



Aubrey Buxton: Oral History Transcription

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1. Early interest in wildlife and starting out in broadcasting

Int: Well Lord Buxton, good morning. Thank you in advance for granting us this interview. It is not for any television programme or for any immediate purpose. It is for archive. Imagine how wonderful it would be if you and I could look at a television set and see Gilbert White speaking or J H Gurney, who I don't need to tell you wrote an early history of the birds of Norfolk. That's the kind of thing we're into, it's for archive purposes and you are, for the record, Lord Buxton of Alsa. Do I pronounce that correctly?

AB: Yes.

It is today 13 December 2006, we're in you're home, thank you very much for having us, and it's on the north Norfolk coast, and I can see out of the window here both your nature reserve and your farm. You are my Lord, if I'm allowed to say, 88 years of age. In one sense you're retired but in another sense you are an active farmer and an active conservationist. But we're here today to talk about your professional involvement in wildlife television and that was, I believe, preceded by your personal interest in wildlife, in nature.

AB: That's right.





Int: Could you tell us about how you got into that?

AB: Well, it goes back to family history. It's interesting that you mentioned Gurney because he was a great, great uncle and successive generations have always produced one young that was passionately interested. They're dotted about now, John Buxton at Horsey, and his cranes, he's a second cousin. I think that my interest started at the age of eight for no reason at all and I've then, from then been passionately interested in, as a schoolboy in books, and trips in the holidays and so forth.

So I can't answer why except that it's a family interest and most people, members of the family have houses or habitations which are specifically designed to attract birds and so forth, like as you see out of the window. That's a new lake, that's only 20 years old.

Int: Right. What's your earliest recollection of ever seeing a moving image of a wild animal? Would it have been a film or would it have been an early television programme?

AB: Well I remember there were one or two illustrious photographers whose names I've forgotten but you would know. One was the Hawk Man, who was he?

Int: Yes, Captain C W R Knight with his golden eagle.

AB: Captain Knight. I had flu once when I was schoolboy and I played his film over and over again in bed. Then there was my cousin, John's father, Tony Buxton - Anthony Buxton. He was a great photographer. So it all started with stills rather than cine and I don't think I really took any interest thereafter except when television started after the war.

Int: I remember Anthony Buxton wrote a book called Fisherman Naturalist (1) I seem to remember.

AB: That's right.

Int: Okay, and I can't resist saying at this point that, of course, you have a daughter who became a professional wildlife cine photographer, and now you have a granddaughter who appears to be very interested in the topic.

AB: It bears out what I said, every generation produces some madman or madwoman who's passionately interested.

Int: How did you come to be involved in television, given this natural history interest, you then got involved in television? Or did you get involved in television other than through natural history?

AB: No, it was by chance. A friend of mine, a neighbour George Townshend, told me one day that ITV [Independent Television] was coming to the East of England, and I didn't know what he was talking about to be honest. He then invited me to join his group which was making the application and that consisted of

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himself, and he produced the first agricultural programmes on television (2), John Woolf who was a famous film producer. He did Day of the Jackal (3) and Oliver (4) and all those things, and he was our play man on drama. And Laurence Scott who was chairman of The Guardian (5) who was interested in the sales side and advertising, and me who was interested in natural history and conservation. So that's how I got involved but before that I was with a pharmaceutical company call Hoffman La Roche, or Roche Products, and I worked every day with them at Welwyn Garden City.

So we were into now the application and to my amazement after about three months we won it hands down, against eight different groups and there were all sorts of reasons why we won it which are quite obvious. But one of the things was that in the application we said we've got Aubrey Buxton, etc, who will produce natural history programmes, and I never expected to be visited with this. But that's how it started.

Int: How splendid.

AB: After we'd been on the air for about three months and they made me Chief Executive of the company, I then had a good deal of clout in order to introduce natural history programmes.

Int: Just to be absolutely clear, what we're talking about was a regional franchise for commercial, independent television covering East Anglia. At that stage the application was for general television, including news and drama and so on, as you say, weather forecasting and so on.

AB: That's right. It was a local, regional station and it was much more disparate and separated than it is today.

Int: Indeed.

AB: And they were completely independent and could do more or less what they liked. But they didn't necessarily have the resources in terms of Board members that we had.

