

The TVTimes Digitisation Project 1955 - 1985

Introduction

The TV Times Digitisation Project aims to microfilm *The TVTimes* London and regional editions, digitise the microfilm for the London edition and create a database of the schedules of the London edition for the period from 1955 - 1985. The project is one of a number of Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) funded projects in the area of radio and television and one of two major projects lead by Professor John Ellis, a leading media researcher and academic at Royal Holloway, University of London. It is now in a final, but lengthy phase of data inputting into the schedule database. This paper addresses a number of aspects of the project: the importance of *The TVTimes*; a history of programme journals; historic audience research - an important related issue; the value of the project to teaching and learning; the Schedules Database; the contribution of the project to best practice and finally future directions for the project.

What's this about the TVTimes then?

To those not familiar with broadcasting research, *The TVTimes* is not an obvious choice for digitisation. The author, having claimed to be involved in research projects to a colleague working at a red brick university was rewarded with amusement having cited *The TVTimes* as an example. *The TVTimes* is thought of as ephemera, a disposable television listings magazine. Perhaps the reaction to a project to digitise *The Radio Times*, associated with the wholesome values of the BBC and public service broadcasting might elicited a more positive response. However, the poor image of the *TVTimes* is the key to this project, as *The TVTimes* is now very rare indeed. Libraries preferred to keep *The Radio Times* instead of *The TVTimes*. The current publisher IPC Media does not have an archive. To our knowledge only one complete printed London and all regions set exists in the British Library and another in various formats in the bfi. An incomplete northern edition exists in Manchester Public Library. A second hand book dealer in the broadcasting area has not seen a set in 25 years of trading and the location of sets in the hands of private collectors remain unknown, copyright for schedule data lay with the independent television companies providing a lucrative source of income. They fought hard with the publishing industry, regulators and government to retain control of copyright. *The Radio Times* played a similar role for the BBC, equally vigilant in guarding their copyright. *The TVTimes* therefore together with *The Radio Times* are the only complete source for knowing what

was broadcast on a particular time or date and therein lies their value. This duopoly was abolished by the Broadcasting Act, 1990.

Programme journals - a very short history

Bernard Sendall (1982) and Jeremy Potter (1990) have written an extensive history of independent television on which the following is based. Jeremy Potter's is a first hand account as he was Managing Director of Independent Television Publications (ITP) Ltd. from 1970 to 1979, publisher of *The TVTimes* from 1968 to 1990.

When independent television was launched in 1955 there were a number of aspects that were unplanned. One was the need for a single television schedule. Sir Robert Fraser, Director General of the Independent Television Authority (ITA), 1954-1970, anticipated the need for a single schedule, or to use the industry term programme journal, to compete with *The Radio Times*. However, the copyright to programme journals was given to the individual television companies in the initial franchise negotiations. Provided the programme journals were published the ITA would not interfere. The ITA did produce its own publication in 1963, the first *ITV Annual*, a parallel publication to the *BBC Handbooks*. There is some anecdotal evidence that the independent television companies did not initially understand the financial value of their monopoly of schedules data. Associated-Rediffusion (London Region) first offered it to *The Radio Times* but were rejected, as the BBC wanted nothing to do with the upstart competitor (Pers. Com.). However, Associated Newspapers, owners of the Daily Mail and partners in Associated-Rediffusion (they pulled out in 1958), did appreciate the opportunity and launched *The TV Times* under the guidance of Stuart McClean. The first print run in September 1955 of 300,000 sold out. In an interview three years later the Managing Director of Associated Rediffusion, Paul Adorian, was able to respond to criticism leveled at Associated-Rediffusions programming by the Observer with the comment "The Observer's attitude? I don't know; what is its circulation? One seventh of the TV Times? And we have only been going three years ..." (Jenkins 1961 p 93-94)

