

Written from Brian Hodgson to Ray White in 2006, with minor editing...

Dear Ray,

Boat scraping rained off. I spent several happy hours with your excellent CD [BBC Radiophonic Workshop: An Engineering Perspective]. It is difficult sometime to follow the chronology as it appears to shift backwards and forwards, depending on the strand you are addressing at the time, but I think that is always a problem when dealing with a complicated and multi-stranded article and I can't see any other way through it.

One or two minor comments for your interest as much as anything.

Desmond became Senior Studio Manager in 1958. He and all the rest of us were only SMs [studio managers] until sometime in the late sixties, when he became Organiser and we became Assistants then he became Head in 1972, just before I left to start Electrophon.

The Crystal Palace was the inspiration for and star of "Music of the Brisbane School" in my score for Philip Saville's TV production of "The Machine Stops" eerily precursing Minimalism. Incidentally the programme was the first TV play ever to win a Film Festival.

Soundcraft desks will be installed in the Radiophonic Workshop "over my dead body" was the remark of Rex Belgrove at the technical sub committee, to which my reply of "That can be arranged" earned me a well-deserved ticking off by Desmond and George Crowe. Rex then got Alan to inspect a Soundcraft and called him a traitor when Alan said he thought it was quite good.

Room 11's [opening celebration] cake was a mess as Guy [the chef] had hit the LSD the day before and it was thrown together that morning. To make matters worse it was cut with a knife that had been used earlier for chopping onion and had not been washed so it's taste was as bizarre as it's appearance.

Our row in Studio B was really about the fact that Peter complained that the lights in the studio were shining on the top of the equipment and not on its face, as was the intention. You did one of your wobblies about "That's where they were on the plan you accepted" and then I did one of my wobblies about having to move them with my customary lack of tact, of which I am not proud. Isn't that when the roof fell in as Ray Riley was changing the tiles round to bring the lights forward?

Your summing up of Producer Choice is spot on. Mr Birt is a nice man to meet provided you don't disagree with him, but I think totally devoid of the skill in of man management and motivation.

I was never given the opportunity to manage your team. It would have shaken the foundations of engineering heaven. Desmond once half suggested it but was firmly told to

back off. Nor I may add did I ever get the impression that it would have been acceptable to you or Ray Riley.

The decision to lose the devoted Radiophonic Engineers was not quite as simple as it probably looked at the time. We had to lose a large chunk of overheads. We were paying two salaries plus the pension contributions plus rental on workshop and store plus a management fee to Engineering. I was led to believe that if we accepted the MV team [the staff who maintained the 'main' studios at Maida Vale] my overheads would be cut to about Ray Riley's salary, a considerable saving. However that wasn't enough to save the situation.

I was not offered redundancy and had been specifically asked to stay and look after the workshop by Keith Harlow, but after looking at the figures I reckoned that by cutting my job and that of Maxine [who ran Workshop's office] the total savings including those of the rental of the offices etc might just make the department viable. That fact in addition to three years of extreme unhappiness (mostly concealed only with great difficulty), with trying to fit in with the new management regime and a total lack of faith in its intention and its capability, led to my decision to make my job redundant. Maxine was overjoyed as she had just about had enough and at least she was able to enjoy the last few years of her life with Derrick in their dream home [she sadly died of cancer in 1998].

However, even that was not enough, as the accountants simply added the given up costs to the overall overheads as increased charges. All we managed to achieve was an extra couple of years pension contributions and misery for those who remained.

The Workshop came into being as the organisation had a creative need for it and it could not be provided from outside, and it died when the organisation had a financial interest in losing it and the service could be theoretically provided from outside more cheaply.

It was the victim of its own success. The more we were able to keep it ahead in engineering terms and pay people a decent wage the more we were building up the overheads which crushed it. Monetarism destroyed the NHS as it was introduced and has very nearly destroyed the BBC

One day I hope some bright economist will write a brilliant thesis on the right way to transform a public corporation into a market economy, because no one got it more wrong than John Birt.

Your contribution to the Radiophonic workshop and that of Ray Riley was as I said in my letter quite exceptional and it was your combined legacy that made it possible for the takeover by the MV team to be as successful as it was.

It seems like another life in another world. I must off to scrape Elsa's [the boat's] bottom and feed the ducklings that have just appeared at the back door.