

LIVES IN A LANDSCAPE: IMAGINING BRITISH LANDSCAPE AT THE BBC



INTRODUCTION

People commonly think of environmental programming in terms of images of iconic species, rich or fragile ecosystems, views of harsh, challenging or damaged habitats, beautiful, remote and awe-inspiring natural environments. One idea that connects these different images is the concept of landscape. Landscapes are arrangements of natural and human; physical and social; flora and fauna; places and people; environmental processes and cultural understandings that connect species, habitats, ecosystems and environments to specific conceptions of locality, place and region. Though the term is used in a variety of ways, the places, environments and things we call landscapes are always more than simply passively assembled and objective.



The term landscape refers to culturally meaningful ways of making sense of the world around us, both as we stand back and view it from afar and as we live and work within it. What is appreciated and cherished as landscape is itself a product of broader understandings, knowledges, concerns and values – whether it takes the form of a tranquil garden, productive agriculture, a wild and pristine natural environment or a fine and thriving cityscape. This is partly because what might be precisely defined as ‘tranquil, ‘wild’ or ‘thriving’ changes from time to time and place to place.

The story of how landscapes are made by artists, gardeners, agriculturists, planners and landscapers is central to understanding the ways in which people use, appreciate and value the environment.

This story has often focused on arts media such as painting, poetry literature and music or on the physical fabric of designed landscaped environments; more rarely has it included feature films, wildlife documentary, current affairs and radio programming. Yet since the 1920s, radio, and later, television, have played a central role in mediating a wide range of cultural understandings, including those related to landscape and environment. In the UK, landscape has long held an important place in thinking about land, nation, people and identity.

The BBC has been a primary agent in national debates and conversations since its formation in 1922. Yet beyond iconic and long-running programmes such as the radio-based drama serial *The Archers*, little interest has been shown in the extent to which BBC programming plays its part in reflecting, making and changing widely held conceptions of what constitutes landscape and landscape value.

AIMS & QUESTIONS

This ebook pays particular attention to BBC programming concerning landscape in the UK, as shown in the image gallery on the right of this page. It asks:-

- *What role has landscape played in BBC programming?*
- *How has landscape in BBC programming shaped understandings of environmental topics, issues and debates?*
- *How has that role changed over time in relation to changing media technologies, matters of environmental concern and social, economic, political and cultural value?*



The Country we are Making - 1970 - BBC2





LANDSCAPE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

Landscape plays many roles in radio and TV programmes. Sometimes it can be the main focus, as is the case in documentary programmes about particular artists or particularly scenic parts of the world. However, landscape can equally act as a background or context to stories focusing on people and places and a wide range of social, political, economic and environmental issues.



In many respects, such background or contextual portrayals of landscape in broadcast programming are equally important to the ways in which landscape acts as a culturally meaningful way of making sense of the world in many societies and for many people. One important reason for this is that landscape as background to the action often promotes and reinforces widely held and taken-for-granted understandings of what landscape means culturally. When used as a background or context, landscape often appears in BBC environmental programming as an anchoring point – a stable point of reference against a background of change and instability.

Scroll through the image gallery on the right for examples of the different roles landscape plays in television programmes.



The place 'Mushroom Green' is used to show what the pre-industrial landscape looked like. (From *Landscapes of England: the Black Country* - 1976 - BBC2)



The Britannic Greenhouse, first broadcast in 1989 as part of the BBC TV *Horizon* series of topical documentaries, addressed the issue of ecological landscape and farming change brought about by the prospect of increasing mean average temperature as a result of human-induced climate change. The opening shots juxtapose the threats and uncertainties of change with familiar valued farming landscapes and everyday activities. The sequence of images concludes with the question, 'How will our little island respond?'

Later in the programme, landscape is shown in a rather different light, as a historical record marking change over time and as a laboratory for the kind of Britain people want in the future. Scientists are shown gathering data from the landscape.



Horizon: The Britannic Greenhouse – 1989 – BBC2

Landscape is sometimes used as the ground on which to examine social and environmental change. In this short section from a 1969 Radio 3 talk *The Future of Britain*, British expert in town and country planning Professor Colin Buchanan discusses the issues that Britain was expected to face in the final 30 years of the 20th century. This was a time when Britain was understood to be in transition as post-war reconstruction and modernisation moved the country towards a new post-industrial, post-colonial society. At the time it was expected that Britain's rapidly growing population would reach more than 70 million by the year 2000, with Earth's inhabitants at the same time demanding significantly better living standards and more leisure.



Click on the photo above to read about the famous town planner Colin Buchanan

Listen to Buchanan's overview of Britain based on an imagined plane trip. His description of the country as a series of passing landscapes is animated by a series of valued physical landmarks such as Chesil beach in Dorset, the Cairngorms, and familiar evidence of human settlement such as Lincoln cathedral, the Forth bridge and the "smudges" of urbanisation around London, Glasgow and Manchester.

Touch to hear Colin Buchanan describe Britain as he flies over the length and breadth of the British Isles



The Future of Britain – BBC Radio 3 – 1969

Together these references encourage the listener both to recognise a shared heritage and to take a step back to reflect on the future. Buchanan describes the kaleidoscope of passing landscape as "this Island we call home". He is very careful at the beginning of the talk to make connections between land, people and language, invoking a sense of nationhood, national pride and responsibility for the future. He suggests to his listeners that they, the British, are temporary custodians within a long lineage of inhabitants, with a responsibility to develop a sense of good stewardship and concern for what will be passed down to forthcoming generations. In doing this, Buchanan is drawing on longstanding cultural understandings of landscape within British and European culture, where landscape is an object of good stewardship in which the future is held in trust by the present.



The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of considerable uncertainty about the place of Britain in the world as the heavy industries of the 19th century declined and began to disappear, industrial unrest began to escalate and the effects of post-war 'baby boom' population growth and new Commonwealth immigration began to be felt. The familiar reference points of British landscape and society were beginning to feel rather fragile and insubstantial. Buchanan sums this up at the end of the introduction to his talk:

“ It is a heavily populated island by any account, with a population density more than twice that of France. We got this huge population, of course, on the basis of pioneering the industrial revolution and more or less simultaneously building up a great trading empire. We’re no longer pioneering the world in industry. We no longer have the empire. But of course we’re stuck with the population, and being big it’s increasing rapidly. And that, I suppose, in a nutshell, is the whole difficulty of our position; how are we all going to earn a living in the world? ”

This sense of reflection was represented in other BBC programming at the time. *The Country we are Making* shown on BBC 2 on 26 October 1970 was introduced by HRH Prince Philip as part of European Conservation Year. However, it also spoke to many of the themes highlighted by Colin Buchanan in his 1969 radio talk. You can see from the opening sequence how landscape shots are intercut with other images to show interconnections between people and place and to emphasize the sometimes unintended effects of human actions on the environment. Note how the sequence of images closely illustrates the narrative voiceover and how images of routine domestic events such as turning on a tap or flicking a light switch are juxtaposed with landscape images so as to demonstrate the effects that personal decisions and individual consumption have on the wider world.



The Country We are Making - 1970 - BBC2

The suggestion here is that landscape as a way of seeing the world makes visible the impact people as individuals and groups have on it but which so often remains hidden in plain sight. It is not insignificant that the documentary opens with a shot of a beauty spot on Dartmoor. Like Colin Buchanan's piece, the programme both suggests a sense

of precious heritage that it is assumed everyone wants to keep and poses the question of how to ration resources in the face of rapidly increasing demand and consumption. In this context, landscape becomes a symbol for communal understanding of what is valued and important in social life and the wider environment.

This second clip from the closing sequences of *The Country we are Making* again adopts the medium of landscape, in this case to drive home the message articulated so eloquently by Colin Buchanan that we in the UK are 'stuck' with a population that is large and increasing rapidly considering the size of the British Isles. In this highly polemical conclusion to the documentary, landscape is used to

evidence just how overcrowded the British Isles are and how that in turn creates a set of dilemmas when planning a place fit for others to live in the future. The sequence begins with images of vast crowds of mainly young people at the famously oversubscribed and unmanageable 1970 Isle of Wight pop festival which reputedly attracted around 700,000 people.



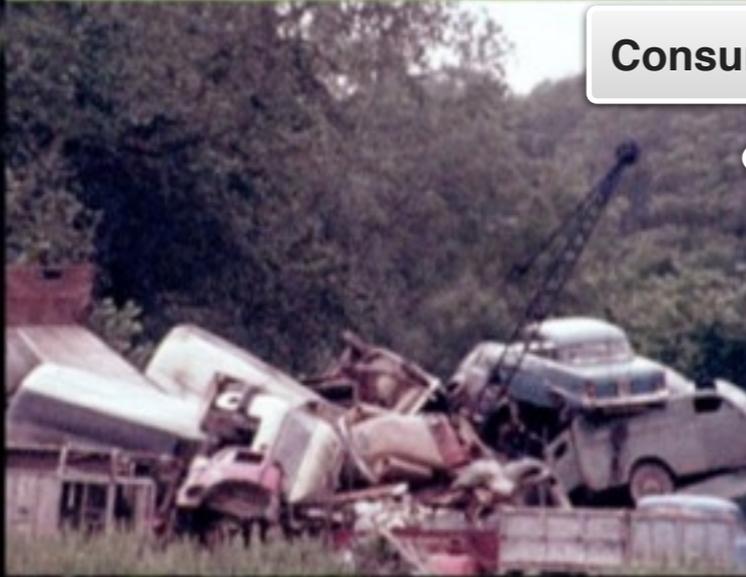
The festival had taken place just a couple of months before the documentary was shown and these images are likely to have been familiar to viewers from news footage at the time. The sequence continues as the narrator sets out the alternatives and dilemmas that seemed to face Britain in 1970 as it planned for the future. The camera traces a long traffic jam on a major road in a rural part of the South of England and as the aerial camera lifts and banks away from the queuing traffic tailing off into the distance. the narrator says:

“ *Only one thing is not going to grow and that’s our country, Britain. That is going to stay exactly the same size.* ”

The Country We are Making - 1970 - BBC2



Deindustrialisation



Consumerism



Wider Global Concerns



Population Pressures



1

2

3

4



Touch the words to find out more on this page





Touch the photo to read about the battle for access to the countryside

The very assumption that everyone shares a sense of British nation grounded in the history, traditions and aesthetics of British rural landscape was to come increasingly under scrutiny during the final years of the 20th century. Though both Buchanan and *The Country we are Making* acknowledge the pressure on British landscape from migration and increasing urban consumerism, they also present a concept of British landscape based firmly on a set of ethnically white Anglo Saxon, comfortable middle-income values, hopes and expectations. Though the UK had experienced significant



Touch the photo to read about Britain's emerging demographic

immigration since 1955, people of New Commonwealth, African, Afri-American and Asian origin in particular are almost entirely absent from any shots of valued landscapes in *The Country we are Making*. Though both programmes suggest the need to plan actively and creatively for a modern world in which British people would want to live, the visual language allows modernity only as an unwelcome disruption, in the form of electricity pylons, traffic jams and crowds of festival goers.



THE GOOD LIFE: LANDSCAPE AND RURAL STEREOTYPES

In Britain, and in England in particular, the idea of quiet rural life dominated by church, squire and the farming community exemplified by images of family farms, aristocratic estates and stable traditional villages nestling peacefully in rolling agricultural countryside have long been central to the way nation and people are imagined. This has been the case, even though life in Britain is increasingly mobile, multicultural and urban.



Look at the way landscape is used to supply context in this item from the BBC 1 programme *Countryfile*. This edition from 16 July 2000 includes a six-minute feature in which writer John Seymour is interviewed on location at his smallholding in County Wexford. Seymour's books were instrumental in driving the popularity of 'self-sufficiency' on the land as a lifestyle choice. In this interview feature, background images of landscape tell an integral part of the story as a counterpoint and context to the spoken words of the interview. John Seymour is interviewed talking about the "interlocked" qualities of farming tasks and activities which for him are central to self-sufficiency. He explains how outputs and waste products are used to enhance the farming system and increase its overall productivity. In this section of the feature Seymour is filmed talking against the backdrop of a tranquil scene in which cows graze in a field with the broad expanse of a river with woods and fields rising behind. It is as if the harmonious and peaceful arrangement of fields, animals, river and woodland provide a visual demonstration of the interdependencies that make self-sufficient farming an attractive as well as ethical and individually self-fulfilling way of life.



Countryfile - 2000 -BBC1



Touch photo of John Seymour to find out more

Elsewhere in the feature Seymour talks about his own personal difficulty fitting into a modern world where people 'only do one job' and sit at computers all day. He feels that a self-sufficient lifestyle is not a matter of 'dropping out'; rather he likes to think of it as 'dropping

in' and gaining a greater depth of understanding and engagement with the physical environment. Here his words are illustrated by slowly panning images of the Wexford countryside, its mountains, farmland, cottage farmsteads and river.



