

File: LR003203 - BBC Oral History of North Regional Broadcasting - 24 - YVONNE ADAMSON.wav

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Interviewer: History of north regional broadcasting. This is interview 24, Yvonne Adamson.

In 1948, the BBC published a booklet entitled 'This is the north of England'. It showed how the talent, humour, culture and expanding resources of the region are reflected in the BBC's north of England home service.

Given prominence of place is an article entitled 'I set out to explore the North'. It was written by Yvonne Adamson who began with the words:

Yvonne Adamson: From the ___[0:00:39] in the north to the [wash] and the [d] in the south. From the hills of the border to the plains of the Midlands, the Pennines, the [Fens] and the Isle of Man for good measure, this is the great broadcasting unit we call the North Region.

0:01:01

Interviewer: Bold words, Yvonne. They were written by you shortly after you began working for the BBC in Newcastle in, when was it, 1945?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, I think it was the first job I ever did for the BBC. I was asked to travel throughout the region to see the land that I was to cover in my new job as a freelance.

The war was just over. We'd just spent five years more or less I think turned in on ourselves. We were very busy doing our own jobs and yet, we were aware of a common purpose and that everyone had their own jobs to do and were getting on with it, but we knew little about them.

The BBC had been the great force in keeping us aware of each other. We were aware too, I think, that now peace had come, there was a curtain being lifted and we wanted to see behind it. I set out to explore the north region.

My only jobs with the BBC were in reporting.

Interviewer: I noticed, Yvonne, the sort of subject you covered, for example, the return of wartime evacuees from Rhodesia, the [whaler 0:02:16] unloading its cargo once again, shipbuilding to replace the losses sustained by the cargo-carrying merchant fleets.

0:02:27 Of particular interest to me in this day and age, there you were reporting on the old established Muslim population of South Shields. This is in 1945.

Yvonne Adamson: One of the most interesting early jobs that comes to mind is one that happened in 1947 or '48, was a report I had to do on research by a firm in Newcastle, Merz & McLellan. They were consulting engineers and they did plans and produced schemes for all kinds of projects.

They had a machine there, the design of which I had never seen before and it was something apparently completely new. I said, "What's this?" They said, "That is an automatic brain." An automatic brain? Well, we would call them today computers, but they weren't known in those days.

Another interesting report was on a ship's bell. The ship was HMS Nelson which was built on the Tyne in 1928. Incidentally, it was on her deck that the unconditional surrender of Italy had been signed.

Shortly after her launching, she was given by the people of Newcastle a silver bell, a ship's bell. It was a beautiful [affair 0:04:08], about two or three feet high and made of solid silver. It was given back to the people of Newcastle in 1947 for safekeeping, because Nelson was being broken up in the site.

I went to record the ceremony at which this bell was handed back to Newcastle and having done so... Of course, in those days we had no hand recorders. We had to take a recording [car 0:04:49] and I had nothing to do except write a script.

So I got in touch with the commander and asked him if I could arrange to get a recording car to record just a few ting tongs on this bell, I would do so. He thought it was a good idea, so we got the recording car round and recorded the bell.

Afterwards, I had a very nice letter from him in which he said how grateful he was to me for having done this and asking me if he could have copies of my script to go into the Admiralty archives.

Interviewer: Of course, before we had the advantage of the little tape recorder, well, it was a large one really and then it became

more miniaturised, one we could carry around ourselves, we relied upon the services of our colleagues, the BBC recording engineer with the recording van with the ___ discs.

0:05:53 You must have done quite a lot of recordings with BBC recording engineers, Yvonne?

Yvonne Adamson: Indeed, yes. They were very good, the recording engineers. We got on splendidly, but occasionally they were a bit... They liked to be back in time for their meals and in time for a little [kibble 0:06:15] before meals.

Interviewer: Yes, opening time.

Yvonne Adamson: Opening time, yes.

Interviewer: As I recall. As we recall.

