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Unlocking Audio 2 - Connecting with Listeners

The British Library, London

Spreading the Word, Protecting the Rights.

Professor Seán Street and Matt Holland, Bournemouth University
16 April 2009,

Bournemouth University and the Centre for Broadcasting History Research [CBHR] Archive collections have a unique flavour, at least in how projects linked to radio collections have come about. We should mention that there have been other projects linked to television as well, the TVTimes project also a partnership with the British Library, The This Week Project and BBC Panorama with the BBC. None of these projects, however, have actually involved digitising moving image. We have also recently acquired the giant IBA paper archive from Ofcom, dating back to the start of ITV. This paper, however, will focus on our sound radio archives, and in particular the creation of an online resource hosted by the BUFVC website, and funded by JISC, to preserve and provide access for students and academics in the UK, material from the LBC/Independent Radio News Archive.

The following three anecdotes illustrate some of the circumstances and say something as well about how serendipitous the survival of archives can be:

1) Some years ago we received a phone call from the BBC Radio Four Analysis team to say that they were moving to a smaller office and if we could visit the office the next day with a van we could have the entire listening tape collection of this flagship Radio 4 programme - nearly 1000 audio tapes. Now some or all of these recordings may well also exist in BBC Information and Archives as well, but there was not time to check. At the time it seemed to us that here was an opportunity to house a resource of major importance for students and academics and to study the history and influence of this historic programme.

2) An approach from Charlie Rose and John Perkins then of LBC, and IRN respectively, with concerns that the LBC/IRN archive was at risk in the turbulent commercial circumstances of Independent Radio, if in a change of

ownership. New owners might not have viewed the costs of keeping the archive in commercial storage in London as viable. By coincidence at the same time Bournemouth University had space in a basement of one of its buildings to host the archive. This was a speculative commitment on our part as we hoped in the future to secure project funding to digitise the collection. At the time, it felt something like rescue archaeology – “We’re saving this because tomorrow will be too late”. And with that comes the weight of responsibility – how does one decide what will or will not be important or valuable to posterity... At the time, you have to take the view that – potentially – it all is. Subsequently an opportunity has arisen from the JISC Digitisation Call to fund the digitisation of this collection and as a result, an online database has been launched to UK Higher and Further Education.

We will be referring to the LBC/IRN Archive a lot during this paper, so it is worth explaining here the nature of the two organisations. LBC was the first Independent Radio Station in the UK, opening on 8 October, 1973. Now as then, it

serves the population of London with speech radio. IRN – Independent Radio News – was a linked company with LBC until the 1990s, when it became independent. It has retained a licence in its part of the archive, and has therefore been a key enabler of this project, while LBC – the London Broadcasting Company to give it its full, original name, is the legal owner of the archive itself.

3) Not all the collections were at risk, the Independent Local Radio Programme Sharing Archive was in fact deposited with the National Sound Archive and in storage. Its location or happy rediscovery and ultimately digitisation with funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council were almost accidental. It came from a personal memory of Seán Street’s – that during the 1980s he had been working in Independent Local radio at 2CR, in Bournemouth. His job was as Features Editor, and the IBA in those days charged all stations with producing a high proportion of spoken output:- what the IBA Director John Thompson called famously “meaningful speech.” As a result some programmes of very high quality were made over a period of about ten years. The

1990 Broadcasting Act changed the whole ethos, enabling consolidation of companies, relaxing regulation, and shifting the prime responsibility of commercial radio companies away from communities and towards shareholders. In the meantime, from about 1980 to 1990, the IBA, and subsequently the Association of Independent Radio Contractors - the AIRC had set up an altruistic scheme for the sharing of material between stations. Twenty years on, Seán asked himself the idle question, where did all that shared work go? That question brought him finally to the doors of the British Library Sound Archive, who had a large portion of the surviving material from those days. The Centre for Broadcasting History Research, (the CBHR) at Bournemouth University, was able to bring an understanding of the collection's significance to Independent Radio and radio broadcasting in general and we were able to make the necessary connections with end users – academics, the radio industry and research students. The digitisation of the collection was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC] under the Research Enhancement Scheme. Although this scheme is no longer running it might yet prove

to be one of the most influential and farsighted investments
in radio studies and research.

