

“I get a real kick out of Big Ben”: BBC Versions of Britishness on the Empire and World Service, 1932-1967

In 1932, Stephen Tallents wrote of the need to ‘project’ England (though Scotland, Wales and Ireland merited a footnote) overseas: to define ‘Englishness’ before other countries took the initiative. This would be essential, according to Tallents, for the maintenance of ‘peace itself’. In deciding exactly the kind of material which should be projected, he posed the question, ‘what are the English characteristics in which the outside world is most interested?’ His answer ranged from ‘The Monarchy’ and ‘Parliamentary Institutions’ to ‘a reputation for disinterestedness’ in international affairs’ and ‘a reputation for coolness’ in national character. He then added his own personal list of ‘institutions and excellencies’ which included ‘Piccadilly...Big Ben and Princes Street, Edinburgh’, ‘English servants’ and ‘the arts of gardening and of tailoring’. England, wrote Tallents, urgently needed to ‘master the art’ of casting such images ‘worthily upon the screen.’ (Tallents, *The Projection of England*, London: Faber and Faber, 1932: 14-17).

That same year, with ‘British prestige at stake’ in the field of external broadcasting, the BBC launched their Empire Service (Reith quoted in script for ‘One Great Family’, WAC, E2/225). The aim was to take British programming to British people scattered across the colonies and dominions and to foster mutual links which would strengthen the imperial community. Although Tallents had referred predominantly to the medium of cinema in his pamphlet, the ‘Projection of Britain’ became a central objective of BBC overseas radio broadcasting to the Empire and beyond. Using official BBC records and publicity, alongside government papers, I will analyse some of the ways in which ‘Britain’ was transmitted by the airwaves and how versions of Britishness changed with the identification of new groups and types of listener in the postwar period. BBC external broadcasting became increasingly complex with the addition of foreign language services during and after the war. I will focus however on broadcasts in English: first as the Empire Service, then as the General Forces Programme and General Overseas Service, before looking very briefly at the transition to a World Service in 1965.

Krishan Kumar, in *The Making of English National Identity*, urges us to ‘lay aside the traditional approaches to English national identity. ... They take for granted the very thing that needs investigation: the wider world within which “England” and “Englishness” find their meaning. English national identity cannot be found from within the consciousness of the English themselves. We have to work from the outside in’ (Kumar, 2003: 16-17). The BBC World Service offers a perfect case study of the ways in which English and British identities were formed explicitly in the context of a wider ‘British’ world. As such, I should perhaps revisit and reassess my title. This paper is not so much about BBC versions of Britishness, but about the ways in which Britishness was shaped in the interactions between the BBC and audiences outside of Britain.

Nostalgic Imaginings: Exile Memory and Sounds of Britain before the Second World War

It was a metropolitan version of Britishness which dominated early publicity for the Empire Service. In a poem printed in the special ‘Empire Number’ of *World Radio* in October 1932, radio waves emanated out from the ‘homeland’ to diasporic listeners united by a common racial, linguistic and ancestral heritage:

You of our race and name who, scattered, dwell/
 Beyond this Island’s wave-washed boundaries...//
 To you, remote, unglimped, to you we send/
 Tidings to echo the familiar speech/
 Of this, your homeland ...//
 And it shall be that, listening here or there,/

Fancy, thus prompted by swift-winged sound,/

Shall build you fairy-pictures in the air/
 Of Thames and Tweed, of mountains heather-crowned,/

Of Sussex windmills whitening in the sun,/

Fens grey with rain, green meadows, furrows dun,/

And London, with the Empire’s House of Prayer.”

