



BBC LOCAL RADIO PUBLICITY

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BACKGROUND TO BBC LOCAL RADIO

The BBC has been committed to Local Radio since 1922 when it discovered what an excellent medium it was to celebrate local activities and bring neighbours in the community even closer together.

Before the war there were not enough frequencies to go around. Local Radio had to give way to the national networks. But BBC **experiments** showed that with post-war technology, local radio was viable once more - and the BBC has been pressing for its development ever since.

The first station, BBC Radio Leicester, opened in 1967. Today there are 31 BBC Local Radio stations in England and the Channel Islands. There will be further editorial coverage in areas including Essex (opening in 1986), Suffolk, Warwickshire, Thames Valley, Surrey, Gloucestershire, Hereford and Worcester, Wiltshire, and Dorset.

THE STRENGTH OF BBC LOCAL RADIO

BBC Local Radio is in the front line of reporting. It broadcasts its own local stories, examines issues behind the headlines, and supplies news to BBC central newsrooms.

On an average day in January, BBC Local Radio provided 25 news stories for the BBC's national networks. These were broadcast in 35 news summaries. In addition, 10 interviews were heard on the main news bulletins of Radio 2 and Radio 4.

The importance of BBC Local Radio news gathering has been re-emphasised during the miners' strike when BBC Local Radio journalists fed national networks with live reports from the picket lines.

BBC Local Radio was at its best during the recent arctic conditions, said Mr Michael Barton, Controller Local Radio. "Both television and national radio networks were advising people to tune to their BBC Local Radio stations for the latest news which was being collated on special Snowline services."

BBC Radio Kent, for example, broadcast information round-the-clock for several days, while BBC Radio Sussex put out a special plea for four-wheel-drive vehicles to help the WRVS reach the elderly.

BBC Radio Solent extended its broadcasting hours, while BBC Radio Devon extended its boundaries to cover West Dorset, and "split" its medium wave transmitter to give an exclusive information service to North Devon and South Devon people. BBC Radio Cornwall also extended its broadcasting hours, and offered an information service.

BBC Radio WM (West Midlands) 'Helpline Service' for the elderly was hailed as a "lifesaver" by Birmingham's Social Services Committee chairman Theresa Stewart: "It would be no exaggeration to say that without Radio WM's service some people would have died."

In the Channel Islands, BBC Radio Guernsey and BBC Radio Jersey kept broadcasting all day as the islands' only communication service.

WHY IS BBC LOCAL RADIO SPECIAL?

It is special because it gives listeners what they want - a speech-based information and entertainment service. BBC Local Radio is an integral part of community life - an adviser and job finder, and a lifeline in emergencies.

Programmes

Many stations have education producers who broadcast specialist programmes for young people, the unemployed and create projects in conjunction with the local education authorities. For instance, BBC Radio Leicester is setting up a project with the City Council and the Management Services Commission charting and recording industrial and social history to establish a City Council sound archive.

At BBC Radio London a documentary series called 'It seems like only yesterday' is being used in hospitals as an aid to memory stimulus with older patients.

BBC Radio Derby was the first Local Radio station to make a five nights a week commitment to a rock show for 15-25 year olds. From the outset 'Barbed Wireless' has achieved an untypical BBC sound, reflecting the specialised music knowledge of the young presenters.

Also on BBC Radio Derby, and on other stations in the Local Radio network, is a series called 'Write to Work' accompanied by a booklet giving advice and information to people seeking their first jobs.

BBC Radio Merseyside has exceptionally good audience figures. The station carries a wide variety of programmes, including educational series such as 'Straight Talk' in which the area's young people make their own programmes about problems which affect them, including law and order, drugs and the nuclear issue.

BBC Radio Nottingham's TXRX Media Project gave unemployed people constructive activities designed to develop their existing skills.

A major adult literacy scheme 'Chalo Kaam Kare' is produced by BBC Radio Leicester (which broadcasts a minimum of nine hours of programmes for the ethnic community each week) in conjunction with the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit. A work pack, which accompanies the programme, was so successful it is now available nationally to teachers of English as a second language.