Regional editions of *The TVTimes* were published in eight of the fifteen independent television franchises in 1963 (ITV, 1963). Other regions produced their own programme journals: Channel Television - *The Channel Viewer*; Scottish Television - *The Viewer*; TWW - *Television Weekly*; Tyne Tees Television - *The Viewer*; Ulster Television - *TV Post*; Wales/Teledu Cymru - *Wales TV* and *Teledu Cymru*; Westward Television - *Look Westward*; Midlands - *TV World* (1964-1968). This diversity of publication came to an end in 1968. The Independent Television Authority (ITA), Chaired by Lord Hill, 1963-1967, made it a condition of the franchise renewal process in 1967 that the

independent television companies agree to a single programme journal. "There were seven different programme journals in seven different editions. Some were good some were bad. The authority decided on the creation of a single journal for Independent Television with regional editions. A single publishing company be formed by the programme companies." (Lord Hill, 1974). Lord Hill's comment reflects a concern with the uneven quality of programme journals. They were popular, cheap to produce and profitable. Quality was not a primary concern. Perhaps more importantly they did not compare well with rival BBC publication *The Radio Times*. The decision was unpopular because of the loss of regional autonomy. Potter (1990) records that copies of *The TV Post* were burned in protest on the floor of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The only franchise to win its argument with the ITA was Channel Television who kept *The Channel Viewer* (1962-1971), continued as the *Channel TV Times* (1971-1987) and finally *CTV Times* (1987 – 1991).

To refer back briefly to *The TVTimes Digitisation Project*, regional data is key to understanding the differences in the programming and scheduling strategy of independent television companies in their formative years. Early copies of the London edition did contain schedules for the Midlands. However, the majority of regional information is contained in separate regional editions. These are to be microfilmed, but the current project is not funded to include regional schedules in the Schedules Database. Not included in the project either are the seven additional regional programme journals published in addition to the *TV Times*. These are all held by the British Library with the exception of *Wales TV* and *Teledu Cymru*. There is potential to extend the regional dimension if researchers want it and if an acceptable bid can be made for funding.

The story of *The TVTimes* changes post 1968. A new company, jointly owned by the then fourteen independent television companies, Independent Television Publications (ITP) was established. Peter Jackson, former editor of the AA's *Drive Magazine* (now a part time lecturer at Bournemouth University) and with extensive experience in IPC of editing women's magazines became the first editor. The new magazine took over the staff from *The TV Times* and the title with one minor change, it became one word *TVTimes*. It is worth noting that there are clashes between the flexibility of the television schedules and the inflexibility of copy and print deadlines. In effect the schedules are a record of what was intended to be broadcast and not what was actually broadcast. *The TVTimes*, however, carried some weight and Potter records instances where schedule changes were blocked after the magazine had gone to press.

The TVTimes and *The Radio Times* became the largest circulation magazines of the day with combined readerships of 12 million or 8 million copies sold. This success was entirely built on the monopoly of schedules data. The

independent television companies represented by the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA) fought off a sustained attack from publishers and government, in the form of the Estimates Committee and the Annan Committee, to surrender their copyright and make schedules freely available. Perhaps reflecting the quality concerns of Lord Hill a decade earlier, the Annan Committee was strong in its criticism of the duopoly, "Are the high circulations of the Radio Times and TVTimes achieved simply because they are popular, or only because the broadcasters prevent anyone else publishing a programme journal by exercising their copyright? Some of us found the layout and editorial features of the journals dull and unimaginative." (Annan 1977, p 465). In its defence ITV found common cause with the BBC. Both organisations comment on the value of the letters page as a means of communicating to readers. ITV put forward the best commercial case it could given the limited competition that can exist in a duopoly "They are competitive and complementary show windows: one dressed in a style appropriate to ITV, the other that expected of the BBC ... Readers of both would no doubt find it a convenience if all television details were between the sets of one cover, but a merger would mean the end of two of the most popular magazines in Britain." (ITV 1975). The BBC appealed to its Charter with only a passing reference to the profit motive, "The whole Business (of publishing *The Radio Times*) is conducted as a public service which is also a profit making enterprise. The Charter of the BBC declares that one of the objects of the Corporation is to "compile and prepare, print, publish, issue, circulate and distribute with books Circulars and other matter as may be conducive to any of the objects of the Corporation". (BBC 1974). The Annan Committee did not appear overly impressed by these arguments but did not force the issue. Instead, following the Annan Committee Report, the Home Office required both the BBC and independent television companies to account separately for the revenues from programme journals. The battle was lost in the Broadcasting Act, 1990, when the independent television companies and the BBC were forced to surrender their duopoly.

