

BURSTING OUT OF THE ARCHIVES: WOMEN IN THE BBC 1922-1939

In March 1936 Miss A.M.P. Mills, the BBC's Registry Supervisor, was given permission to recruit a second-in-command for the rapidly growing department she headed. The Registry was the repository for the Corporation's inexorably expanding paperwork, the reality of an organisation that had grown from just four employees in December 1922 to 2,528 by December 1936, 820 of whom were women. The meticulously filed records, formally maintained from August 1927 when Miss Mills was appointed to the job, now form the backbone of the BBC's capacious Written Archives, housed at Caversham Park in Reading. Intriguingly, it was four female staff who inaugurated the Corporation's other key archival sources. Florence Milnes was the BBC's first Librarian, holding the position from 1926 until 1958. Kathleen Lines was in charge of the photographic department for twenty two years, from 1925 to 1947. In 1937, Marie Slocombe began her nurturing of the fledgling BBC Sound Archives, a department she then headed until 1972 while in 1931 Kathleen Edwin was tasked with maintaining the official BBC Archives as part of her duties as secretary to Reith's deputy, Admiral Carpendale¹. That women held these important positions is perhaps not so surprising. Librarianship and administration were two of the professions that were becoming increasingly acceptable work for women in the inter-war years.²

Miss Mills' quest for an assistant proved to be a protracted affair. The advertisement, which stressed that applicants should be female, aged between 25-35 with a university education, a librarian's training and the ability to control staff, was placed in *The Times* and *The Manchester Guardian*.³ It was also sent to the Women's Appointments Boards of many universities and to Mrs Ray Strachey, Secretary of the Women's Employment Federation.⁴ In the event, there were 147 external and three internal applicants for the post. Eighteen women were invited for interview at Broadcasting House however the selection committee of four senior staff failed to appoint.⁵ Advice was sought as to why no suitable candidates had applied. Miss Young, from the Cambridge University Women's Appointment Board thought that the advertisement had not given enough information; Ray Strachey "was of the opinion that a higher starting salary would have resulted in more applicants".⁶ With "the matter now becoming urgent", five further candidates were called for interview. When none were deemed suitable it was agreed that a Miss Grandy, who had recently been seen in connection with the position of Statistician, should be offered the post.⁷ On June 29th 1936 she started in the Registry on a salary of £260 a year.⁸ Working alongside Miss Mills, she would oversee thirty six female filing clerks and two office boys.⁹

The detailed process of recruiting an Assistant Supervisor in the Registry is just one of countless narratives that can be told through the documents held at the BBC's Written Archives Centre. The files are well trawled, with hundreds of books and papers having been written about the BBC. However, few have told the story of the women who worked for the Corporation. Newspaper articles from the 1930s validate their significance with ebullient headlines such as: 'Important Women of the BBC's Big House'; 'The Women at Broadcasting House'; 'The Women who Rule the Air Waves'.¹⁰ Asa Briggs, the foremost of the BBC's historians, does include significant references to Hilda Matheson, the Director of Talks from 1927-1932 and Mary Somerville, the Director of Schools Broadcasting from 1931.¹¹ However, while

Briggs acknowledges “the key part women played in the daily running of the organisation”, the individual women themselves receive only fleeting mentions.¹² This is not unexpected as, until recently, women have largely been neglected in most company histories. While several early BBC men wrote accounts of their time with the organisation, Olive Shapley, a pioneer of the radio feature, provides the single memoir of a woman working at the BBC before the war.¹³ Hilda Matheson, the most well known of the early BBC women, is the only one to have subsequently merited a biography.¹⁴ Matheson was the sole woman to have been head-hunted by Reith. He enticed her away from her high-powered job as Political Secretary to Nancy Astor MP in 1926.

