

Independent Local Radio (ILR) in the West
Midlands, 1972-1984: a comparative study of
BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio.

D. P. Allen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment
of the University's requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2011

University of Worcester

Abstract

Informed by theory and debate associated with the field of media studies, this thesis presents a comparative analysis of two Independent Local Radio (ILR) stations in the West Midlands between 1972 and the mid 1980s: BRMB Radio in Birmingham and Beacon Radio, which served Wolverhampton and the Black Country. It locates the two stations in the context of the development of British broadcasting policy, which had been shaped from the start by the British model of public service broadcasting. ILR was a public radio service which was funded by the sale of advertising time. Similar to commercial radio elsewhere, the survival of BRMB and Beacon Radio depended on the income they could generate, but the commercial imperative was constrained by the legislative and regulatory framework of British public service broadcasting. The thesis argues that the fortunes of the two stations depended largely on the approaches taken by their respective management teams to these conflicting influences.

The success or failure of an ILR station, in terms of profit or programming, was shaped by its management team. BRMB Radio was an example of a station with an appropriate balance of experience and expertise. From the beginning it was headed by a managing director with a commercial background and a programme controller who was experienced in regulated public service broadcasting. In contrast, Beacon Radio was a station with the wrong people in charge. Both the managing director and the programme controller were from a commercial broadcasting background, and their approach brought the station into conflict with the Independent Broadcasting Authority, ILR's regulator. Almost every aspect of the Beacon operation was designed to make money. The profit motive took precedence over the fulfilment of its public service obligations. Beacon's deficiencies in terms of local coverage and its aggressive sales tactics caused some parts of the local community to reject the station, with some calling on the IBA to remove the Beacon licence.

Formulating the correct type of programmes and working with the regulator was a necessity. To generate revenue a station needed to sell an audience to advertisers. To build an audience it had to create programming to which listeners could relate. Music policy, the personality of presenters, and predictability of output were specifically relevant to BRMB and Beacon. Above all, each station had to have access to the airwaves, and with the IBA as gatekeeper to the airwaves it had to abide by its rules and regulations, especially those relating to programming and content. This was exemplified by the case of Beacon Radio: it was only after the IBA had refused to renew its licence that Beacon recognised the importance of having programmes which met the prescribed standard of quality and public service, and working with the regulator and not against it.

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List of Abbreviations Used

AIRC	Association of Independent Radio Contractors
ATV	Associated Television
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BPM	Birmingham Post and Mail Group
CBSO	City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra
EMAP	East Midlands Allied Press
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FRC	Federal Radio Commission
HTV	Harlech Television
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
IBC	International Broadcasting Company
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
ILR	Independent Local Radio
IPA	Institute of Practitioners in Advertising
IRN	Independent Radio News
ISBC	Incorporated Society of British Advertisers
ITA	Independent Television Authority
ITC	Independent Television Commission
ITV	Independent Television
JICRAR	Joint Industry Committee for Radio Audience Research
LAC	IBA Local Advisory Committee
LBC	London Broadcasting Company
MNA	Midlands News Association
MRH	Midland Radio Holdings
MRS	Midland Radio Sales
NDBC	National Broadcasting Development Committee
PPL	Phonographic Performance Limited
PRS	Performing Rights Society
RMB	Radio Marketing Bureau
TSA	Total Service Area
UBN	United Biscuits Network
VHF	Very High Frequency

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people and organisations for their help during the preparation of this thesis. First, many thanks to my supervisory team, Dr. Darren Oldridge, my final Director of Studies, and Drs. Dil Porter and Ben Calvert; with special thanks to Darren and Dil who were a tremendous help during the final writing up stages. Special mention must also be given to Dr. Ronnie Kowalski who sadly passed away during the completion of the thesis. As my former Director of Studies, Ronnie was a huge inspiration and made great effort in keeping me focused on the job in hand.

Thanks, too, to a number of organisations. The archives at the British Film Institute and Ofcom each provided great assistance, as did the British Library - both at St. Pancras and the newspaper library at Colindale - and the library at the London School of Economics. The archives at Birmingham Central Library and the Wolverhampton Local History Centre should also receive mention, as should all the staff at the Peirson Library at the University of Worcester.

Finally, thanks also go to the university's Graduate Research School who were a tremendous help in keeping me up to date with the bureaucracy involved.

Introduction

This thesis seeks to provide a history of Independent Local Radio (ILR) in Britain from 1972 to 1985. Two ILR stations based in the West Midlands, BRMB Radio (Birmingham) and Beacon Radio (Wolverhampton) lie at the heart of this study, and their operations are analysed in some depth. The fortunes of these stations illustrate the larger history of ILR. The thesis will engage with two major themes. The first theme is how these stations addressed the conflicting imperatives that confronted ILR. As a network of limited companies charged with providing a commercially viable community-based radio service, ILR was expected to make money while also fulfilling a public service remit. The thesis will explore the ways in which the stations dealt with the tensions arising from these two imperatives. It will show that each station developed its own model, and these models exemplified the different approaches available to ILR stations nationally. Secondly, the thesis will examine how the choice of management teams for the respective stations was a critical factor in determining success or failure. In particular, as we shall see, this affected not only the way in which each station addressed ILR's regulatory remit, but also its relationship with the regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA).

Independent Local Radio in Britain after 1972

ILR, Britain's first official commercial radio service, was sanctioned by the Sound Broadcasting Act of 1972. This reversed the position taken by parliamentary inquiries in the 1950s and 1960s - notably those undertaken by Beveridge (1949-51) and Pilkington (1960-2) - which had rejected the notion of commercially funded radio. Thus, before 1972, where it existed, it operated offshore.

The new service was very similar in some respects to its television counterpart, Independent Television (ITV), which had been established in 1955. Whilst the Conservative government of the time unquestionably wanted an alternative to BBC television, ITV represented a compromise between two schools of thought. On the one hand, there were those committed to the idea of public service broadcasting (PSB) funded and regulated on the same lines as the BBC; on the other, there were those who argued for a purely commercial alternative where programmes would be funded by revenue from advertising. The result was a commercial television service, funded by advertising but heavily regulated by the Independent Television Authority (ITA - renamed Independent

Broadcasting Authority in 1972 to accommodate responsibility for ILR). When ILR finally arrived in the 1970s it was subject to similar constraints. As was the case with ITV, the PSB ethic was used to check rampant commercialism. As well as providing entertainment with which to attract and retain audiences, stations were required to educate and inform. The major difference was that, whereas ITV was essentially a network of regional franchises, each ILR station was to be firmly entrenched within its local community.

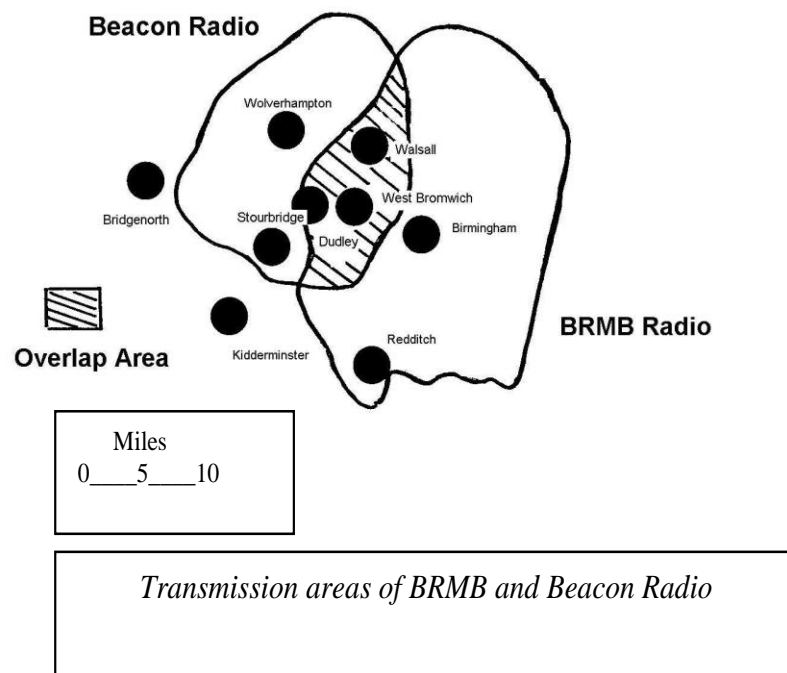
These and other issues created major difficulties for ILR stations over the years that followed. Alongside the PSB and community remit were financial constraints such as station rental and the requirement to build studios to the IBA's exacting standards. Another problem was the fact that ILR was seeking to establish itself in the difficult economic climate of the 1970s with inflation running at high levels after 1973 and rising unemployment at the end of the decade. It did not help that the UK advertising industry had become accustomed to using television. Whilst advertising agencies in other countries had a long-established relationship with radio and turned to the cheaper medium during economic downturns, British advertisers remained with their existing tried and trusted outlets – television, cinema and the press.

Between 1974 and 1979, ILR also found itself struggling to meet more stringent regulatory requirements as the Labour government of that period encouraged ILR stations to prioritise their PSB commitment. A changed political climate after 1979 and, in particular, the liberal economic policies of the Thatcher government prompted the ILR companies to argue for relaxation of the regulatory regime which would allow them the freedom they needed to cope with the recession and with competition from newer forms of media. The Conservative government's emphasis on consumer choice encouraged the adoption of a decidedly liberal view towards the IBA's control over ILR. Thus the 1980s saw major changes to ILR in terms of both structure and regulation.

Local Radio in the West Midlands

Coming to air on 19 February 1974 and 12 April 1976 respectively, BRMB and Beacon were in direct competition with BBC Radio Birmingham, which had been established in 1970. With a transmission area covering most of the West Midlands conurbation (Birmingham, the industrial 'Black Country' and Coventry), Radio Birmingham did not receive a medium wave frequency until shortly before BRMB came to

air. Whilst the BBC did not see poor reception in south Birmingham as a major problem - the power of the medium wave transmitter had been reduced so as not to interfere with other stations on the same 206 metres wavelength - Radio Birmingham proved the least popular of the three stations once the era of competition had begun. Beacon and BRMB proved to be the most popular stations in the region, with BRMB emerging as the more successful of the two.



Source: the above is a composite of two separate maps published in *TV & Radio 1976* (London: IBA, 1976), pp. 146, 163.

ILR broadcast simultaneously on medium wave and in stereo on VHF from the start via transmitters built and owned by the IBA. Though the IBA hoped audiences would eventually accept VHF as their main way of listening, the paucity of VHF sets (especially in motor vehicles) ensured that medium wave remained the most popular way of listening to ILR during its early years. Broadly speaking, though its main VHF transmission area also included the Staffordshire towns of Lichfield and Tamworth, and Redditch in Worcestershire, BRMB was principally Birmingham's ILR station. Similarly, Beacon was the main station for Wolverhampton and the Black Country, though it could also be heard further afield. However, being in close proximity with one another, both also served the

Black Country towns of Dudley, Walsall and West Bromwich. With medium wave signals travelling further than those on VHF, especially during daylight hours, it was also possible to receive BRMB in Wolverhampton and Beacon in Birmingham. Indeed, BRMB could also be heard on medium wave in Burton-on-Trent (Staffordshire), and Beacon in Bridgenorth and Telford (Shropshire).

The Thesis: Structure and Content

The first three chapters will provide a theoretical and historical framework. Chapter One details media theory relevant to this study. With ILR a heavily regulated public service broadcaster, which was commercially funded, emphasis will lay on a number of key factors. First, the chapter will consider the differing models of broadcasting and the formulation of government broadcasting policy; it will set out the origin and development of the American commercial and the British public service models. It will then discuss the influence of the public service model, which remained central to British broadcasting throughout much of the twentieth century. Equally important to ILR were the economics of broadcasting, especially the importance of the audience in determining the price at which airtime could be sold and thus the revenue that could be derived from spot advertising. Staying with the theme of audiences, discussion will finally centre on local and community radio. In particular, the chapter will address the development of the community media movement of the 1970s and the issue of social exclusion.

Chapter Two will provide a commentary on the political and social debates that culminated in the introduction of ILR. In particular, it will consider how ILR reflected the ideology of post-war Conservatism through to 1979 with its continuing emphasis on paternalism and state controlled industry. It will show how the lessons learned from the regulation of ITV were reflected in both the 1972 Sound Broadcasting Act and the 1973 Independent Broadcasting Authority Act. Chapter Three will identify the regulatory and operational shifts in ILR during the early 1980s. Whilst the paternalistic ideal still shaped media policy, recession and economic liberalism provided the catalyst for change. Beside the IBA's changing attitude, ILR was developing into an industry in its own right. It was to polarise into two types of station: the larger metropolitan and the smaller, provincially-based stations. The smaller stations were willing for ILR to remain within its heavily regulated framework, while the larger operators, who had more to gain from a relaxation of the rules, began to call for lighter control.

With Chapters Two and Three establishing ILR in the national context, Chapters Four to Six will turn to the case studies and bring the development of ILR to the local level. These chapters will map the operations of BRMB and Beacon Radio within the changing political, economic and regulatory circumstances in which ILR existed. Chapter Four will concentrate on their early years of operation and will show two options which were open to stations when addressing ILR's paternalistic form of regulation. Similar to most ILR stations BRMB established a PSB form of output and operated wholly within its regulatory remit. In contrast, Beacon took a decidedly commercial approach. By charting each station from the consortium created to win the licence through to their early years of operation, this chapter will show how the future of an ILR station rested on decisions made at these early stages. First was the promise of a commercially-viable PSB operation, and it was this that decided who won and continued with the franchise. Then there was the choice of management to run the station. The chapter will demonstrate the influence of management teams from opposing backgrounds. With a commercially-experienced managing director aligned with a PSB-experienced programme director, BRMB successfully sacrificed a purely commercial operation for commercially viable public service. Headed by a management team from North America whose only experience was of commercial radio, Beacon's profit-driven operation caused it to neglect its duty as a community-based public broadcaster. The station's cavalier and outspoken attitude led the IBA to decide that the station could not, or would not, operate within the British spirit of responsible broadcasting.¹

Chapter Five and Chapter Six will take the story of BRMB and Beacon into the early 1980s. Chapter Five will deal with programming while Chapter Six will deal with commercial operations. Both will demonstrate how each represented ILR's changing structure. Chapter Six will show how BRMB was to adopt a particularly commercial outlook. The attempt at a 'Radio One' type output was now more acceptable to a commercially sympathetic regulator. Though it had its own unique problems, sharing a sizable portion of its broadcast area with BRMB being one, Beacon was representative of many small to medium-sized stations. It now adopted a more cautious approach. Following

¹ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Progress Report on Beacon Broadcasting, April 1978 – March 1979* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0174/10), para. 37.

the IBA's earlier criticism of programme and managerial lapses, the fear of repeating past mistakes proved decisive for the station.

The two final chapters will consider operations within ILR's changing regulatory framework. With the IBA still maintaining a paternalistic stance during the early 1980s, Chapter Five describes output under this continuing regulatory regime. Chapter Six will show how this altered when confronted with changing political and economic circumstances. The choice of the management team at each station was paramount. By switching to a new PSB-orientated management Beacon Radio indicated that it now recognised the importance of operating within ILR's heavily regulated remit. Recognising the IBA as gatekeeper to the airwaves, it found that the prerequisite to maintaining the franchise was winning credibility - both with the regulator and with the local community.

Sources

Secondary literature helped to conceptualise ILR and to locate it in its political, economic and social context. Relevant works in areas such as public and commercial broadcasting, media policy and community participation also provided the questions with which to interrogate the available evidence, thus helping provide a framework for this study. Several policy related studies such those by Jones (1989), O'Malley (1994), Humphreys (1996) and Hutchinson (1999) have offered some analysis of the policy developments that affected ILR.² Besides examining the competing influences that shaped the operations of two adjacent ILR stations, the intention here is build on these works by examining the impact of policy developments at a station level.

Previous scholarly interest in ILR has simply formed part of the larger analysis of broadcasting and broadcasting policy. For instance, in their histories of radio in particular and broadcasting in general, Street (2000, 2006) and Crisell (1997) were mainly concerned

² Jones, T.H., *Evaluating Regulatory Legitimacy: A Study of Policy and Rule Making in the Regulation of Independent Local Radio by the Independent Broadcasting Authority* (unpublished PhD thesis, Brunel University, 1989); Humphreys, P.J., *Mass Media & Media Policy in Western Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Hutchinson, D., *Media Policy: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); O'Malley, T., *Closedown? The BBC & Government Broadcasting Policy, 1979-1992* (London: Pluto Press, 1994).

to place ILR in the wider context.³ Likewise, Barnard tended to neglect ILR as a separate theme when he addressed the developing genre of music radio.⁴ Lewis and Booth (1989) did provide an account of Cardiff's ill-fated community based ILR station, though again this formed part of their larger study of public, commercial and community radio.⁵ Only Baron (1975), Carter (1998), and more recently, Stoller (2010) have provided work specifically dedicated to ILR.⁶ Though both Baron and Carter were more narrative than analytical in their approach and were not concerned with the scholarly conventions of footnotes and bibliography, they supplied some useful insights. Baron presented ILR as the culmination of the history of British commercial radio, while Carter provided a commentary on the growth of ILR from its initial nineteen local stations to over two hundred local and regional stations.

Stoller has now provided a more critical analysis by taking the story of ILR from the debates that preceded its introduction through to the demise of the original model with the 2003 Communications Act, which removed the remnants of its public and community remit. Like this study, Stoller's work aims to contextualise ILR within changing economic and political circumstances; in particular, he traces the development of ILR against the movement in Britain from a social economy of the 1970s to a market economy in the 1980s and 1990s. In order to capture the significance of these changes in relation to the development and direction of ILR over time, Stoller has favoured a chronological approach, which this study has adopted for similar reasons. Importantly, in four separate chapters he has highlighted the regulatory and economic shifts that occurred during the 1980s and the effect these had on ILR. Stoller concentrates on the political and administrative aspects of ILR, and this means that some issues that were important to the stations at an operational level – the complexities of music programming, engineering and transmitter technology – receive relative little attention in his account. Music programming, as he points out, justifies a volume in its own right and Barnard has already provided a detailed study of this

³ Crisell, A., *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 184-208; Street, S., *A Concise History of British Radio: 1922-2002* (Tiverton: Kelly Books, 2002), pp. 117-129; Street, S., *Crossing the Ether: British Public Service Radio and Commercial Competition 1922-1945* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006), pp. 204-210.

⁴ Barnard, S., *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), pp. 69-92.

⁵ Lewis, P.M., and Booth, J., *The Invisible Medium, Public, Commercial & Community Radio* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 89-114.

⁶ Baron, M., *Independent Radio: The Story of Commercial Radio in the United Kingdom* (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1975), pp. 56-181; Carter, M., *Independent Radio: the First 25 Years* (London: Royal Society of Arts / Radio Authority, 1998); Stoller, T., *Sounds of Your Life, The History of Independent Radio in the UK* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2010).

topic.⁷ Thus, like most previous commentators, Stoller has taken a broad view of ILR using incidents in the histories of individual stations to illuminate more general points in his argument. Indeed, Stoller acknowledges that most of the source material of this kind used in his book relates to those stations which operated in London.⁸ As this study demonstrates, however, a wealth of material is available concerning the provincial stations. Stoller did make several references to BRMB and Beacon, especially the maverick nature of the Beacon management and the overlapping transmission area it shared BRMB, though these were more anecdotal than analytical.⁹

Though Stoller's knowledge of ILR from the inside allows him to write with authority on the subject, it does mean that his work has to be evaluated with particular care. Stoller was involved with ILR throughout the period under investigation, both with its regulation and its operation. Joining the IBA Radio Division in 1974, in 1976 he rose to head of Radio Programming before assuming the role of managing director of Radio 210 in Reading a few years later. It was during this latter role that he became a senior officer within the AIRC (Association of Independent Radio Contractors – ILR's representative body). Despite his being well placed to provide a full knowledge of the industry, some consideration must be given to his own position within the industry. Though Stoller lamented the demise of ILR as a community-based service which was of "daily relevance" to its listeners – he argues that it was "brought down in the end by its commercial doppelganger" - it was whilst heading Radio 210, and with the AIRC, that he was (as chapter three of this study will show) a leading advocate for the deregulation of ILR.¹⁰

Preparation for the thesis then utilised previously untapped documentary evidence and oral testimony relating to BRMB and Beacon. Documentary evidence came from a number of sources. Besides former IBA documents held at OFCOM and the London School of Economics, and material relating to West Midlands radio made available by the BBC's Written Archives, great use was made of company reports and licence applications. Importantly, the contemporary press, such as the *Times* or *Sunday Times*, and contemporary trade journals, such as the prominent (bi-weekly) publication *Broadcast*, provided a major commentary on the progress of ILR. Indeed, reportage in Birmingham's *Post* and *Evening*

⁷ Stoller, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid, p. 5.

⁹ Ibid, p. 73.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

Mail, and Wolverhampton's *Express and Star*, was such that the story of BRMB and Beacon unfolded almost on a daily basis. Finally, interviews with a number of people involved with West Midlands ILR provided oral testimony. Everyone has a story to tell, and whilst ex-BRMB personnel also provided evidence, those from Beacon provided the most illuminating material. From its former chairman through to ex-managing directors, programme controllers and presenters, those associated with the station were more than eager to tell their side of the story.

Chapter One

The Broadcast Media

For many years research in media studies and media history tended to neglect radio. Once television overtook radio as the dominant form of broadcasting, academics appeared to focus their attention almost exclusively on the newer medium. Recent years, however, have seen a revival of interest. Crisell's *Understanding Radio* (1986) was followed by a number of similarly broad-based studies, notably by Shingler and Wieringa (1998), Barnard (2000), Hendy (2000) and Chignell (2009).¹¹ Almost every aspect of radio has been addressed. Its regulation, its social, economic, political and cultural contexts, its use of words and music along with the creation of radio communities are just a few of the areas covered. The work of Barnard (1989) and Lewis and Booth (1989) on the development of music radio and local community radio are of special relevance to this study.¹² Radio's importance as an industry has also been recognised in other ways. The Radio Academy, founded in 1983, has supplied a platform for academic and professional discussion.¹³ Many colleges and universities now offer radio-based vocational courses whilst the internet-based Radio Studies Network, formed in 1998, facilitates dialogue between researchers.

Commercial Broadcasting versus Public Service Broadcasting

In building a theoretical framework for this study, an essential starting point is the opposing models of broadcasting. Most commentators agree that broadcasting institutions fall into two major paradigms: the American commercial model and the British and European-based public service model.¹⁴ These two models will be of importance when researching Independent Local Radio (ILR), especially ILR in the West Midlands. As this and the next section on broadcasting policy will show, the public service model has shaped British broadcasting since its inception. Thus, in discussing the origins and development of ILR an understanding of this model is critical. However, ILR, though influenced by the

¹¹ Crisell, A., *Understanding Radio* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed., 1994); Barnard, S., *Studying Radio* (London: Arnold, 2000); Shingler, M. and Wieringa, C., *On Air: Methods and Meanings in Radio* (London: Arnold, 1998); Hendy, D., *Radio in the Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 14.

¹² Barnard, S., *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1989); Lewis, P. and Booth, J., *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

¹³ For discussion surrounding the rise of radio studies as an academic field see Garner, K. 'Defining the Field', *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Audio and Broadcast Media*, 1 (1), (2003), pp. 5-12; and 'Review of Radio Studies Teaching', *Ibid*, 2 (2), 2004, pp 101-22

¹⁴ Hendy, p. 14.

public service model was also commercially funded and so an understanding of the commercial model will be equally important. This will help when subsequent chapters move onto the competing influences that faced ILR, and especially Beacon which was initially run by a management whose previous experience of broadcasting was on American commercial lines.

Broadcasting in Britain and America came about in broadly similar circumstances. Initially, radio was seen as a commercial opportunity on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States a variety of business organisations – from advertising agencies to department stores - established radio stations, seeing them as a way of developing new and existing markets. Aside from using it as a business or commercial tool, even colleges and universities saw radio broadcasting as a way of raising profile and a means of enhancing the educational services they offered.¹⁵ Manufacturers of radio receivers had a particular interest and were especially prominent both in Britain, where they took the lead, and in the United States. It was an obvious way of promoting the sales of their products. Beyond this broad parallel it was soon apparent, however, that American and British broadcasting would develop along two quite different paths. Distinctive cultures and ideological outlooks helped to create the American (commercial) and the British (public service) models of broadcasting.

The pursuit of profit shaped the American commercial model.¹⁶ American commercial broadcasting started as a promotional tool for existing businesses and evolved into an industry in its own right. Renting studio time to prospective broadcasters, the Atlantic Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) was the first major company to see radio as a way of making money.¹⁷ Whilst AT&T began to sell studio time to broadcasters, others soon realised that airtime could be sold to advertisers. Initially letting advertisers sponsor programmes, and then through the sale of time slots, individual radio companies soon came into existence. With a growing number of operators leading to the emergence of a highly competitive market, a process of merger and takeover facilitated the rise of national networks in the 1930s. A simultaneous rise in corporate sponsorship meant that many individual operators lost editorial control over the output of their stations. This, however, proved a relatively short-lived development as networks and sponsors turned their attention to

¹⁵ Keith, M. and Krause, J., *Radio Station* (Boston MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 3rd ed., 1993), p. 4.

¹⁶ For a detailed coverage of the introduction and development of radio broadcasting in America see Lewis and Booth, pp. 30-50.

¹⁷ Keith and Krause, p.4; Lewis and Booth, p. 37.

television in the late 1940s, thus allowing many stations to revert to local ownership and control. In these circumstances spot advertising – the sale of airtime in short time-slots to advertisers – became especially important as radio stations competed amongst themselves and sought to generate what income they could in an advertising market now dominated by television.¹⁸

With Republican administrations in the mid to late 1920s sympathetic to the large corporations, radio in the United States was initially subject to minimal regulation.¹⁹ It was the oversubscription of a limited number of frequencies that caused the federal government to intervene via the Radio Act of 1927. This established the Federal Radio Communications department (FRC) whose only function was to issue or remove operating licences. The existing anti-trust laws should have prevented the national networks from monopolising the airwaves. A sub-clause in the Radio Act, however, whereby the FRC could allow ‘chain broadcasting’ (chains of independent ‘affiliated’ stations), allowed both the Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS) and the National Broadcasting Company to create their own national networks.²⁰

American Radio came under a stricter regulation from the 1930s onwards. This was in the context of the loss of confidence in the free market following the Stock Market crash and subsequent debate on federal involvement in public life. Introduced as part of President Roosevelt’s package of New Deal policies, the 1934 Federal Communications Act initiated a period of tighter regulation. The 1934 Act brought an important element of ‘public interest’ into American broadcasting regulation. In 1949, the Fairness Doctrine built on this foundation when it addressed the question of cross-media ownership - an increasingly important issue given the rise of television. The 1934 Act had already laid some emphasis on editorial control, and now the 1949 Doctrine sought to end editorial bias in America’s television and radio. Besides obliging broadcasters to “...provide reasonable opportunity for the discussion of conflicting views on issues of public importance”, airtime now had to be set aside for news, public affairs and general information.²¹

¹⁸ Barnard (2000), p. 50.

¹⁹ Barnard (2000), p. 11.

²⁰ Lewis and Booth, p. 40.

²¹ Keith and Krause, p. 11.

An important feature of the 1934 legislation was that it recognised the importance of public service broadcasting. Many organisations, such as universities or local community groups, had already established information-based radio stations. One function of the new Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which replaced the FRC, was to protect such stations from powerful commercial rivals by guaranteeing minimum funding levels and access to broadcasting facilities.²² This was an important precursor of the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, which enabled the Corporation for Public Broadcasting – an affiliation of community and public broadcasters – to set up a national network of ‘high-brow’ community stations. National Public Radio (NPR), as its publicity indicated, had a distinctive public-service brief and a niche audience:

NPR’s news and performance programming attracts an audience distinguished by its level of education, professionalism, and community involvement. Research shows NPR listeners are consumers of information from many sources and are more likely than average Americans to buy books. They are motivated citizens involved in public activities, such as voting and fund raising. They address public meetings, write letters to editors, and lead business and civic groups.²³

Despite successive legislation introducing this element of public service, throughout most of the twentieth century American broadcasting remained commercially driven. For the majority of television and radio stations, programme sponsorship or the sale of advertising time was still the main source of funding.

The British public service model

The concept of British public service broadcasting (PSB) was embodied in the creation of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).²⁴ As in the United States, too many operators were competing for a limited number of frequencies and this had led the General Post Office (GPO), then a government department, to create the British Broadcasting Company – the Corporation’s predecessor - in 1922. It was, however, more than simply a

²² Fairchild C, ‘Deterritorializing Radio: Deregulation and the Continuing Triumph of the Corporatist Perspective in the USA’, *Media Culture and Society*, 21 (4), (1999), p. 556.

²³ Keith and Krause, p. 11.

²⁴ Briggs, A., *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. 1, *The Birth of Broadcasting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Curran, J. and Seaton, J., *Power Without Responsibility: the Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 111-114; Crisell, A., *An Introductory History of Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 22-24; Williams, K., *Get Me a Murder a Day! A History of Mass Communications in Britain* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 88-109.

matter of regulating access to the airwaves.²⁵ Principally, the BBC was a product of a new form of liberalism prevalent to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the economics of free market competition gave way to an ethos of paternalism and state control. In the years after the First World War radio broadcasting came to be regarded as a national resource. The BBC supplied the government with a way of controlling the airwaves – just as the utility boards controlled the supply of gas, water or electricity.²⁶ Constituted by royal charter, and headed by a government-appointed director general and board of governors, it embodied Britain's unique method of arms-length state control. Importantly, the BBC was free from state interference and commercial influence. Financed by a license fee collected by the GPO but paid by the listener, the BBC was relatively free from the pressures which a government could exert if it had been directly funded. Moreover, with advertising or sponsorship banned under its charter, it was also protected from the kind of market-driven commercialism that prevailed across the Atlantic.

With sponsors dictating content, programming in the United States came with a broad populist appeal. It was for this reason that successive committees of inquiry rejected advertising as a way with which to fund the BBC. These committees held the Corporation's informative and cultural content in high regard, and the fear was that programme standards would deteriorate as it strove to deliver large audiences to advertisers or sponsors. This was, however, only part of the story. As Ellwood and others have suggested, there was a strong anti-American feeling throughout the British establishment during the 1920s and 1930s, and this led to a rejection of the American concept of unregulated free market competition.²⁷ Suspicious of America's economic and cultural influence, the traditional elites feared the commercialisation of British society.²⁸ In deciding how to finance the BBC, even the Sykes (1925) and Crawford (1926) committees referred disparagingly to the 'American example'. Films made in Hollywood and shown in British cinemas were already causing concern. With radio already incorporated into America's manufacturing and marketing sectors, it was paramount that Britain should not follow a similar path. Such concerns underpinned the case against commercial broadcasting in Britain.²⁹

²⁵ Lewis and Booth, p. 53; Williams, pp. 91-3.

²⁶ Curran and Seaton, pp. 112-14.

²⁷ Coase, R.H. quoted in Local Radio Workshop (LRW), *Capital: Local Radio Private Profit* (London: Comedia, 1984), p. 6; Curran & Seaton, p. 114; Ellwood, D., 'Americanisation or Globalisation?', *History Today*, 52 (9), September 2002, p. 18.

²⁸ Clark, P., *Hope & Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 116.

²⁹ LRW, p. 6.

The religious and moral outlook of the nation's middle classes was also important, especially the ideas prevailing amongst politicians and in the higher ranks of the civil service. Within this context, many commentators have pointed to the Calvinist upbringing of John Reith, the BBC's first Director General, and his subsequent desire that the BBC should seek primarily to inform and educate.³⁰ Williams has argued that middle-class values helped to shape British broadcasting in its formative years. Of particular concern was the idea that by appealing to their baser instincts, a popular form of mass media would have a detrimental effect on the morality of the working classes. It might also undermine the efforts of middle-class improvers who sought to promote an air of religious, cultural and social enlightenment.³¹ Especially relevant here was radio's potential to reach a mass audience. Instead of adding to the problem that some believed the rise of the popular press had created, a responsible broadcasting service could form part of the solution. As Briggs pointed out, Reith's 'four pillars of public broadcasting' responded to these concerns. These were a public rather than a commercial service, a national service subject to centralised control, a universal programme aimed at all listeners and, finally, programmes of a high standard.³²

Thus, by the 1930s, two distinctive models of broadcasting had emerged. Both the American and the British models were rooted in the particular political and social circumstances of their respective countries. The commercial model, though somewhat constrained by federal control after 1934, embodied an acceptance of free market capitalism. While an anti-commercial consensus shaped much of its early regulation, many within the radio industry, albeit having little effect on the efforts to regulate radio, still refused to relinquish their unbridled commercial freedom. David Sarnoff commercial manager of the Marconi Company, for instance, used democracy and the idea of 'American freedom' to argue against the 1934 Act.³³ Voters were free to choose, he stated, and radio should be free from editorial control in order to help them make their choice. Private businesses in the United States were free to operate as they chose under the law. Why, therefore, should radio operators be constrained by state intervention?³⁴

³⁰ Clarke, pp. 112-16.

³¹ Williams, p. 92.

³² Briggs (1995), pp. 214-217.

³³ Quoted in Lewis and Booth, p. 42; Shingler and Wieringa, p. 15.

³⁴ Quoted in Fairchild, p. 557.

Its public service counterpart was rooted in an ideology of paternalism and control. With output influenced by the need to maximise audiences and satisfy a perceived public demand, the commercial model centred on profit and consumer choice. Based on a desire to educate and inform, the PSB model represented what Mulgan described as producer quality or professionalism. It aimed to fulfil a range of social and cultural functions.³⁵ As Curran and Seaton have argued, PSB aims to:

... maintain high programme standards and contributes to the cultural resources of society, rather than offering what is just profitable. It seeks to democratise culture by making widely available the best works of literature, drama, art, and music. It aims to renew and develop cultural tradition by supporting tradition by supporting innovation and experimentation. Above all, it is committed to catering for the diversity of the public, the enthusiasms of minorities, as well as of the majority. It responds to the breadth of public taste rather than that of the lowest common denominator.³⁶

Indeed, as they and others have pointed out, despite decades of inquiry into the future of broadcasting, Green and White Papers, and various Broadcasting Acts, this interpretation has remained relatively intact.³⁷

The Formulation of Media Policy

Media policy is rooted in social and political circumstances. Central to the formulation of policy are the players involved. Scholarly discussion on media policy has centred on the 'gatekeepers' of the media process, in particular, the relationship between media organisations and the government of the day. As Hutchinson (1999) observed, politicians, civil servants, regulators, broadcasters, and even consumers have their own particular interest or agenda to follow and all have a role to play.³⁸ Whilst the ideology of the party in power will dictate the shape and direction of broadcasting policy, broadcasting organisations will seek to either promote or protect their own particular interests. Crucially, for the direction or shape of regulation to change it only needs a new government or a different level of influence amongst one or more of the other protagonists involved.

³⁵ Mulgan, G., 'Quality in Broadcasting: an Essentially Contested Concept' in Franklin, B., *British Television Policy: a Reader* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 94-97.

³⁶ Curran and Seaton, p. 335.

³⁷ For a full discussion see Curran and Seaton, pp. 301-15.

³⁸ Hutchinson, D., *Media Policy, an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 125-140.

The introduction of British commercial television during the 1950s provides a useful example of how this worked.³⁹ First came the pressure groups campaigning for commercial television. According to Harvey, by imposing their views on broadcaster and legislator alike, pressure groups can play a pivotal role in the formulation of media policy.⁴⁰ In the case of British commercial television, there were several groups involved - each with an agenda for either campaigning for or against its introduction. In favour were those who would gain from commercial television. For instance, potential broadcasters would benefit from the sale of advertising time whilst for newspapers and advertisers it was a way in which they could expand their existing businesses. Led by the National Television Council (NTC), there were then those who feared for the existing quality of British television. Headed by Labour MP and BBC broadcaster Christopher Mayhew, and consisting of a selection of churchmen, educationalists and left-wing politicians, in essence the NTC carried over the paternalistic attitudes of their late 19th and early 20th century counterparts. Feared most was the effect commercial television's populist programming would have on the BBC's standards. Similar to the arguments against a commercially funded BBC, the fear was that as it maintained a justification for the licence fee by competing for audiences, so it too would simply opt for popular programming.⁴¹

Alongside those campaigning for or against commercial television were the developments in the political arena, where two wings of a new Conservative Government also represented these two opposing views. Without question, after the 1951 election the new Conservative Government wanted an alternative to the BBC's television service. As Prime Minister, Churchill had a longstanding mistrust of the BBC but his party contained a majority of traditionalists who simply wanted a publicly funded option. Newer members, those from the world of industry and commerce, however, saw this as an opportunity to introduce commercial television.⁴² With the traditional members maintaining the ethos of public service and state control and the newer intake favouring competition and the power of market forces, when it was introduced commercial television was a compromise between the two broadcasting models. The point is that these two differing viewpoints played a central role in

³⁹ For a comprehensive commentary on the introduction of Independent Television see Wilson, H.H., *Pressure Group: the Campaign for Commercial Television* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961).

⁴⁰ Harvey, S., 'Making Media Policy', in Briggs, A. and Cobley, P., *The Media: an Introduction*, 2nd edition, (Harlow: Longman, 2002), p. 220.

⁴¹ Crisell (1997), p. 79.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 78; Curran and Seaton, p. 163.

the decision to introduce commercial television. The resulting new service, 'Independent Television' (ITV), was essentially a settlement between those looking to television for its commercial benefits and those who simply wanted an alternative to the BBC while preserving the public service ethic.

In formulating media policy, both the ideology of the ruling executive and contemporary political circumstances proved crucial. This was no more evident than during the 1980s when the growing belief in the free market had a dramatic effect on media policy. Goodwin (1999) traced this free market philosophy to the 1970s, where a collapsing post-war boom gave way to a new 'neo-liberal' form of political thinking. Subsequent scholarly discussion on both sides of the Atlantic has therefore focussed on a 'commercialisation' of the existing broadcasting models in this period.⁴³ Beside events in the political arena, some commentators have pointed to the simultaneous transformation of media technology as an important factor.⁴⁴ Indeed, technological advances were such that some left-wing commentators were calling for a re-regulation of the existing broadcasting models. In referring to Europe, both Goodwin and Humphreys noted the revolution caused by cable and satellite and its threat to the public service model.⁴⁵ Using new satellite technology, Murdoch's News Corporation, for instance, was able to beam Sky's multi-channel television service directly into Britain. These developments, largely unregulated, posed a major threat to the more heavily regulated BBC and ITV, as they competed for both audience share and advertising revenue.

In Britain, Thatcher's promotion of the free market proved decisive. As Negrine (1989) observed:

... Under the Thatcher Government, there has been a sustained ideological and political attack on the pillars of public service broadcasting. Not only has there been a serious questioning of licence fee, but there has also been a reassessment of the idea of a scarcity of the airwaves, the idea of equality to all and the need for regulations. The idea of a national public service paid for by the community is under attack from those who favour the concept of 'consumer sovereignty' and subscription television.

⁴³ Goodwin, P., 'The Role of the State', in Stokes, J. and Reading, A., *The Media in Britain, Current Debates and Developments* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 132; for a discussion of deregulation in America, see Fairchild, pp. 556 – 561.

⁴⁴ Hutchinson, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Goodwin, pp. 132-33; Humphreys, p.15.