Countryfile - 2000 - BBC1



In 2004 The Good Life was voted ninth in a poll to find Britain's best sitcom.

By juxtaposing these words and images of Wexford and playing an Irish folk melody as a soundtrack, a set of associations are implicitly set up which define these landscapes as steeped in history to the extent that living and farming in them is to be able to physically live that history. To be self-sufficient here is to go back in time and to inhabit a place where the clock runs slowly and the natural flow of the seasons dictates a more authentic lived temporality than that of the city. This of course is a textbook example of the kind of romantic ruralist thinking in Britain that has for many generations encouraged people to idealise the countryside as quiet pastoral landscape. Perhaps not surprisingly, the feature is intercut with short sections from the first programme in the very popular TV sitcom series *The Good Life* – BBC1, first broadcast in 1975. The book *Farming for Self-Sufficiency – Independence on a 5-Acre Farm* by John Seymour and his then wife Sally Seymour was published in 1973, two years before the first episode of *The Good Life*. This told the story of a middle-aged, middle-income couple who decide to grow their own food and become self-sufficient by converting their garden in the comfortable London suburb of Surbiton, Surrey.

It is clear that in these excerpts from *Countryfile*, landscape has an important function, holding a variety of words and images together in order to tell a specific story about the author and champion of self-sufficiency John Seymour. The French writer on culture Roland Barthes (1915–80), well-known for his writings on photography, film, advertising and fashion, wrote extensively about how images and words work together in culture. He identified two important ways in which images and words combine to create messages and meanings, which he called *anchorage* and *relay*. *Anchorage* occurs when particular words or sentences, for example the caption to a photograph, help to confirm or reinforce how the image is understood. Photo captions are a good example of this because they tell us what the photograph is about even where the image itself may be unclear or ambiguous. *Relay* provides a contextual explanation for an image or group of images. . it might be thought of as the story that makes a collection of images understandable as a sequence of images that are related to each other. The text in a strip of cartoon images is sometimes used as an example of this.

Though Barthes was largely thinking about words and images in print advertising, it is possible to think about *anchorage* and *relay* in other contexts, for example where words might be spoken rather than written and where images might relate to each other or even anchor words and texts rather than the other way around. In the feature on John Seymour you can see how landscape acts as both an *anchorage* to the words spoken by John Seymour whilst also acting as *relay* providing context and continuity to the story. In the sections where John Seymour stands in front of the rural Irish landscape and talks about his life and beliefs, landscape reinforces what he has to say about living close to the land which he describes as ‘dropping in’ not ‘dropping out’. Thinking of the feature overall, it is possible to see how the sequential use of landscape images at key moments link footage of the reporter and then Seymour either being interviewed, working on the farm, or walking, to create a sense of context. This helps the spoken words make sense in terms of Seymour’s life, his environmental ethics and values.



Touch the photo of Roland Barthes for his biography

Though the programme is not about landscape as such, this feature from *Countryfile* both draws on and reinforces widely held stereotypes. While John Seymour claimed during the programme to feel at odds with the modern world, he was not against using technology when and where necessary. It is worth noting that while the images in the film are of picture-perfect rural landscapes, smallholdings of the kind that John Seymour helped to promote are not necessarily pretty or visually ordered to meet the expectations of those seeking tidy or beautiful postcard views. Rather, they can be untidy, practical places. In later episodes of *The Good Life* for instance, one source of comedic tension between Tom and Barbara Good and their neighbours, the respectable and polite Leadbetters, was the scruffy, ramshackle and sometimes smelly and noisy nature of their garden once it had been turned over to self-sufficiency. None of this is mentioned in the *Countryfile* feature, where an implicit sub-text connects the self-sufficient lifestyle with an idealised rural world of peace, harmony, beauty and authenticity.



Images from *Countryfile* interview with John Seymour - 2000 - BBC1





LANDSCAPE PROGRAMMES ON THE BBC





The programme *Countryfile* – BBC 1 – was first broadcast in 1988 and scheduled for Sunday mornings. Its magazine format brings together a broad spectrum of countryside

and landscape issues, including wildlife, conservation, farming and food production, the arts, countryside crafts, social history and leisure activities. There is a focus on investigating rural issues including farming policies and practices, industrial farming and craft-based rural diversification, threats to rural services and environmental issues such as recycling, pollution control and renewable energy. However these are frequently set among leisure and interest stories.

Sometimes programmes are regionally themed and feature material on walking and sightseeing, heritage, holidays, leisure and rural pursuits. The well-known personalities who present the

programme are often shown hiking, cycling, rock climbing and canoeing, eating and enjoying rural produce and foodstuffs or helping out on farms and in rural industries, lambing and ploughing or making cheese and other regional products. In 2009 *Countryfile* moved to a Sunday evening slot and it has subsequently become one of the five most watched programmes on television, regularly attracting between 5 million and 7 million viewers each week (*Western Morning News*, 22 October 2014.) By early 2016, it was attracting over 8 million viewers.

Though the mix of farming issues, leisure and tourism is extremely popular, *Countryfile* is sometimes criticised for presenting a sanitised, urban-based perspective on the countryside that reinforces dominant understandings of British landscape as an attractive and often quaint patchwork of places and lifestyles, and a varied and picture-perfect playground for city dwellers.

Both the magazine format and the presenter-led journey through specific regions and localities emphasising distinctiveness in terms of lives, culture and environment evident in *Countryfile* are longstanding and very popular genres for the depiction of landscape in BBC programming. Perhaps one of the most direct precursors to *Countryfile* was the programme *In the Country* presented by former newsreader Angela Rippon, which ran on BBC 2 between 1979 and 1982.

Some of the most longstanding examples can be found on radio. The programme *Down Your Way*, first broadcast on the Light programme in December 1946 and subsequently on Radio 4, where it ran until 1992 is a good example. A presenter visits a specific locality and interviews people who have interesting or unusual jobs, detailed local knowledge, or distinctive forms of connection to place. The result is a rich tapestry of stories and experiences which emphasise the distinctiveness of place.

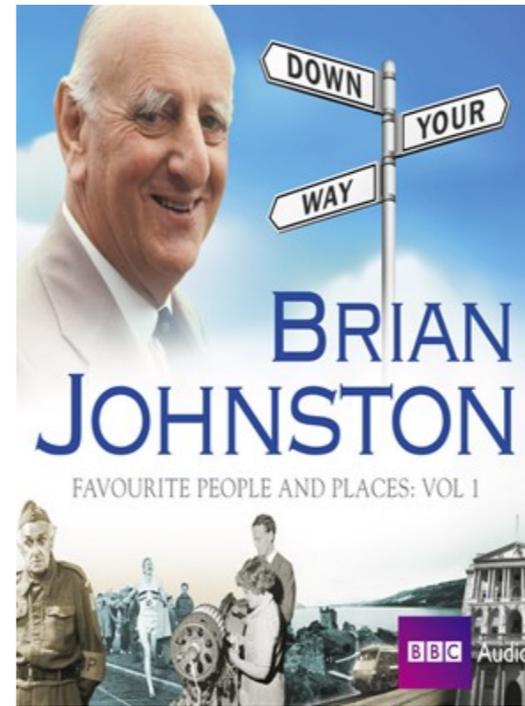


Front covers, *Radio Times* October Issues
1937 and 1938



Down Your Way interviewees were asked to choose a piece of music to be played on the programme, drawing on the legacy of wartime programming such as *Workers' Playtime* (1941-1964), which used weekly visits to specific factories to boost morale and create a sense of common spirit within the nation. Though *Down Your Way* was much parodied in its final years for its outmoded saccharine middlebrow picturesque portrayals of British life, the basic technique of creating a space in which people from a variety of backgrounds are invited to tell stories about their lives in the context of the environment in which they live is an enduring one.

More recent examples include the BBC Radio 4 Programme *Lives in a Landscape* which reached its 21st series in 2015, with a remit to tell 'original stories about real lives in Britain today', Reviewer Elisabeth Mahoney describes this programme using words that might have described a programme made 50 years previously. For her, *Lives in a Landscape* 'teases out the textures of the particular landscape, and hovers over its quiet curiosities, its irresistible characters (*The Guardian* 18 November 2010).



Down Your Way -
1976 - BBC Radio 4

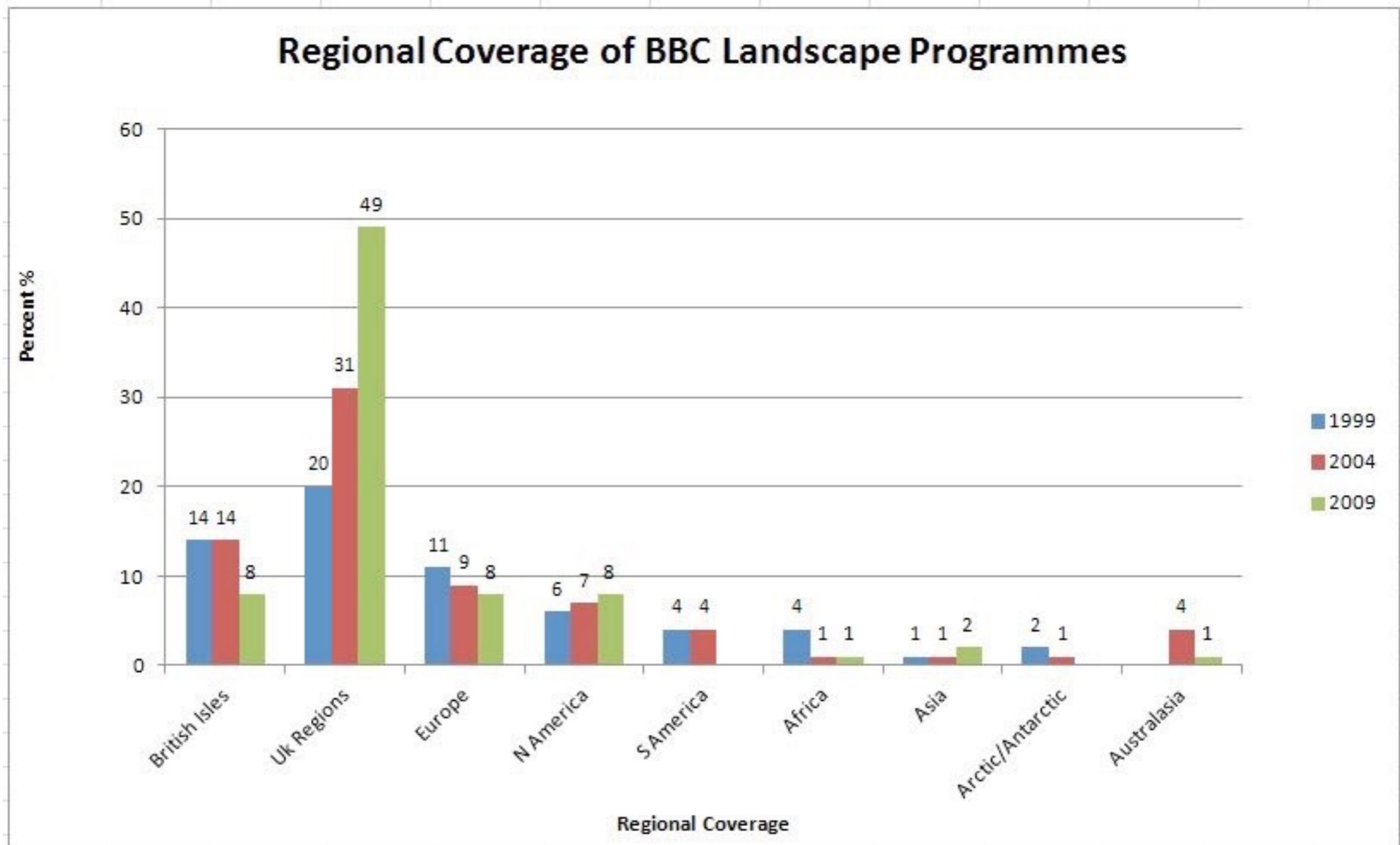
Listen to Brian Johnston interviewing Eric Lowe in Tenbury Wells, April 11th 1976 for BBC Radio 4 programme *Down Your Way*



Lives in a Landscape: A Good Fondness for Rats - 2005 - BBC Radio

Listen to an extract from *Lives in a Landscape: A Good Fondness for Rats*, broadcast on July 11th 2005 - BBC Radio 4.

