

HANCOCK'S HALF HOUR COLLECTIBLES

Notes to Accompany Volume 3

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The Tony Hancock Appreciation Society is delighted to have given its support to the production of this new and unique series concerning the lost works of Tony Hancock.



Tony Hancock: BBC Publicity Shot for *Hancock's Half Hour*, November 1956

The Tony Hancock Appreciation Society (THAS)

Since its creation in 1976, the THAS has dedicated itself to preserving and promoting the works of Tony Hancock and, more crucially, to finding his broadcasts that were missing from the archives. Over the decades, these efforts have yielded a wealth of material, most notably lost episodes of his most beloved work on *Hancock's Half Hour* for both television and radio. Many of these have now been located and returned to the BBC; some feature in this special series of *Collectibles*, now

into its third volume. However, many still remain lost at this time. In addition, our efforts have found other material – shows recorded before Hancock became a household name – from series such as *Calling All Forces*, *Variety Bandbox* and *Star Bill*. Again, examples of these can be found in this series. In the previous volumes, there was an extensive analysis of missing recordings from Hancock's radio career, and, as ever, we remain hopeful that some of these recordings will emerge from private collections or, perhaps, the archives of the BBC or other institutions.

In these notes, we will focus on a number of missing recordings and shows outside the 'core' work Hancock did on his eponymous series and those that preceded it. If any reader thinks that they may know if – and where – these shows survive, the THAS would be delighted to hear from you.

The first is *The Guy Fawkes Show*, broadcast on the Light Programme on 5 November 1952. This was a comic musical written by Jimmy Grafton, who was pivotal in the creation of *The Goon Show* and a prolific writer of the post-Second World War period. He was also a close friend of Larry Stephens, who would be Hancock's first dedicated writer in 1951. Little is known about the show – we are unsure if the script survives in the BBC Archives – but we know that Hancock played multiple roles alongside fellow performers Joy Nichols, Graham Stark and Max Bygraves. Nichols and Stark were also appearing with Hancock at this time in *Forces All Star Bill*, which would eventually develop into the forerunner of *Hancock's Half Hour*.

We are also fascinated by two broadcasts that are listed in Roger Wilmut's detailed listing of Hancock's performances that appear in his 1978 biography *Tony Hancock: Artiste*. On 27 September 1952 and 13 December 1952, it is believed that two shows were recorded on Radio Luxembourg featuring Hancock at the London Palladium. Radio Luxembourg occupies an important place in the development of commercial radio in the United Kingdom. It had begun broadcasting before the war, filling in gaps when the BBC was off air or providing alternative schedules to the sober fare offered on 'Reith Sundays'. After the war, it restarted operations and featured many well-known stars of the period. For example, Vera Lynn decamped to the station in 1951 when she refused the BBC's demands to stick to her conventional repertoire. The comedy series *Much Binding in the Marsh*, which was cancelled by the BBC in 1950, also found a temporary home on the station. Strikingly, Bill Kerr had his own series on the station in 1952. *The Bill Kerr Show* was sponsored by the catalogue company Marshall Ward, and featured Pat Coombs and Diana Coupland. The transmission dates of Hancock's performances are unknown. In addition, the date of these recordings is a mystery to us since they do not tally with Hancock's known stage performances. However, over the years we have become aware that some artists arranged special appearances at the Palladium purely for Radio Luxembourg purposes – we also believe that some of these were filmed. As so little of Hancock's stage performances have survived, these are naturally of great interest to us.

On 20 July 1956, Hancock was featured in the first series of *The Laughtermakers*, which focused on the lives and careers of leading entertainers of the period. Harry Secombe was the subject of a later show in the series, and this turned up in private hands several years ago. However, Hancock's episode remains lost at this point. This is particularly frustrating given the guests who made contributions. Leslie Bridgmont, for example, had given Hancock his break on radio as far back as 1941. Aged just seventeen, Hancock appeared on *A La Carte*, a 'mixed menu of light fare' broadcast from Bristol (to where BBC operations had repaired during the Blitz). Bridgmont was also the producer of *Calling All Forces* during the early 1950s, which proved a catalytic show in the development of the comic's career. Derek Scott also appeared. He had formed a short-lived double act with Hancock in the late 1940s which found success in the challenging environment of the Windmill Theatre (he would also go on to provide the music for the ATV series, *Hancock*, and the star's movie *The Punch and Judy Man*).

One of the most important lost works is the radio broadcast of HG Wells' *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (31 December 1956). Leaving aside some stage performances from the late 1940s, this is the first substantive example of Hancock attempting a straight acting role, playing George Fotheringay, who discovers he can perform miracles. The cast included many actors with an

association with Hancock, notably Kenneth Williams and Hattie Jacques. The latter had joined the cast of *Hancock's Half Hour* a few weeks before the play was broadcast. Other members included Fred Yule, Hugh Morton, Charles Lloyd Pack and Warren Mitchell, all of whom would appear in either the radio or television series of *Hancock's Half Hour*. Curiously, the show featured the theme tune of said series, an odd choice given the nature of the work. We know that Hancock was distinctly uncomfortable about the recording process, feeling somewhat overawed by the presence of so many established actors. This led to the producer (and writer), Dennis Main Wilson, to take the extreme step of placing Hancock's microphone during rehearsals such that the rest of the cast were behind him. Although the recording is lost, Kenneth Williams provided an account of the performance in his infamous diaries, which is typically acerbic:

'He failed to come up at the end, and I know it was because he didn't believe in what he was saying. If he is philosophically opposed to a script idea, he doesn't seem able to perform it.'



A production shot from *The Flight of the Red Shadow*, January 1959 (a lost BBC Television Show).

Again, it would be of great benefit to listen to the broadcast so we can make our own assessments, not least because many researchers of Hancock's career have long suggested that his career and life would have been dramatically different had he embraced the idea of serious acting. Thankfully, a subsequent straight performance in *The Government Inspector*, made for BBC TV and broadcast live on 9 February 1958, has survived.

On 5 August 1957, Hancock was featured on *Desert Island Discs*. To date, this show has remained completely lost – it did not survive in the BBC archive and no home recording has turned up. The programme notes survive and tell us that Hancock chose *Migraine Melody* by David Rose and his Orchestra; *Gloomy Sunday* by Artie Shaw and his Orchestra; *The Thieving Magpie Overture* by the NBC Symphony Orchestra; *Symphonic Variations* by the London Philharmonic Orchestra; *The Man That Got Away* by Judy Garland; *The Swan of Tuonela* by the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra; *Soleares* by Pepe De Alzeria; and *Un Jour Tu Verras* by Mouloudji. His luxury item was a television set. If anyone does have a recording of this programme, please let the THAS know. It is one of the most sought after items on our list of missing material. Our hopes in this regard were raised in early 2018 when a researcher announced via the Facebook page of Kaleidoscope, the lost broadcast company, that he had found the missing recording of Harry Belafonte's *Desert Island Discs* appearance from October 1958. This hailed from a collection of a long-deceased BBC producer.

We are also interested in locating an interview Hancock did with Joan Bakewell for *Late Night Line-Up*. This was a pre-recorded piece broadcast on BBC2 on 15 October 1966 as a precursor to his imminent one-man show at the Royal Festival Hall.

Lastly, on 4 January 1959, Hancock appeared on *What's My Line*, the famed television quiz show. He was the guest celebrity, faced by regular panelists Gilbert Harding, Lady Isobel Barnett, Pippa Stanley and Cyril Fletcher (who appeared with Hancock in an episode of *Calling All Forces*, which is contained in this collection). Eamonn Andrews was the host – interestingly, it was on the Irishman's chat show that Tony made his last ever television appearance in the UK (*The Eamonn Andrews Show*, ABC TV, 14 January 1968). Recently, the audio from this show was located in a private collection and makes for fascinating, if sobering, listening.