Among other successful programmes for ethnic groups are 'Aaj-Kal' and 'Black Roots' (BBC Radio Derby), and BBC Radio Manchester's 'I 'n' I Rule OK'. BBC Radio Leeds, with funding from West Yorkshire County Council, has recently started a five nights a week programme 'Connections' for and about the Asian community, but of interest to all people in West Yorkshire. And this list would not be complete without BBC Radio London's 'Black Londoners' programme broadcast five nights a week to the Afro-Caribbean communities in the capital.

At the time of the assassination of India's Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi, plans were developing for an Asian news service for BBC Local Radio stations which required it giving up-to-the-minute news from the Indian sub-continent. The plans were immediately put into action the day after Mrs Gandhi's death, and broadcasts are continuing with daily news bulletins being prepared in Bush House, and transmitted from Local Radio's Programme Services Unit.

Advice and Help

Research has shown that people are 80 per cent more likely to make contact with their Local Radio station for advice and help than a statutory agency. Social problems are covered by every station in daily phone-in programmes, and series highlighting particular issues.

Every station has daily phone-in programmes when social problems are aired and, in some cases, investigated in depth. Every fortnight on BBC Radio Nottingham the DHSS regional information officer provides an off-air telephone advice service following his regular broadcast about benefits.

BBC Radio Cumbria is the only station to have a full-time farming producer, and the Lamb Bank Service which can be heard during the lambing season, allows local shepherds and farmers to "exchange" lambs and sheep when they have either a surfeit or a shortage. According to ADAS research the farming programmes are listened to by 52 per cent of farmers in Cumbria. During the summer season the station runs a Tourist Line of information about accommodation, events and weather.

Many stations carry a Job Search service. Some, like BBC Radio Northampton and BBC Radio Lancashire, have a daily service and promote jobs which are available through the counties' Jobcentres. BBC Radio Northampton has helped 2,500 people get back to work since the station opened in June 1982.

There is a constant focus by all Local Radio stations on a variety of other social problems including the needs of the disabled, with programmes like BBC Radio Newcastle's 'Contact' and BBC Radio Sussex's 'Caring for the Aged'. Special programmes for the blind and partially sighted can be heard on BBC Radios London, Manchester, Solent, and Sussex.

Religion

Several stations have run highly successful Lent courses in conjunction with their religious programmes. BBC Radio Kent's course generated so much interest that 400 listeners made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Religious programming is a feature of BBC Local Radio, with regular programmes and 'Pause for Thought' inserts in morning sequences.

BBC Radio Newcastle's first Annual Lecture was given by the Archbishop of York, Dr John Habgood, who spoke on The Church and the State. Often the community served by a Local Radio station has many religions and cultures, and the stations endeavour to give all of them some air-time.

Music and Arts

BBC Local Radio is a strong supporter of music, drama and the arts in its areas, often sponsoring local music and drama festivals or series of concerts, and broadcasting parts of local festivals. At Christmas, BBC Radio Devon broadcast the premier of a two-hour rock opera written, produced and presented by students at Exeter University.

BBC Radio Northampton along with BBC Radio Leicester, BBC Radio Nottingham and BBC Radio Lincolnshire are currently working with the East Midlands Arts Council developing future programming and sponsoring local artists.

BBC Radio Lincolnshire's Carol Concert was sold out, and the Cathedral had to shut its doors on would-be singers, while BBC Radio Solent's Christmas Sing-In attracted so many people that the venue had to be changed to a larger hall - and that was filled to capacity, too!

BBC Radio Manchester founded a Chorale which has been so successful that the City authorities have taken it over, and both BBC Radio Leicester and BBC Radio Sussex have their own award-winning Big Bands. Young musicians are featured, often for their first broadcast, by BBC Radio London, and other stations have commissioned works by their local bands and orchestras.

The European Baroque Orchestra is to be based in Oxford this year, and BBC Radio Oxford will be broadcasting several concerts in connection with the orchestra's visit.

Local folk, jazz and country music has regular programmes on almost all stations and local festivals are covered with enthusiasm.