It would be wrong given the circumstance of these projects to say that the CBHR had planned a strategy to save and digitise radio collections. The point we would make is that none of this was really planned, however, we were open to requests from potential donors, sympathetic to their concerns, which we shared, and willing to take risks immediately in finding storage space that were repaid with our success in getting funding at a later date. What we *can* say is that CBHR learned quickly from each experience and brought an extensive knowledge and contacts to each collection that contributed to our success in gaining funding. What began as almost a cottage industry, fuelled by personal enthusiasms, has grown to a group strategy built around the connections between our collections, and the value they provide a linked resource to the study, not just of radio and media, but the history of our recent past.

To analyse this in a little more detail let us take this point by point.

Licences and Copyright

One of the major concerns of funders – and indeed the original owners of material - is copyright and permissions to enable release of audio to wider higher education and further educations while protecting the rights of the makers of the work from illegal pirating. The funders want product for their investment after all, and the makers want assurances that their work will not be used inappropriately. This potentially raises many concerns; after all, exploitation of the archive places a value on the content if money can be made from it. On this particular point we were able to pre-empt concerns by making it clear that we are interested in educational use only – which following some negotiations came to be understood as non-commercial use. Rights holders are more concerned about potential loss of revenue than the use archives might be put in a non-commercial context. We were helped too, in that many of the people who created the content were as concerned as we were for their long term survival. While in one instance, (TV Times and IPC Media), it took many months - in the end 18 months - to come to an understanding of our intentions, in

most instances regarding the audio archives, the relationship with rights owners was a true partnership for mutual benefit. In the case of the Independent Local Radio Programme Sharing Scheme Archive and the LBC/IRN Archive the support from the industry has been excellent. They have been prepared to go the extra mile with us to secure licences for material that met their requirements and those of funders. It may be true that the ground is shifting somewhat. Media organisations now regard archives as assets rather than liabilities, however, most do not have the time or resource to digitise material. The management of assets usually refers to digitised material that is already absorbed into electronic management systems. We should also not underestimate the extent to which media organisations think yesterday was a long time ago and tomorrow is sooner than you think. In other words archiving is not a priority, especially if it is expensive. Nevertheless we never lose sight of the responsibility of satisfying the requirements of all parties; we are the custodians of our collections in the case of many of them; we are not the owners. So it is necessary for us to stay in close contact with the owners themselves, and to act as an intermediary and facilitator for companies who enquire with regard to using the material for

current broadcast use. It would be a sad state of affairs if, by preserving work for educational purposes, we were to prohibit access to that same work by the very industry that enabled our projects to bear fruit. Nevertheless it is a tricky circle to square.

One other related point is and has been the churn in media ownership. Over the lifetime of the LBC /IRN project LBC/IRN has already changed hands a number of times. The 70 Independent Radio Companies that existed in the 1980's has been reduced to 4 or 5 large organisations. We are a bewildering distance away from the pre-1990 world of 'Independent Local Radio' (the IBA in those days didn't even encourage the use of the word 'commercial' !) when one station related to one community and had its own discreet style and character. Identifying and securing rights from defunct companies is near impossible but we had the support of the industry organisation, the Commercial Radio Companies' Association, (CRCA) the successor to the Association of Independent Radio Companies, (AIRC). This has now been absorbed into the Radio Centre; (even there – in all those changing acronyms - there is a metaphor for some of the problems of continuity!) Anyway, it was the CRCA, and in