Int: So at that time you were responsible as the Chief Executive Officer, to use the contemporary term though I think you said you were Managing Director for all the output really. You had overall responsibility for that new company if I understand you.

AB: Yes. Except that we had a unique form of management. The four of us sat together at least twice a month, if not once a week, and it would be wrong for me, and I wouldn't want to claim to have been wholly responsible, it was the four which gave us the clout and the position in the industry. And perhaps I could come on to that whenever you want as to how we made our name on the network.

Int: Yes, we'd like to hear that please.

AB: Well, the regional companies were never expected to contribute to the network. Their job, and their contract was to provide a service, ITV service for their region, and the companies, network companies as they were called, which was ATV and Rediffusion and Granada and so forth, produced all the national stuff and the regional companies produced the regional service. We, as a four, were not happy to be content with

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that, certainly not Woolf, who produced better dramas than anybody else in the light of his experience. We also had Glyn Daniel and he was very keen to do all sorts of things and did something from Cambridge.

Int: Glyn Daniel was an archaeologist?

AB: He was an archaeologist and he did programmes from Cambridge but they were networked as well. So we managed by skulduggery and all sorts of methods to persuade the network, especially Rediffusion who were our great allies, that our programmes merited wider coverage than just the East of England and were national productions. So we did a deal with Rediffusion which resulted in our putting on natural history and drama, and even sometimes Glyn Daniel archaeology and so forth. That's how we got into the network through Rediffusion.

2. Anglia television's first natural history programme

Int: Okay. So tell us about, please, your very first natural history programme which was transmitted nationally across the network.

AB: Nationally I think the first was about the wildlife of London (6) and the unit was provided because it was London and not Norwich, which was provided by Rediffusion. They put it in the national slot, to which they were entitled, and the rest of the industry had to take it. Now, I'll come to it later, but if, for example, that had been just a natural history programme produced by a naturalist there wouldn't have been a hope in hell of getting it on the network. It was because of our influence and position and experience that we were able to do a deal with Rediffusion, and they were happy to accept it for quality and public appeal.

Int: Right, and that first series, I think it was a series on London, wasn't it, a small series on London?

AB: No, I think it was only one show as far as I remember.

Int: Was it called Survival (7), do you recall?

AB: It was called Survival (7). I remember discussing with them the title and it then stuck for 20 years.

Int: More.

AB: Until the whole system was changed, which I violently opposed in Parliament.

Int: You mean when Margaret Thatcher deregulated television, is that what you mean?

AB: Yes, deregulated television and we got one scheduler for the whole country and for the whole industry. The first thing he said was that he didn't want natural history on the screen.

Int: Right. We'll come to that later. Not sparing your blushes, you actually appeared in this London programme (6) didn't you?

AB: Yes, it was a crazy idea. John McMillan, who was the Head of Rediffusion, persuaded me that it would be a good idea because they'd seen Peter Scott on BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] and they thought, well, why not? We've got a tame naturalist here, let's put him in. And I think, apart from my awful voice, I think it was not unpopular, but I didn't like it. As I mentioned many times in the past, I was once stopped on the underground by a lady with a boy aged eight and they started asking me some complicated, scientific questions, and I didn't have the foggiest idea what they were talking about or what the answer was. So that persuaded me that I didn't want to go down that road and thereafter we usually picked the right narrator, as we saw it, and this resulted in our being able to change the narration and the narrator in every country throughout the world.

Int: Indeed.

AB: Because there wasn't somebody appearing on camera.

Int: So your professional life as a presenter was rather limited then?

AB: It was very limited but I did have quite a lot of experience before that because we started with a local thing called Countryman (8), and I think that used to appear almost once a week or once a month, I forget now, on Countryman (8). Then it all became a bit of a joke. Nobody round here worried whether I was professional or not, they just knew me already.

Int: That was with Billy Bishop and Ted Eales, Ted Eales is it?

AB: Yes, he died, well, they've both died now but they were great friends of mine.

Int: One of them was a cine cameraman, never put the camera on a tripod I remember.

AB: Yes. Ted Eales was very good.