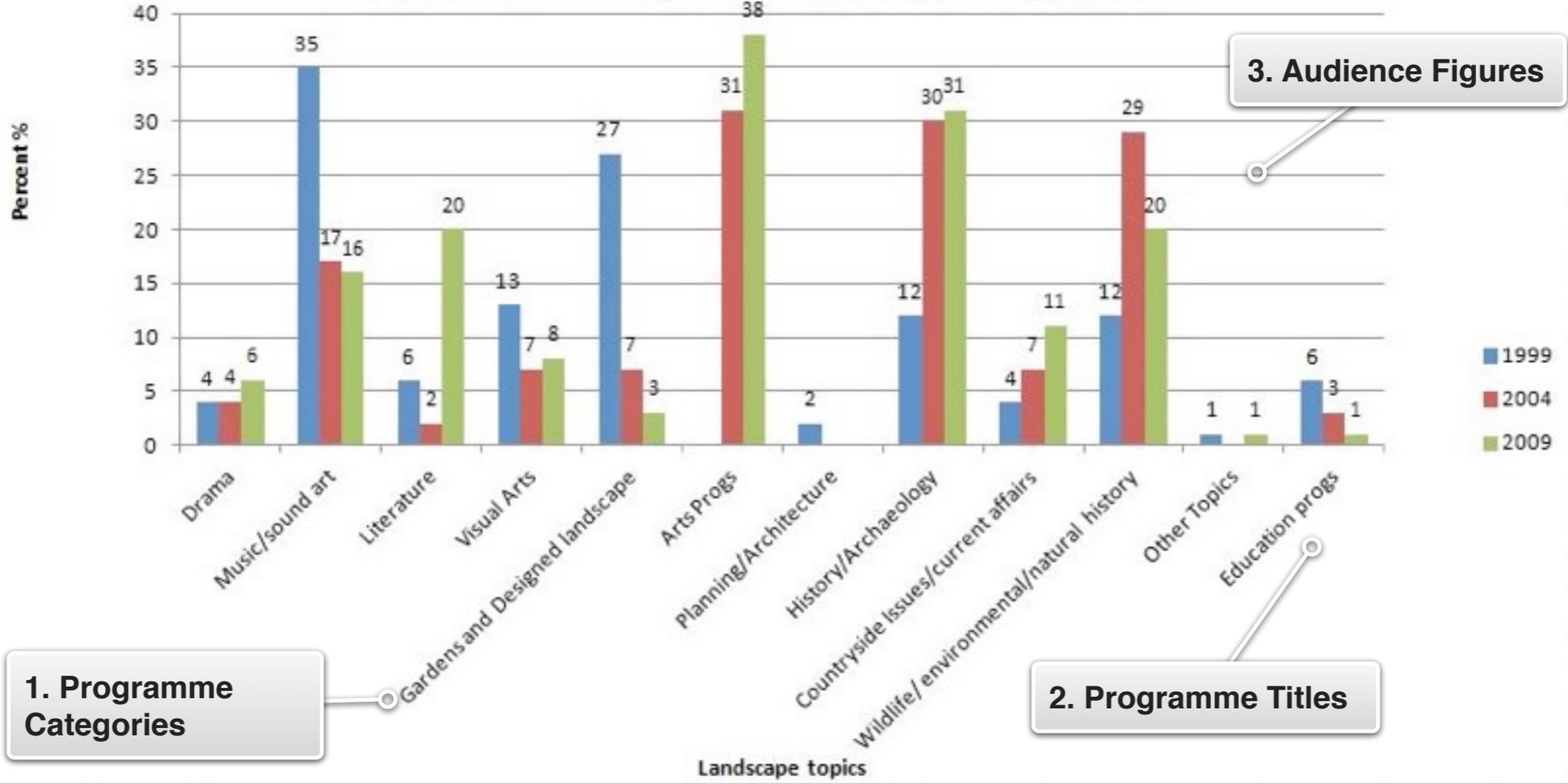




Landscape programming on the BBC ranges across the network and across many genres from drama and comedy to arts and current affairs. BBC Genome project has digitised *Radio Times* programme listing information data and made it searchable for key words. This gives a basic

sense of where programmes concerning landscape appear on the network and some sense of their themes and content. It is possible to search for programmes from the very early years of British broadcasting in 1922 until 2009, the last year of digitisation..

Topics Covered by BBC Landscape Programmes



1. Programme Categories

2. Programme Titles

3. Audience Figures



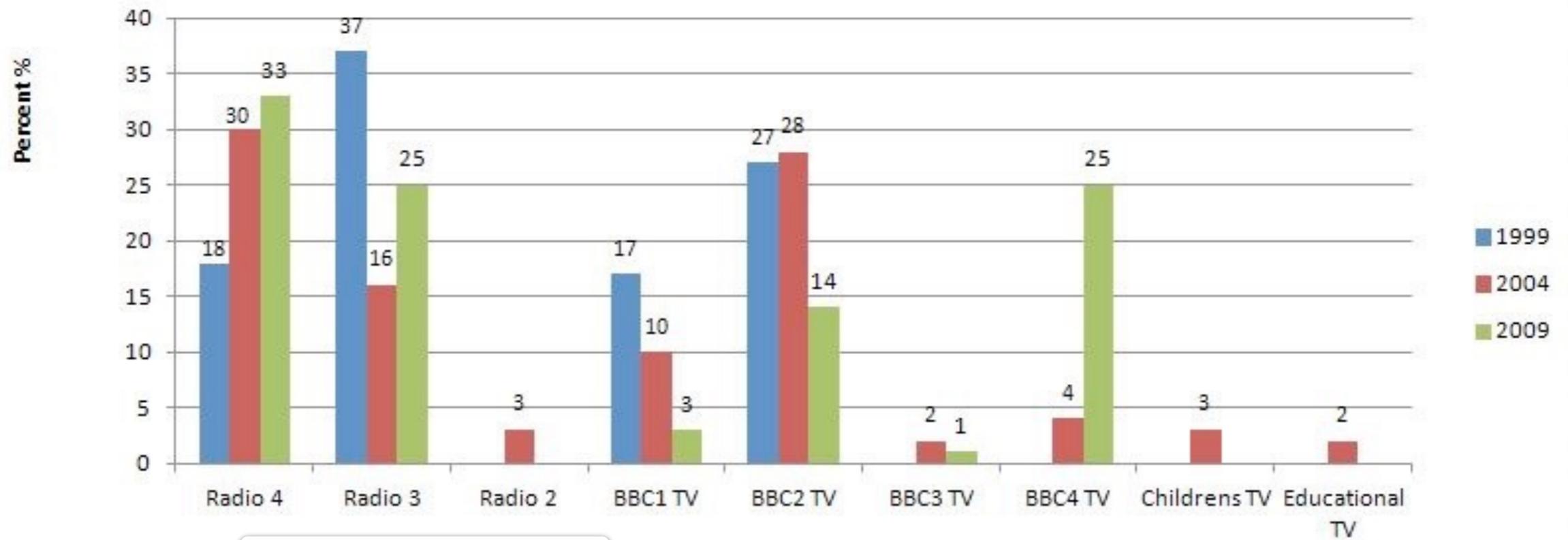
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3



BBC Landscape Programmes Channel Coverage



Findings and Analyses

Channel

1

What is clear from the BBC Genome database evidence is that around one quarter of all programmes identified by searching for the term 'landscape' were broadcast in the decade 2000 to 2009. This is not particularly surprising: given that the decade in

question witnessed the proliferation of BBC TV channels and more specialist outputs. So it might be expected that there is more programming during this decade than previously. Click on the graph *Findings and Analysis* for more details.



The growth of public interest in wildlife and natural history topics, and a fascination with landscape history and archaeology, partly fuelled by new survey techniques, scientific techniques for analysis and historical dating as well as the live reconstructions of experimental archaeology may be factors in making landscape programming more popular. This assertion is supported by figures showing that approximately 25% of programming relates to topics concerned with wildlife and natural history, while 30% of programming is concerned with landscape history and archaeology. What is also instructive in terms of content is that by far the most substantial proportion of programming – amounting to very nearly 40% – is concerned with specific regional landscapes within the British Isles, while 20% also concerns personal journeys and biographical stories of some kind. It would seem that the stereotype of the *Down Your Way* type landscape and human interest story magazine programmes focusing on distinctive lives and landscapes in the British Isles may still represent the most common form of landscape-based programming on the BBC.

In television programming landscape shots are often used for continuity purposes, to link one scripted scene to the next providing momentary relaxation in the pace of the programme narrative and a point of connection between different scenes. Landscape, then, is often used to tie programmes together, yet programmes about landscape are often composed as a collage made up of individual fragments and discrete sections stitched together to create a sense of continuity. It has often been remarked that an important quality of landscape is that it gives human-made environments such as parks, gardens, farms and woodlands the appearance of being natural environments. As landscapes they often appear to the spectator as being untouched by humans rather than created by and for them.

It has been said by cultural critic Roland Barthes, among others, that one thing that has made television so pervasive is that because it *looks like* reality, people think that it *is* reality (Youngs 1985: 146). Both individually and together, the ways in which we understand landscape and the ways in which we watch television work to create convincing senses of what is real from a variety of visual and sonic materials. Thinking about how these elements are put together and how programmes are made is important for understanding how landscape works as a vehicle for programme makers. Filming landscape programmes on location, for example, necessarily produces a schedule which has to juggle a range of external factors which dictate how the programme is made. These include: the weather, distances to be covered between locations to be filmed, negotiating access to private property and key filming sites and engaging experts and informants to be present on location.

Items are rarely shot in sequence but when the programme is stitched together during production with a sound track to match, the result is an assembled landscape that has a story, coherence and logic that often belie the complex fabrications involved in making the programme.



A clear sky - good weather for filming on location



Look at these examples from *Landscapes of England: The Black Country* - 1976 - BBC2



Landscapes of England: The Black Country - 1976 - BBC2

Among the most popular topics for BBC programming featuring landscape are history and archaeology. Though programmes of this genre have proliferated in recent years there are notable examples from previous decades, one of which is *Landscapes of England* shown as two series of six programmes each, in 1976 and 1978 respectively. The programmes were written and presented by the eminent local and landscape historian Professor W.G. Hoskins (1908–1992) author of the ground-breaking book *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955).



[Click on the image to read WG. Hoskins's biography](#)



Landscapes of England: The Black Country - 1976 - BBC2

The programmes were based on material and themes from Hoskins's writing on English landscape. Though it is not possible to trace the entire making of the programme or the series of which it formed part, enough documentary evidence remains in the BBC archives to provide an indication of some key events, actions and components of the making of some programmes in the series. These include programme No. 5, broadcast on 13 February 1976,

The Black Country, which portrays the old industrial area of the English west midlands centred on the town of Dudley. Remaining documents for this programme include background texts, programme scripts, shooting schedules, letters and invoices. From these materials it is possible to see how the programme was developed and evolved from Hoskins's initial manuscript, itself derived from his early books and writings.

28 January 1975

Dear Professor Wise

We are in the process of starting a series of six television programmes on English Regional Landscapes. Professor W. G. Hoskins is advising us and will be appearing in the series. He has suggested that we approach you with regard to background information on the landscape of the Black Country.