(‘Britain Calling’ by Tom Pilgrim)

In these early days of the Empire Service, Britain was portrayed as an island nation for which all white British ‘exiles’ instinctively yearned – a lush rural island of green

meadows, of sun and rain, but dominated in the end by London, centre of the Empire. Radio sounds would be used to trigger fond memories of Britain – ‘fairy pictures in the air’ – yet such memories were not necessarily dependent on lived experience. These were national, even racial, memories, formed outside of national boundaries but held in the collective exile consciousness and crucial to an ‘imagined community’ of Britishness which could survive any distance of time and place. Through radio, through “swift-winged sound”, Britain could be re-imagined by exiles throughout the Empire. This was an essentially nostalgic version of Britain which worked to exclude listeners who could claim no such memories of the Mother Country.

With the Empire Service about to be officially launched, there was some discussion amongst potential listeners over precisely *which* sounds would be appropriate for an empire audience. In 1932, a woman in British Guiana, writing for the BBC’s *World Radio* journal, pondered over her own aural memories of Britain. She highlighted the ways in which interpretations of sounds depended on the listener’s location in the geographical, social and cultural spaces of empire, simultaneously suggesting ways in which *World Radio* readers might interpret the sounds they would soon be hearing: ‘No, not for me those glimpses of the London of hard, white brilliance, reminding us that she has welcome only for the rich, coldly indifferent to such as must save for years before they may even contemplate “a leave at Home”... it is with the more shadowy touches of Home that my memory is agog. ... It occurs to me that the filling of a hot-water bottle would have a “cooling” sound on a night when we could not bear the lightest of covers on our beds.’ She continues enthusiastically to list the sounds she remembers fondly: ‘The fussy “baa” of a mother sheep! ... Carol singers in a rustic lane! Such are the vignettes of the England of our recollections.’ (*WR*, Nov 25th 1932). Sounds evoked memories of ‘Home’ yet they were heard and interpreted within the new sensory geography of the Colonies. A particular version of Britain as ‘homeland’ was needed for this audience.

The Empire Service did indeed strive to offer some of these suggested vignettes of Britain to listeners overseas, though the focus was more often on the street sounds of London than on rural soundscapes. Listener reactions to early, experimental broadcasts illustrate the importance of radio sound, made imperfectly audible through the shortwave technology, in evoking memories of Britain as both a literal and a

symbolic, spiritual homeland. Although listeners struggled to make out meaningful programmes from the noise of background interference, an article in *World Radio*, by the journal's New Zealand correspondent, highlighted the importance for 'lonely settlers' of listening to London: 'New Zealand listeners get out of our beds ... and are completely satisfied if only Big Ben's chimes boom out in our own homes. There is a constant heavy hum ..., and a rhythmic surge as the radio waves reach us. Radio has linked us instantaneously with the heart of the Empire. We have not heard the whole programme, but our patriotic imagination has filled in the blanks.' (WR, Nov 4 1932) Sound thus stimulated creative practices of nostalgia (Jo Tacchi, *The Auditory Culture Reader*, 2003: 273-287). The Empire Service did not offer a complete version of Britishness, rather this was formed in the interaction of broadcaster and listener. The shift from referring to 'listeners-in' to 'listeners' encapsulated a more active, *deliberate* rather than passive, haphazard engagement with radio.

Big Ben was the surprise star of the Service in the 1930s, coming top in surveys of listener preferences for a number of years. In response to listener demand, Big Ben became a regular feature – suggesting again the ways in which listeners were to some extent able to set the agenda for Empire Service programming and that versions of 'Britishness' were the product of negotiation rather than simply 'top-down' impositions by BBC bosses. The chimes of the great bell clearly had sentimental meaning, even for those listeners who had never heard them in London. Big Ben could also be a means of structuring and regulating time in the colonies in an appropriately 'British' fashion. A letter from a listener in the Punjab, suggesting that exiles could be convinced to make some financial contribution to the service, commented that: 'It would be worth a couple of shillings a year just to hear Big Ben doing its stuff once a day. My bearer used to check his watch with Paris, but since the 19th of last month, nothing less than Big Ben will suit him.' (WR, Feb 17th 1933) The chimes communicated Greenwich Mean Time, from which the rest of Britain and the world had set their clocks since the late nineteenth century. This reinforced a sense of London time as the only time which really mattered; listeners may have been overseas but they still operated within British frameworks, performing British identity through an obsession with punctuality. The clock was thus a fitting symbol of the power of the imperial metropolis and an emblem of 'Britishness'.

