The Ally Pally Spirit

1. A predictable birth

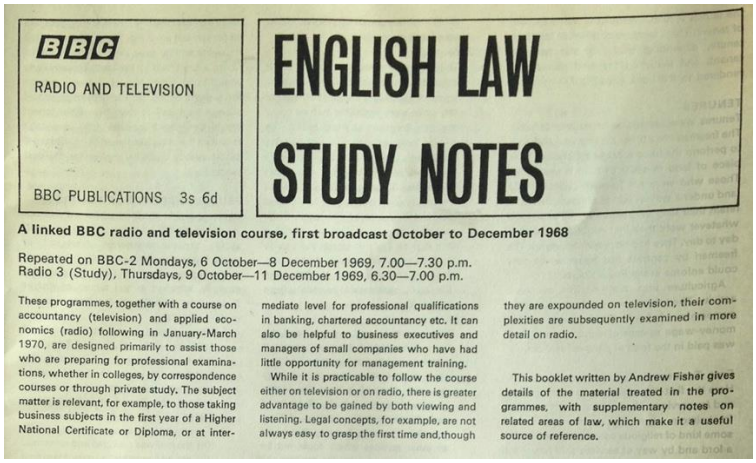
'*I just knew it was going to happen; a Prime Minister can you know.'*

(Harold Wilson, in Perry, 1977, p.11)

x

Figure 1. Winter campus,1990

Few things in history, if indeed any, come out of blue. So it was with The Open University. There were notable developments in history that led to its establishment. For instance, Bell & Tight (1995) argue that there were some 'open universities' enabling students to study at a distance in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The authors name, in particular, the University of London, the Royal University of Ireland and the University of St Andrews. In terms of open learning through broadcasting, in 1924 there was a proposal to Lord Reith, director general of the BBC, for 'a wireless university' and requests to offer adult education in an informal way through regular radio talks with a printed syllabus provided for listeners (see Perry, 1977). In the early 1960s, the Institution of Electrical Engineers argued for a 'televarsity' which would link broadcasts with correspondence learning and visits to existing universities (Williams, 1962). In 1968, to assist those preparing for professional examinations in law, accountancy and economics, the BBC made available Radio 3 and television programmes in English law, accountancy and economics. These were accompanied by printed study notes.



BBC

RADIO AND TELEVISION

BBC PUBLICATIONS 3s 6d

ENGLISH LAW STUDY NOTES

A linked BBC radio and television course, first broadcast October to December 1968

Repeated on BBC-2 Mondays, 6 October—8 December 1969, 7.00—7.30 p.m.
Radio 3 (Study), Thursdays, 9 October—11 December 1969, 6.30—7.00 p.m.

These programmes, together with a course on accountancy (television) and applied economics (radio) following in January-March 1970, are designed primarily to assist those who are preparing for professional examinations, whether in colleges, by correspondence courses or through private study. The subject matter is relevant, for example, to those taking business subjects in the first year of a Higher National Certificate or Diploma, or at intermediate level for professional qualifications in banking, chartered accountancy etc. It can also be helpful to business executives and managers of small companies who have had little opportunity for management training.

While it is practicable to follow the course either on television or on radio, there is greater advantage to be gained by both viewing and listening. Legal concepts, for example, are not always easy to grasp the first time and, though they are expounded on television, their complexities are subsequently examined in more detail on radio.

This booklet written by Andrew Fisher gives details of the material treated in the programmes, with supplementary notes on related areas of law, which make it a useful source of reference.

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Figure 2. Study notes for a 1968/69 radio and television course

During the 1950s/60s more university places were needed for the growing demand from post school applicants. Universities more than doubled from 24 to 44 by the late 1960s. However, there was a notable gap in the provision of university-level qualifications for part-time adult 'mature learners' as opposed to initial younger full-time entrants. Some of these later learners would have been school leavers who had originally left school at fifteen without any qualifications. Geoffrey Crowther, the first OU chancellor, addressed the problem in 1969 at the charter ceremony:

> *'The first and most urgent task before us, is to cater for the many thousands of people fully capable of a higher education, who for one reason or another, do not get it, or do not get as much of it as they can turn to advantage, or as they discover sometimes too late, that they need. . . The existing system for all its great expansion misses and leaves aside a great unused reservoir of human talent and potential.'* (Crowther, 1969)

Michael Young and Brian Jackson noted this need in 1962 and, with an eye on what was happening in the USA and Russia, suggested the use of multimedia in order to create an 'open university', which they named 'The National Extension College' (NEC) based in Cambridge. In many ways, this can be seen as a successful pilot initiative for the more developed concept of The Open University.

It was Harold Wilson, as the incoming labour prime minister in 1963, who gave a political push to the ideas that were already developing.

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Figure 3. Harold Wilson (circa 1965)

<insert 0.46 mins clip of Harold Wilson's 'need for the OU' speech in 1963> x

Despite the fact that education through TV and radio was, to some extent, already happening, Wilson wrote:

> *'The opposition was pretty massive. The original proposals met an almost unanimous hostile press . . . Opposition in the educational world, from the established universities to adult education and local authorities, was hardly less robust'*. (Wilson, in Perry, 1977, p. vii)

Notwithstanding this, he astutely placed the project in the hands of Jennie Lee, a one-time teacher brought up in a mining community and the minister of state in Education and Science in Wilson's cabinet. She reported Wilson as saying, 'For God's sake get this thing going' (Lee, 2019). So, with that compelling mandate and her own dogged sense of purpose, she guided the initial stages of implementation to found The Open University with the full range of university activities - planning its own courses and degrees, producing teaching resources, assessing students and conducting its own research (see Wilson, in Perry, 1977, p. vii).

