

Radio broadcasting/communications within the Falkland Islands

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INTRODUCTION

I am extremely grateful to the Committee members of the Shackleton Scholarship Fund for their generous support of my academic research project, which has investigated the issue of 'Radio broadcasting/communications within the Falkland Islands'. This was always intended as an historical study and relied heavily on access to key sources located within the Falkland Islands. The sponsorship and support of the Shackleton Scholarship Fund allowed me - from 31st October-15th December 2003 - to make full use of the excellent facilities at the Falkland Islands Archive and Broadcasting Station (now Falkland Islands Radio Service), but also to experience something of life in the South Atlantic; an essential ingredient in understanding the development, roles, and sometimes contested nature of radio technologies within the Falkland Islands.

RESEARCH

Falkland Islands Archives:

During this time I conducted a significant survey of archival documents in the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) Archives, with particular emphasis on the excellent collection of Empire Service policy documents (Circulars) and correspondence between Governors and the Colonial Office which point to the historical development of the radio within the Islands, from the 1920s onwards. Much of this material could not be found in the National Archives/Public Records Office in London.

The files - for example, *BBC Experimental Broadcasts to the Falkland Islands (1928)* - reveal the extent to which H.E. Governor Arnold Hodson was personally responsible for the rapid development of radio communications in the Falklands Islands during his tenure (1926-30).¹ The Imperial Circulars, meanwhile, illustrate Hodson's continuing enthusiasm for broadcasting in his subsequent postings in Sierra Leone (1931-34) and the Gold Coast (1934-41).² Further work conducted within the BBC Archives (Caversham) reinforced this suggestion. An internal BBC memo, received by the Director-General John Reith in 1934, praised Hodson and the early broadcasting achievement in the Falkland Islands, which was regarded as the model for further Empire development:

Sir Arnold Hodson, who was formerly Governor of the Falkland Islands, is a keen wireless enthusiast, and when he was at Port Stanley he inaugurated a wireless exchange. He is now setting up a similar service at Freetown. I saw him when he was on leave in England last summer and the Engineer-in-charge of the Government Broadcasting Service in the Falkland Islands who has also been transferred to Sierra Leone. They have purchased two shortwave receiving sets at £150 each. Their procedure is to distribute the Empire programmes, but at the same time to make use of the local service for originating periodic programmes and for distributing Government notices, etc.³

In the tasks of searching and interpreting the historical archive I was assisted greatly by archivists Jane Cameron and Tansy Newman. Both were enormously generous with their time, providing me with files that had - previously - been unresearched and uncatalogued, while allowing me to photocopy a wide variety (and large volume) of documents for processing back in the UK. This complemented and indeed extended the archival base previously secured at the BBC Written Archives Centre and the NA/PRO.

Falkland Islands Broadcasting Station (FIBS) Archives:

I also conducted a thorough assessment of the Falkland Islands Broadcasting Station (FIBS) sound archives which, although catalogued during the early 1990s, had latterly fallen into some confusion. This was a difficult and time-consuming process, not least because many of the preserved sound recordings from the early-1980s were undigitised and could, thus, only be listened to on large spool-to-spool tape placers (now a largely redundant technology). This involved utilising the integrated equipment in the main FIBS broadcasting studio, which was accessible only during "off air" hours. I also had to rely considerably on the goodwill of the FIBS staff, who personally (and very kindly) assisted in the search for, and digitisation of, relevant aural materials.

Despite these challenges, the FIBS archive provided a range of valuable recordings from before, during and after the Falklands Conflict in 1982. This included an original set of tapes brought by the Argentine military authorities in 1982 for transmission to the Falkland Islands population. This included the, so called, "Edicts" (broadcasting on 2nd April) which were used to establish and promote Argentine sovereignty claims over the 'Islas Malvinas', while providing the Islanders with a new set of rules ("Instructions for the Population") and "Guarantees" according to the "principles stated in the National Constitution of and in accordance with the customs and traditions of the Argentine people".⁴ Also preserved are several versions of the Argentine national anthem and a reel of Argentine Folk Music each of which were broadcast over the renamed Radio Nacional Islas Malvinas during the Argentine occupation of the islands. Additionally, the archival collection contains original broadcast recordings of Governor Rex Hunt's speeches from the time he departed the Islands shortly after the Argentine invasion, and those he made on his return, with some interesting commentary from a number of FIBS and BBC journalists (including 'as live' coverage of the Governor's return to the Islands on 25th June). Following consultation with Jane Cameron and the staff of FIBS, several of these [text missing....]