Yet even Big Ben was not unproblematic, symbolising a London-centric approach which was rejected by some listeners in the dominions who felt that their own voices should be represented if this was to be a true 'Empire Service'. G.L. Blunden wrote a piece for the *Empire Programme Pamphlet* in Nov 1937 considering Australia's relationship with BBC broadcasting. He acknowledged the power of Big Ben to strike 'right into the heart of the exiled Englishman' but criticised the Empire Service as run too much from 'a Big Ben point of view'. This kind of complaint was rare, however; presumably those who found the Empire Service to be irritatingly London-focused tuned instead to alternative local and American stations. As the novelty wore off, Big Ben ceased to be the main topic of listener letters yet from isolated examples it is clear that this sound still had meaning for listeners overseas.

Six days after the official opening of the Empire Service, King George V broadcast his Christmas Day message to listeners across the British Empire. Whilst Big Ben offered a nostalgic reminder of home, the King's voice made listeners feel 'at home' as British subjects in the empire, part of an imperial family: 'I would like to think that you who are listening to me, now, in whatever part of the world you may be, and all the peoples of this realm and empire, are bound to me and to one another by the spirit of one great family.' (WAC, E2/225) The medium of radio allowed the King's voice to be heard in people's own homes, stimulating the fantasy of familial connections for listeners in a much more affecting way than simply reading the speech in print. Dr Joseph Lunt, of Cape Town, wrote in to express how the King's 'intimate talk to His Empire created a profound impression.' (WR, Jan 27 1933.). Whilst striving for an independent identity, people in the dominions of Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and, though perhaps to a lesser extent, Australia, clearly continued to feel some connection with Britain, the 'Mother Country', which they were able to perform through listening to broadcasts from London. Loyalty and love of the Royal family continued to offer a shared sense of Britishness throughout the period under discussion. The Coronation in 1953, for example, elicited a substantial volume of positive listener correspondence. Miss Dorothy Ingram, of Ontario, Canada, was one of many who wrote in to express her appreciation. She described how, 'Everyone was so excited to know that we could feel so close to the Mother Country at such a thrilling time.' (Audience Research O/S, Coronation, Reaction, Overseas, 1953.

WAC, E3/20) Imperial narratives of the 'Mother Country' still had meaning for this listener, though by the 1950s the overall emphasis was on a Commonwealth 'family'.

Projecting Britain: General Programming before WW2

It would be impossible to give full details of all the programmes relating to the projection of Britain in the broad period I am discussing today. Indeed, each edition of *London Calling* offers a bewildering array of material in the weekly schedules: some programmes solely for the General Overseas Service, others for particular services intended for specific listeners in the Empire and beyond. The subjects covered were diverse: from British industry, to culture, to science, to folk traditions, to democratic institutions. The diverse programmes mirror the range of aspects of British society which Tallents had identified in the early 1930s. I will highlight here just a few examples of early programming which are particularly relevant to the theme of 'Britishness', and which feature in listeners' letters in these terms.

Early schedules for the Empire Service were made up largely of material from the Home Service – both the National and the Regional Services. This was quickly deemed unsatisfactory. The BBC believed that Empire listeners deserved a range of programmes suited to their particular tastes and to the limitations of shortwave transmission – crowd noises at football matches could be problematic for example. Moreover, there was pressure to take some initiative in communicating with English speakers across the world, in the face of competition from other shortwave propaganda. In a confidential report of 1934, discussion centred on the need for a *more* 'national type of programme' than that featured in the Home service:

On non-technical grounds it is probably the objective of the home programme builders to exploit to the fullest possible extent the best talent and material in all forms of entertainment and education, without very great regard to nationality. With the growth in other countries of shortwave broadcasting as a means of propaganda there is greater necessity for the British Empire Service to concentrate on a more national type of programme... (WAC, E4/7)

So these 'national' programmes were intended for listeners outside the 'nation' who were nevertheless categorised as British. The BBC vowed to address the 'common interests of British subjects' scattered around the globe. But these 'common interests'

were defined in the inter-relationship between the metropolis and the peripheries, rather than within the home nation itself. (Notes on Imperial Relations for Parliamentary Report, Nov 1934, WAC, E4/7.)