Audience research - an even shorter history

Another unforeseen need was for ratings or audience figures. To dwell on this for a moment, ratings and audience research are another missing 'primary text' in the history of independent television but a very crucial one because of independent television's relationship with advertising. An 'ad hoc' committee of advertisers and television companies oversaw early ratings research following the launch of commercial television in 1955. AC Nielson, an American company, and Television Audience Measurement (TAM), a British company, competed to offer ratings services. There is an amusing account of Art Nielson's bid to capture the market by Robert Silvey, Head of the

BBC's Audience Research Unit, (1974) in which after a heavy lunch Art Nielson took an unnecessarily long 50 minutes to sell his services. In addition he used an early version of visual aid, large cards with single keywords on them, EFFICIENT, SWIFT, ECONOMICAL and MOMENT-BY-MOMENT. Silvey reported that "[a] deferential aid stood by to whisk away each card as Neilson's elephantine exposition disposed of its point. ...I overheard one of my fellow guests muttering grimly that after this experience of paralysing boredom not even the Archangel Gabriel would induce him to subscribe to this service." (Silvey 1974, p175-176).

In 1961 an industry wide organisation was created, the Joint Industry Committee for Television Advertising Research (JICTAR) owned by the Independent Television Companies Association (ITCA), the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA) and Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA). A contract to collect audience ratings data was awarded by JICTAR to TAM. In August 1968 the contract was transferred to a new organisation formed from ex-TAM board members, Audits of Great Britain Ltd. (AGB). These early audience research surveys were in the collection of the Independent Television Commission (ITC) Library and recently came to light in the transfer of the material to the **bfi**. A bid to create electronic copies of this data and links to the Schedules Database failed. However, this is an avenue that will be worth exploring and one that is of significant value to researchers, teachers and students.

It's learning and teaching Jim, but not as we know it ...

The TVTimes Digitisation Project is one of a number of projects which aims to provide access to 'primary texts' in broadcasting. Usually 'primary texts' are television and radio programmes but the definition is extended here to include information about television and radio programmes. Briefly these projects are a Major Award *Did ITV Revolutionise British Television?* a Small Research Grant looking at *This Week*, an independent television current affairs programme, and a Research Enhancement Award to digitise the *Independent Local Radio Programme Sharing Archive*. The British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFVC) is currently undertaking a pilot study for a major digitisation project with the archive of ITN. On a smaller scale Professor John Corner at the University of Liverpool has completed research into another independent current affairs programme, *World in Action*. The unifying theme in all these projects is that they are concerned with the independent broadcasting sector, up to now an under researched area of British broadcasting.

The issue of access to primary texts has in the view of a number of scholars restricted the development of a research agenda and curricula in television and radio. John Corner in his book *The Art of Record* (1996), describes the impact of the difficulty of obtaining television output on teaching and research in television documentary. "The difficulty of (legally) obtaining primary texts for screening and study has limited the place of documentary on the syllabus. This is particularly true of broadcast television output ... It is also true that the very modest, if increasing size of academic literature, particularly that usable for teaching, has until now dissuaded many lecturers from attempting much more than the most selective and brief treatments." (Corner 1996, p5.).

The TVTimes Digitisation Project was conceived as a project to enable research. The conference theme addressing the impact on teaching and learning, however, challenges us to take our thinking about the project one step further and consider how it will be used in a teaching and learning context. We know from analysing our own needs as researchers and from informal contacts with researchers who have come across the project by word-of-mouth, that access to the Schedules Database is likely both to inform existing research and stimulate new research and in due course to support a growing literature on independent television. Following John Corner's observation, this literature when it appears may persuade lecturers to attempt in depth treatments of independent broadcasting.

It is worth commenting here that public broadcasting in the United Kingdom, in the form of The BBC, is well represented, perhaps over represented, in broadcasting history. There are a number of reasons for this. One is certainly the degree of access scholars have to BBC Archives, especially the excellent BBC Written Archive at Caversham. Those involved in the BBC felt it almost a public duty to record their experiences in many memoirs, providing a rich source of first hand information. In contrast those working in independent television are comparatively reticent, including Sir Robert Fraser, the first Director General of the Independent Television Authority (ITA), 1954-1970 who records his views in a few brief pamphlets.

A more direct impact will come from the release of the Schedules Database over the web. Plans are in hand to release the Schedules Database to all in higher and further education from the British Universities Film and Video Council website, subject to a satisfactory agreement with the copyright holder IPC Media. We know there is already a group of experts who value the Schedules Database and will want to share it with their students. One strategy to stimulate interest in the Schedules Database is to ask experts to write case studies as exemplars for lecturers and students and make them available from the same location as the database. A methodology widely adopted by the Learning and Teaching Subject Centres (LTSN's) and for other electronic resources.