Figure 4. The Open University charter (1969) x

So it was, on 23rd April 1969, that the Queen granted a royal charter to a new kind of university, a university that focused on those who were over 21 and those who had, upon leaving school, missed out on attending a university, and also the many who may not have seen themselves as eligible for higher education and studying for a degree. It thus carried a strong social and political mandate and could be regarded as 'a great liberal experiment' (Weinbren, 2015, p.8). It was sometimes cast as the 'university of the second chance' but Jennie Lee, and others who followed her, strove to make sure it had first class standards and full parity with established higher education institutions.

Figure 5. 'Learn and live' the OU's first coat of arms x

2. A distinctive location

'Iconic buildings have a life force. They endure, inspire and evolve by slowly adapting to life and the world around them. . .' (Johnson, 2019, p. 2)

Alexandra Palace also did not come out of the blue, of course. It dates back to 1873 and before that there were similar grand Victorian public structures in London and elsewhere that sought to provide interest, information and entertainment for the public.

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Figure 6. The south eastern corner of the Palace in 2018

A number of existing BBC studio centres were considered by the Open University's executive in 1968/69. A key issue was their distance from the planned campus site in Milton Keynes – up to an hour was regarded as viable. The Palace, although run down in many ways, was well placed for the M1 and seen as adaptable with its two studio spaces. Moreover, BBC News was operating there. With a sense of urgency to provide the first four foundation courses for students, BBC/Open University Productions moved in early in 1970.

Benetta Adamson, who first joined the Corporation at Broadcasting House as a trainee after her A Levels, worked at the Palace as a production assistant in the mid 1970s. She remembers:

> *'It was a shanty town inside the old Palace. The tower was really the only bit which felt as if it more or less had the function intended. Everywhere else was make-do and mend'.* (Adamson, 2019)

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Figure 7. Robert Rowland in 1971

And Robert (Bob) Rowland, head of BBC/OU Production at the Palace, refers to a:

> *'. . . strange, odd, lugubrious building with lots of unknown corners and places'.* (Rowland, 2009)

The history of BBC broadcasting at the Palace is of international significance. After all, on 2nd November 1936, it transmitted the world's first regular 405-line high definition public television service. Architects also have argued that 'the status of Studios A and B, as the birthplace of public broadcast television is immense' (DIS, 2012, p.70).

It was therefore a significant and historically charged place for those who were appointed to be there in the 1970s. John McCafferty (2019), who was based in the post room, remembers going into the studio gallery and control room. He felt moved to imagine that the first television programmes came from that very room.

Alan Bird, a studio engineer, who initially worked for BBC News at the Palace and then for the BBC/OU, makes a candid assessment of the state of the premises:

> *'Sometimes rain came through the roof. It was a bit shambolic really and a bit past its sell-by date. It was already an old building when it had been converted into studios in 1936.'* (Bird, 2019)

Tony Coe (2019), a BBC radio producer, remembers the premises as being higgledy piggledy but it also had a feeling of being ‘really interesting, dynamic, and almost a law unto itself’ maybe, he speculated, because it wasn’t part of the main BBC establishment.

In a sense, the choice of Alexandra Palace was revisiting history. Just as the newly formed BBC moved into the Palace and adapted the premises in 1936, so the newly chartered Open University tailored the premises for its purposes in 1970.

When the BBC/OU moved into the premises it could thus be regarded as run down and in need of repair and re-decoration. However, some, like John above, experienced a degree of aesthetic appreciation for spaces that could be considered rather ‘lost in time’.

John Hulse, a sound engineer, recalls:

> *‘I felt very much at home there as it's steeped in history. I loved exploring the building and finding clues as to how television started because there were plenty of clues around in terms of hardware and mysterious doors and things.’*
>
> (Hulse, 2019)

Nick Levinson, a BBC producer, who arrived just before course production needed to start, comments:

> *‘It was an extraordinary place. It was terribly impressive because of the building and the situation.’* (Levinson, 2019)

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Figure 8. Tricia Cann, production assistant, in 1973

It made a similar impression on Tricia Cann:

> *'It's an iconic and a most amazing place to work, it really was. It had a kind of intimacy that did inspire people.'* (Cann, 2019)

Initially, in May 1969, when the OU's first Vice Chancellor, Walter Perry, and senior administrators were first appointed, the University's administrative offices were temporarily located in Belgrave Square, London. At that time the campus at Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, had yet to be built. So, Alexandra Palace was in effect the first functioning location (1970 - 81) for the OU's media production.

Paul Kafno, a BBC producer, remembers his arrival:

> *'I think it was probably January 1970 when we moved to Ally Pally. News and Current Affairs were up there and they moved out on a Friday with a great big party and we moved in on the Monday.* (Kafno, 2019)

He recalls his first office being in a room directly above the main (tower) entrance on the south-east corner and later this became the office for the head of BBC/OU productions, Bob Rowland. The room had curtains which were emblematic as they could not be drawn. It was just small strips of material, Paul recollects. He thought this indicated 'a certain rank in the BBC' and felt it an interesting insight into corporate thinking. He also recalls that he had a wonderful view over North London.