'National' did not mean the complete abandonment of regional programming. The Empire Service continued to offer regionally specific features. On his tour of the Empire in the early 1930s, Frost took with him a selection of Empire programmes intended for rebroadcast and consumption in the empire. Amongst these programmes was a feature on the Isle of Man; a story of 'generations of a Yorkshire mill family'; and a 'Scottish Empire Programme' "that will bring back to Scots of every generation who are scattered all over the Empire the spirit, the voices, the songs, the very atmosphere of their native land." (BBC booklet of Empire Recorded Programmes, 1932, National Archives, CO323/1198/2) 'Britain' was thus not an entirely London-centric construct for overseas listeners prior to the Second World War, although it was frequently criticised as such. The Empire Service reflected the diverse character of the British overseas and the persistence of regional identity.

A list of exclusive Empire Service programmes from Nov/Dec 1933 is interesting in its coverage of explicitly 'imperial' subject matter, combined with special coverage of more 'domestic' events such as the Lord Mayor's Show. On Nov 2nd Sir Arnold Hodson, Governor of Sierra Leone, took part in a 'Topical Talk' in connection with the emancipation of slavery celebrations in West Africa; on Nov 3rd listeners heard a debate on whether 'life in Canada is preferable to life in the home country'; on Nov 23rd began the 'Under Big Ben' series with Mr Howard Marshall; on Nov 30th, the St Andrew's Day programme was broadcast from Edinburgh; finally, on Dec 13th, the Governor of Bombay introduced 'Indian vocal and instrumental music, and commentary on a typical Indian street scene.' (WAC, E4/70). Alongside these dedicated programmes were relays, including the 'Swearing-in of the new Governor of the Isle of Man', and various sporting events such as the England v Wales International Association football match. Sport tends to dominate the list, although earlier that year the BBC had relayed coverage of the Welsh National Eisteddfod and a speech by Right Hon Stanley Baldwin M.P. on 'National Character'.

In a speech in 1936, the Empire Programme Director outlined the difficult task of the service in both keeping listeners in touch with 'home' and providing a true 'empire' service which allowed for links to be made *between* the colonies and dominions. Listeners were assured that talks by Howard Marshall and A G Street, would 'help to keep you in touch with the home country, by talking in their characteristic way about those little personal experiences. And on the intervening Thursdays (or Fridays) we are going to try to bring you a breath of some other part of the home country, such as Marshall and Street bring you from London, and the Southern English countryside ... Scots exiles, and Welshmen and Ulstermen, North-countrymen and West-countrymen and Midlanders, please note!' White male exiles from across the British Isles were being explicitly addressed here, with their British regional identities still seemingly in tact. However, the Director aimed to counter the valid criticism that 'some of our talks were inclined to express the English point of view ... and to ignore the distinctive views of the Dominions and Colonies.' (WAC, E4/70) 'Englishness' is here held in opposition to the new national/imperial identities of expatriate communities, suggesting the complex affiliations of listeners. Audiences were to look out for talks by representatives of the Empire outside Britain on a variety of subjects, though these were to be rather last-minute affairs.