The combination of these influences has encouraged the opening up of the airwaves to competition.⁴⁶

Negrine's reference to 'serious questioning of the licence fee' relates to the Peacock Committee (1985-1987), set up to investigate both the funding of the BBC and the future and possible deregulation of broadcasting.⁴⁷ The Thatcher government had already embarked on the privatisation of utilities and Peacock's remit was to examine the way in which public broadcasting, a utility of a kind, was financed in the light of these changes. This demonstrated the extent to which media policy was inseparable from political ideology. Peacock's findings were, nonetheless, a compromise between those wanting to protect public broadcasting and those wishing to end a publicly funded BBC. In rejecting advertising or sponsorship as a form of funding, Peacock argued that the BBC was too important to be left to the mercy of market forces, though the committee's report did recommend the privatisation of Radio One and Radio Two. The recommendation that the license fee should be replaced by subscription funding was, however, a concession to those favouring some form of consumer choice. In its response, the Thatcher government also compromised. It left the licence fee intact and showed no inclination to privatise the BBC's popular music stations. It did, however, take up Peacock's idea that some kind of internal market should be created within the BBC. It was hoped that this would reduce costs and provide a stimulus to independent producers whom the BBC would now be obliged to contract, a model already in place at Channel Four.⁴⁸

The biggest challenge to British public broadcasting, however, was the deregulation of independent television and radio. To accommodate its new responsibility for independent radio, ITV's regulator, the Independent Television Authority, had already been renamed the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA -1973), and during the late 1980s and early 1990s it replaced its system of quality based licensing with a system of competitive tendering when choosing franchise holders.⁴⁹ Paying an annual rental for the privilege of holding the licence, contractors were originally chosen for their ability to operate within the regulator's guidelines and financial viability (see Chapter Three). Whilst competitive tendering still centred on the ability to operate with guidelines, with a one-off fee replacing the annual rental, contracts

⁴⁶ Negrine, p. 102

⁴⁷ For the Peacock Committee see O'Malley, T., *Closedown? The BBC and Government Broadcasting Policy 1979-92* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), pp. 88-117.

⁴⁸ Crisell (1997), p. 214.

⁴⁹ Harvey, S., 'Making Media Policy' in Briggs and Cobley, p. 223.

instead went to those promising to pay the highest amount. Initially this only applied to the ITV television contracts, but soon the independent radio contractors were subject to the same process. Baldwin *et al* had already suggested that radio undergo a system of competitive tendering. Writing in 1987 in the *International Review of Law and Economics*, they recommended radio licences be allocated via a market-based auctioning process. They were adding to a growing debate in both academic and industry circles. For a number of years the radio industry was in a state of flux over quality and financial issues (see Chapter Three). By the late eighties the new Channel Four and Breakfast Television channels, as well as satellite and cable, were offering competition for audience and revenue (see Chapter Three). Bidding for licences, it was argued, would better equip commercial radio in an increasingly crowded market place. Having assessed the financial implications of operating within a highly competitive environment, potential licence bidders would, Baldwin *et al* argued, be better equipped to run a commercially viable radio station.⁵⁰

During the 1990s, broadcasting on both sides of the Atlantic saw further deregulation. The United States witnessed the commercial sector losing many of its obligations regarding public provision. National Public Radio and its television counterpart remained the nation's sole provider of an information-based service. Becoming more market regulated than deregulated, in Britain the distinction between commercial and public broadcasting became more clearly defined.⁵¹ Despite still regulating British broadcasters more heavily than those in the United States, the 1990 Broadcasting Act clearly distinguished between commercial and public broadcasting. Nevertheless, the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority, the two 'lighter touch' regulatory bodies that replaced the IBA, had less power over programming and schedules than the body that preceded them. With regard to radio, the previous public service duopoly was polarised into the system we have today - a commercial sector with minimal PSB obligation and the BBC, which remains Britain's main public broadcaster. Even though broadcasting policy had applied market principles to independent broadcasting, the Radio Authority still held power over ownership and format.⁵²

⁵⁰ Baldwin, R., Cave, M. and Jones, T.H., 'The Regulation of Independent Local Radio and its Reform', in *International Review of Law and Economics*, 7 (7), (1987), pp. 177-91.

⁵¹ Hendy, p. 25.

⁵² Barnard (2000), pp. 9-67.

The Political Economy of Radio and the Importance of the Audience

With ILR a commercially funded service, the sale of advertising was important for its survival. Therefore, attention will now turn to the economics of broadcasting, in particular, the importance of the audience in attracting advertisers. Both Barnard and Hendy have pointed out that radio is an audience-led medium. For the BBC audiences are required for it to justify its right to the licence fee. For commercial radio, they are necessary to attract advertisers: essentially commercial radio sells audiences to advertisers.⁵³ The way in which commercial radio attracts an audience is therefore important. As Barwise and Gordon (1998) clearly set out in reference to the deregulated post-1990 period:

... Most [of radio's] costs are incurred before there is a single listener. Each listener adds nothing to the costs, and the aim is to get as many listeners as possible to generate the maximum amount of advertising revenue. Given the number of radio stations, most of which are music based, each station has to carve out a loyalty based on a definite personality, expressed in music policy, the kind of presenters and disc jockeys it uses, its jingles, and the predictability of its output at various times of the day. ...People are used to driving to Atlantic 252 or working to Classic FM or doing the washing up while listening to an ILR station.⁵⁴

Central to attracting audiences are the 'texts' (the words or music) used and the way in which stations produce programmes.⁵⁵ Whilst Barwise and Gordon pointed to how personality, music policy, and predictability of output all played a role, Scannell (1996) demonstrated the importance of programmes to which an audience can relate. During the 1930s, he argued, the introduction of audience research had enabled the BBC to introduce programming with the listener in mind and what they might be doing at different times of day. This helped radio to become part of the nation's life as audiences began to shape their daily routines around the radio schedule. Later, even though the advent of television meant radio becoming a 'secondary' medium, where audiences no longer give it their undivided attention and can perform a variety of other tasks whilst listening, programmers continued to design schedules around the needs of their audience.⁵⁶ As Hendy has noted, modern music stations supply a continuous 'strip' of 20-30 minute programmes which listeners 'tap' into

⁵³ Barnard (2000), p. 87; Hendy, p. 115.

⁵⁴ Barwise, P. and Gordon, D., 'The economics of the Media', in Briggs and Copley, p. 209.

⁵⁵ For a full discussion on programming techniques and the ways listeners interpreted various texts, see also Barnard (2000), pp. 173-201, Hendy, pp. 69-114 and Crisell (1994).

⁵⁶ Scannell P, *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 150-51.

and when they wish.⁵⁷ This practice recognises that listeners may tune in and out several times in a day.

Alongside programming designed to construct and hold an audience is an appreciation of what ‘experience’ the listener derives from listening. Analysing radio audiences has attracted much academic attention, and Crisell has identified the development of two strands of theory. First came ‘effects analysis’, which examined the effect radio had on its audience, and therefore the audience’s reaction to listening. This idea was, according to Crisell, first put forward during the inter-war years, when radio was in its supremacy and formed a central role in people’s lives. Quoting Lowery and De Fleur (1983), he referred to radio as having a ‘persuasive’ and ‘pervasive’ effect on its audiences – where simple and deliberate transmitted messages caused audiences to react in a direct, predictable and often dramatic way. Indeed, to demonstrate the point Crisell used Orson Welles’ 1938 US radio dramatisation of H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* and how this caused an estimated six million listeners to believe they had heard genuine reports regarding an alien invasion.⁵⁸

However, with radio turning into a ‘secondary’ medium (see above) and its effect on the audience becoming harder to ascertain, effects analysis was no longer a useful way of analysing audiences.⁵⁹ Thus ‘uses and gratification’ analysis, the second of Crisell’s two strands of theory, was seen as more useful. In place of analysing effects, uses and gratification research examines why listeners use radio and what benefits they derive from its use. In this regard, with radio forming part of the daily routine, commentators have identified four main reasons why audiences listen: a diversion from the daily routine, as companionship and a form of social integration (as in the case of phone-ins or talk shows), to provide a sense of self-awareness (by comparing personalities or programme content to one’s own self or situation), and finally, to simply learn of the world outside.⁶⁰

In examining these uses, Hendy (2000) identified a cross between what he described as the active and the passive listener.⁶¹ For example, using radio to learn of the world around themselves is using it actively whilst using it as a distraction from the daily routine is using it

⁵⁷ Hendy, p. 130.

⁵⁸ Crisell (1994), pp. 205-24.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 219.

⁶⁰ Katz *et al*, (1973); McQuail, (1983); Lowery and De Fleur, (1983), Fiske, (1990), quoted in Crisell (1994), p. 209; Hendy, p. 133

⁶¹ Hendy, pp. 134-35.

passively. Indeed, Crisell has argued that even when using radio as secondary to television, listeners still ‘actively’ decide to listen. In this sense they can still therefore fall within the same category as those for whom radio is a primary medium and who listen intently.⁶²

This all forms part of an academic line of enquiry entitled ‘reception studies’. Within this many faceted area Alasuutari (2002) has recognised two generations of inquiry.⁶³ First, Hall’s *Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse* (1974) built on the uses and gratifications model, and also German research centring on ‘literary reception’, to outline an approach to the question of how programmes were received by audiences. Instead of regarding the broadcasted texts as a package, or as a product manufactured and delivered to a passive audience, Hall argued that programmes came complete with encoded meanings or messages which various audiences would unwittingly decode in different ways. The work of Morley (1980) on the BBC’s *Nationwide* television programme, which revealed the various ways in which different social and demographic groups responded, supported this line of argument and encouraged a generation of researchers, notably Ang (1985), Hobson (1982), Katz and Liebes (1984), for example, who paid particular attention to audience attitudes.⁶⁴

Whilst building on Hall and Morley’s work, these researchers used in-depth interviews to move attention away from programmes and their production to the actual consumer or viewer. With discourses specialising on specific social groups - age, race or gender, for instance - attention was now focusing on how each related to the various strands of the media, including the press, radio and television. Using his earlier *Nationwide* work as a basis, Morley (2000) even broadened this line of enquiry to include relationships between the media and community life, which included the home and family.⁶⁵ Unlike Scannell (1996), who assumed the existence of a unified sedentary population, Morley examined the role of the media in portraying the diverse society which we have today and its varied cultural needs. Destroying Scannell’s notion of a ‘national home’, he in effect highlighted those who felt excluded from the media process: women who saw the media as being too masculine or ethnic groups who felt marginalized from a seemingly white-dominated media

⁶² Crisell (1994), p. 224.

⁶³ Alasuutari P, ‘Three Phases of Reception Studies’ in McQuail, D., (ed), *McQuail’s Reader in Mass Communications Theory* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 326-33. For a broad -based overview of the field of reception studies see Livingstone, S., ‘Relationships Between Media and Audiences: Prospects for Audience Reception Studies’, in Liebes, T. and Curran, J., *Media, Ritual and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 237-55.

⁶⁴ See Alasuutari, pp. 327– 29.

⁶⁵ Morley, D., *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000)

were two examples. Importantly, Morley emphasised how Scannell's assumption of an integrated society did little for the construction of cultural identities.⁶⁶

Access to the Media Process: Local and Community Radio

From this, discussion now moves onto local and community radio, where the question of those excluded from the media process has attracted the attention of researchers. Here, Lewis and Booth have brought Scannell's and Morley's work to a local level. Since the inception of British broadcasting, they argued, it had always provided for the 'greater audience,' essentially for Scannell's 'unified' national community. Siding with Morley, they blamed the seeming failure to provide for the whole community on the failure to develop provision for the ethnically-diverse, socially-mobile, multi-layered society that had emerged since the Second World War. There was no single, unified community but a number of different communities, each with its own needs.⁶⁷ Wasko and Mosco (1992), in linking the media to the democratic process, then went even further by stating that equal representation by (and access to) the media, especially for minorities, was an essential prerequisite of a functioning democracy.⁶⁸ Hagen's neat encapsulation - 'democratisation of the media, democratisation through the media' – underlined the point.⁶⁹

Providing an output the existing radio stations (local and national) failed to provide, the land-based pirate radio stations from the 1970s onward very much resulted from groups who felt alienated from the existing media.⁷⁰ Providing the impetus for their creation was the availability of cheap broadcasting equipment and the rising popularity of disco and black music.⁷¹ Varying from just a single person to quite sophisticated operations with their own studios, and with some fifty in operation by the mid 1980s, their persistence cannot be over emphasised. Partly intended to end their operations, even the 1984 Telecommunications Act seemed to have little effect. As Hind and Mosco, and Crisell, pointed out, as soon as the

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 125-127.

⁶⁷ Lewis and Booth, pp. 91-2.

⁶⁸ Mosco, V. and Wasko, J., (eds), *Democratic Communications in the Information Age* (Toronto: Garmond Press, 1992), p. 6.

⁶⁹ Hagen I, 'Democratic Communications: Media and Social Participation', in Mosco and Wasko (eds), pp. 25-6.

⁷⁰ Though biased in their favour, for discussion surrounding the land-based pirate stations, see Hind, J., and Mosco, S., *Rebel Radio: The Full Story of British Pirate Radio* (London: Pluto Press, 1985).

⁷¹ Lewis and Booth, p. 105; Barnard (1989), p. 172.

Home Office closed them down some simply started re-broadcasting from a different location - often with equipment donated by wealthy supporters.⁷²

Whilst arguing the case for pirate radio, Hind and Mosco categorised their output into three broad groups: black music of varying types, community news and political affairs (often with an ethnic slant), and humour or eccentric views.⁷³ Whilst subsequent chapters will return to the pirate stations, which were to become particularly relevant when discussing the West Midland's ILR stations, here it is important to note their effect on existing operators. By the mid 1980s, Capital Radio and BBC Radio London responded to pirate competition by providing programming that they had previously ignored. Providing music which ranged from jazz to black music such as hip-hop and soul, the aim was to take the wind out of the pirates' sails.⁷⁴

At the same time as this growth in illegal pirate radio, community media groups marked another attempt to remedy the apparent disenfranchisement. Nigg and Wade (1980) pointed to the establishment of such organisations when they discussed the development of community media; in particular, the seeming failure of the existing media to provide for the modern day multi-cultural society. Predominantly led by left-wing activists, such as teachers and professional community workers, it was through the creation of an enhanced sense of cultural identity amongst minority groups that these organisations attempted to address the problem.⁷⁵ When Schulman (1992) surveyed the development of community media and gauged the reaction of those groups in society it aimed to target he noted the importance of addressing their fear of and apathy towards the media process.⁷⁶ In this regard - besides mobilising disenfranchised groups into the media process - news-sheets, local video workshops and community radio and television stations all had proved useful in helping create a sense of 'value' and belonging.⁷⁷

Coinciding with this interest in community provision was an increasing scrutiny of local radio's effectiveness in representing the entire community. Leading the way was the

⁷² Crisell (1994), p. 36; Hind and Mosco, p. 17.

⁷³ Hind and Mosco, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Barnard (1989), p. 171.

⁷⁵ Nigg, H. and Wade, G., *Community Media* (London: Publications Distribution Cooperative), 1980.

⁷⁶ Schulman, M., 'Communications in the Community: Critical Scholarship in an Emerging Field', in Wasko and Mosco (eds), pp. 28-41.

⁷⁷ Nigg and Wade, p. 7.

left-wing, London-based Local Radio Workshop (LRW). A non-profit organisation, the LRW provided programme-making facilities for the capital's varied community groups. Besides criticising London's three local radio stations for not using the programmes it produced, the LRW's main cause for concern was the absence of fully researched news and discussion programmes. In particular, the three stations were not involving local organisations whilst making these programmes. While discussing local radio in the general sense, Lewis and Booth were also critical of such community provision. The London stations and their counterparts elsewhere were criticised for giving airtime to churches and other national organisations instead of people from the local communities.⁷⁸ As the LRW acknowledged in their various reports, the locally-experienced community groups were having to give way to the more 'radio experienced' professional 'experts'.⁷⁹ Basing their observations on those of the LRW, Lewis and Booth continued by blaming the institutional nature of the BBC and ILR's 'commercial professionalism'. This was seen as part of the problem for the insistence on professionalism amongst presenters and programme makers often resulted in the poor representation of local views.⁸⁰

Furthermore, independent radio's failure to exploit community programming to its full potential might have resulted from its need to attract wider audiences. This became especially evident with the introduction of community stations during the 1990s, such as Birmingham's short-lived Choice FM (1995-1998). Highlighting the conflict between commercial viability and the need to satisfy community responsibility, Wall (1999) pointed to Choice's failure to provide the Afro-Caribbean service as promised in its licence application.⁸¹ Wall's thesis centred on music radio and its use in the construction of cultural identity; he argued that Choice had effectively alienated the community it set out to serve. Despite setting out with a full Afro-Caribbean service, the need to build an audience sufficient to attract advertisers meant Choice soon having to adopt a predominantly 'pop' format. Importantly, it had to relegate the Afro-Caribbean content to the off-peak period of evenings and weekends. Indeed, Wall advanced his analysis further by asking not just who

⁷⁸ Lewis and Booth, p. 101- 103.

⁷⁹ LRW, *Capital Radio Ltd* (London: Comedia, 1976); *Nothing Local About it: London's Local Radio*, (London: Comedia, 1983); and *Capital: Local Radio and Private Profit* (London: Comedia, 1984),

⁸⁰ An idea Booth put forward in report he produced for the IBA as part of its research fellowship scheme ; see Booth, J., *A Different Animal: Local Radio and the Community* (Independent Broadcasting Authority - Department of Sociology, University of Essex, 1978-1980), pp.132-133.

⁸¹ Wall, T., *Constructing Popular Music Radio: Music and Cultural Identity in Radio Station Discourse* (unpublished PhD thesis for University of Birmingham, 1999), pp. 1, 72-112.

possessed the power to identify a community, but also what ‘serving the community’ actually constituted?’⁸²

When discussing the developing interest in community media, it is important to consider the events in the political arena. By the early 1970s, Labour had already introduced local radio, and when returning to power in 1974 so its interest in community broadcasting grew. Importantly, a unified community media movement was to exert pressure on Labour to facilitate the introduction of community radio. Formed in 1977, the Community Communications Group (COMCOM) drew together the previously uncoordinated activities of the various local community media groups. Besides providing evidence to the Annan Committee into the future of broadcasting, (1974-1977), which had the additional remit to review local radio and its community provision, it was through its persuasion that Labour sanctioned five experimental cable-based community radio networks.⁸³

By the mid 1980s, interest in community radio was such that the Conservative government allowed for a network of experimental stations using low-powered VHF transmitters. This idea, too, undoubtedly resulted from pressure from within the community media movement. Drawing together the existing community radio operators - student and hospital ‘closed circuit’ networks and radio workshops for example, the Community Radio Association (CRA – the renamed COMCOM) used several conferences and feasibility studies to highlight the benefits of non-commercial community radio.⁸⁴ By developing an interventionist media policy, the newly elected left-wing administration of the Greater London Council (GLC) played its part, too. Forming part of its commitment to anti-racist/sexist policies and the funding of community arts, the GLC created its Community Radio Development Unit in 1982. As Lewis and Booth emphasised:

The Community Radio Development Unit became the best resourced centre of information, advice, research and funding in the country. Its Local Radio Forum which met for the first time in October 1982 identified areas for intervention and research – the latter on foreign experience, frequency space in London and public attitudes to community radio – and Afro-Caribbean, Asian and other minority groups

⁸² Ibid, p. 1.

⁸³ Shingler and Wieringa, p. 20

⁸⁴ Ibid; Hind and Mosco, pp. 4, 139.

became prominent in the community radio debate as a result of GLC interest and funding.⁸⁵

In understanding the development of community radio, it is again important to recognise the various factors at play. First was recognition that existing media outlets had failed to cater for what was now a more diverse society. Though the concept of a homogeneous population may have once proved adequate, Britain's transformation into a multi-cultural and a more mobile society meant the need for an increasingly diverse approach to broadcasting. Alongside the availability of cheap transmitting equipment which enabled an illegal output not covered by existing operators, there was a growing awareness amongst left-wing activists of those excluded from the media that gave rise to the interest in community-based radio stations. Above all, it is important to remember that the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the rise of the political left. Paternalistic left-wing local authorities and a Labour Party divided by the rise of its left-wing and were arguably symptomatic of this. The LRW and its criticism of London's local radio, too, fell within this context as did the GLC's interventionist media policy, which was a product of its policies on multi-culturalism.

Whilst the left disliked commercial radio, it was able to exert pressure, especially on the Labour government before 1979, in favour of community radio. Ironically, this bore fruit under the Conservatives when they planned to introduced a network of experimental stations in 1985. It appeared that there was some kind of party political consensus sympathetic to community radio by the early 1980s. Whereas Labour considered it as a 'forum for local democracy', the Conservatives regarded it as a means to 'enrich listener choice' and 'foster business enterprise'.⁸⁶ Indeed, it was for the idea that community radio would be a forum of local democracy that the Conservatives later abandoned their experiment. As Shingler and Wieringa pointed out:

Having received the applications, ministers feared that such [left-wing –inserted by author] orientated groups broadcasting during an election period could hamper their prospects of re-election, given that the majority of applications came from ethnic and left wing political groups. ... The Tories justified the decision by claiming that they needed time to consider the feasibility of the experiment. Then, in yet another about-face, the government agreed that the community radio project should be operated

⁸⁵ Lewis and Booth p. 106.

⁸⁶ Crisell (1997), p. 215.

within a free market economy and that any station would be permissible as long as it kept within the bounds of decency and good taste and, most important, was self-financing.⁸⁷

When community radio arrived in 1989 as a serious proposition, it was Shingler and Wieringa's latter point that was to shape its future. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, after having many of its governing rules relaxed by the IBA, ILR now consisted of a largely 'top 40' format. It was in response to this that the IBA capitulated to continuing pressure from the community radio lobby and licensed twenty-one 'incremental' community stations within existing ILR areas.⁸⁸

Conclusion

This aim of this chapter has been to provide a theoretical framework for subsequent chapters. In summing up, the importance of the political arena cannot be over emphasised. From creating the models of broadcasting to forming media policy, broadcasting was very much shaped by political thought. In Britain, this entailed the paternalism of the late nineteenth century through to the neo-liberalism of the late twentieth. When commercial television arrived during the 1950s it was still shaped by an ideology that recognised state intervention and government control. Moreover, and the next chapter will show how this was also the case with ILR, pressure group exertion and political thinking played a central role in the creation of ITV. Indeed, being a public service funded by spot advertising, ITV formed a compromise between the public and commercial models. Then during the 1980s government policy came under the influence of the political right - where deregulation and market forces were favoured over the idea of state control. From the BBC's internal market to cable and satellite television, so broadcasting, too, experienced its own share of deregulatory forces. There came the polarisation of British broadcasting. With the BBC retaining Reith's mission to entertain, inform and educate, having many of its informative duties removed the independent sector became more commercialised.

Whilst this later polarisation came beyond the time span of this particular study, it is imperative to remember that during the period under investigation commercial broadcasting was a compromise between Reith's concept of public service and the need to be

⁸⁷ Shingler and Wieringa, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Crisell (1994), p. 37.

commercially viable. Besides having to educate and inform, for it to attract audiences (and therefore advertisers) the duty to entertain was of particular importance. Audiences were central to the economics of running a television or radio station. From understanding audience reaction to the programmes broadcast to how, as a secondary medium, radio stations developed schedules that reflected the daily lives of their listeners, this chapter has therefore introduced this particular aspect of media studies. Importantly, both academic research and the community media groups had identified sections of the community who were excluded by the existing media. From either the ethnic minorities to those people seeking a particular type of niche music, there were sections of the community who felt neglected by radio stations. This had particular relevance for ILR. As will be evident from Chapter Six, which will examine the operations of BRMB and Beacon under a lighter regulation, West Midlands ILR was to experience its own share of pirate competition and criticism regarding community provision. Indeed, Choice FM demonstrated the paradox of operating a commercial station within a public service remit. It had to provide a community based service whilst at the same time be commercially viable, and as later chapters will show, this was a contradiction that was to also beset ILR.

Chapter Two

The Origins of Independent Local Radio

This chapter will consider the origins of Independent Local Radio (ILR) and will show how legalised commercial radio was largely shaped by post-war Conservatism which encouraged free enterprise within a framework of paternalism and state control. Concentrating on developments within the private and political spheres and ending with the 1972 Sound Broadcasting Act, the chapter will demonstrate how ILR was the culmination of a long drawn-out campaign. There was a discernible shift in favour of commercial radio broadcasting which gathered momentum in the 1960s, though the idea that broadcasters should have a public service remit remained influential.

Commercial radio before 1960

Despite the BBC's official monopoly of radio broadcasting, 'unofficial' commercial radio was a feature of British broadcasting almost from the start. A number of British entrepreneurs purchased airtime on European stations so that they could beam commercial programmes into Britain during the 1920s and 1930s.⁸⁹ Though these broadcasters achieved some success in attracting advertising and sponsorship, irregular scheduling and limited air time meant that they were often short-lived *ad hoc* affairs.⁹⁰

The first company to achieve any success was the International Broadcasting Company (IBC), created by Leonard Plugge, which by the early 1930s was enjoying a virtual monopoly of this form of broadcasting.⁹¹ Plugge opened stations in countries with governments that were more sympathetic to commercial radio than in Britain. Radio Normandie, based in France, was the most important IBC station. By 1930, it had developed a regular schedule of light popular music hosted by British announcers which proved to be

⁸⁹ For a narrative history of Normandie and Luxembourg see Baron (1975), and an analytical discussion, including their relationship with the BBC, see Browne (1985) and Scannell and Cardiff (1991). Baron, M., *Independent Radio: The Story of Independent Radio in the United Kingdom* (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1975), pp. 9-27; Browne, D.R., 'Radio Normandie and the IBC Challenge to the BBC Monopoly', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 5(1), (1985), pp. 3-18; Scannell P. and Cardiff, D., *A Social History of Broadcasting*, Vol. 1: 1922-1939, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp.230-231, 295-299.

⁹⁰ Browne, p. 4.

⁹¹ Baron, p. 15; Chapman. R., *Selling the Sixties: the Pirates and Pop Music Radio* (London: Routledge, 1992), P. 6.

the taste of listeners who had tired of what the BBC had to offer, especially on the so-called ‘Reith Sundays’.⁹² Though Normandie’s transmitters had a limited range – reaching mainly the east and southeast of England, the expanding network of relay exchanges (whose number had increased from 34 exchanges in 1929 to 343 exchanges in 1935) enabled a national coverage.⁹³

The success IBC enjoyed with Normandie was soon surpassed by Radio Luxembourg, established in 1933, for which Plugge’s company handled sales. With Luxembourg’s transmitter covering most of the British mainland, advertisers soon preferred it to Normandie for their national campaigns. In 1937, by which time advertising contracts with ninety British companies had been secured, Luxembourg had developed sufficiently to sever all ties with IBC. Normandie and Luxembourg provided the initial impetus for the advertising industry in Britain to campaign for commercial radio. Though the BBC and the Post Office’s efforts to prohibit the relays carrying Luxembourg and Normandie came to nothing, the outbreak of hostilities in continental Europe eventually caused both to abandon their English service. British advertisers, however, now had some experience of radio advertising.

Nevertheless, with the BBC having enhanced its prestige during the war and a Labour government in office, at first the outlook for commercial radio seemed unpromising. In 1951, the trade journal, the *Advertiser’s Weekly*, detected an industry-wide consensus that radio advertising would do more harm than good. Potential sponsors and the advertising industry itself feared an adverse reaction if any attempt was made to “foist” commercial broadcasting on an “antipathetic public”.⁹⁴ What is more, advertising agencies were satisfied with their existing outlets, including Radio Luxembourg, which had now resumed its English service.⁹⁵ Two years later, however, after the issue of the BBC’s monopoly had been explored by the Beveridge inquiry of 1951, attitudes appear to have changed. The advertising business was now divided on the issue with the Institute of Incorporated Practitioners being for commercial broadcasting and the rival Incorporated Society of British Advertisers being against. The prospect of commercial television was undoubtedly a factor and some agencies remained

⁹² Chapman, *ibid*; Street, S., *Crossing the Ether: British Public Service Radio and Commercial Competition 1922-1945* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006), P. 41.

⁹³ Street, p. 42.

⁹⁴ *Advertisers Weekly*, 18 January 1951.

⁹⁵ Camporesi, A., ‘There are no Kangaroos in Kent: the American Model and the introduction of Commercial Television’, in Ellwood, D. and Kroes, R. (eds), *Hollywood in Europe, Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony* (Amsterdam: V. U. University Press, 1994), pp. 270-271.

unwilling to risk antagonising - and possibly losing - their existing outlets in the newspaper press. The conservatism of some British agencies with loyalties to existing customers contrasted with the new American-owned agencies which were more inclined to embrace the use of radio and television.⁹⁶ Prominent amongst those promoting commercial radio was the London division of J. Walter Thompson, America's largest advertising agency, which was producing the popular *League of Ovaltineys* programme for Radio Luxembourg. It had already demonstrated its support for commercial broadcasting by publishing a pamphlet in 1946 that advocated advertising on the BBC.⁹⁷

Changing economic and social conditions in the late 1950s and early 1960s shifted opinion decisively in favour of commercial broadcasting. The end of rationing and introduction of ITV helped create the consumer boom of the late 1950s. In addition, the emerging youth culture and growing popularity of pop music generated a demand for new broadcasting outlets.⁹⁸ The BBC was not oblivious to these developments. With bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Beatles rising in the music charts, programmes such as Sunday's *Pick of the Pops* or those dedicated to new releases provided regular airings. However, there were limits to the extent to which the BBC could embrace the new pop culture. Restrictions on needle-time and the public service remit were factors to consider. The copyright rules introduced in 1956 limited the BBC to a needle-time of just twenty-eight hours per week. The BBC was also under obligation to cover all genres of music, not just the newer forms.⁹⁹ With Radio Caroline being the first in 1964, operating from outside British offshore limits, the pirate broadcasters of the mid 1960s were not hindered by such restrictions and could play as many records as they thought necessary to attract an audience.¹⁰⁰ Young consumers, enjoying unprecedented levels of affluence, provided a market for the pirates to exploit and advertisers to target. Record companies dissatisfied with the amount of airtime available for their new artists on the BBC and the invention of the transistor radio also contributed to the success of pirate radio.

⁹⁶ Camporesi, p. 270.

⁹⁷ Local Radio Workshop (LRW), *Nothing Local About It: London's Local Radio*, (London: Comedia, 1983), p. 8.

⁹⁸ Briggs, A., *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, vol. 4: Sound and Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 1018; Crisell, A., *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 77; Baron, p. 57.

⁹⁹ Chapman, pp. 21-23; Barnard, S., *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), p. viii.

¹⁰⁰ Street, p. 105.

Politically, it was Conservatives that recognised the demand for an officially sanctioned commercial radio service.¹⁰¹ Though the Beveridge Report had rejected commercial broadcasting in any form, including a suggestion that the BBC should be partly funded through advertising, Selwyn Lloyd's minority report recommended a regulated system of commercial radio and television.¹⁰² With the advent of commercial television in 1955 and the Conservatives winning again at the 1959 general election, hopes were raised that a radio counterpart would be introduced. Lord Teynham raised the issue of the BBC's radio monopoly and the introduction of commercial radio in the House of Lords in November 1959, just eight months before the first sitting of the Pilkington Committee which had been set up to determine the future of British broadcasting. Importantly, he emphasised how commercial broadcasting was no longer an unknown territory. In attempting to dispel the fear that advertisers would dominate commercial radio, Teynham pointed to the fact that only six per cent of Radio Luxembourg's airtime was devoted to commercials. He also argued that it would be beneficial to the economy if advertisers bought airtime on British rather than foreign stations.¹⁰³

Pilkington on local sound broadcasting: the BBC's case for local radio

As well as the future of the BBC and ITV, Pilkington was asked to consider the question of local sound broadcasting. Both the BBC and the commercial sector provided evidence as to what form they thought local radio should take. Despite finding no evidence of a public demand for local radio, it was the BBC's plans that swayed Pilkington's final recommendation. "If a service of local sound broadcasting is introduced", his report stated in June 1962, "it must be in the hands of an 'answerable public corporation'." By this, he meant that the BBC was the only suitable body to run local radio. Pilkington's proposal has to be seen in the light of his critical view of the ITA which, he argued, had failed to exert sufficient control over the ITV companies whose populist programming was seen as detrimental to the "essential public objective of providing the best possible service of broadcasting".¹⁰⁴ In effect, Pilkington simply restated the arguments presented by the BBC in its evidence. With commercial radio having to compete for audiences, valuable airtime - which would have otherwise been used for informative programming and to meet the needs of minorities - would have been lost to costly needle time. The BBC also argued that commercial local

¹⁰¹ Baron, p. 57; Crisell, p. 143

¹⁰² Briggs, pp. 390-392.

¹⁰³ *Times*, 27 November 1959.

¹⁰⁴ Cmnd. 1753, *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting* (Pilkington Report), (1962), paras 810, 576, and 819.

broadcasting on sound radio would be less likely to serve the interests of particular localities as it could only be economically viable through the use of networking.¹⁰⁵

Pilkington also argued that local broadcasting, financed by the licence fee and thus free from dependence on advertisers, would be more likely to be innovative.¹⁰⁶ Impressed with the BBC plan to utilise local organisations, Pilkington suggested that local stations should be supported by local advisory committees.¹⁰⁷ Such a service, the BBC had argued in its evidence, “would be of real value to the framework of public service broadcasting”. Moreover, the use of local stations combined with the national networks would enable a more comprehensive service than had “hitherto been possible in sound broadcasting”. Though the BBC’s plan to establish between 80 and 90 stations over five years was ambitious, its declared aim of encouraging churches, schools and local authorities, even the local press, to participate would enable each station to offer a service tailored to its particular area. Even though large audiences were not expected, it was companionship that was on offer. As well as providing information on local affairs, the BBC promised to bring local personalities to the microphone. This would ensure that local radio stations were “close to the ordinary preoccupations” of their listeners.¹⁰⁸

As Lewis and Booth pointed out, it was the BBC’s commitment to ‘localness’ that was most appealing. In an age of big business and increasingly centralised government, there was “ideological mileage” in the idea of locality.¹⁰⁹ It helped the BBC’s case that its radio service was already run on a regional basis and that it was already experimenting with the low-powered but highly directional VHF frequency. In 1951 Beveridge had recommended that this should be used to develop local broadcasting.¹¹⁰ It was also important that in Frank Gillard, head of programmes in Bristol, the BBC had a strong advocate of local broadcasting. In a 1955 memorandum, Gillard had argued that ways had to be found to concentrate some broadcasts on a local rather than a regional basis if the BBC was to provide a real community service.¹¹¹ Gillard’s experimentation and research helped persuade the

¹⁰⁵ Cmnd. 1819, *Paper Number 28, BBC Memorandum (Number 12): The Future of Sound Broadcasting, Local Broadcasting*, (February 1961), paras. 222-224.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, paras. 842, 845.

¹⁰⁷ Cmnd. 1753, paras. 842, 843.

¹⁰⁸ Cmnd. 1819, *BBC memorandum*, (February 1961), paras. 12-15.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis and Booth, p. 90.

¹¹⁰ Cmd. 8116, *Report of the Broadcasting Committee (Beveridge Report)*, (1951), para. 295.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Briggs, A., *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. 5: *Competition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1018.

BBC's own Marriott Committee (1959) to recommend the development of local radio, prompting the Corporation to begin pressuring the government.¹¹² Writing to the Postmaster General in April 1960, Director General Hugh Greene had indicated the BBC's wish to open six local stations within twelve months, and a further eighteen by April 1964.¹¹³

Despite the Conservative government quietly forgetting Pilkington's ideas on local radio the BBC's campaign continued.¹¹⁴ In 1963, Gillard and Greene championed their cause through a series of articles in the local and regional press. Gillard, now Director of Sound Broadcasting, compared local radio's usefulness to that of a local newspaper and stressed its cost-effectiveness, arguing that stations could exist with just a few tape recorders and a VHF transmitter. Greene, while also stressing that local radio was relatively inexpensive, also linked it to the idea of a "University of the Air".¹¹⁵ This meant that the BBC was well placed to take advantage of the changing political climate after Labour was elected in 1964 and again in 1966.

Permission for the BBC to proceed with its plans for local radio finally came in 1967 with the Marine, Etc., Broadcasting (Offences) Act.¹¹⁶ Though the BBC's argument now centred on local democracy and the possibilities that local radio could offer in furthering democratic debate, circumstances had changed since Pilkington had published his report. Wilson's Labour government was eager to close down the pirates while the Conservative opposition had now decided to back local commercial radio. Seeking to address the problem of the pirates caused the government to call for a total reshaping of BBC radio, and local radio was to form part of this. Radio One was to provide a pop-based service to replace the outlawed illegal operators; local radio would serve local communities. Whilst this was to form the future of BBC radio, like its local radio service, community participation, local advisory committees and adherence to the principles of public service broadcasting were to play a major role in the shape of commercial radio when it did finally arrive.

¹¹² BBC, *Area and Local Broadcasting: Report of a Committee to the Director, Sound Broadcasting*, (BBC, 1 September, 1959), cited in Briggs (1995), p. 629.

¹¹³ Briggs (1995), p. 628.

¹¹⁴ Lewis and Booth, p. 26.

¹¹⁵ Briggs (1995), p. 632.

¹¹⁶ Cmnd. 3189, Marine etc, Broadcasting Offences Act, (1967).

The Commercial Radio Lobby and its Evidence to Pilkington

A loose alliance in favour of commercial radio was in existence before the Pilkington inquiry; its members supplied evidence to the inquiry and continued to campaign after it had reported.¹¹⁷ Its most determined supporters were those individuals and organisations who had registered their own radio companies. Many had powerful backers. The Rank Organisation registered 29 companies throughout the country; the owners of the ITV companies created others. Harlech Television's Lord Tenby and Westward Television's Peter Cadbury both registered stations with a view to operating within the area covered by their television franchises.¹¹⁸ It was clear from the evidence presented to the Pilkington inquiry that the lobby for commercial radio represented a broad spectrum of opinion. There were those wishing for an unregulated 'free-for-all.' Then there were those who recognised that local commercial radio, if introduced, would be heavily regulated. In seeking to gain favour from Pilkington, they tended to stress the idea that local commercial radio would bring 'public service without public expenditure.'¹¹⁹

We have already witnessed how, by the early 1960s, the advertising industry was united in its support for commercial broadcasting. Though in its overview of the pressure for commercial radio the left-wing Local Radio Workshop (LRW) was partially correct in assuming that the advertising industry simply saw radio as another means to make money, it was obvious from the industry's evidence to Pilkington that there were those who recognised there would be some form of regulation.¹²⁰ The Advertising Inquiry Council, representing the interests of consumers, cautiously welcomed the idea of a commercially-funded local radio service but, with the experience of independent television in mind, demanded much stronger safeguards against the apparent cases of offensive and undesirable advertising.¹²¹ The Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBC) was in favour of an information-led local radio but objected to it being financed through the BBC licence fee.¹²² Instead, it looked to either a purely commercial service or one provided by the BBC but funded through advertising. To some extent, the ISBC echoed the BBC's argument for local involvement; local ownership would provide an incentive for a "valuable and popular" local news and

¹¹⁷ For an overview of the commercial radio lobby see the Local Radio Workshop, pp. 7-17.

¹¹⁸ LRW, p. 10; *Times*, 13 October, 21 November 1961.

¹¹⁹ Lewis, P.M. and Booth, J., *The Invisible Medium, Public, Commercial & Community Radio* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 90.

¹²⁰ LRW, p. 9.

¹²¹ Cmnd. 1815, *Paper Number 188, Memorandum, Advertising Inquiry Council*, (January, 1961),

¹²² *Ibid*, *Paper Number 191, Memorandum, Incorporated Society of British Advertisers*, (February, 1961).

information service, though it was important to offer something different.¹²³ “To be of real use as well as entertainment value”, it continued, “there would seem to be little value in local sound broadcasting if it did not provide information about local commercial affairs, from department stores to daily market prices and the availability of goods in the shops”.¹²⁴ In contrast, the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) took a purely commercial view, emphasising radio’s potential as an advertising medium especially during the daytime and evening “non-television” hours.¹²⁵

The local press also featured prominently in the commercial local radio lobby. In anticipation of Pilkington recommending the introduction of commercial radio, some had already registered radio companies/stations within their circulation areas. EMAP (the East Midlands Allied Press) registered ten in the East Midlands and East Anglia while in central southern England the Southern Broadcasting Company (which was backed by several local papers) had registered a further eleven.¹²⁶ In Bristol, Bristol and West of England Radio comprised a number of press backers.¹²⁷ As Pilkington noted in his final report, the major newspapers/groups had provided detailed evidence of their plans for local commercial radio.¹²⁸ Home Counties Newspapers, which owned fourteen newspapers in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, had formed four subsidiary radio companies. In emphasising the service it could provide for the community, it argued that the local knowledge acquired through its newspaper business would place it in an ideal position to run a local radio station. With start-up costs in the region of £15,000 - £20,000 per station and annual operational costs of between £20,000 and £30,000 local radio would be both cost-effective and viable. A regulatory regime similar to commercial television was anticipated.¹²⁹

However, not all within the newspaper industry were totally committed to commercial radio. The industry was divided on how it saw commercial radio. As H.R. Pratt-Boorman, the President of the Newspaper Society, had explained in November 1960:

¹²³ Ibid, para. 21.