Int: But I must persist with the London programme (6), Aubrey - if I may call you Aubrey - because rumour has it that you actually appeared in a Rolls Royce in Highgate watching a fox tipping the top off a dustbin and getting some food. Is this true? I mean the future researchers, people are going to be looking at that.

AB: It's all true except for the Rolls Royce and I can understand that because they just wanted to find something comic about the story. But it's perfectly true that I had a Bentley, but it was an old Bentley and dark green. My late wife's father, Tim Birkin who was buried at Blakeney, he was a world famous drive who you must remember.



Int: Well, I remember the green cars. I remember Le Mans. He drove at Le Mans.

AB: Yes. His team came first, second and fourth against the might of Mussolini and Hitler.

Int: There we are. Tell me this please. So there were programmes before the first Survival(7) that you were involved with, which were only regional, and then the first Survival (7) was network?

AB: That's right, a year or two, and then as a result of that and what we were able to show, we had a deal with Rediffusion to fill one of their slots on the network and I remember that very well, the London programmes (6). Because the rest of the industry didn't really like the idea of a regional company getting its toe in the network, for obvious reasons. I mean not only financial but prestige and all the rest of it. But Rediffusion backed us and stuck to it and, again I've forgotten what I was going to say to you and I'm not ashamed of saying where were we? What was your question?

Int: I'll tell you. I'd like you to tell us, please, who else was involved in that very first programme (6)? Had Colin Willock arrived on the scene then or not?

AB: No, that's when I got Colin Willock.

Int: He was involved in that very first programme?

AB: He was working for Rediffusion and he wrote the first programme (6), and that's what I was going to say, that I needed quite a bit of support from Rediffusion because not only was I not a cameraman, therefore we, that's another story. But as far as the writing and producing is concerned, Colin was the key man for the whole thing. Because what had existed on television before was Peter Scott, who was my great friend, delivering what I call local lectures about natural history. No sense of entertainment, or the masses and that's where I was a moment ago.

I was trying to explain that the audience was thought to be negligible for natural history. When the London programme (6) was being put on by Rediffusion some of the other companies objected and said this is scandalous, to expose natural history, a good scientific documentary, expose it to being slaughtered by all the entertainment shows on the BBC and all the rest of it. The point was that I had to ring up the Director General to give him the good news that it got in the top 10, against Top of the Pops (9).

Int: Wow

AB: This is the first time they realised that there was something in this, this business of wildlife and natural history. From then on we concentrated hard, Colin Willock and I and the photographers, on entertainment. No loss of scientific integrity but designed to capture the maximum audience and not just to give a lecture.

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3. The Survival Anglia team

Int: So it moved on from there, so you were behind it. You were a director of Anglia Television as such, the regional company, and when did other people start to come in? When did that delightful and amusing chap, Stanley Joseph, when did you take him on as Director?

AB: Well quite a bit later. I can't imagine how we managed without him to start with but we did, we got away with it with the London programme (6) and one or two others. But he certainly became an important component, without knowing the first thing about, it was a good balance in a way, without knowing the first thing about natural history.

Int: He knew nothing about animals and a hell of a lot about entertainment.

AB: Well, I don't know about that, but everybody was on side about entertainment. But Stanley Joseph probably kept us on the rails as it were.

Int: And tell me, how soon did Mike Hay come in?

AB: Well, that was ages afterwards, I think some years. Well, you probably know through the previous conversation.

Int: Yes, he wasn't there at the beginning, certainly not, no.

AB: He certainly wasn't. He was a technician and we needed somebody to look after the works because it became very big. After the London programme (6), some years after, I did a deal in New York with J Walter Thompson and we got all the programmes, the Specials (10), on American TV, I think NBC [National Broadcasting Company] mainly. Now the difference in the economy of the show was that we got £1,500 for the London programme (6) on the entire ITV network, that's how much they knew about it. Then we got one show on, I think the Galapagos (11), one show on the American network we got \$430,000. That's the difference.

Well then, of course, I was given my head by my colleagues and everything else and we started sending people all over the world, and not worrying about costs or anything. Well obviously you manage things, you worry about costs but it was no longer a tightrope of string, as in the case with the London one (6).

Int: So one of the major successes that one always remembers in respect of Survival (7) was that you broke into the American market, didn't you, on behalf of Britain and it was an international even of significance, wasn't it, because you'd got into that market with animals?