We should be most grateful indeed if you might be able to spare us time to be able to chat to us regarding this - either during normal working hours, or if this is impractical from your point of view, over a meal.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Rita Cooper (Miss)

Assistant to Peter Jones
Producer
Science & Features

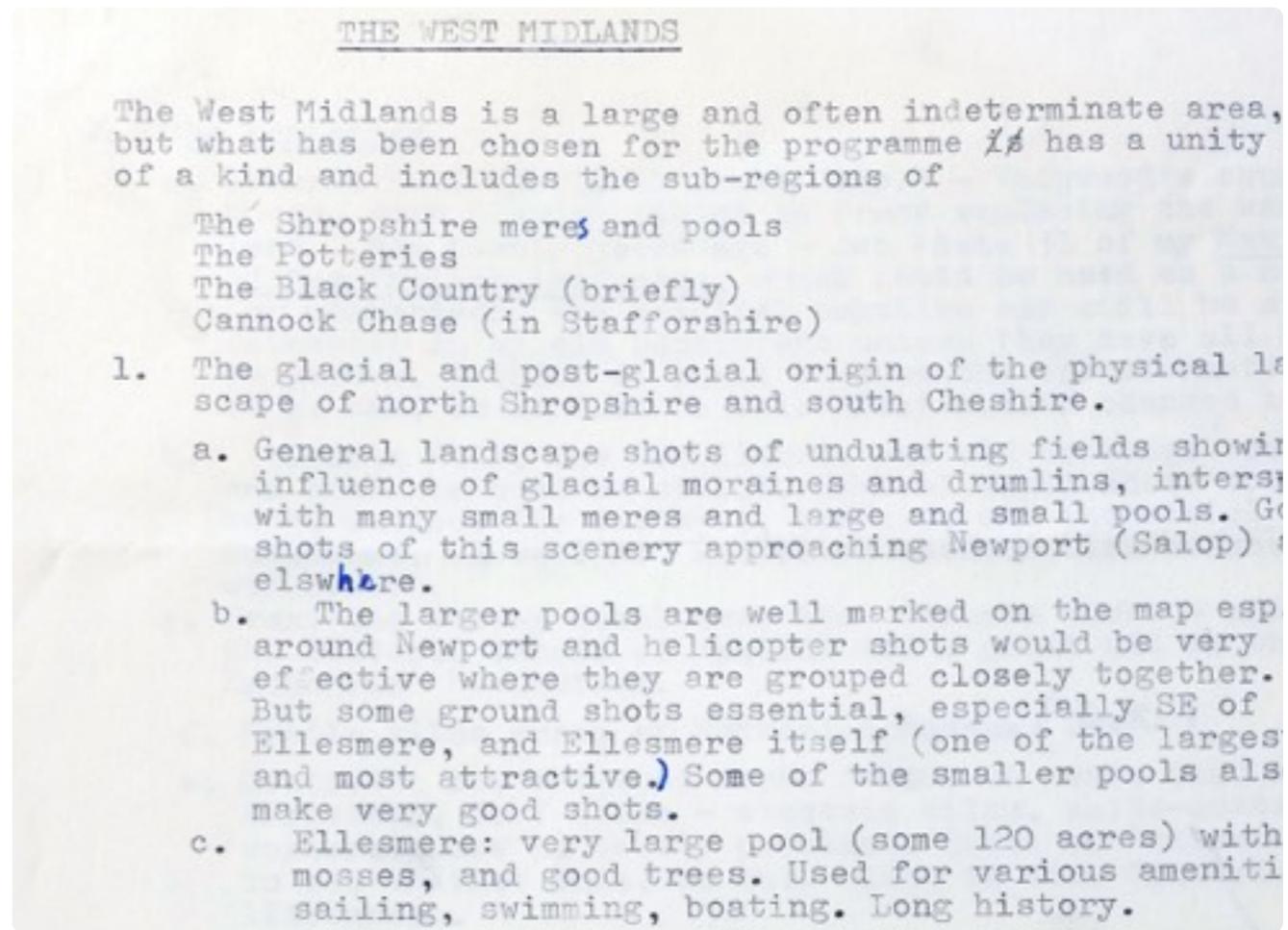
4.30. 4/2/74 St. Clement Building
5.405
4th floor.

In early 1975, during the planning stages for the programme, Rita Cooper, assistant to programme producer Peter Jones, wrote to Michael Wise (1918 – 2015), Professor of Geography at the London School of Economics. Wise was a native of Staffordshire, had worked at the University of Birmingham and had specialist knowledge of the economic and industrial geography of Birmingham and the Black Country. Informed by Hoskins's already written text on the history of the Black Country landscape, the result of the meeting with Professor Wise was a list of locations with some notes on what could be seen there, suggestions and contacts. In addition, Michael Wise lent the programme-makers some books and photographs relating to the history and redevelopment of the region. Notes of the meeting were typed up and Rita Cooper began writing to some of the people and organisations on the list, on behalf of producer Peter Jones and presenter W.G. Hoskins, but mentioning Professor Wise as a point of introduction. The correspondence records a number of key contacts including Dr John M. Fletcher, Lecturer in Political History at the University of Aston and chair of the Black Country Society and Dr David Palliser, a historian of the Tudor period and then lecturer at the University of Birmingham.

Letter from Rita Cooper, assistant to programme producer Peter Jones, wrote to professor Michael Wise



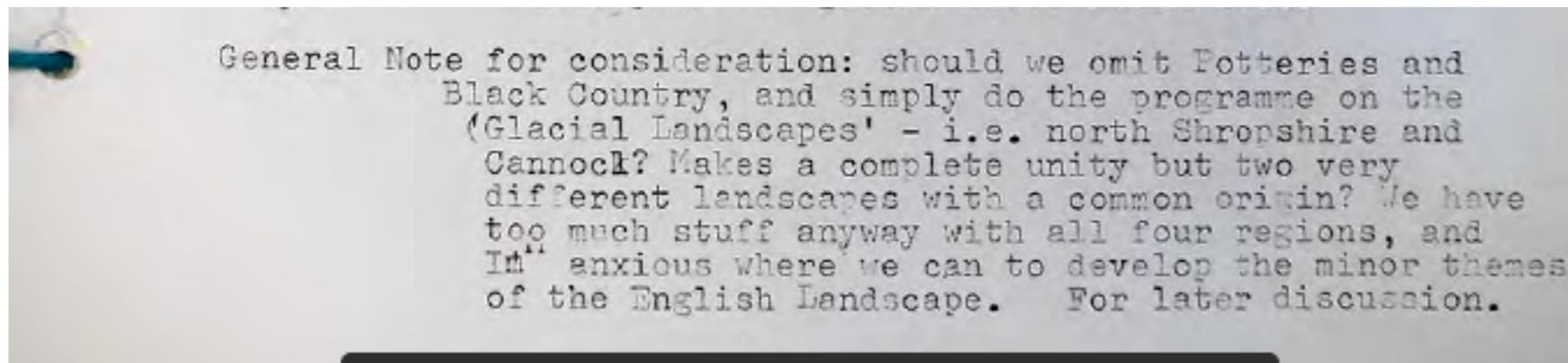
The result of this initial exploration of the topic was a typed three-page document entitled *The West Midlands* which set out a list of possible locations with some detailed notes concerning what might be found there that was of relevance to the programme. Click on the gallery to read the document.



Typed three-page document entitled *The West Midlands*



In addition to setting out some possible sites for filming, the document asks some fundamental questions about the shape and direction of the programme. It says:



It is clear that in earlier stages in the development of this programme it had not been decided which of the industrial landscapes of the West Midlands would feature. It seems that the developers were even thinking about omitting the Black Country altogether.

22 May 1975

Professor W. G. Hoskins

Dear Bill

I'm sending a copy of the work which David Palliser has given to Peter for you to read - Peter seems quite impressed by the way that he has balanced his story in that he talks about dual economy and has not relied completely upon Dad Dudley's records.

Also enclose "The Economic Emergence of the Black Country" for you to read the chapter on 'Enclosure' which Peter mentioned in his last epistle to you.

On the hotel side of things, I have arranged for your wife to stay at the Plough Hotel from Wednesday 25th - 27th June when we are in Oxford - I do look forward to meeting her.

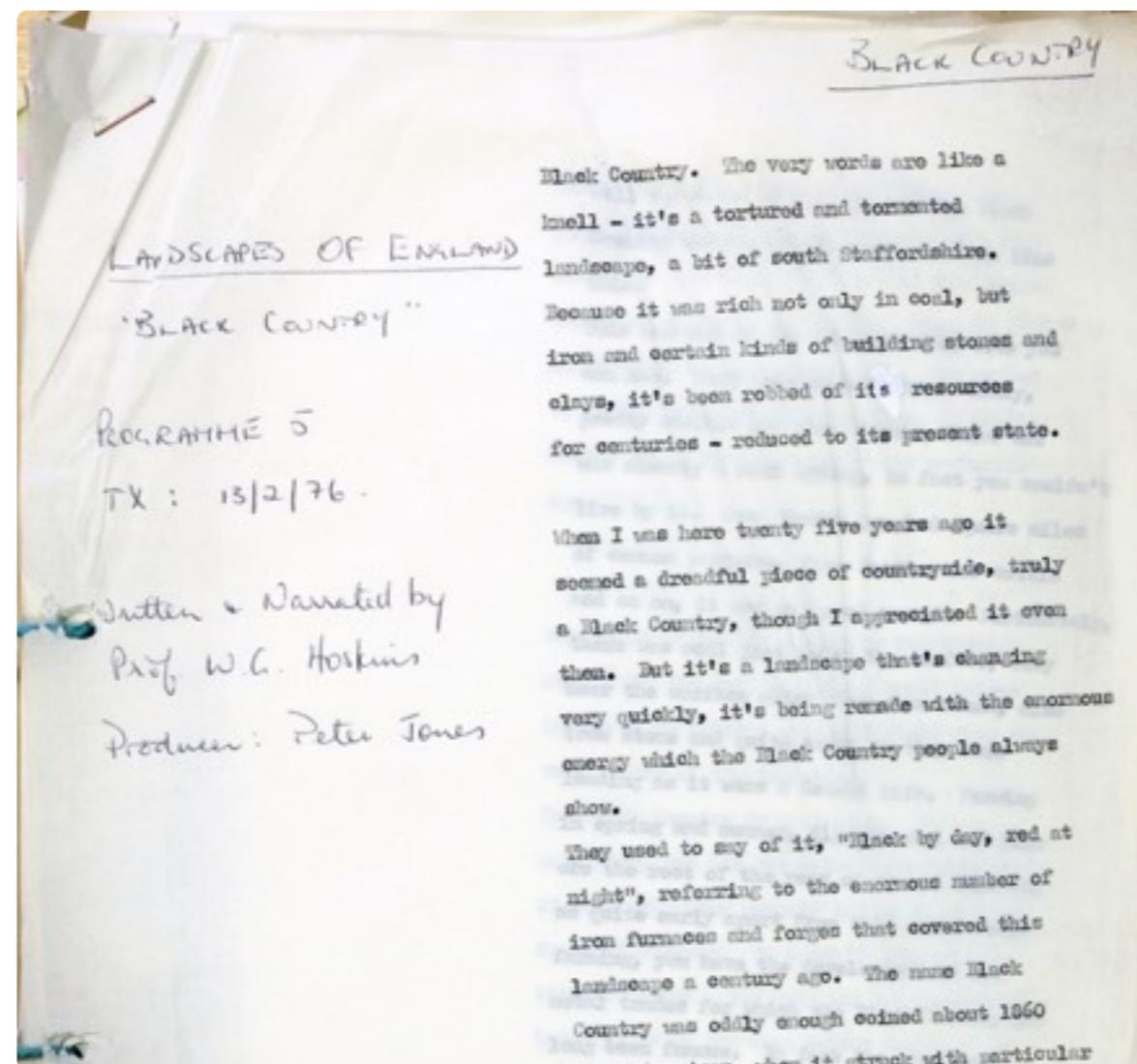
I think that's about my lot of news for now, workwise that is - I don't seem to have the time to write chatty letters with Peter cracking the whip at Staines over the telephone!

Look forward to seeing you in the depths of the Black Country (there's a fantastic Methodist Minister there - shall I introduce you? He may know of one or two ruined Methodist churches - not to mention ruined Methodists!).

Rita

It is possible to trace how, during the spring and early summer of 1975, the programme production team liaising with Hoskins organised the locations (see letter 22 May 1975 and reply). Correspondence records them: asking for advice and information from Drs Fletcher and Palliser; obtaining permission to film at a quarry site; organising a visit to a chain maker's workshop; hiring a helicopter and a narrow boat for different days; consulting with the police in relation to their helicopter flight; arranging overnight hotel accommodation and a visit to a well-known old pub 'The Crooked House', which had been badly affected by mining subsidence; and filming at the mine owner's former country residence at Himley Hall. The result was a two-page filming schedule that diverges significantly from the ordering of scenes within the completed film. Actual filming on the day was typed up on to a shooting order shot list documenting precisely what was filmed and giving location and duration so that it would be possible to identify particular pieces of film and locations from the spools of 16mm film in order to assemble and edit the film. Elsewhere in the correspondence it is possible to find the production team: thanking various contacts for their help and arranging to take them out for drinks and meals; paying for books, maps and copyright material; trying to find out the whereabouts of an historic waterpump steam engine; and letting contacts know how the programme was progressing and how and when they might be able to view the final version.