Of course, Hancock made numerous other appearances on radio and television, for multiple stations, over the 1950s and 1960s. Given his importance in the history of British broadcasting and culture, the THAS welcomes any contacts from people who think they may have a previously unknown recording featuring him.

Detailed Programme Notes

Hancock's Half Hour: The 13th of the Series (4/13)

Featuring Bill Kerr, Sidney James, Hattie Jacques and Kenneth Williams

First broadcast BBC Light Programme 6 January 1957

This show exists in two distinct forms – the original broadcast and a subsequent remake. The one in this collection is a newly-discovered home recording of the original. It was recreated two years later at the behest of BBC Transcription Services (TS), which sold *Hancock's Half Hour* to foreign markets. Such sales raised issues such as the relevance of topical references made in certain shows, and, more challengingly, features of the scripts that would limit the buyer's freedom to place them anywhere in a series of repeats. As *The 13th of the Series* very specifically referenced its chronology, it was remade in 1959 as *The 13th of the Month* (TS/2) so it could be placed anywhere in a batch of repeats. Three other shows were remade alongside this episode for similar reasons. *The New Secretary* (4/5) was altered so Grizelda Pugh's entrance to 23 Railway Cuttings

was presented as a flashback, again to allow it to be placed anywhere in a series. The two other shows were changed for reasons of topicality. *The Bolshoi Ballet* (4/2) became *The Ballet Visit* (TS/3), thus avoiding the specific references to the appearance in London of the famed Russian dance group that took place in 1956. Lastly, *The Election Candidate* (5/10) was altered so Hancock stands for Parliament representing the Independent Party as opposed to the East Cheam Liberal Party.

The 13th of the Series features the announcer, Robin Boyle, in probably his most pronounced role in the series. Throughout the history of the series, various BBC staff announcers were involved in the programme, and in the second season, Kenneth Williams frequently filled this role. Robin Boyle can be heard extensively throughout the first five series, but his broadcasting career was more significant than this. A veteran of the Second World War, Boyle began working on radio in Hamburg with British Forces Network, with a particular focus on the German end of *Family Favourites*. A great fan of dance music, he returned to London in the late 1940s to work on shows such as *Night Ride*, *Music While You Work* and, most notably, *Friday Night is Music Night*. His association with this latter programme started in 1953, and by the 1970s he was the main presenter of the show.



Radio 2 DJs photographed in 1984. From left to right, Ray Moore, John Dunn, Gloria Hunniford, Sheila Tracey and Robin Boyle, the announcer on *Hancock's Half Hour*

In issue 20 of *Railway Cuttings* (the THAS magazine, now called *The Missing Page*) from the early 1980s, he provided some insights into his time on the show.

'There was a certain amount of scene setting to do and, as far as I can recall, I took part in most of them, so I got to know the entire cast well. However, I feel it would be breaking a confidence to detail any of the happenings backstage, in the same way that it would be unfair to an author to allow uncorrected galley proofs to be published.'

'The Hancock series were the result of a marvellous chemistry between two brilliant writers (Galton and Simpson); the creation of the 'little man', who fitted the star's personality like a glove, and a supporting cast, most of whom went on to be stars in their own right. Added to this was a timelessness about the scripts. To clarify this, take a listen to an old Tommy Handley show, full of topical allusions and catchphrases which had the audiences of the day falling about with laughter but, in a different time, are unintelligible. I believe Tony's 'Blood Donor' or 'Sunday' will probably strike sympathetic chords with audiences in fifty years' time.'

This is not to detract from Tony's genius. Most of us talk about 'timing' but it is an essential quality for all broadcasters. I have never known anyone to extract quite so much from a simple sigh or pregnant pause. One of his silences would have the audience anticipating his next crushing line, like children waiting to open Christmas presents.'

Rehearsals were sometimes hysterical and we often started with our sides aching from laughing. Before the show, Tony and the cast would warm up the audience. He liked to do his impression of a lighthouse, for which he revolved slowly, silently opening and closing his mouth each time he faced the front of the house, never changing that familiar lugubrious expression'.

Robin Boyle died in October 2003 aged 76.

This recording – and the three others featured in this collection – come from a collection of off-air recordings of domestic VHF repeats broadcast in 1964 which was discovered by Ted Kendall, the renowned sound engineer. In all cases, the technical quality is substantially better than that of the existing recordings that have been issued commercially to date. In the case of *The 13th of the Series*, all previous releases of this show were derived from a tape retrieved from TS in the distant past. By the time this tape found its way to Ted, it had been played on a machine with a magnetised head and, consequently, was noisy. The new version is much quieter, so much so that we can now hear a valve in the original recording chain 'singing' at points during the last third of the show.

Hancock's Half Hour: The Male Suffragettes (5/3)

Featuring Bill Kerr, Sidney James, Hattie Jacques and Kenneth Williams

First broadcast BBC Light Programme, 4 February 1958

The 'timelessness' of Galton and Simpson's scripts mentioned by Robin Boyle above has been cited by many as the key reason for the longevity of the humour in *Hancock's Half Hour*. Of course, all the shows contain content that dates them, whether this is reference to contemporary currency, political events, movies and much else besides. However, very rarely do these details obscure or detract from the main narrative thrust of each episode. Further, since so much of the comedy in *Hancock's Half Hour* was based on character and situation, much of it remains undimmed by the passage of time. *The Male Suffragettes*, therefore, is an interesting episode because it is one of few that can prove uncomfortable listening for modern audiences. The plot concerns Hancock's attempts to have the vote removed from women. This is based upon a number of rather flimsy allegations established in the first scene, such as the undue influence that the wives of Members of Parliament have on their husband's voting records:

'Tony: MPs vote according to their conscience.'

Sid: Never, their wives decide how they vote. They're in the kitchen cutting their sandwiches ready for them to take to the House...and they say 'Now don't you forget Henry. You vote how I told you to!' Then they look it up in Hansard and if they didn't vote how they were told, they're for it when they get home.'

At this time, in the wake of the 1955 election, there were approximately 30 female MPs of the 630 that had recently been elected. The Equal Franchise Act, by which voting rights were given to men and women on the same terms, had only been passed in 1928. The view that – despite their gross under-representation in Parliament – women could still be viewed as having a sinister effect on democratic processes is an unsettling one, even in jest.

Perhaps more concerning is that the impetus for this debate comes from a prior confrontation between Hancock and Miss Pugh. This begins with the former complaining about his secretary's cooking and treatment of his newspaper:

'Page 1, followed by Page 3, folded in half. Then we have Page 8 upside down, followed by 6,2,7 and 4 in that order. Why can't women read a newspaper from the front to the back and leave it like that?'

In the fullest surviving recording we have – contained in this collection – Miss Pugh replies by stating that the newspaper is *'all there'*, to which Hancock retorts:

'Yes, but you're not, neither is any of your lot. Votes for women? They're a dead handicap. They prevent us men from doing great things.'

However, in the original script, his response is actually more disturbing:

'Yes, but you're not, neither is any of your lot. Votes for women? Put 'em all in yashmaks and tie 'em to the gas stove, that's me. They've got the right idea in Algeria. Herd them together, lock them up, and forget about them. Throw them a side of beef every week and let them sort it out among themselves. They're a dead handicap. They prevent us men from doing great things.'