AB: That's right. I mean eventually I did a deal and formed a partnership with J Walter Thompson in America, and we automatically sold all the Specials (10) and I think starting with Galapagos (11). Enchanted Isles (11) it was called, and others followed, and particularly Des Bartlett's Snow Goose (12). That was the first time, I see them all the time now but this was the first time that somebody had managed to film snow geese apparently against the sky, following a car, having brought up the brood. I notice that now it's often



done and claimed to be the first but it's not.

Int: Yes. The Enchanted Isles (11) in the Galapagos was introduced by the Duke of Edinburgh, wasn't it, and shot by the Roots. Joan and Alan Root went out there to live, didn't they, at the time.

AB: They were there for a long time.

Int: That's right. And I think we should just say that what's special about a Special (7), correct me if I'm wrong, is that they weren't just to fill half an hour, they were to fill a one hour slot. Yes, right. So at what point in time did Anglia Survival as a separate company in effect break away from the parent company? Because it became a limited liability company in its own right, didn't it?

AB: Yes, but it was a subsidiary. It was owned by, it enabled us to get a partner in America, I think, as far as I remember, that was the reason. I'm anxious not to hog all the time and we will presumably come to photographers because they were a key factor in the whole thing.

Int: Yes. Let's come to photographers now. You've mentioned Des Bartlett, I've mentioned Alan Root. Who else do you remember? Pick three or four and just tell us about those in turn. Tell us first about Des.

AB: Well, Des was the first major cameraman that I acquired and I was in Nairobi, and I can't remember who it was but somebody took me to see them. They were here the other day, he's now in Namibia but his daughter's in Norwich and he was staying with her for a time.

Int: Julie, yes.

AB: So they came over here and we left with a joint determination to find something, a deal to do together. Because he was at that time with Armand Denis and as soon as he finished with Denis he joined Anglia. I've forgotten but I think we sent him on Snow Goose (12) because that was the first show in America. Then remained mates, and colleagues, and friends ever since, both he and Jen.

Then Alan Root claims, but I don't remember it exactly, that I was in the far west of Uganda on one side of a river, coming out of the Congo is it, or what?

Int: I don't know actually.

AB: Or is it Rwanda? One or the other. I shouted at him, he claims, and said would he like to join Survival (7) and he said yes, and we didn't meet again for two or three days. It's quite untrue I'm sure, but that's the legend.

Int: Yes, okay.

AB: Well then another admirable and estimable character who I was so sad to lose was Dieter Plage, whose wife Mary still lives round here and we see quite a bit of her. But he died, you may remember, falling out of a tree or something when he was experimenting with a balloon over the top and everything caught up and down he went.

Int: Dieter, of course, being an East German who came to live in Britain and found his wife in a Bristol bank I believe.

AB: Yes. That brings me on to another point of how they came about. He was very strongly recommended by Bernhard Grzimek, who is my partner in Germany and he was involved as well in a lot of the development, as representing Germany and German television. So he had a better input and a participation and used to come over here a lot. In fact, he flew in once and landed on the lawn in a chopper because it was so important to have his views on something.

Int: Bernhard Grzimek was, of course, director of Frankfurt Zoo and had his own enormously successful, didn't he, television series in Germany (13) about animals?

AB: He did.

Int: That's right.

AB: But he didn't, like we did, originate very much, most of it was acquired. I think I'm right in saying that. But at any rate, from the time on that we got together and were working closely together, he had a big input into our programmes and he used them, of course, for Germany.

Int: Is there one more cameraman that comes to mind, camera person? I mean your daughter, Lucinda [Cindy], was employed by the company wasn't she?

AB: Cindy was for a long time.

Int: Yes, and made a film in Ethiopia (14) I remember with —

AB: John Buxton.

Int: That's right, yes.

AB: She was, I remember saying to her, look, I'll back your experience and training but thereafter you've got to be on your own because I don't want anybody saying that I provided jobs for the family. So we took that very seriously and she worked very well with Ted Eales and other people, and was considered by Stanley Joseph and Colin Willock to be an excellent bird photographer. So she wormed her own way in through them and not through me.

