. Colonel M. M. Haldane for the systematic retention and control of documents created and received by the British Broadcasting Corporation. From then on Filing Section became known as Central Registry. The removal of papers from folders was forbidden and a system keeping track of movements of folders between departments was set up. The records administered by Central Registry included departmental working papers; papers relating to the formation of the British Broadcasting Company; Programme logs (known as Programmes-As-Broadcast, or PASBs); statistical records; contributor contracts; MSS of Broadcast Talks and news bulletins. Central Registry was housed at Savoy Hill until Broadcasting House became available in 1932.

Talks files encompass several major strands, e.g. Services Educational Broadcasts (1943 – 1952) aimed at the armed forces; Current Affairs, including *From Our Own Correspondent*; Farming Talks (1932 – 1976); Health, including *The Beveridge Report* (1944); Book Talks, including *Book At Bedtime* and *Morning Story* (1960s); Political Broadcasting, including *Freedom Forum* and *The Week In Westminster*; Religion, including *Lift Up Your Hearts* (1939 – 1959); and Lecture Series e.g. the *Reith Lectures*. The section also contains, Talks Policy files and minutes of Home Service, Light Programme, Sound and Third Programme meetings.

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Arrangement

The files are arranged alphabetically by title for the initial sequence of material (R51/1-739) covering the period to c.1954. Within this arrangement, there are main subsections for:

- Current Affairs
- Overseas Talks
- Talks Policy
- Religion
- Services Educational Broadcasts
- Talks Series
- Suggestions

The later accruals (R51/740-1,034) are arranged alphabetically by title and cover the period 1955 to c.1965. Subsections within this arrangement include:

- Current Affairs
- Light Programme
- Talks Policy
- Religion

The final sequence (R51/1,035-1,361) is arranged in numerical order and covers the period 1965-1975, with some additional *Woman's Hour* files from the 1980s and a *Theatre Talks* file from the 1930s added to the end of the sequence. Within this arrangement, subsections include:

- Current Affairs
- Political Broadcasting
- Talks misc.

A complete alphabetical listing of the files in this series is available. Detailed précis for each file are gradually being created.

Related Areas

- Education (**R14-R17**).
- News (**R28**).
- Policy (**R34**).
- Contributor files (**RCont**).
- Talks Advisory Committee (**R6**).
- Audience Research reports (**R9**).
- TV Talks (**T32**).
- Recorded Programmes (**R45**)
- Regional talks.
- Talks scripts.

Administrative History

Talks had its origins in Education - a sub-division of the original Programme Department set up by Reith in the early days of the Company. The first talk was broadcast in December 1922. By 1926 Education with Talks, News and Religion were all the responsibility of Director of Talks J.C. Stobart. In 1927 Control Board decided that a separate 'talks section' should be disentangled from Education and placed under the charge of Hilda Matheson.

During the following decade a series of reorganisations, splits and mergers took place between General Talks, News Talks and Adult Education Talks: In 1929 Adult Education section merged with Talks and in December of that year News section was separated out and placed under the direct control of the Assistant Director of Programmes. In 1932 News section was brought back into Talks under Director of Talks, Charles Siepmann. Two years later 'News & Topicality' under Professor John Coatman became News Department, independent of Director of Talks.

During the second world war Talks Department liaised closely with the Ministry of Information to produce talks on such wartime topics as air raid precautions, health, the black market, physical education, food and the family, e.g. *Wise Housekeeping*, *The Kitchen Front*, *Family Relationships* (on the difficulties of reuniting families after a six year war), *National Health Service* (1944) and *Family Allowances* (1940 – 1942). Talks Department also produced the daily counter-propaganda programme *Listening Post*, as well as J.B. Priestley's *Postscripts* (to the News), *War Commentary* and the series *World Goes By* which included Richard Dimbleby's 1945 report on the liberation of Belsen.

The post-war Talks Division (under Controller R.A. Rendall) included Schools, Services Educational, Religious and Pronunciation Departments; major series included Alistair Cooke's *Letter From America*, and the *Today* programme. In 1961 Talks Division was dissolved, Talks merging with Current Affairs under J. A. Comacho as Head of Talks and Current Affairs (Sound), later renamed Talks and Current Affairs (Radio). The 'General Talks' branch of Talks and Current Affairs (Radio) encompassed *Woman's Hour*, *Home This Afternoon* & *Can I Help You?*. In 1970 Music Talks began to be produced by Music Department and *Woman's Hour* separated from General Talks, which by then had been renamed 'Documentary and Talks Programmes' (later 'Talks and Documentaries') to become part of General Current Affairs Programmes. Both General Current Affairs and Talks and Documentaries remained part of the Talks and Current Affairs Group – re-designated Current Affairs Group in 1974. By this time *Woman's Hour* and *You And Yours* were being produced by Current Affairs Magazine Programmes. By the early 1980s Talks and Documentaries had become a separate department under Radio Programmes Division, making such series as *Kaleidoscope* and *Analysis*.

c. 398,000 items

1,990 files

1923 - 1987