The British Broadcasting Company had been formed in October 1922 by the major wireless manufacturers, under government direction, as a means of promoting the sale of radios and co-ordinating radio output. Finance was provided by a 10s licence fee, half of which went to the new company and half to the Post Office.¹⁵ John Reith, who was appointed General Manager in December 1922, confessed to knowing nothing about wireless when he applied for the job.¹⁶ This would soon change with Reith becoming a passionate champion of public service broadcasting. He led the debates that saw the British Broadcasting Company become the British Broadcasting Corporation on January 1st 1927, under Royal Charter.¹⁷ The BBC was by then broadcasting a wide range of programmes including concerts, plays, variety performances, sporting events, news bulletins, debates and talks as well as the popular Children’s Hour. Listening figures had grown rapidly. By September 1924, almost one million licences had been brought. In January 1927, this figure had risen to more than two million and at the outbreak of the Second World War, licence holders were in excess of nine million.¹⁸ Reith estimated that the average number of listeners per licence was five: “though for any special occasion an infinitely greater number can gather.”¹⁹ On this calculation, by 1927 the BBC’s audience was already upwards of ten million with most of the population having access to a radio by 1939.²⁰

The Corporation was a highly attractive place to work, especially for women. In November 1936 the House Superintendent, H.L. Chilman, confirmed that there were two thousand names on his waiting list for charwomen.²¹ Working class women were also employed as waitresses and wardrobe staff, however, the majority of the BBC’s female employees came from middle and lower-middle class households. A small but significant number had gone to university, such as Miss A.M.P. Mills who had studied history at St Hilda’s College, Oxford.²² Many others had attended secretarial training school and it was these capable, well educated young women who formed the bulk of those recruited into the BBC. From 1931, Miss G. M. Freeman was Women Staff Supervisor with responsibility for all but the most senior female staff. “She’s behind the girls behind the programmes!” the *Daily Mirror* exclaimed in January 1936 adding that “there are hundreds of them, but they respect the kindly staff ruling of tall, blonde, 100 per cent personality Miss Freeman. She has been through the mill herself, having risen to this big job from a small position as a BBC secretary.”²³ And it was a big job. In April 1939 Miss Freeman’s annual salary was £720 making her one of the most highly paid women in the Corporation.²⁴

The BBC was unusual in that women did have opportunities for promotion. At a time when most female clerks and secretaries were in dead-end jobs, a notable number of BBC women did rise through the ranks. Janet Adam Smith, who became

Assistant Editor of *The Listener*; Doris Arnold, who became a famed variety producer and presenter and Clare Lawson Dick, who ultimately became the first woman Controller of Radio Four in 1975, all began their careers as clerks or typists. In a memo on the subject of 'Women Assistants' from 1926, John Reith made clear that "they should be as eligible as men for promotion" earlier stating that "they should rank on the same footing as men."²⁵ Hilda Matheson was also aware of the BBC's atypical attitude to its female employees. Writing in 1931 she commented:

As regards women on the staff, the BBC has set an example which is not always to be found among public bodies. Women are not compelled to resign at marriage and equal pay for equal work is on the whole respected.²⁶

While the BBC archives do provide evidence of broadly equal pay, the introduction of a marriage bar in 1932 was to cause endless internal controversy and debate until its eventual removal in 1944.²⁷

The Establishment List for July 1939 gives a breakdown of both the gender and status of BBC staff. Of the 4,233 staff, just under one third, 1,362, were women.²⁸ Ninety of these women were considered senior enough to be monthly-paid, many having been promoted from the ranks of the weekly-paid staff. While the figure is small, only 6% of monthly-paid staff were female, the women concerned were involved in a range of important tasks. The rest of this article sets out to examine the careers of two of these women, the producer Janet Quigley and the women's press representative Elise Sprott. A third woman, Olga Collett, will also be considered. She worked for the BBC as an outside broadcaster and was not an established staff member therefore was not included in the 1939 staffing figures.

Research into these three women's BBC careers is very much a work-in-progress, as they are slowly tracked through the archives. While there has been increased investigation into the careers of professional women in the inter-war years, for example teachers, civil servants and university academics, there is scant information about women in large organisations.²⁹ Little is known about their backgrounds, their daily lives or their career progression. By providing a glimpse of these three BBC women I hope to address some of these issues.