It is unclear whether the missing text was ever broadcast. It may have been cut from the script before the recording or during routine editing prior to transmission. Alternatively, if the line proved controversial on first transmission it could have been removed before the repeat of the programme, which would air the following week. It would certainly have been excised by TS in any case, to avoid causing offence to foreign audiences, as was a later line – *'If this was Algiers, I'd have put her up for auction by now'* – which has been restored in the recording contained in this collection.

However, it is unlikely that the missing lines mentioned above were cut for reasons of taste in deference to British listeners of the time. When Tony and Sid convene the first meeting of the male suffragettes, the latter refers to a society badge depicting *'a bird being sloshed across the nut with a spiked club'*. It is an uncomfortable image. Indeed, commentators have pointed to other casual references to domestic violence in several episodes of the radio series. In *The Marrow Contest* (2/11) Hancock shouts out the measurements of his prized vegetable to his neighbour and horticultural foe. He then laughs at the reaction: *'Look at him bashing his wife'*. More egregiously, there is an uncomfortable exchange in a lost episode called *The Breakfast Cereal* (3/15), which has since been remade as part of *The Missing Hancocks* project. In this show, Hancock winds up in court suing the manufacturer of Crunchyflakes – Sid – because his cereal did not give him the pep and vigour promised by its adverts. In his defence, Sid calls a Mrs. Biggs, played by Andree Melly, who testifies as follows:

'I owe everything to Crunchyflakes. I can remember the time when my old man came home so tired from the dog meeting that he didn't have the strength to wallop me...so much so that I began to think he was no longer interested in me. But since I have been giving him Crunchyflakes...I can look forward to a right bashing. Thank you Crunchyflakes for saving my marriage.'

It is important to stress that no criticism of Galton and Simpson is implied by these observations. Attitudes to domestic violence in the 1950s were clearly very different to those held now. Infamously, in an episode of the television police drama *Dixon of Dock Green* from the same period, the eponymous hero, played by Jack Warner, once reflected that *'If I arrested every bloke who clocked his wife, I'd be working overtime'*. Indeed, it is rather shocking to learn that the first major specific piece of legislation in Britain on the problem of abuse in the home was the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act in 1976.

In addition, it must always be remembered that Galton and Simpson devised characters that were, in many ways, utterly dislikable, with objectionable opinions and with few redeeming qualities. For example, the entire plot of one of the most famous and oft-repeated episodes – *Hancock's Happy Christmas* (4/11) – revolves around Hancock's dislike of children and his attempts to steal from them. On paper, this set-up seems an unlikely basis for comedy. The fact that his machinations are towards orphans and, obviously, at Christmas, make it almost impossible to conceive that any semblance of humour can be derived from it. However, as those familiar with the show will know, Galton and Simpson manage to make this one of the funniest they ever wrote. They were masters at identifying the basest characteristics of people and presenting them for ridicule, and it can be strongly argued that this is the approach they took to the issue of domestic violence of their time.

This version of *The Male Suffragettes* comes from the afore-mentioned set of home recordings made in 1964. To date, commercial releases of the episode were taken from an unavoidably noisy TS pressing made by British Homophone. The improved noise level on this new version throws Hancock's laryngitis into sharp relief – his struggle with this is very clear early on in the show. This recording also features some missing material that has not been heard in any of the previous commercial releases.

Hancock's Half Hour: The Sleepless Night (5/20)

Featuring Bill Kerr, Sidney James, Hattie Jacques and Kenneth Williams

First broadcast BBC Light Programme, 3 June 1958

This episode was the final show of the fifth series of *Hancock's Half Hour* on radio. By this time, the team of Hancock, James, Kerr, Jacques and Williams had been working together for around eighteen months across two series, recording thirty-six shows together. During this time, they had taken scripts by Galton and Simpson and, together, had created episodes that are still considered among the greatest examples of British comedy. Early in their run came *The Diary* and *Cyrano de Hancock*; the weeks before *The Sleepless Night* had seen the transmission of *Sunday Afternoon and Home* and *The Threatening Letters*. These shows were also distinguished by some of Kenneth Williams's most memorable performances, not least in this episode, where he plays both the insomniac telephone caller and the besotted biker.

Despite these successes, this show proved to be one of the last that Williams appeared in. As his diaries reveal, he had been developing a resentment towards the show and its cast and crew. On 4 May 1958, following the recording of *The Junk Man* (5/16), he wrote:

'Did the Hancock show. It went very badly. The scripts seem to get worse and worse. There was a time when Tony would have complained. He seems quite happy with them. They are terrible. This one was a lot of inconsequential rubbish about rubbish. Hardly a joke anywhere.'



Publicity shot for the first series of *Hancock's Half Hour*, 2 November 1954

Whilst *The Junk Man* may not be the strongest episode written by Galton and Simpson, it is difficult to view Williams' comments as objective. For context, the three shows recorded before *The Junk Man* – when scripts were getting 'worse and worse' according to Williams – were *The Foreign Legion*, *The Grappling Game* and *Sunday Afternoon at Home*. Each is a sublime example of work by the writers (and, indeed, the performers).

As most researchers have noted, tension between Williams and Hancock had been developing in 1957 over the future of the Snide character who, eventually, had been killed off, quite literally, in the final show of the fourth series (*The Last of the McHancocks*, 4/20). Interestingly, William's diary entry for that day makes no overt reference to this; however, he does note surprise that James Robertson Justice was a guest star and he complains about his meagre role in this episode. Perhaps the pivotal moment in this story was on 10 February 1958, when *The Insurance Policy* (5/4) was being recorded. He wrote:

'Arrived at the Paris to find that the Snide character was in the script. When Tony arrived he said he was angry about it, and that it should go. He really believes it is 'cartoon' and etc. etc. He has certainly gone down in my estimation. Every time he asks me if I mind, I have to say no because after all this fuss I'd feel awful doing the damned voice.'

In November 1958, a few months after *The Sleepless Night* was broadcast, he rejoined the rest of the cast to record the remakes for TS referred to earlier. It is clear that a break from his colleagues had not helped matters. His diaries read:

'Did the Hancock show from the Piccadilly. It was a general disaster. Really terrible. This team is so dreary to me now!'

His exit from the show was now seemingly inevitable. Notably, when the festive special *Bill and Father Christmas* was recorded on 7 December 1958, the role of the conflicted family doctor was played by Warren Mitchell, even though it was tailor-made for Williams (who, according to his diaries, was at home on this day writing cards). A few months later, recording commenced on the sixth radio series. On 6 June 1959, he took part in *The Smugglers* (6/1) and *The Childhood Sweetheart* (6/2); both shows were recorded on the same day. His assessment of these was damning:

'I was given an innocuous part in one, and a 'spot' in the other, but neither of them worth anything artistically. I think that I am quite superfluous now.'

Williams pledged to call his agent the next day to end his involvement with the show. Although this matter is not referred to further in his diaries, he was clearly true to his word. The next recording session, for *The Picnic* (6/4) was planned just three days later. On Alan Simpson's original typed script for this show, the first page refers to Williams in the cast, but it was subsequently blotted out. Hancock and Williams never worked together again.

This version is taken from a 1964 repeat. Before this was found, only the TS LP pressing survived in broadcast quality and in previous restorations the missing lines had to be sourced from domestic recordings of indifferent quality. This led to a 'patchwork quilt' effect in the audio that has now been eliminated. The new source is of excellent quality throughout, and required only the opening and closing signature tunes to be partly restored from TS sources.