¹²⁴ Ibid, para. 19.

¹²⁵ Ibid, *Paper Number 192, Memorandum, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising*, (December, 1960), para. 9.

¹²⁶ *Times*, 7 November 1960; Cmnd. 1753, Paper 211.

¹²⁷ *Times*, 26 October 1960.

¹²⁸ Cmnd. 1753, para. 815.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

[Though commercial radio would be a natural development of newspapers] not all are at one in their approach to this development. Some favour the introduction of a new competitor at a local level. Others only wish to run stations if local radio is permitted. Adventurous ones are looking forward to a new medium with new techniques to be integrated with their own newspapers.¹³⁰

As the evidence of the Newspaper Society to Pilkington confirmed, however, the main concern of newspaper proprietors was the threat to their core business. As W.R.H. Coleman of the *Sheerness Guardian* confirmed, if local commercial radio was introduced then local press involvement should be a prerequisite.¹³¹ “If only for their survival”, Coleman stated, “the local press needed to be involved in what would be a major competitor”.¹³² Larger newspaper groups, such as such as EMAP or Home Counties were looking to establish their own stations. The smaller publishers, those without the financial muscle to do likewise, merely wanted the chance to become involved in the stations that were established by others. While there were other reasons for Pilkington’s decision to offer local radio to the BBC (see above) concerns regarding the emergence of local media monopolies may also have been a factor, though he did recognise that the viability of local newspapers would be undermined if local commercial radio went ahead without them.¹³³

The *Guardian* highlighted the variety of approaches when it analysed the commercial radio lobby in March 1961. When establishing Radio Yorkshire in 1959, Conservative MP Geoffrey Hirst had rejected a service based on local ‘butcher and baker’ advertising and instead wanted an emphasis national advertising. The radio and television manufacturer Pye, favouring a combination of both national and local advertising, looked to spot advertising with costs varying between ten shillings and £1 per minute. Bristol’s News of the West recommended twelve-minutes of advertising per hour while its neighbour, Bristol and West, looked to six-minutes. With regard to programming, Southern Radio wanted separate programmes for schools, religion and art interspersed with local weather reports and information for yachtsmen. News of the West, on the other hand, was promoting a highly localised light entertainment service. Where some believed there was no need for network

¹³⁰ *Times*, 29 November 1960.

¹³¹ Cmnd. 1815. *Paper Number 206, Memorandum, W.R.H. Coleman, Esq., Director of Walter J. Cole Limited, Sheerness Times-Guardian*, (December 1960), *Paper Number 209, Memorandum, Newspaper Society*, (December 1960).

¹³² *Ibid, Paper 206*.

¹³³ Cmnd. 1753, paras. 832, 845.

programming, there were others that envisaged small networks that would mushroom into larger syndicates. The only areas of universal agreement were on the importance of forty per cent needle-time and the providing of a local rather than regional service.¹³⁴

The Campaign for Commercial Radio: Post Pilkington

The campaign for commercial radio continued after the publication of the Pilkington report in 1962. Many involved had already given evidence to Pilkington. Prominent amongst these were Pye and the Isle of Man government. A major player in the campaign for commercial television, Pye entered the campaign for commercial radio in autumn 1960 with plans for up to one hundred stations on both VHF and medium wave.¹³⁵ By using a mock-up station it created for the 1960 Cambridge Royal Show, it even played recordings to Pilkington of what it thought commercial radio would sound like. In 1964 Pye joined Richard L. Meyer to form Manx Radio; the Isle of Man Government having already registered Radio Manx in 1959.¹³⁶ Besides an attempt to stop mainland companies from getting a foothold on the island, it was hoped that Radio Manx, with its planned 100kW medium wave transmitter (which would have almost certainly been heard throughout Britain), would help the island's tourist trade. The Manx government, however, was subject to the 1949 Telecommunications Act whereby any licence issued by the Post Office would have restricted transmissions to the lightly populated island area, making the station commercially unviable.

Whilst the company remained dormant, the Meyer/Pye consortium joined the Isle of Man government in persuading the Post Office to licence a local VHF service in 1964. Gaining permission for a further medium wave transmitter the following year, the jointly-owned Isle of Man Broadcasting Company developed what were a series of experimental broadcasts into a twelve-hour service of music, local news and information. Despite Meyer and Pye selling their interests to the Isle of Man Government in 1968, Manx Radio was considered the prototype local commercial radio station.¹³⁷ Relying on local advertising and with a staff of only fourteen, including four full-time presenters, the company was running at

¹³⁴ *Guardian*, 18 March 1961.

¹³⁵ 'A Plan for Local Broadcasting', *Times*, 17 October 1960.

¹³⁶ Cmnd. 1815; *Paper Number 187, Report, Isle of Man Government*; Meyer, R.L., *The Future of Local Broadcasting in Britain: a Report on a Successful Experiment in Government Authorised Commercial Radio*, (London: Richard L. Meyer Associates, 1966), p. 4; Baron, p. 28.

¹³⁷ Baron, p. 30.

a profit within two years.¹³⁸ As it was only heard on the island, it attracted little advertising revenue from national companies, and thus demonstrated that a station could survive on predominantly locally-generated income. Importantly, it demonstrated that commercial radio was capable of providing a community-based public service. Local news, local sport, local transport information, local religion, police messages, tourist information and reports on local organisations featured in its daily output.¹³⁹

Each of Manx's senior management had a proven record in commercial and public broadcasting. Meyer himself was general manager of IBC (1932-1940) and director of BBC Forces Broadcasting in the Middle East (1943-1946) before forming his own commercial company, Meyer Davenport, in South Africa, where he assumed control of its Lourenco Marques commercial radio station. Later he took the same role of commercial manager at ITV's Associated Television (ATV) before joining with others to form Richard Meyer Associates in 1959. Gerald Stacy was also ex-ATV and had been responsible for some of commercial television's earliest audience research. Philip Cookman, too, was involved with ITV through its Associated Rediffusion, Scottish Television and Independent Television News contractors. Another significant appointment was David Pinnell, a long-standing associate of Meyer, who joined Manx in 1965 after a two-year study of commercial broadcasting in America and Europe, and was later to be managing director at Birmingham Broadcasting (BRMB Radio).¹⁴⁰

A by-product of the interest in commercial radio was the proliferation of individuals and organisations offering to assist the campaign and advise those wanting to establish stations. For example, Meyer and his associates established an international consultancy service building on their previous careers and their more recent experience at Manx. Many who had been actively involved in the commercial television lobby now turned their attention to commercial radio. Norman Collins, who had left the BBC to lead the campaign for commercial television in the early 1950s, formed the Independent Broadcasting Services (IBS) consultancy service.¹⁴¹ By 1964 the Popular Television Association had metamorphosed into the National Broadcasting Development Committee (NBDC); it

¹³⁸ Meyer, p. 6.

¹³⁹ Ibid, pp. 4 and 18-23.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp.24-25 for Pinnell's career. He was also Commercial Manager – Lourenco Marques (1946-1955), Special Projects Manager and General Sales Manager - ATV (the ITV contractor), Managing Director Meyer Davenport with directorships at Rhodesian (1962) and Zambian Television (1963).

¹⁴¹ LRW, p. 10.

operated as a political pressure group and as a channel of communication between interested organisations. The IBS and NBDC then merged to form the Local Broadcasting Association.¹⁴² In 1966, Radio Luxembourg and ITV personality Hughie Green established Commercial Broadcasting Consultants (CBC) to offer advice on projected operational costs and attracting advertisers and programming.¹⁴³ The most prominent of the representative organisations was the Local Radio Association (LRA) which was formed in 1964 by right-wing MP John Gorst, who had already established organisations such as the Telephone Users Association and the Enterprise Association - which campaigned against nationalisation, and ex-Pye advertising manager John Witney. The LRA represented the interests of over 120 companies and handled the proposals for over 270 stations.¹⁴⁴

Finally, the popularity and success of the offshore pirate radio stations cannot be over emphasised. As the government sought to outlaw the pirates in 1966, so public opinion demonstrated their popularity. Rallies, including a 'Free-Radio Week' which culminated in a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square during the summer of 1967, demonstrated the popularity of pirate radio and the strength of opposition to the government's plans. Much of this was organised by the Commercial Radio Listeners Association (later renamed the Free Radio Association), which also published a short-lived magazine, *Radio News*, carrying news and information on each pirate station and a free supplement for national advertisers.¹⁴⁵ Importantly, with an annual audience of ten to fifteen million listeners and with revenue of approximately £2 million in 1965, the pirate operators demonstrated the benefits of commercial radio to potential operators and advertisers alike.¹⁴⁶ By 1967, the year when pirate broadcasting was banned, advertising agencies were recommending them to clients. By 1970, with the pirate stations no longer on the air, the advertising industry was even developing its own plans for a series of regional stations.¹⁴⁷

The impetus behind the commercial radio movement was such that by the time the Conservatives were returned to office at the 1970 general election over 400 radio companies

¹⁴² *Times*, 11 October 1962, 15 May 1964.

¹⁴³ Baron, p. 61.

¹⁴⁴ Sampson, A., *The New Anatomy of Britain*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), p. 17; LRW, p. 12; Barnard, p. 69.

¹⁴⁵ Chapman, p. 183; Knot, H., 'The Fight for Free Radio: the Political Action of Offshore Radio's Fan Base, 1969-1964', *Journal on Media Culture*, 6, (2003), pp. 1-25.

¹⁴⁶ Crisell, pp. 137-139.

¹⁴⁷ *Times*, 24 June 1966; LRW, p. 9.

had been formed.¹⁴⁸ Those setting up companies each had their own agenda for moving into commercial radio. The advertising industry saw radio advertising as a new outlet for its clients. The local press looked at protecting and expanding its own interests. Then there were companies such as Pye which not only hoped to operate its own stations but also hoped to benefit from helping to establish the necessary infrastructure. Importantly, even though it had not been introduced, there was still money to be made from commercial radio. Intertwined with the above were organisations, such as the LRA or the CBC, which advised prospective radio companies and acted as advocates for commercial radio generally. Amongst other sundry beneficiaries, solicitors would profit from the registration and sale of off-the-peg ‘shell’ companies. One example was Birmingham Broadcasting which was registered in 1961 by the Birmingham firm of Pinsents. Pinsents were also solicitors to the Birmingham Post and Mail newspaper group (BPM) and Birmingham Broadcasting was to pass over to the BPM which in turn used it as a vehicle with which to enter independent radio (see Chapter Four).¹⁴⁹ The lobby had developed to such an extent such that newspapers, television companies, entertainment organisations and publishing groups were all involved.¹⁵⁰ With a Conservative government in office that was sympathetic to commercial broadcasting, it seemed that its time had come.

Developing Conservative Policy: Towards ILR

As the BBC developed its plans for local radio at the beginning of 1965, the Conservatives began formulating ideas for a commercial counterpart. Moreover, as Labour compiled the White Paper paving the way for a BBC-operated service, the *Daily Mail* was claiming that, had the Conservatives won the 1964 Election, then commercial radio would already be a reality.¹⁵¹ A small number of Conservatives had been helping the campaign for commercial radio since 1959. When reporting Hirst’s creation of Radio Yorkshire, the *Times* noted the emergence of:

... A small energetic group of Conservative backbenchers who played an influential part behind the scenes in the campaign for commercial television have for sometime been pressing the Government to take one further step and break the BBC’s sound

¹⁴⁸ LRW, p. 12

¹⁴⁹ Lord Iliffe, member of Iliffe family, owners of Birmingham Post and Mail Group and instigator of Birmingham Broadcasting, and Geoffrey Battman, Birmingham Broadcasting financial director, interviewed by the author, 10 October 2005.

¹⁵⁰ *Times*, 29 March, 1971.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Mail*, 10 February 1965.

broadcasting monopoly. They have canvassed their views in the private meetings of the Conservative Broadcasting and Communications Committee.¹⁵²

Indeed, by this time, a number of Conservative MPs were already involved with organisations interested in commercial radio. Besides Hirst and his Radio Yorkshire group, Ulster Unionist Lawrence Orr, chair of the party's broadcasting committee, sat on the board of two Pye subsidiaries. Sir Tufton Beamish was a director of Southern Broadcasting while Sir Frederick Bennett was connected with Southwestern Broadcasting.¹⁵³ Others such as John Hay (Rediffusion), Selwyn Lloyd (Rank) and John Rodgers (J. Walter Thompson) also had connections with advertising and communications.¹⁵⁴ Alongside Beamish, a number of Conservatives were also members of the NBDC.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Ronald Simms, formerly chief publicity officer for the party, was chair of the NBDC while Sir Harmar Nichols, chair of Conservative Broadcasting Committee, was a director of Radio Luxembourg.¹⁵⁶ On the other side of the House, Maverick Labour MP and broadcaster Woodrow Wyatt was chairman of a Banbury-based radio company.

Though in 1964 Simms denied any links with the pirate broadcasters, a connection between them and the Conservatives developed as the decade progressed.¹⁵⁷ In 1966, as Labour prepared its legislation to outlaw the pirates, Radio London and Radio Caroline, the principal pirate stations, looked to the Conservatives for support. Paul Bryan, Conservative spokesman on the Post Office and on broadcasting from 1965, had already visited Radio 270, owned by Wilf Proudfoot, a former Conservative MP, and had also held talks with representatives of Radio Caroline.¹⁵⁸ Ted Allbeury, owner of Radio 390, who claimed that over 70 Conservative and Liberal MPs now supported 'free broadcasting', twice addressed the Conservative Broadcasting Committee.¹⁵⁹ Those stations remaining active supported the Conservatives in the run up to the 1970 election.¹⁶⁰ Besides providing airtime for the Free Radio movement, former Caroline owner Ronan O'Rahilly used his Radio Northsea ship,

¹⁵² *Times*, 26 November 1959.

¹⁵³ LRW, p. 13; Roth, A., *New Statesman*, 9 October 1970, pp. 441-442.

¹⁵⁴ Roth, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Times*, 15 May 1964.

¹⁵⁶ LRW, p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ *Times*, 15 May, 1964.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*; *Guardian*, 15 October 1966.

¹⁵⁹ *Guardian*, 15 October 1966.

¹⁶⁰ LRW, p. 14.

anchored just off the Essex coast and renamed ‘Caroline International’, to broadcast a constant barrage of anti-Labour propaganda.¹⁶¹

It was while opposing Labour’s legislation to outlaw the pirates that Bryan effectively announced the Conservative’s support for the pirates, praising them for offering listeners a choice. Labour “needed to learn the lessons”, he observed before promising that a future Conservative government would allow them to continue broadcasting until an alternative form of land-based local radio could be agreed.¹⁶² This was whilst the Conservative party’s annual conference had signalled its commitment to local commercial radio even more clearly. Eldon Griffiths MP’s avocation of ‘an alternative source of sound broadcasting’ received overwhelming support.¹⁶³ Importantly, as well as expressing the desire for a wider choice in listening and scope for greater enterprise and competitiveness, Griffiths’ address also referred to the public service remit:

[A future Conservative] Broadcasting Bill should reaffirm the public service principles of the BBC and preserve its licence revenue; should permit a wide variety of broadcasting companies in main centres of population with each station required to devote a substantial proportion of time to local affairs. No one person or company would be allowed to control more than a limited number of stations. Other programme companies would be able to compete in supplying stations with material.¹⁶⁴

The Conservatives, therefore, entered the 1970 General Election with the promise to introduce local commercial radio.¹⁶⁵ This formed part of a commitment to stimulate Britain’s “uncompetitive” economy that characterised the party’s manifesto and was in line with the idea that state industries should be more exposed to market forces in order to make them more efficient.¹⁶⁶ It also seems likely that commercial radio was designed to appeal to the 18-21 year-olds who were allowed to vote for the first time at the 1970 general election. Conservative research following the defeats in 1964 and 1966 had pinpointed a new young,

¹⁶¹ Ibid; Baron, pp. 59-60.

¹⁶² *Guardian, Times*, 15 October 1966.

¹⁶³ *Times*, 12 October 1966.

¹⁶⁴ *Times* 15 October 1966.

¹⁶⁵ *A Better Tomorrow*, Conservative Party Manifesto, 1970, reprinted in Craig, F.W.S., (ed), *British General Election Manifestos: 1900-1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 325-344.

¹⁶⁶ Clark, P., *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900 – 1990* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 413; Blake, R., *The Conservative Party From Peel to Thatcher* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 304.

skilled working class voter, traditionally aligned to Labour but now willing to break with tradition.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, while the impact of Caroline International's anti-Labour broadcasts on voters in the south-east is open to debate, Labour's alienation of younger voters through its policy of outlawing the pirates has already been noted.

Facilitating the move toward commercial radio were important changes in the political landscape. Coinciding with the Conservative's new 'scientific' approach to electioneering was a widening ideological gap between the two main parties as the post-war consensus began to break down. It was while the party was in opposition after 1964, as Anthony Sampson pointed out, that traditional Tory organs such as the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph* and even a revived *Spectator* began to carry articles by former left-wing writers and commentators. Novelists John Braine (*Room at the Top*) and Kingsley Amis (*Lucky Jim*) had become disillusioned with Wilson's government and were now adopting a distinctly right-wing slant.¹⁶⁸ The influence of the intellectual right and right-wing pressure groups was increasingly felt. The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), founded in 1955, was especially active in promoting free market ideas.¹⁶⁹

The IEA had long been an advocate of commercial radio. In 1965, just as the BBC was being given permission to experiment with local radio, an IEA pamphlet, *Competition in Radio*, was calling for its future development to be shaped by the "competitive conditions" of free enterprise. The "central authorities" of the state and the BBC had unfairly restricted access to the airwaves, as the Pilkington recommendations clearly demonstrated, and this was not supported by public opinion. The audiences for Normandie, Luxembourg and for pirate radio were ample proof of the popularity of commercial radio. Moreover, the experience of Australia and the United States indicated that public and private radio could coexist. With access to a 'reliable' news service and an adherence to existing advertising standards, including just six minutes of advertising in each hour, commercial radio was capable of a "reputable" service. Looking to the current situation, commercial radio would help both the BBC and the music industry. The BBC, it was argued, would gain through the

¹⁶⁷ Blake, p. 304.

¹⁶⁸ Sampson, p. 121.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 120.

sale of additional radio licenses, while the music industry would also benefit through the airing of ‘pre-leases’ supplied by the record companies.¹⁷⁰

Though the IEA were on the periphery of Tory policymaking at this time, the Bow Group was much better placed to influence party policy. Formed in 1951, and characterised mainly by a social conscience with a tolerance towards the welfare state, it represented the (as then) new, younger and “intellectually questioning” Tory MP.¹⁷¹ The Bow Group’s influence on party policy did not come to the fore until after the 1970 election.¹⁷² Whereas there were only seventeen members under the Macmillan/Home leadership, by the time Heath came to power there were 38, seven of whom entered the new cabinet including Geoffrey Howe (Solicitor General), David Howell (Civil Service Minister) and, most significantly, Christopher Chataway, the new Minister of Posts and Telecommunications.¹⁷³ Chataway’s first major decision upon taking office was to suspend the Annan Committee, recently set up by the outgoing Labour government to consider the renewal of the BBC and ITA charters and likely to prove an obstacle to Conservative plans for commercial local radio.¹⁷⁴ Chataway’s major decision was to invite interested parties to submit their ideas as to what form the new commercial service should take.¹⁷⁵ This prompted many organisations and individuals to show their hands, as indicated by the *Times* which was devoting in a half-page article on the prospect of commercial radio.¹⁷⁶

It was the Bow Group, a long-time advocate of commercial radio, which was to exert the most important influence on policy. This was hardly surprising as Chataway was himself a Bow Group member. As early as 1962, it had suggested that the BBC’s planned local stations be partially commercially funded and now its *Home Town Radio* document of September 1970 was providing the blueprint for what was to become ILR.¹⁷⁷ The proposals in *Home Town* were designed to build on the Tory election pledge of a locally-led private enterprise radio and there were many similarities between these and what actually transpired. Though sponsored programming and multiple stations in the major city areas were not to

¹⁷⁰ Thomas, D., *Competition in Radio*, Occasional Paper no. 5, (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, May 1965), pp. 3-4, 9-11, 19.

¹⁷¹ Sampson, p. 113.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Barnard, pp. 59–60.

¹⁷⁵ *Times*, 17 January 1971.

¹⁷⁶ ‘The Campaign for Independent Broadcasting’, *Times*, 12 January 1971.

¹⁷⁷ Kelly, T., (et al), *Home Town Radio*, (Bow Group Occasional Papers, (September 1970).

feature in ILR, many other Bow Group ideas were later adopted, such as a national news service, simultaneous broadcasting on medium wave and VHF and restrictions on advertising time. Many of the Bow Group's policies relating to contactors were also taken up: potential contractors were to be vetted regarding their financial viability, the extent to which they were funded by local investment and their programme plans; they were to pay a rental for use of transmitters, and would lose their licenses if they defaulted. The Bow Group also envisaged the broad shape of the regulatory arrangements that were later adopted. As the ITA was already burdened with its responsibility for ITV, it envisaged a new Central Radio Authority (CRA) supported by Local Radio Authorities (LRA) which would allocate franchises and oversee their daily operation.¹⁷⁸ Though the ITA did eventually assume responsibility for commercial radio, it did establish a separate Radio Division which was subdivided into regional versions of *Home Town's* LRAs. Overriding all the Bow Group's proposals was the idea of a commercially-funded, community-based PSB service. This reflected the social conscience of the Bow Group and its acceptance of state paternalism.¹⁷⁹

An Alternative Source of Broadcasting

In understanding how this was transposed into the *Alternative Source of Broadcasting* White Paper, a useful starting point would be to examine the actual words used. The key words were 'alternative' and 'independent'. The new Conservative government believed that people were entitled to an *alternative* radio service. As with ITV some fifteen years before, Independent Local Radio was to be a radio service *independent* of that provided by the BBC.¹⁸⁰ Like ITV, it would be funded through the sale of spot advertising. With the ITA changing its title to the Independent Broadcasting Authority, it would even be placed under the same regulator.

This reflected the continuation of Britain's paternalistic broadcasting policy. As Brian Young, IBA Director General, from 1970 to 1978, later pointed out:

Paternalism as operated by the IBA was essentially protective and preservative; television and radio should be available everywhere, not just in the obviously profitable metropolitan areas, so that the individual's equal right to the signal was upheld. Paternalism ensured high technical and artistic standards and a commitment

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ Lewis and Booth, p. 9.

to quality – output must not consist only of programmes that pay their way – which overrode the commercial imperative. It guaranteed impartiality and balance on matters of controversy and protected the programme-makers, and by implication, the public they represented, from editorial interference by political parties or advertisers.¹⁸¹

It is also important to consider the nature of the new Heath administration which, though it contained a more middle-class, business-minded intake, was reluctant to abandon the paternalistic ideal.¹⁸² Seldon has argued that despite promising a tougher, market-orientated economy, Heath was never a believer in *laissez-faire*. He belonged to a Tory tradition that put the state at the heart of economic and social policy.¹⁸³

Barnard's account of the introduction of ILR essentially echoes this analysis. Despite the rhetoric of free enterprise, the "revolutionary" manifesto still offered "traditional Macmillanite conservatism ... presided over by a traditional Macmillan lieutenant".¹⁸⁴ Deeply suspicious of radical change, Heath followed Macmillan's inheritance by seeing the business world as a servant of the nation; industry and commerce were for the benefit of the people rather than those running it.¹⁸⁵ This was critical in shaping the government's attitude to commercial radio. Take Heath's replacing Paul Bryan with Lord Carrington during his final Shadow Cabinet reshuffle before the 1970 general election. It was Bryan's outspoken support for the creation of up to a hundred local commercial radio stations that caused Heath to replace him as front bench spokesman on broadcasting.¹⁸⁶ Where Bryan, who was to become a director of Piccadilly Radio - Manchester's ILR station, represented the forces of commercialism, Carrington, who at the time was leader of the Conservative peers and became Secretary for Defence after the election, represented the Party's traditional dislike of pure market forces. Thus, while the importance of private enterprise was acknowledged

¹⁸¹ Sir Brian Young, Watt Club Lecture 1883, quoted in Barnard, p. 71.

¹⁸² Ramsden, J., 'The Prime Minister and the Making of Policy' in Ball, S., and Seldon, A., (et al), *The Heath Government 1970-1974* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 22; Roth, p. 442.

¹⁸³ Seldon, A., 'The Heath Government in History' in Ball and Seldon, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸⁴ Barnard, p. 71.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid; Roth, p. 442.

¹⁸⁶ Obituary, Sir Paul Brian, *Independent*, 14 October 2004; R¹⁸⁶ Sir Brian Young, Watt Club Lecture 1883, quoted in Barnard, p. 71.

¹⁸⁶ Ramsden, J., 'The Prime Minister and the Making of Policy' in Ball, S., and Seldon, A., (et al), *The Heath Government 1970-1974* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 22; Roth, p. 442.

¹⁸⁶ Seldon, A., 'The Heath Government in History' in Ball and Seldon, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸⁶ Barnard, p. 71.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid; Roth, p. 442.

¹⁸⁶ Obituary, Sir Paul Brian, *Independent*, 14 October 2004; R oth, p. 442.

when ILR was set up in 1972, the commitment to PSB remained paramount; not once did the Conservatives in their manifesto, or their pre-election rhetoric, use the word “commercial”.

For many, the arrival of the White Paper at the end of March 1971 ended years of guesswork and suspense.¹⁸⁷ It was generally welcomed by those hoping to establish stations, including corporations like Rank and Granada and major newspaper interests, while other responses were more cautious.¹⁸⁸ Of those who had lobbied for commercial radio the most vocal in their disappointment were John Gorst of the LRA and CBC’s Hughie Green. Gorst saved his criticism for the Sound Broadcasting Bill, based on the White Paper, which he criticised in a pamphlet issued by Aims of Industry. Gorst argued that the 60 stations proposed in the bill would result in a regional rather than a local service and argued the case for more than three times that number. He also challenged the provision that had been made for the local press to invest the new stations. With restricted holdings, proposed in order of preventing local monopolies, it would not, Gorst thought, be worth their while investing.¹⁸⁹

Green’s main criticisms were related to finance. His CBC had already presented plans for up to 115 PSB-oriented stations, each presenting a range of cultural or educational programming with content ranging from the Halle Orchestra or quiz shows with university scholarships as prizes. Reflecting the view of many contenders, however, he was dismayed at the prospect of transmitter rental fees and absence of programme sponsorship:

Only people with fantastic incomes can afford it. You’re paying 30 per cent of your money in copyright charges and rent to the IBA even before you’ve got four walls, before you’ve even paid the tea girl. ... We could have borrowed the money and built our own transmitter. Allowing for depreciation it would cost £700,000 and that’s doing it rich. If you’re kicked out after three years [reference to proposed three-year rolling contracts, see next chapter] then at least you’d have an asset. Now you’re being asked to pay for something, which isn’t even yours and never will be.¹⁹⁰

While writing in the *New Statesman* Andrew Roth had already warned the medium would not be the money-spinner that many imagined. As would-be broadcasters were

¹⁸⁷ *Times*, 29 March 1971.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Gorst, J., *Commercial Radio: the Beast of Burden* (London: Aims of Industry, 1971).

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Barnard, p. 73.

submitting their plans to the Government, he was pointing to the obligation to provide comprehensive news and information. Even if they won the right to broadcast, he argued, many would be destroyed, especially those who were relying on the playing of records. Needle-time and copyright payments were a major issue. Some lobbyists wanted legislation releasing them from the obligation to pay royalties, though this was something Roth thought would not happen.¹⁹¹ This was something the broadcasting trade journal, *Television Mail*, also picked up on. Even those taking royalties into account were looking to lose a hefty portion of their net revenue. Using CBC's and LRA's estimate that about 40 to 50 per cent of daily output would be needle-time, the *Mail* claimed that the royalty payments this would generate would cut profits by between six and 28 per cent.¹⁹² Indeed, despite a national agreement being negotiated by the IBA on behalf of the entire network, the issue of royalties remained a major problem for the early ILR operators.

Home Town had already predicted a stormy parliamentary passage.¹⁹³ Even before the election John Stonehouse, Labour's Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, had attacked Conservative policy. Having already overseen the experimentation and eventual introduction of BBC local radio, Stonehouse claimed that:

... No country in the world has a better sound broadcasting service. The government don't want commercial radio to happen in Britain. That is why we decided that local broadcasting should be through proper community stations, not run by commercial interests, who will only be concerned in maximum profits, but by local broadcasting councils interested in providing community interests. I am not unhappy about the Conservative threat to introduce commercial radio it is just one more reason why the electorate will be supporting Labour at the next election.¹⁹⁴

Unfortunately for Stonehouse the electorate were not of the same view. When the new government's commitment was signalled in October 1971, Ivor Richard, Labour's broadcasting spokesman, attacked it as "Conservative theology designed to satisfy an ill-considered and half-baked election pledge." He dismissed it as no more than a plan for "another sixty pop stations" and criticised the vagueness of the White Paper regarding

¹⁹¹ Roth, p. 441.

¹⁹² *Television Mail*, 2 April 1971.

¹⁹³ *Home Town*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Baron, pp. 58-59.

regulatory arrangements. What were the plans for regulating programme content, he asked, and “would they include protection for minority interests?”¹⁹⁵ Opposition leader Harold Wilson predicted the “wholesale slaughter of weekly newspapers”. What level of circulation would be required to give a local newspaper the right to participate? Indeed, if they were not offered a right to take part would the smaller ‘weeklies’ simply go out of business?¹⁹⁶ When the Sound Broadcasting Bill came before parliament a year later Richard renewed his attack, focusing on the powers concentrated in the IBA and on the franchising system. He asked: “Who is to get the contracts? On which criteria are contracts to be awarded?”¹⁹⁷

Conclusion: The Sound Broadcasting Act

After more than 34 sessions, over 70,000 words and around 90 hours of Parliamentary time, the Sound Broadcasting Act received Royal Assent on 12 June 1972. Only twenty pages long and containing just thirteen clauses, it left some important details unresolved. It was later consolidated into the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, which reconstituted the ITA to allow for its new radio responsibilities, but continued to provide only a basic framework.¹⁹⁸ Major decisions such as the establishing and actual running of the new service were left to the discretion of the IBA. What was most important, however, was that independent radio would effectively be regulated by the organisation that had originally been set up to control ITV. Commercial radio had arrived in Britain but was subject to a PSB-style regulation.

When the first ILR station, London’s all-news and speech station, LBC, commenced broadcasting in October 1973, it was the culmination of a long drawn-out campaign which had been conducted in both the public and political arenas. Rudin has argued that the pirates of the sixties had provided an alternative model of free enterprise and libertarianism, in effect challenging the post-war political and cultural consensus, but it was not this model of commercial broadcasting that had triumphed. British commercial radio was troubled from the start by a clash of ideologies.¹⁹⁹ It was public service rather than commercial radio and the importance of making money in order to survive was at times compromised by the

¹⁹⁵ House of Commons, *Hansard*, vol. 814, 29 March 1971, cols. 1162-1163.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, col. 1167.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, vol. 825, 11 November 1971, col. 1267.

¹⁹⁸ *Independent Broadcasting Authority Act 1973* (London: HMSO, 1973, ch.19); Baron, pp. 67-72.

¹⁹⁹ Rudin, R., ‘The Politics of the introduction of Commercial Radio in the UK: A Clash of Ideologies Produces a Troublesome Birth’, *Southern Review*, 39 (3), (2007), pp. 93-110.

responsibility to inform and educate; as was clearly demonstrated by LBC whose statutory emphasis on informative speech (and nothing else) did little in helping it to attract audiences, and therefore advertisers. We will never know whether the commercial lobby's promise of a PSB-based service was merely rhetoric, but it is important that those genuinely interested recognised that commercial radio would only be possible if it was regulated in the same way as commercial television. After the Pilkington report delivered a severe setback to the commercial lobbyists it was clear that it was not a question of whether local commercial radio would be regulated - if it ever came into existence - but how it would be regulated.

It was this climate of debate that helped shape Independent Local Radio. As the next chapter will show, measures to prevent excessive profits and the upholding of public programming were the order of the day. Running as a thread throughout this chapter are the words "public service" and "community". They were especially prominent in the plans that the BBC presented to Pilkington but, significantly, they also featured in the plans put forward by many of those interested in establishing commercial radio stations, in the proposals of the Bow Group and in the White Paper that preceded the 1972 Act. By the early 1970s it was overwhelmingly clear that, besides providing an *alternative* form of sound broadcasting *independent* of that provided by the BBC, ILR was meant to satisfy a number of agendas. Driven by free enterprise and funded by spot advertising commercial radio was part of a package designed to breathe life into a stagnating economy. Just as ITV had apparently helped to stimulate the economy of the late 1950s, so ILR would provide advertisers with new markets, such as motorists in their cars or families at the breakfast table. It would also serve to help declining local newspapers. Importantly, like ITV it, too, was to be heavily regulated. Operated by commercial companies with their own shareholders, the public service objective was to take precedence over the profit motive.

Chapter Three

The Independent Broadcasting Authority and the Development and Regulation of Independent Local Radio in the 1980s

Although, at first, only 25 areas were identified, the Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) envisaged that there would be as many as 60 ILR stations in due course.²⁰⁰ These were to be regulated by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). The first three sections of this chapter will provide an overview of the new regulatory arrangements and deal, in particular, with the IBA's view of its remit. The rest of the chapter will show how changes in economic and political circumstances during the early 1980s had a dramatic effect on the development of ILR and the way in which it was regulated. The arrival of a new government in 1979 that was intent on promoting a market-led economy, declining audiences and advertising revenues, competition from newer forms of media, and changes within the regulatory body itself, combined to encourage the partial deregulation of ILR during the 1980s.

The IBA as Regulator

Jones (1989) described the IBA as “an independent regulatory agency established to decide questions affecting both public and private rights”. Its key functions were to articulate and apply the law. Once policy had been formulated by the legislature, the power of quasi-legislative organisations such as the IBA, Jones argued, lay in the articulation of that policy and subsequent rule making.²⁰¹ The status of the IBA as “an independent regulatory agency” was of prime importance. As has already been established, the Independent Television Authority (ITA), forerunner of the IBA, was in some ways very similar to the BBC. Its powers were embodied in its own version of the BBC's charter which was subject to renewal every ten years and its governors were government-appointed. Unlike the BBC, however, the ITA did not produce the programmes. These were instead the responsibility of the ITV contractors.²⁰² Despite the regulatory regime set up by the ITA, there was much criticism in

²⁰⁰The first areas being: London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester, and then Bradford, Edinburgh, Ipswich, Liverpool, Nottingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Swansea, and Tyneside; and then Belfast, Blackburn, Bournemouth, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Huddersfield, Leeds, Tyneside, and Wolverhampton, Baron, M., *Independent Radio: The Story of Commercial Radio in the United Kingdom* (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1975), p. 72.

²⁰¹ Jones, T., *Evaluating Regulatory Legitimacy: a Study of Policy and Rule Making in the Regulation of Independent Local Radio by the Independent Broadcasting Authority* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Brunel University), 1989, p. ii.

²⁰² Curran, J. and Seaton, J., *Power Without Responsibility: the Press and Broadcasting in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 167-168.

the 1950s and early 1960s – much of it levelled by the BBC’s Governors – that the ITV companies were simply “in it for the money”. Sir Kenneth Clark, the new regulatory body’s first chairman, promised that the ITA would oversee independent television with a “due sense of responsibility”.²⁰³ As indicated in Chapter Two, however, the Pilkington Committee was subsequently critical of the ITA’s performance; it had allowed the ITV companies to chase profits and therefore to neglect the “essential public objective” of providing “the best possible service of broadcasting”.²⁰⁴ The IBA, with its remit for both independent television and ILR, was determined from the start to avoid similar difficulties. ILR stations were to be left in no doubt about what was expected of them.

This began at the planning stage, even before the Sound Broadcasting Act had completed its passage through parliament. ITA’s planning for ILR began in 1971 when a small team was seconded to work under Christopher Chataway, the new Minister of Posts and Telecommunications. Preliminary talks were also held with various groups with an interest in the new service, from prospective broadcasters to the Musicians’ Union.²⁰⁵ A number of senior engineers were seconded to work with the BBC on technical matters such as broadcasting frequencies.²⁰⁶ Between June and October 1972, a series of ‘guidance notes’ were issued to prospective applicants and the general public.²⁰⁷

As with ITA’s control of ITV, the IBA had four basic functions with regard to ILR: selecting and appointing programme contractors; the supervision of programme planning; control of advertising and the transmission of programmes. The most important difference, as Barnard has pointed out, was that whereas ITV consisted of sixteen regional companies ILR was to be 60 local stations, each firmly entrenched within their local community.²⁰⁸ The IBA established a separate radio division to oversee ILR.²⁰⁹ With applications closing within two months of a franchise being advertised in the local press, a document entitled *Particulars of Independent Local Radio Contract* was provided to each applicant. This provided

²⁰³ Ibid; Quoted in Briggs, A., *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. 5, *Competition, 1955-1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 4.

²⁰⁴ Cmnd. 1753, *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting* (Pilkington Report, 1962), para. 576.

²⁰⁵ Thompson, J., ‘The Shape of Independent Local Radio’, *Independent Broadcasting*, (March, 1976), p. 17.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. For a full discussion on work between the IBA, BBC and the Home Office in finalising ILR’s frequencies see Lewis and Booth, J., *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 25-29.

²⁰⁷ Baron, p. 75, Thompson, ‘Shape of Independent Radio’.

²⁰⁸ Barnard, S., *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), p. 70.

²⁰⁹ Barnard’s estimate, p. 70.

important technical information, relating to the setting up of an ILR station and what was then expected with regard to performance. Three-year contracts were initially awarded, each with a twelve-month extension being granted at the end of the first and subsequent years. This system of ‘rolling’ contracts formed a fundamental part in the IBA’s regulatory strategy for ILR. Yearly appraisals enabled a check on the progress of each contractor, not only in relation to compliance with the Sound Broadcasting Act but also in respect to staff relations and financial performance.

With stations effectively renting airtime, *Particulars* also carried details of how much ‘primary rental’ each were to pay. Beyond ensuring that independent radio was not a “licence to print money”, the fundamental aim of the rental scheme was to cover the cost of the IBA’s administration, including repayment of £2 million loaned by the government to establish the network.²¹⁰ Once a station’s profit reached five per cent of total income contractors were then liable to an additional ‘secondary rental’. Funds raised from secondary rental were to be used to finance a programme-sharing scheme and to help stations with important community projects. Most important, some of the funds raised through secondary rental were to be set aside for the future development of the network. A charge that had been levelled at the ITA during the 1960s was that it had failed to prevent the ITV companies from making excessive profits. Many saw secondary rental, in particular, as the IBA’s way of preventing a repeat situation.²¹¹ Indeed some within ILR saw it as an additional tax on the more profitable stations.²¹²

John Thompson, who had worked with Chataway in formulating plans for independent radio, was head of the IBA’s Radio Division. Speaking to *Music Week* in October 1976, shortly after the first nineteen stations had come to air, he outlined his vision for ILR. There were four distinctive themes. The first was that ILR should be distinctly local. It was, to be “of its area as well as for its area”. Though no single shareholder was allowed to own more than 20 per cent, typically around 80 per cent of each company’s shares were locally owned, thus ensuring a high degree of local involvement. As Thomson noted, a feature of ILR was that station staff could then draw advice and knowledge from locally-

²¹⁰ Barnard, p. 71

²¹¹ Street, S., *A Concise History of British Radio, 1922-2002* (Tiverton: Kelly Books, 2002), p. 120; Stoller, T., *Sounds of Your Life, the History of Independent Radio in the UK* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2010), pp. 131-137.