Janet Quigley

Janet Quigley is the best known of the three, meriting an entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.³⁰ While Briggs makes no mention of her in the first two volumes of his BBC history, his war-time volume credits her significance in 'Home Front' broadcasting for women.³¹ For this she was awarded an MBE in 1944. Janet Quigley is unusual in that her staff file has been retained by the BBC Written Archives Centre.³² All too often a request for information about an individual is met with the apology that their personal file has been destroyed. Quigley's staff record gives her date of birth as May 10th 1902. She was educated at a Belfast high school, going on to read English at Oxford where she graduated in 1923. She then worked in publishing and bookselling before taking a job in the Publicity Department at the Empire Marketing Board. Her appointment to the BBC was almost certainly a result of her friendship with Isa Benzie, who she had met at Lady Margaret Hall and with whom she shared a flat.³³

Isa Benzie had joined the BBC in 1927 as a £3-a-week secretary to the Foreign Director, one of many women graduates who began their BBC careers in a lowly-paid secretarial capacity. In 1930, Benzie was promoted to the position of Assistant in the Foreign Department. When the need for a second Assistant was mooted, Janet Quigley was suggested for the job. After a successful interview, Quigley joined the BBC in January 1930 on £260 a year. Her glowing first annual report recommended that she be offered a substantial increase in salary, the £40 proffered would ensure she was earning the salary she would have had, had she remained in the Civil Service. There are frequent references to Quigley's great work in the Foreign Department which was responsible for the Corporation's overseas relationships. In particular, she worked with American representatives and on Empire correspondence. A memo from December 1934 finds Janet Quigley praised for her efficiency, balanced judgement and helpful sense of humour, specifying that "she always keeps her head, sticks to her guns and gets things done as they ought to be done."³⁴ Isa Benzie became Quigley's boss in 1934, when she was promoted to Foreign Director.

As a result of continual growth, the BBC faced constant internal reorganisation, with frequent staff moves. It is not clear why but in 1936 Janet Quigley was transferred from executive work in the Foreign Department to creative work in the Talks Department on an increased salary of £500 a year. Her initial responsibility was to be for Morning Talks although, as a *Radio Times* article from 1937 explained, she "got away with her suggestion that she should handle some afternoon talks as well."³⁵ Much of her work in the Talks Department would be aimed at women listeners.

Women were a key audience for the BBC. As Hilda Matheson, the Director of Talks, pointed out they were:

...bound to spend the greater part of their days at home. It is difficult to exaggerate what broadcasting has done and is doing for women.... The evidence from women, particularly poorer women, as to what a wireless set may mean to them, is one of the most remarkable and encouraging results of broadcasting.³⁶

From 1923-1924, a daily *Women's Hour* had been broadcast (not to be confused with the later *Woman's Hour*.) After the demise of the programme, women's interests were incorporated into general talks, being formalised in 1927 as *Household Talks* and later as *Morning Talks*. It was Hilda Matheson who had transformed the "Talk" into a mainstay of the BBC schedule, introducing a range of innovative programmes and broadcast techniques. *The Week in Parliament* (later *The Week in Westminster*) was one of her creations. The day before the first programme was broadcast on November 6th 1929, Matheson wrote to Nancy Astor:

We are plunging into a new experiment this autumn by having a woman MP to give a simple explanatory talk on the week in Parliament every Wednesday morning at 10.45 – the time most busy working women can listen best, when they have their cup of tea.³⁷

All the early programmes were presented by female MPs, beginning with Mary Agnes Hamilton, the Labour MP for Blackburn, who would become a Governor of the BBC in 1932.

By the time Janet Quigley took over responsibility for *The Week in Westminster* in 1936, male MP's were also included in the panel of speakers. Memos from 1937 show Quigley grappling with a change of day and time and attempting to assess the impact this was having on its audience. She was convinced that the move to 5.45pm on Fridays was detrimental to the programme's female listeners.³⁸ She also worked on the 1937 series "Towards National Health" which Paul Donovan has described as an early example of social action broadcasting, "combining self-help with an appeal to collectivism."³⁹ In April 1939, working with Ray Strachey of the Women's Employment Federation, Janet Quigley produced a series of six talks on *Careers for Women*. The Ministry of Labour were also consulted, with school leavers offered information and advice on careers in nursing, physical education, domestic service, dress making, the Civil Service and secretarial work. The first three areas were seen as particularly important as "besides being in urgent need of recruits they have direct bearing on national service."⁴⁰ This was to be a foretaste of Quigley's ground-breaking work during the Second World War.