Many of Arnold Wesker's plays are based on his experiences in Norfolk, and BBC Radio Norfolk sponsored a week of Wesker events, including special public readings on the anniversary of his play 'Roots'.

BBC Radio Bristol organises a school contest in the county for budding playwrights, while BBC Radio Sussex has a thriving arts programme which staged Charles Dickens' play 'Hunted Down', with Christopher Timothy and Lockwood West.

BBC Radio Sheffield commissioned a play called 'Shifts' from a local playwright about the miners' strike which was broadcast by other stations with mining interests. A BBC Radio WM play and another Sheffield play, 'Paula's Tape' have had a national audience on Radio 4. Lead mining in Teesdale was dramatised by BBC Radio Cleveland who also broadcast 'Carrots', the story of Dr. Barnado.

The Programme Services Unit of BBC Local Radio is based in London and generates documentary programmes which are syndicated throughout the network. 'The Great War', a collection of reminiscences from First World War soldiers, with comments from historian A.J.P. Taylor, was well received by listeners and critics alike.

Already planned for this year are series to mark the 150th anniversary of the Great Western Railway, and the recent upsurge of interest in the nation's canals. Individual stations also produce programmes which are then syndicated - such as BBC Radio Solent's 'A Lady in the Valleys', about life behind the miners' strike in South Wales.

BBC Radio Cambridgeshire's documentary 'Inside Bourn Hall', that dealt with the topical but highly sensitive subject of test tube babies, was not only syndicated but received Radio 4 air-time.

Sport on BBC Local Radio

BBC Local Radio covers not only soccer from Football League grounds and county cricket, but, because of the essence of its service, reflects the minority sports which do not receive the support of national television and radio.

In Cumbria the ancient sport of hound-trailing is a major event to the listeners of BBC Radio Cumbria who get detailed coverage. Rugby League attracts a national following, but its heartland will always be the north of England. Stations there, at Manchester, Leeds, York, Lancashire and Humberside share an exclusive 'Sunday Afternoon' service of commentary on important matches, with the BBC Radio Humberside audience outstripping those of the other stations.

BBC Radio Stoke-on-Trent initiated a Round the Town Cycle Race as part of a special youth programme in conjunction with Staffordshire Police, and the success in 1983 ensured the race's annual appearance in the city calendar. The station also runs an annual angling contest with up to 5,000 anglers taking part. The local marathon gets a good mention on air, too.

Cricket features throughout Local Radio, and on BBC Radio Lancashire coverage of local games has often gone well into "bad light" with commentaries by torch light.

Speedway and basketball are the specialities of BBC Radio Solent, with bowls being well covered by BBC Radio Sussex. BBC Local Radio has joined forces with the Football League in an effort to encourage the family to watch football, and is constantly seeking ways of solving the soccer hooliganism problem.

Derby County Football Club celebrated its centenary this season, and BBC Radio Derby marked the occasion with a mammoth 15 part series on the history of the famous club.

Village football and cricket are not forgotten and every Saturday evening scores of local sports secretaries link with their stations to provide the weekend's results. Many stations give trophies and prizes for local events, especially those which encourage minority sports.

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME FOR BBC LOCAL RADIO

Every station in the BBC Local Radio network helps to organise some form of fund-raising for local and national charities. Whether a local playgroup needs toys, or a hospice a vital residential area, the local hospital a special care unit for babies, or the WRVS could do with some more tins of food, the Local Radio station will help.

The Oxfam/Ethiopia Appeal has benefited to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of grain, blankets and other vital equipment and food - all raised with the help of BBC Local Radio.

Farmers throughout Yorkshire and the county's four BBC Local Radio stations York, Cleveland, Leeds and Humberside combined to collect tons of grain from farmers which was sold to raise money for the Send a Tonne to Africa Appeal.

BBC Local Radio reporters journeyed to Ethiopia to see for themselves what was happening and sent back vital reports of the conditions.

All the stations contributed to the BBC's Children in Need Appeal, raising a massive total of more than £590,000 in the one night broadcast, some 40 per cent of the total.