The other one was John Buxton who was never in the front or top line but was a very good countryman and amateur cameraman, and he did a lot. They went to the Simian Mountains and I've forgotten the name of the programme (14), the serial.

Int: I can't remember the name of the programme (14). They filmed the Walia ibex.

AB: The Walia ibex was the main thing.

Int: Yes, the Simian fox. Lord Buxton, can we come on to the kind of middle period of Survival (7) when, correct me if I'm wrong, there were really four of you at the top. There was you, there was Colin and there was Mike Hay and I think Stanley Joseph had moved on by then. This was a collegiate. What was, just define for us the role. What was Colin's role briefly? What was Mike's role? I always think of him as moneybags but when I called him moneybags in the interview the other day he didn't like it very much. And there was yourself. So what was your role really?

AB: I think I have to answer that in a different way, I wouldn't like to confine it to four. The difference between ourselves and all other organisations was that it was really a club and everybody, with the exception of Stanley Joseph and possibly Mike to some extent, everybody knew all about the subject. In other words they were country people, wildlife mad, conservation minded. We met as a club and whoever happened to be there would be in on the discussions, and there was no private regime and management, or anything like that. Whoever came to London or Norwich was immediately part of the club.

I think that mustn't be escaped and it especially applied in my case because I reflected their views about everything being also an enthusiastic conservationist and naturalist. So you had it at all levels. Now one of the things where I'm so critical and things have fallen apart is because the new management that, originally in ITV, and even BBC, is based on the theory of management and dealing at arm's length with programme producers and below them whoever else is involved. They get sort of edicts about going to Galapagos, say for six weeks to do this, that and the other or Lake Rudolf in Kenya for a month. We sent people, we said don't come back till you've finished, until you're wanted and they were sometimes there for two years. All this we were able to do economically because of the deals I had with the States and overseas. In the end we were selling to 100 different countries, and I forget how I got onto that.

Int: Well, I'd like to learn a little bit more about this club which met, usually in Brook House, and I have been told that the club's tippie was Tio Pepe and I have brought you a bottle of Tio Pepe to give you at the end of the interview, provided you keep up this excellent standard for the next hour or so. And also, wasn't there always the same food? What was it?

AB: Yes. Smoked salmon sandwiches, which I may say you're going to get before you leave, and Kit Kat, and it went on for something like 15 years, smoked salmon and Kit Kat. You're quite right about the Tio Pepe, probably I had most of it.

Int: You can have the whole of this one. But may I just press you a little bit. I understand that you don't want the quartet at the top to take all the credit. But nevertheless they were at the top, they were the responsible people, albeit as a collegiate and you had to choose the topic, you had to appoint the cameramen, you had to agree the contracts and the money. So just tell us a little bit, what was Mike's role really as you saw it and what was Colin's role?

AB: Colin was a controversial character and people who really knew what they were doing and thought they knew everything, like Alan Root for example, didn't always get on with Colin. I was in the fortunate position of having two very strong experts in their particular fields and helping to marry the different views. One thing I remember, and I've never forgiven him for, my dear old friend Alan was highly critical of the fact that we decided in the case of Snow Geese (12), which I think was our first, that we had a, I can't remember his name now, but a very popular singer singing songs.

Int: Yes, a western singer I think.

AB: I think it probably is.

Int: I think so, I can't remember the name. I remember the instance, yes.

AB: Alan Root simply couldn't bear this. He thought it ought to be somebody like Julian Huxley or something, and I said you've missed the whole point. It makes no difference to the science who does the commentary or sings the songs. The only thing that matters is that we sell it for \$430,000 and those were the sort of things that I had to occasionally, otherwise I was entirely reflecting their brilliance as cameramen. I was involved always in the choice of subjects and trips and how long they went for, and all that. But basically speaking it was come back when you'd finished, and so that gave them a considerable licence in those days.

Colin therefore was the key in this and he only occasionally had to come and say I'm having difficulties with Des. I mean in fact it hardly ever occurred, they were all great friends because it was a club. Mike, I think, was an admiral and valued colleague but he wouldn't have ventured into decisions of that sort. He might have said this man's using too much film or something.

Int: Ah, that's what I was about to say because the great story about Des is, that Des on one occasion, I believe, shot so much stuff and sent it in. That while you paid to have it processed, you refused to have it printed, it's too much bloody money. That makes sense, doesn't it?