There are hints that Janet Quigley was disabled. Her 'Confidential Report' for the first quarter of 1938 mentions that although she was "handicapped in different health" she got through an enormous amount of work, and never complained.⁴¹ Her 'Leaving Note' from 1945 stated that "in spite of bad health she does not spare herself and is clear headed in a crisis."⁴² A colleague who worked closely with her in the 1930s, described her as "...terrific... a constant inspiration...she coaxed the best out of you. The lameness you were unconscious of..."⁴³ That colleague was Olga Collett.

Olga Collett

On February 18th 1937, Mrs Olga Collett broadcast the first of her BBC talks, which was produced by Janet Quigley.⁴⁴ Collett had been inspired to submit her rough script for "On Political Canvassing" after a brief appearance on the wireless. While the final script has not been retained, the correspondence between Collett and Quigley does survive in the archives and provides a candid illustration of both a growing friendship and the process of creating a broadcast talk. Collett's first letter, dated February 3rd, is her suggestion of a talk on the lighter side of political campaigning. Quigley replied that while she liked the manuscript, it would need to be considerably abbreviated. She suggested that Collett concentrated on her personal experiences: "the story of your first platform and the little boy who rang the bell is delightful".⁴⁵ Collett agreed to "take an axe to it" returning the "drastically shortened version" on February 12th. There was also discussion about when exactly the talk was to be broadcast as Olga Collett had limited time; she had a full-time job as Female Staff Supervisor at ICI.

The ICI archive for this period is inaccessible, so it is fortuitous that the script for Collett's second talk has been kept by the BBC. This was an illuminating broadcast, focussing on her work for the chemical company. Aired on May 29th 1937, it was part of Quigley's 'Other Women's Lives' series, a Saturday morning programme which brought women to the microphone "to speak of some aspect of their lives that is likely to be of interest to other women."⁴⁶ Olga Collett spoke

candidly about her work and the tragedy that led to her getting the job. Her husband had been killed in an air accident in 1934 and, needing to find employment, she had applied to ICI who had offered her the position of supervising the 650 female staff at Head Office in London. It was a hefty responsibility:

The big problems with which I am continually concerned are recruitment of new staff, transfers of existing staff, and resignations, and I share also in discussions of confidential matters such as salary scales, and increments, Pensions and Assistance cases, or the policy of the Company with regard to women staff generally. In my firm, women resign on marriage. Yes. I know all the arguments, but there it is. And that means an average of about a hundred vacancies a year to fill.⁴⁷

Olga Collett's job at ICI was not dissimilar to that of Miss Freeman at the BBC. In 1937, Freeman would have been overseeing a similar number of female staff.

Collett's difficulties in juggling her day job at ICI with her work for the BBC increased in June 1937 when she gave the first of her commentaries for the Outside Broadcast Department. As well as writing to Janet Quigley, in March 1937 Olga Collett had also begun a correspondence with S.J. de Lotbiniere, the Director of Outside Broadcasts. Invited by him to audition on the roof of Broadcasting House, she so impressed him with her ability to describe the surrounding area that "at the end of eleven minutes he came and begged me to stop!"⁴⁸ She was subsequently contracted to commentate on the arrival of "their majesties" at that year's Ascot, for which she was paid eight guineas.⁴⁹ Collett was soon being invited to commentate at other events but was adamant that she was not going to let her BBC work jeopardise her position at ICI, so only accepted out-of-hours assignments. These included commenting on a Women's League of Health and Beauty demonstration in 1939 and, the same year, on the British Women's Ice Skating championships.⁵⁰ The latter was deemed to be such an exemplary broadcast that it was used for many years as an example of good practice by the BBC's Training Department.⁵¹

