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LBC/IRN Archive Teaching and Learning Case Study

Introduction

The online archive provides lecturers, researchers and students with an extraordinary wealth of audio material covering the period 1973-1996. Precisely how this is best used in a teaching and learning context will probably only emerge after the resource has been used in various schools, colleges and universities. The subjects covered are so diverse that it is hard to know whether, for example, it is the history of Northern Ireland, or changing attitudes to food, which prove to be the most productive subjects. Will it be students of the media, and of course in particular radio, who exploit the archive, or those studying recent British history; political, social and cultural? There are, however, some general points worth making about the archive and how it might be used before looking in a bit more detail at what is available;

- The archive is important both in terms of content (especially news and current affairs coverage of political, economic, social and cultural events and developments) and for also for production techniques employed (including interviews, vox pops, phone-ins, reportage and rolling news).
- The online resource lends itself to student centred learning in which the student can explore the archive using the search and key word functions. This will probably work best as a relatively non-prescriptive task which allows the student to wander through the material in their own way (see the examples below).
- Perhaps the most exciting archive-based student projects will include examples of audio which have been downloaded and then edited and incorporated into a web based report with audio examples, possibly within a multimedia product.

Examples

It is important not to forget the extraordinary size and breadth of the resource and so any attempt to suggest particular routes or subjects is in danger of appearing to restrict the possibilities offered by the archive.

These suggestions are only that, they are a very small and restricted sample. The aim here is to identify possible routes or entry points in the archive which might at least serve to give a student a start, or an initial project, from which other research ideas and routes might emerge.

MARGARET THATCHER

The archive covers her career from election as Leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 to her resignation in 1990. A great deal of this is in her own words as she is interviewed or heard giving speeches during her time as Leader of the Opposition and then Prime Minister. Of particular interest is the earlier material at a time, in the 1970s, when her famously rigid political views had been less clearly formulated, for example in an early interview with Peter Allen (31 January 1975) or the interview with Brian Hayes (January 1976). The archive allows us to trace the history of the period through Thatcher's career and to take diversions into specific historical moments such as the Falklands War and The Miners Strike.

THE MINERS' STRIKE

A search for 'coal miners' produces 56 results but there are 79 for the famous 1984-1985 strike. The dispute was discussed in no less than 9 of the LBC current affairs programmes, *Decision Makers*. Coverage of this extremely acrimonious strike includes interviews, 'reportage' and the use of vox pops providing an unusually graphic sound history. The strike is particularly important for analysis of the media as it raises questions about bias; an exploration of this part of the

archive would make it possible to carry out some interesting primary research – perhaps comparing television coverage (see research by the Glasgow Media Group) with commercial radio.

PHONE-INS AND VOX POPS

The phone-in became the signature technique of LBC and IRN. Unlike the BBC, in which the phone-in was generally seen as a populist gimmick, commercial radio embraced the possibilities of the technique. As a distinct genre it can be searched, as can ‘phone’, to produce a great variety of programming. To take just two examples; a phone-in from 19 July 1974 includes a man swearing about IRA bombers in a very disturbing sequence and a programme from 1976 has callers talking about the problems of the Notting Hill Carnival to produce a programme which gives an excellent insight into questions of race, crime and policing.

Vox pops were also widely used on commercial radio and also unpopular in the BBC. The use of ‘the voice of the people’ added greatly to the variety of voices heard and this means that the archive does include a particular richness of speech. Vox pops, like phone-ins, also added to the emotional range of speech radio with the sounds of people who are angry, upset, frightened and so on.

The phone-in programme, *Nightline*, dealt with personal issues and this provides a neat segue to a different sort of content in the archive.

HEALTH AND AIDS

There are 297 items in the archive related to health. This provides a fascinating survey of changing attitudes towards a range of health issues including smoking, mental illness (and the ‘care in the community’ policy), the health service and the particularly dramatic health story of the 1980s, AIDS. Although there are

relatively few programme on AIDS, there are key word links to 'sexual behaviour' and 'homosexuals'.

MARRIAGE

Another personal issue is marriage. Like Health this takes us away from the more conventional hard news and current affairs content in the archive. There are 27 programmes featuring the subject of marriage and these include royal weddings, Christianity and marriage, teenage marriage, decline of the institution and so on. Given the changing attitudes towards marriage over the 23 years of the archive, this is audio source material which would enable an interesting look at changing attitudes over time.

IRELAND

One of the great achievements of the archive is to provide an extraordinary sound history of the conflict in Northern Ireland with over 339 results for a key word search for 'Ireland'. This coverage includes interviews, political discussions, reportage and actuality. There are 24 items featuring the Northern Irish politician, Ian Paisley and 139 results are produced by searching for the 'IRA'. The coverage is not only about Ireland but also includes hostage crises in the UK and the disastrous consequences of IRA bombs. Students of Irish politics, Thatcherism, Terrorism and of radio itself will find a great deal of value here.

A search just for **hostage** is also very productive with 22 results including reports and discussions on the Balcombe Street Siege, kidnapping by the Red Army Faction and the very important Iranian Hostage Crisis.