Letter 1: 22 May 1975 - Production team to Bill Hoskins



Written text *Landscapes of England "Black Country"*

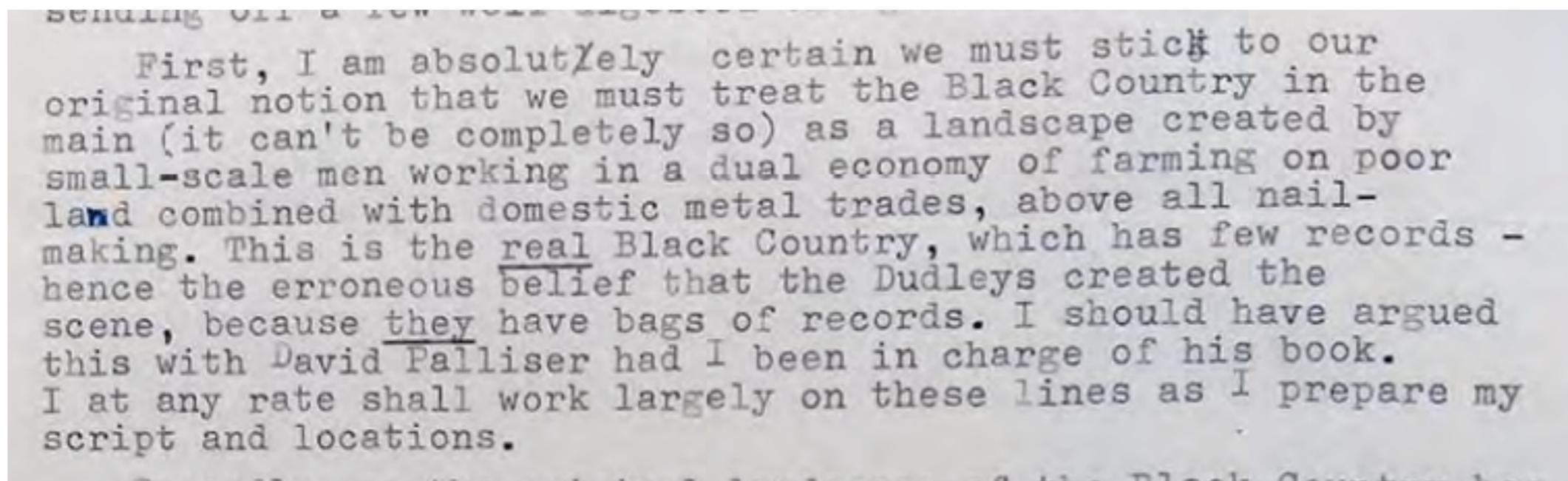


It seems evident from all this that making a programme about landscape is as much about building and maintaining a network of social contacts as it is about the technical arrangements, the equipment needed to shoot film or the weather and conditions necessary to go filming. It can also be seen that, in spite of all the pre-planning and scripting (see, for example, the written text

Landscapes of England "Black Country"), Hoskins improvised his words to camera. Transcripts show how from take to take of the same scene, his description and analysis of the landscape changed and developed to be shorter, punchier, easier to understand or different in emphasis (see transcripts concerning Mushroom Green in the gallery).

However, throughout the process of filming characterised by contingency and compromise Hoskins was determined to hold onto his portrayal of the Black Country as a landscape created by countless working people, farmers, miners and

metalworkers, rather than the heroic figures of the 'Industrial revolution', famous engineers, aristocrats and owners such as the Earls of Dudley in the case of the Black Country. In his letter to Peter Jones dated 17 May 1975, he writes:



First, I am absolutely certain we must stick to our original notion that we must treat the Black Country in the main (it can't be completely so) as a landscape created by small-scale men working in a dual economy of farming on poor land combined with domestic metal trades, above all nail-making. This is the real Black Country, which has few records - hence the erroneous belief that the Dudleys created the scene, because they have bags of records. I should have argued this with David Palliser had I been in charge of his book. I at any rate shall work largely on these lines as I prepare my script and locations.

In his belief that English landscapes were made by ordinary folk whose lives and actions were often omitted from formal historical records with the result that they were overlooked and dismissed by historians, Hoskins showed himself to be both radical and innovative as a historian of landscape. One of the

enduring appeals of his writing and broadcasting remains his commitment to landscape as a medium for understanding the everyday lives of ordinary people. However in doing this, his work also reinforces the longstanding 'lives in a landscape' theme as a dominant way of portraying landscape at the BBC.



SEASONAL LANDSCAPES IN BBC WILDLIFE AND NATURE PROGRAMMING



Wildlife and nature programming works with landscape in ways that make it a very eloquent backdrop for presenting multiple stories. In this respect, such programmes have much in common with documentaries about history, or leisure and environment such as *Landscapes of England* or *Countryfile*. In each case the complex ways in which multiple landscapes are assembled into a coherent medium for telling stories are hidden by the activities of programme making. Greg Mitman (1999) highlights this issue while writing about ‘America’s romance with wildlife on film’. Thinking about the ways in which shots are filmed out of sync, and often in different locations at different times and then edited together to make a story, he argues that there is nothing very natural about the nature documentary.

Disappearing wildlife magically reappears, often in abundance, before the camera; biological rhythms are dramatically enhanced, and the natural world speeds up. Such filmic strategies elaborately stage the world they present to us as natural (see Huggan 2013 8-9). In this context, landscape fulfills a role that it has occupied in painting, poetry and landscape design since the Sixteenth century. This is exemplified by the way in which landscapes assemble together people, places and environments while at the same time disguising the creative act of bringing these together as part of a single aesthetic experience that we understand as a landscape.

In wildlife and nature programming, landscape can be both the subject of the programme, for example, in programmes featuring Yosemite National Park in the US or the Serengeti in Tanzania – but it can also be a backdrop to other wildlife stories featuring animals, plants and ecologies. Most often, it has some elements

of both, as with the series *Lost Land of the Tiger* - BBC 2 (1997), and in the series *Wild Africa* - BBC 2 (2001) and *Wild China* - BBC 2 (2008).

Advances in digital technology relating to remotely controllable cameras, 24-hour webcam monitoring, wifi, radio tagging, wildlife camera traps, infra-red imagery, high-definition image formats, slow motion, concealable miniature cameras and cameras mounted on aerial drones or miniature submarines, radically extend the ability of film-and programme-makers to juxtapose and intercut near and distant, micro and macro scales, fleeting moments and long intervals of time. At once these techniques expand, multiply and fragment viewers’ experience of landscape. They increasingly make it possible to know the world in ways which are beyond the conventional reach and capacity of the human senses. As Graham Huggan (2013: 8) says, such filmic techniques elaborately stage the world they present to us as natural. Huggan quotes Kerridge (1999: 182):

“ *We are brought close, but not too close: artful camerawork helps convey the illusion of intimacy without involvement, either by presenting empty landscapes disjoined from the human cultures that have historically shaped them, or by performing a variety of disembodied tricks* (Kerridge 1999: 182)

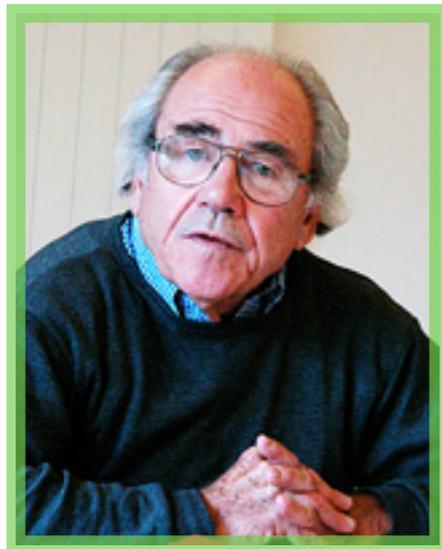


Frozen Planet: 2011 - BBC1 Episode 1 - To the Ends of the Earth

Although some of these techniques have been available for generations using film and analogue technologies, cost, complexity and quality implications have strictly limited their application. Today the adoption of digital technologies has increasingly made it possible for BBC landscape and environment

series such as *The Blue Planet* – BBC 1 – 2001 (eight episodes), *Planet Earth* – BBC 1 – 2006 (eleven episodes) and *Frozen Planet* – 2011 (seven episodes) to provide breathtaking and richly detailed landscape imagery.

Technology enables these programmes to combine multiple perspectives from the air and intimate close-ups from remote cameras together with timelapse and other techniques that might best be described as 'hyperreal'. French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard describes hyperreality as the generation of models of the world that do not have a simple or single origin in reality. They are convincing representations of the sorts of reality we experience as human beings but it is a reality that does not or cannot exist in the world separately from its representation in, for example, television, film or photography.



Click on the image to read Jean Baudrillard's biography.



Timelapse filming the freezing sea from *Frozen Planet* - 2011
- BBC1

The Open University was a co-production partner in the BBC 'Frozen Planet' series and members of the University were working on the series since early 2008.

Mark Brandon, an Open University polar scientist, was the Principal Academic Advisor to the series. Listen to Mark talking about the importance of wide angled photography in wildlife and landscape filming to tell a story, and in particular for grounding people in the environment being shown.



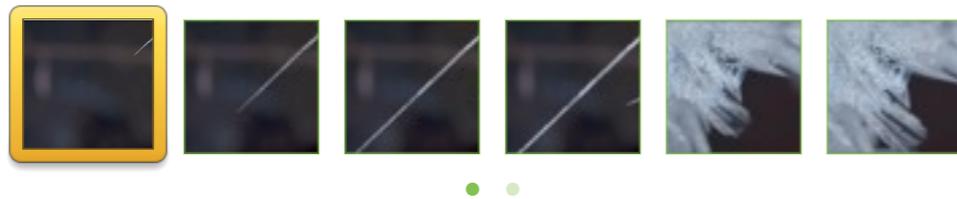
Dr Mark Brandon - Polar Oceanographer
The Open University



Alexander Island, the largest island of Antarctica

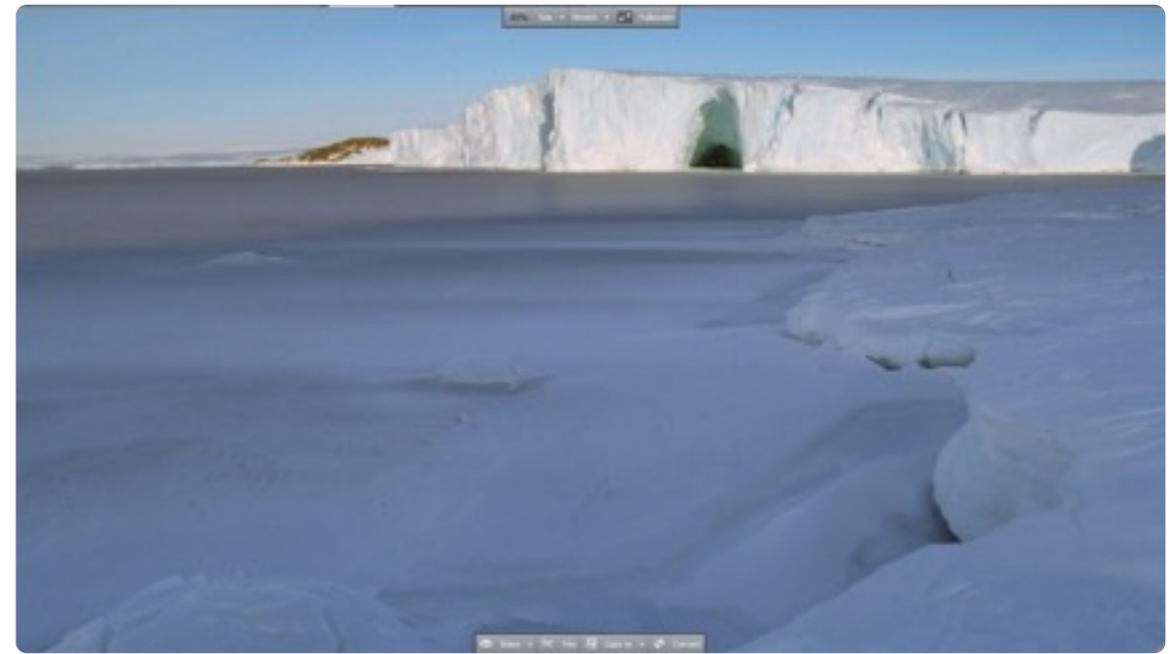


View the gallery of Mark's photo's taken on location of
Frozen Plant



Screen shots of ice close up - *Frozen Planet* BBC 2

Starting from the basis that landscape is something that humans perceive, recognise and experience when they walk through or stand and observe the world in which they live, programmes such as *Frozen Planet* produce hyperrealities because they create a sense of landscape that could never be experienced by humans outside the action of watching the programme itself. In *Frozen Planet*, for example, images of the sun sweeping across a mountain range in which 24 hours is reduced to a few seconds; microscopic images of freezing ice intercut with time-lapse photography of a freezing sea ice sheet; the intimate moments shared by a polar bear with its cub; and a slow-motion



Screen shots of thawing Ice - *Frozen Planet* BBC 2

close-up of an owl hunting are visually stunning, and seem to provide an experience that is deeper, more detailed and more truthful than perceivable reality itself. Such images both show us the richness, complexity and diversity of lives lived in landscapes and demonstrate the limitations on our physiological capacity to experience landscape as human individuals. In fact, such images create an interest in and appetite for landscape that might very well never be totally satisfiable outside its representation in the very programming that helps stimulate and create interest in nature and environment in the first place.