AB: Well, I think it makes sense, well it was one, because it was too much bloody money. It was because it was impossible to use it because it was so repetitive. I do remember what, I mean it would have made six one hours or something on one subject and you can't do that.

Int: So just mention a couple of other truly memorable productions that you were involved in.

AB: Well they happen to be the one hours although, of course, we were continually churning out half hours, and in that connection I'm afraid I'll have to do some homework before I can remember them all.

Int: What about Year of the Wildebeest (15)? That for me is in the top ten ever made anywhere by anybody, Alan's Year of the Wildebeest (15), yes.

AB: That was Alan's. They all had absolutely top shows for which they will always be remembered. I think

that Des's was Snow Geese (12) because there was a lot of innovation and first ever factors about that.

Int: Dieter did one on oranges (16)?

AB: Dieter did oranges (16) and gorilla (17). Do you remember the gorilla (17) one with Adrien Deshryver? They all had their shows. Cindy even, with Falklands and Penguins (18), (19).

Int: And South Georgia (20)?

AB: And South Georgia (20).

Int: Filming during the war.

AB: Yes. She was caught by the Argentineans and remained there in her hut with her school friend doing the cooking. But the Argentineans had no idea and no briefing, poor things. They, I'm sorry I've forgotten again.

Int: We're talking about Cindy and 1992, I think, was the Falklands War wasn't it?

AB: 1982.

Int: 1982, sorry, yes. She was on South Georgia, wasn't she?

AB: She was on South Georgia and I'd been very involved politically in the whole business of the Falklands and Argentina. As a result of that, I was close friends of the Argentine Ambassador in London and I'd been to Buenos Aires on the way to the Falklands, and I was very much involved. I'd written to Margaret Thatcher several times about what the bureaucracy was up to, and having negotiations about possible deals and all the rest of it. She was flabbergasted when they invaded and I happened to be there in Argentina, on the way back. I had my first wife with me who died about 20 years ago and very fortunately we came through without any problem. But we were fully expecting to be detained like Rex Hunt, the Governor, on the way back.

But to finish off where I lost myself. The Argentineans who invaded South Georgia had no briefing and didn't know what they were doing or why they were there. So they never struggled across the terrain, and ice and snow and everything, to find Cindy who was only about five miles away. Eventually she was the only British subject in communication with Great Britain through HMS Endurance which was creeping about in the ice.

4. The end of the Survival club

Int: Colin [Willock], of course, retired after a time, after a long time and at least a couple of 100 programmes, and as a caretaker you had Jeremy Bradshaw for a couple of years, didn't you? Then you put in Graham Creelman to run Survival Anglia. Am I right about that?

AB: Sort of. I mean what happened was that George Townshend, the Chairman, had retired and I took over. Colin had gone and I couldn't possibly go and do Survival (7) on my own, there just wasn't time. It was automatic that the management appointed Graham Creelman and I was part of that. But where I lost it and finally retired was that, we never really found a successor and another member of the club. Because from then on, with Colin gone, Mike Hay due to go, me gone and everything else, it got back to management which takes me right back to where we started. They had the notion, the management of Anglia, that all you had to do was to find a producer and a director and enough money and the programmes would emerge. It never functioned from then on properly and steadily went downhill, lost its place on the networks and had no overseas sales. So it became a totally different function and I don't think it even exists now, does it?

Int: My understanding is, and I was going to ask you about this, that Survival Anglia was bought by Granada, wasn't it? That's what actually happened and a bit of it went to Bristol but it didn't work out very well. At this time Petra had come to succeed Graham Creelman because Creelman moved up, didn't he, to be managing director of Anglia Television as such.

AB: He was appointed by the Anglia Board as managing director and really became, I'm glad this is not being broadcast tomorrow, I mean it really became a non event except as a local station with local news and I don't think has any involvement in the network at all as far as I know.

Int: What, Anglia Television?

AB: Yes.

Int: Yes, I think that is true as far as I know.

AB: I'm not very much involved, as you can imagine, today except for seeing my old friends.