3. Using what was there

The plan below shows the complex of corridors, connective spaces and rooms including the two narrow studios to the left marked 'Studio A and B'. The designated Studio A needed some refurbishment and re-equipping, as did the nearby technical areas and the offices. Studio A was challengingly narrow, given it was just 30 x 70 feet, but was larger than Studio B which was mainly used for rehearsals and storage.

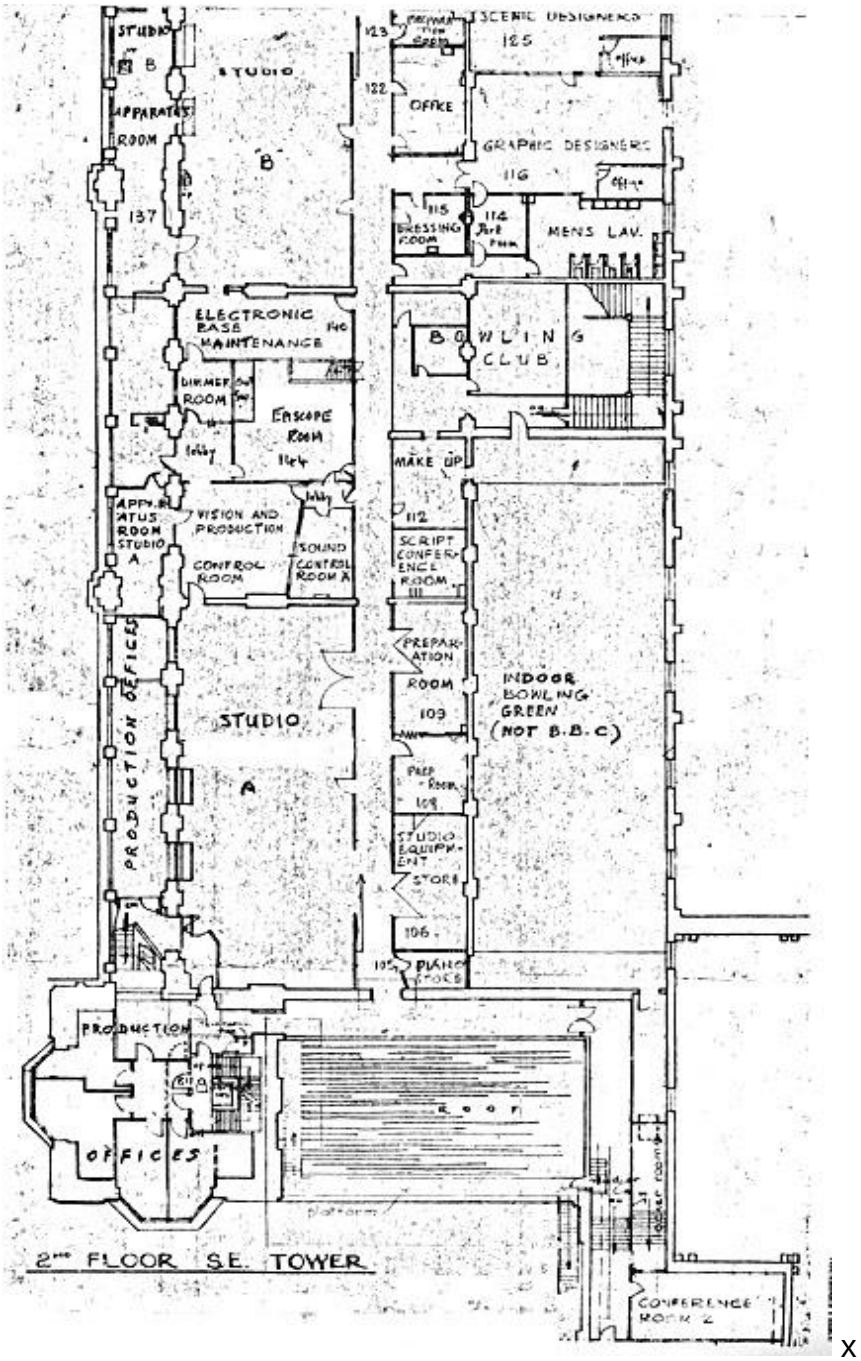

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Figure 9. Plan of the second floor issued by the BBC in 1975

David Kennard, deputy to Bob Rowland, mentions the specific resources available for production at the Palace in 1970. He itemises three monochrome cameras, two pairs of Ampex two-inch video-tape recorders, one Telecine (for film and slide projection), four film cutting rooms, a 'prep' lab, a small visual effects unit, and a photographic studio with black-and-white processing facilities (Kennard, 1980).

George Low, an OU staff member, although recognizing ‘a certain charm’ in terms of setting, regarded the premises almost to be a museum and, when he arrived in 1970, Studio A was being refitted for transmission (Low, 2009).