²¹² David Bagley, BRMB Sales and Promotions Officer from 1979, interviewed by the author, 21 January 2004.

based directors and shareholders. His second theme was that ILR stations would be a part of the community which they served. This was to be achieved by encouraging community participation, via phone-ins, for example, also through outside broadcasts and coverage of local politics, religion and sport. Thompson envisaged that ILR stations would serve the whole community, an objective which most sought to achieve through the use of “mixed programming” - music intertwined with news, local, national and international, information slots and phone-ins. The third of Thompson’s themes was that ILR would be seen as an alternative radio service to that provided by the BBC, nationally and locally, through the information, education and entertainment that it provided for its listeners.²¹³

Quality was the fourth of Thompson’s objectives. As both Street and Barnard have pointed out, with ILR the IBA, just like the ITA with ITV in the 1950s, had to fight a strong prejudice against commercial broadcasting, especially amongst media commentators and influential MPs.²¹⁴ It was important to demonstrate that ILR was not simply a land-based version of the off-shore pirates, who had only been taken off the air a few years beforehand. To show that ILR would not be a ‘radio Juke-Box’, and to satisfy those involved in the music industry such as writers and the Musician’s Union, each ILR station was obliged to spend three per cent of its net advertising revenue on live music. Many benefited from this policy. These included local pop and rock groups, orchestras, and even a Big Band in the case of Two Counties Radio in Bournemouth.²¹⁵ There was also an issue over the regulator’s record in controlling ITV. In 1968, when the ITV contracts were due for renewal, it had been criticised for its “wayward” appointment of a number of contractors; independent radio gave it the opportunity to re-establish credibility.²¹⁶ ILR contractors were to be subjected to close scrutiny; it was important to demonstrate that they were responsible broadcasters and quite different from the pirate broadcasters of a few years earlier with their essentially commercial orientation. Local Advisory Committees (LACs), meeting four times a year, were assigned an important role. Each station would have its own LAC consisting of representatives from the wider community, a third of them to be nominated by the local council. In 1975, the IBA described the function of these committees as follows:

²¹³ Thompson, ‘Shape of Independent Radio’; *Music Week*, 9 October 1976.

²¹⁴ Street, p. 119; Barnard, p. 72.

²¹⁵ Thompson, *Music Week*; Street (2002), pp. 121-122; Stoller, p. 82.

²¹⁶ Barnard, *ibid*.

The committees continue to provide candid, constructive and valuable comments, which contribute towards the Authority's assessment and judgement of the companies' performance. Because of their heterogeneous membership, each committee covers a wide range of tastes and interests, but the members have at least one attribute in common, in that they all demonstrate extensive knowledge and awareness of life in the area. The Authority's specialist staff, in recommending individuals for membership of a committee, is concerned also that they should be aware of the practicalities involved in the running of a self-financing radio station, and not least that they should be able to devote sufficient time to listening to their local station.²¹⁷

IBA's monitoring regime, besides checking that ILR stations operated in a way that was consistent with the four themes that Thompson had outlined, also kept a close eye on adherence to the rules governing programme content. Like ITV, ILR was subject to a range of IBA Codes of Practice. Advertising (shared with ITV), personal advice programmes, crime reporting, fairness and impartiality during news, current affairs and phone-in programmes were just a few areas covered. Stations were required to retain recordings of output for three months in order to facilitate IBA investigations of alleged transgressions, especially where complainants included individual listeners or aggrieved outside organisations. Though most were usually dealt with at regional level, the more serious transgressions were referred to the IBA's London headquarters. Stations were also monitored by regular visits by regional officers. Besides providing guidance on almost every aspect of the IBA rules, it was the results of these visits that informed the annual appraisals on which the renewal of the franchise depended. Should performance fall seriously below that required, the IBA was in a position to refuse to 'roll' the station's contract for a further twelve months. A 'three strikes and then out' strategy was applied. This gave a station time to take any corrective action demanded by the IBA, while the IBA was also able to maintain a close eye on developments without the need to find a replacement contractor at short notice.

Thompson believed that programme standards were inextricably linked to technical standards.²¹⁸ Of these, stereo broadcasting was regarded as especially important. Whereas

²¹⁷ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Report and Accounts, 1974-1975* (London: IBA, 1975), p. 39.

²¹⁸ Thompson, *Music Week*; see Stoller (2010), pp. 49-50, for discussion on the IBA's engineering standards.

BBC used stereo only for selected programmes, ILR was to broadcast a continuous stereo service on VHF. As Thompson stated:

The high quality of the IBA transmissions allows the listener to hear ILR programming at its best and gives an extra incentive to the programme makers to ensure top quality output. For music in particular, the VHF and stereo broadcasts make high demand on studios, performers and engineers, but offer the listener something special.²¹⁹

Central to this pursuit of technical excellence was the emphasis on exacting engineering standards. Before coming to air, licence applications needed to include a studio plan meeting specifications laid out in the *Particulars of Contract* document. Once on air, stations were then required to not only monitor their own output. Weekly fault logs were to be filed to the IBA's Quality Control department, who in turn also regularly visited stations to ensure maintenance was to the prescribed standards.

The IBA was, therefore, involved in almost every aspect of the ILR operation. From the initial licence application, through to the broadcasting of programmes, it established strict rules and guidelines as to how individual stations should operate. Besides working within the various codes of practice, each was also required to obtain IBA permission for schedule changes or altered broadcast hours. All this will become apparent when the next chapters turn to BRMB and Beacon. In the meantime, attention will now turn to the 1977 Annan report and its findings relating to IBA and its control of the network.²²⁰

Annan and local radio

Appointed by Labour in 1970, the Annan Committee formed part of the ten-yearly BBC and ITA Charter renewal. Though abandoned when the Conservatives came to power later that year - they did not want an inquiry to hinder its plans for ILR – the Committee was immediately reconvened once Labour had won the first General Election of 1974. By then the first nineteen stations were either already on air or well into their planning stages.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Other than indicated, information regarding regulation of ILR taken from *ITV '75: Guide to Independent Television with Independent Local Radio Supplement*, (London: IBA, 1975), pp. 218-221; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Report and Accounts, 1973-1974* (London: IBA, 1974), pp. 31-35.

Reporting in March 1977, Annan broadly accepted the IBA's development of ILR. He was pleased that most stations had built significant audiences and were now paying their way; the exceptions being mainly London's LBC and Capital who misjudged the amount of advertising revenue they would attract and therefore suffered an initial degree of over-manning. LBC was also burdened with the additional expense of setting up and running Independent Radio News (IRN) – which was to supply national and international news to all the provincial stations.²²¹ Annan did note the occasional failure on the part of the IBA to hold contractors to the promises made in their applications, however.²²² Some committee members were of the view that some applicants had “cynically set out the bare minimum of public broadcasting”; then, having acquired the licence, there had been “a flagrant failure to provide what little they promised”.²²³ Whilst this perception may have derived from a failure to understand ILR's remit of a public service within a commercial environment - an issue to be addressed in subsequent chapters - on the whole most committee members thought that the IBA had handled the introduction of ILR successfully.²²⁴ Moreover, believing that programmes would “develop in the light of experience”, the report agreed that the IBA was correct in not taking too rigid a stance.²²⁵ “Too heavy a hand” would be detrimental to the survival of what were in effect fledgling stations: “too many fearsome regulations in the early stages can cripple any commercial enterprise,” Annan observed.

Though the report welcomed ILR's commitment to local and community service, it was argued that this could be taken further. The committee, however, seemed to have been especially influenced by evidence given by the community media lobby which may have led to the conclusion that the IBA was not the most suitable body to regulate ILR.²²⁶ It had merely transposed the system devised for ITV over to ILR, and thus had not developed “quite the right touch” for overseeing what was a large number of disparate local radio stations, it was thought. Noting that there were “a number of enterprising broadcasters who have ideas for new kinds of local radio which would not fit into the IBA mould”, Annan suggested a new regulatory regime for ILR.²²⁷

²²¹ Stoller, pp. 57-58.

²²² Cmnd. 6753, *Report of the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting*, (Annan Report, 1977), para. 11.30.

²²³ *Ibid.*, para. 11.32.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 11.33.

²²⁵ Annan believed programme policies should develop with experience and that having “second thoughts might be better than their original intentions.” *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, paras. 11.38-11.40.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 11.38.

Annan thought the regulation of local radio was in a mess.²²⁸ With responsibilities spread over almost the entire broadcast spectrum, in developing new initiatives neither the BBC nor the IBA were in the position to give local radio the attention it required. Instead, he recommended a ‘Local Broadcasting Authority’ (LBA) to take control of local radio. Wishing to preserve the existing ILR network, he envisaged the LBA developing a new tier of community stations. Impressed with Canada where local groups and organisations came together to form community stations, he looked to a similar idea in Britain with stations being operated by non-profitable trusts.²²⁹ Restricted to the populated urban areas, these would in turn be accompanied by several rural ‘satellite’ stations operated by the existing ILR operators.²³⁰ Importantly, retaining the sale of airtime as the main source of income but with the main shareholders being replaced by non-profit making trusts, he wanted to see the profit motive being removed from ILR:

...The removal of any compulsion to make profits for shareholders would enable programming to appeal to smaller audiences and so meet the needs of minorities and of the underprivileged. We believe that in the long run the best of local broadcasting would be safeguarded if the station’s primary concern were to improve its service to the community rather than increase its profitability. The emphasis in local broadcasting must be on the shared interests and concerns of local communities. The best of local radio stations already recognise this, and we would wish to underline this as the way local broadcasting should develop in future. Non-profit distributing trusts may well be better placed to meet these ends.²³¹

The Labour government ignored Annan’s suggestion of a Local Broadcasting Authority. Indeed, it was now throwing its weight behind the growth of ILR. While the Sound Broadcasting Act was passing through Parliament, when they were in opposition, Labour had promised to halt any expansion of ILR until a royal commission had been appointed to look at the whole future of broadcasting.²³² Now that Annan was broadly in favour of ILR continuing, and that a Select Committee on Nationalised Industries (SCNI)

²²⁸ Ibid, para. 14.3.

²²⁹ Ibid, paras. 14.3-14.4.

²³⁰ Ibid, para. 14.8.

²³¹ Ibid, p. 209.

²³² Baron, p. 68; Stoller, p. 37.

had recommended more stations be introduced, Home Secretary Merlyn Rees was authorising another nine new ILR areas (on top of the existing nineteen).²³³

This aside, according to Freedman the re-instatement of the Annan Committee in 1974 was Wilson's way of shelving an issue that divided the party at a time when the government had only a very slim majority.²³⁴ On issues relating to broadcasting, as on many others at this time, the Labour Party was divided on left-right lines. As far back as 1968, Anthony Wedgwood-Benn was advocating stiffer parliamentary control over broadcasting, arguing that "it was too important to be left to the broadcasters".²³⁵ The following year, as the Conservatives were floating their ideas for independent radio, the left-wing 76 Group was calling for a Royal Commission to investigate the structure and finance of broadcasting. Then as the plans for ILR came to fruition in 1972, Benn, who chaired Labour's media policy committee, called for a Public Communications Commission to not only collect and redistribute all licence and advertising revenue but also take control of all broadcasting organisations - BBC and independent.²³⁶ This demonstrated the extent to which the Labour left was looking to broadcasting reform. By reappointing Annan upon returning to office in 1974, however, Wilson had effectively taken the issue off the immediate party agenda.²³⁷ The decision to drop the ministerial brief of Posts and Telecommunications was further evidence of his determination to keep broadcasting policy out of the hands of the left. Benn, who had held the position of shadow brief for Posts and Communications before 1974, found himself at a new department for Trade and Industry, while broadcasting policy was assigned to the Home Office. A Broadcasting White Paper did outline a plan for independent local radio stations to be run by non profit-making trusts but the 1979 general election intervened before this could be acted upon.²³⁸

1980-1984: Towards Relaxation of ILR Regulation

On the Conservative side, the Bow Group believed that it had proposed a framework of supervision that would cope with the growing pains of independent radio and "foster

²³³ *Independent Broadcasting Authority: Tenth report of the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries*, (July, 1978), (paper 637-I) (637-II), session 1977-8, vol. Xi.

²³⁴ Freedman, D., 'What Use is a Public Inquiry? Labour and the 1977 Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting', *Media, Culture & Society*, 23 (2), (2001), p. 199; Barnard, p. 82.

²³⁵ Freedman, p. 196.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 197.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 208.

²³⁸ Cmnd. 7294, *Broadcasting*, (White Paper on Broadcasting), (July, 1978).

responsible, enjoyable and financially sound broadcasting”.²³⁹ It had not, however, foreseen that ILR would have to establish itself in the midst of the economic crisis of the 1970s. ILR’s arrival in 1973-4 came at a time when many companies, faced with increased production costs arising from rising oil prices and demands for higher wages, were cutting their advertising budgets. In January 1974 *Broadcast*, the trade journal, examined the crisis facing commercial broadcasting, ILR in particular. The difficulty, argued Allen and Hogben, was not a lack of local advertising, but failure to attract national companies and brands. It did not help that, unlike other Western countries, commercial radio had arrived in Britain after commercial television. Elsewhere, advertising agencies turned to the cheaper medium of radio when times were hard. Demonstrating their “traditional conservatism”, for British advertisers, television was the tried and trusted medium and they instead turned away from ILR.²⁴⁰

In Britain, as Allen and Hogben observed, ILR was hampered by a number of factors: ITV being able to offer cheap airtime at short notice; the absence of nationally coordinated audience figures for ILR; and the fact that there was at this stage no national network of stations. Moves had already been made to address these problems. Before coming to air, Air Services, one of the two companies handling ILR’s national advertising, was offering peak-time advertisers on BRMB free equal airtime during off-peak periods (similar to today’s ‘buy one, get one free’ offers). Aiming to fill unsold airtime and to make the station sound as commercial as possible, agencies were encouraged to use slots other than the popular breakfast and evening drive-time periods. Unsold airtime during the off-peak evening and weekend periods had already caused the pioneering Capital Radio and LBC to at times sound like non-commercial stations.²⁴¹ The situation improved somewhat after 1976 when ILR adopted an overall national marketing strategy. This enabled the Association of Independent Radio Contractors (AIRC), ILR’s representative organisation, to advertise ILR as a credible national advertising medium.²⁴² Though this and other initiatives achieved some success, a paucity of national advertising was to remain a problem throughout the remainder of the decade. Moreover, it was to worsen during the recession of the early 1980s.

²³⁹ Kelly, T., (et al), *Home Town Radio*, (Bow Group Occasional Papers), (September 1970), p. 15.

²⁴⁰ *Broadcast*, 11 January, 1974.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Campaign*, 2nd April, 1976.

During the first term of the new Conservative government (1979-1983), ILR expanded to a network of over 40 stations. In addition to the nine sanctioned by the previous Labour administration, a further 15 were promised by the Conservatives following the report of a Home Office working party.²⁴³ Influenced by Annan's call for more community-based stations, under Labour in 1979 Coventry and Cardiff were initially awarded to consortia comprising a coalition of business and community interests (charities, voluntary organisations, etc.).²⁴⁴ However, these were to remain the only two stations of this kind as government enthusiasm for community radio evaporated when the Conservatives returned to office.²⁴⁵ With a network promising to be almost double in size and a government more sympathetic to commercial broadcasting than its predecessor, ILR entered the 1980s with an air of optimism, despite difficulties in attracting national advertising. In a two-page review in January 1980, *Broadcast's* radio columnist Gillian Reynolds sensed a growing confidence within the radio industry as both ILR and the BBC had been promised new local stations.²⁴⁶ *The Times* endorsed this outlook a few weeks later. In an extended feature on commercial radio, it predicted that the relatively low cost of radio advertising and the arrival of a national network would enable ILR to attract more advertising revenue.²⁴⁷

Difficulties facing ILR: cause and response

Both Reynolds and *The Times*, however, seemed to forget ILR's experience of that previous recession and it was soon apparent that this optimism, and that of others, had been built on false premises. A prolonged technicians' dispute that blacked out ITV towards the end of 1979 had forced advertisers to turn to ILR for their national campaigns, resulting in an 82 per cent increase in that year's net advertising receipts.²⁴⁸ By February 1980, however, *The Times* was forecasting a possible 10 per cent fall in advertising as the recession took hold. Under the heading "Advertisers switch off local radio", it predicted a period of uncertainty for the advertising industry which would compound what was already a batch of poor sales figures for ILR.²⁴⁹ By the autumn of 1980 business commentators were detecting

²⁴³ The nine included Aberdeen/Inverness, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Chelmsford/Southend, Coventry, Dundee/Perth, Exeter/Torbay, Gloucester/Cheltenham and Peterborough; the further fifteen areas were Ayr, Barnsley, Bristol, Bury St. Edmunds, Canterbury/Dover, Guildford, Leeds, Leicester, Londonderry, Luton/Bedford, Newport, Preston/Blackpool, Swindon, Hereford/Worcester, Wrexham and Deeside; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Television & Radio 1980*, (London: IBA, 1980), pp. 135, 165-167.

²⁴⁴ Barnard, p. 82.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Broadcast*, 7 January 1980.

²⁴⁷ *Times*, 7 February 1980.

²⁴⁸ *Times*, 5 February 1980.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

a sense of gloom within ILR.²⁵⁰ It was becoming clear that, just as in the 1970s, a lack of interest from national advertisers along with rising costs was leading to poor turnover and diminished profits.

On returning to power in 1979 the Conservatives inherited an inflation rate of fifteen per cent.²⁵¹ While this peaked at twenty-two per cent in the summer of 1980, the effort to stem its relentless rise through high taxation and reduced public expenditure caused one of the worst recessions since the 1930s.²⁵² Thus, even though ILR could now offer national coverage through its network of local stations, national advertisers were still aligning themselves with television.²⁵³ Whereas during the same period commercial radio in the United States and Australia attracted ten per cent and seven per cent of their respective advertising markets, in Britain ILR captured only around two per cent.²⁵⁴ Cost could not have been the reason for advertisers and their agencies not choosing radio. Using 1980 prices, where £44,300 could buy 50 thirty-second peak-time breakfast slots across the entire ILR network a single television commercial could cost as much as £100,000.²⁵⁵ Talented and experienced advertising executives concentrated on developing the more lucrative television contracts while radio was left to the inexperienced junior or trainee, meaning that it was a long time before radio could be creatively developed so as to match its television counterpart.

A major attempt was made to address this problem. There were further efforts to draw the attention of national advertisers to the benefits of using radio. In the autumn of 1980 the AIRC mounted a £100,000 campaign using Saatchi and Saatchi - the agency that had handled the Conservative's 1979 election campaign – involving conference presentations and advertisements in the trade and quality press.²⁵⁶ With interests in a number of English-based ILR stations and as part owner of Air Services, the Associated Newspapers Group also tried to stimulate interest with the Rothermere Radio Research Awards.²⁵⁷ From 1981, there was also an effort to match ITV's regional set-up. With the ITV regions already forming the basis upon which advertisers (and their agencies) based their campaigns, a number of

²⁵⁰ *Times*, 2 October 1980; *Broadcast*, 15 December 1980.

²⁵¹ Blake, R., *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher* (London: Fontanna, 1985), p. 340.

²⁵² Pugh, M., *State and Society: a Social History of Britain, 1870-1997*, (2nd edition), (London: Arnold, 1999), p. 347.

²⁵³ Financial Times Business Information, *Key Issue Briefs: Radio in the United Kingdom* (London: Financial Times Media Intelligence Unit, January 1984), p. 19.

²⁵⁴ *Broadcast*, 18 February 1980; *Financial Times*, 20 January 1982.

²⁵⁵ *Times*, 5 February 1980.

²⁵⁶ *Sunday Times*, 30 November 1980.

²⁵⁷ *Broadcast*, 18 February 1980.

adjacent ILR companies joined to provide a similar facility under supervision of their respective sales houses. Radio Orwell (Ipswich) and Saxon Radio (Bury St. Edmunds), for instance, joined to form the Suffolk Radio Group, which covered Anglia Television's East of England region.²⁵⁸

The emergence of new competition for a share of corporate advertising budgets compounded this problem. Early morning was the time of day when ILR reached its largest audience and was, therefore, especially important in the effort to attract new advertising. ILR breakfast shows now found that they had to compete with breakfast television after 1983. Extending the 'breakfast minute' was a move to counter this threat. Already a minute's airtime had been set aside at 8 am on Mondays to Fridays to provide major advertisers with advertising time across the entire ILR network, which had met with some success - car manufacturer Ford and a number of national newspapers were making use of it - and now this was being extended to two minutes.²⁵⁹ Even with its poor start breakfast television still managed to encroach on ILR's lucrative breakfast market.²⁶⁰ Moreover, reports in the trade and quality press showed that national advertisers still preferred television to radio. This was made quite apparent in May 1983 when Richard Brookes of the *Sunday Times* reported that despite ILR's audience being 20 times higher TV-AM (ITV's new breakfast contractor) was attracting the lion's share of advertising.²⁶¹ AIRC created the Radio Marketing Bureau (RMB), charged with promoting independent radio as a credible advertising medium, in an effort to counteract this trend.²⁶² Its activities also included functioning as a 'clearing house' for information, demographic and audience details for example, relating to each station. It was hoped that, through RMB, ILR would capture ten per cent of the advertising market but this target proved far too ambitious. Figures for 1984 saw only three per cent being tapped by ILR.²⁶³

There was also the problem of rising costs and poor investment. Brookes noted that in 1982, even after extensive cost cutting, half the network was either just breaking even or

²⁵⁸ *Financial Times*, 20 January 1982.

²⁵⁹ *Broadcast*, 5 April 1982.

²⁶⁰ *Commercial Radio*, (2nd edition), (London: Keynote Publications, 1983), p. 24.

²⁶¹ *Sunday Times*, 21 May 1983.

²⁶² *Broadcast*, 3 May 1982; *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 21.

²⁶³ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Television & Radio 1984* (London: IBA, 1984), p. 169; *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 7.

was actually losing money.²⁶⁴ A later *Financial Times* special report on commercial radio pointed to eleven loss making stations, including Bristol and Leeds, in what should have been the profitable metropolitan areas.²⁶⁵ Aggravating the situation was a three-year index-linked wage deal negotiated by the AIRC with the NUJ (one of the main unions representing ILR staff) in 1980. With over 20 per cent inflation at one point, the beneficial effect of any serious attempt to reduce costs would have been wiped out by having to pay higher wages. The BRMB chair in his 1980 report emphasised how the company was looking to reduce expenditure whilst not compromising output, and other reports from across the network struck a similar note.²⁶⁶ Having already ceased 24-hour broadcasting, redundancies were reported at Radio Tees.²⁶⁷ Radio Orwell in Ipswich was asking staff for ideas on how to reduce costs while Glasgow's Radio Clyde postponed a move to its new studios in anticipation of a projected loss.²⁶⁸ Even those reporting profits felt the need to cut back. Despite a £3 million profit (on a turnover of £12.2 million) London's Capital Radio had frozen programme development.²⁶⁹

'Needle-time', the amount of time which stations could allocate to the playing of records, and royalties, the amount they had to pay for doing so, were other factors to consider. The music industry was represented by a number of organisations, each with their own interests to protect. Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL), the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) and the Musicians Union each took a particular interest in the amount of music radio stations could play. As Barnard pointed out, it was thought record sales would be harmed through excessive airplay and that (in the words of a former BPI chairman) "a record played on the radio is a record sale lost". The PPL controlled the amount of airtime the BBC and ILR stations could devote to the playing of records, and under its agreements with ILR the independent stations could allocate up to nine hours a day, which generally amounted to five per cent of the total airtime across the entire network.²⁷⁰ It was the royalties that each station had to pay for the playing of records which was a major drain on its expenses, however. The issue over needle-time and royalties came into effect after the 1956 Copyright Act, and like the BBC ILR was obliged to pay the record industry for the use of

²⁶⁴ *Sunday Times*, 15 May 1983.

²⁶⁵ *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 24.

²⁶⁶ Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30th September 1980* (Birmingham, Birmingham Broadcasting, 1980).

²⁶⁷ *Times*, 26 October 1980.

²⁶⁸ *Sunday Times*, 30 November 1980.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Barnard, pp. 93-94, 105-106.

almost all commercially-recorded material. Under agreements originally set between these and the IBA, the payments were collected by the PPL and another organisation, the Performing Rights Society (PRS).²⁷¹ Later, the AIRC had unsuccessfully sought reductions via an appeal to the Performing Rights tribunal and a High Court action. In 1980, a new sliding scale of charges based on advertising revenue had replaced a single fixed fee.²⁷² It was the payments that could be derived from the larger metropolitan stations and those now broadcasting 24-hours that interested the PPL and PRS most. Four per cent of turnover was now payable on the first £750,000 of advertising receipts, rising to six per cent of the next £750,000, eight per cent of the next £1.5 million and, finally, ten per cent of the remainder. This proved a significant problem for ILR, especially as it was already suffering from the impact of recession, and some larger stations were paying as much as ten per cent of turnover in royalties during the 1980s. For example, Capital Radio expected to pay £2.7 million in 1985.²⁷³

Unwillingness by investors to invest in ILR and high taxation were other major difficulties. Referring to the situation during the 1970s, Baron, Barnard and Crisell have each argued that ILR operated within an editorial and technological “straightjacket”.²⁷⁴ Of those who contemplated entering the industry, expensive rental, the need to build studios to the IBA’s exacting standards and the requirement to provide balanced programming were major disincentives for all but the most determined.²⁷⁵ Stations running at a loss, or unable to start owing to lack of finance, meant the IBA having to take action. Breaking its own rule on foreign investment, from 1975 onwards it allowed the Canadian-based Standard Broadcasting and Selkirk organisations to acquire significant stakes in a number of operators.²⁷⁶

By the 1980s, failure to find initial start-up finance - in 1983 an estimated £750,000 was needed to begin a medium-sized station - resulted in stations either starting later than planned or, if they did start on time, having difficulty in finding the money to continue.²⁷⁷ Tony Stoller, head of ILR programming for the IBA before taking the chair of the AIRC,

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 94, pp. 101-109.

²⁷² *Times*, 8 July 1980.

²⁷³ Barnard, S., *Studying Radio* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 136-137; *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 7.

²⁷⁴ Barnard (1989), pp. 72-73; Baron, p. 82; Crisell, A., *Understanding Radio*, (2nd edition), (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 35-36.

²⁷⁵ Crisell (1994), pp.35-36.

²⁷⁶ Besides Radio Forth (Edinburgh - Selkirk) and Metro Radio (Newcastle upon Tyne - Standard), these included London’s Capital Radio (Standard - 24%) and LBC (Selkirk - 49%): see Barnard (1989), p. 76.

²⁷⁷ *Sunday Times*, 15 May 1983; *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 6.

blamed the poor economic conditions for investors failing to see ILR as an attractive long-term investment: “if they wanted to make a fortune,” he exclaimed, “they would sooner put their money in Gilts”.²⁷⁸ Press coverage of ILR’s problems did not help. In May 1982, for example, potential investors could only have been discouraged when the *Investors Chronicle*’s annual review of independent radio disclosed ILR’s tax burden. “Even if there were to be an advertising boom”, it noted, “profits would be offset by hard taxation”. On top of corporation tax at 52 per cent was a 40 per cent levy on profits made after paying secondary rental, which was introduced in 1980 to bring ILR in line with ITV. As the *Chronicle* concluded, this meant that the more profitable ILR stations were now subject to an “eye watering” IBA/Exchequer taxation of up to 87 per cent of profits. This made it one of the Britain’s highest taxed industries.²⁷⁹

The political context

In an effort to alleviate these problems the AIRC increasingly looked to a reduction in ILR’s regulatory burden. It focused its efforts on pressuring the IBA to reduce its grip on the network and achieved some success in 1984 when ILR was partially deregulated. To put this into context we must now turn to the changing political situation of the early 1980s and how this modified attitudes, both within AIRC and the IBA itself.

The Conservatives may have promised to radically “rebuild the economy” through reduced taxes, denationalisation and deregulation when they returned to power in 1979, but the 1980 Broadcasting Act indicated a more restrained attitude.²⁸⁰ On one hand, it seemed to indicate that the government was determined to encourage new business enterprise by opening the way for breakfast television and the fourth television channel (the main object of the Act); the requirement that Channel Four should commission programmes rather than produce them itself was designed to encourage television’s independent production sector.²⁸¹ On the other, the regulation of these new channels and the existing ITV/ILR services remained unchanged. Apart from a few operational details outlined below, ILR was to remain subject to the 1972 (Sound Broadcasting) Act. The IBA’s strict level of monitoring

²⁷⁸ *Times*, 8 July 1980.

²⁷⁹ *Investors Chronicle*, 14 May 1982.

²⁸⁰ *Conservative Party Manifesto 1979*, reprinted in Craig, F.W.S., (ed), *British General Election Manifestos: 1959-1987* (Aldershot: Parliamentary Research Services / Dartmouth Publishing, 1990), pp. 267-283.

²⁸¹ O’Malley, T., *Closedown? The BBC and Government Broadcasting Policy 1979-92* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 74; Bonner, P., *Independent Television in Britain*, vol. 5: *ITV and IBA, 1981-92: The Old Relationship Changes* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 12.

was to continue, even though fixed-term contracts lasting up to ten years (the IBA eventually settled on eight) were to replace the yearly licence renewal.²⁸² Moreover, the 40 per cent levy on profits did not suggest a ‘sympathetic’ government intent on ensuring ILR’s commercial success, especially with the prospect of another recession. Such a levy would not help an industry already suffering a lack of new investment, even though another clause in the 1980 Act had removed the right of local newspapers to hold up to 20 per cent of shares, thus allowing companies to attract other large investors.

Thatcher was known to be unsympathetic to a publicly-funded BBC – a commercially-funded Radio One being one of her suggested options - but was constrained by political circumstances. As with her policies on deregulation and denationalisation, broadcasting policy in the immediate aftermath of her 1979 election victory may well have been influenced by the shape of her first cabinet. O’Malley has emphasised that her shadow cabinet after 1975 was not dissimilar to that of the previous Heath government.²⁸³ Her first cabinet was also heavily weighted towards traditional Conservatism, with a majority of her ministers somewhat apprehensive about reduced spending and less state intervention in the economy.²⁸⁴ It was only after a reshuffle in September 1981 that Thatcher finally achieved almost full Cabinet backing for her preferred policies. Ministers disagreeing with her economic policy (often referred to as the ‘Wets’) gave way to those who were more sympathetic. While the left of centre William Whitelaw remained, previous Heath stalwarts were either lost or moved aside to allow new ‘Thatcherite’ ministers to take their place. Lord Carrington, Ian Gilmour, James Prior and Sir Francis Pym gave way to Norman Tebbit, Cecil Parkinson, Leon Brittan, Nigel Lawson and Norman Fowler. This trend was accentuated by the Falklands War and victory in the general election of 1983, when the Conservatives returned for a second term in office with an ambition to complete what was hitherto unfinished business: this included reducing public spending, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises and public utilities, curbing the trade unions and the deregulating of the economy.

With respect to broadcasting, a portent of this second term was the almost immediate arrival of cable television. Introduced during election year, this could be viewed as the point

²⁸² *Broadcasting Act 1980, The Public General Acts and General Synod Measures*, vol. iv, 1980, (London: HMSO, 1981) sections 33-34, and 36, pp. 2137-2175; O’Malley, p. 74.

²⁸³ O’Malley, p. 70.

²⁸⁴ Blake, p. 343.

at which the party turned away from its attachment to Tory paternalism in broadcasting policy.²⁸⁵ Indeed, some saw this development as a defeat for Whitelaw who, as Home Secretary, had been the principal architect of the 1980 Act. Though Whitelaw remained in the Cabinet, his replacement at the Home Office by Leon Brittan, a Thatcherite, signalled a new approach to broadcasting policy; an approach more in keeping with the Prime Minister's views on competition and deregulation. All this was happening within a wider context which, as their governments adopted the neo-liberal agenda, saw a full or partial deregulation of broadcasting in many Western countries. At the same time, new technologies - new methods of sound and video recording and cable/satellite television for example - provided a challenge to the existing broadcasting platforms. Furthermore, the dominance of public broadcasting was confronted by the need to accommodate an alliance between right-wing political and commercial interests.²⁸⁶ In Britain the Institute of Economic affairs (IEA), for example, the most influential right-wing think tank, was recommending that the license fee should be abolished and that the BBC should be broken up into a number of smaller units to be run on commercial lines.²⁸⁷

The IBA: adapting to new challenges

The government of the day enjoyed the right to make senior appointments to both the BBC and the IBA. Beyond the legislative process, this was its only direct control over the two organisations and it was in making appointments that political bias often took precedence over experience or ability.²⁸⁸ In the second half the 1980s, as Lewis and Booth argued, the Thatcher government effectively politicised control of the BBC by appointing chairmen and governors who shared their own political outlook.²⁸⁹ Indeed, in the wider context Hugo Young emphasised much the same point, referring to Thatcher's question "is he one of us?" when assigning people to government organisations.²⁹⁰ As this next section will argue, the Thatcher government's movement away from paternalistic Conservatism was reflected in a gradual change in attitude regarding the control of the IBA.

ILR had arrived when the IBA were chaired by Lady Plowden, former deputy chair at the BBC; the IBA's Director-General at this time was Brian Young, previously an assistant

²⁸⁵ O'Malley, p. 74.

²⁸⁶ Lewis and Booth, p. 215.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 215.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 216.

²⁹⁰ Young, H., *One of Us: a Biography of Margaret Thatcher* (London, Macmillan, 1989), p. vii.

master at Eton and then headmaster at Charterhouse.²⁹¹ Their appointments had been made in the post-Pilkington period when public service considerations dominated the making of broadcasting policy. Senior members of the Conservative government of the time, along with other prominent members of Britain's Establishment, promoted the public service model as exemplified by the BBC. Indeed, many favoured the BBC over its commercial rival purely for what was seen as ITV's populist outlook, believing that the ITV companies had neglected "serious" programming in their efforts to build audience share and make excessive profits.²⁹²

Milland has joined Potter in identifying the transition between Clark (ITA's first chairman), and Robert Fraser (ITA's first Director-General), and Plowden and Young as the main cause of the ITA's failings and a resultant change in attitude. Clark, it is alleged, underestimated the extent to which the first ITV companies would be driven by the profit motive and how this would lead them to neglect their public service responsibilities.²⁹³ Fraser, on the other hand, simply saw ITV as the "people's channel" and allowed ITV to reflect the likes and dislikes of its audience.²⁹⁴ The difference between Fraser, a former Australian journalist and a free marketeer, and Young, who succeeded him in 1970, cannot be over emphasised. As an educationalist, Young instead saw ITV as an opportunity to enrich the lives of ordinary people. Whilst recognising the need to attract mass audiences, Young encouraged producers to experiment in ways not previously attempted by the profit-driven companies and ITV saw a dramatic rise in serious and minority programming.²⁹⁵ Young's emphasis on public and community service was carried over to ILR. Like the ITV companies, after 1972 the ILR operators were also strongly encouraged to educate and inform.²⁹⁶ This tendency was reinforced after the Annan Report recommended increased 'meaningful' speech in local radio: during the post-Annan period, ILR's music content fell from 55 per cent to 49 per cent of total airtime.²⁹⁷

²⁹¹ Bonner, p. 12.

²⁹² Milland, J., 'The Pilkington Report, the Triumph of Paternalism,' in Bailey, M., (ed), *Narrating Media History* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 101.

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 106.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 102; Potter, J., *Independent Television in Britain*, vol. 3: *Politics and Control, 1968-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 87.

²⁹⁵ Potter, *ibid.*

²⁹⁶ Bonner, p. 12; Barnard (1989), p. 82; Sarah Thane, IBA Midlands Local Radio Officer 1974-1982, in e-mail to the author, 18 March 2008.

²⁹⁷ *Marketing Week*, 16 November 1984; Barnard (1989), p. 82.

Before replacing Plowden, who was due to retire at the end of 1980, Lord Thompson spent his first months at the IBA as her deputy.²⁹⁸ Thompson's appointment marked the start of a more sympathetic appreciation of the commercial aspects of independent broadcasting. A minister in Wilson's government and one of Britain's first commissioners to the European Community, Thompson had been awarded a life peerage in 1977. Before joining the IBA his most recent experience was serving as chair of the Advertising Standards Authority.²⁹⁹ Though this experience meant that he knew the advertising industry well, Thompson's Labour background – along with Young continuing as Director-General - indicated that any shift away from the paternalistic regulatory regime that the IBA had established since the mid 1950s was likely to be gradual.

The change to a “commercially sympathetic” IBA came when John Whitney replaced Young at the beginning of 1983. To appreciate the nature of this change it is essential to understand the circumstances surrounding Whitney's appointment. At the time of his appointment many ITV companies – along as those in ILR – were in financial difficulties, some of which could be blamed on the IBA.³⁰⁰ Moreover, the new ITV contracts awarded in 1980 had led some contractors to complain of the attached conditions, which they believed to be totally unrealistic. One example was the Midlands' franchise, which was now split between the East and West. To retain its licence, Associated Television (ATV) had to change its name to one which better reflected the area that it served (it chose Central Independent Television); it was also required to lose its ‘Londoncentric’ orientation – it had to relocate its main studios from Elstree to the Midlands - which resulted in the decision to build a new studio complex in Nottingham. In addition, it had to find new investors after ACC, its parent company which owned all the shares, was forced to reduce its stake to 51 per cent.³⁰¹ According to Bonner, the sorry state of ITV could be explained largely with reference to Plowden and Young and their ideological predisposition. Quoting Lord Windlesham, who in 1981 had resigned the chair at ATV in protest at charges imposed by the IBA, Bonner argues that that Plowden's and Young's “high mindedness” and “public spiritedness” precluded any understanding of the business world.³⁰² There was, thus, a need for a Director-General who understood the challenges and complex issues confronting ITV and ILR.

²⁹⁸ Bonner, p. 8.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

³⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 10-11.

³⁰² Ibid.

Whitney's previous experience suggested that he would have a better understanding of the problems facing both ITV and ILR. He was chosen over four other candidates. While they were experienced in *either* the public *or* the private broadcasting sectors, Whitney's appointment stemmed from his experience of commercial and public broadcasting. Through his company Ross Productions, he had produced shows for Radio Luxembourg during the 1950s, he had openly campaigned for commercial radio during the 1960s, and in the 1970s he had co-produced programmes such as *Upstairs Downstairs* for ITV.³⁰³ As a managing director of Capital Radio and chair of AIRC, he understood the difficulties of delivering public service broadcasting within a commercial environment.³⁰⁴ According to contemporary commentators, the IBA became increasingly commercial in its outlook under Whitney's leadership. Whitney told *Broadcast* in November 1984 that the IBA was anxious that ILR stations would have a greater degree of responsibility in their own affairs; that the IBA would reduce its "bureaucratic burden" and therefore help the stations thrive.³⁰⁵ IBA meetings, which had once centred on programme content and control issues, now focused primarily on commercial considerations, a development which alarmed both IBA staff and broadcasters like, who remained committed to the public service mandate.³⁰⁶ Putting it bluntly, television presenter and producer Roger Bolton, an official of ABS (Association of Broadcasting and Allied Staff), believed that the IBA was now "just in the business of selling franchises".³⁰⁷

AIRC presses for relaxation of regulation

Though ILR revenue grew by eighteen per cent in 1982-3, this proved only a brief respite.³⁰⁸ From late 1983, it was clear that ILR's fundamental problems remained; costs were rising and it was still proving difficult for the industry to attract investors.³⁰⁹ Competition for advertising revenue had intensified with the arrival of breakfast television and Channel Four, and new satellite and cable services were projected. Land based pirate radio stations remained a problem even though they had been outlawed and, as Chapter One explained, the government was now considering the introduction of a new lightly-regulated community radio service.

³⁰³ Ibid, p. 28.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ *Broadcast*, 16 November 1984.

³⁰⁶ *Broadcast*, 6 January 1984.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ *Radio in the United Kingdom*, pp. 6, 28.

³⁰⁹ *Broadcast*, 31 May 1982; *Marketing Week*, 5 November, 1982; *Campaign*, 26 October, 1984.