Yvonne Adamson: As we recall. I remember once that we were covering the Queen's progress after her coronation and her visit to Windermere. ___[0:06:33] was there. He had the recordings and I had to come back to introduce the programme, I think. I had to get back to Manchester and I had my own car with me, of course.

He said, "Right, well, I'll see you in Manchester at such and such a time." I suddenly realised that he was reckoning on averaging about 50 miles an hour and I said, "Well, I couldn't do it." He said, "Of course you can."

We set off. I heard this 'honk, honk, honk' going along behind me for quite a long way going down- I remember especially down past Kendal and ____ [0:07:13]. Suddenly, he stormed past, put on his brakes and stopped me and said, "Well, they'll have to find somebody else to introduce that programme. I can't keep you going at this pace any longer. You'll just have to be late."

I wasn't, of course, but I remember that. (Laughter)

Interviewer: You weren't a speed merchant.

Yvonne Adamson: I wasn't a speed merchant. Well, I could go fairly fast but ____ [0:07:39].

Interviewer: But you're here today, Yvonne, because you lived to tell the tale.

Yvonne Adamson: I nearly didn't once.

0:07:47

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Yvonne Adamson: That was Whitehaven to Washington. We were very short of cash in those days and there wasn't much money for me to spend on the expenses so I had to do it all in a day, all the recordings in a day. I think there were about 10 of them. I left home at about 6:00 in the morning.

I did my last recording I know at about 7:30 at night at [Silloth 0:08:19] because I had to get over to Whitehaven, which is over 100 miles, and then go up the coast and I had all these recordings up the coast to make.

I left Silloth at about 7 or 8 o'clock and it was winter and a dark night, perfectly good night. I got onto the [Roman wall 0:08:46] at Military [Way], the Roman [Wall] Road, and it started to snow.

I think I made a mistake. I was probably too tired and wrecked my brand-new car and ran into a wall, head-on collision.

Luckily, I was picked up by somebody who was in broadcasting in Glasgow. I can't remember what his name was. He was coming along behind me and picked me up and took me home, which was very good of him.

Interviewer: So you crashed in the service of the BBC and you were rescued by the BBC.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. Fortuitous.

0:09:30

Interviewer: Given the choice, did you prefer the outdoor life, going out to meet or find the subjects for broadcasting?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, I think so. Those were my great days. The days of those wonderful days when I was doing those topographical programmes.

Particularly I remember the ones when I went round the coast. I started at Fleetwood and then I think it was 9 or 10 programmes, I went up the coast, right across the borders and down the coast on the other side, down the east coast of Scarborough. I think it was 13 programmes in all.

They were absolutely wonderful days. I remember so well. One thing that was nice about them when I did those programmes was that not only did I interview the people, but I made all my own effects. If I said there was a ___[0:10:41] warbler in a tree, [it] wasn't anything out of the-

Interviewer: Effects library.

Yvonne Adamson: Effects library.

0:10:47

Interviewer: You recorded him yourself?

Yvonne Adamson: I recorded them all and that was great. It [would be 0:10:52] nice to find this recording, I think, of that.

In fact, one of the finest recordings I ever made was right on the border at the top of Kielder Forest. It was of course in the days when Kielder Forest and Kielder were very remote. This was before the reservoir and right up on the top in January and snow on the ground and cold.

There were some sheep in the field and they were [baa-ing 0:11:23] and I recorded this. I've never heard a recording that gave such an impression of loneliness and distance. There

was something about it that was quite remarkable. It was wonderful.

That's what I loved. I loved going into these places, going up into the remote areas.

I remember a little shepherd way, way up above Rothbury, up in the Cheviots. He made Northumbrian pipes and he brought out his pipes and played a tune to me sitting on his doorstep.

Another shepherd I met near [Caldbeck 0:12:16] who told me about his sheep, his ____ he called them. I still keep in touch with him.

Interviewer: You also reflected the north-east past, Yvonne, by doing a series of historical features based on accounts contained in 18th and 19th century Newcastle newspapers.