***Hancock's Half Hour: The Last Bus Home* (6/3)**

Featuring Bill Kerr, Sidney James, Warren Mitchell and Hugh Morton

First broadcast BBC Light Programme, 13 October 1959

This episode is one of the best-loved of the entire series. One striking feature of the show is that it features a number of lines that fans repeat to this day, often having to explain to others why they feel compelled to do so. In a recent discussion in the THAS Facebook group page, members happily recounted occasions they have yelled *'It's the bus, it's the bus!'* to groups of nonplussed strangers. Similarly, looking over the exchanges members have had during the years, it is noteworthy that if even the slightest hint of disagreement has crept into a discussion, the phrase *'Now I know where I stand'* has been used to defuse any simmering conflict.

In previous notes for these collections, we have provided some insights into the careers of the stars that featured with Hancock in his legendary series. In the case of Sid James, who features so prominently in this episode, there is little that can be said that has not been documented by copious biographers and historians of the *Carry On* series. Those interested in learning more should consult these sources, not least those by Robert Ross (for example, *Sidney James: Cockney Rebel*). For the purpose of these notes, we would like to recount an incredible discovery made about Sid that emerged during our research over the past two years. It seems particularly fitting given that one theme of this collection is sharing previously unknown or rare insights into the careers and lives of Hancock and his acolytes. This story has not featured in any of the numerous biographies of Sid to date.

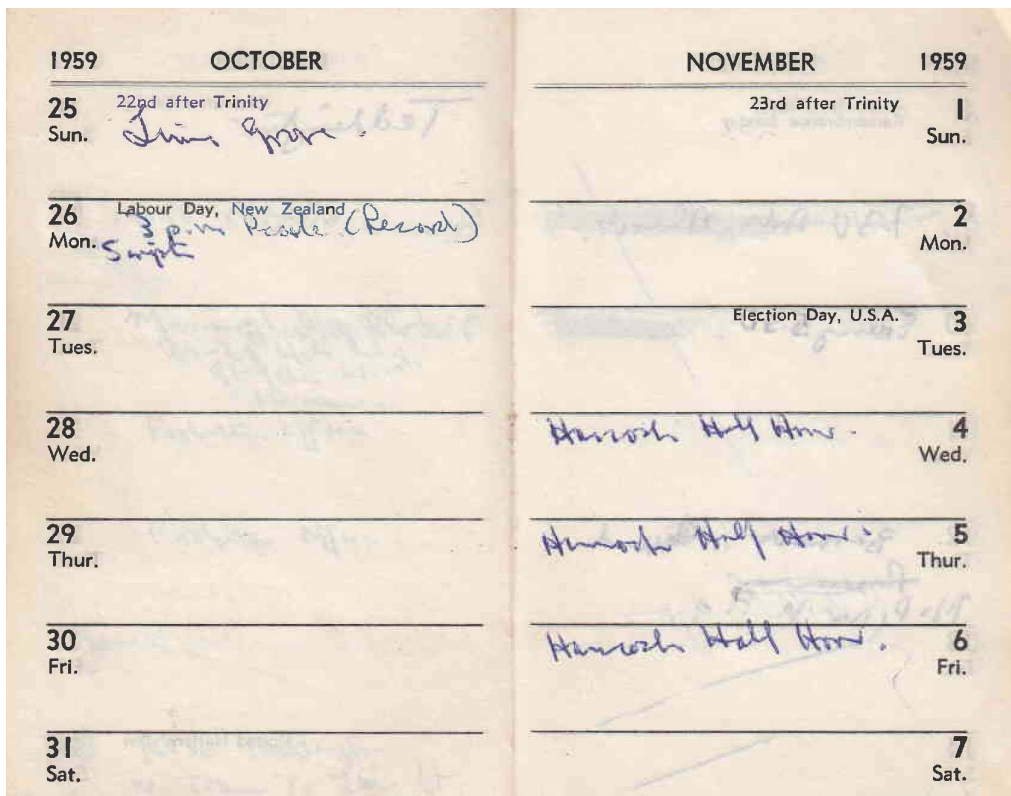
Two years ago, we were contacted by Christopher Beeching, the long-term partner of the writer and actor Glyn Jones, who died in April 2014. Glyn was a supremely talented creative whose career spanned many decades, continents and roles. Born April 27, 1931 in Durban, South Africa, he was the son of Llewelyn Jones, a Welsh-born gold prospector in Southern Rhodesia, and Rosa Angela Paino, a teacher from northern Natal.



Glyn Jones appearing with Hancock in *The Tycoon*, BBC TV

Glyn was a prolific actor with a notable connection to shows as diverse as *Doctor Who* and *Here Come the Double Deckers*. The reason for Chris contacting the THAS was because Glyn appeared in a 1959 television episode of *Hancock's Half Hour* called *The Tycoon*. In Glyn's effects, Chris had found the original pay slip for the part and the diary entries for the recordings, which are reproduced here by kind permission. Sadly, the diary details were perfunctory – he was no Kenneth Williams in this regard – and the only other known reference to this appearance was in his 2012 autobiography: '*Hancock was a quivering bundle of nerves, worse than me. This was before he had to resort to idiot boards.*'

As mentioned earlier, Glyn's mother was Rosa Angela Paino, a teacher from northern Natal. She matriculated in 1918 and then attended Teacher Training College at the University in Pietermaritzburg. When this three year course concluded, aged 21, she began her teaching career, specialising in English, History and Mathematics. She was posted to a primary school in Newcastle, Natal in 1921.



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Glyn Jones' diary entries and pay slip for his appearance in *The Tycoon*

Two years prior to this, the entertainers Lou and Reine Cohen, a struggling vaudeville act from Johannesburg, were offered a touring act of Australia. Despite having two young sons, Maurice and Sollie (aged eight and six years old, respectively), they accepted the booking and arranged for their boys to be sent to stay with relatives in Newcastle. This arrangement – which was meant to be for just a few months – ended up lasting nearly two years. It was to have a profoundly negative effect upon Sollie's relationship with his parents.

The boys were enrolled into the government school where Rosa would eventually start teaching in 1921. In later years, Rosa remembered Sollie as '*just a little Jewish boy in her class in Junior School...academically not the brightest spark.*' Over time, however, she was '*always happy for his success in theatre*', because Sollie Cohen was destined to enter repertory in South Africa and achieve a moderate level of success there. Eventually, after the Second World War, he would change his name, forget his past – indeed, actively seek to hide his past – and leave to seek his fortune in Britain. Sollie Cohen would, of course, become the one and only Sidney James.

Sadly, we do not know whether Glyn or Sid ever discussed this coincidence on the set of *The Tycoon*, or whether it had any bearing upon Glyn's appearance on the show (although Chris has suggested that Glyn rarely used his South African origin or network to get breaks). In any event, Sid was notoriously secretive about his past life in South Africa. Consequently, it is entirely plausible that even if Glyn had alluded to their shared background during breaks in rehearsals, Sid might have realised the connection but kept quiet about it. In any event, the THAS was delighted to have unearthed this untold story as part of its ongoing research, and to obtain rare personal documents related to the production of *The Tycoon*.

As with *The Sleepless Night*, this version of *The Last Bus Home* is taken from a recording of a 1964 repeat. Previously, only a rather noisy TS LP pressing was known to survive in broadcast quality, the cuts in which had to be opened out using domestic recordings of indifferent quality. The new source is used throughout, with just the opening and closing signature tunes drawing upon TS recordings.