The IBA's first response to this difficult situation was to join the AIRC and the record companies in pressuring the Home Office to take action against the pirates. Despite raids leading to the confiscation of equipment, a hardcore of better-organised stations had regrouped to recommence broadcasting from a new location. Apart from their illegality, the main concern, especially for ILR and the record companies, was that the pirates paid no taxes or royalties. Neither did they have to adhere to IBA standards. In addition to using cheap mobile transmitters (usually placed on the tops of tower blocks), the pirates simply broadcasted from flats and front rooms, thus avoiding the expense of expensive studios. Moreover, in the face of this unfair competition, ILR was further handicapped by its responsibility to cater for the wider community whereas the pirates were free to target specific audiences. This was a facility ILR would have very much liked as it would have made it easier to attract niche audiences which advertisers wished to target. Finally, it was argued that ILR was losing out because some of the larger pirate operators were funded by local businesses.³¹⁰ In these circumstances, AIRC director Brian West sought a level playing field; all commercial radio should be subject to the same degree of regulation. "If the pirates were allowed to continue unabated and should the new community service come into existence", he argued, "ILR should also be allowed to exist within a "relaxed system of control."³¹¹

West's view was representative of a growing dissatisfaction with the IBA's regulation of ILR. This could be traced back to the autumn of 1983 when Leicester's Centre Radio, which had only been on air a few months, collapsed under a mountain of debt. Though it was later revealed that Centre had overspent in equipping its offices and studios, the fact remained it could not generate sufficient income to meet its operating costs.³¹² Poor budgeting may have given the IBA a pretext for not taking action, but its refusal to allow measures to save Centre and its continued exacting regulation of the network provided a catalyst for the industry to call for a lighter form of control. Tony Stoller, now managing director of Reading's Radio 210, was one of the first to openly express dissatisfaction, writing a series of articles for *Broadcast* in 1984 which effectively outlined AIRC's case against the IBA. Two fundamental questions summed up Stoller's argument: "Why should not local stations own

³¹⁰ Hind, J., and Mosco, S., *Rebel Radio: The Full Story of British Pirate Radio* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp. 96-98.

³¹¹ West quoted in Barnard (1989), p. 83.

³¹² Thane, e-mail to the author; *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 6.

and operate their own transmitters to agreed standards?” and “[Do] we any longer need a transmission agency for local radio?”

Arguing that transmitter rentals were excessive, Stoller compared the IBA’s estimate of the cost of a pair of VHF and medium wave masts (£200,000) with advertisements in the trade magazine *Wireless* where the same equipment was on offer at a lower price (£1,500 each). Turning to programme control, he described the IBA’s position as wasteful and unproductive. Stoller suggested that ILR should be largely self-regulating with the IBA’s role reduced to providing a “guiding hand”. He challenged the IBA’s interpretation of the original 1972 Sound Broadcasting Act and asked if there was any need for it to be involved in almost every aspect of a station’s output.³¹³ At the same time as Stoller was airing these views in *Broadcast*, a conference of all 43 ILR stations was drawing up plans for the AIRC’s campaign for deregulation.³¹⁴ According to Stoller’s later history of independent radio, the chairmen of all the first nineteen stations met in early 1984 to form a potential lobbying group.³¹⁵ They resolved to convene a meeting of all the AIRC members, and at that meeting, on 23 June 1984 at the Sheraton Skyline Hotel at Heathrow Airport (referred to by commentators as the ‘Heathrow Conference’), it was agreed that the AIRC will pressure the IBA for a light regulation of ILR.³¹⁶ The conference resolved to adopt six resolutions, which if implemented would end with ILR being a truly commercial radio service. Of these six there were four principal aims: firstly, to make the case that ILR was over-regulated; secondly, to demand an early and substantial cut in transmitter rental charges; thirdly, to press the government for new legislation that would lighten the burdens on commercial radio; and fourthly, to demand an independent report on the potential for more ILR stations.³¹⁷

IBA reciprocation

At first, the AIRC campaign seemed to have had little impact on the IBA. Even Whitney seemed to be caught within the institutional nature of the IBA and was unable to meet the full demands of the ILR companies.³¹⁸ In any case, its regulatory remit could only be changed through new legislation. However, with the IBA also struggling financially this

³¹³ *Broadcast*, 29 June 1984.

³¹⁴ *Broadcast*, 15 June 1984, *Campaign*, 26 October 1984.

³¹⁵ For discussion on the Heathrow conference see Stoller (2010), p. 142-152.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ Barnard (1989) p. 83; demands as listed in Stoller *ibid.*, p. 145, and Street. S., *Crossing the Ether: British Public Service Radio and Commercial Competition 1922-1945* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006), p. 209.

³¹⁸ Stoller (2010), p. 118.

indifference was to be short-lived. In previous years its television and radio divisions had built up large surpluses but the development of the fourth television channel had proved enormously expensive, leaving less to spend on the maintenance of ITV and ILR.³¹⁹ Diminishing revenue was also a problem for the IBA. In the difficult economic climate of the early 1980s few of the larger stations were generating enough profit to become liable for secondary rental payments, so that, by November 1984, there were insufficient funds to pay for the further development of ILR.³²⁰ These problems, along with the continuing paucity of new entrants, forced the IBA to look for new ways of financing ILR expansion.³²¹ Rather than seeking new entrants, existing licensees were invited to extend their coverage into adjacent areas. In addition to being permitted to head a consortium to replace Leicester's failed Centre Radio, Radio Trent was, for example, invited to add Derby to its already established Nottingham service.

According to Bonner, the managing directors of the ITV companies were delighted with Whitney as IBA Director-General.³²² Without doubt, their ILR counterparts were equally pleased to have a sympathetic businessman in charge of their regulatory body. The IBA was now showing more understanding of the network's problems and recognised the need to ease its control. As a former senior IBA officer later observed, it was found necessary to ensure that the "weight of regulation", neither destroyed existing operators, nor acted as a barrier to new entrants.³²³ A number of rules and practices were either changed or relaxed. While the emphasis on community and public programming continued, the level of monitoring was reduced. Though the yearly appraisal remained, the new eight-year contracts meant an end to the process of having the license renewed every year. Rather than inspecting every detail, the IBA's regional officers were now instructed to be more concerned with the public response to a station's output.³²⁴ Stations were allowed to vary transmission hours without prior permission and no longer had to spend three per cent of net income on live music, which, unfortunately, enabled some to abandon their support of local orchestras and

³¹⁹ Financial Times Business Information, *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 28.

³²⁰ IBA deputy director of radio Peter Baldwin quoted in Barnard (1989), p. 84; Whereas BRMB paid £68,000 in secondary rental in 1981-1982, profits were such it was eligible to pay none the following year (1982-1983) – Independent Broadcasting Authority, *BRMB: Progress Report January 1982 – January 1983*, (Ofcom documents), para. 58.

³²¹ Barnard (1989), p. 84.

³²² Bonner, p. 30.

³²³ Thane, e-mail to the author.

³²⁴ *Broadcast*, 16 November 1984.

live concerts. Finally the IBA's annual rental charges were reviewed and some stations benefited from reductions of up to ten per cent.³²⁵

The most significant changes were probably in relation to networked programming and station ownership. Following an earlier AIRC suggestion, for the first time national advertisers were provided with genuine national coverage when the IBA allowed the introduction of a networked chart show - in order to compete directly with a similar Radio One programme on Sunday afternoons.³²⁶ New rules on station ownership were introduced permitting stations to raise more funds than before from outside their immediate area. Crucially, ILR stations could now buy shares in other ILR stations and a pattern of cross-ownership emerged which would eventually lead to regional groupings. Dunstable and Bedford's Chiltern Radio had already expanded into the new ILR area of Milton Keynes; it was now able to absorb Hereward Radio, the financially-struggling contractor for Northampton and Peterborough.³²⁷ Through a process of takeover and merger, semi-national groupings also emerged. Owen Oyston established a network of stations throughout northern England and South Wales. His Red Rose radio company already owned two Lancashire-based stations and he used his Miss World company to acquire Manchester's Piccadilly Radio; he then acquired Leeds' Radio Aire and the Welsh stations of Gwent and Cardiff (which were combined to form Red Dragon Radio).³²⁸

Though most ILR stations and the companies that owned them welcomed the IBA's new approach there were some sceptics. James Gordon, managing director of Glasgow's Radio Clyde, welcomed the reduced rental charges but did not believe that the new rules would help ILR achieve its main goal of reducing costs.³²⁹ He was convinced that relaxed rules on monitoring and the opening up of broadcasting hours would see some stations introduce "wall to wall" music which would infringe existing needle-time agreements. A month after the IBA announced its first raft of changes the ILR companies had met again to discuss demands for further deregulation. Writing in *Broadcast*, Gordon made it clear that he did not see this as the way forward, believing that further relaxation would result in lower

³²⁵ Ibid; Thane, e-mail to the author.

³²⁶ *Broadcast*, 4 May 1984; Barnard (1989), p. 85.

³²⁷ Barnard (1989), p. 84.

³²⁸ Ibid, pp.84-85; *Birmingham Post*, 22 December 1988, 3, 4, 7, 8 February, 3 April, 1989; *Financial Times*, 22 December 1988, 4, 7 8 February, 21, 31 March 1989; *Guardian*, 22 December 1988, 4, 7 February, 21, 31 March, 1989; *Times*, 22 December 1988, 4, 7, 8, 21, 22 February, 21, 23, 31 March 1989.

³²⁹ *Broadcast*, 17 December 1984.

standards. Local news, he observed, was a major reason why people listened to local radio and any cuts here would simply drive listeners away.³³⁰ The broadcasting industry unions denounced ILR's new direction. They were driven mainly by fear of redundancies across the deregulated network and its more cost-driven regulator.³³¹ Like Gordon, the unions also feared for the future of public service broadcasting within the commercial sector.

Moreover, some smaller ILR stations were clearly dissatisfied with the AIRC, despite – and sometimes because of – its success in campaigning for a more relaxed approach to regulation. While the AIRC was pressuring the IBA during the summer of 1984, Plymouth Sound, Severn Sound (Cheltenham and Gloucester) and Radio Wyvern (Hereford and Worcester) all resigned from membership. It was clear that the departing stations took the view that the AIRC was dominated by the larger metropolitan broadcasters and that their subscriptions no longer gave them value for money.³³² As *Broadcast* noted, these resignations formed part of the wider effort to force the AIRC into introducing a graduated membership scheme.³³³ Plymouth Sound's annual membership subscription was £5,000 - a significant outlay while revenues were falling - and this did not include the additional costs of JICRAR audience measurement and RMB membership. It also seemed clear that it was the larger stations which were likely to benefit most from any pressure that the AIRC's exerted on the IBA. Further concerns included issues such as the long-running dispute with the PPL over needle-time. So far this had cost the Association over £250,000, a cost some smaller stations believed extravagant given that it was the larger 24-hour stations that would benefit most from a successful outcome.³³⁴

ILR: towards an industry in its own right

Writing in December 1984, Tony Stoller believed that over the previous decade political, economic and technological changes had caused ILR to become a “different animal” to that which existed in 1974.³³⁵ During the early 1980s ILR was seen as more than just a new broadcast medium, it was progressively seen as a new industry. It was increasingly referred to by the business and financial press. The *Investors Chronicle* in 1982, and the *Financial Times* again in 1983, noted how ILR was developing a two-tier structure.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ *Broadcast*, 16 November 1984.

³³² *Broadcast*, 6 April 1984.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ *Broadcast*, 21 December 1984.

Stations serving the larger centres of urban population were growing away from the smaller stations serving relatively small towns and cities such as Ipswich or Plymouth.³³⁶ It was the smaller stations that were most likely to suffer from low investment and low profitability. We witnessed earlier how the smaller operators believed they saw little benefit from the AIRC. Significantly, it was the large metropolitan stations that were to dominate the AIRC and use it to further their own particular interests. The IBA's changed stance on ownership, for example, left them well-placed to dominate the new regional groups that were emerging. In addition, the metropolitan stations increasingly looked to the stock market for investment. By 1984, both Capital and Glasgow's Radio Clyde in seeking to join Liverpool's Radio City on the Unlisted Securities Market.³³⁷

As it grew as an industry, ILR became progressively more professional in its standards. After 1982, the Sony Awards, described by Street as radio's equivalent to the Oscars, provided a clear indication of this.³³⁸ With categories ranging from best station, through to best breakfast show, or best current affairs programme, broadcasters were encouraged to attain a degree of excellence. For instance, BRMB's George Gavin was awarded Sports Broadcaster of the Year in 1986.³³⁹ The Radio Academy, founded in 1983 with ILR being a member of its founding consortium, which provided a forum for the academic study of the medium, was another move in this direction.³⁴⁰

A more structured approach to training was undoubtedly another indication of a maturing industry. Until the late 1970s the BBC provided ILR with readily-trained staff. With the growth of BBC local radio, as well as ILR, this was a diminishing source of skilled manpower and could no longer be relied on. The SCNI, in 1979, had recommended that both the AIRC and the IBA should develop their own training facilities and the 1980 Broadcasting Act built on this by putting the onus on the IBA and ILR to provide such facilities. Funded by IBA's secondary rental revenues, this the larger stations undertook by providing relevant in-house courses in areas such as journalism and engineering. Eventually, in 1980, Capital Radio established a national training school with places for up to 750 full and part-time

³³⁶ *Investors Chronicle*, 21 May 1982; *Radio in the United Kingdom*, p. 28.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ Street (2002), p. 123.

³³⁹ *Birmingham Post*, 29 April 1986.

³⁴⁰ *Broadcast*, 8 August 1983.

students.³⁴¹ Though recession and the paucity of secondary rental meant many of these schemes were subsequently abandoned, the fact that they had been introduced demonstrated ILR becoming an industry in its own right. Moreover, the fact they were funded by the IBA demonstrated the intricate link between broadcaster and regulator. Just as it had for the previous ten years, the IBA was still taking an interest in the survival of ILR. Having nurtured the new network since even before its inception, political changes enabled it to find ways of easing its plight during the difficult conditions of the early 1980s.

Conclusion

These first three chapters have provided a contextual framework for the case studies of BRMB and Beacon Radio. The various themes which they explored will be developed further when we turn to the culture of running an ILR station. It has been established that ILR was a commercially funded public radio service: charged with public service remit, each company was expected to be financed by the sale of airtime to advertisers. The discussion in Chapter One on the economics of broadcasting and the importance of attracting an audience will, therefore, be of particular relevance to our understanding of how an ILR station worked. From later discussion it will become evident that there was a need to construct an audience large enough for the two stations to become viable concerns. Likewise, the discussion of ‘reception studies’ will also be important. The various methods which were used in order to attract and hold an audience, including the personality of the presenter, music policy and the predictability of output, had specific relevance to BRMB and Beacon. It will later be seen how BRMB’s success in attracting audiences was partly down to the freedom that it gave to presenters to develop their own style, and that audiences were apparently dissuaded from listening when presenters became patronising and self-indulgent. Moreover, the next chapter will show how Beacon’s heavily formulated ‘impersonal’ commercial format did little to build an audience: despite its efforts to sound ‘professional’, the station still had a relatively poor audience share.

The regulation of ILR will be of particular importance to the case studies. Chapters One and Two established that broadcasting in Britain was dominated by the emphasis on public service. Even when commercial television arrived during the 1950s in the shape of ITV, the public service ethic still took precedence over the commercial imperative. The

³⁴¹ *Broadcasting Act 1980* (London: HMSO, 1980), ch. 64, section 35; *Broadcast*, 15, 28 April 1980; Stoller (2010), p. 135.

lessons the IBA had learned from its control of ITV were carried over to ILR. On its formation in 1954 the ITA, forerunner to the IBA, had to prove that Independent Television would be more than a simple form of commercial broadcasting. After much criticism, particularly from Pilkington, the BBC, and left-wing critics, the ITA turned ITV into a credible commercially-funded public service broadcaster; and this set the agenda for its control of ILR. Importantly, it had to satisfy the critics of commercial radio by showing that ILR would not simply be a continuation of the offshore pirates, which had been outlawed only a few years before. The IBA even went to great lengths to dissuade the press and other bodies from referring to the network as commercial radio – it emphasised that ILR was ‘independent’ and not commercial radio.³⁴²

Then there was the shape of ILR and the way in which it was to be controlled. The key word was ‘franchise’: each ILR company was contracted to operate a franchise on behalf of the IBA. Though they were free to develop programming which reflected their own particular area, companies still had to operate within the IBA’s strict code of standards and operating practices. As this chapter showed, the IBA took an interest in almost every aspect of ILR, and its contractors. As the next chapter demonstrates, to win and keep the franchise each company had to appreciate the importance of working within the IBA’s regulations. The companies needed to be consortia with deep roots in their local communities. They had to be capable of building studios to the prescribed engineering standards. They had to produce a licence application which met with the criteria laid down by the IBA. Additionally, they needed to demonstrate that they could achieve the right balance between commercial viability and public service: being commercially funded, they had to show they would be commercially viable, and as public service broadcasters they had to show that they could formulate programme schedules that would inform, educate and entertain. Then, once in operation, they had to show that they were capable of being a responsible ILR operator that could and would work within the spirit of the (1972) Sound Broadcasting Act. In the next chapter we will see how the creators of BRMB ensured that their station would fit all these criteria. The company would win and operate the franchise fully within the IBA’s expectations. Beacon, on the other hand, would prove to be the opposite case. Its overtly commercial operation and transgressions against the rules governing ILR were not expected of a suitable franchise holder. Indeed, the IBA’s refusal to renew the Beacon licence for a

³⁴² Stoller quoted in Street (2006), p. 205.

further twelve months, and the company's subsequent efforts to correct past mistakes, will show the effectiveness of the Authority's oversight of ILR. In particular, this episode will demonstrate the merit of its system of three-year rolling contracts.

Crucially, these first chapters have contextualised ILR within a developing political arena. Like ITV, ILR was shaped by a post-war Conservative ideology that recognised paternalism and state controlled industry. Then, soon after coming into existence, ILR was affected by the rise of the political left, especially with Labour winning the two elections of 1974. The community media groups and organisations such as the Local Radio Workshop were symbolic of an increased scrutiny of local radio. Local radio stations not making use of all the available local organisations and certain sections of the community being apparently excluded from the wider broadcast media were just two of the accusations which would influence both Annan and the IBA's control of ILR. Annan's emphasis on removing the profit motive from ILR and the need for more community radio was reflected in the IBA's regulation of ILR. With regard to programming, it was during this post-Annan period that the IBA would insist on more 'meaningful' speech and an increased emphasis on 'community'.

It would be an oversimplification to say that the arrival of a more market-driven Conservative government in 1979 led to the IBA relaxing its regulation of ILR. As Chapter Five will show, in the case of BRMB, the IBA was still keeping a tight grip on those stations which seemed to be adopting a more 'commercial' form of output and taking a relaxed view toward their community and public service remit. As seen earlier in this chapter, continuity was initially the key. Thatcher's first cabinet was a broad coalition in which traditional Tories were well represented; only after 1981 did the more right-wing Thatcherites gain the upper hand, and their position became progressively stronger thereafter.

Britain was not alone in this respect. Chapter One indicated this in its discussion of the various broadcasting models. Throughout the western world commercialisation and globalisation was transforming both commercial and public service broadcasting. Importantly, these political shifts were shadowed at the IBA: over a transitional period between 1981 and 1984 the 'high mindedness' of Lady Plowden and Brian Young was replaced by the business experience of Lord Thomson and John Whitney, manager of London's Capital Radio. Whilst the public-service remit remained important, what changed

was the move toward a more sympathetic regulator. With its television and radio franchises facing not only the inflationary pressures of increased costs and declining advertising receipts, and an increasingly competitive market, the IBA now, more than ever before, wanted to secure the commercial survival of ITV and ILR.

Informed by the theory outlined in Chapter One, the following chapters will locate BRMB and Beacon within these changing contexts. Concentrating on the personalities involved and the politics of running an ILR company, they will show how each operator had to adapt to these conditions in order to survive. The strict enforcement of the rules governing ILR during the 1970s, through to the mid-1980s where economic liberalism and recession provided a vehicle for change, there were always fresh challenges to address. In addition, the easing of the IBA's control, ILR developing into two tiers of station, and into an industry in its own right, will be seen through the parallel development of BRMB and Beacon.

Chapter Four

BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio 1972-1979

Previous chapters have established how British broadcasting was regulated within the ethos of public service broadcasting (PSB) and where it existed commercial radio operated outside the established regulatory framework. When commercial radio officially arrived in 1972 in the shape of Independent Local Radio (ILR), the public service ethic was to constrain any commercial initiative.

Attention will now turn to the case study of two West Midlands based ILR companies, BRMB and Beacon. Both represented a different interpretation of ILR's PSB remit. This chapter will set out the reasons for, and the effects of, these two differing interpretations. It will demonstrate how the experience and management style of their managers influenced their interpretation of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) rules. This was particularly evident in the case of Beacon, whose operation under Jay Oliver engendered a turbulent relationship with the regulator; to an extent that in 1979 the IBA refused to renew its licence for a further twelve months. First the chapter will briefly establish the setting up of each company and how each attained their operating licence. It will show how the seeds for future development were sown at these early stages, in particular with the appointment of their management teams. The second part will examine how with John Russell as programme director David Pinnell established BRMB's PSB credentials. BRMB demonstrated how a station could provide a public and community service whilst still return a profit for its shareholders. The third and final section will concentrate on Beacon Radio. Beginning with its operations under Oliver and his somewhat commercial initiative, it will continue by exploring IBA grievances with the station. In particular, how the station's commercial outlook and lack of managerial control resulted in the IBA failing to recognise Beacon as responsible public service broadcaster. Demonstrating how managerial changes were imperative for Beacon to retain its franchise, the chapter will conclude with the circumstances surrounding Oliver's departure in 1979.

Winning the Franchise

Both BRMB and Beacon originated from the local press' interest in commercial radio during the 1960s. Registered as the Express and Star Radio Company, Beacon was established in November 1960 by the Wolverhampton-based Midland News Association

(MNA).³⁴³ Birmingham Broadcasting Limited (BRMB) was established in March 1961 and was one of a number of stations registered by the Birmingham Post and Mail Group (BPM).³⁴⁴ Without plans, infrastructure or staff, both companies remained dormant until the arrival of ILR.³⁴⁵ As Chapter Two pointed out, during the 1960s some newspaper groups saw commercial radio as a natural extension to their business. Indeed, when he was seeking the views of those looking to enter ILR MNA proprietor Alan Graham was one of those from the newspaper industry to lobby Christopher Chataway, the Tory Minister for Posts and Telecommunications.³⁴⁶ There were two reasons for an interest in commercial radio. These were the wish to protect existing revenue should other commercial radio stations be established and the opportunity to expand revenue; they could offer their advertisers with an additional advertising outlet. In the West Midlands here was the case of two adjacent newspaper groups who were therefore looking to expand their local monopoly and protect their revenue from any prospective competition.

Once the regulatory nature of ILR was known the MNA and BPM found that access to the airwaves depended on relinquishing control of their radio companies and forming a consortium of other local interests. The previous chapter demonstrated that under the rules governing ILR no single shareholder was allowed to own more than 20 per cent of the shares in a station; IBA Director of Radio John Thompson pointed out that when appointing franchisees the IBA looked for a degree of ‘localism and diversity’.³⁴⁷ Being the larger of the two the BPM had little difficulty in forming a consortium.³⁴⁸ With his extensive business and civic connections Eric Clayson, chair of Birmingham Broadcasting and director at both BPM and ATV – the Midlands ITV franchise holder, was successful in bringing together a broad

³⁴³ Company number 674678 Express & Star Radio Company registered 10 November 1960, *Jordan's Daily Register of New Companies* (London: Jordan and Sons, October – December, 1960). Upon Independent Local Radio becoming a reality company renamed Beacon Broadcasting Limited (21 February 1972), Dunbar and Company Limited, *Beacon Broadcasting Limited, Issue of 349,900 Ordinary Shares of £1 Each at Par Payable in Full on Application* (Birmingham, Dunbar and Company, April 1975), p. 3.

³⁴⁴ Company number 685666 Birmingham Broadcasting Limited registered 8 March 1961 by Pinsents Solicitors, *Jordan's Daily Register of New Companies* (January – March, 1961); Lord Iliffe, member of Iliffe family, owners of Birmingham Post and Mail Group and instigator of Birmingham Broadcasting, and Geoffrey Battman, Birmingham Broadcasting financial director, interviewed by the author, 10 October 2005. Other non-operational radio stations owned by the BPM included West Midlands Sound Radio Ltd, Radio Birmingham Limited and Voice of Birmingham Limited, Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Report of the Directors*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 30 September, 1975).

³⁴⁵ Alan Graham, proprietor of Midland News Association, interviewed by the author, 22 July 2005; Iliffe and Battman, interview.

³⁴⁶ Graham, interview.

³⁴⁷ Thompson, J., ‘Who Owns Independent Radio?’ *Independent Broadcasting* (November 1975), p. 15.

³⁴⁸ Graham interview; quoted by Iliffe from Birmingham Post and Mail Group, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending July 1974* (Birmingham: Birmingham Post and Mail, 1974).

group of businesses and local dignitaries.³⁴⁹ The MNA did not have connections to the same extent; it was a family run firm and was the smaller of the two newspaper groups. It instead invited the Birmingham merchant banking firm of Dunbar and Company to form the Beacon consortium.³⁵⁰

Of the four applications for the Birmingham franchise that of Birmingham Broadcasting was the best prepared. The IBA even congratulated the group on the extent of its research.³⁵¹ Like Birmingham Independent Radio (BIR), the runner-up for the Birmingham franchise, the BPM realised that to win credibility with the IBA it had to have a consortium firmly rooted in the local community.³⁵² The next important factor was the choice of David Pinnell as company manager and John Russell as programme director. With Pinnell and Russell on the company board the BPM persuaded the IBA that Birmingham Broadcasting was in the charge of people from a radio background, people experienced in public service and commercial radio. Chapter Two showed that Pinnell had previously managed the Lourenco Marques and Manx commercial radio stations, and had been involved with sales at ATV.³⁵³ Programme director John Russell was formerly programme controller and training officer at the PSB based British Force's Broadcasting European Service (BFBS).³⁵⁴ Station manager Dennis Maitland also represented a similar public service and commercial background but he was absent from the board of BIR. Though the IBA was not questioning his credibility, his managerial career ranged from the BBC through to Radio Luxembourg and the Radio London pirate station, it objected to his not being local and his not being a board member.³⁵⁵

The Wolverhampton and the Black Country licence was amongst the last of the nineteen areas to be advertised. When advertised in autumn 1974 it was the victim of a

³⁴⁹ Iliffe interview. BPM was a constituent member of the Birmingham Conference, a group comprising local authorities, local businesses and voluntary organisations, and it may have been through this group that many contacts were made, Birmingham Post and Mail Group, *The Birmingham Post Year Book* Birmingham: Birmingham Post and Mail, 1972).

³⁵⁰ Graham, interview.

³⁵¹ Undated IBA ILR Birmingham Travelling Committee report on each applicant for the Birmingham ILR franchise, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0174/04). See appendices for details of rival consortia.

³⁵² *Birmingham Post*, 5 February 1972; Iliffe and Battman, interview. See appendices for composition of consortium.

³⁵³ Iliffe, interview. Pinnell appointed March 1972, *Birmingham Post*, 3 March 1972. Pinnell was introduced to the Post and Mail by Norman Collins, a former colleague of Pinnell at ATV, Lord Iliffe, in e-mail to the author, 30 August 2006.

³⁵⁴ John Russell, BRMB programme director 1973-1979, in e-mail to the author, 26 June 2007.

³⁵⁵ *Birmingham Post*, 7 December 1972; ILR Birmingham Travelling Committee.

paucity of interest in ILR. The previous chapter has already noted how commentators referred to ILR's editorial and technological 'straightjacket', where the need to provide balanced programming, pay high transmitter fees and build expensive studios provided an obstacle to those wishing to enter the industry.³⁵⁶ The ongoing economic crisis was also a major issue facing prospective candidates. In the Beacon share issue (see below) Dunbar Bank indeed referred to Beacon as a particularly 'high-risk' venture: besides the risk of high operating costs there was the dependence on advertising revenue during a period of economic difficulties.³⁵⁷ With a sizable overlap with the Birmingham franchise (see introduction), having to share its transmission area was an additional problem. In part Beacon would have to compete for advertising sales and after only a few months of operation Birmingham Broadcasting was itself reporting particularly poor sales figures. Whilst it is difficult to ascertain whether these issues were the exact cause of a lack of interest, the fact remained Beacon Broadcasting was the only applicant.

The IBA was dissatisfied with the Beacon application, despite Beacon being the only contender. Unlike Birmingham Broadcasting's well-prepared document Beacon's was brief and to the point. According to the IBA its ambition was merely to attract the "largest possible audience".³⁵⁸ Little mention was made of community or informative programming such as education or religion, and instead the emphasis was on popular programming such as music and sport. There was also a problem with the funding of the new station. Probably for the same reasons that few showed an interest in ILR, or even this particular franchise with its proximity to Birmingham, the new consortium was having difficulty in finding finance. After a failed share issue of £350,000 only a further commitment by new and existing shareholders satisfied the IBA that the company was suitably financed and allowed it to continue.³⁵⁹ Chapter Three showed how Selkirk was one of the two Canadian organisations that helped finance a number of ILR stations, and with its 30 per cent share it was Selkirk that provided most of the Beacon funds.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ Barnard, S., *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), pp. 72-73; Baron, M., *Independent Radio: the Story of Commercial Radio in the United Kingdom* (Lavenham: Terence Dalton, 1975), p. 82; Crisell, A., *Understanding Radio* (London: Routledge, 2 ed., 1994), pp. 35-36.

³⁵⁷ BRMB chairman quoted in *Birmingham Post*, 18 December 1974; *Beacon Broadcasting Share Issue*, p 6; Jay Oliver, Beacon managing director 1974-1979, in e-mail to the author, 12 September, 2005.

³⁵⁸ IBA technical assessment on the Beacon Radio application, 29 December 1974, (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/02).

³⁵⁹ *Broadcast*, 19 May 1975; *Broadcast*, 26 May 1975; *Times*, 21 May 1975.

³⁶⁰ Stoller, T., *Sounds of Your Life, The History of Independent Radio in the UK* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2010), p. 73.

The IBA was also concerned that Beacon had no radio experienced people in charge, so the licence offer was also on condition that the company form a committee comprising directors and management.³⁶¹ Jay Oliver arrived three months after Beacon was provisionally awarded the franchise. Besides helping raise the necessary finance he insisted that he and his yet to be appointed programme and sales directors were awarded seats on the company board.³⁶² Oliver later emphasised how before his arrival none on the company had ever run a radio station. Only a few members of the board had media experience. Alan Graham's family, who in essence created the Beacon company, were proprietors of MNA while J. Clement Jones was a former editor of the MNA's *Wolverhampton Express & Star*. Bernard Blakemore was controller of ATV between 1964 and 1970 and had enjoyed a long career in radio engineering.³⁶³ With Graham ruling himself out as chairman because he lived in Monte Carlo, Alan Henn, proprietor of the T&A Henn jewellery business, was elected as chair. BRMB chair John Parkinson had had a lifelong interest in radio, Henn, had no such interest, however.³⁶⁴ Indeed, before being invited to take the Beacon chair he did not even know ILR existed.³⁶⁵

Originally John Whitney and former pirate operator Chris Carey were in the running to head Beacon. With Whitney 'head hunted' by London's Capital Radio, Carey was ruled as too erratic to run a station to IBA standards.³⁶⁶ Though discounted by the fact that Oliver was listed as managing director before any Selkirk involvement, Henn recollected that Selkirk had appointed Oliver. In evidence, however, both Graham and Oliver emphasised how the IBA was involved in his appointment.³⁶⁷ According to both it was his work for the American security services in Northern Ireland that caused the regulator to 'push' him towards Beacon.³⁶⁸ Moreover, Oliver believed it was his commercial radio experience and his overseeing of Downtown Radio, which won the Belfast ILR franchise, that persuaded John Thompson (IBA Director of Radio) to recommend his taking charge of Beacon.³⁶⁹ It

³⁶¹ IBA contract offer to Beacon Broadcasting Limited, 27 January 1975.

³⁶² Oliver, e-mail.

³⁶³ Alan Henn, former chairman of Beacon Radio, and Bernard Blakemore, former director of Beacon Radio, interviewed by the author, 3 October 2005.

³⁶⁴ *Birmingham Post*, 5 February 1972.

³⁶⁵ Henn, interview.

³⁶⁶ Graham, interview.

³⁶⁷ Henn, interview.

³⁶⁸ Graham, interview; Jay Oliver, in e-mail to the author, 30 August 2005.

³⁶⁹ Oliver, *ibid*.

was his commercial/business background that is of particular importance here.³⁷⁰ Aged 29 and one of ILR's youngest managing directors his career hitherto centred on commercial radio and advertising. Before handling its successful ILR application he was sales and promotions manager at the *Belfast Telegraph*; before this he worked in commercial television and radio in Mexico - at one point he was operations manager at a Mexico City commercial radio station.³⁷¹

Oliver was described by some as 'flamboyant' and 'larger than life'. An insight into his business style, indeed arrogance, came with his purchasing of the Beacon studios. As well as finding finance for the new station, another task for Oliver was to find a suitable base. With it central to the Beacon broadcast area Sandwell's prestigious Burntree House was the planned headquarters. With the Burntree House being ruled as too expensive another location had to be found, however.³⁷² With neither pre-arranged finance nor the knowledge of the board, Oliver purchased an old Victorian house on Wolverhampton's Tettenhall Road with an unsecured cheque for £18,000. It was only after a hastily arranged board meeting that the finance was sanctioned and the deal finally approved.³⁷³

BRMB: Following the Public Service Tradition

Pinnell and Russell composed the Birmingham Broadcasting application using their extensive knowledge of commercial and public broadcasting. According to Russell, Pinnell had little knowledge of programming – despite having previously run Manx and other radio stations. Instead Pinnell brought the commercial experience he had gained at ATV and it was Russell who outlined the programming of the new station.³⁷⁴ A comparison with Manx was detectable, however.³⁷⁵ For instance, reference to radio being “no longer a storytelling medium” featured in both the Birmingham Broadcasting application and a 1966 Manx Radio report which outlined its activities.³⁷⁶ Forging a close relationship with the local community

³⁷⁰ Munro Jack, Beacon Radio presenter, 1976-1978, in e-mail to the author, 4 May 2006.

³⁷¹ Graham, interview; Oliver, e-mail, 30 August 2005; *Beacon Broadcasting Share Issue*, p. 4; Jack, e-mail, 4 May 2006.

³⁷² Baron, p. 153.

³⁷³ Oliver, in e-mail to the author, 1 September 2005.

³⁷⁴ Russell, e-mail.

³⁷⁵ See chapter two for discussion on Manx Radio and its community commitment.

³⁷⁶ Meyer, R.L., *The Future of Local Broadcasting in Britain: a Report on a Successful Experiment in Government Authorised Commercial Radio* (London: Richard L. Meyer Associates, 1966), p. 7; Birmingham Broadcasting licence application, as reprinted in Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Report and Accounts, 1973-1974* (London: IBA, 1974), pp. 95-100.

and a service centring on local news and information was also not that dissimilar.³⁷⁷ It was Pinnell and Russell's strong sense of social and community involvement that shaped their application and the future output of Birmingham Broadcasting.³⁷⁸ Promising a "high standard" of service which was designed to "enrich" the "personal lives" of the "greater majority of the community" were the words the IBA wanted to hear. Only when a station "enjoyed large audiences", the application continued, "could it satisfy the basic popular need for a sense of communal participation". Whilst this recognised that a commercial radio station could only survive if it was widely popular, it went some way in indicating how the company planned to involve and provide for the whole community. Russell later argued, "every minority is part of the majority ... cater for the majority and you also cater for the minority".³⁷⁹ Whilst this is a matter we will return to in Chapter Five, when the issue of ethnic coverage proved to a contentious issue for BRMB during the early 1980s, the important point here is that the station was aiming to provide an information-based service for the greater part of the community.

Previous chapters have already established how ILR was envisaged as a service of information, education and entertainment. It was to provide the same service as that provided by all the BBC radio stations, national and local. With BBC Radio One and Radio Two the largest competitor for audiences it was inevitable that most ILR stations should adopt a similar 'strip-show' format.³⁸⁰ Described by the IBA as 'flow' programming, consisting of news and information interlaced with entertainment via the use of popular music, each station developed its own unique daily schedule. After detailed research schedules were tailored to meet the needs of each locality.³⁸¹ With the on-air name of BRMB Birmingham Broadcasting utilised various methods of research to gauge what the Birmingham community expected from its new local radio station; these included focus groups and Gallop Polls.³⁸² As commercial entities, however, the success of each ILR station depended on its ability to provide advertisers with audiences. While stations satisfied their public service remit through information based speech it was music with which they attracted

³⁷⁷ Manx Radio report, p. 8; Birmingham Broadcasting licence application, pp.95-96.

³⁷⁸ Russell, e-mail.

³⁷⁹ *Music Week*, 1 March 1975.

³⁸⁰ Barnard, p. 77.

³⁸¹ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Television and Radio, 1981* (London: IBA 1981), p. 150; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Partnership in the Community* (London: IBA, February 1981), p. 2.

³⁸² Russell, e-mail.

an audience large enough for their commercial survival.³⁸³ Such was the importance of music it indeed topped the list of priorities in the BRMB application.

In competing against Radio One and Radio Two ILR stations planned their music accordingly. Most presented a combination of Top 40 and Middle of the Road (MOR) music which matched Radio One's chart singles and the older, lighter music of Radio Two. Using music as what Barnard described as a form of musical "marketing tool" each station matched its music to the tastes of the local community.³⁸⁴ Before and after it came to air BRMB used focus groups to gauge the musical preferences of the Birmingham population.³⁸⁵ With the changing musical tastes of the audience, or just to get the balance right, for all stations this was an ongoing process. From purely Top 40 through to a mixture of MOR album and chart music, Capital Radio went through several formats before reaching an audience-winning package.³⁸⁶ Importantly, at these early stages the intention was to capture the widest possible audience. It was during the 1980s when ILR faced increased competition for audiences that it took a more commercial approach to its operations and shaped its music policy so as to attract particular demographic groups – especially pop music for younger listeners. Partway between MOR and Top 40, BRMB initially pitched its music output towards the 18-49 age range.³⁸⁷ Besides playing chart singles for its younger audience it was able to target the older listener with a combination of new and existing 'lighter' artists.³⁸⁸ As with most stations BRMB used its needle-time to match the listening habits of its listeners. Chart music, oldies and popular album tracks featured during the main daytime period while music for students (rock and 'progressive') and specialist interests (country and classical) was consigned to the less popular evening and weekend period.³⁸⁹

With the BBC providing Britain's only model of local radio it was inevitable ILR would adopt a similar approach, especially with both having a similar public service and community remit. 'What's on' spots, sports bulletins, celebrity interviews and outside broadcasts such as those from local shopping centres and hospitals were all carried over.³⁹⁰ With it being described by as some as [BBC] Radio Birmingham with commercials, BRMB

³⁸³ Barnard, p. 81.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Russell, e-mail.

³⁸⁶ Barnard, p. 79; for discussion on ILR music policy see Barnard, 'Music as a Marketing Tool', pp. 78-82.

³⁸⁷ BRMB licence application.

³⁸⁸ *Radio Guide*, September 1976.