0:12:37 I was surprised to see that you had done- we all know about Davy but you did one on Stephenson's miner's lamp.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. I did one on that and on the research that Stephenson did at Killingworth on the lamp when he lived at Killingworth, several others and on the history of course of the castle, one on the old assembly rooms, and so on.

Then of course I did a number on a series called 'Castles on the Air', which was great fun, for which I travelled all over Northumberland anyhow, up to Norham and down to Warkworth and all over.

Interviewer: In 1945, you originally applied, I believe, to the BBC to be an announcer.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, I did.

0:13:42

Interviewer: What happened there?

Yvonne Adamson: I didn't get the job. Rosemary [Horseman 0:13:46] got it.

Interviewer: Ah, Rosemary Horseman, yes. She was a general programmes assistant, wasn't she?

0:13:57 You didn't get the job as an announcer but you met at the time, I suppose, John Coatman, the wartime and post-war controller of North Region?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. I applied for the job and I got a letter saying that I hadn't got it. At the time, I was up in the ___ [0:14:15] country. We have a country cottage up at Alston and I was staying there.

At breakfast time the next day, the telephone rang. I went to the telephone and it was the BBC in Newcastle saying that John Coatman and also [JC Clark 0:14:38] who was then the ___ director of the BBC in Newcastle, would like to see me.

I wondered what this was all about. I thought it was rather exciting. I [bent 0:14:54] down. In those days we had stone [flags] on our sitting room floor and with a bit of chalk there. I chalked the telephone number of the BBC on the floor and said that I was going to come in the next day.

That telephone number I think is still there to this day. I try not to wash it off every time I try to wash the floor. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Rather sacred writing.

Yvonne Adamson: Very sacred writing.

0:15:25

Interviewer: So what was the job they offered you, Yvonne?

Yvonne Adamson: Well, they offered me the job of being full-time freelance. I was told it would be very rewarding, there was a lot to learn and it would take me some time to learn it and I couldn't expect to earn very much money for about a year but after that, I should be alright. I wondered what I should do about it, however in the end I decided to risk it.

I was very grateful, you know, to John Coatman and John Clark at that time. When I look back now, I see how much they had prepared themselves to train me, after all, a person who knew nothing, and they weren't even asking me to go on the staff.

0:16:18

Interviewer: What was the first actual work they gave you to do in order to learn something about broadcasting?

Yvonne Adamson: Well, the first thing they said was that they thought the best way for me to learn about broadcasting was to learn how to write a script, which is pretty obvious really.

It was summertime and people were going away on holiday and they asked me if I would take a temporary secretarial job

typing scripts, so that I could get the hang of what scripts were like and what was involved in the way of research and other things as well.

They gave me the job of going through the newspapers every morning. I used to go in at 9 o'clock and have a look at all the newspapers, taking out cuttings that were of relevance to the archives and mentioning the BBC and criticisms and so on. Also, anything in the newspapers that I thought might be of use for programme purposes and distributing them amongst the departments that I thought might be interested in them.

Then of course, they arranged for me to have a week, or I think it was probably more, in Manchester under [Bob Reid 0:17:54], who then was news editor.

This was a tremendous experience. Not only was he very helpful to me, extraordinarily helpful and extraordinarily kind, but also living in the atmosphere of a busy newsroom was a great experience and one that I was likely to have to live with probably for most of my life.

0:18:29

Interviewer: When you joined at John Coatman's invitation to take on the role of a full-time freelance in Newcastle, you were given a brief to work to.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. It was a wonderful thing. He told me that I must remember that every listener would be my boss and my customer. My boss because he was paying his licence fee and my customer because it was my job to reflect their lives and the life of the region as a whole. I therefore looked upon myself

as the piece of paper on which their story is written, and I've always felt that.

You know, there isn't a hamlet nor a remote valley, nor a little farmhouse that hasn't some living soul in it who has something original, something interesting to write. You come across this over and over again.

The [roadman 0:19:36] whom I met living on the border who spent his life and all his free time studying the Anglo-Saxon relics of that area, in particular the Bewcastle Cross. These people are wonderful people and I never forget how privileged I was to be able to do anything that I could to help through my work with the BBC.