Int: Yes, I understand that. But by any standards when the history of natural history movie really comes to be written and it's 100 years old next year, the first ever public exhibition of a wildlife movie was in London in 1907 (21), on August 26, given by a man who's name I'm sure you'll remember, Olive Pike. He was the very first chap. But when the whole of that comes to be written, one of the most major chapters in that book, that global book on that topic, is going to be Survival Anglia and I say this as an ex-BBC chap. The programmes that you referred to as lectures introduced by Peter Scott, if I may remind you, were produced by me but we won't go into that.

AB: But they were quite right for the time.

Int: Yes, okay. I'm trying to pull your leg, I'm trying to pull your leg.

AB: I mean they were all great friends, everybody.

Int: Yes. I was great friends with Colin, I really was because he and I were competitors.

AB: It wasn't meant to criticise in any sense, no. But let me make this because it's a very important point. I was determined, particularly as Peter Scott was a great friend, quite determined not to imitate and do the same thing. Because, there is no justification whatever because, his BBC programmes and yours were so exceptional and new in history. There was no justification for doing the same thing all over again. So that's why I got Colin and said our ambition is to entertain and to build up audiences, and we may in the process have led the way a bit in popularity. But also in overseas and globalisation, so to speak.

At one time Survival (7) was the highest selling programme overseas in America of any sort. Now I know my old friend Lou Grade would jump to his feet and say what about this and what about that. They were all joint productions. Survival (7) was the only documentary that broke in all in its own and swept the board. So that explains why we had to do what we did and why we didn't want to be simply copying Peter Scott, who when he finished with the BBC joined Survival (7).

Int: Yes, that's right.

AB: I mean that's a most important point because it explains why there's room for two streams of programming, using the same material.

Int: Because I used to meet Colin and indeed you, because I ran that thing in Bath. Remember we ran a filmmaker's symposium in Bath?

AB: I remember very well yes.

*Int: We were quite worried in Bristol when this quartet of upstarts in Norwich started making a whole lot of programmes. We were quite worried as you can imagine you see, but we were on very good terms, and I coined the phrase which sounds very obvious now to Colin. I said what you're doing is **Pop-Nat-Hist** and Colin, being Colin, he really liked that phrase.*

AB: I remember.

*Int: But what I really wanted to bring you onto was that the demise of this major element, and you have the BBC as a major element, you had Oliver Pike's stuff before the war in the 1930s, an absolutely major element. You had, with the arrival of Channel 4 and **Carol**, what's her name, help me somebody, and Mike Rosenberg. Those are the big bricks.*

AB: I remember Mike Rosenberg, yes.

Int: Yes, and he's still going strong. He lives in South Africa now. Anglia, Survival Anglia, Survival (7), that series is an absolutely major achievement and a big chapter in any overall work. But tragically it's gone.

AB: Because the club has gone.



Int: Was that really the reason?

AB: Yes.

Int: If I had somebody ask me yesterday —

AB: I mean I wouldn't like to hear anybody taking the credit, least of all myself, for any success that was achieved. Everybody was involved with their different roles and myself, if you like, with a title of a CEO, whatever the word is and Colin as the fully backed entertainer in a sense, because his writing was very good.

Int: Bold.

AB: Bold and the people could understand what was being said. In those days, you may dispute this, but conservation was not a common word and the average chap in the street wouldn't have known what you were talking about if you'd gone up and said conservation. Now everybody knows what it means and you couldn't take one component of the team or the club or the group, or whatever you'd like to call it, away without affecting the whole thing. In other words, we kept them together and then the moment that the key people started to drop out it no longer had its function and couldn't be pursued.

Int: This is an analysis which is new to me. I didn't know this and this is one of the most important things that you're saying, and it is of course not available —

AB: You never get anything again like that unless you could put the whole thing together again, and you need somebody like yourself to replace me and somebody to replace Colin, and somebody to replace Root and Bartlett, and all the rest of it. It was only the combined strengths and experience of that team or club that got us where we were.

Int: I hear you. I think you're a little bit self-effacing about your own role. Okay, it was luck that you were asked originally to contribute and be a member of this franchise team and so on and so forth. But had you said to me yesterday, and anybody said to me yesterday, what actually happened to Survival Anglia? I would have said what happened to Survival Anglia was it was bought up by Granada and that was what happened but that isn't true, is it? That also happened but what you're telling me is that the demise, the regrettable, sad demise of Survival Anglia, you're now telling me wasn't really caused by that sale.