³⁸⁹ Barnard, p. 77.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

was very much representative of this tendency.³⁹¹ Like BBC local radio, phone-ins provided a sizable proportion of its community participation.³⁹² For BRMB the phone-in was useful in two ways. As well as providing a useful way in which to save needle-time for the morning and afternoon peak listening periods, they were an inexpensive way of maintaining the localness of its service. They helped forge a close relationship with the local community and in part satisfy the public service remit.³⁹³ While a number of caller-based community programmes provided listeners with information and advice, two daily phone-ins from Monday to Friday (two hours at lunchtime and one hour in the evening) centred on news and local current affairs. Besides the daily mid-morning show, where telephone lines were opened for listeners to question studio guests on community related matters, there was also a Sunday community-based phone-in. There were also specialist advice-line programmes which ranged from legal problems (one-hour Monday-Friday) to matters of a personal and spiritual nature (two hours Sunday evenings). Most of the ILR stations believed that phone-ins dealing with personal matters would need some type of off-air follow-up, so the Sunday evening spiritual programme also developed an off-air Open Line Club where people feeling lonely and isolated could meet and share their problems.³⁹⁴ On Saturday afternoons, too, listeners were invited to give their views during the five-hour sports and music programme. Finally the daily 'Tradio' programme offered a radio version of classified advertisements where listeners could sell, buy or swop items. Developed by Russell and copied by a number of other ILR stations, this proved a popular addition to the afternoon music show.³⁹⁵

News and documentaries were a major contribution to BRMB's public service commitment. According to Russell, it was these that put the station at the heart of the Birmingham community.³⁹⁶ He used the two-minute *Mike Henfield's Comment* feature, the "hugely popular" editorial slot during the Monday to Friday breakfast show, as an example. A service of national, international and local news was developed by the station's own news

³⁹¹ Munro Jack, in e-mail to the author, 31 May, 2006; Peter Windows, BRMB presenter and operations manager, 1974-1975, interviewed by the author, 8 May 2006.

³⁹² Barnard, p. 77; Crisell, A., *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 143; Lewis, P. and Booth, J., *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 101-102.

³⁹³ Windows, interview. For contemporary discussion on the use of the phone-in Stoller, T., 'Phone-in Programmes on ILR', *Independent Broadcasting*, (November 1974) and 'Phone ins & outs', *Radio Guide*, (March 1977).

³⁹⁴ Stoller, *ibid*; Stoller (2010), p. 81.

³⁹⁵ Windows, interview.

³⁹⁶ Russell, e-mail.

team using what was described as ILR's first 'revolutionary electronic newsroom'.³⁹⁷ Besides its own reporters and correspondents, great use was made of Independent Radio News which provided ILR with national and international news. Five-minute hourly bulletins were supplemented with headlines on the half-hour during the peak drive-time periods and three in-depth newscasts at 1pm, 6.30pm and 10pm. BRMB also provided a valuable contribution to the ILR network. Serving the industrial Midlands it used its own industrial correspondent to provide coverage of the on-going industrial disputes at the British Leyland Longbridge plant. In November 1974 it was also in the unenviable situation of providing the network with first hand coverage of the IRA's bombing of two city centre pubs.³⁹⁸

BRMB established its own documentaries with the appointment of Brian King in 1978, some of which became part of ILR's programme sharing scheme.³⁹⁹ The programme sharing scheme was an economical way of introducing quality programming to ILR and was initially administered by the IBA before being handed over to the Association of Independent Radio Contractors (AIRC – ILR's representative body).⁴⁰⁰ BRMB's *The Midlands Gun Massacre*, concerning a fatal shooting and subsequent high-speed police chase, received particular acclaim - both the *Observer* and *Sunday Telegraph* praised the programme for its research and coverage.⁴⁰¹ A more coordinated approach to the news and current affairs phone-ins was also developed when presenter Ed Doolan and Mike Owen, his newly appointed producer, assumed control.⁴⁰² Although it enabled a greater concentration on content and presentation, and relieved pressure on the newsroom, the move caused friction between the news and the programming departments. Doolan, a former journalist, and Owen were answerable to the programme director while the news team and the news editor only saw themselves answerable to the managing director.⁴⁰³ This aside, these and the other examples showed the extent to which BRMB had developed serious programming.

Through its 'social action' activities BRMB established a strong sense of community involvement, despite the criticism of ILR's community provision as laid out in Chapter One.

³⁹⁷ *Broadcast*, 11 January 1974; *Times*, 19 February 1974; *Broadcast*, 22 February 1974; Baron, p. 113.

³⁹⁸ *Broadcast*, 2 December 1974.

³⁹⁹ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 16 May 1984.

⁴⁰⁰ For detailed discussion on the programme sharing scheme see Street, S., *A Concise History of British Radio, 1922-2002* (Tiverton: Kelly Publications, 2002), p. 119-121, and Stoller (2010), pp. 137-141.

⁴⁰¹ *Sunday Telegraph*, 1 April 1979; *Observer*, 8 April 1979.

⁴⁰² Wright, A., *Local Radio and Local Broadcasting: a Study in Political Education* (Birmingham: IBA IBA Research Fellowship Scheme / Department of Extramural Studies, University of Birmingham 1980), p. 68.

⁴⁰³ Russell, e-mail; Wright, *ibid*.

Constant contact was established with the areas various voluntary and public organisations through John Hedges, apparently ILR's first community relations officer.⁴⁰⁴ Regular community information slots were developed with child fostering and job finding as two examples, both produced in conjunction with Birmingham Social Services and the Department of Employment respectively.⁴⁰⁵ BRMB indeed set out with a series of themed weeks which highlighted the problems faced by certain sections of the community, the first centring on the blind.⁴⁰⁶ Local charities also benefited from working with BRMB. In 1977 a central collection point for the BRMB Toy Appeal was established in a disused Edgbaston Shopping Centre retail store while in subsequent years the BRMB Toy Bus assumed a similar role. The station's fourth birthday party also raised over £2,500 for the benefit of the Variety Club of Great Britain's Sunshine Coach Appeal.⁴⁰⁷

Central to maintaining the public service initiative was the choice of BRMB's presenters. We have already seen how Pinnell and Russell were chosen for their commercial and public service credentials and the presenters they chose were appointed likewise. Like most ILR stations BRMB had the choice between those from a BBC or those from a commercial background - American commercial radio or British pirate radio. Russell was in charge of appointing presenters and besides a preference to local people, he chose people from a public service background. Most were either ex-BFBS or ex-BBC. Before working at BFBS in Europe and the Middle East, Hedges had spent two years as a BBC studio manager.⁴⁰⁸ Presenter Ed Doolan was also ex-BFBS Germany while operations manager Peter Windows and presenters John Henry, Brian Savin and Les Ross all came from BBC Radio Birmingham.⁴⁰⁹ There were some with commercial radio experience. Like Pinnell, George Ferguson also moved from the commercial/PSB Manx Radio and Robin Valk had spent a few months at a commercial station in Buffalo, New York before joining BRMB as its evening rock show host. During the 1960s Brendan Power managed pop groups and worked at the Radio 270 pirate station before becoming BRMB's commercial production

⁴⁰⁴ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 9 November 1973; Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *BRMB 24 Hour Radio: Working in the Community* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, February 1980).

⁴⁰⁵ *Broadcast*, 24 June 1974, 24 October, 1977, 12 January 1978; *Times*, 19 September 1974; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 22 January 1975; Russell, e-mail.

⁴⁰⁶ *Broadcast*, 22 February 1974.

⁴⁰⁷ *Working in the Community; Broadcast*, 27 January 1978.

⁴⁰⁸ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 9 November 1973.

⁴⁰⁹ Windows, interview.

manager and presenter of the country music show.⁴¹⁰ Russell laid emphasis on personality and individuality. He rejected what he described as commercial radio's 'discotheque' 'robotic' disc jockeys.⁴¹¹ Though he set an overall station sound and presentation method, the emphasis was on personality. For instance, with their distinctive Black Country and Australian accents Tony Butler and Ed Doolan were encouraged to develop their own unique, and sometimes controversial, style.⁴¹²

BRMB and its Audience: Commercial Performance

With BRMB being a limited company, commercial success was as important as fulfilling its public service responsibility. To be commercially viable much depended on building and maintaining an audience. With the initial slogan 'The Sound Way to Spend Your Day' the station strove to match the daily routines of its audience.⁴¹³ Chapter One demonstrated how radio is an accompaniment to everyday life, and as Hendy pointed out, broadcasters adjust their output according to "what people are doing and when".⁴¹⁴ In this instance, BRMB's mid-morning music and phone-in show and lunchtime news phone-in, aimed at the housewife and those having lunch respectively, were surrounded by lively morning and afternoon drive-time shows. These latter music based shows intertwining news, weather, local traffic reports and lively banter were designed to capture listeners on their way to and from work. Importantly, they were designed to hold the audience throughout the day. The breakfast show was hosted by a succession of presenters and was seen as the day's most significant programme. As George Ferguson, one of its former presenters and now running his own station on the Isle of Man, later emphasised: "once you've caught the listener at breakfast, you've got them all day ...people just don't like turning their [tuning] dials".⁴¹⁵ The evening programmes were also tailored to the audience. The evening rock show was designed to capture students doing their homework while the late night easy-listening show catered for bedtime listening – so listeners would leave the radio tuned into BRMB for the breakfast show. To build a close relationship with the audience breakfast presenters were carefully chosen. Presenters already familiar to Birmingham listeners, ATV linkman Kevin

⁴¹⁰ Gorge Ferguson, BRMB presenter, 1974-1979, interviewed by the author, 2 September, 2005; Windows, interview; and Rusling, D. and Rusling, P., *Who's Who in British Radio 2002* (Hull: Broadcast Data, 2002).

⁴¹¹ *Music Week*, 10 July 1976; Baron, p. 111; Russell, e-mail.

⁴¹² Russell, e-mail.

⁴¹³ *Birmingham Post*, 13 June 1973; Ferguson, interview.

⁴¹⁴ Quoted in Hendy, D., *Radio in the Global Age* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2000), p. 132.

⁴¹⁵ Ferguson, interview.

Morrison or former BBC Radio Birmingham breakfast host Les Ross for instance, helped the station to build an increasing share of the daily audience.

The IBA's 'Total Service Area' (TSA) was the area within which a station could market itself. Based on the station's VHF and medium wave transmission area it could only attract advertisers from within that area. While BRMB's TSA also encompassed Burton-on-Trent to the north to Redditch to the south, in essence the station only saw itself as Birmingham's independent radio station.⁴¹⁶ Within the entire TSA there existed a potential audience of almost 1.75 million people, however. In capturing a share of this audience listening figures proved testament to the success of BRMB programming. After a month of broadcasting, with a weekly total of 650,000 listeners BRMB had almost achieved its aim of capturing 50 per cent of the available audience.⁴¹⁷ Growth was such that the trade press twice reported BRMB as having the second largest ILR audience outside London, first in May 1975 when listeners increased by 100,000 to 750,000 and again in June 1978 when the audience stood at almost one and a third million.⁴¹⁸

This success with audiences was not reflected in the amount of advertising sales. During the first few months of operation there was a reluctance to advertise on BRMB. Apparently ignoring the economic recession, Pinnell blamed local businesses for not using radio to its full potential.⁴¹⁹ This did not affect the company's viability, though. Whilst being no licence to print money it was soon apparent that BRMB was a profitable concern. At the end of its first year on air, despite high start-up costs and a loss during the first few months of operation, the company still returned a profit of just over £7,000.⁴²⁰ There were casualties however. A month before the first anniversary of broadcasting in January 1975 the *Birmingham Post* had revealed several redundancies, mostly amongst administrative staff.⁴²¹ With the company closer to profit than originally anticipated it was taking a sharper view towards costs, former BRMB operation's manager Peter Windows later stated. With staff such as Hedges and Henry going it was "as if the company no longer needed those who

⁴¹⁶ Russell, e-mail; Windows, interview.

⁴¹⁷ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 14 March 1974.

⁴¹⁸ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 9 May 1975; *Birmingham Post*, 29 June 1978.

⁴¹⁹ *Birmingham Post*, 7 October 1974; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 22 February 1975.

⁴²⁰ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 22 February 1975; Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1975* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1975).

⁴²¹ *Birmingham Post*, 2 January 1975.

helped to establish it”.⁴²² Though Windows may have had an axe to grind, he himself was a victim of redundancy, a month after the announced job losses Pinnell emphasised how the company could produce the same programmes but with fewer people. By restructuring existing personnel the same level of service could be maintained but with lower overheads, he told the *Birmingham Evening Mail*.⁴²³ Presenter Sue Barker took over Hedges’ role as community officer, for instance. Taking both the restructuring and Window’s view into account, the company was obviously looking to its commercial future. As Pinnell continued, “...commercial Radio is efficient radio, we have to cut all the corners. We run a tight operation”.⁴²⁴ In the face of increased operational costs there was the impetus to maintain and build on the recently achieved profit. According to Pinnell 40 per cent of income was taken by the IBA in rental and copyright charges, and over £20,000 was being spent on research alone.⁴²⁵ Schedule changes to increase audiences and make the station more attractive to advertisers were implemented. While maintaining the main phone-ins, by late summer 1975 the afternoon legal advice and the Sunday community phone-ins were replaced with music.⁴²⁶ Music policy also changed. As Windows pointed out, “it became more focused”. “From playing what we thought was nice music” emphasis was now placed on the more popular chart music.⁴²⁷

Though many of those departing were of BBC origin, BRMB still maintained its public service credentials. In 1977 it strengthened its commitment to minority interests by introducing a selection of specialist programmes ranging from the arts through to classical music. The Saturday evening reggae programme was also extended by two hours to finish at 2am.⁴²⁸ By then BRMB had reached its goal of broadcasting 24-hours a day. It had already steadily increased its daily hours from the initial eighteen, and by autumn 1976 it was in a position to provide a round-the-clock service.

Increased PSB output aside, autumn 1979 was the period in which BRMB took a greater step towards commercialisation. Over the previous twelve months it had lost 250,000 listeners, presumably to Radio One and Radio Two. With the BBC reacting to the challenge

⁴²² Windows, interview.

⁴²³ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 22 February 1975.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ *Broadcast*, 12 May 1975.

⁴²⁶ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 5 August 1975; Windows, interview.

⁴²⁷ Windows, interview; Baron, p. 112.

⁴²⁸ *Broadcast*, 12 December 1977.

from ILR this was not unique to BRMB. Beacon and Nottingham's Radio Trent also suffered lost audiences.⁴²⁹ To regain younger listeners BRMB announced that from the following January it would increase its amount of daytime music, Ed Doolan's lunchtime phone-in being replaced with a music show was one example.⁴³⁰ At the same time there was an increased emphasis on marketing. David Bagley introduced a more determined attitude to selling the station when he replaced Andrew Peet as publicity and advertising manager. Bagley brought with him a 'synchronized' approach to promotional activities and replaced what he later described as a relatively "uncoordinated affair".⁴³¹ He immediately set about organising a £75,000 multi-media advertising campaign using the local Jukes and Cureton marketing agency.⁴³² The regulatory obligation to provide for the community also became part of the marketing strategy. The glossy eighteen-page *Working in the Community* (1980) booklet highlighted the community involvement. Alongside photographs of station personalities undertaking various outdoor events there were details of BRMB's community achievements. Pinnell's foreword, which outlined BRMB's community commitment, was accompanied by letters of thanks from the various organisations it had helped; the local Association of Youth Clubs and the City Education Department were two such organisations.⁴³³

During its first five years of operation the success of BRMB cannot be overemphasised. Despite the dramatic loss in listeners during 1979 we have seen how by summer 1978 the audience was in excess of 1,300,000. Crucially, as BRMB gained more listeners so the local and national sales teams were able to adjust their advertising rates accordingly.⁴³⁴ From £1,700,000 in 1977-1978, during the financial year 1978-1979 revenue had increased to £2,400,000. From the initial £7,000 the company was now delivering a profit of over £224,000. Despite paying an IBA annual rental of £263,000 and a secondary rental of £233,000, and royalty fees, this meant a 12.5% dividend to its shareholders - which by now had become a regular event.⁴³⁵ During its first years of operation BRMB essentially

⁴²⁹ *Birmingham Post*, 12 September, 1979.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴³¹ *Broadcast*, 6 August 1976; David Bagley, BRMB publicity and sales manager 1979-1986 marketing director 1986-1993, managing director 1993-1997, interviewed by the author, 26 January 2004.

⁴³² *Broadcast*, 14 January 1980.

⁴³³ *Working in the Community*, p. 1, pp. 7-8.

⁴³⁴ Ninety per cent of airtime had been sold by April 1976, *Broadcast*, 19 April 1976; Eve Archer, BRMB traffic manager from 1974, in e-mail to the author, 1 June 2004.

⁴³⁵ Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1979*, (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1979).

demonstrated how it was possible to operate a commercial radio station within a public service remit. As Pinnell emphasised time and time again, the commitment to the local community was the cause of his station's success.

Beacon Radio 303: the Commercial Approach

Beacon Radio was the antithesis of BRMB. One former presenter even likened it to “sex, drugs and rock and roll”.⁴³⁶ In a *Sunday Telegraph* feature in October 1977 Jim Crace compared Beacon's slicker, flashier, youth-orientated studios with BRMB's ‘dull’ business-like atmosphere. He referred to the fun, ambition and energy whilst others have since referred to the Beacon motto of “work hard and play hard”.⁴³⁷ Marking Beacon apart from BRMB was Oliver's emphasis on employing people from a predominately commercial radio background.⁴³⁸ For example, Beacon programme controller and former LBC presenter, Allen Mackenzie, originated from Scottish pirate and Canadian commercial stations.⁴³⁹ Oliver took a tough and competitive attitude and he made a point of building a team of young like-minded people. The ‘hard sell’ techniques employed by the Beacon's sales team, which was led by Paul Stevenson, produced results far greater than originally expected. The first month of operation saw local receipts 200% above those envisaged.⁴⁴⁰ “We were successful because we were smart, focused, hard working and had the experience, intellect and the dedication to win”, Oliver later boasted.⁴⁴¹

Only part of the company's income came from the sale of advertising time.⁴⁴² Though the company annual reports make this difficult to evaluate – there was no breakdown regarding where the money came from - this was another area in which Beacon differed from BRMB, indeed most other ILR stations. Rather than simply broadcasting, Oliver saw Beacon Radio as a broader business venture. As well as being cost effective almost every aspect of its operation had to make money. Equipment was not just built for its own use but was sold to other stations, both at home and abroad. Besides keeping costs to a minimum by building their own equipment this also contributed to the station's revenue. Above

⁴³⁶ Ferguson, interview.

⁴³⁷ *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 October 1977; Viv. Birch, secretary to the managing director Beacon Radio 1975-1977, in e-mail to the author, 29 November, 2005; *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 8 April 1977; Rudin, R., ‘Beacon Radio Reunion’, *Radio Magazine*, (578), (May 2003).

⁴³⁸ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁴³⁹ Graham, interview; *Broadcast*, 23 June 1975.

⁴⁴⁰ *Broadcast*, 26 April 1976.

⁴⁴¹ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

promoting the station, station merchandise too was sold at a profit. A shop for the sale of station merchandise was attached to the forty-foot outside broadcast trailer, which also consisted of a small recording studio. “With a budget of around £12,000 I could spend it on what I liked, just as long as it made a profit”, emphasised Austin Powell, Beacon publicity manger between 1978 and 1980. Where other stations concentrated on items such as tee shirts, sweatshirts and badges, Beacon also sold, as Powell went on to list, belts, dog chains, pencils, plastic rulers and ceramic mugs.⁴⁴³ Finally, like most stations Beacon also gained from presenters making outside appearances. However, beyond simply hiring out the presenters, for Beacon this was quite an elaborate affair with a third party involved. With the regulation uniform of a white suit and red shirt, Beacon personalities were hired out to local functions, from local fetes to night clubs and beauty pageants.⁴⁴⁴ Whether appearances were in their own capacity or on the station’s behalf, all bookings were handled by Red Hot Promotions Limited, an outside promoter run by Brian Jackson who was a personal friend of Oliver. While the Beacon personality eventually gained most of the income, 30 per cent went to Beacon who in turn split it equally between the station and Red Hot.⁴⁴⁵

With his commercial radio background Oliver paid particular attention to the sound and format of the station. It was here that Oliver took full responsibility, despite an input from Mackenzie and Philip Birch, manager of Piccadilly Radio and former manager of the Radio London pirate ship.⁴⁴⁶ With a “sound previously unheard on British radio”, a “highly professional” format was devised.⁴⁴⁷ Some commentators indeed joined the IBA in describing the Beacon presentation as being distinctly ‘mid-Atlantic’ in style, even unique not just for ILR but British radio in general; in its 1977 yearbook the IBA even stated that the station was aiming for a “bright and commercial sound”.⁴⁴⁸ This was partly achieved by choosing presenters, or deejays, for their commercial radio background.⁴⁴⁹ An admirer of American radio, Mike Baker was an ex United Biscuits disc jockey and was the first to be hired.⁴⁵⁰ With a commercial sound similar to that of American radio, the United Biscuits

⁴⁴³ Austin Powell, Beacon promotions manager 1978-1980, then free-lance Beacon presenter until mid 1980s, interviewed by the author, 26 June 2007.

⁴⁴⁴ Jack, e-mail, 31 May 2006.

⁴⁴⁵ All information provided by Oliver, e-mails, 12 September 2005, 23 May 2006.

⁴⁴⁶ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁴⁴⁷ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 9 April 1976.

⁴⁴⁸ Report on IBA visit to Beacon Radio, 9 August 1977, (Ofcom documents, A/A51/0167/01); Rudin, *Reunion*; Stoller (2010), p. 73; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *TV and Radio 1977* (London: IBA, 1977), p. 159 .

⁴⁴⁹ Beacon was initially based at the offices of the *Wolverhampton Express & Star*: Birch, e-mail.

⁴⁵⁰ Jack, in e-mail to the author, 11 May 2006.

Network (UBN) was a closed-circuit radio service which United Biscuits broadcasted to all their British factories. It was not surprising that Baker formed the model for the choice of Beacon presenter as this was the sound Oliver was looking for.⁴⁵¹

Beacon was not unique in employing ex-UBN presenters. Both Barnard and Stoller have already pointed to a number of former UBN disc jockeys finding their way onto other ILR and BBC stations.⁴⁵² It was Baker's 'bright, up-tempo' presentation that Oliver looked for, however.⁴⁵³ This made a major contribution to the tightly formatted Beacon sound. Control was exercised over almost every aspect of presentation. From the start Oliver insisted on a predetermined presentation style, unlike BRMB and other stations which allowed presenters to develop their own personality and presentation technique. For example, to prevent listeners tuning to other stations presenters were forbidden to say "good-bye" at the end of their show. A common practice on American stations, the thinking was that while the presenter had finished the station was still continuing.⁴⁵⁴ The presenter's voice, too, had careful consideration. There were reportedly eighteen variants to the Black Country accent and it was for this reason that Oliver did not pick presenters for their local voice. "People want good radio and are prepared to accept any voice", he told *Music Week*.⁴⁵⁵ The 'Sunshine Sound' package of identification jingles, according to Oliver designed to "brighten the daily lives" of those living in the "gloomy" Black Country, was also a major part of the Beacon sound.⁴⁵⁶ Produced by Emison - a British company heavily influenced by Jams of Dallas which was a popular choice for American music stations, these differed greatly from the more melodic BRMB jingle. BRMB presented a package, composed and produced by Tony Hatch, with which presenters were allowed a degree of leeway regarding their timing and placement.⁴⁵⁷ The Beacon jingles were placed not just before and after each newscast, but also between each record; often accompanied, especially during a JICRAR (ILR's official audience measurement organisation) audience measurement period, by the presenter's name and station frequency.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵¹ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005; Jack, e-mail, 11 May 2006.

⁴⁵² Barnard, p. 152; Stoller (2010), p. 120.

⁴⁵³ Jack, e-mail, 11 May 2006.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ *Music Week*, 1 May 1976.

⁴⁵⁶ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁴⁵⁷ Windows, interview.

⁴⁵⁸ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005; Jack, e-mail, 31 May 2006.

Music policy was also strictly enforced. With five other music stations within the Beacon area - BBC Radio One and Radio Two, BBC Radio Birmingham, BRMB and Radio Luxembourg - Oliver believed Beacon's music had to be distinctly different from that of the rivals.⁴⁵⁹ Beacon immediately instigated a strict policy, unlike BRMB and other ILR stations where the music format was developed over a period of time. Compared to BRMB's eventual sixty records, ten 'breakers', ten album tracks and the Top 40, Beacon worked with a play-list of 120 tracks. Like BRMB it relegated most specialist music shows to the weekend off-peak period. These consisted of the more popular disco (Saturday evenings), golden oldies and chart (British Top 40 and the American Hot 100 - Sundays) genres, not like BRMB's country or classical music. Sunday evenings also saw an 'easy listening' show consisting primarily of non royalty film scores and show music. The bulk of Beacon's music format came during the weekday period. Chosen weekly by Oliver, Mackenzie and George Ferguson, former BRMB and now chief Beacon presenter, the 120 tracks were sub-divided into four categories: singles, breakers, album tracks (from thirty albums) and oldies, or 'Supergold'.⁴⁶⁰ It was then the responsibility of the disc jockey to play these in strict rotation: single, album track, breaker, single, album track, oldie, single, album track, breaker... etc. Fine tuning of the rotation enabled the station to match the changing profile of its audience during the day. With research showing a younger audience during the evening period it was therefore at this time that the more 'downmarket' pop singles were played. Bands like Mud and Slade were, for example, receiving more airplay here than at any time during the day.⁴⁶¹

A much 'beefier signal' than that of any other station, BBC or independent, played a central role in the Beacon music presentation.⁴⁶² This was provided by the use of a sound compressor, though presenters deliberately increasing the sound level also played a role.⁴⁶³ Flattening the higher and lower levels of the transmitted sound, the use of what might have been an Optimod - a device used by the pirates during the sixties - would have provided the impression of a stronger signal.⁴⁶⁴ Though it has since been indicated that some other ILR stations also employed a similar practice, at Beacon the IBA did not find the device.⁴⁶⁵ It did

⁴⁵⁹ *Broadcast*, 26 April 1976; *Music Week*, 23 October 1976.

⁴⁶⁰ *Broadcast* 26 April 1976.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² Rudin, *Reunion*.

⁴⁶³ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September, 2005.

⁴⁶⁴ Jack, in e-mail to the author, 16 June 2006.

⁴⁶⁵ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September, 2005; Jack, e-mail, 16 June 2006; Powell, interview.

notice the practice of sound manipulation, however. Concern over the Beacon station sound level was such that in March 1977 it warned the station of its excessive sound levels.⁴⁶⁶ Though by the following November the IBA Quality Control department had noted some improvement, one presenter who habitually exceeded sound levels was reported.⁴⁶⁷

Addressing Community and Public Service Commitments

When advertising each ILR franchise the IBA asked local organisations what they would look for in the new station. When Dudley Borough Council was asked in 1974 what it expected from the forthcoming ILR service it wished for a station that represented a knowledge and sympathy for the various communities within the Black Country, a station that would operate for the “positive benefit of the local community”.⁴⁶⁸ Hoping ILR would “strengthen and enrich” the area’s religious life, the Bishop of Lichfield looked to a strengthening of the bonds between the church and the local media.⁴⁶⁹ With Beacon Radio’s public service provision shaped by Oliver and Mackenzie’s commercial radio background, these and other similar hopes were not quite fulfilled. With its public service credentials BRMB sought to provide a heavily localised service and embedded itself in the local community. The original Beacon licence application acknowledged the problem of providing a service which was acceptable to each Black Country community.⁴⁷⁰ Believing “you cannot make everyone happy at the same time”, Oliver seemed to ignore the disparate nature of the Beacon broadcast area, which comprised several towns each with their own identity. Minorities, Oliver maintained, “attracted small audiences, and you could not satisfy every minority ... I would never try”.⁴⁷¹ Instead of serving the wider community he opted for what would best be described as a broader, lighter, approach. Masked by the heavily formatted music and speech output, much of its public service and community provision was decided on its ability to attract audiences. The opening of phone lines during music programmes was closely themed on celebrities or popular news stories; they were also timed for the quarter hour so as not to interrupt music flow. Rather than items concerning news or community

⁴⁶⁶ Jack, e-mail, 16 June 2006; IBA letter, (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/02).

⁴⁶⁷ Internal IBA memorandum from Head of Quality Services: visits to BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio, 29 November 1977, (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/02).

⁴⁶⁸ Letter, Chief Executive, Dudley Metropolitan Borough to IBA Regional Officer, 9 December 1974, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0174/09).

⁴⁶⁹ *Local Broadcasting*, report by Bishop of Lichfield for IBA concerning forthcoming ILR franchise, Wolverhampton and the Black Country, 4 November 1974, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0174/09).

⁴⁷⁰ Beacon Radio licence application, reprinted in Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Report and Accounts, 1975-1976* (London: IBA, 1976), pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷¹ Oliver e-mail, 12 September 2005.

themes, listeners were instead invited, again especially during audience rating periods, to speak to top music guests.⁴⁷²

Like BRMB Beacon also developed regular community segments. For example, from April 1978 the *Just the Job* slot had built on an earlier experiment to help the jobless.⁴⁷³ Charitable appeals were also initiated, one being to help feed the animals at Dudley Zoo.⁴⁷⁴ Its community provision was, however, of a more commercial, or populist, nature. The *Brass Tacks* programme was a prime example. Made in conjunction with the Black Country Society, a group dedicated to providing nostalgic entertainment evenings, each week the programme centred on a different Black Country public house. Proving popular with pub regulars and the wider audience, each week the landlord was asked to ensure an assortment of ‘local characters’ would be present during recordings.⁴⁷⁵

Beacon’s Relationship with the IBA

Chapter Three pointed out how the IBA would conduct regular inspection visits. It was the result these visits and subsequent reports that in 1979 the IBA refused to renew the Beacon licence for a further twelve months. Though Beacon was not in danger of losing the franchise, there was still two years left on the contract, this ‘warning shot’ on behalf of the regulator indicated grave misgivings with regard its performance. With three breaches of the 1973 IBA Act and a fourth under consideration, most problems stemmed from the commercialised nature of the Beacon operation and lapses in manager and programme control. The IBA *Progress Report* for the twelve months to 1979 will provide a useful insight into the IBA’s anxiety, indeed the station’s programme and commercial development. Based on the regular visits by its officers, the IBA progress report had two main functions. First it provided the operator with the IBA’s view towards its performance over the past twelve months, and included areas which the IBA felt needed improvement. Secondly, and importantly, the progress report helped the IBA when considering the annual renewal of the station’s three-year contract.

⁴⁷² Oliver *ibid.*

⁴⁷³ *Broadcast*, 6 February 1978.

⁴⁷⁴ *Broadcast*, 5 December 1977.

⁴⁷⁵ Oliver e-mail, 12 September, 2005; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Progress Report on Beacon Broadcasting, April 1978 – March 1979* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0174/10).

To contextualise the 1979 Beacon progress report it will be useful to examine a similar report for 1977. Though that year's actual progress report is unavailable, the report of an IBA visit to the station that summer indicated its possible content. The Local Advisory Committee had already raised a number of issues regarding Beacon's output and it was these which the IBA officers bore in mind when visiting the station. The absence of specialist music shows such as classical or country music, the distinct lack of local content, the disappearance of religious programmes, the standard of the *Topic* current affairs phone-in programme and the apparent neglect of older listeners formed the bulk of the LACs concern.⁴⁷⁶ Despite an initial reluctance by Mackenzie to discuss future plans, it was obvious to the IBA inspectors that programme development was to be of a populist nature.⁴⁷⁷ For example, the enhanced local content was to be provided by more outside broadcasts and the introduction of locally themed 'Reader's Digest' style slots utilising local authors.⁴⁷⁸ Religious programming was also to be enhanced by what the report described as "US type homiletic stuff", short one-minute segments of religious thought presented by Bob Price – the popular ATV gardening expert.⁴⁷⁹ At the time music seemed to be aimed at the younger listener and the IBA wished for a wider range of style and genre to attract a broader age range. While Mackenzie accepted the need for more specialist music he had no proposals for any such programming.⁴⁸⁰ Importantly, though at this point officers were not looking for definite plans they seemed unconvinced by Mackenzie's ideas. The report concluded by recommending a record be kept of his plans - so as to provide "...something to refer to when we try to pin them down on their firmer plans".⁴⁸¹

Significant to the 1977 report was the feeling that after twelve months of broadcasting there was the need to move away from a concentration on music. With the company in profit the failure to develop programming could no longer be put down to a lack of finance.⁴⁸² Indeed, the concern of the IBA and its LAC may have prompted Selkirk, Beacon's biggest investor, and the Beacon board to take action. An internal memo from Mackenzie in August that year announced the appointment of Selkirk's Gerry Laing as head of presentation. His aim, according to Mackenzie, was to "...listen [to Beacon] and point out where we are going

⁴⁷⁶ Introduction, IBA Report on visit to Beacon Radio, 1-2 August 1977, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01).

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, para.1.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 2.c, 2.d.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, para.2.e.; correspondence Beacon - IBA, 17, 26 March 1979, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/067/01).

⁴⁸⁰ IBA report on visit to Beacon, August 1977, para. 2.f.

⁴⁸¹ 'Note', *ibid.*

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, para. 1.

wrong, and equally what we are doing right”.⁴⁸³ Furthermore, in October that year the board announced an abandonment of ‘maximum profit’ and the immediate introduction of extensive programme investment and new programme staff.⁴⁸⁴ The company’s annual report and accounts for that year also announced an additional expenditure of £18,500. Whether all this went on programming is unknown, but the report also highlighted the appointment of Reverend John Hammersley as religious advisor and improvements to the news service and community action activities.⁴⁸⁵

The 1979 *Progress Report* opened by emphasising the improvements which had been made during the previous year. The range of music, local news and current affairs, community features and ethnic and religious programming had all been enhanced. There was no longer a major worry over programme content, though a number of recent developments were the cause for concern – the disappearance of the short one-minute religious slots being one example. Attention was drawn to a weeklong monitoring exercise, via a direct feed to the IBA London headquarters, which looked into the range and scope of programming. Notwithstanding a slight increase in music and a slight decrease in meaningful speech, a significant improvement to news and information meant these were now at a satisfactory level, in some instances above the ILR average.⁴⁸⁶ Local flavour was still “somewhat elusive”, however. The report felt that Beacon was still presenting a “simplistic” Wolverhampton bias and neglecting the complex composition of its area - a situation compounded by its continued use of ‘transatlantic’ jingles and presentation style.⁴⁸⁷ This meant presentation was still questionable for there was still “a lot to be desired” with regard to a number of presenters.⁴⁸⁸ The report indeed noted a lack of professionalism amongst some presenters and a lack of respect toward their audience. The breakfast presenter was, for example, described as “breathless” and “self indulgent” while the mid-morning presenter was referred to as “patronising”, even “banal and juvenile”.⁴⁸⁹

The size of the Beacon audience also caused IBA displeasure, even after recognising the impact of BRMB and its competition for listeners. Under IBA rules stations were only

⁴⁸³ Beacon memorandum, Mackenzie to all presenters, 31 August 1977.

⁴⁸⁴ Beacon board memorandum, 29 October 1977.

⁴⁸⁵ Chairman’s Report, Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1978* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1978).

⁴⁸⁶ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 22.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, para. 17.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid*, paras. 21, 20.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid*, para. 20.

allowed to market themselves within their designated areas (the TSA – see above), and despite an earlier reprimand for promoting itself within the BRMB area, Beacon was still failing to capture a satisfactory proportion of its available audience.⁴⁹⁰ The weekly audience of slightly over half a million in 1978, a 33 per cent reach, was only one per cent more than that of the previous year. As a result the IBA argued that Beacon was one of the worst ILR stations in terms of audience share; it placed Beacon fourth from bottom of the ILR league table, just above LBC, Radio Victory (Portsmouth) and Pennine Radio (Bradford). In its area Beacon came third to Radio One and Radio Two, and of those listening to ILR in Wolverhampton and the Black Country two fifths preferred BRMB - which was not technically their station. The average number of hours listener's tuned in each week had also fallen from ten in 1976 to just seven and a-half in 1978 - also well below the ILR average.⁴⁹¹ A range of music which did not reflect all age groups and initial failure to provide a full local news service were two reasons why Beacon failed to achieve its full audience potential. The 1977 IBA report highlighted the need for a wider range in music, but here there was still a consistent bias towards listeners under the age of thirty-five, which in effect disenfranchised the older age groups.⁴⁹² The 1977 report also indicated financial constraints and it was these that prevented Beacon from developing a full local news service. According to a 1980 IBA report into listening habits news was the main reason people listened to ILR, and it was not until after the increased expenditure during late 1977 and early 1978 that the newsroom was sufficiently staffed to provide an evening and weekend local news service.⁴⁹³

Audience share was already a bone of contention. Beacon claiming it had reached 42 per cent of the available audience after just four months of broadcasting demonstrated the outspokenness of Oliver's rhetoric and station publicity.⁴⁹⁴ From reports in *Broadcast* and the local *Express & Star* newspaper twelve months later it was clear that this 42 per cent was only that of younger listeners.⁴⁹⁵ As already noted the highest IBA figure was 33 per cent and the Beacon figure of 42 per cent demonstrated the extent to which the station had exaggerated what were particularly poor ratings. In fact, on the second occasion, and in

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, para. 39; letter from IBA to Beacon, 22 October 1976, (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/02).

⁴⁹¹ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 32.

⁴⁹² Ibid, para. 35.

⁴⁹³ Lewis and Booth, p. 103; *Broadcast*, 20 February, 1978; *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, paragraph 16.

⁴⁹⁴ *Broadcast*, 2 June 1976; Beacon advertisement, *Campaign*, 24 September 1976.

⁴⁹⁵ *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, 7 July 1977; *Broadcast*, 18 September 1977.

answer to a poor showing against BRMB, Oliver was stating that Beacon's performance was better than most other ILR stations in their first months of broadcasting.⁴⁹⁶

Contracting out the Asian *Jankhar* programme (October 1978) was another problem highlighted by the IBA. BRMB had already established its own Sunday evening *Geet Mala* programme and it was only at the request of a group of interested Asians that *Jankhar* came into existence. Initially neither Oliver nor the IBA's Local Advisory Committee felt the need for an Asian language programme.⁴⁹⁷ Obligated by the extent of interest, Oliver nonetheless reciprocated and handed every aspect of the programme's production to the Asian group.⁴⁹⁸ The IBA remained apprehensive towards the situation, even after Oliver allowed the regulator to decide the credibility of the group. The IBA's main concern was the distinction between advertising and programme content.⁴⁹⁹ Earlier documents relating to the matter indicate how Mackenzie made several requests for the group to confirm it understood the distinction. Above all, Mackenzie required a commitment to a number of key issues: a full English transcript of each programme before transmission; a written guarantee that only non-royalty music was to be played, if not, details had to be provided to the station; a substitute programme to be constantly available at all times, and finally, all commercials to be forwarded to the station before transmission.⁵⁰⁰ Impartiality between advertisers and producers was important. As Mackenzie stressed to the group, before the contract was finalised there had to be assurances that one particular group member would resign his directorship of JK Promotions Limited - presumably the company handling advertising content. While the programme was to be made in the Beacon studios it was only after assurances that the above issues had been met that in late 1978 the IBA sanctioned the project.

Transgressions of the ILR regulations gave the IBA particular cause for concern. First, the IBA felt that on more than one occasion Beacon had "sailed close to the wind" with regard to its commercial activities. In relation to sponsorship it noted how all the company vehicles carried the name of their supplier.⁵⁰¹ A suspected link between the station and a

⁴⁹⁶ *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, 7 July 1977.

⁴⁹⁷ Oliver, e-mail, 23 May 2006; IBA report on visit to Beacon, August 1977.

⁴⁹⁸ Oliver, e-mail, 23 May 2006.

⁴⁹⁹ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 43, ii.

⁵⁰⁰ Mackenzie letter, 10 November 1978, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01).