0:20:09

Interviewer: You also wrote and produced several dramatised features, 'The Great Fire of Gateshead'. What was that, 1854, thereabouts? Which not only struck at the heart of the emerging chemical industry but also wrecked Newcastle quayside.

One I remember particularly, Yvonne, that you had done was 'Whitehaven to Washington'.

Yvonne Adamson: Oh, yes.

0:20:37

Interviewer: You dealt with the links between West Cumbria and the United States of America, particularly in the colonial days.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, that was fascinating. I didn't know until then how close a liaison there was in the 17th century in particular between that

part of West Cumberland and America, particularly the southern states.

Whitehaven was a great shipbuilding port but [the 0:21:05] Whitehaven people [was a] great [Quaker] area and they wouldn't have anything to do with the slave trade. Bristol went out and brought back the [rum 0:21:18] and stuff, but they also called in on their way out to Africa and took the slaves.

Interviewer: And profited by it to a great degree.

Yvonne Adamson: And profited by it and that's how Bristol not only founded its fortune but superseded Whitehaven in that part of the world.

When I was in Whitehaven, I met the family of local wine merchants in Whitehaven, Jefferson's, who were related to the two Jeffersons. They were still in the wine trade in Whitehaven after all these years.

Of course, Washington's mother married a Whitehaven man and her black servant is buried in Whitehaven Church.

0:22:17

Interviewer: How lovely to find all that out and then put it into a programme. The research of course is half the joy, isn't it?

Yvonne Adamson: It's the most interesting part.

Interviewer: Yes. Yvonne, you've mentioned how helpful the Newcastle station director, JC Clark, was when you arrived.

Tell me about some of the others who you were working with when you first joined the BBC. You had your stint in Manchester, you were saying you learnt the layout of a radio script and the requirements by doing some typing. Then you had an attachment to the newsroom with Bob Reid, the first of North Region's news editors. He, incidentally, was with us during the war on Radio Newsreel.

0:23:00

What about those in London? Did you have any contact with any of the London staff in your early days?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, I did but I can't remember.

Interviewer: Godfrey Talbot.

Yvonne Adamson: Oh, yes. We were together on the same programme and by listening and watching him and how he approached things, I learnt a great deal and became, incidentally, extremely friendly with him.

I remember once getting enormous help from him. (Laughter)
We went to record the Queen's visit to Holy Island and we were up in the coastguard's little cabin on top of a mound looking out over the sea as the Royal Yacht steamed up.

But there was thick fog and so the Queen couldn't land. We had to fill in the gap of goodness knows how long.

Interviewer: Pretend all was well. (Laughter)

Yvonne Adamson: Pretend all was well. Godfrey and [I 0:24:01] had to share this half hour or something like that. I learnt an awful lot about filling in from him on that day.

Interviewer: It was Godfrey, you know, he joined the BBC Manchester staff in 1937 as the press officer. He was responsible for publicising the, well, I would call them political radio plays of that young Tyneside ex-school teacher feature Cecil McGivern.

Yvonne Adamson: Who was in Newcastle.

0:24:33

Interviewer: Who was in Newcastle in later years, yes. Later, you came into contact with Tom [German].

Yvonne Adamson: Oh, yes. Very much so. Of course, he started as a freelancer, didn't he, in Manchester?

Interviewer: That's right.

Yvonne Adamson: We were together then. Then he became head of overseas in Manchester.

I did a lot of work for him. I remember him saying to me once that he was very glad to be able to give me work because he didn't have to bother. He knew that anything I produced, he would agree with, which was very nice. It's a great thing when you get people thinking on the same lines.

Interviewer: Well, it's nice when people give you [your head 0:25:16], isn't it?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, and Tom did. Another one who did was Herbert Smith.

Interviewer: Oh, yes.

Yvonne Adamson: Dear Herbert.

Interviewer: Herbert's funeral service was held only a few weeks ago. It was an occasion to think back on all the happiness [certainly that he brought the listeners 0:25:34] through 'Children's Hour' and his great facility for storytelling, and the work that he did on the features side for us as a member of staff.