Interviews:

Running parallel to the archival study I also conducted a number of formal interviews, and rather more informal discussions, with Falkland Islanders. These interviews sought to investigate - although not exclusively - the particular function of radio broadcasting and communications during the 1982 Falklands War (in the absence of archival sources due to the 30-years rule). Interviewees included:

- **Richard Cockwell** - Councillor and former manager of Fox Bay sheep farm. (FIG archives, Stanley, Falkland Islands: 20th November 2003)
- **Tim Blake** - Former Speaker of Legislative Council & owner of Hill Cove Farm. (Stanley, Falkland Islands, 28th November 2003)
- **Roddy and Lily Napier** - Owners of West Point Island. (West Point Island, Falkland Islands: 23rd November 2003)
- **Joe King** - Formerly in charge of FIG printing/publications. (Stanley, Falkland Islands: 26th November 2003)
- **Mike Butcher** - Father was electrical engineer of the original radio system in Stanley. (Stanley, Falkland Islands: 26th November 2003)

As well as dealing with the 1982 conflict, interviews also explored the evolution of radio as a communications medium during the late 1920s [Mike Butcher], and the subsequent widespread adoption and everyday-use of the 'radio telephone' (RT) and '2-metres' systems across the Islands [Roddy Napier/Tim Blake]. I remain very grateful to all those who agreed to be interviewed. Their thoughts, reflections and memories were not simply added colour, but formed the basis of - and purpose for - this work.⁵

Other Finds:

My sincerest thanks go to Miriam Booth, formerly of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and a great radio enthusiast.

During the eve of the Argentine invasion in 1982, Miriam - like many Islanders - followed the Governor's advice and 'stayed tuned to the radio'. Through her home radio system, Miriam made a near-complete and uninterrupted recording of the invasion as relayed through FIBS and the BBC World Service into Islanders' homes. Patrick Watts' well-documented resistance to the Argentine forces in the radio station is captured here. Perhaps more significantly, though, the

tapes record a fascinating `call-in' programme from early in the morning of 2nd April 1982, when Islanders shared information of Argentine troop ingress into Stanley via their home telephones and the FIBS. The result is a powerful testament to the resilience and ingenuity of Falkland Islanders, while highlighting radio's transformation into a potent tool of Islander resistance to the Argentine invasion and occupation.

OUTCOMES

Following my return from the Islands in December 2003 I was asked to appear on the BBC's Calling the Falklands programme to discuss my research and preliminary findings. This was a memorable experience and, given the subject matter, seemed an appropriate and timely medium for acknowledging the support of the Shackleton Scholarship Fund, and the kind hospitality of Falkland Islanders.

Since 2003/2004, I have researched and completed a PhD thesis entitled *Radio Geopolitics: the BBC World Service as Britain's `voice around the world'*. The research conducted in the Falkland Islands during November/December 2003 makes up a substantial proportion of this work. The support of the SSF and Islanders was, again, warmly acknowledged in this work, a copy of which is held at Senate House Library in London. I also enclose copies of the thesis on CD-ROM for your information and records.

Two academic papers have been produced relating explicitly to Falkland Islands radio. These are currently under consideration with large UK-based journals. I will advise the SSF committee on publication dates in due course, and will be happy to supply offprints.

CONCLUSION

I would like to extend my thanks to all those involved in making my stay in the Falkland Islands such an enjoyable and memorable experience. Kay McCallum was a wonderful host in Stanley, and her bed-and-breakfast deserves all of the excellent reviews that it receives. Jane Cameron was a great help throughout my time in Stanley, going above-and-beyond her duties to make this project, and my stay in the Islands, both academically successful and socially enjoyable. My continued thanks also go to those Islanders who agreed to participate in interviews. In particular I am grateful to Roddy and Lily Napier for making me feel so at home on their beautiful island of West Point.

Finally, and in conclusion, I would like to reiterate my gratitude to the Committee of the Shackleton Scholarship Fund for their support of this project.

Alasdair Pinkerton London, October 2007

1 FIG CS [650/27]

2 FIG CS [312/32] Media-Broadcasting: New Empire Broadcasting Station; CSO [0802] 1: Broadcasting in the Colonies.

3 BBC Written archives Centre: E4/7: Empire Service Policy, 1934

4 See also J. Smith (2002), for a complete record of the communiqués/edicts broadcast on 2nd April over FIBS (pp. 21-22).

5 These interviews were recorded digitally, and I intend - given appropriate permissions - to provide the Falkland Islands Archive with copies of the interviews in due course.