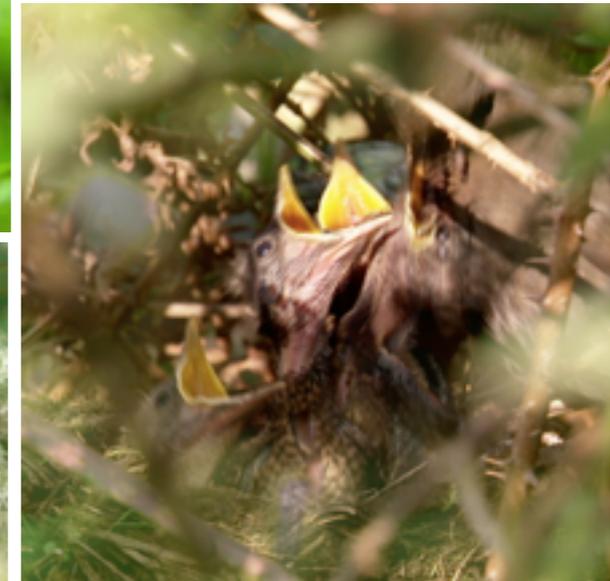
Digital-based technologies have also had an important impact on BBC environmental programming much closer to home. Such technologies allow multiple perspectives, micro and macro scales, intimacy and distance, emotional empathy and scientific observation to be combined on film in the manner demonstrated in *Frozen Planet*. However, digital and computer-based technologies also allow these to be combined in real time, radically expanding the possibilities of live broadcasting. The following chapter

takes a look at the annual BBC series *Springwatch* and its seasonal spin-offs *Autumnwatch* – BBC 2 – and *Winterwatch* – BBC 2. These examples show how recent environmental programming connects with the ‘lives in a landscape’ theme which seems to remain dominant in BBC programming. Broadcast mid-evening since 2005, the programmes chart the fortunes of wildlife at key moments in the UK’s changing seasons.



There is a long history of BBC programming charting the seasons –for example, the long-running BBC Radio 4 series *The Countryside in Spring*, *The Countryside in Summer*, *The Countryside in Autumn*, *The Countryside in Winter*. These programmes ran between 1971 and 1990 and were hosted by the Welsh broadcaster and author concerned with the Welsh countryside Wynford Vaughan-Thomas (1908-1987). Where *The Countryside in Spring* etc. was poetic, contemplative and culturally highbrow, harking back to the forms of British nature writing pioneered in the 1920s and 1930s, programmes such as *Springwatch* are high-energy and fast moving, with broad appeal across the age range.

The programmes are broadcast live, usually over four consecutive days per week for a period of between one and three weeks from a specific wildlife reserve and hosted by a core team of three presenters. They are characterised by the use of many hidden and remotely operated cameras based in animal sets and burrows and bird nesting and feeding sites, these are available as live feeds to presenters on set and for broadcasting. Recorded packages are distributed through the running order featuring specific wildlife stories from around the UK often using guest reporters. The use of many cameras allows the programme to dip in and out of any number of ongoing wildlife stories, nestings, birthings and predations as these shape up over three weeks.



The mood of the programme is informal, exploratory, and flexible with an emphasis on promoting fun approaches to ecological and biological observation, investigation and science. Audiences are involved and engaged through the use of digital social media and sometimes encouraged to get involved in citizen science based wildlife exercises. The broadcast of wildlife webcams 24/7 via internet using a BBC website and the even more informal conversational audience participation show on *Springwatch Unsprung* often broadcast off channel on the BBC's digital red button facility demonstrates the extent to which this model of landscape and environment broadcasting is only possible using digital media. Interviewed at the end of his first series in 2009 co-host Chris Packham calls *Springwatch* a 'show' not a 'programme'. This characterisation of the programme suggests an emphasis on values of entertainment and the open ended conversational, partly improvised and interaction driven dynamic of each edition. It is perhaps no surprise that two of the shows current presenters Michaela Strachan and Chris Packham had substantial previous experience fronting the long running children's' wildlife series for CBBC, *The Really Wild Show* (1986 - 2006).



Though *Springwatch* is strongly driven by wildlife stories, landscape provides essential context and continuity to the programmes. Programmes are always set in iconic landscapes for example, the Dovey Estuary in West Wales, in the sandy heaths of the Suffolk coast or in the Cairngorms national park in Scotland. Though some filmed segments feature stories concerning urban wildlife such as foxes, birds of prey, garden birds, hedgehogs and other fauna, the substantial majority of content is angled towards rural and particularly wilderness based nature stories. This excerpt from the beginning to episode nine 2013, shows how landscape both anchors a diverse and eclectic range of wildlife stories locating them in a specific place and relays a broader context setting a mood of anticipation and providing a sense of continuity and coherence for the many dramas to be told. Media commentator Mark Lawson call the programme 'high drama', a 'soap opera' that does not need 'twists' or gimmicks. Shooting continuity segments in which the presenters are set against the backdrop of the beautiful Dovey Estuary is important. It provides the presenters with an air of authority because the setting enables them to be understood as legitimately speaking for and on behalf of wildlife through what is so clearly a rich personal eyewitness experience of landscape. This is demonstrably grounded in opening sequences that showcase a very full and vibrant nature. At the same time, the informal and exploratory tone of the commentary invites viewers to feel they are in this landscape with the presenters investigating wildlife alongside them.



Springwatch - BBC2 – 2013

In *Springwatch*, the use of multiple wildlife cameras freely viewable via the internet and the ability to interact and share experiences via social media further connects the stories and experiences of viewers with those of the presenters and with the wildlife stories brought together through an iconic landscape. In this way *Springwatch* provides yet a further manifestation of the longstanding 'lives in a landscape' format which so dominates landscape based programming which focuses on the UK. Here digital technology and social media in the context of live broadcasting are able to forge patterns of shared experience and multiply unfolding and elaborating stories in ways which are substantially new and which may point towards some of the future shape and character of interactive broadcasting. At the same time, the use of landscape as context and continuity to a multiplicity of stories and journeys has strong echoes of BBC programming on both radio and television that can be traced back to the 1940s.



[Click on the image to read Tim Scoones biography.](#)



Click to hear **Tim Scoones, Executive Producer for the BBC Natural History Unit**, talking about his work with *Springwatch*. He describes how audience participation with *Springwatch* Unsprung has resulted in the creation of meaningful scientific knowledge.

Landscapes can be the main subject matter of radio and TV programmes when, for example, they concern the work of particular architects, designers, artists, painters, poets, authors and composers; the environment and ecology of iconic places such as the Lake District or Snowdonia; or, indeed, the history and archaeology of particular localities and regions such as the Black Country. Evidence shows that these form a substantial proportion of all landscape programming about Britain. However, a significantly larger body of programming uses the landscape as a context to tell stories about people, places and wildlife. In these programmes landscape acts to anchor messages and meanings to the actions and words of those in the stories, it also relays the broader context providing continuity between different filmed segments and individual story lines. As shown in the example of the landscape history documentary series *Landscapes of England* landscape programmes, like much other programming are very frequently filmed out of sequence and it is only in the finished work itself that a sense of landscape is established that is meaningfully coherent and continuous. To this extent the landscape we see or hear in radio and TV programmes is always some sort of fabrication.

BBC programmes concerning the landscape of Britain most frequently adopt a format that relates lives and experiences, both human and non-human, to the landscapes in which they are lived. The origins of the 'lives in a landscape' approach can be traced in radio programming devised to give a voice to ordinary people and boost moral during WWII and it can be found in long running and

much loved post-WWII series such *Down You Way* (Light Programme later Radio 4). More recently radio programmes such as *Lives in a Landscape* and TV programmes such as *Countryfile* transformed the 'lives in a landscape' format from one of simply providing nostalgic and rustically picturesque scenes of Britain to one better able to address contemporary human and environmental issues. More recently, technological developments in digital recording and broadcasting exemplified by programmes such as *Springwatch* show how the multiple simultaneously accessible perspectives available to current live broadcasts enable programme-makers to weave multiple 'real life' story lines through landscape programming. At the same time such technology allows viewers to be actively involved and share their own individual landscape, environment, wildlife and nature stories as an integral part of programming.

When it acts contextually in programming as *anchor* and provides continuity as *relay*, landscape can often pass unnoticed by the viewer whose focus is directed towards the actions, activities and stories it supports. Yet even taken as background to events and actions landscape continues to provide an important medium for thinking about land, nation, people and identity in the British Isles. At least since World War II, the 'lives in a landscape' format in BBC programming has provided a highly flexible and adaptable format for making and remaking ideas of who the British are, how they live and how they communicate with one another.

READING ROOM

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BBC Written Archive Centre Folder, T63/112/1 May 1975 Letter to Peter Jones dated 17/05/75 (1 page)

BBC Written Archive Centre Folder T63/112/1 22 May 1975 Letter and reply; reply undated

BBC Written Archive Centre Folder, T63/112/1 June 1975, Two page filming schedule

BBC Written Archive Centre Folder, T63/112/1 Three paged typed document The West Midlands

BBC Written Archive Centre Folder, T63/112/1 WG Hoskins scripted text Landscapes of England "Black Country"

BBC Written Archive Centre Folder, T63/112/1 June 1975 9 Page Shooting order shot list

BBC Written Archive Centre Folder, T63/112/1 Undated list of books for Landscapes of England Production Team

Images

Image of Roland Barthe by alyletteri at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alyletteri/5352054723>

Image of Jean Baudrillard in 2005 by (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:WikipediaBaudrillard20040612-cropped.png>)

Earth in vision: pathfinding in the BBC's archive of environmental broadcasting

Joe Smith, Kim Hammond and George Revill share some of the findings of their work examining what digital broadcast archives are available and which could be made available in future.

Still from *Tonight* – transmission date: 21 May 1965, BBC1.

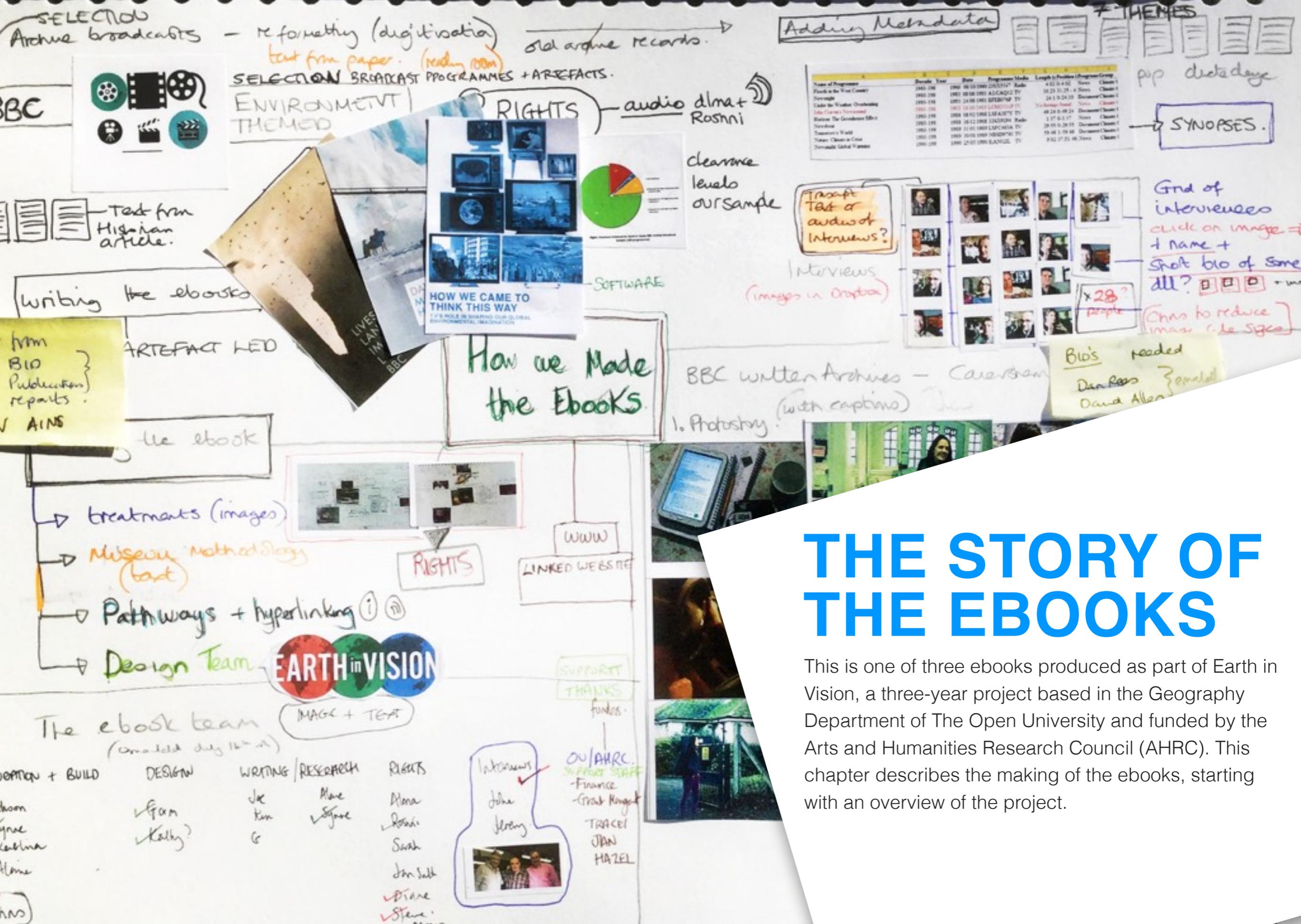


The BBC's archives hold over a million hours of programmes, dating back to the 1930s (radio) and 1940s (television). It represents one of the great cultural and historical treasure-houses. It sits behind a well-padded door, however, with entry-passes distributed only to broadcasters or other media producers searching for clips. What might happen if the door were broken down? Everything from coverage of independence struggles in the global south to personal recollections of births, marriages and deaths might be viewed in a new light.