⁵⁰¹ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 40.

major record company was even more significant.⁵⁰² As the IBA noted, Beacon was already carrying more record advertising than any other stations; a situation which Oliver blamed on Beacon having more record stores in its area.⁵⁰³ The IBA discovered that the proposed presenter of a ‘new releases’ programme was also involved with WEA records, and this added to the controversy. This presenter had already left Beacon to take up a sales position at WEA Records, and now he was returning free lance to present a show airing the records he was already promoting for WEA. Though an investigation found no evidence of cross-promotion, it was only after the IBA had made its concern clear that Oliver and Mackenzie reluctantly found a new presenter.⁵⁰⁴ In both instances, the vehicle and record promotion, the IBA blamed the failure to understand, indeed contempt for, Britain’s system of regulated broadcasting on Oliver and Mackenzie’s American background. It even referred to an American conference where Oliver was reported as saying that “in comparison to America radio” ILR was “unjustly restricted in its [commercial] activities”.⁵⁰⁵

The cases involving *Jankhar* and WEA records came close to contravening section 8.6 of the (1973) IBA Act, that dealing with the distinction between advertising and programme content. Indirect advertising (or ‘plugging’) for Kenco Coffee (August 1977), Wolverhampton Retail Market (February 1979) and Legal and General Assurance (March 1979) were in direct contravention of section 8.6. Indeed, the IBA found the investigations into these cases being hampered by the station only keeping recordings of its output for two rather than the stipulated three months.⁵⁰⁶ The maverick nature of the station’s chosen presenters may well have explained the reason for these impromptu advertisements. Here the ‘on the spot’ phone calls to politicians and celebrities during the breakfast show was a clear demonstration. Several examples of bad taste and unprofessionalism were noted and these undoubtedly contravened section 4.1a of the 1973 Act, that governing taste and decency. Besides a telephone conversation with Ugandan leader Idi Amin and another involving a cleaner at the Prime Minister’s Office, these included a NASA ‘space expert’ who turned out to be a security guard.⁵⁰⁷ Indeed, flouting section 4.1b of the Act, the incitement to commit

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September, 2005.

⁵⁰⁴ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, paras. 40, 13.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, para. 40.

⁵⁰⁶ Correspondence, IBA-Beacon, 8, 22 August 1977, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01); *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, paras. 43.iii, 43.iv.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, para. 43.viii; Henn, interview.

crime, the Authority had taken exception when the same presenter encouraged listeners not to pay the television licence fee.

Lack of impartiality during a *Topic* phone-in and bad taste during calls to the late night programme caused the IBA to doubt Beacon's credibility as a responsible broadcaster. First a *Topic* phone-in which concerned abortion was in direct contravention of section 4.1f of the 1973 Act, which demanded the impartiality of presenters during news and current affairs programmes. From the outset it was clear the presenter was taking an anti-abortion stance and was therefore dictating the emphasis and mood of the programme.⁵⁰⁸ Wright had already noted the hastily assembled and 'notoriously' unprofessional standard of the *Topic* programme when he examined the news services of the three West Midlands' local radio stations (see next chapter). He drew particular attention to one especially abrupt journalist-presenter "...who often left the audience ill informed and alienated".⁵⁰⁹ With this particular programme the station management still refused to admit any wrongdoing, even standing by the presenter and praising his professionalism. In correspondence between it and the station the IBA regional office had repeatedly stated the transgression, and it was only after referring the case to the IBA London head office that the station recanted and accepted fault.⁵¹⁰ The second case involved the overnight show (March 1979) in which the presenter had accepted sexual and racist calls from prostitutes and drug addicts.⁵¹¹ On this occasion, however, Oliver accepted immediate responsibility and forwarded the required tapes for investigation. It transpired the presenter was himself under the influence of drugs and the next morning Oliver took the remedial action of dismissing him from the station.⁵¹²

By 1979 the IBA had lost faith in Beacon Radio. On numerous occasions, frustration, indeed dismay, existed in its dealings with the station. The case of the late night callers formed part of an issue dating back to autumn 1976. When BRMB applied for permission to broadcast 24-hours, believing there was an agreement between both stations to begin round-the-clock broadcasting together, Beacon also filed a similar request. The application was however rejected. As Stoller pointed out, at this time the IBA was going at length to exercise its power over the number of hours a station could broadcast. If it thought that stations could

⁵⁰⁸ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 45.

⁵⁰⁹ Wright, p. 83.

⁵¹⁰ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 45.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid*, paragraph 45.ii.

⁵¹² *Ibid*; Oliver, e-mail, 19 September 2005.

not manage the additional financial outlay it would reject their requests for longer hours.⁵¹³ In the case of Beacon, however, the issue was over content rather than finance. The IBA was already dissatisfied with the lack of ‘meaningful’ speech in the station’s daytime output, and with a service already designed to maximise audiences, it suspected that the move to all day broadcasting was simply for commercial reasons.⁵¹⁴ It was only after Beacon had introduced significantly improved programming, and after a nine-week experiment during October 1978, that the IBA finally gave permission for an all-night service.⁵¹⁵ Even then the station was criticised for compiling, and publicising, the new 24-hour schedule before the IBA had granted it permission.⁵¹⁶ Besides this, the IBA was further frustrated to find that some of the promises the station had made in order to win the extended hours were now being broken. Both Oliver and Mackenzie had assured the IBA that they would personally oversee the new late-night service, yet while investigating the case of the late-night callers the IBA had found that the responsibility for late night programming had been passed on to the station’s ‘Head of Presentation’. Moreover, it was he who was being blamed for allowing the offensive phone calls to be broadcast.⁵¹⁷ It was as a consequence of letting the company down that he was supposedly leaving the station (Ofcom subsequently blanked his name out so his identity remains unclear). Yet as the IBA pointed out in its report, just a week before the incident the station had told its regional officer that this same person had been offered a job in Canada; he was reported leaving the station because he was “frightened away by the IBA rules and restrictions”.⁵¹⁸

1979: the Departure of Oliver and Mackenzie

The gravity of the IBA’s 1979 *Progress Report* cannot be overemphasised. An accompanying IBA letter stressed how it was responsibility of the company to operate within the spirit of the 1973 IBA Act.⁵¹⁹ Though the IBA was essentially critical of Beacon’s management control and commercial activities, the actual reason why Oliver, Mackenzie and Stevenson departed the station during the summer and autumn of 1979 can only remain

⁵¹³ Stoller (2010), p.60.

⁵¹⁴ *Music Week*, 9 October 1976; *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, 11 October 1976; *Birmingham Post*, 13 October 1976; *Broadcast*, 27 February 1978; *Broadcast*, 25 October 1976; IBA letter to Beacon, 15 February, 1978, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01).

⁵¹⁵ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 11.

⁵¹⁶ IBA letter to Mackenzie, 12 September 1978, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01).

⁵¹⁷ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 42.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ IBA letter, 18 April 1979, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/0174/10).

conjecture. It transpired that there were many sides to the story. Before attempting to provide an analysis of the affair let us first look at how Oliver explained his dismissal.

According to Oliver, the dismissal of he and his colleagues centred on a proposal by Selkirk for Beacon to change the company which handled its national advertising to Selkirk's own company. In May 1979 Selkirk wanted Beacon to change from Air Services to its own firm of Radio Sales and Marketing (RSM). Mackenzie and Stevenson had only just recently acquired seats on the company board, and they sided with Oliver in being content with using Air Services; they believed RSM would offer an inferior service. With all three voting against the move, chair Alan Henn believed the board could not go against the wishes of its only executive directors. Despite Selkirk pressuring Henn to dismiss the three should they continue to oppose the deal, it was Henn and Graham that persuaded the board to retain Oliver on condition he released Mackenzie and Stevenson from the company. With Oliver refusing to dismiss his colleagues, both he and Mackenzie were immediately dismissed. Stevenson was to leave the company a few months later.⁵²⁰

Beyond Oliver's version of events there was also the question of an IBA involvement. Though Blakemore and Henn sidestepped the issue during interview, an off-the-cuff remark by Blakemore illustrated the IBA's thoughts regarding Oliver's position within the company. Mention was made of a letter from the IBA Chairman clearly stating that the Authority no longer wished for Oliver to remain as managing director.⁵²¹ In another interview, former presenter George Ferguson also stated how, due to the company's numerous transgressions, "the IBA told the board to get rid of him [Oliver]".⁵²² Even Brenda Wright, chair of the IBA's Local Advisory Committee, told the *Sunday Mercury* how she had put Beacon's troubles down to a certain number of "controversial personalities."⁵²³

At the same time as the proposed Beacon change, most of the ILR stations with a Selkirk involvement had either transferred or were transferring their national advertising sales to RSM. Besides LBC in London, which had used RSM since 1973, Portsmouth's Radio Victory and Sheffield's Radio Hallam were beginning to use the service.⁵²⁴ While this

⁵²⁰ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁵²¹ Blakemore and Henn, interview.

⁵²² Ferguson, interview.

⁵²³ *Sunday Mercury*, 14 October 1979.

⁵²⁴ *Broadcast*, 22 October 1979.

was obviously a corporate move on the behalf of Selkirk, there was the added problem of Beacon not having its licence renewed. Though the IBA emphasised how the licence was not at risk, it was obvious that before it could be renewed the following year fundamental changes were needed at the station.⁵²⁵ The Beacon board recognised this too. Clement Jones, who took over from Oliver as caretaker manager, explained to the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* how the board were “increasingly unhappy” with the station’s “sound and lifestyle”. In particular, how the directors had decided on a “complete change of management, and therefore direction”.⁵²⁶ In his chairman’s report for that year Henn stated how the problems with the IBA, and a decline in profits, had “forced the directors to take action” which culminated in the resignation of Oliver and departures of Mackenzie and Stevenson.⁵²⁷ In fairness it seemed the IBA did not hold Mackenzie totally responsible for its problems with Beacon. Immediately after leaving the station he was allowed to become manager at Radio Tay in Dundee - a position he then held for several years.⁵²⁸

Besides bringing Beacon’s sales under the same umbrella as Selkirk’s other stations, here lay the opportunity to meet the IBA’s concern and remove the root cause of the problems at Beacon. It is evident that relations between Oliver and Selkirk were not always cordial. In reference to the Beacon board, Ferguson also pointed to one unnamed Selkirk member who often returned unfavourable reports back to Canada concerning Oliver.⁵²⁹ In his evidence Oliver was disparaging in his view towards Selkirk, too; though he may have still have been aggrieved over his dismissal. He stated how he had reluctantly accepted Selkirk’s offer of support when he was searching for finance. He thought that with he and Mackenzie there was already enough American influence at the station. Oliver also believing that Selkirk only invested in stations it thought would fail was significant.⁵³⁰ Moreover, he thought that once the stations had failed Selkirk would increase their investment and effectively take them over, though this would have been against the IBA’s rules. He believed this was the reason why Selkirk became involved with Beacon in the first place: they seriously believed it would not survive as a viable concern. To make his point Oliver used Selkirk pressing for more community-based programming. Moving away from

⁵²⁵ *Broadcast*, 18 June 1979.

⁵²⁶ *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 26 October 1979.

⁵²⁷ Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1979* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1979).

⁵²⁸ Jack, e-mail, 11 May 2006; Stoller (2010), p. 118.

⁵²⁹ Ferguson, interview.

⁵³⁰ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

popular programming, which would have been more attractive for advertisers, will have resulted in a reduced profitability. The IBA noted that under Oliver Beacon had been consistently in profit. Besides repaying shareholders their original investment after just six months of operation, during the 1978 financial year it had paid its first dividend of five per cent.⁵³¹ By September 1978 Beacon's profit stood at almost £60,000, though this figure would have been lower if it were not for the company being four months behind in its (music royalty) payments to the Performing Rights Society. Importantly, the figure of £60,000 was £5,000 less than that of the previous year, which was probably due to the increased expenditure on programming.⁵³² By removing himself and pushing the station to improve programming, Oliver believed it was "dedicated" to the removal of the cause of the Beacon success.⁵³³

Though these were unsubstantiated and perhaps biased views, Oliver may have misinterpreted an effort by Selkirk to save the Beacon licence. We have witnessed how Beacon was not meeting its full ILR remit and Selkirk's Gerry Laing being put in charge of presentation. Beacon also had difficulty in attracting national advertising and the move to RSM may have also been an attempt to address this. The revenue of £773,000 for 1977-78 - a 30 per cent increase on the previous year - was almost entirely due to increased local rather than national advertising sales.⁵³⁴ In private, BRMB feared the competition for local sales when Beacon came to air. In public, however, it believed both stations would complement one another when attracting national advertisers. This latter view was probably influenced by Air Services, which handled national advertising for both stations.⁵³⁵ Air Services' Eddie Blackwell told *Broadcast* how he would market both stations as a "Midlands radio region"; he prophesied that the two together would provide advertisers with an "ideal alternative to ATV".⁵³⁶ This was apparently not the case. While each had their own area within which they could attract advertisers, which included the Black Country overlap, it was BRMB that attracted the lion's share of national revenue.⁵³⁷ Peter Tomlinson, Oliver's successor, blamed this on the attitude of the national advertisers. When looking at the West Midlands

⁵³¹ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005; *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 29.

⁵³² *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 28; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1977*, (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1977); IBA internal letter, 18 October 1978, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/0167/01).

⁵³³ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁵³⁴ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1978 – March 1979*, para. 30; Jack, e-mail, 16 June 2006.

⁵³⁵ IBA memorandum, 10 May 1976, (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/05).

⁵³⁶ *Music Week*, 1 May 1976.

⁵³⁷ *Music Week*, 15 May 1976.

conurbation on a national map, advertisers would see the name Birmingham prominently displayed, in larger letters than any of the other towns, including Wolverhampton. Seeing that BRMB was Birmingham's ILR station they therefore believed it provided for the whole conurbation, and therefore chose it in preference to Beacon.⁵³⁸ With this in mind, Selkirk's invitation to use its own sales house would have meant Beacon being marketed in its own right. A *Broadcast* article centred on the growth of RSM, and in this the company emphasised how instead of promoting stations as part of a national or regional network, as did Air Services, it would sell theirs on an individual basis. As Dick Seabright, chief executive of RSM stated, "national advertisers have to understand that commercial radio is a federal system of small stations, selling two stations at once is wrong, [and] instead [under RSM] each station will receive the maximum effort, with stress on its individual identity and marketing potential".⁵³⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the parallel histories of two independent radio stations. Birmingham Broadcasting and Beacon Broadcasting came into existence during the 1960s. They were created by two adjacent newspaper groups who, along with many others in the newspaper industry, saw the opportunities commercial radio could offer. Though they had to relinquish their full control once commercial radio became a reality in 1972, the important fact is that the companies they created became vehicles with which they could enter the new medium of independent radio. Birmingham and Beacon Broadcasting were almost as different from one another as the difference between public service and commercial broadcasting. These differences were down to the background and personality of those put in charge. With his experience of PSB and commercial radio, and delegation style of management, in the one corner there was forty-nine year-old David Pinnell of BRMB. In the other corner there was twenty-nine year-old Jay Oliver, who came from Miami and modelled Beacon on his own commercially aggressive outlook.

Under the terms of the Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) BRMB and Beacon were charged with providing a commercially viable, community based, public radio service. To win and maintain the franchise BRMB sacrificed what could have been a purely commercial

⁵³⁸ Peter Tomlinson, Beacon Radio managing director 1979-1984, interviewed by the author, 28 January 2004; Archer e-mail, 1 June 2004.

⁵³⁹ *Broadcast*, 22 October 1979.

operation.⁵⁴⁰ From its profitability and audience size through to its informative type of output, BRMB had struck the right balance between commercial and public service considerations. To fulfil its regulatory remit BRMB effectively copied BBC local radio, which was at the time the only British model of local radio. Nearly all of BRMB's programme staff came from a public service background, either ex BFBS or ex BBC. The extensive use of phone-ins and the employment of a community officer went some way in addressing its public and community responsibilities. With its heavily formatted presentation, the commercially driven Beacon took the opposite approach. After pressure from the IBA it too developed a community and information service. It also undertook community based campaigns such as those for the unemployed. It also provided ethnic programming, although this was contracted out to an outside organisation. Beacon's public programming never quite matched that of BRMB, however. Especially in building a relationship with the listener: the IBA Local Advisory Committee pointed to an apparent lack of local identity, a situation made worse with disc jockey's often mispronouncing local place names.⁵⁴¹

Beacon was not unique in having managers from a commercial background. Philip Birch, manager of Manchester's Piccadilly Radio, was the former manager of the Radio London pirate ship. The problems Beacon had with the IBA were down to managerial responsibility and the station's choice of presenter, moreover, a lack of understanding toward Britain's tradition of regulated public broadcasting. Previous chapters showed how ILR was subject to the same statutory and regulatory controls as Independent Television. The Beacon management and staff had little, if any, experience of working within such strict regulations. On several occasions Oliver criticised the IBA for its control of ILR. On one occasion, after being informed by the IBA it was keeping a 'close eye' on his station, he accused the regulator of treating station management like children, even criminals.⁵⁴²

After three years of operation the IBA had lost patience with the Beacon management. Even after significantly improved programming it was the apparent lack of control and its commercial practices that brought the station into disrepute. Beacon's profit

⁵⁴⁰ A similar idea put forward by Sourbati in reference to Channel Four television, *Regulating Content Diversity in Digital Television Markets: an Archaeology of Positive Programming Requirements* (unpublished PhD Thesis, Brunel University, 2001).

⁵⁴¹ Birch, e-mail.

⁵⁴² Correspondence, IBA-Beacon, 12, 14 September 1978, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01).

and rebellious attitude caused the IBA to take an exception. Despite the wrongdoing and serious lapses of control the relationship between Beacon and its regulator must be put in context, however. Oliver believed the “ludicrous” rental and copyright fees were intended to prevent stations from building a strong profit base.⁵⁴³ There was some truth in his judgement, the IBA was criticised by Pilkington and others (see Chapter Two) for the exuberant profits of the ITV companies, though Beacon was exceptionally profitable within a short period of time. IBA action against Beacon also coincided with the post-Annan period. The previous chapter demonstrated how after Annan reported in 1977 the IBA had adopted his call for more meaningful speech in local radio. Importantly, the IBA was tightening its stance on stations that put commercial before public and community considerations.

According to Oliver the BRMB/Beacon overlap was a deliberate experiment to see how two ILR stations would operate within close proximity to one another. Being the only applicant for the Wolverhampton licence Beacon was also allowed to operate either on the edge or just outside the IBA’s rules, to push the regulatory boundaries.⁵⁴⁴ Documentary and verbal evidence has refuted this rhetoric. During the initial planning stages the IBA adjusted the power of the Birmingham transmitters so as to minimise its overlap with Wolverhampton.⁵⁴⁵ Nor did IBA concern over the Beacon operation show an agreeing regulator, as this chapter has at gone at length to point out. This aside, there remained two ILR stations sharing a sizable overlap with one another. Beyond their designated area each could be heard in the other’s broadcast area, and both were attracting advertisers throughout the West Midlands conurbation. We saw earlier how Beacon was reprimanded for selling time within the BRMB area, though no doubt BRMB also set out to attract advertisers from Wolverhampton. Under the watchful eye of the IBA each station kept itself to its own operating area, though there was the occasional outbreak of competition, which was initiated by Beacon. Whilst we will return to the issue of competition in Chapter Six, when during the 1980s it was BRMB that seemed to be the aggressor, the important point here is that when it came to sales and promotions it was Beacon that was taking the predatory stance. Indeed, with its commercially aggressive attitude, it can be asked whether Beacon was in effect a commercial radio station. To this the answer must remain no. Whilst in spirit Beacon was

⁵⁴³ Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁵⁴⁴ *Wolverhampton Express & Star*, 7 July 1977; Oliver, e-mail, 12 September 2005.

⁵⁴⁵ IBA memorandum, (Ofcom documents: A/C/0144/03).

run as a commercial station, over time it did address its public service responsibility - albeit with much prompting from the IBA.

Though not to the extent of those engendered by Beacon, to be fair it must be stated that BRMB also had its share of IBA criticism and staff difficulties. Not long after coming to air the station had a severe reprimand for lax engineering standards. Besides the IBA's own procedures, using its own radio set each station was required to monitor its own output. An announcer apologised for the station having been off the air, when in reality it was not - a major IBA investigation found poor connections to the station's monitoring equipment. In November 1974 news editor Keith Hayes resigned after a dispute over a phone-in he had presented. In August 1975 Alan Leighton, presenter of the station's afternoon legal advice phone-in, was suspended and subsequently dismissed: he had staged a one man protest outside the station and vented his anger to the local press over the decision to withdraw his programme.⁵⁴⁶

The differences between BRMB and Beacon can be traced to the creation of their original consortia. Originating from the larger of the two newspaper groups, BRMB was formed by people with a strong media background. The merchant-banking firm of Dunbar and Company formed Beacon Broadcasting on behalf of the Midlands News Association. With no senior staff – albeit radio staff - and no credible application Beacon only just won the Wolverhampton franchise, and despite it being the only contender the IBA was still reluctant to offer the contract. From the beginning, the board at each station allowed management to run the station as they saw fit. In this respect, Oliver could not be held totally responsible for the problems at Beacon. Despite the board and its chair knowing little of running a radio station there was the pressure to make profit. During interview at times the chairman praised Oliver and showed how the board was more than happy with the profit he returned.⁵⁴⁷ Oliver also had the pressure of establishing Beacon Radio, especially given that Beacon was awarded the licence whilst it had neither finance nor studios. Indeed, pressure to find finance was such that the trade press believed the company would collapse.⁵⁴⁸ As Oliver's successor later commented, "...hats off to the guy, he got the station

⁵⁴⁶ IBA memoranda, 1, 13 May 1974, IBA letters to BRMB, 14, 23 May, 1974, IBA engineer's reports, 17 June 1974, 8 August 1974, (Ofcom documents: A/E/0144/02); *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 5 August 1975; *Broadcast*, 2 January 1975.

⁵⁴⁷ Henn, interview.

⁵⁴⁸ *Broadcast*, 19 May 1975; *Broadcast*, 26 May 1975; *Times*, 21 May 1975.

on the air and within months we were in profit”. Furthermore, and driving home how the choice of management team was important to the success of an ILR station, “...if you’d taken his [commercial] experience and allied him to an experienced Black Country broadcaster who knew the area, then maybe the two could have worked”.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁹ Peter Tomlinson, interviewed by the author, 12 July 2004.

Chapter Five
BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio 1980-1984
Programming and Community Provision

Attention will now turn to BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio during the early 1980s. Chapter Three demonstrated how after 1977, during the post Annan period, the IBA was toughening its stance on ILR's community and public service provision. Influenced by Annan's call for more community-based stations, it was looking to introduce a new breed of community-based ILR stations. It was also hardening its position on the existing stations that appeared to be putting profit before their public service responsibilities. This was nowhere more evident than the IBA's reaction to Beacon Radio's hitherto 'commercial' operation. This remained the basis for the regulation of ILR when the Conservatives returned to power in 1979. The next two chapters will develop the theme of BRMB and Beacon as businesses operating within this continuing regulatory framework. This chapter will focus on programming and community involvement.

It has already been established that ILR was dependent on large audiences in its endeavour to attract advertising revenue. Continuing from Chapter Four, this chapter will show how access to these audiences depended on maintaining the franchise and how this necessitated a full cooperation with the regulator. From this point of view, BRMB and Beacon faced a difficult entry into the 1980s. To put things in context, 1979 was a watershed year for both stations: Beacon was forced to review its management and programming while BRMB was moving toward an increasingly commercial outlook. We previously saw how Beacon was under pressure to correct what were serious lapses of management control. We also saw how BRMB was taking a critical look at its programming and marketing activities. This chapter will now show that by 1980 BRMB's once lively and entertaining output had become 'tired and predictable'. Importantly, it had drifted away from its previously strong information led content. It was for this reason that BRMB attracted the concern of the regulator, and like Beacon it too was forced by the IBA to implement corrective changes to its operation. BRMB was to adopt a fresher approach to its output, and at the same time strengthen its dwindling PSB content. Beacon, on the other hand, had to find a new management, forge a more harmonious relationship with the regulator and local community alike, and take a radical view towards its programming. Essentially, Beacon had to move in a

direction that was more in keeping with its duty as a responsible community-based public service broadcaster (PSB).

This chapter will consist of three sections, the first of which will focus on the relationship between the IBA and each station. In particular, the chapter will examine how BRMB and Beacon were under IBA pressure to provide programming which contained an enhanced informative and community content. The discussion here will utilise a number of relevant works and will build on their research. First it will add to Lewis and Booth's (1989) commentary on local and community radio. With there being evidence to suggest that Birmingham's black and Afro-Caribbean communities felt neglected from BRMB's already enhanced ethnic coverage, it will also encompass works such as that of Nigg and Wade (1980) and Morley (2000) who addressed minority communities and their apparent alienation from the media process.

Using available IBA and BBC documentation, the second section will gauge the audience's reaction to BRMB and Beacon, especially before and after they had made significant changes to their programming. Furthermore, it will place both in relation to BBC Radio Birmingham - the existing West Midlands' based local radio station. The third and final section will demonstrate how the effort to win widespread public support involved an improved off-air community involvement. For BRMB there was the need to generate public support in preparation for the re-advertising of its licence, as instigated by the 1980 Broadcasting Act (see chapter three). For Beacon there was the task of correcting a previous community-wide dissatisfaction toward the station. Crucially, this section will show how community involvement was to form part of BRMB and Beacon's promotional activities, which will provide a useful precursor to Chapter Six's concentration on their commercial operations.

Working with the Regulator

Beacon Radio: a New Management and a New Direction

Beacon Radio was not the first station to have its licence renewal refused by the IBA: two years previously Nottingham's Radio Trent also failed to have its licence renewed due to

an industrial dispute over programming.⁵⁵⁰ Perhaps showing a complete lack of confidence in the whole company Beacon was the first station to have its entire board called to London to meet with the IBA, however.⁵⁵¹ A meeting between the full IBA board and the station's remaining directors was arranged for July 1979.⁵⁵² This provided the opportunity for the company to convince the IBA it should continue with the Beacon licence: the IBA were seeking its proposals for a new management team and an outline of the measures it planned to implement which would prevent any future lapses in programme control. Correspondence with the IBA revealed the extent to which the company understood the seriousness of its situation. In writing to the IBA's Director of Radio, the Beacon chair sought to draw a line under the previous management. A substantial part of the station's troubles were due to the 'autocratic' nature of the previous regime, and efforts being made to rectify past mistakes. The lack of impartiality during the *Topic* phone-in programme on abortion was blamed on the presenter being pressured to take an argumentative line, for instance.⁵⁵³ Importantly, the Beacon board were now taking a keener interest in the management of the station, as well as its relationship with the IBA. The first IBA *Progress Report* for Beacon under its new management welcomed the more "open and constructive" relationship that was being encouraged.⁵⁵⁴ It (the *Progress Report*) was further pleased with the chair's assurances that both he and his board were now maintaining a grip on the company's affairs, especially the encouragement of management and staff to operate strictly within IBA guidelines.⁵⁵⁵

Following the departure of managing director Jay Oliver and programme director Mackenzie the chairman of the IBA wanted an interim committee of senior directors to run the station. Assisted by Selkirk's Gerry Laing, J. Clement Jones, who was a founder member of the original consortium, took responsibility for its daily running.⁵⁵⁶ Immediate steps were taken to address the station's major failings. New autumn schedules were compiled with an

⁵⁵⁰ *Broadcast*, 28 February, 10 May 1977, 17 May, 28 June 1977; Stoller, T., *Sounds of Your Life, The History of Independent Radio in the UK*, (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2010), pp. 102-103.

⁵⁵¹ Stoller, *Sounds of Your Life*, p. 102.

⁵⁵² IBA brief for meeting with the Beacon board, Thursday 5 July 1979; notes by radio staff and suggested questions, 5 July 1979, IBA, 29 June 1979, (Ofcom documents: A/X/0018/4).

⁵⁵³ Letter, Beacon chairman to IBA Director of Radio, 15 June 1979, (Ofcom documents: A/X/0018/4).

⁵⁵⁴ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Beacon Radio: Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980, and Possible Extension of their Contract* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0019/6), paras. 9, 49.iii, 49.i.

⁵⁵⁵ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 - March 1980*, para. 49.iii.

⁵⁵⁶ Though the name of the Selkirk representative was subsequently removed by Ofcom, it can be assumed that this was Laing, 1979, *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*; Bernard Blakemore, Alan Henn, former chairman of Beacon Radio, and Bernard Blakemore, former director of Beacon Radio, interviewed by the author, 3 October 2005; *Birmingham Post*, 7 June 1979; *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 5.

emphasis on speech rather than music. Several thousand pounds was also spent on a sound delay system which would prevent offensive listener's telephone calls from reaching the airwaves.⁵⁵⁷ A fortnightly review of each presenter and their programmes was introduced.⁵⁵⁸ This tighter control over the station was evidently having an effect. A freelance disc jockey was suspended over an incident at an end of year school disco which he had hosted; a game was introduced whereby blindfolded contestants had to guess the nature of a mystery object - one object being a contraceptive sheath. The game's use of a contraceptive horrified both parents and teachers, and the fact that the incident was reported in the national and local press further damaged the station's already poor reputation. The affair also saw Beacon severing its contract with Red Hot Promotions, the company which handled all its outside appearances (see Chapter Four). Though it was a personal appearance by the presenter and not an official station engagement, Red Hot had implied a Beacon involvement by using Beacon letterheads when making the booking.⁵⁵⁹

Clement Jones demonstrated that the company was getting a grip on its operations; in effect he was preparing Beacon for its new management. Peter Tomlinson was announced as the new managing director in September 1979.⁵⁶⁰ Tomlinson was chosen for his familiarity with Midlands' television viewers and proven track record in broadcasting.⁵⁶¹ Setting out as a free-lance sports reporter for BBC Radio South West, and then undertaking spells of presenting on the HTV (Wales and the West Country) and Granada (north-west England) ITV franchises, he joined ATV as a producer and continuity announcer in 1972. It was here that he created and co-presented TISWAS, the popular Saturday morning children's programme.⁵⁶² In contrast to the public and private perception of the previous management, his 'warm' and 'friendly' personality would have been readily acceptable to the IBA and the local community alike.⁵⁶³ Bob Pierson arrived as programme controller three months later. A number of factors point towards the reason for his appointment. First, he was a close friend of Tomlinson. Besides working with him at HTV he was the best man at Tomlinson's

⁵⁵⁷ *Birmingham Post*, 12 September 1979; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 22 August 1979.

⁵⁵⁸ IBA brief for meeting with the Beacon board.

⁵⁵⁹ *Express & Star*, 25 July 1979; various correspondence and newspaper cuttings, July 1979 (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01).

⁵⁶⁰ *Birmingham Post* and *Express & Star*, 18 September 1979.

⁵⁶¹ Austin Powell, Beacon promotions manager 1978-1980, then free-lance Beacon presenter until mid 1980s, interviewed by the author, 26 June 2007; *Birmingham Post*, 11 October 1979.

⁵⁶² Peter Tomlinson's biographical details, *An Application to the Radio Authority to Provide a programme Service for the West Midlands* (Birmingham: Saga Radio Limited, 2000), p.15.

⁵⁶³ Bob Pierson, Beacon programme controller 1980-1984, in e-mail to the author, 15 May 2007; Powell, interview.

wedding.⁵⁶⁴ Pierson's experience in public service radio was probably the more significant reason, however. Trained by BRMB's programme director John Russell while both worked at the BFBS European service, he represented the same public broadcasting credentials as his BRMB counterpart. In interview he even referred to Russell as his mentor, even role model.⁵⁶⁵

According to Pierson their brief was turn Beacon around; they were to "clean up its act".⁵⁶⁶ This included winning the support of its staff. Because of the way the previous management had run Beacon, the staff had lost all faith in their superiors. Whilst the chairman had referred to the autocratic nature of the first administration, former employees have since pointed to the climate of fear that existed during the Oliver and Mackenzie era. "Rock bottom" was how one former presenter described morale: "...you came to work on a Sunday just to see who had been sacked the week before". Describing Oliver and Mackenzie as being "one of the lads" when the station was being set up, he emphasised how each had retreated to their offices once it had been established – to send out memoranda which threatened to discipline anyone who stepped out of line.⁵⁶⁷ The rotational playing of records was a case in hand. The previous chapter showed how Beacon's heavily formatted sound involved music being played in strict rotation. Either through their liking or disliking of a record some disc jockeys would override the system by playing a record out of sequence. Played sixteen times in one week instead of the specified seven, ELO's 'Mr Blue Sky', was one such example. Such was Oliver's displeasure a disciplinary memorandum was issued to all presenters.⁵⁶⁸ According to Powell, the former promotions officer, one senior presenter was dismissed for continuingly playing the album rather than the single version of a particular record.⁵⁶⁹ Powell also pointed to heated arguments between Oliver and Mackenzie, many of which were allegedly fuelled by an excessive consumption of alcohol. According to Powell the main problem was a difference in personalities. Oliver had a volatile character while Mackenzie was quiet and would stubbornly stand his ground, and this was to cause much friction between the two.⁵⁷⁰ Importantly, while many organisations will have their fair

⁵⁶⁴ Bob Pierson, interviewed by the author, 2nd June 2006; George Ferguson, former senior presenter at Beacon, interviewed by the author, 2nd September 2005.

⁵⁶⁵ Pierson, interview; Pierson, e-mail.

⁵⁶⁶ Pierson, e-mail.

⁵⁶⁷ Munro Jack, Beacon Radio presenter, 1976-1978, interviewed by the author, 23 March 2007; Powell, interview.

⁵⁶⁸ Munro Jack, in e-mail to the author, 11 May 2006.

⁵⁶⁹ Powell, interview.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

share of ill feeling between management and staff, it seemed that by the very nature of their characters, and attitude towards the running of the station, Oliver and Mackenzie were going out their way to create a hostile working environment, causing a large degree of animosity between management and staff. When the Beacon chair described to the IBA the changes which were underway at the station, he noted the relief amongst the staff that they were going to have a new management.⁵⁷¹

This was in the letter which the Beacon chair had sent to the IBA immediately after the departure of Oliver and Mackenzie in June 1979. The change in management was obviously in reference to Clement Jones taking temporary charge of the station. As the former editor of the *Express & Star*, Clement Jones had always been associated with the running of the station, mainly in the newsroom, though his role was more consultative than managerial. According to some he was “a guiding light” to the Beacon staff, especially the journalists who respected him for his extensive knowledge of the Black Country.⁵⁷² He was undoubtedly put in temporary charge because of his knowledge and popularity. Despite this, however, there was no smooth transition between the old and new management. As the IBA noted, the presenters were not giving him their wholehearted support. His fortnightly review of the presenters and their programmes, which also included individual consultations, was met with scepticism.⁵⁷³ This was probably not surprising given the type of presenter the earlier management had employed, though the previously oppressive atmosphere and the wariness this generated amongst the staff also played a role. The last chapter showed how Beacon’s presenters were chosen for their disco or commercial radio background, and how this engendered a failure to understand the British tradition of regulated public broadcasting. Tomlinson’s first move upon taking charge of the station was to ensure that all staff, directors and board members included, understood both the Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) and the workings of the IBA.⁵⁷⁴ Drawing attention to their responsibility to serve the disparate Beacon area, he and Clement Jones created a credo for presenters to learn and recite: “we are a Black Country radio station serving a million people in many different towns”.⁵⁷⁵ When providing evidence, Pierson, too, indicated how he set out to keep a tight rein on the presenters. When interviewed by Clement Jones for the position of programme controller, “Discipline” was the word he used when he was asked to provide in one word what he

⁵⁷¹ Letter, Beacon chairman to IBA Director of Radio, 15 June 1979.

⁵⁷² Powell, interview.

⁵⁷³ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 7.

⁵⁷⁴ Peter Tomlinson, Beacon managing director 1979-1984, interviewed by the author, 26 January 2004.

⁵⁷⁵ Pierson, interview.

thought was the most important element in running a radio station.⁵⁷⁶ Indeed, the IBA later commented how the programme department was run with military precision.⁵⁷⁷

Caretaker manager before the arrival of Tomlinson and Pierson, Clement Jones was the architect of the new schedules.⁵⁷⁸ In keeping with ILR's responsibility to inform and entertain he adopted an output similar to that of BRMB. To recap, a service of music was interlaced with news, sport and information in what the IBA described as 'flow' programming - designed to match all the BBC's national and local radio channels. The station's sound was the first major change. Removing the previously formatted output meant an end to the strict rotation of records and the reduction of the number of station identity jingles to just three per hour.⁵⁷⁹ Influenced by the desire to steer Beacon away from its transatlantic image, the music range was also widened to include more 'middle of the road' music.⁵⁸⁰ The move away from its previously bright and sharp image was not totally welcomed, however. In interview Powell described the station as now sounding very much like (BBC) Radio Two, indeed bland without its "jazzy" Americanised jingles.⁵⁸¹ Though his personal friendship with Oliver may have influenced this opinion, even the IBA had commented that the new output had lacked "spontaneity and sparkle"; in its *Progress Report* it noted that the "fresher" Top-40 music had given way to past hits and album tracks. It essentially believed that the station had overcompensated when correcting its "previous deficiencies"; it believed the station was fearful of "again stepping out of line".⁵⁸² To weaken what was now a daily routine of repetitive features and interviews - many featuring similar guests each week - a better variety of feature material was needed. Some daytime features, such as the *Melting Pot* consumer advice spots, were carried over from the previous output, but even these were now described as dull and perfunctory. In short, the station lacked character. As the *Progress Report* stated, "the pursuit of worthiness and localness had resulted in the neglect of a discernable music style", and the station needed a "lively entertaining presentation".⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Beacon Radio: Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982* (Ofcom documents: A/X/00413/03), para. 34.

⁵⁷⁸ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 11.

⁵⁷⁹ *Birmingham Post*, 12 September 1979.

⁵⁸⁰ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, paras. 10, 11.

⁵⁸¹ Powell, interview.

⁵⁸² *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, Paras. 15 -17.

⁵⁸³ Ibid, para. 15.

The IBA's Local Advisory Committee (LAC) did point to a general improvement in presentation standards. It thought that the station's "discourteous attitude of talking down to the audience" no longer existed.⁵⁸⁴ The adherence to a set presentation code had gone. Like those at BRMB, presenters were encouraged to develop their own broadcast style and let their personalities flow through. According to Pierson, however, they had to have the right attitude. Quoting John Reith, the first chairman of the BBC, he emphasised how the station now "aimed just above the heads of the audience ... neither patronising nor insulting their intelligence ... we showed respect."⁵⁸⁵ Tomlinson shared much the same view. He believed in "the "basic standards of broadcasting", "... in terms of presentation, in terms of music selection, and in terms of the people you attract to present". Presenters were needed "who could speak properly, who would cower to the audience and who would be intelligent enough to take the audience with them".⁵⁸⁶ The resignation of the breakfast presenter over another controversial on-air phone stunt, this time involving an impromptu call to the General Secretary of the Labour Party, demonstrated the station's new strictness with the presenters.⁵⁸⁷ As Tomlinson told the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, presenters were not only there to introduce records they were there to talk to people and make them respond: "Beacon is here to provide a service and not just entertain".⁵⁸⁸ Informative talk was now thought to be as important as music and entertainment, which was previously the station's main emphasis. Indeed, despite two unnamed directors wanting the station to adopt a pure PSB style of operation, where speech would take precedence over all else, this was in line with ILR's remit to inform, educate and entertain.⁵⁸⁹

The board allowed Tomlinson and Pierson a relatively free hand in running the station. Whilst the board set programme budgets they could develop programming as they saw fit.⁵⁹⁰ Their main objective was to re-create the station into one which better served the community.⁵⁹¹ As programming developed so the IBA and its LAC thought that Beacon was becoming more representative of its area. The amount of daytime information was steadily increased; by 1983 the IBA was even commending the station on its improved feature

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, Appendix A, *Report of the Local Advisory Committee*.

⁵⁸⁵ Pierson, interview.

⁵⁸⁶ Peter Tomlinson, interviewed by the author, 12 July 2004.

⁵⁸⁷ *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 26, 27 October 1979; *Express & Star*, 27 February 1978.

⁵⁸⁸ *Wolverhampton Chronicle*, 26 October 1979.

⁵⁸⁹ Powell, interview; Pierson, in e-mail to the author, 31 May 2007.

⁵⁹⁰ Pierson, *ibid*.