particular its Chair, Paul Brown, who approached and secured the agreement of existing ILR companies. Where the output of many of those companies is - their archives or collections - can for the most part only be conjecture. Some may have been deposited with the regional archive or library as was the case with the Central Southern Local Radio Project – archives being deposited with the Wessex Film and Sound Archive. In many cases, when the takeover came, collections were simply thrown away as being no longer relevant to the new generation of commercial broadcasting which created ‘programming’ rather than ‘programmes’ and for the most part, turned its back on ‘built’, shaped spoken word output. For example, that Seán own station during the 1980s, 2CR in Bournemouth, had its tape archive destroyed when the company was taken over by the GWR group in the late ‘80s. Anything that survived came mostly from the archives of individual members of staff – and that material continues to find its way to our door. And when you consider that a few years ago, GWR merged with the Capital Radio Group to form GCap Media, only to be bought in turn by Global Radio, you get a sense of some of the problems of locating material – and its originators. On 3 March, the brand name “Independent Radio News” was replaced in commercial radio news

bulletins by “Sky News”. IRN is still the supplier, but an iconic name, there from the very start of independent radio on 8 October, 1973, has vanished. A student coming to Higher Education in two or three years time might not know – or might have forgotten – that name. Over successive months, Global Radio is currently renaming many of its stations around the UK; on 22 June, 2CR Bournemouth will after 29 years be renamed “Heart”. That in itself is a metaphor for the broader purpose of what we do.

Our Motivation

From what has been previously said it is obvious that Bournemouth University and the Centre for Broadcasting Research did not set out to have large archival collections. Nor in the early stages of this journey did we see ourselves as a natural archive for radio and television. It has evolved almost by word of mouth; Bournemouth is a good place to deposit material. Bournemouth University has a leading Media School, and has run for many years courses in media production, latterly Radio production at Foundation degree, BA and MA level. We founded the Centre for Broadcasting History Research because of a

common interest in historical perspectives that a number of our staff were developing, and the related fact that we had an expanding body of doctoral research students working in areas of media history. So in many ways we were a natural target for archives, even if we did not see that at the time. We should also say that some collections have been turned away and some have come with demands on the University that we could not meet at the time they were offered. What is different from Bournemouth's experience to that of a dedicated archive is that we were able to ask the question right from the beginning; what do we want to do with this? How can we exploit this collection for our own research? What value is this collection to researchers and Ph.D candidates and therefore potentially to the broader academic community ? From the outset then Bournemouth University and the Centre for Broadcasting History Research has sought to add value to collections through research and outputs rather than just taking a curatorial role. One of these outputs – for those who work in higher education this will not be news – is the financial value of funding from Research Councils and other funding bodies such as JISC. So the act of digitising collections with external funding was in fact an output. The first AHRB research funding received for the

University was for BBC Radio 4 Analysis collection. Combining the research funding and comparing it to other research groups across the University made at one point CBHR the most successful research group at securing external funding. In other words it was a virtuous circle. Funding was a good thing, and the University and the Library collaborated to find space for donations. There have been other benefits in securing material suitable for post graduate research at a time when the University was expanding funding for Ph.Ds and this has helped build the CBHR. It is true that no collection accepted by CBHR and the Library has gone without some form of research attention. This approach gives a distinctive methodology to CBHR research, focusing in primary sources, radio programmes. Taken a step further, it focuses on programmes and programme makers, and because the collection we have focuses on documentary and current affairs – as opposed for example to drama (although drama and creative features are indeed represented in our collections – in particular in the LBC/IRN archive), there are applications beyond the study of media history, to history in the broader sense. But to return to specifically media-related resources, an early inspiration for our activities was John Corner who, to paraphrase, said that access to primary materials

or the lack of it was a significant block to the development of the research and teaching in media. Bournemouth's experience has to some extent supported this in reverse. Access to primary sources has created research opportunities.