Large-scale releases of online digital broadcast and film archives have been undertaken in fits and starts, and YouTube

Return to The Story of the
Ebooks Chapter





THE STORY OF THE EBOOKS

This is one of three ebooks produced as part of Earth in Vision, a three-year project based in the Geography Department of The Open University and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This chapter describes the making of the ebooks, starting with an overview of the project.

EARTH in VISION

Earth in Vision is a pathfinding research project exploring the potential of emerging releases of digital broadcast archives (DBAs). The focus of the project is the BBC broadcast archive, which holds more than a million hours programmes dating back to the 1930s (radio) and 1940s (television). Though a small amount of this material has been released for public viewing on BBC iPlayer and dedicated YouTube channels such as BBC Earth, the majority remains substantially unavailable both to the public and to researchers.

Specifically, Earth in Vision explores the BBC's broadcast archive of environment-themed television and radio programmes spanning six decades from the late-1950s.



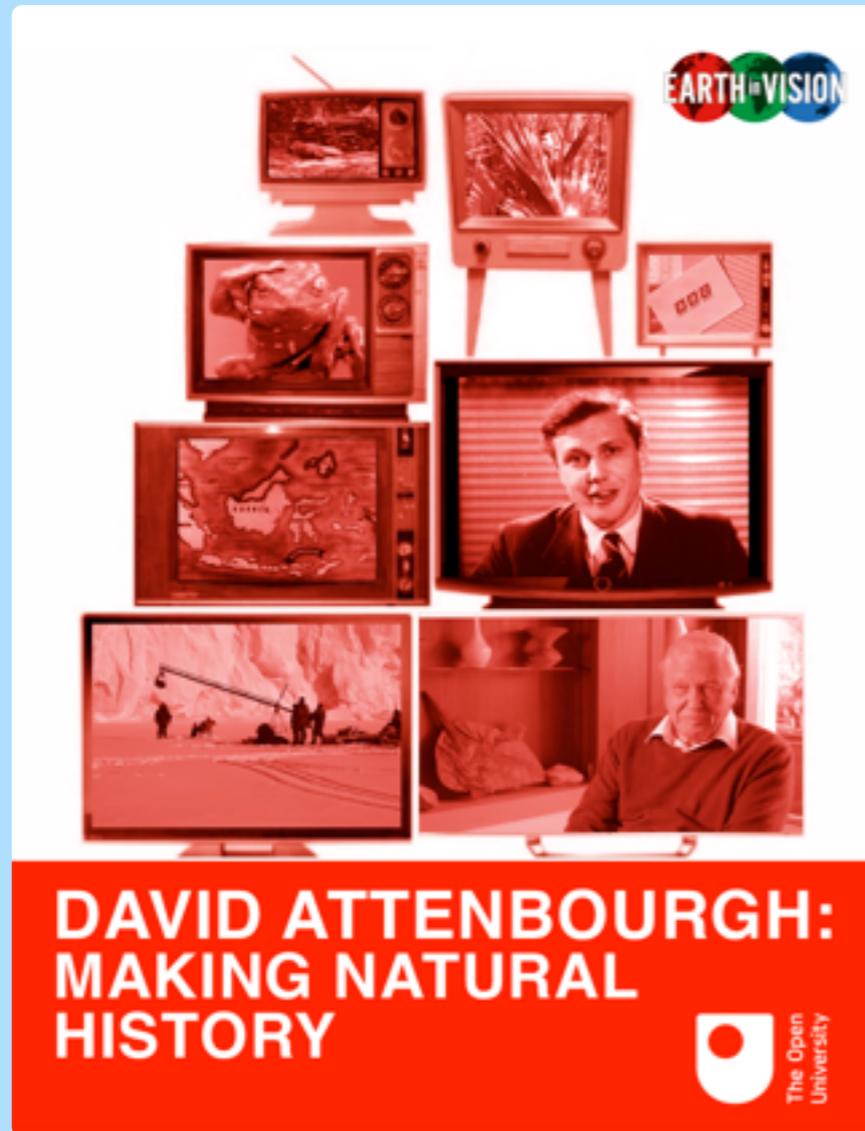
Press to find out more about online digital broadcast archives (DBAs)

The project's two central aims are to explore: first, how DBA content can be used to tell new environmental histories and inform new debates; and, secondly, how people may want to use DBAs to tell their own environmental stories, and what tools, information and metadata they may need or want.

The ebooks illustrate the Earth in Vision team's efforts to achieve these two aims.



The Earth In Vision Ebooks



David Attenborough: Making Natural History



Digital Narrative Space

The Earth in Vision ebooks tell three stories of the history of the environment using BBC digital and paper archives. They also explore different aspects of the BBC's role as a prominent producer of environmental narratives.

In turn, the books examine: the iconic role of Sir David Attenborough in BBC environmental programming; the ways in which BBC programming produces and reproduces ideas of British landscape; and television's role in shaping the understanding of global environmental issues.

The three stories illustrate the potential of the BBC broadcast archives in the writing of new historical, cultural and political accounts of these themes. They are published as free ebooks, and link to the [Earth in Vision website](#), which holds a sample of BBC archive content that has been rights cleared for public use.



Press to read more about ebooks

The ebooks draw on a range of digital assets and **metadata**, including footage from the BBC television and radio archives, documents from the archive of BBC paper files, the BBC Genome project, images, and filmed interviews with a range of natural history and environment-themed programme makers. These assets are outlined in the following sections, which also discuss the opportunities and challenges posed by digital formats, access and rights.

BBC Broadcast Archives



The ebooks draw primarily on a sample of 50 hours (100 programmes) of BBC environment-themed radio and television programmes spanning six decades.

Digital Formatting

The first stage in making archive footage available is to make digital copies to watch.



Press to read more about digital formatting.



Storytelling is associated positively with the act of ‘giving voice’: the ability to make and tell stories provides opportunities for free speech, plurality of expression and diversity in debate. Earth in Vision contrasts the formal strategic narratives represented by programming by the BBC (and other mainstream media organisations) with the tactical stories than can be created informally by the public.

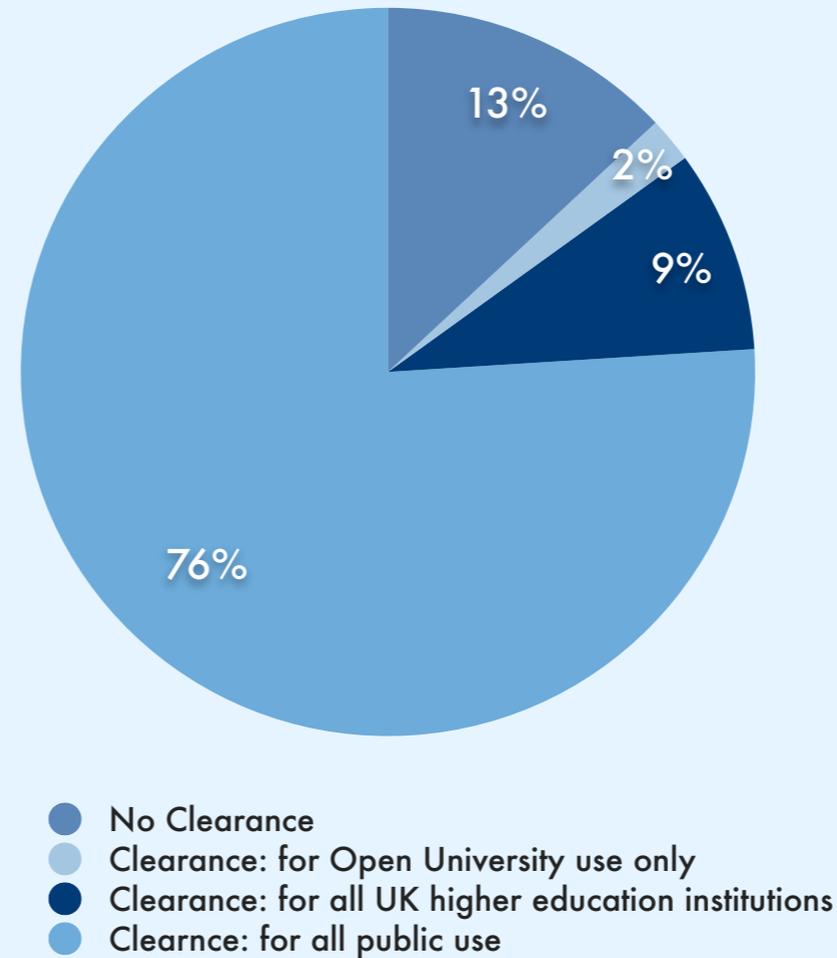
For the latter, people need access to broadcast archive content (programmes) and to the tools for downloading and re-versioning this footage with collages, voiceovers and mashups. This requires digital media archives and tools to be freely available...which brings us to the knotty issue of legal rights to reproduce broadcast archive content.

Access and Rights

The processes involved in making ebooks highlight issues of access and accessibility. A founding purpose of Earth in Vision was to explore the challenges and opportunities arising from the expansion of legally available DBAs. This included investigating the ideas that diverse individuals and groups might have about how such material could be used.

Differential access is partly tied up with geographical location and socioeconomic factors - for example, inequalities exist in both network coverage and access to technological devices - but among the biggest barriers to opening up the possibilities of using digital archives to tell new stories are questions of copyright and intellectual capital. DBAs cannot be made public unless issues surrounding rights can be resolved. This process brings to light the already composite and collaged nature of content from broadcast media - including archived programmes - which is often so shot through with third-party rights to embedded film clips, images and music that it becomes more or less impossible to clear the material for legal use.

Rights Clearance Achieved for Earth in Vision BBC Archive Broadcast Sample



As the chart shows, of the 50 hours (100 programmes) in our pilot sample, only 75% would have been available for full public rights clearance. If these figures are representative of the whole BBC archive, a quarter of a million hours of TV and radio broadcasts would be unavailable for open public clearance.

AUDIO 9.1 [Round Table Discussion](#)

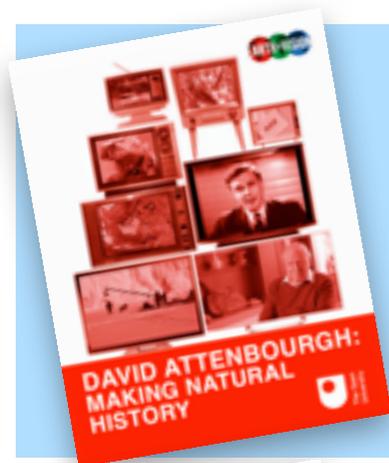


[Listen to Alma Hales, Head of Intellectual Property at the Open University, and Roshni Amin, Sound and Vision Producer at the Open University, discussing the possibilities of digital broadcast archives and the issues of access and rights.](#)

Choosing Content: challenges and constraints

Choices regarding the number and length of BBC programme clips that could be used in these ebooks were tightly constrained by copyright and associated costs. Interestingly, such constraints were also in their way a stimulus to working creatively and economically with media assets.

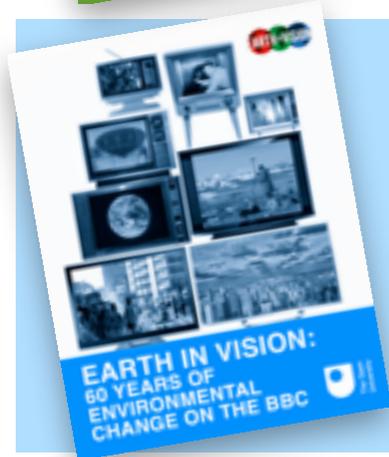
Each ebook had a maximum “budget” of approximately 18 minutes. The challenges of selecting broadcast archive content were different for each ebook, reflecting the different challenges of each story.