This recording is still available in the BBC's Sound Archives as is her most famous broadcast, commentating on the Royal Gala at Covent Garden held in honour of the French President's State Visit to the UK in March 1939.⁵² Collett was not only required to cover for a colleague who had been taken ill, but found herself having to 'fill' for more than half an hour, as the royal party was delayed. Her highly personalised descriptions of the outfits, the colours, the sounds, "a word picture of brilliance", made news headlines the following day. The newspaper reports also added further details about her private life revealing, for example, that her husband, a Squadron Leader, was killed during an RAF Pageant at Hendon in 1934. This was the same year that her father in law, Sir Charles Collett, was Lord Mayor of London.⁵³ One report hints at her age, that she would soon be forty, placing her year of birth as 1899.⁵⁴ Other snippets of Olga Collett's life and work emerge from the columns of the *Radio Times*, where her broadcast of, for example, the 1938 Lord Mayor's Banquet at the Guildhall is praised⁵⁵ and from a profile of her in *Radio Pictorial* in June 1939.⁵⁶ Headlined "Britain's Ace Radio Talker" the article, by an 'intimate friend' hinted that her training as a broadcaster was partly inspired by the political speeches she made on behalf of her brother, Kingsley Griffith, the Liberal MP for Middlesbrough West. The feature also included a rare photograph of her.

Elise Sprott

In 1939, Elise Sprott wrote an article for *Woman's Magazine* on 'Broadcasting for Women' which referred to Olga Collett as having "won golden opinions from many".⁵⁷ One of Miss Sprott's responsibilities as the BBC's Woman Press Representative was to supply newspapers and magazines with information about the women who worked for the Corporation. This was one of a number of roles that she fulfilled at the BBC.

An early employee, Sprott had joined the BBC in 1925. She is one of the women fleetingly referred to by Asa Briggs where she is described as "having moved from secretarial work to a post of considerable responsibility."⁵⁸ Elise Sprott is fascinating because of her ubiquity. She was a real 'doer', a woman who crops up in unexpected places all over the BBC. However, like the majority of the BBC's early employees her personal file has been destroyed which necessitates the piecing together of her life and career from a range of documents and sources. This includes the BBC's Photographic Collection which has retained a handful of photographs of Elise Sprott from the late 1930s and early 1940s. These show a cheerful, rotund woman, painfully unstylish but with a look of obvious pride in her work.⁵⁹

A file index card retained by the Written Archives Centre gives Sprott's date of birth as August 1st 1885. A few personal details can also be gleaned from the *News Chronicle* in July 1939 where she was profiled as part of a series on 'Women Behind the Mike'.⁶⁰ From this we learn that she was Cumberland-born, from a seafaring family, but had been prevented from taking her Master's Certificate "by the fact that women weren't allowed to." Instead, she took a commercial training, became a pioneer in motor engineering and, in 1908, took up nursing with the V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachments). During the First World War she became quartermaster to a Carlisle hospital; worked for the Ministry of Shipping in London; went to France as quartermaster to a 'girls unit' finally joining the United States Embassy staff.

Prior to becoming BBC staff, Elise Sprott had given broadcast talks, her debut being on *Women's Hour* in 1924. The *Radio Times* lists the subject of this first talk on June 14th as 'Continental Fashions in Food'. On July 29th she spoke on 'Refrigerators' and on September 25th she shared her experiences of 'Motoring through Bohemia'. On January 29th 1925, when she formally joined the British Broadcasting Company there is some uncertainty as to her initial position. Some documents specify that she started as secretary to J.C. Stobart, the Director of Education.⁶¹ The Salary Information files from 1939 state that she was appointed as an Assistant in the Talks Department.⁶²

Although she was 39 years old, with considerable experience, Elise Sprott's initial salary was only £3.15s a week. However, an analysis of the speed with which women rose from being weekly-paid to monthly-paid staff shows Sprott to be the fastest mover, gaining a salaried position of £260 within nine months of joining the BBC. By April 1930, she was earning £450. But, for reasons unknown, in June 1931 the Talks Department wanted to get rid of her. The Minutes of the Control Board, Reith's executive management committee, suggest that Miss Sprott had been replaced by "a more efficient junior."⁶³ Reith wrote about the incident in his diary: "Much discussion about Miss Sprott's case, both in general and in particular. I was

very angry with the way she has been handled.” Later he added that it was “mostly Miss Matheson’s fault.”⁶⁴ What had actually happened is as yet unknown.