Project Funding

Digitising through project funding has brought its own challenges. For one thing, the ILR Programme Sharing Archive Digitisation which we did in-house, was transferred the collection onto CDR's with the excellent assistance of the late Peter Copeland from the British Library, our partners in the project. At that time the thought of having the entire collection on a single disk was just beyond our reach technically. Disks of sufficient capacity and low cost were just coming onto the market. By the time the project had finished – and the money was spent – it was possible, and added hugely to the accessibility of the collection. All on one single disk rather than 1500 CDR's. The CBHR paid a technician to transfer all the recordings onto one disk, and from here it was only one step away from distributing the entire audio collection over the web. We should mention here the support of our long time collaborator the British Universities Film and Video Council [BUFVC] who have

been with us every step of the way. Without BUFVC's long term commitment to these projects this would not have been possible within the constraints of short term project funding. It illustrates another hard learned lesson - that project funding will only get you half way there. You have to take seriously the longer term stability of resources created, and changes in technology. Even the most clear sighted vision of where you want to be at the end of a digitisation project - as we have learned - can be undermined by changes in the technology to deliver it. Project funders have for the most part been sympathetic to these issues, in part because they affect digitisation projects in all media.

Project funding, more so with the JISC than the AHRC, also has the benefits in plugging our projects - and in particular radio - into the UK HE and FE content infrastructure. Whatever the medium, we are, like the British Library's excellent ASR projects, building content for UK HE. JISC expects delivery and they will exploit it and diffuse information about it through their own channels. Radio and moving image are late comers to this process, but their very presence in the UK HE content mix ensures that they will be used - *and* used by a much wider community than we are currently able

to envisage. We can't really know what a political scientist will make of access to radio news, documentary and current affairs of the Thatcher years in the future, but it *will* add another dimension to the research – because access became that much easier after March 2009.

A Special Context

The relationship of CBHR with these collections is very specific, even special, for a number of reasons. We have alluded to the knowledge about radio that exists within the University and the benefits to the CBHR in research. However, the area that CBHR has specialised in is Independent Radio from the period 1973 to roughly 1996 - although there is less material after the 1990 Broadcasting Act - the Act which as we have seen, transformed Independent Local radio from a medium with a balance of local content, quality speech and music, to a largely music-based medium. 1990 was also the year in which the Programme Sharing Scheme closed for the same reason. Many of those who created the material are still living and working in radio or in early retirement. Underpinning these collections are many strong

personal networks of contacts and a wealth of as yet untapped knowledge that will add context and meaning to the collections. Bournemouth University and the CBHR has been able to tap into these networks. Within this lies another project – for which we are hoping to seek funding - to capture that experience through audio interviews in the perhaps brief window that presents it self. CBHR intends to create another oral history for example of the LBC / IRN years, to go with the LBC /IRN Collection. Thus we would envisage the possibility of the researcher having the opportunity of listening to Jon Snow’s LBC/IRN ‘live’ report – via one of the first radio telephones available to journalists, on the ending of the Balcombe Street siege on 12 December 1975, linked to a current interview with Jon, in which he recounts from an historical perspective, his reflections on the event.

These networks have helped in other ways. One example is the lack of the expected material on the Falklands in the Central Southern Independent Radio Collection – a gap that was made good through the personal collections of programme makers.

What is good about these projects?

From the point of view of the radio scholar and researcher this question really answers itself. We cannot study and research radio without the raw material. Yet we do have to make a case for the value of the material for other and future scholars. The first point to make is that within the history of Independent Radio exist many of the innovations that we now take for granted, especially on BBC networks and stations like Radio 5 Live. The development of phone-ins, a very early example of which is in the LBC / IRN Collection. The first use live of a report called into the studio using radio telephone (Jon Snow as previously mentioned), dual presentation, the increased presence of women reporters, a recognition of ethnic broadcasters; these innovations are recorded in books by Seán Street and Tim Crook, himself a key figure in the story. But we can expect a more substantial history of LBC / IRN to be written on the basis of access to the archive - one that perhaps places Independent Radio in its right context compared to that other great broadcaster, the BBC.