Yvonne Adamson: And his absolute integrity. The same applied to Tom.

0:25:53

Interviewer: You also worked with religious broadcasting, didn't you? With 'Sunday Half Hour'?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes.

Interviewer: Peter Hamilton?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. I started off with Eric Saxon ___[0:26:07] a service from York Minster on Christmas Day. I went to do something else, I can't remember what it was. I felt a bit cross because the recording [girl] there had to give up my Christmas dinner, but never mind. (Laughter)

0:26:24

Interviewer: What other characters do you remember, Yvonne? What about some of the characters here in Newcastle?

Yvonne Adamson: Well, did you ever know Maggie Wilson? She was secretary to the director.

Interviewer: To JC Clark?

Yvonne Adamson: JC Clark. She was also in charge of all the female staff and people like ___[0:26:47].

0:26:53

Interviewer: A sort of [Miss Worsley] in Manchester but Maggie was in Newcastle. Tell me about her.

Yvonne Adamson: Well, when I first went... I was at school with her, of course.

0:27:00

Interviewer: Did that help?

Yvonne Adamson: (Laughter) I don't know.

Interviewer: Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't.

Yvonne Adamson: Well, all you could do with Maggie was pull her leg because she's got plenty of leg to pull.

The first thing I remember about her was when she brought [a crab 0:27:19] and put it in the stationery cupboard and forgot about it. A week later, people were wondering what on earth was up in the secretary's room.

But she was always fussing around. Everybody loved her but she nearly drove everybody crazy. In those days there was a brewery called ['Flowers' 0:27:41]. Do you remember them?

Interviewer: Yes, still going, I believe.

Yvonne Adamson: Are they?

Interviewer: Yes.

Yvonne Adamson: Well, they produced a beer called 'Dragon's Blood'. We called her 'the dragon'. It was her birthday and we gave her a bottle of Dragon's Blood. I wrote a suitable ode to go with it called 'Ode to the Dragon, what ales the [Staff 0:28:08]', A-L-E-S.

Have you heard the dragon's roar echoing down the corridor?
Have you seen and heard her blast and blare, sorting the
commissionaire?

Have you seen the dreadful blighter take it out of her
typewriter, or the flimsy swish and swirl when she's after little
Pearl? Oh, and goodness, have you seen her chasing up a
hapless cleaner?

Once the dragon's eye did land on Moira, she's no leg to stand
on- That was the time of stiletto heels and Moira had gone
over on her ankle and broken it.

She's no leg to stand on. ____ [0:28:50] Margaret formed from
grace soon will surely lose her pace. Margaret Pace, another
of one of the secretaries. Lone the she-wolf- Mrs [Woolf
0:29:02]. Lone the she-wolf in her lair cowers and hides atop
the stair- ____.

Alas, for timid creatures all, alas, alas, discomfort all. Alas,
alas, what can they do? Wherever they flee, [Drag 0:29:18] will
pursue. No, let's hold such sad confusion, pray, Drag, have a
blood transfusion.

(Laughter) Oh, I've missed one verse out. All of us who live in
fear long to see her on the beer, lay there on this gift of
flowers, for even dragons have their hours.

0:29:41

Interviewer: (Laughter) One might well ask how it went down with the
recipient.

Yvonne Adamson: The recipient was very pleased with it. (Laughter)

0:29:53

Interviewer: Well, fancy remembering that, Yvonne. I mean, that is going back how many years?

Yvonne Adamson: The beginning of the '60s.

0:30:01

Interviewer: You did some announcing.

Yvonne Adamson: Oh, quite a lot.

0:30:10

Interviewer: Although the BBC turned you down initially, young Miss Adamson as an announcer, in the end you did do quite a lot, didn't you?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, I did. In fact, right from the beginning, when I started at the beginning so many old programmes were still running, like 'Country Magazine'.

I got an enormous amount of experience through that because I was not only announcing but I was given the script to write. Of course, as I said, in those days everything had to be scripted. And also the fieldwork and finding the people to go in to take part in the programme.