It was decided that Miss Sprott should be moved to a different department, on a reduced salary. She accepted a position in the Information Branch, with responsibility for publicity in connection with women’s interests. She would also continue to broadcast. The *Radio Times* for September 11th 1931 lists her as presenting a series of Morning Talks on “Cooking for Beginners”. Her presentation style was obviously excellent because, as Woman’s Press Representative, she was invited on lecture tours all over the country, something for which she was frequently applauded in the local press.⁶⁵

That Elise Sprott was prodigious is apparent from the monthly progress reports she compiled for the Director of Information and Publications. In February 1932, for example, she presented details of the seven conferences she had attended and the seven lectures she had given.⁶⁶ This included attending the Annual Meeting of the Surrey County Federation of Women’s Institutes where she opened a discussion on “How WI’s can co-operate with the BBC.” She had also made contact with “a considerable number of magazines, covering many sides of women’s activities”; had sent the ‘usual’ newsletter to about 150 weekly and monthly magazines and had written articles for a number of women’s journals.

On April 24th 1936, Broadcasting House hosted a Women’s Conference, largely organised by Elise Sprott.⁶⁷ Convened by the Public Relations Division, under the direction of Sir Stephen Tallents, the conference brought together hundreds of individuals representing dozens of women’s organisations “for an exchange of views on the subject of the BBC’s Morning Talks.” Opinions were sought on five key areas: the timing of talks; whether cookery and child welfare talks were of value; whether listeners liked regular talks on current affairs; whether there was a woman’s point of view on subjects such as books and music and how women’s organisations could encourage their members to make more use of broadcast talks. The total attendance for the morning session, which was introduced by the BBC Governor Mary Agnes Hamilton, was 449. Amongst those who spoke were Mrs Peattie of the British Federation of University Women; Lady Rhys Williams from the Joint Council of Midwifery and Mrs Amon, speaking as “an ordinary working man’s wife”. Mrs Peattie expressed the opinion that 9.30am was a better time for talks while Mrs Amos preferred 10.45am, when the working woman would have done her shopping. Lady Rhys Williams stressed the importance of broadcast talks as a means of co-ordinating health services throughout the country. While there was great interest from the press and copious notes of the proceedings were taken, it is not clear how much impact the conference ultimately had on radio output.

The conference was one of the items commented upon in the first edition of the BBC staff journal *Ariel*, published in June 1936.⁶⁸ Also reviewed in the journal was the BBC Amateur Dramatic Society’s production of the comedy ‘The Sport of Kings’ which included Miss Elise Sprott and Sir John Reith amongst the cast. The drama society was one of many out-of-hours activities supported by the BBC. As well as amateur dramatics, the vibrant BBC Club provided a debating society, a bridge club and a range of sporting activities many of which took place at Motspur Park, the Corporation’s own sports ground. Elise Sprott was an enthusiastic

participant, supporting Hockey and Netball matches, sitting on the Pavilion and Grounds Committee and being an indefatigable member of the catering committee, where her food is always described as excellent.⁶⁹

Conclusion

This brief look at the varied careers of Elise Sprott, Janet Quigley and Olga Collett highlights the diversity and range of women's working lives within the BBC during the inter-war years. The former were both honoured for their work with the Corporation; like Janet Quigley, Elise Sprott was awarded the MBE, in 1938. Sprott would continue with the BBC until her retirement on December 31st 1945. Her staff index card records her final job designation as "Head of Section: Lectures and Women's Interests." She died on November 28th 1961. Janet Quigley would rise to be one of the most senior women in the BBC. Having resigned on marriage in October 1945, she returned to work for the Corporation in June 1950, as Editor of *Woman's Hour*, on a salary of £1,000 a year. Later, as Chief Assistant in the Talks Department, she would be crucial to the development of the new early morning current affairs programme "Today". Promoted to Assistant Head of Talks in 1960, Quigley was earning £3,450 on her retirement in October 1962. She died on February 7th 1987.

Little is known of Olga Collett's subsequent career. In 1947, she was one of the early panellists on 'Twenty Questions'.⁷⁰ In September 1950, she again worked briefly with Janet Quigley, broadcasting a talk for *Woman's Hour*. Quigley, then the programme's editor, wrote to her: 'It is so long since I had the pleasure of listening to you that I should like to hear the talk and make any suggestions that occur to me...'⁷¹ In April 1957, Collett broadcast her final BBC talk, again for *Woman's Hour*. The 1983 interview with John Lane is the last known reference to her that exists.