With regard to this studio, John Hulse, a sound engineer, recalls:

> *‘We had great fun trying to produce dramas in the studio that was a shoe box.’*
>
> (Hulse, 2019)

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Figure 10. The opening of Studio A in 1970 showing Walter Perry (vice chancellor left) and Richmond Postgate (controller of Educational Broadcasting)

The glazed control room (gallery) linked to Studio A is shown above in Fig 9 and this would have been raised some fifteen feet. The fact that there was an indoor bowling club with a ‘green’ (installed in 1909) which was not part of the OU/BBC premises, provides a sense of the size of this south-eastern corner of the Palace. And, of course, there was a similar set of spaces below on the ground floor which included a BBC canteen (directly under the bowling green) and close by, the BBC club, using a former transmitter hall. Below the ground floor were various BBC-owned basement areas which, from 1936, were used for storage, cutting rooms and laboratories. John Hulse also found what he remembers as secret passages. These enabled people to get from the BBC part of the building to the Great Hall. He declares:

'Providing you didn't mind scrambling through rat infested areas you could get into a concert without having a ticket' (Hulse, 2019)

A little away from the central production area was the East Court which was used for storage and various support functions. Catherine King, lecturer in arts, mentions:

'. . . strange little kind of Nissen huts where the editors . . . toiled over their editing machines, and you'd sit in with them. (King, 2009)

<insert Catherine King 1.13 mins clip>

x

Figure 11. Outside broadcast (radio) vans, East Court, May 1981, just before the move to Milton Keynes

Sound recording was located in a room that was close to the Great Hall. John Hulse recalls an unexpected problem:

'I remember once we were in the radio studio and we couldn't record anything that day because Pink Floyd had hired the Great Hall and they were rehearsing for their next concert. Their sound just went straight through the wall'. (Hulse, 2019)

Edward Milner, a BBC TV/radio producer until 1985, remembers:

'Alexandra Palace had rather rickety old offices. I do remember early on being in the BBC club which was a bit of a Heath Robinson affair. I was sitting there having a drink when bits of plaster fell into people's beers.'

(Milner, 2019)

As with all other BBC locations across London, the Palace had a club and bar. This was a popular place and some considered it the social heart of the production community. It had a reputation for having a particularly convivial atmosphere. It also had a snooker table, a pool table, and darts all located in an adjacent room accessed through sliding doors. Competition, by all accounts, could be intense.

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Figure 12. The (unbeatable) Bert Sharp (left) with his brother 'Tynee'. (Circa, 1975). Both worked as commissionaires at the Palace.

Ian Macdonald, a dark room print finisher, states:

My favourite memory is that just before the Milton Keynes move Nationwide programme came from there [the Palace]. *The studio was above the bar and we were told to keep the noise down as they could hear us up there.*

(Macdonald, 2019)

Tim Benton, an OU arts lecturer, regarded the bar with some importance:

'We all drank Guinness and smoked Gauloises cigarettes, or pipes, and it was an extremely heady atmosphere; and there were a lot of tensions. There

were quite strong feelings around - mostly because what we were doing seemed to be very high risk.' (Benton, 2017)

The Club provided staff with a place to relax away from their formal working contexts, but it was also a favoured venue for work-related meetings. Concert parties, which drew upon in-house musical talent, were a popular feature.

Benetta Adamson, production assistant, highlights the creative interaction between roles:

'Everybody knew everybody and that was a very special part of it. Everyone went off to the bar, went to the Club at lunchtime. We knew each other across all the usual boundaries'. (Adamson, 2019)

Almost four years after the BBC/OU productions were installed at the Palace the University held its first graduation ceremony. Fittingly, it served to associate a prestigious university event with another part of the Palace i.e. the Great Hall. It was attended by 867 graduates plus their families and friends.


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Figure 13. The first graduation ceremony on 23rd June 1973

<insert 2.46 min clip of the first ceremony> x

4. Assembling the team

'There was an amazing mix of backgrounds and cultures and we did feel we were pioneering something completely new.' (Benton, 2017)

Where then did the Palace employees come from and why were they attracted to work at this location? It seems that many of the BBC producers were London based and arrived with relevant experience, but many were academically qualified too. Similarly, with those who were in a production support role. John Selwyn Gilbert, a producer, recalls:

> *'There were some terrifically talented people around that time.'* (Gilbert, 2019).

He mentions, in particular, Nuala O'Faolain, who worked for the OU's arts faculty. Resourcefully, she brought in established names such as Philip Larkin and John Berger to feature in the course materials.

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Figure 14. Nuala O'Faolain, journalist, writer and TV producer

Another highly regarded arts producer, throughout the 1970s, was Richard Callanan who enlisted actors such as Ben Kingsley and Patrick Stewart to appear in OU drama productions.
On the University's side of recruitment, the vice chancellor, Walter Perry (1977) reports that, despite his initial concerns, there were 1,200 applicants for 34 academic posts, and many, he adds, were from very qualified and experienced people. In fact, within a very short time it was realised that this was an underestimate and that more academic appointments were needed (see Weinbren, 2015, p. 86).