Our work on the LBC/IRN Archive has been challenging and thrilling; and a glance at some of the material is enough to

demonstrate its importance as a witness to history: this includes the *Decision Makers* series: weekly 30-minute programmes of political and current affairs analysis made by IRN and offered for free transmission across the whole Independent Local Radio network. This series, running as it did from 1974-86, provides a unique insight into politics and its reportage within the UK at the time.

Other recordings include “live” reporting of UK election results from 5 General Elections, giving a unique sense of the political shaping of the country, in particular the Thatcher years. There is also extraordinary material relating to the conduct of The Falklands War, including the following, all from just one month - April 1982:

- The Resignation of Lord Carrington
- Training and social life of troops en route for the conflict, aboard HMS Canberra
- Interview with Lieutenant Keith Mills, leader of the Marines who surrendered to Argentine Forces on South Georgia
US President Reagan and UK Secretary of State Alexander Haig

on talks with the Argentinean government, regarding the crisis.

In addition there is material of particular significance relating to the ending of apartheid in South Africa. Notable amongst these recordings is that of State President PW Botha's speech at the opening of the South African Parliament, in which he announced that the era of apartheid was over, and that tangible political structures were to be established to accommodate the black population in the decision making process. There is also accompanying political and journalistic analysis of this event.

To browse across the three collections is to find connections and programmes from different sources exploring important subjects from various angles, and at significant moments. Both Capital Radio and LBC made important early documentaries about AIDs, at a time when public knowledge of the disease was scant to say the least. These programmes were important then for their vital role of informing; they are important now because they give us a window into the context of the time in which we as a society were just coming to grips with the implications of AIDs.

The archive is a rich source of such significant moments in history; drama on our own streets – the IRA bombings, the killing of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, the Miners' Strike. It contains a range of interviews with key political figures, capturing their very words on momentous events and placing them within the contemporary context. It provides the political commentary and records the reactions journalistic analysis of events in real time. It is therefore both the content of the archive and the unique historical record of the period which gives makes the LBC/IRN collection such an important resource for research, and for learning and teaching.

I hope that the data which has been placed alongside the programmes themselves will also aid this. It has been a challenge in some cases, to build a body of material that provides a context for the user, in some cases more than 30 years after that material was originally archived. For example, in the case of the LBC/IRN collection, a card index and an early computer database had been intended for immediate, day-to-day journalistic use, and once we dug into it we found that in many cases it lacked information a modern day researcher would need. It was rather like an old family

photograph album in which names and details had been omitted because they were either irrelevant, or known and therefore taken for granted at the time. A key – and time-consuming part of our project – has been to research information from primary sources, in order to build a body of complementary text to support the online audio.

Good also is the access – the added dimension – that these programmes will give to students and researchers in contemporary society and politics. The LBC / IRN project allows scholars to hear contemporary figures being interviewed, discussing and defending their ideas at the time events were taking place. All three projects – The Programme Sharing Archive (dedicated to the late Felicity Wells, who co-ordinated the project for the AIRC in the 1980s), the Central Southern England Archive, and the LBC/IRN Archive - will deliver in excess of 4000 hours of radio or 32 thousand individual items.

What have we learned?

Of course we have learned about project management, bidding for funding and what makes a good project. But part of this process

has been an exploration of the limits of copyright, data protection and freedom of information. These restrictions are not as onerous as they seem. When our legal advisor first went to a workshop run by JISC in the early stages of the LBC/IRN project, he came back and said more or less that ‘the project has to stop now’. However, considered examination of Broadcasting Law, custom and practice in the industry and discussions with the Information Commissioner have overcome many of the imagined problems we faced. And not least in that process of overcoming has been the good will and support of the industry responsible for the programmes in the first place. There’s has been a ‘can do’ philosophy without which much less would have been possible. Fortune favours the brave, and those who are prepared to seek answers to difficult questions.

Professor Sean Street

Matt Holland

March 2009