Extract from *Calling All Forces*

Featuring Charlie Chester, Cardew Robinson, Jack Simpson, Miriam Karlin, Denis Goodwin and Stanley Black and his dance orchestra

First Broadcast BBC Light Programme 12th May 1952

Calling All Forces was a variety programme aimed at military personnel based around the UK and Germany. It included slots for military personnel to request songs to be sung or played by guest singers or instrumentalists. It is worth considering here the background to the creation of such shows.

At the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the BBC combined its existing BBC National Programme and BBC Regional Programme into the Home Service. However, the new Home Service concentrated on news, informational programmes and music and, consequently, many of the lighter pre-war programmes were discarded.

Consequently, and originally intended for military personnel overseas, the BBC Forces Programme started broadcasting on 7 January 1940. This had a light tone, similar to that of the pre-war programmes. It featured a mixture of drama, comedy, popular music, quiz and variety shows alongside news broadcasts. It was quickly picked up by the general public as an alternative to the Home Service. Some of the broadcasting was developed for specific military operations, such as *AckAck Beer Beer* for the anti-aircraft and barrage balloon stations and *Garrison Theatre* for the Army. Other shows such as *Hi Gang*, *It's That Man Again* and *Variety Bandbox* were developed for the Forces more generally.

From 1942, American troops, used to a faster-paced comedy, started to receive broadcasts of *The Bob Hope Show* and *The Jack Benny Program* on the BBC Forces Programme. Given the large number of American soldiers receiving these broadcasts ahead of D-Day on 6 June 1944, the BBC General Forces Programme replaced the BBC Forces Programme on 27 February 1944, with a greater focus on American-sourced programming.

After VE Day (8 May 1945), the wavelengths used by the BBC General Forces Programme were transitioned to the BBC Light Programme on 29 July 1945. The broadcasts continued to have a Forces focus, especially given the number of troops stationed in Germany. For example, the *Radio Times* listing from the opening night of the Light Programme includes *Variety Band-Box* (note that the title was hyphenated at this time), which was described as 'An entertainment programme for Forces overseas.'

Calling All Forces was broadcast only seven years after the end of the Second World War and was one of many programmes still aimed at military personnel at this time. Contemporary programming continued to include *Variety Bandbox* (until September 1952), *Forces Favourites* (which became *Family Favourites*, and was broadcast until 1980), *Much Binding in the Marsh* (for the RAF), *Stand Easy* (for the Army) and *HMS Waterlogged* (for the Navy).



Variety Bandbox 1950: From left to right Brian Sears (producer), James Douglas (writer)
Miriam Karlin and Peter Sellers

The significant changes to the style of the shows broadcast during the latter stages of the war and throughout the late 1940s were important in the early development of key comedy writers during this period. Galton and Simpson forged their early friendship listening to American radio comedies such as *The Jack Benny Show*, *Burns and Allen* and *The Phil Harris Show*. These shows were a huge influence at the very start of their writing career. Bob Monkhouse and Denis Goodwin, the writers of *Calling All Forces* (and for many British comedians such as Arthur Askey, Jimmy Edwards, Ted Ray and Max Miller) also served as gag writers for American comedians, including Bob Hope, when they wanted jokes for British tours.

As can be seen, *Calling All Forces* fitted into a period of post-war radio where programming was aimed specifically at Forces both at home and overseas. It was first broadcast on 3 December 1950 and ran through to 28 July 1952, a total of 87 editions in as many weeks. The show was originally hosted by Ted Ray (with Richard Murdoch deputising twice) but, towards the latter end of the run, Charlie Chester and Tony Hancock became the show's joint hosts.

Calling All Forces ended in July 1952 with the last six shows of the run written by Galton and Simpson. With them now writing the majority of the programmes, the show changed its name to *Forces All-Star Bill* (Hancock appeared in the seventh programme in September 1952) and then to *All-Star Bill* (Hancock appeared in the third edition in October 1952). The show then reverted to *Forces All-Star Bill* and Hancock appeared regularly from January 1953. The final version of the show was *Star Bill*, with two series airing during 1953 and early 1954. These shows featured Hancock as host and, in the second series, saw him working with Moira Lister and Graham Stark, developing the character that would transfer to *Hancock's Half Hour* in November 1954. Extracts from the only surviving *Star Bill* episode can be heard in *Hancock's Half Hour Collectibles Volume 1*.

The extracts from the show presented here comprise four sections from Hancock's (and Charlie Chester's) fifth show as co-compere.

After Charlie Chester's initial introduction, Hancock makes his appearance. He has just 'found' some love letters hidden under Charlie Chester's mattress. After trying to blackmail Charlie for £2, it turns out that the love letters are from an unexpected source, and Hancock's skullduggery fails.

In the next section, we find out that Hancock has found love at last. We are introduced to Prunella, his betrothed. It is established that Prunella is a wealthy heiress, but all is not as it at first seems. There is a lovely section where Hancock fluffs his lines three times without interrupting the flow of the programme.

The next section starts with a very brief extract in which the guest star of the week, Cardew Robinson, is introduced. Robinson had developed his *Cardew the Cad of the School* character during his time entertaining whilst in the RAF. He went on to appear in many films including *I'm All Right, Jack* and *The Wrong Arm of the Law*. He would work with Hancock again, playing Chalky White in *The Reunion Party*, one of the most famous episodes of the *Hancock's Half Hour* television series. At the end of the dialogue, Hancock makes his appearance. It transpires that Hancock is sensitive when anyone mentions the word 'television' because he has never appeared on the medium. Robinson, of course, mentions the word and Hancock's over-reaction is a joy to listen to.

Finally, Hancock appears in a brief play with Robinson and Miriam Karlin. Like the former, Karlin went on to appear in many films and made her film debut in the so-called '*Goon Show*' movie – *Down Among the Z Men* – in the same year that this edition of *Calling All Forces* was broadcast. Her most famous role was as Paddy in the ITV comedy *The Rag Trade*.

The play is *Jekyll and Hyde*, a very loose adaptation of the Robert Louis Stevenson novella, first published in 1886. Hancock plays Dr Jekyll whilst Cardew plays the transformed character Mr Hyde. Hancock even manages to include a quote from his previous radio success, *Educating*

Archie, when he uses the tutor's catch-phrase '*Flipping kids!*'

Extract from *Calling All Forces*

Featuring Charlie Chester, Robb Wilton, Patricia Gilbert and Stanley Black and his dance orchestra

First Broadcast BBC Light Programme 19 May 1952

The extracts from the show presented here comprise three sections from Hancock's (and Charlie Chester's) sixth show as co-compere.



Ray's A Laugh 1953. From left to right: Charles Hawtrey, Ted Ray and Patricia Gilbert

In the opening sequence in this episode, listeners will notice that Hancock takes on the role of a con-man, trying to hoodwink Charlie Chester, the complete opposite of his role in the future *Hancock's Half Hour*, where Hancock is always on the receiving end of the latest deception (usually at the hands of Sid James). To a modern listener used to hearing Hancock as the perpetual sucker, it seems strange to hear him take on such a role. On this occasion, Hancock plays a second hand car salesman and sells Charlie a car; but the vehicle is missing something quite important.

Next we are introduced to Hancock's latest beau, Sylvia Van Winterbottom, who is determined to bring *Calling All Forces* up to the correct BBC standards.

Finally, rather than a play, this episode tells the story of Charlie Chester wanting to return to the

Army and details the medical examination he goes through. Featuring Robb Wilton and Patricia Gilbert, Chester's Certificate for Admission to the Armed Services has rather a twist.