Alan Bird (2019) remembers that some who worked at the Palace were a little skeptical about the new university but many also regarded it with curiosity and goodwill. Undergraduate teaching with an emphasis on radio and TV had never been done before on this scale (60 hours of broadcasts per week) and it appears to have provided enthusiasm and determination. Walter Perry, writes of an all pervasive 'heady atmosphere' in the early days (Perry, 1977, p. 42). It seems, many people were attracted because it was regarded as a very worthwhile venture. As John Selwyn Gilbert states:

> *'The opportunity to help to kick-start that great institution The Open University into action was fabulous, wonderful. It was the time of my life'.* (Gilbert, 2019)

Bob Rowland, head of BBC/OU productions, felt he had inherited a remarkable number of producers (Rowland, 2009). One reason for this was that the BBC appointed people for their academic (subject) understandings as well as their ability to produce radio and TV programmes. As formal members of a course team, they were able to become very involved with the proposed teaching content as well as the production aspects.

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Figure 15. Mandy Hutchins, graphic artist, one of twelve people in this role for the BBC/OU in 1971

A BBC staff list dated 19th February 1974, gives the number of persons employed as 306, and this doesn't include OU academic staff because they would have visited only when they were directly involved in planning or presenting radio or TV materials. The staff list identifies a considerable variety of production and support roles – designers and graphic artists, maintenance staff, secretaries and typists, production directors, firemen, assistants, riggers, film editors, electricians, porters and lift attendants, telephone operators, cleaning staff, engineers, post room staff, research assistants and heads/senior staff. This list is revealing of the workforce that was needed to produce and broadcast the twice weekly radio and TV programmes.

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Figure 16. 'Flo', a member of the BBC canteen staff. Affectionally named because the tea flowed liberally.

Benetta Adamson remembers it as a time of opportunity and for role upgrading. As a school leaver at 19, after her A Levels, she started as a trainee radio production secretary with the BBC at Broadcasting House but then went to the Palace in 1972,

moving into radio production and then a TV production assistant role (Adamson, 2019). Mike Peet began as a maths research assistant but found himself moving through to TV and radio production in other academic areas as well (Peet, 2019). Edward Milner (2019) was a qualified teacher who had worked for a short time as a researcher for school television with BBC Glasgow. He then moved to London to train as a producer for BBC/OU productions.

Joe Coe (Coe, 2019) arrived in 1978 with programme production experience with the BBC in Birmingham. Having studied English and drama at university, these continued to be his main production interests. He was first appointed at the Palace as a radio producer and he valued the time given to properly research and produce an OU programme. He paid tribute to Nancy Thomas who headed up the art department for the way she was encouraging of new appointees like himself.

x

Figure 17. Nancy Thomas when an assistant producer for the BBC's Monitor programme in 1959

Alan Thomas, an OU tutor in research methods and education in the 1970s, recalled:

> 'I went up to Alexandra Palace. I don't know why it was but I did meet some of the team up there . . . I was struck by the enthusiasm of everybody there, the BBC production team and so on and the academics. There was a feeling that there was something special, that this was new.' (Thomas, 2018)

Many of the appointed OU academic staff, although qualified in specific areas of lecturing, had little experience of presenting to a camera, or indeed to a radio microphone. Initially, they drew on the style of lectures they had given as teachers in other universities. Tricia Cann noted that many academics tended to 'deliver a lecture rather than welcome the camera as a friend' (Cann, 2019). What might be seen as a perfectly acceptable lecture in another university needed to be converted into a broadcast for the OU. Paul Kafno (2019) explained that a programme is a 'built experience', probably only saying a small number of things, but saying them very powerfully. Presentational skills associated with a TV programme, and also radio broadcasts, had to be learnt. Tricia Cann recalled that those who acquired these aptitudes went to become able professional presenters (Cann, 2019).

Phil Hinchcliffe (2019), a BBC studio engineer, remembers that there were discussions about whether or not to bring in a well-known BBC presenter such as Richard Baker. It was felt, however, that students would relate more to an academic (as a teacher) rather than an accomplished news reader.

Figure 18. Studio A, 1971. Rehearsal for a second level geochemistry programme. Director Penny Compton, presenter Ian Gass and course team colleagues from visual effects.

Tim Benton, appointed in May 1970, remembers:

'So it was a big induction for me having to read from auto-cues and learn my lines when I had to walk and hit the spot and that sort of thing. It was all very exciting'. (Benton, 2017)

Many lecture-like TV presentations were made in the initial years and these doubtless brought about a public stereotype of what the OU was about. Weinbren (2015, p. 144) reports that there were disputes about the suitability of the chosen academic content, the sets, the clothes of presenters and the way programmes were presented.

Catherine King, a lecturer in arts, introduces her own perspective:

'If people laughed at what we wore or how we spoke, it didn't really matter; we were there, we were present on BBC2 in the mornings on Sundays, and other kind of prime times, as well as at night.' (King, 2009)

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Figure 19. Make-up artist Scota Rakison at the Palace in 1971

To the surprise of many (and the envy of most established universities) there were some 43,000 applicants for the first four foundation courses resulting in 25,000 registered students. To put this into perspective, in 1970 the total number of graduates from all UK universities was 51,189 (Bolton, 2012). The BBC producer, Paul Kafno (2019), considers it 'an extraordinary social revolution' that the OU was able to attract and teach such high numbers of students, almost entirely from non-

academic backgrounds. Such a volume of undergraduates brought distinct advantages in terms of income, staff numbers at the Palace and on campus, the time and resources that could be allotted to the production of a course, and ultimately the quality of the broadcasts and other teaching materials. Weinberg (2015, p. xv) draws on Christensen (2003) to suggest that the new university could be seen as a 'disruptive innovation'. It rendered visible the long-established secrets of higher education by making media and printed materials available to all and, moreover, introduced new forms of learning content with forward looking teaching approaches.