Self-censorship: Britishness in World War Two

During the war, the Empire Service took on a more vital role in holding the wider British world together and securing widespread support for the British war effort. Moreover, it had to cater to a new audience of British soldiers overseas. The main Empire Service was renamed the General Forces Programme, to which listeners at home in Britain could also tune in. As the BBC was gaining its reputation for reliable, objective broadcasting, the true but unbiased 'Voice of Britain', it had to renegotiate the very meanings of 'Britishness' in its everyday schedules. If expatriates in the colonies had once been largely upper and middle class, their needs were now being challenged, if not overtaken, by ordinary working class soldiers who demanded popular music and variety programmes: 'The British civilian in India demands a lot of good light music, a substantial amount of the better-known classics, a lot of serious and authoritative spoke material, a little 'straight' dance music. The

Forces demand a lot of dance music, a little 'good' light music, the minimum of spoken material. They like girl announcers; the civilians seem to detest them!' This contrast seemed to cause particular problems in India, where the exile listener had always been treated as something of a special case: 'There is probably no keener listener anywhere than the 'resident' British civilian in India. Like exiles the world over, he has tastes ... as pronounced and as deeply rooted as his national loyalty. The longer away from Britain, the more fixed in form his nostalgia becomes.' (BBC Yearbook, 1945, 88-89)

The Policy Directive for variety programming during the war is suggestive of the ways in which Britishness as routinely performed within the British Isles could be censored for an international audience. Cecil Madden warned, 'Listeners overseas form their judgment of British character partly by listening to the BBC. It is obvious, therefore, that we must set a really high standard in good taste and international good manners.' Programmer producers were told not to include jokes and sketches purely 'local' to Britain and were presented with a list of material from recent variety scripts which would be entirely inappropriate, including 'any cannibal stuff' and 'cracks about Indians'. 'Old school tie' characters such as 'Colonel Blimp' were a good way for the English to laugh at themselves but the key was to 'humanise' the 'Englishman' for white audiences in the States and the Dominions. The 'monocled peer' was a character to be used sparingly. (WAC, E2/496/2)

The voice from London underwent something of a transformation in the war years; male announcers in formal dinner jackets were being replaced by women. This was due partly to male staff leaving to fight but also reflected an increasing, though not absolute, acceptance of women's voices on the radio. Female announcers were certainly popular with many of the troops. Yet debates continued as to whether the tone of a woman's voice could ever be suited to shortwave radio transmission. There were also criticisms of women's accents, particularly those from affluent areas of London. Listeners overseas clearly wanted a certain, though not always consistent, version of native British femininity.

Class, race and gender were significant factors both for the BBC and for listeners overseas in constructing and projecting Britishness. During the war, the BBC aimed

to challenge stereotypes of the British, or rather the English, character. The figure of the 'monocled peer' was singled out as an image which needed to be quashed if London was to take its place as the 'metropolis of the advanced based of the United Nations in Europe'. (WAC, E2/496/2) There are clear signs during the war that the BBC was trying to reconfigure Britishness in ways which rejected upper class imperialism and embraced Britain's place on the *world* stage as both power and peacemaker. The Empire had not disappeared but was to be reimagined as a more collective, collaborative enterprise, partly through the language of the Commonwealth. The Empire Day programme of 1945 was intended to celebrate 'rich diversity and an underlying unity' but there was to be 'no moralising or generalising ... about the sun never setting, being brothers under the skin, or anything of that sort.' The old imperial clichés were being abandoned. But what shared symbols would take their place? Each country in the British Commonwealth would make a contribution to the programme, with England's being suggested as either an extract from *It's That Man Again*, the chimes of Big Ben or the Greenwich time signal (WAC, R34/213/2). In projecting a version of metropolitan Englishness, then, the aural iconography had not changed much from the 1930s; yet the context in which such symbols would be received was changing fast.

From the Exile to the Tourist: Postwar Britishness

In the new political context of the postwar period, the shared assumptions of 'Britishness' and British imperialism which had dominated the early days of the Empire Service were under threat. The nationalist demands of the colonies could no longer be ignored and the British Government feared that discontented colonial subjects would be seduced by Communism. Whilst many listeners simply rejected the suffocating imperial nostalgia of the BBC, they also challenged programmers to redefine notions of empire, 'home' and 'British' identity. Radio certainly still had a role to play then in holding the Empire together, even as it disintegrated. Yet what versions of Britain could the BBC project which would unite its increasingly diverse and challenging audience? In the handbook of 1945, Britishness was broadly conceived for the airwaves: 'Hardly an aspect of the British way of life, or accomplishment in any realm, is left unobserved, undiscussed, unillustrated or

unexplained by people with expert, and frequently first-hand, knowledge.’ (*BBC Yearbook*, 1945, p.86.)