AB: I think it's true that if we were still young eager beavers, as we were, and were still there doing what we did, we would never have allowed it to happen. We'd have bussed in somewhere.

Int: No. Yes, not to put fine a point on it, it has been suggested to me that there are one or two people who might perhaps just have done something about it at Survival. But let's not go into that.

AB: They didn't exist, that's the point.

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Int: No, what I'm saying is at the point in time when the offer came to buy the company from Granada, somebody somewhere in Norwich, there might have been some kind of rear-guard action to keep it on. You don't want to comment about that or so you're not familiar with that?

AB: Well, I don't think that they were, if you take away half a dozen of the people it can't operate. I think that's the point.

Int: Okay. Coming back to the club just briefly. I haven't been able to get a copy —

AB: Sorry to interrupt. That man, the scheduler who said I'm not going to have any natural history would never have been allowed to do anything in the old days, if you see what I mean.

Int: I do see.

AB: And I warned them in a debate on broadcasting, whatever bill it was, that this would happen. You cannot have one man making decisions about somebody in the Outer Hebrides and down in Kent and Anglia. I mean it's absolutely absurd and it was a bad decision. I made it quite clear to Douglas Hurd who was largely responsible.

Int: He was Home Secretary at the time I expect.

AB: Well he may have been at the time. He had a lot to do, he would have been responsible for broadcasting as Home Secretary, yes.

Int: Right. Well, I was in love with Margaret Thatcher for her first nine years.

AB: So was I actually.

Int: But the day she deregulated my profession I jilted her. I said bye, bye Margaret, that's the end of it, you've bugged up my profession. Aubrey, may we come onto something slightly different, please, and thank you for explaining that, because I really didn't know. I gather Colin compiled a lexicon of Buxton sayings. Do you know about this?

AB: Did he?

Int: Yes. I've tried to get a copy, I can't get a copy. I was going to quote them to you. You can't remember any, classical Buxton sayings?

AB: I wish you could find that.



Int: Yes, I'll try and find it.

AB: Because I'm sure he'll only tell me the polite ones. I think that I do remember him saying that after people had been setting the guts in some part of the world, and Colin had driven himself mad with producing something. They then showed it to me, the rough stage, and apparently I said as always "That's not a bad start." That's the only thing I can remember, but I'd love it if somebody else can —

Int: One of the several people that have asked about you, you would expect us to have done some research, who worked for you for 17 years said he only remembers you swearing once.

AB: Really?

Int: Can you remember the occasion?

AB: No.

Int: Well, you were very fond apparently of a nest of goldfinches which was coming on very nicely. A grey squirrel came along and took the babies, and you said that [expletive] squirrel. That's the only time Jeremy Bradshaw, who remembers you fondly and asks me to be remembered to you, remembers you swearing.

AB: How nice for him. It's nothing to do with the programme, sorry I'm interrupting. I was only going to ask you, he's got a brother I met somewhere. Is he a minister?

Int: Do you mean a minister, a political minister?

AB: Government minister, yes. Bradshaw.

*Int: I can't think that there is a Bradshaw. If there is a government minister at the present time he can't be very prominent because I would probably know actually. I'm fairly familiar with that. So Lord Buxton, it only remains for me to thank you. To thank you from me, to thank you from Derek the director, Kilkenny-Blake, from Alison the researcher, Alison Tunnicliffe who is entering the profession, from Bob here, the camera person, and for all the future researchers, who in five years time or 50 years time, or perhaps even 500 years time, will be listening to you today. I'm sure they'll be grateful for your contribution, for your charm and for being, if I may use the phrase, almost desperately British. Just imagine in 500 years time what an **anachronism** you will appear to be and perhaps myself as well. I'll give you the Tio Pepe in a moment.*

This recording was for Wild Film History which is a subdivision of the Wildscreen Trust which is run by Derek here. So my Lord, thank you very much.

AB: All right, it's very kind of you indeed to say so

END

Glossary

Pop-nat-hist: Term coined for the genre of Popular Natural History programming

Anachronism: A thing belonging to a period other than the one in which it exists

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