All foundation course students needed to receive their materials by January 1971. The Palace employees therefore had a pressurised period to achieve this. Thirty hour per week were assigned to BBC2 and then there were radio programmes on BBC3. This ambitious brief is why production had to begin as soon as BBC News moved out. Walter Perry (1977) writes that there was a heavy reliance on the goodwill of government, benefactors and enablers. To this should be added the spirit of enthusiasm and energy of those who were based at the Palace. Weinbren (2015, p. 271) believed that 'industrial production methods' were needed to both create and distribute materials to students.

5. Conceiving the course

'Most of my colleagues in universities regarded my move to the Open University as a sign of incipient senility; they thought I was quite mad! They did not believe that education through the media could conceivably work.'

(Perry, 1977, p. 32)

The task ahead for those based at the Palace in 1970, indeed the challenge, comes through in the above words of Walter Perry, the first vice chancellor. The brief for each 'course team' (there could be up to fifteen people with various production understandings and teaching skills) was to rethink traditional conceptions of university teaching to ensure an integration of TV, radio and printed materials. They couldn't thus expect to provide undergraduate education in quite the same way in which others had done it before.


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Figure 20. The contents of a science home experiment kit in 1973

Apart from developing the educational use of radio and TV, a central factor compelling a new approach was open enrolment i.e. the Open University wished to be 'open to all'. In their lectures and seminars, existing universities could assume that students, in their first undergraduate year, will have achieved a level of subject understanding that would form the basis of university teaching. At the Open University there would be students with little or no previous experience of, for instance, mathematics who chose to study the maths foundation course (M100), but some who might have an A Level in maths.

Open enrolment therefore required an imaginative pedagogy and teaching content enabling access for any student who expressed an interest in studying for a degree. This was no mean task for those working at the Palace and on campus. In the history of university teaching this had not been something that was seen as feasible, or even desirable.

The four foundation courses sought to be modernist in the way they represented and taught mathematics, the humanities, science and understanding society. There was a belief in the value of providing students and their tutors with interdisciplinary content, primary sources and discursive TV, radio and printed materials – to instill 'a critical understanding of reality' (Sandini, 2018). As well as drawing upon the

knowledge and skills of the appointed course team members, each course recruited others to assist with the presentation of programmes and authoring printed materials. These people included academics from other universities but also practitioners such as architects, psychologists and writers. This variety of contributors served to enrich courses and make it more likely that students unused to studying would find individual ways of engaging.

Joaquim Moreno, an architect and curator, highlights many of the above aspects in an 2017/18 exhibition at the Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon. In this event he revisits the third level OU arts course A305 'A History of Architecture and Design 1890 -1939'.

Copyright Centre Canadien d'Architecture

Figure 21. Joaquim Moreno explaining the exhibition, 'The University is now on air: broadcasting modern architecture'

A305, which first went out to students in 1975, Moreno regards as:

> '. . . *a privileged instance for the mobilization of new media environments for educational purposes, and for the convergence of mass media and mass education.'* (Moreno, 2017a)

He suggests this course reformulated the long established 'transmission of education' (i.e. specific messages to specific persons) and moved it forward to the 'broadcasting of education' (i.e. varied messages to a general public) (Moreno, 2017b). He proceeds to evaluate A305 as a radical transformation of the teaching of architecture in higher education. Although it was produced after the first foundation

courses, it can be argued that the seeds of A305's approach to teaching and learning were laid down in the former.

Of course, there was an assumption that a course team would be able to work productively together. However, as mentioned above, there could be strong feelings as to how to proceed and what should be included in a course. Mike Pentz, the dean of science, provides a candid sense of what had to be achieved in the science foundation course (S100):

> *'Of course, we had to invent the whole thing more or less as we went along. It was an enormous bit of improvisation.'* (Pentz, 1979)

<insert clip (1.41 mins) from the OU archives> x

Correspondence texts take time in terms of drafting, developmental testing by critical readers, revising and professional editing, as do broadcasted materials. Three days of filming in Studio A involved up to two weeks of editing and this would result in around thirty minutes of viewing for students. Radio generally required less production time.

Benetta Adamson provides a sense of how long seemingly small things related to TV could take:

> *'In those days a caption had to be ordered two weeks before because they had to be made up, and then had to be photographed, and then they had to be put into a slide, and then they had to be delivered. All captions came on cards'*. (Adamson, 2019)

Early OU surveys of the study experiences of students suggested that the audio-visual component of a course was often the aspect that was most remembered. What happened at the Palace throughout the 1970s it seems was a particularly innovatory and novel contribution to teaching at a distance.

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Figure 22. ‘The Three Sisters’ with Tessa Wyatt, Ben Kingsley, Jeremy Kemp, Mark Digham and George Little. An Open University Drama course produced in 1977.