So it was quite a big operation, the whole thing. Announcing was just part of it. I enjoyed that very, very much.

0:31:00

Interviewer: I think it's a fact, Yvonne, that television and its working methods began to reflect on radio.

You've mentioned York. Well, to quote from my own experience, once York had had a visit from the new style freelance camera crews employed by the early 'Tonight' programmes from London, I suddenly found- at that time I was running 'Children's Hour'. I found that our regional relations with the then town clerk of York became somewhat strained.

The BBC in the north was no longer given carte blanche in making programmes in and around that city. Thoughtless people had seen to that, they'd put up another sort of side to the BBC, the sort of 'we are and we demand' attitude.

Yvonne Adamson: Well, it was a general attitude of mind that had got into the corporation but I did find there were certain difficulties.

For example, once I remember being asked to go to interview the Archdeacon of Northumberland, Milner-White, who was appointed to succeed the Red Dean of Canterbury.

I asked him if I could do this interview and I told him and he said, "Yes, I'd be glad to see you but on one condition and that is that you ask me about my job and how I see my job, but do not ask me anything about the Dean of Canterbury." I promised I wouldn't.

When I got there, he repeated this and he said, "Well, I was asked the other day by television to do an interview and I made the same request as I've made to you and we went onto television live and the first thing they asked me was about the Dean of Canterbury." No wonder we got a bad name.

Interviewer: The emphasis was on the interviewer making a name for himself or herself and never mind the interviewee.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, that's quite right. I was called once before the powers that be and told that my interviews were unacceptable. I said, "Why? Why are my interviews unacceptable?" They said, "Well, they're not emphatic enough." I said, "What do you want me to do?" They said, "Well, we want you to attack your interviewees, we want you to attack them and be rude to them. [Get them stirred 0:34:00]."

I said I didn't think that was the way to get the best out of people and what I was interested in was getting the best out of people. I think that was quite right.

0:34:14

Interviewer: Were you ever asked to base your reports on telephone conversations, things like that?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes, I think I was.

Interviewer: By our journalistic friends? I put 'friends', again, in inverted commas.

Yvonne Adamson: Once or twice, yes. Not very often but yes, I was.

Interviewer: This happened to me on two occasions.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. I refused to do so.

0:34:39

Interviewer: What in your estimation, Yvonne, were for you the great days working for North Region?

Yvonne Adamson: Well, there were two, I think, two things that I enjoyed doing particularly.

One perhaps not quite so much was 'The Week Ahead' that I did for newsroom for so many years. I think it was 20 or more. A weekly programme. That was nice because of the continuity. It was nice also because I got so many friends all over the region who kept writing to me and telling me what they were doing. That was fun.

Interviewer: Not quite such an onerous task as having to go through the newspaper cuttings as you did at the beginning. (Laughter)

Yvonne Adamson: No, but we got something like- I used to get something like 100, 150 letters a week, people writing telling me what they were going to do. Absolutely ___[0:35:46], a lot of it.

Yes, week after week I used to go to Manchester, caught the 6 o'clock on a Tuesday night and 1 o'clock home on Thursday morning. We compiled the programme there. Mrs [Burke 0:36:06] was one of the producers who was assigned to it.

Interviewer: Oh, I remember Mrs Burke. She was continually smoking, wasn't she?

Yvonne Adamson: She was.

0:36:18

Interviewer: Yes, smoke curling out of her left eye. Tell me about Mrs Burke as you saw her, Yvonne.

Yvonne Adamson: She was great fun. I was very, very fond of Mrs Burke but she had her little ways. She knew the history of the English language, she knew English. She was the expert on English. She was always telling me that I pronounced things wrongly and I shouldn't have said this and I shouldn't have said that.

I'll never forget one awful day we had a professor of English in on the programme who I introduced and I said, "By me now is so-and-so to tell us about it." She turned round to me and said, "By me now, by me now. Ridiculous, it's 'with me now'." This professor of English turned round to me and he said, "By me now is perfectly correct. It's absolutely correct Northumbrian and you're a Northumbrian. Talk your own language, don't listen to any of these people."