Although there are glaring gaps and omissions, most notably of personal files and early documents, the BBC's extensive Written Archives provides countless opportunities to witness early female staff in action. The BBC's wide-ranging Sound Archives and Photographic Archives add to the picture. Whilst far more needs to be done to finally release BBC women from the confines of the archives, there is no doubt that their stories are waiting to be told.

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¹ R13/388/1: Departmental: Secretariat Archives Section 1927-1931

² The 1919 Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act had opened up the professions to women who became eligible to train, for example, as lawyers, engineers, accountants, and veterinary surgeons. It also ostensibly removed the barriers to women being admitted to the administrative and executive classes of the Civil Service, though in reality this was more complex.

³ R13/399: Departmental: Secretariat: Registry Staff 1936-1958, 3 March 1936

⁴ Ibid. The universities were Oxford, Cambridge, London, Leeds, Reading, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester, St Andrews, Durham, Sheffield, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and the University of Wales, Cardiff.

⁵ R49/27/1: Appointment Boards: Minutes File 1, 22 April 1936. The interviewing panel consisted of the General Establishment Officer, Douglas Clarke; the Women Staff Administrator, Miss Freeman; Mr G.C .Dailey of the Office Administration Department and Miss Mills.

⁶ Registry Staff file, 30 April 1936

⁷ Ibid. 9 June 1936

⁸ R62/100/3: Salary Information 1923-1939

⁹ BBC Staff List, 1937

¹⁰ The Evening News, 30th November 1934; Good Housekeeping, August 1935; Radio Times, November 12th 1937

¹¹ Asa Briggs, The Golden Age of Broadcasting, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, vol. 2 (London Oxford University Press, 1965) The BBC had commissioned Briggs to write an official history in 1958. The first volume, "The Birth of Broadcasting" covering the years 1922-1926, was published in 1961. The second volume, as quoted from above, covered the years 1927-1939. The subsequent three volumes covered the years up until 1975, the final volume being published in 1995.

¹² Ibid. p. 457.

¹³ Olive Shapley, Broadcasting: A Life (London: Scarlet Press, 1996)..