As already indicated, a very significant dimension to course creation involved the recruitment of others to teach students. For instance, Benetta Adamson remembers a science programme about Concorde wherein a government minister was enlisted to talk about the new aircraft and its construction. Alan Thomas, an OU tutor, recalls that when he moved to Darwin University as a lecturer, he continued to use OU materials and broadcasts in his teaching. Such broadcasts contained, for instance, influential educational thinkers such as Noam Chomsky and Jerome Bruner (Thomas, 2019). For OU drama courses, Tricia Cann recollects the involvement of actors such as Patrick Mower, John Gielgud, Donald Pleasence and Patrick Stewart:

> *‘They could be sitting in the BBC bar and chatting so it was like having someone in your home’,* (Cann, 2019)

Such willing contributors to courses reflected their wish to support a new kind of university, especially one that disseminated to a wide student and public audience.

Nick Levinson, a BBC producer, provides a sense of the needed commitment:

> *‘It was exciting being there but we had to get on with our work. It was a mixture of long lunch hours in the BBC club and hardworking into the evening and night to get the programmes ready to go into the studio.’*

(Levinson, 2019)

The standard of production and content could be very high recalls John Selwyn Gilbert (2019). He remembers that in 1974 an OU radio programme about philosophy was selected as the BBC's entry for the Japan Prize, an international contest dedicated to educational content.

It seems that many staff were attracted because of a deep interest in education and even a dissatisfaction with the existing nature of higher education.

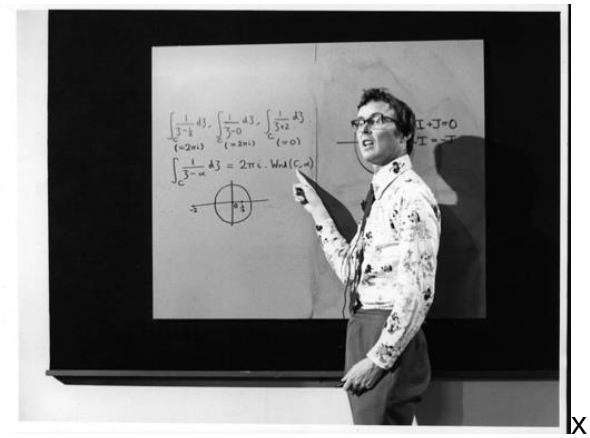 x

Figure 23. Robin Wilson presenting a maths TV programme (circa 1974)

Robin remembers that some BBC producers also had mathematics degrees and, given his studio inexperience, this was extremely helpful to him:

> *'Their job was to take our batty ideas and turn them into good teaching television material . . . it was really a partnership . . . I learnt so much about teaching.'* (Wilson, 2009)

The appointed academics may have been inexperienced in terms of TV and radio production and presentation but nevertheless keen to learn. Tim Benton, newly appointed in 1970, comments:

> *'I made a second [film] in the summer of 1970 on the nude in Victorian art. It was about fairies in Victorian times because fairies were almost the only*

figures that could be shown nude in Victorian painting; and that was done entirely in the studio with photographs on cardboard. I was very wet behind the ears'. (Benton, 2017)

6. Cometh the fire

It is perhaps surprising, with the amount of heat producing equipment needed for studio work, that a fire did not happen during the BBC's occupancy since 1936. In fact, in seeking to protect the rest of the Palace from such an eventuality, the BBC had constructed a fire wall at the western end of the leased premises close to the Great Hall. Nevertheless, there was always a risk that there might be overheating, even though both studios were lined with asbestos to contain an outbreak and also for sound-proofing. Alan Bird (2019) highlights the additional measures that were taken such as air conditioning to reduce heat from the studio lights.

There were of course always risks from cigarettes and archival film of those working at the Palace are revealing of the amount of smoking that took place. It is surprising too that the major fire that destroyed the western part of the Palace and the Great Hall in 1980 barely affected the Eastern part.

Figure 24. The fire on 10th July 1980

Alan Bird was on duty on that ill-fated day and reports:

> *'Alan Cathie* [senior television engineer] *was on the phone trying to raise the fire brigade. I went down the stairs and switched the studio power off in the middle of a programme. It was obviously not just a puff of smoke so we did evacuate the building'*. (Bird, 2019)

Tricia Cann, also at work, remembers that having enrolled as an OU student, she'd left her nearly completed social science foundation assignment on her desk when the fire bell sounded. She assumed, like many, that it was only a fire drill. When assembled outside with others, she noted helicopters overhead and the west side roof of the Palace on fire. She realised it was too late to go back to collect her work but retrieved it on the next day, albeit smelling a little smoky.

Edward Milner was filming in Liverpool:

> *'We had some problem and my assistant tried to ring Ally Pally. We got a very strange noise on the phone and realised there was something seriously wrong'.* (Milner, 2019)

Lesley Hickson who was based in the resources department was very worried that her new Mini outside in the nearby car park might burn but fortunately it wasn't close to the heat and flames. (Hickson, 2019)

John McCafferty (2019), who worked in the post room, had gone to his nearby home for lunch. When he looked out of the living room window, he could see a plume of smoke. Preparations were being made for an open-air jazz weekend by Capital Radio, so at first John thought a stage light might have caught on fire.

John also recalls that a video tape store was close to the Great Hall. A human chain was formed to remove pre-recorded OU programmes, put them in a car and then transport them to a nearby garage as a temporary measure.