In addition stations support their local charities, and many run Christmas toy collections. BBC Radio Manchester's appeal brought in 5,000 toys for deprived children and £3,000 worth of food for Christmas hampers for needy families.

During 1984 the stations raised well over £800,000 for charity, not counting the thousands of pounds worth of donations in kind. The letters of appreciation which pour in after every appeal, marathon broadcast, radio auction or sponsored event speak volumes for the hard work put in, by the staff often without pay.

BBC Local Radio and Parliament

The Parliamentary Unit of BBC Radio has a section dedicated to BBC Local Radio, and this service is augmented by MPs themselves, many of whom have a regular weekly broadcast to tell their constituents about the week's business in the House.

Stations enjoy good relations with their MPs regardless of politics, and they are frequent visitors for phone-in debates. (BBC Radio Leeds gets one of its highest audience figures for the week when an MP talks to listeners).

On BBC Radio London the local MPs have a programme to themselves called 'Members Lobby' when they can discuss and debate the current issues of the capital. Members of the European Parliament find the stations useful to keep in touch.

BBC Local Radio and Parliament (continued)

At BBC Radio Merseyside the station's political and economic adviser is the co-author of a guide to local councils and their services. And in the near future a series called 'Running Our Country' will feature the local MPs.

"BBC Local Radio provides a useful and important medium for MPs to keep in touch with their constituents. Many of them are realising the value of holding surgeries on the air, and the importance of keeping their local electors informed of what is going on in the House of Commons," said Mr Michael Barton the Controller of BBC Local Radio.

BBC LOCAL RADIO - THE STARMAKERS

The chances are that when you see the television news, whether BBC or ITV, at least one of the news readers will have started their broadcasting career in BBC Local Radio. Many of the sports reporters on Radio 2, and 'Grandstand' presenter Desmond Lynam began covering the town sports.

Michael Barton said that BBC Local Radio was the vital High Street presence of the BBC around the country. And he added: "It is encouraging to see our staff moving on into other areas of the BBC where their Local Radio experience is proving so valuable to them."

Michael Buerk and Kate Adie, two of BBC Television's most travelled reporters, began their BBC careers in Local Radio, as did Jenni Murray, now a presenter on BBC-2's 'Newsnight'.

Libby Purves - the presenter of 'Midweek' on Radio 4 - cut her radio teeth with BBC Radio Oxford when she was a university student. Her husband Paul Heiney - 'In at the Deep End' and 'You and Yours' - made his radio debut on BBC Radio Humberside.

In addition to Desmond Lynam, who started broadcasting with BBC Radio Brighton (now Sussex), John Motson was a Saturday football reporter with BBC Radio Sheffield, Mike Ingham (BBC Radio Derby), Gary Richardson and Tony Adamson (BBC Radio Oxford), Ian Darke (BBC Radio Leicester), Eddie Hemmings (BBC Radio Merseyside), while their boss, Pat Ewing - Head of Sport and Outside Broadcasts, Radio - began her career at Carlisle, now BBC Radio Cumbria.

Sandra Chalmers, Editor of 'Woman's Hour', was manager of BBC Radio Stoke-on-Trent, and Radio disc jockeys Janice Long (BBC Radio Merseyside), Bruno Brookes (BBC Radio Stoke-on-Trent), Peter Powell (BBC Radio Birmingham, now Radio WM) and Adrian Juste (BBC Radio Leicester) all started wowing the BBC Local Radio listeners before they earned their place on Radio 1.

BBC LOCAL RADIO - THE STARMAKERS (continued)

Richard Skinner, Radio 1 DJ and a presenter of 'Whistle Test' on BBC Television was a station assistant at BBC Radio Solent. Nicholas Witchell, co-presenter of 'The Six O'Clock News' on BBC Television, was a news trainee with BBC Radio Merseyside, and Philip Hayton, whose reports are seen from the farthest flung parts of the world, was a producer with BBC Radio Leeds.

Many of the regional television presenters began their careers with BBC Local Radio stations, as did countless producers, on both radio and television in the BBC and commercial networks.

FROM:

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JANUARY 29, 1985