The Project

Writing from experience gained from other projects the project team for *The TVTimes* brought together a strong mix of project management skills and experience. One of the key challenges has been placing work with third party providers. This has included using a consultant from the Higher Education Digitisation Service (HEDS) to write a technical specification for the digitisation process. The work itself was placed with a commercial company, DocuMangement, selected after a lengthy tendering process managed by the Bournemouth University Purchasing Department. The key document, the invitation to tender, included the technical specification as well as a significant portion of legal and financial information. This process did extend the time it took to select the final company but proved very rewarding, delivering a competitively priced bid to our chosen standards. The data management of the project, including the design of the database, harvesting the data and eventually making it available on the web has been contracted to the BUFVC. By placing work and resources with the BUFVC, we hope to underwrite access to other broadcasting projects to create a framework for a television and radio portal hosted by the BUFVC. In addition the BUFVC and Bournemouth University now have extensive experience in database design using our chosen software for the project FileMaker. Copies of all the outputs of the project are deposited with Arts and Humanities Data Service/Performing Arts Data Service (AHDS/PADS) for long-term storage and preservation. Working with third parties and professional intermediaries has made a significant contribution to the project's success.

The Schedules Database

We hope that by working closely with the BUFVC the final public access to the Schedules Database will inherit the capabilities of the excellent TRILT (The Television and Radio Index for Learning and Teaching) database. BUFVC

The screenshot shows a web-based search interface for the TRILT database. At the top, there are search filters for 'SEARCH', 'DATE', and 'HYBRID'. Below this, the main heading is 'Multi Channel Listings'. The interface includes a search bar with the text 'SEARCH FOR TV SERVICES AND RADIO SERVICES AS OF CHANNEL'. There are several tabs or sections visible, including 'SEARCH RESULTS', 'SEARCH FILTERS', and 'SEARCH RESULTS'. The search results are displayed in a table format with columns for 'Channel', 'Time', 'Programme', 'Genre', 'Duration', 'Frequency', and 'Notes'. The table contains several rows of data, including entries for 'BBC1', 'BBC2', and 'BBC4' with various programme titles and times.

are due to host their own version of TRILT from September 2003.

TRILT serves the dual purpose of providing current awareness for off-air broadcasting and a research tool for media scholars. TRILT has undergone an extensive trial with user communities and it is expected that the interface will develop in the light of their feedback.

Particularly helpful for example is the capability to visualise schedule data in a graphical display showing schedules hour by hour on a single day in the TRILT *What's On* area. The screen shot, courtesy of BUFVC and taken from 12 August 2003, illustrates the type of display we aim for. The ability to select days or dates for comparison over a number of years gives an instant visual indication of changes or

quizzes and light entertainment was to be a key differentiation for ITV from the BBC. However, it also raised questions about what we might today call 'dumbing down'. For the informed researcher, the Schedules Database is a fast and easy route to quantitative information which can underpin qualitative assessments of scholars, commentators and participants. For the novice user, it is a general reference tool with access to programme synopses and descriptions. It enables a quick exploration of the full schedules that expands the partial information - tables and Schedule summaries - currently available in existing published sources.

Digital Futures

Future developments are in four areas, enhancing the data, creating a complete schedules database, collecting the electronic outputs of these projects into a single portal and audience research data.

- *This Week* and *World in Action*, have created schedules databases as a methodological tool in which to store data about programmes and programme makers and participants collected by expert researchers with extensive background knowledge. There is potential either to include this data within *The TVTimes* Schedules Database or to link to separate databases for both these projects from the Schedules Database.
- Current and future schedules data collection appears to be secure with the TRILT Project. With 30 years of independent television schedules also available, a complete historic schedules record is possible, including BBC television and independent television between 1985- 1998. It should include radio: national radio, local radio and independent radio as well as regional schedules. Some of this data may already be in electronic form in corporate archives.
- The number of projects in radio and television represent a critical mass of information. Work to assemble it into one electronic location is ongoing in partnership with the BUFVC. It requires careful preparation in clearing rights, assembling the data and reengineering interfaces to a uniform level of presentation.
- Finally, there are the early audience research data sets, particularly for the period 1955-1961. Electronic access to these could be as significant as the Schedules Database.

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