Quite remarkably, the intense fire that destroyed the Palm Court to the west, the Great Hall, the Banqueting Suite, the former roller-skating rink, and the theatre

dressing rooms, failed to reach the BBC/OU production areas, the East Court, or the Victorian theatre.

In terms of continued working, Tricia Cann remembers there was hardly any interruption and Ian McDonald, recalls:

> *'We lost water after the fire so there were water tankers delivering two or three times a day for drinking, washing and the toilets.'*
>
> (McDonald, 2019)

Ian also reports that a broken pipe was responsible for a lack of water pressure. Once fixed the pressure was restored to the running water baths (for black and white stills processing) and the heated water baths to keep chemicals at the correct temperature.

Alan Bird recalls that the area housing the telecine machine, situated at the extreme western end of the BBC part on the studio level suffered water damage, but the equipment was salvaged and re-installed in Studio B.' (Bird, 2017)

Michael John Freeman, a film and video editor, remembers the alarm going off just after lunch and sensed it was for real. He felt helpless watching the roofing going up into the sky. Nevertheless:

> '*Much to my amazement I was in working the next morning. We were able to look into the devastated inside as security was not up and running then. It looked like a scene from the blitz*. (Freeman, 2019)

The fire had also damaged a small section of roof in the telecine area and encroached the floor of the sound suite but there was insufficient air so it went out. A notable loss was the original film editing rooms that had been used in the days of Television News.

Lesley Hickson was having an interview on the fifth floor:

'I remember seeing the smoke out of the window and said 'Excuse me, I think the building's on fire.' (Hickson, 2019)

Despite an evacuation, her interview was continued on the grass and she was given the job she applied for in the photographic department.

Phil Hinchcliffe (2019) recalls that, to a large extent, things were kept going. Certain materials and some equipment needed replacement, as did parts of a burnt-out roof. He felt that engineers have a strong professional tradition of keeping things going.

Jo Gladwin, an information officer, recalling the event in a BBC Newsletter wrote:

'The following morning I arrived to find Bob Rowland (head of production) standing looking up at the tower. He was in shock. 'The Gods Were with us Jo' he said, 'Ours is the only bit left'. He was right. Apart from a little bit of water damage . . . we had survived'. (Gladwin, 1990, p.3)

In an interview in 2009, Bob highlighted the importance of the original fire wall installed in 1936 (a requirement from Haringey Council). On the day of the fire there was concern from the fire brigade that this wall could burst through to the BBC area but it held firm. Bob considered it an irony that a wall built in 1936 to protect the rest of the Palace from a possible fire arising on the BBC side, served to save the BBC from a fire that destroyed the rest of the Palace (Rowland, 2009).

7. And so, to campus

'One of the main aims we had in the move to Milton Keynes was to try and bring with us the spirit of Ally Pally'. (Rowland, 2009)

Notwithstanding the fire, it was in July 1981 that those working at the Palace were relocated to the purpose-built studios and production facilities on campus at Milton Keynes. To what extent could the enthusiasm, energy and 'spirit' of eleven years in

north London be carried over to a new site some fifty miles away? Bob Rowland seeks to capture the nature of this spirit in 2009, referring to:

> '. . . a shared sense of adventure. A kind of democratic attitude to life. A sense of fun. A sense of good comradeship and good family and, I think, a sense of shared objectives all distilled together into a very bonding creative thing'.
>
> (Rowland, 2009)

In the above sections, many of these aspects are touched upon by staff who worked at the Palace. However, an important addition has to be the broadcasting history and historic place provided to employees by a hundred and fifty-year-old palace and park. It has been argued that, '*some buildings embody particular social phenomenon...' (*Johnson, 2019, p.3*)* and Alexandra Palace, set high amongst widespread green surroundings, appears to have been a charged place for many of the BBC/OU employees throughout the eleven years of occupancy.

One can expect the evolved practices of TV, radio and related course production to be carried over to the freshly designed Milton Keynes campus. Indeed, they stood to be further refined given the foundations that had been pioneered in north London. However, the campus could not, of course, be expected to supply the same historic sense of place. And as Edward Casey, a philosopher, argues, certain places tend to foster attachment, a collective identity and even a culture - 'The atmosphere permeates everything' (Casey, 1993, p. 219). This dimension of a collective spirit is unlikely to have been felt in quite the same way on campus.

Figure 25. One of the new campus studios in the early 1980s x

 x

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Figure 26. Studio A (August 2019) with arch infills removed and given essential repairs.

A question that Casey might ask is, although the 1970s employees have left Studio A and the Palace, might it still contain the spirit, indeed the ghost, of the production activity that once took place there?

Addendum

 x

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Figure 27. OU/BBC staff prior to the last day of working on July 3rd 1981.

Nancy Thomas, BBC arts producer (standing centrally, front row, with a white scarf) writes in a Newsletter on 17th June 1981:

> '*The great exodus, after so much anticipation, is finally upon us. The last working day is July the 3rd – and there is to be a party that evening in the Club. Weather permitting David Amy* [photographer] *wants everyone by the miniature golf course at 3.00 p.m. precisely for a final family snapshot in front of the Palace . . . I wish you well in your new home and hope not to lose touch completely'*. (Thomas, 1981)

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