Robb Wilton was a well-established music hall performer. Aged 71 at the time of this broadcast, he had become most famous for a series of monologues in the 1920s and 1930s in which he usually played incompetent figures in authority. One of his most famous creations was Mr. Muddlecombe J.P., who appeared in a number of radio series in the pre-war period. Patricia Gilbert was a television actress of the time, most notable for appearing in *The Eric Barker Half Hour* during 1951-1952.

Some bursts of noise appear from time to time. These are what remain of atmospheric interference on the off-air recording, caused by lightning.

Extract from *Calling All Forces*

Featuring Charlie Chester, Cyril Fletcher, Joan Heal, Paul Fenoulhet and the Variety Orchestra

First Broadcast BBC Light Programme 2 June 1952

The final extract from *Calling All Forces* in this collection comprises Hancock's eighth appearance as co-host with Chester.



Publicity Shot of Cyril Fletcher 1959

Once again the proceedings are captured in three separate sequences. The first features Hancock, once again, in the role of con-man. This time Hancock's money raising scheme involves face cream but Chester resists falling for the scam.

Next we are introduced to Joan Heal. At the time of this edition of *Calling All Forces*, Joan had appeared in several television series including *Saturday Night Revue* and *BBC Sunday Night Theatre*. She made regular television appearances throughout the rest of the century and last appeared on *The Bill* in 1992. Joan would work with Hancock again on *Forces All Star Bill* and in the *Hancock's Half Hour* television episode *Sid in Love* in April 1960 where she played the bus conductress who attracts Sid's attentions.



Production Shot from *Sid In Love*, 1 April 1960, with Joan Heal, Sid James and Tony Hancock

In the second sequence, Hancock is a photographer taking a pin-up photo of Joan. In a scene reminiscent of the *Hancock's Half Hour* television episode *The Photographer*, also from April 1960, too much magnesium is used in the flash with explosive results. The use of magnesium powder to produce a flash to illuminate a subject for photography was pioneered by Edward Sonstadt and Edward Mellor in 1862 and, with engineer William Mather, they went on to produce a magnesium ribbon that was said to burn more consistently. Manufactured flashbulbs were first produced in 1929, so, even by 1952, the use of magnesium in flash photography was outdated.

A mention should be made here of a running gag from earlier editions of *Calling All Forces* which featured Geraldo and his Orchestra. One of the characters in these early shows was Freddie, the

Third Trumpet, who was always looking to band leader Geraldo for support and saying 'I want my Auntie Geraldo'. Although Geraldo and his Orchestra had been replaced by Stanley Black and his Dance Orchestra in more recent episodes and by Paul Fenoulhet and the Variety Orchestra in this episode, the character of Freddie was resurrected. The punch line 'I want my Auntie Geraldo' would, therefore, have been a catch-phrase well known to regular listeners.

The final sequence in this programme starred Cyril Fletcher. Many readers will remember Cyril Fletcher's odes in the BBC TV programme *That's Life* which started in 1973 and ran for over 20 years. He began performing his odd odes in 1937 and even had a programme on Radio Luxembourg which started broadcasting in 1933. As mentioned earlier, Radio Luxembourg paved the way for the development of pirate radio stations in the 1960s and, until then, was the only effective medium for advertising products through radio broadcasts. The BBC monopoly on radio stations was removed by legislation in 1973. It is interesting that Radio Luxembourg is referenced as 'the enemy' in this section.

The play in this broadcast features both Joan Heal and Cyril Fletcher. It is a spoof of the *Mutiny on the Bounty* which occurred in the South Pacific on 28 April 1789. Dissatisfied crewmen led by Acting Lieutenant Fletcher Christian seized control of the ship *HMS Bounty* from the Captain William Bligh. The play takes place aboard the *SS Phew*, a fishing boat with no refrigerators. The sketch finishes with the return of Freddie the Third Trumpet and a reprise of his well-known catch-phrase.

Hancock's Other Half's Hour **Introduced by Freddie Hancock**

First Broadcast on BBC Radio 2, 21 September 1997

This programme was described in the Radio Times as: 'a Radio 2 Arts Programme in which Freddie Hancock, Tony's widow, presents her own personal account of life with the great comedian. In this programme she shares her private memories of the Lad Himself, intercut with vintage clips and rare recordings from his appearances.'

This is a warm, affectionate look at Hancock through the recollections of key friends and colleagues who worked closely with him. It is liberally peppered throughout with extracts from his recorded works. Sharing their memories with Freddie are Harry Secombe, Peter Goodwright, Liz Fraser, Bill Kerr, Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, Stirling Moss, Sylvia Sims, Larry Gelbart, Patricia Hayes, Jim Dale, Bill Cotton Jnr. and Frank Thornton. Included are memories of Harry Secombe toasting the birth of his first child with Hancock over rock salmon and Lucozade on Blackpool promenade; Liz Fraser's first spoken line on television in the (currently lost) *Hancock's Half Hour* episode *The Dancer* (BBC TV 1/3 3 August 1956); and Jim Dale's recollection of Hancock in a music hall appearance, in top hat and tails, calling out to the wings 'put the Rolls in the garage, George, I'll butter them later!' Galton and Simpson remember late night intellectual discussions on philosophy and politics with Hancock which they would later resurrect in many *Hancock's Half Hour* scripts.

The programme contains extracts from the following performances: *The Radio Ham* (BBC TV 7/3 9 June 1961), *The Impersonator* (6/14 29 December 1959), *The Scandal Magazine* (5/2 28 January 1958), *The East Cheam Drama Festival* (5/12 8 April 1958), *The Christmas Club Handout* (6/11 22 December 1959), *Star Bill* (21 March 1954), *The Poetry Society* (6/11 8 December 1959), *The Blood Donor* (BBCTV 7/5 23 June 1961), *The Rebel* (1960), *A Sunday Afternoon at Home* (5/14 22 April 1958), *The Egg Commercials* (1965), *The Publicity Photograph* (5/5 18 February 1958) and the specially recorded dialogue for the Pye LP *Pieces of Hancock* (1960). Also included is music from Sammy Davis Jnr., Nat King Cole, Mantovani and Carmen McRae.

This programme was sourced from the BBC Sound Archive.



Production Shot from
The Cold, 4 March 1960, with Patricia Hayes and Tony Hancock

Open House Interview with Gay Byrne

First Broadcast on BBC 2 TV 5 December 1964

Gay Byrne, a legend of Irish broadcasting, was already well known in 1964 as the host of RTE's *The Late Late Show*, which had started in 1962.

In this *Open House* interview from December 1964, Gay explores projects that Hancock was working on at the time and which gave an indication of the direction he was considering taking with his career. However, it should be noted that this was a difficult time for Hancock. He had finished his last television series for ITV (*Hancock*) in March the previous year. It had received a poor reception. His next television show, *The Blackpool Show*, was eighteen months away whilst his next film appearance was a small supporting role in *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, released in 1965.

Interestingly, Hancock starts by naming Jack Benny as his favourite comedian. Benny, aged 70 at the time of this interview, was an American radio, television and film actor who was well-known for his comic timing and the use of pauses in his comedy, both of which were key aspects of Hancock's own brand of comedy. This choice of comedian was surprising because Hancock would usually cite Sid Field as his favourite. Field, who died prematurely aged 46 in 1950 from alcohol-related problems, was a variety music hall comedian who, late in his career, had starred in three films, although none were a critical success.