- ¹⁴ Michael Carney, Stoker: The Biography of Hilda Matheson O.B.E., 1888-1940 (Llangynog: Michael Carney, 1999) Hilda Matheson and Olive Shapley both feature in: Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, A Social History of British Broadcasting, 1922-1939 (London: Basil Blackwood, 1991)
- ¹⁵ For more on the early history of the BBC see: Asa Briggs, The Birth of Broadcasting, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom vol. 1, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
- ¹⁶ Ian McIntyre, The Expense of Glory: A Life of John Reith (London: Harper Collins, 1993) p. 118
- ¹⁷ The Government set up two committees, the Sykes Committee in 1923 and the Crawford Committee in 1926, to consider the future development of broadcasting. It was their recommendations that led to the British Broadcasting Corporation being officially launched on January 1st 1927. The initial Charter was for ten years.
- ¹⁸ Exact figures for licence holders were 2,178,259 for January 1st 1927, when the Corporation came into being; in September 1939, the figure was 9,082,666. Briggs, The Golden Age of Broadcasting p. 254
- ¹⁹ John Reith, Broadcast over Britain (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924) p. 80
- ²⁰ For a comprehensive social history of the BBC see Scannell and Cardiff, A Social History
- ²¹ R49/56/1: Recruitment of Staff: File 1, November 26th 1936
- ²² L1/306/2: Miss AMP Mills, Staff File
- ²³ Daily Mirror, 11 January 1936, Women in the BBC
- ²⁴ Salary Information 1923-1939
- ²⁵ R49/940: Staff Policy: Women Assistants, 30 April 1926
- ²⁶ Women's Leader, 2 January 1931
- ²⁷ The BBC marriage bar constitutes a key part of my research. The WAC has three substantial files on the subject: R49/371/1-3. Marriage bars were common in the inter-war years and were particularly prevalent amongst female civil servants, teachers and banking staff.
- ²⁸ R149/178/16: Staff Policy: Establishment July 1st 1939
- ²⁹ See for example: Alison Oram, Women Teachers and Feminist Politics 1900 - 1939 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Helen Jones, Women in British Public Life 1914-50 (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000); Meta Zimbeck, "Strategies and Strategems for the Employment of Women in the British Civil Service 1919-1939," Historical Journal 27.4 (1984); Carol Dyhouse, No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870-1939 (London: UCL Press, 1995)
- ³⁰ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) Janet Quigley's entry is written by Paul Donovan
- ³¹ Asa Briggs, The War of Words, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970). pp. 36, 296, 504
- ³² L1/784/1 Janet Quigley, Staff File
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 18th December 1929
- ³⁴ E417: Empire Service, Policy, December 11th 1934
- ³⁵ Radio Times, 12 November 1937
- ³⁶ Hilda Matheson, Broadcasting (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd, 1933) pp. 187-188
- ³⁷ RS1/115: Current Affairs: Week in Westminster, 5 November 1929
- ³⁸ *Ibid.* 7 January 1937, 30 June 1937
- ³⁹ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
- ⁴⁰ R51/69/4 Talks: Careers 1938-1951, 1 February 1939 Janet Quigley to Director of Talks
- ⁴¹ L1/784/1 Janet Quigley personal file, First Quarter 1938 – Confidential Report
- ⁴² L1/784/1 Janet Quigley personal file, 22 October 1945 Assistant Controller (Talks)
- ⁴³ Sound Archive: 41963 Olga Collett interviewed by John Lane, 26 July 1983
- ⁴⁴ Olga Collett Talks file. "On Political Canvassing" was broadcast 25 February 1937 as part of the regular series, 'At Home To-Day'. Olga Collett was paid 4 guineas.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, February 10th 1937
- ⁴⁶ Radio Times, Saturday April 3rd 1937. Speakers included Mrs Edward Harvey on her small general shop in a working class district of Liverpool; Mrs Beryl Goddard on her experiences in the Falkland Islands during the war and Agnes Smith who began her life as a 'doffer' in a cotton factory at the age of twelve.
- ⁴⁷ Broadcast 29 May 1937
- ⁴⁸ *Op. cit.* Olga Collett interview, 1983
- ⁴⁹ R30/48/1: Outside Broadcasts: Sound: Ascot Racecourse. 17 June 1937, Description of Royal Ascot Meeting from Ascot Racecourse
- ⁵⁰ The Women's League of Health and Beauty Demonstration took place at Wembley on 10 June 1939; the British Women's Ice Skating Championships on 24 January 1939

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- ⁵¹ Sound Archive: 10293: "What is Good Radio" 22 November 1946
- ⁵² Sound Archive: 13411: State Visit of French Premier: Covent Garden Gala Performance 22 March 1939
- ⁵³ Evening Standard, March 23rd 1939
- ⁵⁴ Sunday Referee, March 26th 1939
- ⁵⁵ Radio Times 9 November 1938
- ⁵⁶ Radio Pictorial, June 16th 1939
- ⁵⁷ Woman's Magazine, October 1939. "Broadcasting for Women" by Elise Sprott
- ⁵⁸ Briggs, The Golden Age of Broadcasting p. 458
- ⁵⁹ G21575: Miss E I Sprott - BBC Public Relations Officer (Women) May 1942; G14568: Miss E Sprott, July 1939
- ⁶⁰ News Chronicle, 29 July 1939
- ⁶¹ Ibid. R51/646: Talks: Women's Programmes
- ⁶² Salary Information 1923-1939
- ⁶³ R3/3/7: Control Board Minutes, 30 June 1931
- ⁶⁴ Reith Diaries, June 1931
- ⁶⁵ For example: Manchester Guardian, 17 April 1934; Cambridge Times, 1 October 1935
- ⁶⁶ R44/619 publicity: Women's Interest Section Reports 1931-1938, 26 February 1932
- ⁶⁷ R44/86/1: Publicity: Conferences 1933-1936
- ⁶⁸ Ariel, June 1936
- ⁶⁹ See for example BBC Club Bulletin, November 1930, December 1930, March 1931, Christmas 1931
- ⁷⁰ Obituary to Stewart MacPherson, The Independent, 29 April 1995
- ⁷¹ Olga Collett Talks File: 20 September 1950