There is a vast and well-kept archive of David Attenborough’s work dating back over six decades and the task of selecting from it a mere 18 minutes of footage for Making Natural History was a big challenge.



In contrast, Lives in the Landscape drew on rarer and more niche content, and a search beyond the pilot 50 hours: the author used YouTube to search and watch material uploaded by members of the public who will almost certainly not have had formal copyright clearance. Some of the BBC programming found on You Tube does not exist in the BBC’s own archive, so although this material can be accessed informally, it could not be used in the ebook because it is not possible to obtain official copies that can be formally copyright cleared and paid for. In this context, the narratives that can be told by academics with public funding are highly constrained, and more strategic than tactical.



For Earth in Vision: 60 years of environmental change on the BBC, the challenge was to stretch 18 minutes of archive material to tell a story that spanned six decades. It was also a challenge to respect the complexity of the issues raised and allow hints of the controversies generated by some of these representations of the issues without becoming sidetracked. Factual programme makers are well used to this challenge, whereas academics actively pursue such drilling down and detail.

Adding the first layer of **Metadata**



Our starting point for selecting broadcast content was the BBC's own database of programming, but this has been designed to address the needs of BBC staff, and the information it provides is very limited.

An example of an original archive summary is shown on the right. Note that details such as who the reporter / presenter is, are missing.

One member of the Earth in Vision team had the task of watching the pilot sample of 50 hours of programming (100 programmes) and producing a meta database to guide navigation of the material for the purposes of drafting academic papers, designing workshops and writing the ebooks. This metadata included detailed time-coded summaries of each programme, and key words/issues and information such as locations, presenters and producers.



Press to read more about cataloguing metadata

Original BBC Database Archive Summary

33. BRITAIN 70: THE COUNTRY WE ARE MAKING

Date: 26/10/1970 Programme Number: NBS9370X

Category	WILDCAT	Cat Number	21341
Ex media	FILM	Programme/Item	PROG
Duration	0:58:51	Copyright Information	BC

This film investigates man's effect on the environment and the plight of our natural world for survival in it.

> ACTUALITY Air pollution P. Scott sync in Manchester * Demonstrates normal Peppered Moth on scot bark of tree Dark phase release on bark Dr. Bernard Kettlewells research Light-form making comeback Low aerial track over Sevenoaks water Geese on man-made reserve - trees screen, gravel pit Dr. Harrison and his work Aerials waterfowl in flight.

Holdings

LOCATION	DESCRIPTION	RESTRICTION
WMR	EAST MUTE POS	
WMR	MAG TRK	
WMR	FINAL DISC	
WMR	EAST MUTE NEG	
WMR	EAST MUTE NEG	
WMR	SD NEG	
WMR	VHS CASSETTE WITH FOOTAGE	



Press to read Earth in Vision's detailed summary of *Britain: The Country we are Making*

Adding Depth

1. The BBC Written Archives

The ebooks draw on a range of documents from the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham, where researchers can explore an array of documents and post-production notes on radio and television programmes. These records add a rich and fascinating layer of detail - scripts and script notes, discussions on commissioning and scheduling and audience research, as well as shooting schedules, letters, accounts and other ephemera.



BBC archivist Jacqui Kavanagh speaks about the written archives

A Virtual Visit to the BBC Written Archives in Caversham, Reading, UK



Preparing what to take: pencils, notebook, camera and memory card, spare batteries and research notes



2. The BBC Genome Project

Another source of metadata used in the ebook about landscape was the BBC Genome Project - the BBC's online digitisation for public use of Radio Times data - which provides a searchable online database of programme listing information. Searches can be made by title, key word, year, month, day, time of transmission, TV only, Radio only or both.

The database made it possible to provide some context in terms of where programmes about landscape appeared on the networks while giving some information about their number, historical patterning, themes and content. It is possible to search for programmes from the very early years of British broadcasting (starting in 1922) until the last year of digitisation in 2009.

As a digitisation of the Radio Times, the project is itself a digital historical archive with its own historical integrity and its own stories to tell. Descriptive entries for specific programmes vary greatly across time and from station to station. Thought of as metadata, the Genome project is very much a compromise, limited by the original data source. In effect, it is a distinctive historical archive where important curatorial and editorial decisions have been made by generations of RadioTimes staff.



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Earth in Vision

Interviews with media producers, from the iconic Sir David Attenborough & Desmond Morris, to new digital natives. This is an important historical collection and a powerful resource for anyone wanting to make or think about environmental media.

About Earth in Vision | Joe Smith - Earth in Vision Introduction | Sir David Attenborough and The Open University

Filter pages by: Activity | Audio | Video | Free Course | Course | Community

Watch the interviews

Watch, listen, debate & discuss with our experts

EARTH VISION

3. Interviews with Programme Makers

A further layer of metadata created by Earth in Vision is a collection of recorded critical reflections in the form of interviews with programme makers. These interviews were filmed and transcribed, and the team drew on relevant interviews to enrich their ebook narratives.

The full interviews, transcripts and interviewee biographies are available and free to view at the [Open Learn website](#) and at [Earth in Vision website](#)

Spaces of archiving and encoding

With the addition of metadata, one task central to the project is scanning, copying, digitising and, where necessary, clearing the rights to use, an eclectic range of historical materials.

Digital archiving involves a process of translation from one format to another - for example, where a paper document is photographed and changed into a digital image file. Such processes always entail losses and gains. When material is digitised, information is lost as a result of the process itself and the level of resolution at which digitising and compression takes place. Some of this information might be considered unimportant

- for example the smell or feel of a piece of paper or a barely discernible pencilled scribble in the corner of a page. Yet thinking of the BBC paper archive materials used in the ebooks, there is something immediate, urgent and provisional in the paper memos and ephemera that is lost in the process of photography. Digital reproduction requires clear, sharp and precise images for screen legibility. But this step does involve attrition (and potential misrepresentation). Digital narrative spaces appear closer and more immediate to readers and yet can also have an objectified distance in which abstraction and translation into digital form results in the significant loss of material qualities.

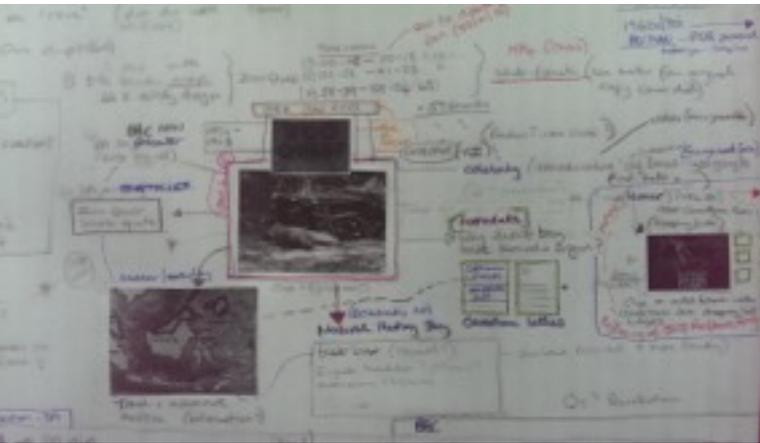


Press here for more on assumptions in digitisation

These issues open up ebook narrative spaces to a range of challenges and opportunities. For example, the abstraction that results from the loss of information with digitisation and clipping presents problems in providing contextual histories that take into account the processes of making programmes and the specifics of social, cultural, economic and political context as well as understandings of genre and format histories of programme making. However, the ease with which audio and video clips can be embedded alongside text and images makes it relatively straightforward to break with existing narrative genres and create new narratives arounds sets of collaged

Curating the ebooks

Ebooks have sometimes been conceived of as a museum with a series of galleries (Troiani and Kahn 2016). Seen in this way, ebooks house a 'collection': they are built around digital artefacts - images, videos, audios and text - that are connected and contextualised by hypertext. There are thus similarities in the way in which ebooks and websites are constructed.



In ebooks, digital objects and artefacts are categorised and juxtaposed in rooms or galleries according to a chosen organising principle or principles. Within this structure, there are opportunities for the

ebook curator to create narrative journeys between the galleries and among the objects. The curator can use hypertext and a hierarchy of levels of detail around a particular gallery or specific object to allow the visitor/reader varying degrees of discretion as to how to read and navigate the ebooks. Ebooks based on collections of historical source material often assume that visitor/readers - as when visiting a museum - will move further or deeper into the collection and linger around particular objects or topics as their interest takes them. To this extent the experience of reading or visiting a multimedia ebook is more like visiting a website or using an interactive app than reading a digitised book on a Kindle or other proprietary e-reader.

Like websites, ebooks follow particular narrative conventions. For example, writing is characterised by the use of short paragraphs, editorial limits on the number of words per page - set at perhaps no more than 400 - and the adoption of textual strategies to gain the reader/visitor's attention, for example, through the use of introductory hooks explicitly designed for that purpose.

In addition, writing that assumes different levels (hierarchies) of visitor interest and knowledge explicitly structures the text: earlier paragraphs assume less knowledge and a more general audience, while information set lower down, or behind, the main page assumes on the part of the visitor/reader a desire to know more.

Team Work

The Earth in Vision ebooks mimic in several important respects the production processes and values of the broadcast programming that forms their subject matter. When thought of through the museum/gallery metaphor, their narratives are artefact driven and rely substantially on visual and audio content. In this sense there is a real danger of reproducing the attention-catching presentism of which the mass media is sometimes accused. At the same time, the multimedia ebook format taps into a potentially rather more positive aspect of media production, as ebook production questions notions of solitary authorship. Even more than TV or radio production, the making of a multimedia ebook can be a team effort, involving writers, audiovisual content providers, curators and designers working together.

The eBook Team

Click on images to read short bio



Ebook Formats

It is arguable that in some important respects multimedia ebooks are more portable and accessible than apps or websites: while they have some of the functionality derived from these platforms, including search, hypertext, audio and video, as well as the potential for interactive engagement through quizzes, links and user-generated text or input, they do not necessarily need a constant internet connection to be at least partly functional.

At the time of writing, there are different ebook formats, standards and capabilities, principally those for the Apple and Microsoft operating systems. This gives rise to problems of access and accessibility. The Earth in Vision team concluded that while the Apple format offered the greatest functionality and was likely to be the choice of ebook makers, the Microsoft format was currently the most readily available to users on their devices. This presented the team with a series of difficult choices, given that, with limited resources, only one format was possible. The current ebooks have been produced as Apple iBooks. Ideally, this problem will be resolved in future by the production of multimedia ebooks in both formats.

The size of media files used in ebooks is also an important consideration for accessibility and portability: currently the total size of the Earth in Vision ebooks is 2.5 GB. One approach is to think in terms of museum standards of reproduction. But maximising portability - for example, to enable the ebooks to be read on public transport - would require the producer substantially to reduce the total file size and hence the range or resolution of available content.

The Future

With all its opportunities and problems, the ebook format opens up a space in which to explore and discuss digital storytelling and the making of digital narratives. Of particular interest to the Earth in Vision team, the use of ebooks offers scope for the wider consideration of innovative academic practice in the 21st century. The team's experience to date confirms that ebooks have very significant creative potential - potential that would be greatly enhanced if some copyright issues could be resolved, and if a greater degree of portability could be established between the Apple and Microsoft platforms. For the foreseeable future at least, the spaces of ebook narrative are likely to continue to be complex and contradictory.

Learning how to order and present material within ebooks - as well as how to invite others into, and lead them through, new digital spaces - promises to become not only a more prominent element of academic practice but a significant and well-measured response to calls for impact and public engagement.

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Author: George Revill

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CREDITS

Producers: Kim Hammond and Joe Smith

Copy editor: Kate Stewart

Designer: Gorm Ashurst for Bullet Creative

Ebook Advisor and Production Assistance: Alison Kahn

Assistant Ebook Builder, Curator and Researcher: Aláine Lee

Rights Management: Sarah Gamman (Intellectual Property Manager, The Open University) and Diane Hopwood (Licensing and Acquisitions Coordinator, The Open University)

BBC Archive Research: Steve Morris (Open Media Unit, The Open University)

BBC Archive Project Management: Diane Morris (Senior Broadcast Project Manager, The Open University)

Archive Research, Film Editing and Ebook Build: Synne Akselberg

Media and Technical Consultant: Chris Bonfiglioli

Director of Filmed Interviews: Jeremy Bristow

Editor of Filmed Interviews: John McIntyre

Contributors - Interview: Roshni Amin (Senior Producer, The Open University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) and Alma Hales (Former Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University)