Hancock goes on to advise that he will be starting work in March 1965 on *Rhinoceros*, a film based on Eugène Ionesco's absurdist play of the same name, which was written in 1959. Roger Hancock, his brother and agent at this time, had been ardently pursuing this opportunity. Hancock was slated to play the lead role of Berenger, the last member of the human race whilst all those around him metamorphose into rhinos. Roger had managed to secure the participation of Zero Mostel – a major Broadway and Hollywood actor of the period, perhaps most famous for his role in Mel Brooks' film *The Producers* – to play the second lead in the film. However, for reasons that are unclear, but almost certainly due to Hancock's alcoholic frailty at this time, the movie fell through. It proved disastrous for the relationship between the two brothers, and Roger Hancock resigned his role of agent as a result.

Next, Hancock speaks of a potential new radio series in which he will showcase humorous extracts, play music and read from *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Ultimately, this was to result in 'Ancock's *Anthology* which was broadcast on Christmas Day 1964. A recording of this programme is included in *Hancock's Half Hour Collectibles Volume 1*. Although Hancock does not sound entirely comfortable in this broadcast, the producer was happy with the programme and started negotiations for a further six shows. However, negotiations did not proceed without difficulty. Hancock was then offered a part in Disney's film *The Adventures of Bullwhip Griffin*, and departed on an ill-fated trip to America in 1965. The idea was subsequently shelved.

Finally, Hancock speaks about an American television contract which will keep him in the USA for seven years. In an interview for *Photoplay* magazine in March 1965, he was still discussing the project. In the article, Hancock states that '*the shows will be delivered in thirty-nine episodes at a time, set against a back-drop of various American cities, one of which would be Chicago. I would bring the contrast between what people think [about a city] and what the facts are into the show – in comic fashion*'. Hancock says that he had taken eight half-hour tapes to the USA to showcase his achievements to support the project. As with many examples during this period, it has become routine to say that the project 'came to nothing', but Roger Hancock offered a more damning explanation for their failure: '*It was a total figment of the imagination*'. By this time, Hancock was clearly suffering severe psychiatric problems. '*He probably thought that if I [Hancock] talk about it enough, it will happen*', Roger Hancock further surmised. In an interview with NOVA magazine in 1966, Hancock was even insisting he had had been offered a five year contract to play Nero in an American television show. In retrospect, it is rather mordantly comic to note that he claimed he had turned the role down.

The quality of this item is mediocre. Ted Kendall has advised that 'undoubtedly the quality leaving the studio was excellent, but off-air recording of TV sound was problematical at this time (video recording was next to impossible). Few TV sound tuners were available, and it was not straightforward to make a direct connection to a domestic set for recording purposes, as their live chassis design carried the risk of electric shock and damage to equipment'. Ted believes that this item was 'taken from an isolating transformer across the TV set's loudspeaker - better than a microphone, but not ideal, given the poor quality of the sound circuits on domestic sets of the day'. Ted has done what he can to clean it up.

Turns of the Century **Introduced by Robert Cushman**

First Broadcast on Radio 3 21 July 1995

Described by the *Radio Times* as 'an audio lexicon of the great English comedy performer', this programme, presented by Robert Cushman, looks at the story of the development of the Hancock character from *Educating Archie* in 1951 through to the final series of *Hancock* on BBC TV in 1961.

Cushman describes the Hancock character as the rich, joint creation of the comic and his writers Galton and Simpson, which owed something to Jack Benny but more to Billy Bunter.

Cushman's final analysis is that Hancock's character was loved, in part, because although he was an unlikeable victim, we all recognised something of ourselves in him.

Although this was only a ten minute programme, it is liberally sprinkled with extracts from Hancock's broadcasts: *Educating Archie* (2/12 19 October 1951), *The House on the Cliff* (1/13 25 January 1955), *The Rail Strike* (2/8 7 June 1955), *The Childhood Sweetheart* (6/2 6 October 1959), *Radio Newsreel* interview (2 March 1961) and *The Blood Donor* (BBC TV 7/5 23 June 1961).

This recording was sourced from the BBC Sound Archive.

Stone Me, What A Life! **Introduced by Denis Norden**

First Broadcast on BBC Radio 2 2 November 2004

Stone Me, What A Life! was first broadcast on 2 November 2004 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Hancock's Half Hour*. The programme was part of a three-hour broadcast called *Hancock's Whole Evening* which included *The First Night Party* (1/1), *Stone Me, What A Life!*, *The Wild Man of the Woods* (4/16) and *The Complete and Utter History of Hancock's Half Hour*. The evening finished with tributes from the show's contributors and fans.

The presenter of the programme was Denis Norden. With Frank Muir, he co-wrote the hugely successful *Take It From Here* with Jimmy Edwards in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1952, they wrote *London Laughs*, a variety show that proved a major hit when it ran at the Adelphi Theatre. This would prove one of Hancock's most critical successes in his early career, having been drafted in as a replacement for Dick Bentley, who had withdrawn after an argument about billing. The documentary tells the story of Hancock's rise to fame from his first BBC appearance in *A La Carte* for the BBC in 1941 through to his early radio appearances in *Variety Bandbox*. It also details the comic's first historic meeting with Galton and Simpson during the making of *Happy-Go-Lucky* in 1951.

Hancock's story is told through extracts from surviving shows, radio and television interviews and voiced recordings of internal BBC memos. In addition to Denis Norden, there are contributions from George Fairweather, Ralph Reader, Denis Main Wilson, Michael Howard and Hancock himself, all from recorded interviews.

George Fairweather was a professional comic and friend of Hancock's mother. He was introduced to Hancock after he had started to perform as a 'confidential comic' at local concerts in and around Bournemouth. Fairweather remembers that Hancock was terrible and took on the role of Hancock's mentor. After a particularly disastrous appearance at a local church hall, in which Hancock told rude jokes he barely understood, Fairweather's advice was to drop any blue content: he never performed risqué material again. In turn, Fairweather taught Hancock material that was to last throughout his stage career, including impressions of famous actors of the day, Charles Laughton



Production Shot from
The Emigrant, 18 March 1960, the
50th Television show, featuring Tony
Hancock and Gordon Sterne



Tony Hancock and Sid
James celebrate the 50th
Hancock's Half Hour televi-
sion show in style

and George Arliss.

Under Fairweather's guidance, Hancock regularly performed at theatres in his home town of Bournemouth and nearby Boscombe before gaining national popularity through variety shows and, eventually, BBC Radio. Hancock remembered his old mentor when making *The Punch and Judy Man* on the South Coast in Bognor. George makes an appearance in the crowd during the switching on of the illuminations.

Ralph Reader played an instrumental role in Tony's career. Reader was heavily involved in the Scout movement and first found fame in 1932 when he staged an all-scout variety show – *The Gang's All Here* – at La Scala in London. Soon after, his productions became known as Gang Shows, and during the Second World War, he was tasked with running concert parties for the troops. In total, Reader managed twenty-four Gang Shows which were performed in every theatre of the conflict. In the process, he recruited around four hundred entertainers, including Hancock, who had just been drafted into the RAF. Reader auditioned him, when he was just 19, at the Gang Show base in Houghton Street, London, in 1944.

'I asked him if he had any comedy material. He rolled off about a dozen or so. Apart from one, I hadn't heard any of them before. They were not real jokes, but mostly service situations. This was fine because we wanted all-rounders who could play in sketches.'