The BBC recognised that it would need a ‘clear conception of aims and objectives’ to justify continued government expenditure on the GOS in English. In a report from 1948, radio was seen to have the potential to help maintain Britain’s status as a world power, to ‘emphasise and sustain such recognition, whether it be in reflection of Britain’s artistic inheritance and virility, or in demonstration of the principles of freedom of thought and maturity of discussion, or in projection of the richness and variety of its national life, each and every of these tasks is clearly worth undertaking with the maximum financial and technical resources available.’ (Report from June 1948 on ‘General Overseas Service’, WAC, R34/213/2) The Projection of Britain was an objective not only of the BBC at this time, but also of institutions such as the British Council. The success of P.O.B. items, as they were known, was thus an important element in justifying a range of BBC overseas services, particularly when faced with funding cuts in the early 1950s.

There was little apparent consistency in the nature of P.O.B items between different branches of the external services. In 1952, a report responding to criticism of the Eastern Service referred to the European and other Overseas Services as needing to devote more time to ‘British politics and economics’. Yet in referring specifically to the English Service for audiences in India, the author was forced to admit that ‘the pendulum can swing too far’. There was found to be ‘a preponderance of political comment’ with a ‘neglect of the lighter aspects of British life’. (WAC, E2/120/6) For many listeners to the General Overseas Service, ‘everyday’ Britishness was still a major part of the appeal of the BBC broadcasts. There were, however, conflicting ideas about what passed for everyday Englishness in the postwar period. The Archers, to the surprise of BBC researchers, did not win the popularity it had had with home audiences. In 1955, a panel of 360 exile listeners from the West Indies, West Africa and South Asia were largely critical of the programme: ‘Recent ‘exiles’ were glad to have The Archers in the GOS, but some of these who had not heard it in England were extremely critical and declared it unsuitable for overseas listeners or said that it was wrong to present what they thought was an unfavourable picture of domestic life in England (‘silly goings on’) in a programme that sounded more

documentary than fictional.’ (GOS Listener Panel Report, Jan 1955, WAC, E3/52/2) Even so, in 1959 there were continued requests for the programme from some British exiles: ‘A few ... persevered in requesting a return of “The Archers”, even if only in omnibus form: “Why no Archers? A rare breath of home. How can the World’s agriculturalists keep up to date with news of Ambridge?’. (GOS Panel Reports, Second Quarter 1959, WAC, E3/212/1) What qualified as ‘Britishness’, and as an acceptable version of rural English life for consumption overseas, was contested by exiles according to the nature and timing of their migration, as well as their social and political affiliations.

In 1959, a major shift in the official objectives of the General Overseas Service was completed under pressure from the Government.¹ The exile or expatriate audience – the ideal listener since the conception of the service – was now to rank second to the ‘tourist’. A 1959 BBC document on ‘Future Planning Policy’ recorded that regional magazine programmes from Scotland, Wales and Ireland, as well as from the English regions, ‘would be retained, but the present trend away from the nostalgic (for the expatriates) to the more descriptive and tourist-compelling style would be accelerated.’ (National Archives, E/186, CO1027/224) Discourses of ‘home’ were being erased from the service. Discussions amongst BBC officials from the 1950s had observed that Britain was no longer ‘home’ for many listeners – whether literally or symbolically. Then, in 1964, ‘Home News from Britain’ became ‘News About Britain’. With the change in title the following year from General Overseas Service to World Service, the BBC formalised its position in a global rather than an imperial context.