Interviewer: (Laughter) These foreigners.

Yvonne Adamson: These foreigners. (Laughter)

0:37:24

Interviewer: How did Mrs Burke take that, I wonder?

Yvonne Adamson: She didn't say anything.

Interviewer: She just lit another fag.

Yvonne Adamson: (Laughter) Poor Mrs Burke.

Interviewer: [Kathleen 0:37:34], wasn't it?

Yvonne Adamson: Kathleen, yes.

Interviewer: Kathleen Burke, yes. Oh, I can see her now. Gosh.

Yvonne Adamson: Another one of her things was 'Wednesday'. You mustn't say 'Wednesday', you must say 'Wednesday'. Another thing was the short 'A'. Newcastle, you know, and all those sorts of things. I had to say, "I'm going to [Chadderton 0:38:01 in an ambulance."

Interviewer: (Laughter) I like the 'ambulance'.

Yvonne Adamson: An ambulance.

Interviewer: Kathleen had two pointers for me, Yvonne. I must remember I must not announce 'Children's Hour' prayers by the reverent but the reverend, you see. I used to think, "Thank goodness we've got through February and I can just refer to March."

0:38:26 So that was one strand you enjoyed.

Yvonne Adamson: That was one strand, but the real satisfactory strand I think were the series of topographical features that I did for Herbert.

0:38:41

Interviewer: You did the household events recorded in the diary of one Edward Fairfax, didn't you, leading up to the famous witch trial in York in the 1630s?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. He lived near Leeds, lived in Yorkshire, near [Harriet 0:38:54] really. He believed that his family had been bewitched by certain women in the district. He wrote an account of the bewitching, which led up to this famous trial which unfortunately for him, they were acquitted.

That was very interesting. It gave an insight into family life in those days and the way people think.

0:39:24

Interviewer: You've always had an interest in historical subjects. I mean, was this a subject which attracted you as a girl at school?

Yvonne Adamson: No, I don't think so.

0:39:33

Interviewer: You were at Oxford. What were you reading?

Yvonne Adamson: French and German.

0:39:39

Interviewer: Not history?

Yvonne Adamson: No, but I've always been interested in history. I don't think you can fail to be interested in history when you live in an area like Northumberland, which is absolutely stuffed with history.

0:39:55

Interviewer: You've never used your German language in broadcasting at all? You spent some time in Hamburg before the war as a young girl.

Yvonne Adamson: Yes.

0:40:05

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Yvonne Adamson: Well, it's so long ago. I was only 17, I think, when I was there, but I loved it. I loved the people, I loved the place and I was very, very happy.

I also spent about six months to a year in Berlin at the [Institut für Ausländer 0:40:32] at the university there. That was interesting. That was much nearer the outbreak of war. Things were really getting to the stage when one could make up one's mind what one thought of Hitler, which wasn't much.

0:40:48

Interviewer: What were you doing during the war years, Yvonne?

Yvonne Adamson: I was a secretary in my father's firm, which was heavy engineering.

0:41:01

Interviewer: That was here in Newcastle?

Yvonne Adamson: Yes. Well, actually, we were out in the country. All his work shifted during the war from the east to the west and we went out and were out there.

I'd always had a hankering to go into journalism of some kind from being a very little girl, but I'd rather given that up. Of course, the tremendous reputation of the BBC during the war and how we lived on it and how we really relied on it for our information, it was tremendous kudos it had.

Something of that kind I would have liked. Then I just happened to see this advertisement. I thought, "Well, I'll try it," and I went round to the pillar box behind the house and put in my application. This is what came out of it.

0:42:14

Interviewer: I trust that the flagstone upon which you wrote in chalk, that magical number of the BBC is going to be preserved. You won't let anybody wash it off, will you, Yvonne?

Yvonne Adamson: Well, [I rather fancy 0:42:25] it may be washed off by now, I don't know.

END AUDIO

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