As a result of this, Hancock was posted to Gang Show 9 and toured Europe until his demobilisation in 1946. Thereafter, he suffered from what can only be described as penury until Reader came to his rescue. In February 1946, Reader began organising a production that would eventually be known as *Wings*. This was a variety show specially designed for ex-RAF entertainment personnel who were finding it difficult to adjust to civilian life. Hancock was successful in his audition, although he ascribed this to his wartime association with Reader. *Wings* toured for much of 1946, concluding in September, whereupon Hancock had to endure another long period of poverty and occasional bookings until his career picked up in January 1949 with a spot on *Variety Bandbox*. Hancock's sole surviving performance on *Variety Bandbox* (from 1951) is in *Hancock's Half Hour Collectibles Vol 1*.

Denis Main Wilson, the producer of the first series of *Hancock's Half Hour*, was also the producer brought in to rescue the failing radio show *Happy-Go-Lucky* in 1951. He was responsible for Galton and Simpson writing the last six episodes of the ailing show. It was during the recording of these episodes that they first met Hancock, who had a guest spot on the show.

Michael Howard was a writer and comedian who wrote and appeared in a number of radio comedies in the late 1940s including *The Michael Howard Show* and *Here's Howard*. The aborted comedy show referenced in this programme was to star both Michael and Hancock. It was called *Dear Me* and was to be written by Ted Kavanagh, best remembered as the writer of *It's That Man Again* for Tommy Handley. Howard was due to be the star with Hancock in a supporting role. It was the view of the producer Jacques Brown – and Hancock himself – that the voices of Michael and Hancock were too similar and could lead to confusion amongst the listeners. The programme was never made.

One point in the programme does need additional clarification. Denis Norden discusses the possibility of a Larry Stephens penned comedy vehicle for Hancock. Full details of the importance of Larry as friend and scriptwriter for Hancock in these formative years are contained in *Hancock's Half Hour Collectibles Vol 1*. At the time of the broadcast of *Stone Me, What A Life!*, it was believed that Larry's comedy vehicle for Hancock was to be called *Welcome to Welkham* and would feature him as an estate agent and town councillor who lives with his eccentric aunt.

However, during the research for an upcoming biography of Larry, Julie Warren discovered the script for one complete and one partial episode of a comedy programme called *Vacant Lot* – and not *Welcome to Welkham*, which was the title given to a later pilot show using this source material

– at the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham, written by Larry for Hancock. It was intended that this series would focus on life in the dull, faded fictional seaside town of Churdley Bay, where the blundering, slightly pompous and barely tolerated Hancock aspires to better his lot.

Julie Warren explains why *Vacant Lot* was never made:

'Auditions for a trial recording took place on the 27th and 28th of October 1952 with Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan both considered for parts.

It had been conceived and written as a non-audience show but the BBC's Heads of Variety couldn't decide whether to invite a studio audience or not and even suggested recording the programme twice on the same day to try out both scenarios. Hancock and Stephens felt this would necessitate different scripts and casts and so the Variety Department reconsidered and consented to the non-audience format.

A few days later they changed their minds again. The Planners wouldn't agree to an amended date for the recording until they had seen a new script and an exasperated Hancock declared that rather than delay the project once again he would prefer that it was dropped. It was therefore shelved in November 1952 and has remained in the archives ever since.'

More details of Julie's upcoming book can be found at <https://unbound.com/books/goons>

There are many extracts contained in the programme and these are taken from the following recordings: *The Emigrant* (BBC TV 6/3 18 March 1960), *The Blood Donor* (BBC TV 7/5 23 June 1961), *Royal Variety Performance* (9 November 1952), *Educating Archie* (19 October 1951), *Star Bill* (21 March 1954), and *The Emigrant* (Radio 4/19 17 February 1957).

Stone Me, What a Life! was previously released in *Hancock: A Comedy Genius* in 2004 and is sourced from the BBC Sound Archive

Late Night Line Up Interview with Michael Dean

First Broadcast on BBC2 TV 5 October 1965

Late Night Line Up was a late-night discussion programme which ran throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and featured candid reviews of television and the arts.

In this edition, Hancock talks to Michael Dean about his philosophy of comedy and, in a similar vein to the *Open House* interview featured elsewhere in this collection, discusses his upcoming projects.

The interview opens with discussions about the BBC's upcoming repeats of *Hancock's Half Hour* on television. An extensive schedule of twenty-six repeats was planned (the complete last two series of *Hancock's Half Hour* and the complete series of *Hancock* from 1961). Research shows that audience numbers for these repeats were at the nine million mark and were a significant success. Indeed, the repeats of these episodes led to record producer Alan Freeman asking Hancock and Sid James to re-record *The Reunion Party* and *The Missing Page* for a commercial LP. Unfortunately, these recording sessions did not go well. Each recording over-ran by about ten minutes, largely due to Hancock's unscripted mugging to the audience, which, to Sid's anger, created unscheduled laughter breaks. In desperation, Freeman drafted in Galton and Simpson to edit the shows into a useable format. The LP was finally released as *It's Hancock* in 1965. It was the last time that Hancock and Sid would work together.

Hancock goes on to discuss his proposed appearance in a new stage project, a musical adaptation

of the play *Noah* by the French dramatist Andre Obey, written in 1934. This was to be a collaboration between playwright Leslie Bricusse, Galton and Simpson, although it is believed that the writers were adapting it with Harry Secombe in mind for the lead role. It was Bricusse who commented that the book was '*perfect Hancock*'.

Unsurprisingly, Galton and Simpson were sceptical. They gave Hancock a copy of the script, not expecting him to be interested, let alone capable, of a long stage run. In the end, and sadly predictably, whilst Hancock talked about Noah a great deal, his drinking got in the way. The writers recalled that on one occasion he turned up hopelessly drunk, and three hours late, for a lunch to discuss the production, in the company of that legendary actor and toper, Wilfrid Lawson. Eventually, confidence in Hancock taking on the role waned, the rights to the play lapsed and it was consigned to the growing list of aborted projects.

With hindsight, the interview is a sad reflection on the comic's hopes and aspirations of the time, none of which would ever be realised. Poignantly, Hancock remembered that a newspaper seller, who had always been a great fan, stared at him plaintively after a recent appearance in the ill-received series for ATV, *Hancock*. '*What happened last night?*' he inquired. Hancock knew that for a fan to say that, the programme had gone badly wrong. It was a hard message to bear.

The audio for this programme was sourced from the BBC Film Archive.



A production shot from *The Flight of the Red Shadow*, January 1959 (a lost BBC Television Show).

Acknowledgements

The THAS would like to offer its sincere thanks to those who, over our long history, worked to find and save material featuring Hancock. This collection would not have been possible without the dedicated work of countless members of our society and its friends.

Sadly, many of these names and their contributions have not been properly recorded, as is the nature of an amateur organisation such as ours. Many have passed away. We owe a great debt to all of them.

Ted Kendall, one of the leading sound engineers in the world, has restored and remastered the material in this collection. However, Ted's contribution to the preservation of *Hancock's Half Hour* comprises much more than this. Over the decades he has discovered missing Hancock material from myriad sources that, otherwise, would have been lost forever.

He has also been the saviour of significant private collections of sound radio that risked dispersal or destruction on their owner's passing. His contribution to unearthing and preserving priceless broadcast material from many genres – not just related to Hancock – constitutes a significant contribution to the history of broadcast media that has been sorely unappreciated. Further information can be found at www.tedkendall.com.

We would also like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions made to this volume by Christopher Beeching, Julie Warren and Keith Wickham.

Tristan Brittain-Dissont and Martin Gibbons

Sadly, shortly after completing these sleeve notes, Tristan Brittain-Dissont passed away. The THAS would like to record their thanks for his significant contribution both to the Society and in perpetuating the memory of his hero, Tony Hancock.

Tony Hancock Appreciation Society

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