Nevertheless, for individual listeners, the association of BBC broadcasts with a British homeland persisted through the 1950s and into the 1960s. Indeed, this is still related anecdotally today by British people who have spent time abroad. Both recent emigrants and those who had lived for many years in the colonies and dominions, conceptualised BBC programming in terms of forming a comforting link with their

¹ Morris from the Colonial Office, noted the BBC’s reluctance to abandon their expatriate listeners: ‘It has taken some trouble to dislodge from the B.B.C.’s mind the old-fashioned conception of the Service as one which “binds the Empire together” and caters mainly for expatriates, the Merchant Navy and Armed Forces and English speaking residents in old Commonwealth countries.’ Memo to Carstairs, Sept 1959, CO1027/224.

true 'home'. In a listener panel report of GOS listeners in Africa from 1955, a plea was recorded from a housewife in a remote part of Southern Rhodesia, 'for programmes to keep them up to date with intellectual and cultural matters so that on return to "civilisation" they will "know what people are talking about". (Audience Research O/S, WAC, E3/89/12). The BBC faced criticism in the 1960s for neglecting their longstanding British exile audience. In 1966, one listener in Nigeria made the point that, 'While appreciating your impossible task of satisfying a world audience my expatriate friends consider that the BBC owes them perhaps a little more preference in the World Service.' ('African Services in English, Panel Reports, 1961-1974', WAC, E3/165/1) Lingering tensions between a global and a metropolitan focus manifested themselves in BBC fears that they would be accused of being too 'parochial' if they reported on a local train crash in Britain (Memo 4th April 1967, E2/985/1).

For some listeners, notions of 'home' and of 'Britishness' in relation to the BBC had become more fluid by the late 1960s. In their correspondence they suggest that listening to BBC radio broadcasts could make them feel 'at home' partly through a sense of familiarity with the station itself, as well as through a lingering sense of imperial connections, rather than through a direct association of the BBC with the 'Mother Country'. In 1966, an Indian man living in Kenya wrote in to express his appreciation of the BBC: 'The chimes of Big Ben are a welcome sound and reverberate confidence and renewed inspiration into a heart beset by the ups and downs of a hard day's work. The chimes are also a good time check to keep me to my daily routine ... I have been a BBC man since my childhood and I still am.' (Letters from Listeners, 5th August 1966, p.2. WAC, E3/213/1) In a post-colonial era, the BBC could offer nostalgic associations of Britishness to some listeners, yet this nostalgia was based on memories of British radio and lifelong listening habits, rather than on experiences and memories of Britain as the 'Mother Country'.

Conclusion

To conclude, I have not been able to offer here any neat version of the nature of 'Britishness' as broadcast by the BBC. Rather, I have tried to suggest some of the aural versions of Britain which were particularly valued by both programme-makers

and listeners in the early days of the Empire Service and the role of external audiences in shaping radio versions of the imperial and post-imperial British nation. The versions of Britain to be projected were rarely articulated in an explicit way, although conflict arose between whether the focus should be on London or the regions, on the political or on the 'everyday', and on 'high' intellectual culture as opposed to light entertainment. 'Britishness' took shape in the spaces between such dichotomies and in the ethereal borderlands traversed by the airwaves. Overall, the BBC appears to have been able to embrace a complex version of Britishness suited to the diverse allegiances of their expatriate audience. However, the 'projection of Britain' to win the loyalty, or at least the sympathies, of a non-exile audience became paramount in the postwar period. With her imperial influence declining rapidly, the question was ultimately how Britain could best sustain her status on a world stage. The BBC World Service provides a fascinating insight into how such global power struggles could manifest themselves audibly via radio broadcasting, whether in a censored version of variety-show humour or in the contested rural Englishness of the Archers. Britishness was being imagined and re-imagined for, and by, an ostensibly non-British audience.

Works Cited:

Kumar, Krishan, *The Making of English National Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Tacchi, Jo, 'Nostalgia and Radio Sound', IN M. Bull and L. Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2003: 273-287.

Tallents, Stephen, *The Projection of England*. London: Faber and Faber, 1932.