⁵⁹¹ *Birmingham Post*, 11 October 1979.

material.⁵⁹² The daily meetings of a new Programme Information Unit, which consisted of the news editor, breakfast show producer and the consultants for education and religious affairs, were a great help. Though the previous management had utilised a similar idea, the Programme Information Unit discussed which features were to be used and when they were to appear - not just on a daily but also on a weekly and longer-term basis.⁵⁹³ There were several examples of how their input had improved the station's informative content. Providing two to three-minutes of historical or contemporary facts relating to the towns within the Beacon area, the *It's Great to Live Here* features were blended in with the flow of music and news.⁵⁹⁴ A direct link with the AA improved the peak-time traffic reports. The *Just the Job* employment spots were extended and special information campaigns were introduced, one example being the *Beat the Burglar* slots.⁵⁹⁵ Religious output was also improved. *Religion Today*, a one-hour magazine programme on Sunday evenings, was supplemented by daily religion-based features. Resurrected from Mackenzie's 1977 programme plans were the short, one-minute segments, of philosophical and religious thought presented by Bob Price, ATV's gardening expert. The Reverend John Hammersley also provided short religious spots. Recognising the various faiths within the Beacon area, these not only provided for Christians but also for Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.⁵⁹⁶

For its commercial survival Beacon was dependent on its audience. The daytime was the audience's main listening period, so like most other ILR stations Beacon saved its less popular specialist programmes for the evening period, where the audience was much lower.⁵⁹⁷ It was in the field of specialist programming that the IBA came to congratulate the station on its sustained effort.⁵⁹⁸ Though again the regulator initially thought that the station was trying too hard in this area, by the end of 1984 it believed that Beacon's greatest strength was in its off-peak speech-based programmes. A good deal of this success was due to new initiatives and improvements to existing programmes.⁵⁹⁹ A schools quiz, coverage of the local arts and specialist music shows which now included jazz, country, soul and reggae, were examples of the improved programming. Though the IBA believed the output still

⁵⁹² Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Staff Report on Beacon Radio, March 1982 – March 1983*, (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07), para. 3.e.

⁵⁹³ Powell, interview; 1981-1982 *Beacon Radio Progress Report*, para. 8.

⁵⁹⁴ Pierson, e-mail, 31 May 2007; Pierson, interview.

⁵⁹⁵ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 25.

⁵⁹⁶ Pierson, interview.

⁵⁹⁷ Barnard, S., *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), p.77.

⁵⁹⁸ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 25.

⁵⁹⁹ Unattributed IBA report, early 1985 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

lacked ‘in-house’ news and current affairs documentaries, a weekly *Showcase* series also featured drama and documentaries provided by ILR’s programme sharing scheme. The *In Those Days* and *West Midlands Now* programmes were a tremendous help in Beacon’s effort to reflect Black Country life, however; both were even praised by the IBA for their topical coverage. Both were created by Clement Jones, who used the contacts he had made whilst editor of the *Express and Star*. *In Those Days* provided an historical view of the Black Country during the previous 150 years. The weekly hour long *West Midlands Now* was a summary of contemporary items of interest from around the Black Country and provided a useful supplement to the daily *It’s Great to Live Here* features. Both involved the employment of a new presenter/researcher and were financed by £5,000 from the IBA’s secondary rental fund. The anecdotal material gathered for *In those Days* was also used to form a sound archive at the Dudley Black Country Museum.⁶⁰⁰

The willingness to cooperate with educational groups indicated a more serious attitude toward the station’s educative responsibility. Harold Fuchs was seconded from Wolverhampton Education Authority to become Beacon’s educational consultant, and with him came a more coordinated approach to this type of broadcasting. Local education authorities, the Open University and the National Youth Bureau were now providing an input.⁶⁰¹ A revision line for ‘O’ and ‘A’ level students, a series of programmes on pre-school education and the frequent airing of educational matters during the new midday and evening *Topic* phone-ins illustrated some of the new initiatives.⁶⁰² The IBA wanted more material which was relevant to teenagers and young adults, and the *1922* programme was a response to this. *1922* was named after the hours it was broadcast, 7pm (1900 hours) to 10pm (2200 hours), and used phone-ins, studio guests, and even an off-air ‘Careline’ service provided by the Citizen’s Advice Bureau to provide information on youth-based issues. Importantly, to make the programme more attractive to its target audience the serious discussion was interspersed with items of a light hearted nature and music, which ranged from live local bands through to rock and pop.⁶⁰³ To assist in making the programme two unemployed graduates were appointed through the Manpower Services Commission’s Community

⁶⁰⁰ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 28; letter, Clement Jones to IBA Regional Office, 12 July 1979 and *Black Country Museum Sound Archive – Timetable and Costing*, undated document (Ofcom documents: A/A45/0167/01); *Birmingham Post*, 11 October 1979.

⁶⁰¹ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, April 1979 – March 1980*, para. 28; *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 8; Pierson interview.

⁶⁰² *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 35.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid*, paras. 7.e, 13; *Express & Star*, 20 July 1982.

Enterprise scheme. This not only ensured that young people were involved in the show's production but also provided a cost effective way of making the show.⁶⁰⁴

Despite such partnerships with outside organisations demonstrating Beacon's new commitment to the community, a degree of selection was exercised in determining who had access to the station. Chapter One showed how some community groups failed to reach the airwaves and how this was put down to the 'professional barriers' that existed within the BBC and independent radio stations. The pursuit of professionalism amongst programmers meant it was only those organisations which were likely to have been trained in the use of radio that reached the airwaves; the more experienced national organisations or the 'professional' local authorities were chosen over the smaller, more local groups. To an extent this was the situation at Beacon. "We did not want to see the airwaves being dominated by 'do-gooding' radio", maintained Pierson, and in reference to those who did reach the airwaves, "...much of the work was off air and we [only] acted as a signpost towards their activities".⁶⁰⁵ Pierson's attitude towards research provided further insight into this thinking. The Local Radio Workshop had already accused London's three local radio stations, BBC Radio London, Capital Radio and LBC, of failing to use fully researched programming.⁶⁰⁶ Whilst it is not suggested here that Beacon failed to research the content for its programmes, it was a question of the effort it went to in gauging what the local area actually needed from its local radio station. From the outset BRMB had regularly investigated the needs of its audience, the results of which were often made available to IBA.⁶⁰⁷ Besides Beacon being a smaller station and its expenditure therefore not matching that of BRMB for such exercises, Pierson rejected the notion of researching the community's needs out of hand. "If you ask people what they want, everyone will want this, this and this ... so you end with providing programmes aimed at each and every small group, sometimes just for one person", he stated in interview. Again quoting Reith, he maintained that few people knew "what they want and very few know what they need [from a local radio station]". In pressing his point he maintained a similar view towards the role of the IBA's local advisory committee. Whilst "they were there to advise", they were in effect "just opinionated people who wanted us to do

⁶⁰⁴ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 35.

⁶⁰⁵ Pierson, interview.

⁶⁰⁶ Lewis, P. M., and Booth, J., *The Invisible Medium: Public, Commercial and Community Radio* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 103-105; see also chapter one.

⁶⁰⁷ Vick, D., IBA Research Department, *Audience Reactions to BRMB Radio and Requirements of a Birmingham ILR Service* (London: IBA, September 1983), (Ofcom documents: 1-23101301), para. 2.2.

their bidding”, he stated in reference to the committee.⁶⁰⁸ Above all, Pierson felt the primary task of local radio was to provide people with a sense of identity. When speaking to local politicians in 1982, he outlined how this was to be achieved: “One can be made to feel a sense of identity by the radio station striking the correct chord in the mind of the listener. The truth is that those strings are already in place for this chord to be struck, local radio is capable of providing comfort, the comfort of being helped”.⁶⁰⁹

At first, the officers at the IBA’s regional office doubted Pierson’s ability to work within ILR’s commercial-public service environment.⁶¹⁰ Coming from the publically financed BFBS he initially knew little about the workings of commercial radio.⁶¹¹ When describing Beacon’s programming under Pierson, Powell mentioned that there seemed little correlation between ratings and programming: “rather than asking how an idea would improve ratings, it was a case of ‘if it sounded good we would try it to see if it worked’”.⁶¹² Pierson’s policy of ‘seeing if it works’ did meet some success, however. In its *Progress Report* for 1981-1982 the IBA was noting that there was now a more imaginative and fresher sound to the daytime output. Though the recipe of ‘melodic’ pop and oldies still existed and needed improvement, importantly, both he and Tomlinson had overcome their initial nervousness and had gained the confidence of both its and the station’s staff.⁶¹³

Crucially, Pierson’s programming was achieving a larger share of the audience. “I quickly learnt that ratings were made at breakfast and a presenter with the right personality was necessary to draw the audiences”, Pierson stated in interview; and indeed in 1982 the station was advertising for a “first-rate” presenter to take charge of the breakfast show.⁶¹⁴ By the summer of 1981 the station had 565,000 listeners; from its lowest reach of 29 per cent in 1979 it was now capturing 37 seven per cent of the available audience – its highest reach so far.⁶¹⁵ The *Express & Star* was crediting this to the “useful information [which was] provided by a stable and well motivated news and presentation team” and the station having

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Pierson, *The Growing Importance of Local Radio*, transcript of speech given at Wolverhampton Town Hall, 1982.

⁶¹⁰ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 4.

⁶¹¹ Powell interview; Pierson interview.

⁶¹² Powell, *ibid.*

⁶¹³ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, paras. 4, 6, 13, 22, 33.

⁶¹⁴ *Broadcast*, 10 May 1982.

⁶¹⁵ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Beacon Radio: Progress Report April 1980 – March 1981* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0411/02), para. 48.

got “the balance right [between music and information]”.⁶¹⁶ While these comments must be treated with an element of caution, as the *Express & Star* was a major shareholder with good reason to praise the station, they were similar to the views that were already held by the IBA.⁶¹⁷ We have already seen the regulator congratulating the station on its output. Another audience increase of 9.3 per cent was reported in July 1982, taking the audience to 632,000 and corresponding to a weekly reach of approximately 41 per cent, and this clearly showed the station’s continuing success in attracting more listeners.⁶¹⁸ Crucially, in its area Beacon was becoming more popular. Whilst it was still third behind BBC Radio One and BBC Radio Two, which followed ILR in the national context, an increasing number of listeners preferred it to BRMB.⁶¹⁹

BRMB Radio: Enlivening the Output

By 1979 the IBA was questioning BRMB’s programming performance. Though it believed the station still maintained a “healthy reputation” with its local community, its once strong community-based operation no longer seemed to meet the prescribed standards.⁶²⁰ The IBA’s 1979 *Progress Report* highlighted several improvements which were thought to be necessary. The absence of an outside broadcasting facility resulted in the apparent failure of the station to integrate fully with the community. Despite the occasional broadcast from a major event, exhibitions at the city’s National Exhibition Centre for example, life within the BRMB area was “only seen from the studios in Aston Road North”.⁶²¹ The station was not capturing “the local Birmingham mood”; and it needed to recognise Birmingham’s varied ethnic and cultural composition. Birmingham’s multi-cultural society, indeed the wider community - the young and the disabled for example - needed to be reflected in the daily output, not just in specialist programmes such as the Asian *Geet Mala*.⁶²² There was the need for this enhanced coverage to spread into the news/current affairs provision and documentaries. Indeed, the latter were also criticised for their apparent scarcity. Beyond the occasional programme which linked to a particular news story or social issue there needed to

⁶¹⁶ *Express & Star*, 28 May 1981.

⁶¹⁷ A Beacon press release may have also influenced the *Express & Star*’s comments.

⁶¹⁸ *Express & Star*, 20 July 1982; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year ending 30 September 1982* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1982).

⁶¹⁹ *Beacon Progress Report March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 54

⁶²⁰ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *BRMB: Progress Report January 1979 – January 1980* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0019/4), para. 6.

⁶²¹ *Ibid*, paras. 6, 7, 33.

⁶²² *Ibid*, paras. 6, 7.

be a more regular strand of documentary making.⁶²³ Finally, there was now a marked shortage of community information in the daily output. Importantly, the IBA thought a fresher approach to output was needed. Output was now described as tired, predictable and ‘regimented’; and this prevented BRMB from exploiting two of ILR’s greatest strengths: immediacy and flexibility. Intriguingly, “a creative development still needed to occur”, and by this it is obvious that many of these issues were ongoing problems. As the IBA’s report continued, “to escape the humdrum 1978 and early 1979, 1980 needed to be the year BRMB moved not just in one direction, but several at once”.⁶²⁴

The previous chapter described how BRMB had lost 250,000 listeners during 1979, and according to the IBA a major cause of its problems was the way in which the station had attempted to deal with this. To recap, the audiences were supposedly lost to (BBC) Radio One and to remedy this BRMB had increased its output of daytime music; the topical lunchtime phone-in was replaced with a music programme for instance. Now the IBA was describing BRMB’s response as reactionary rather than innovative. It believed that by competing with Radio One BRMB was more concerned with the competition than developing its own “varied and lively” service. It thought that BRMB had diagnosed the problem as having too much daytime speech and had therefore reversed its policy of “music between news and information”. Presentation was now based on entertainment rather than the previous emphasis on information.⁶²⁵

The IBA blamed this on the station’s senior staff and their failure to decide on the best way to win back the lost audience. The 1979 *Progress Report* highlighted how Pinnell (managing director), Russell (programme director), Reg Davies (sales director) and the recently appointed operations manager, Paul Brown, would not always see eye to eye on which way programming should develop.⁶²⁶ Though the report failed to elaborate exactly why they failed to agree over programming, a senior officer at the IBA’s regional office later talked of the difference in attitude between Pinnell and Russell. Where the commercially experienced Pinnell looked to the ‘bottom line’, where costs and audiences were his main concern, Russell welcomed the regulatory pressure to provide public and community-based

⁶²³ Ibid, paras. 6, 33.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, para. 34.

⁶²⁵ Ibid, paras. 4, 5.

⁶²⁶ Ibid, para. 4.

programming, which he regularly used as leverage for a higher budget and more staff.⁶²⁷ Losing audiences was not the only problem. In the introduction to its *Progress Report* the IBA also mentioned that a number of “experienced and talented” staff had left the station. Despite this being a problem for nearly all the established stations – the newer ILR stations were promising better opportunities and making attractive offers – in the case of BRMB the IBA were noting that some left because they were disenchanted with the station.⁶²⁸ According to Ed Doolan, the senior phone-in presenter, Russell was not popular amongst staff – when it came to BRMB’s public service responsibilities he was a tough person to work, he demanded exacting standards from his presenters.⁶²⁹ Presenters may also have felt disgruntled at the direction the station was now taking. They were chosen for their PSB credentials, but now they had to present less informative programmes. Improvements to the building also seemed to be taking preference over programme standards. The studios, offices and reception area had all been modernised, yet there was still no outside broadcast unit with which to enhance the station’s community provision. Plans were also in place to computerise the sales and traffic departments. Even the newsroom, which was previously the most modern in ILR, was on the list for improvement.⁶³⁰

By 1980 it seemed that the differences between Pinnell and Russell had reached a conclusion: Russell left BRMB at the end of 1979 to head what was to be an unsuccessful application for the Bristol licence. Despite the trade press reporting that BRMB had regretted losing Russell, some believed his departure was not of his choosing.⁶³¹ According to Doolan, Russell’s pure public service credentials were no longer needed.⁶³² Russell’s replacement was Birmingham-born Bob Hopton, who arrived at the station in April 1980. Hopton was also no stranger to public service broadcasting: he had spent ten years at BBC Birmingham before becoming the first programme controller at the Radio Tees ILR station. According to the IBA and the local press he was more flamboyant and outgoing than Russell, however.⁶³³ He was also more commercially minded and it was this which would shape BRMB’s future programme development. His management style and commercial mindedness would also

⁶²⁷ Sarah Thane, IBA Midlands Regional Officer 1974-1985, in e-mail to the author, 18 March 2008.

⁶²⁸ *Express & Star*, 8, 9 July 1981; *BRMB Progress Report January 1979 – January 1980*, para. 3.

⁶²⁹ Ed Doolan, BRMB presenter 1974-1982, interviewed by the author, 9 April 2008.

⁶³⁰ *BRMB Progress Report January 1979 – January 1980*, para. 3.

⁶³¹ *Broadcast*, 3 March 1980

⁶³² Doolan, interview.

⁶³³ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 18 April 1980; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *BRMB: Progress Report January 1982 – February 1983*, (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/68/04), para. 4; Thane, e-mail.

cause a conflict between him and some of the longer serving presenters, though, as will be shortly seen, this was not entirely of his own making.

Having completed the modernisation programme, by summer 1980 BRMB's attention turned to addressing the concerns of its regulator. According to the IBA, Hopton's aim was to develop programming that was better suited to the listeners' needs.⁶³⁴ With IBA encouragement, his first task was to lift the general tone of the station, in particular the attitude of presenters.⁶³⁵ It seemed that Russell's policy of allowing presenters to develop their own style was being called into question. The IBA believed that after almost six years of broadcasting a degree of complacency had settled in amongst some of the BRMB presenters. The regulator thought that they displayed a certain 'smugness' and this was affecting their relationship with the audience. They sounded patronising, especially the longer serving presenters.⁶³⁶ A good deal of BRMB's popularity was down to the personalities of presenters such as Les Ross, Ed Doolan or Tony Butler; but as with some of the newer presenters, the IBA felt their style of their presentation needed revitalising. As the IBA suggested, they needed persuading, at times forcing, into taking on "new challenges" and "new imaginative directions".⁶³⁷ Within twelve months the IBA believed that Hopton had achieved this. After coaxing, and at times bullying, "many of the station's extrovert" personalities had been made aware of "the gap between their showbiz lifestyles and those of their listeners" - resulting in a presentation "less obsessed with individual egos" and more with in keeping with their responsibility to the listener.⁶³⁸

The IBA also felt that the station had made significant improvements to its programming. The station's first outside broadcast unit arrived in 1980 and had helped provide a greater community involvement, for instance.⁶³⁹ The Sunday evening spiritual phone-in was now supplemented by a new Sunday morning religious magazine programme.⁶⁴⁰ A strengthened information and community content during the daytime programmes was an important move. The mid-morning *Morning Call* music and phone-in

⁶³⁴ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *BRMB: Progress Report January 1980 – January 1981* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0411/01), para. 4.

⁶³⁵ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1979 – January 1980*, paragraph 34; *BRMB Progress Report, January 1980 – January 1981*, para. 4.

⁶³⁶ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1979 – January 1980*, para. 34.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1980 – January 1981*, para. 16.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 3, 4, 12.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 41.

programme was one of the first programmes to be introduced by Hopton, and it steadily increased its community element. Its hour-long phone-in was soon supplemented with ‘Two Way Radio’, which was a two hour off-air help line copied from a similar twenty-four hour facility provided to London listeners by Capital Radio. With their calls regularly summarised on-air, callers were encouraged to either seek/give advice or appeal for/offer help to other callers.⁶⁴¹ This improved community commitment also involved helping local organisations to make a better use of radio when getting their message across. Earlier discussion referred to the ‘professional barriers’ which was preventing some of the smaller community groups from reaching the airwaves. Local radio stations were criticised for giving airtime to national organisations instead of people from local communities. ‘Radio experienced’ professional ‘experts’ were being used in preference to community groups with local experience, and this was something which BRMB sought to rectify. Almost at the same time as introducing Two Way Radio, the station joined with BBC Radio Birmingham, the Second City Theatre group and West Midlands Arts to provide a six-week evening course in basic radio technique. “Radio is an important part of the community and we have got to show people how to use it”, stated Nick Meanwell, who was presenter of *Morning Call* and was also now BRMB’s community officer.⁶⁴² The course offered voluntary organisations the experience necessary to make better use of programmes such as *Morning Call*.

BRMB only seemed to be paying lip service to IBA’s criticisms, however. Despite the failings which were noted in the 1979 *Progress Report*, many improvements since then were only at the request of further IBA prompting. New strands of programming which the station had discussed with the IBA and some of the promised improvements to existing programmes had simply not happened. The IBA’s 1981 *Progress Report* for BRMB noted that on several occasions the company had to be reminded of the discussions which had taken place.⁶⁴³ It seemed that the enhanced community provision was only there to appease the IBA, and that the station was still looking to provide programmes which would only attract the largest audience. When BRMB came to air in 1974 its weekday schedule consisted of information features and phone-ins throughout the day. Despite their return after 1979 they still only featured during the mid-morning period. As the IBA pointed out, despite the morning’s emphasis on community the remainder of the day consisted almost entirely of

⁶⁴¹ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *BRMB: Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0413/01), para. 8.

⁶⁴² *Broadcast*, 23 March 1981.

⁶⁴³ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 8.

music, dedications and competitions.⁶⁴⁴ The magazine-style *Afternoon Affair* was designed to correct this by making a greater use of feature material and providing news on local events, even providing interviews with local newspaper editors and national personalities.⁶⁴⁵ The important point is that *Afternoon Affair* only appeared after the IBA had exerted pressure. Hopton was not interested in BRMB being a community station, stated Doolan, who had been with the station since the start and was to leave not long after Hopton's arrival. "He wanted it to be sound wallpaper", Doolan claimed, and it seemed that good talking disc jockeys were preferred over Russell's former public service announcers: "he didn't really like what I was doing, it was too community and he didn't want community, he wanted music, and he wanted disc jockeys".⁶⁴⁶ Though being pressured to change his style of presentation may have caused Doolan to feel bitter towards Hopton, there may have been some truth in his assertion: according to the IBA his well-publicised move to BBC Radio WM (the newly renamed Radio Birmingham - see below), to host a lunchtime phone-in similar to that which he had previously presented on BRMB, was the result of his contract not being renewed.⁶⁴⁷

News coverage was one area where ratings seemed to have taken preference over content, and again, was an area which was only improved at the IBA's behest. Though his report was written in 1980 and was not made public until 1981, when Wright reported on political coverage on West Midlands' local radio he was particularly critical of BRMB's news service. Though praising the BRMB newsroom for its professionalism he described its local coverage as only being superficial. Produced as part of the IBA research fellowship scheme, where guest academics would investigate a particular aspect of either television or radio, Wright used the three West Midlands' local radio stations to investigate the extent of political education in local radio.⁶⁴⁸ A large part of his research looked at the news service that each station provided. When dealing with BRMB Wright referred to the 'tabloid' nature of its main newscasts. An enhanced breakfast news service would, he suggested, provide a better coverage of national and local events. Pinnell's reply to this was "we all live on this ratings game ... and news programmes would not attract enough listeners".⁶⁴⁹ It was probably because of this, and Wright's own observations, that IBA believed BRMB needed

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, para. 10.

⁶⁴⁶ Doolan, interview.

⁶⁴⁷ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982 – January 1983*, para. 12.

⁶⁴⁸ Wright, A., *Local Radio and Local Broadcasting: a Study in Political Education* (Birmingham: IBA Research Fellowship Scheme/Department of Extramural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1980); *Birmingham Post*, 15 August 1981.

⁶⁴⁹ Wright, p. 133.

to provide a better news service. The IBA's 1980 *Progress Report* for BRMB was probably using Pinnell's comment to Wright when it stated that Pinnell feared an extended news service. Moreover, in spite of BRMB's constant boast of having the best equipped newsroom in ILR Pinnell was reluctant to use it to its full potential.⁶⁵⁰ It seemed that the station's news content had steadily dwindled and it was only after "some IBA 'encouragement'" that the news bulletins were extended. As well as an extended 11pm bulletin, the hourly newscasts, which had previously been reduced to three-minutes, were now back to their original length of five-minutes. Importantly, by combining the main evening news at 6 pm with the Monday to Friday phone-in, which included sport on Fridays, the *Newsline Briefing* programme eventually provided a new ninety-minute news and current affairs programme.⁶⁵¹

Documentaries and ethnic programming were also improved through IBA encouragement. We have already seen how in 1979 the IBA felt the need for a more regular strand of documentary making; it felt that the station's documentary output was 'spasmodic' and 'inconsistent.'⁶⁵² The IBA also quoted Pinnell as telling its Local Advisory Committee that plans were in place for a specialised documentary unit, and not long after Brian King was appointed to head a new documentaries department. By the beginning of 1981 King was reported as being "in his stride and producing worthwhile material"; his documentaries were even making a contribution to the ILR programme-sharing scheme.⁶⁵³ One such documentary was *Paint it Black*, which focused on the relations between the police and ethnic minorities after the Handsworth riots of summer 1981. Though as a documentary *Paint it Black* was congratulated for drawing national attention to the delicate nature of inner city race relations, for BRMB itself it seemed that ethnic programming was a contentious issue. Discussion in Chapter One highlighted the debate which centred on the mainstream media and its apparent exclusion of minority groups. Besides giving rise to the community media movement, this provided an impetus for people to start their own illegal radio stations. From the 1970s onward, the land-based pirate radio stations were carrying programmes which they thought the main radio networks had failed to provide; they were run by a small number of minority groups who felt disenfranchised from the existing radio services. Like most of the large urban areas, the West Midlands had its share of pirate radio stations. From

⁶⁵⁰ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1980 – January 1981*, paras. 5, 18.

⁶⁵¹ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982 – February 1983*, paras. 18, 20.

⁶⁵² *BRMB Progress Report, January 1979 – January 1980*, para. 35.

⁶⁵³ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 22; *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982 – February 1983*, para. 26; see Chapter four for discussion on the ILR programme sharing scheme.

the end of 1978 until sometime in 1980 there was Radio Enoch which was named after Enoch Powell, the former outspoken West Midlands Conservative MP. Describing themselves as “people against Marxism”, this overtly political station sent out the occasional right wing broadcasts on the short wave radio band; indeed, the extremity of its broadcasts brought the station to the attention of the national press, even the BBC’s *World at One* news programme.⁶⁵⁴ Sounds Alternative on Sunday afternoons and Rebel Radio one August bank holiday also represented stations broadcasting music for the black and Rastafarian communities, while between July 1981 and June 1982 EST (Electronic Sound Transmission) presented a diet of rock music and comedy.⁶⁵⁵ Whilst some of these could be heard throughout the West Midlands’ conurbation, Wolverhampton also had its share of pirate stations with Radio Phoenix (alternate Sundays), UK Radio (Sunday evenings) and West Midlands Free Radio (all genre unknown).⁶⁵⁶

Of these pirate operators, Birmingham’s PCRL (People’s Community Radio Link) was the biggest and most prominent. Handsworth based PCRL commenced as Radio Star in May 1981 and was operated by volunteers. Though some volunteers paid towards its running costs it was mostly funded by advertising from within the local black population. PCRL presented a daily 24-hour service of music, news and community information which was targeted at the city’s black population.⁶⁵⁷ “Blacks get only five hours a week on Radio WM, and BRMB broadcasts two-and-a-half hours a week for Asians and Blacks, and that’s mainly music”, stated ‘Music Master’, the anonymous founder of PCRL.⁶⁵⁸ This view was not restricted to PCRL. In 1987 Birmingham’s Handsworth Technical College compiled a report on the city’s black community and its attitude towards its coverage in the local media. The college used a series of quotations and newspaper reports to summarise its findings. “Local radio like BRMB doesn’t say anything for black people” was one such quotation; and this, the report claimed, epitomised the general feeling amongst the ethnic communities.⁶⁵⁹ The fundamental point is that by embracing the varied cultures within Birmingham’s inner city areas, from Afro-Caribbean reggae through to West Indian Rastafarianism, PCRL provided a service that it believed was missing from BRMB. PCRL claimed an audience of 250,000,

⁶⁵⁴ *Birmingham Post*, 13 March 1979; *Observer*, 18 March 1979.

⁶⁵⁵ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 8 June 1982; Hind, J., & Mosco, S., *Rebel Radio: The Full Story of British Pirate Radio* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p. 124-7; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 16 September 1982.

⁶⁵⁶ Hind and Mosco, pp. 124-127.

⁶⁵⁷ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 16 September 1982.

⁶⁵⁸ Music master quoted in *Birmingham Evening Mail*, *ibid*.

⁶⁵⁹ Quote reprinted in *Black in Birmingham*, (Birmingham: ILT Services, Handsworth Technical College, 1987), p. 72.

and support was evidently such that within twelve months of operation a 10,000-name petition calling for it to be awarded a licence had been organised.⁶⁶⁰ Indeed, after the Home Office had completed one its many closures of the station, a local Church of England priest even allowed PCRL to broadcast from his church tower; he believed the station provided a community service and should be afforded the opportunity to get its messages across.⁶⁶¹

Research by the Commission for Racial Equality showed that slightly over half (57 per cent) of the Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities preferred BRMB to other stations, and that the majority (81 per cent) of Asians tuned into the *Geet Mala* Asian programme.⁶⁶² Though this 1980 report showed a degree of satisfaction with BRMB's ethnic coverage, it seemed that the more the station provided the more was expected of it. An IBA audience perception report in 1983 showed that the majority (64 per cent) of BRMB listeners were "fairly content" with the airtime it devoted to ethnic programming; while 20 per cent wanted more time, 14 per cent thought less time was needed and only two per cent thought the amount of time was "about right".⁶⁶³ Only 14 per cent of those interviewed were of either Afro-Caribbean or Asian origin, however, and within this small group there was a desire for further representation: most Asians and approximately half of the Afro-Caribbean listeners wanted more time for their type of programming.⁶⁶⁴ This latter point was all the more interesting given that from 1980 the scope of the *Geet Mala* was steadily increased to include a Bengali section, as was the reggae show to include a broader range of music.⁶⁶⁵ Many of these changes resulted in part from the encouragement of the IBA and its advisory committee, and the regular meetings the station had with the city's various ethnic liaison groups.⁶⁶⁶

It can be remembered that by 1979 the IBA wanted BRMB to provide more ethnic coverage in its mainstream programming. Whilst the station was willing to enhance its

⁶⁶⁰ Undated *Birmingham Evening Mail* report reprinted in *Black in Birmingham; Birmingham Evening Mail*, 16 September 1982.

⁶⁶¹ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 10 November 1986.

⁶⁶² *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982 – February 1983*, para. 11.

⁶⁶³ Vick, D., *Audience Reactions to BRMB Radio and Requirements of a Birmingham ILR Service* (London: IBA Research Department, September 1983), para. 10.7.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 10.8, 10.9.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 7; *BRMB Progress Report January 1983 – January 1983*, appendices, *Report of the Local Advisory Committee; BRMB Progress Report, January 1979 – January 1980*, para. 7; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Staff Report – BRMB, January 1984 – February 1985* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/68/04), para. 4f; *BRMB Progress Report, January 1980 – January 1981*, para. 11.

⁶⁶⁶ Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1983* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1983).

daytime output in order to meet the IBA in its other wishes, its ethnic provision was still constrained by the need to capture the widest possible audience. When the trade journal *Broadcast* questioned why an Irish presenter hosted the lunchtime show, Hopton's reply was that Birmingham was full of immigrants, "but they are not all Asian or West Indian ... the biggest immigrant population is Irish, and lots of people claim Irish descent".⁶⁶⁷ From Hopton's remark it can be assumed that while the white Irish community was being recognised in the daytime output, the coverage for the smaller minority groups was still regarded as specialist material and was saved for the off-peak periods. An Irish presenter was perhaps thought more acceptable to daytime audiences than a black or Asian presenter.⁶⁶⁸ Chapter One also drew attention to Choice FM, the later community-based station, and its failure to provide its promised service for Birmingham's Afro-Caribbean community.⁶⁶⁹ Briefly, the Afro-Caribbean music and content drew insufficient listeners with which to attract advertisers, and a wider range of music was deemed necessary for its commercial survival. The lessons from Choice could be carried over to BRMB, indeed ILR as a whole with its remit to provide a community-based service: the need to reconcile the conflict between serving individual communities and economic viability. In its original licence application in 1973, BRMB stated that it would provide a service which would "enrich the lives of the *greater majority of the community* [own italics]". John Russell, BRMB's first programme controller and the author of its licence application, later told the magazine *Music Week* that "independent radio has to be commercially viable to survive, and that means getting, increasing and keeping the audience". He went on to explain how this was to be done: "you cannot do this by splitting the day into programmes dealing with topics like bee-keeping or marbles collecting, *every minority is part of the majority* [own italics]".⁶⁷⁰ Whatever their personal interests were, the listener's other tastes and interests would match those of the larger majority. Russell was referring to BRMB not using individually themed programmes such as those already adopted by BBC local radio, which is a subject which we will shortly turn to. From what materialised in its programme schedules it was obvious that BRMB was only going to target the larger part of the population.

⁶⁶⁷ *Broadcast*, 21 June 1982.

⁶⁶⁸ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1979 – January 1980*, para. 7.

⁶⁶⁹ Wall, T., *Constructing Popular Music Radio: Music and Cultural Identity in Radio Station Discourse*, (PhD thesis for University of Birmingham, 1999), p. 1

⁶⁷⁰ *Music Week*, 1 March 1975.

Audience Perception to BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio, with Particular Reference to BBC Radio Birmingham

This section will gauge the audience's reaction to BRMB and Beacon. It will be seen that the introduction of an enhanced public and community provision caused a change in the public's perception of each station. Three audience perception reports were available for the early 1980s, the first being that published for BBC Radio Birmingham in autumn 1981. Specially commissioned by the station manager, its primary remit was to assess the local population's awareness and perception of the station within the sphere of West Midlands' local radio.⁶⁷¹ BBC Radio Birmingham's transmission area was designed to cover most of Birmingham and the Black Country. Like most BBC local stations, especially those with an adjacent ILR station, it had quite a small audience. With an audience share of only 1.4 per cent it was, however, one of the least popular stations on the BBC local network. Poor reception in the south of Birmingham may have been a factor to consider, though the BBC did not see this as a major problem; so it would not interfere with the other BBC stations on the same 206 metres wavelength the power of its medium wave transmitter had been reduced to a fraction of its full potential.⁶⁷²

There were several reasons why the audience to BBC local radio was so low. When it started during the late sixties, BBC local radio was only broadcast on the less popular VHF waveband; it was not allowed a medium wave frequency until the arrival of ILR in 1972. Given the paucity of VHF radio sets during its early years of operation, especially in motor cars where a good deal of radio listening took place, only a handful of the potential audience could listen to the service. Despite the fact that it spearheaded the BBC's commitment to community broadcasting, it also had relatively small funding. BBC local radio only received a fraction of the finance which was afforded to the Corporation's other networks; it remained the 'poor relation' when compared to the main television and radio networks.⁶⁷³ There was also a limit to the style and amount of music it could play. At first BBC local radio was only allowed to use music produced by session musicians. Whilst this saved the BBC's limited needle-time for the major networks such as Light Service (later Radio One and Radio Two) it meant that listeners would automatically choose the national stations when looking for the

⁶⁷¹ BBC, *BBC Birmingham: an Awareness and Image Study*, (BBC: September 1981), (BBC Written Archives, LR81/201), para. 1.1.

⁶⁷² *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 24 July 1976, 14 January 1977, 29 June 1978, 14 June 1979.

⁶⁷³ Crisell, A., *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 143; Barnard, p. 66.

latest hit music. Finally, there was its approach to programming. A thin diet of news and information at peak times was accompanied by individually themed programmes which only attracted niche audiences - listeners not interested in a programme's subject would simply tune to another station. The arrival of ILR provided the impetus to address these issues. The manager of BBC Radio York later stated that in having to compete with ILR BBC local radio had to adopt the same format of news and information interspersed with popular music.⁶⁷⁴ BBC local radio also followed ILR's lead in marketing and publicity.⁶⁷⁵ Radio Birmingham was a clear example of this. A month before BRMB came to air it opened a new broadcast studio and information centre in New Street, one of Birmingham's main shopping streets.⁶⁷⁶ Four years later, the BBC station introduced new schedules which would include more locally developed programming. Like most BBC local stations a good part of Radio Birmingham's daily schedule included the national programmes which were provided by Radio Four and Radio Two. Indeed, this was probably another reason why BBC local radio had such a low listenership. From 1978 all daytime network programmes such as Radio Four's *The World at One* and the *Archers* were dropped. Likewise, the night time switch to Radio Two was moved from mid-evening to midnight to 10 pm until midnight, thus also allowing more time for local programmes.⁶⁷⁷ In 1981 Radio Birmingham was then renamed Radio WM and given a totally new style of programming. One local paper attributed the doubling of its weekly audience to 750,000 listeners to a £15,000 publicity campaign and a new 'snappier' Radio One style output.⁶⁷⁸ Though its audience never reached that of BRMB's million plus, a contributory factor in its rise in popularity was undoubtedly the enticing of Ed Doolan to present a lunchtime phone-in - a similar programme to that dropped by BRMB in 1979.

The BBC's 1981 report was published just before Radio Birmingham was renamed Radio WM, and its findings may have even helped the BBC in its decision to transform the station. In broad terms the report found that while Radio Birmingham's news and informative content attracted a predominantly older (50+) middle class listener, the friendly and livelier mix of entertainment and music on BRMB and Beacon was appealing to a

⁶⁷⁴ Quoted in Barnard, *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ Barnard, *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 9 January 1974.

⁶⁷⁷ *Birmingham Post*, 29 June 1978.

⁶⁷⁸ *Birmingham Post*, 26 July 1982.

younger (16-49 year old) and more working class audience.⁶⁷⁹ This reflected the general situation whereby the independent commercial broadcasters, playing a predominance of pop music, traditionally attracted a more working class audience.⁶⁸⁰ BRMB and Beacon were also more successful in maintaining their audience. Where listeners to Radio Birmingham also tuned into other stations, those who chose BRMB or Beacon remained relatively loyal to their adopted station. This may have been for two reasons: the nature of their respective audience and the differences between the BBC and ILR's output. The younger audience of BRMB and Beacon were more likely to have been in either work or education, and may have chosen their station for its entertainment value; they were more likely to be listening while performing another task, possibly work, study or even leisure. Being older and either in a profession or retired, those choosing Radio Birmingham probably had more time to be selective in what they listened to, and had time to hop between channels. Above all, this drew out the differences between ILR and BBC local radio. ILR was charged with having to provide a service which would encompass all the BBC's radio services. As it had to offer a fuller service than its BBC counterpart, theoretically there would be no need for its listeners to retune to another station. BBC local radio, on the other hand, was initially seen as an adjunct to the Corporation's national networks; it was to provide the local service which would not be possible on the national stations. Audiences not looking for a local service would simply tune into one or more of the national networks for these could provide a better service - those looking for national news would have probably chosen Radio Four, for instance. Moreover, BBC local radio was only providing a minimal local service; with its restricted airtime and budget it could only apportion a limited amount of time and effort to its duty as a local broadcaster.⁶⁸¹

Importantly, more people thought that the independent stations were better involved with the community while Radio Birmingham was criticised, by listeners and non-listeners, for its apparent lack of community involvement.⁶⁸² The report did not specify what it actually meant by 'community involvement', whether on or off air, but it can be cautiously argued that age and social class could have been a factor here too. Indeed, this raises the question as to what defines 'community involvement'. Besides providing information, Radio

⁶⁷⁹ *BBC Birmingham, an Awareness and Image Study*, paras. 2.2, 3.3.3, 3.3.4, 3.3.5.

⁶⁸⁰ Hendy, D., *Radio in the Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 125; Seymour-Ure, C., *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 126.

⁶⁸¹ Barnard, pp. 65-66; Crisell, p. 143; Lewis and Booth, pp. 95-97.

⁶⁸² *BBC Birmingham, an Awareness and Image Study*, paras. 3.3.3, 2.2.

Birmingham's older listeners could have looked to an involvement with activities more appropriate to their own age group. If the report was referring to an 'off air' involvement this could have meant a visit to a day centre or covering a '40s music night. Likewise, the younger listeners to BRMB and Beacon may have considered a station road show, the promotion of a rock concert or a nightclub appearance as constituting a community involvement. It could even be argued that these results demonstrate how successful BRMB and Beacon were in their promotional activities. While later discussion will show how BRMB and Beacon later used community involvement as a promotional tool, with their younger audiences talking favourably of their outside activities, this earlier BBC report clearly demonstrated the merits of using community involvement as a way with which to attract audiences.

Having followed the IBA's demand for more informative programming, two later IBA audience reaction reports provide a clear indication as the changing nature of the BRMB (1983) and Beacon (1986) audience. Such reports were published in preparation for the re-advertising of each franchise, as brought about by the new rules under the 1980 Broadcasting Act (see Chapter Three), and helped the IBA to gauge the performance of existing licence holders. It now seemed that music and entertainment was no longer the main reason why audiences chose BRMB or Beacon. While there was no consensus on why people chose not to listen, or who did so, many identified local news and phone-ins as their station's main strength.⁶⁸³ Both stations were still held in high regard for their community involvement. Crucially, a major reason for listening to BRMB in particular was that it helped listeners to feel part of the community.⁶⁸⁴ With 60 per cent of those surveyed commending BRMB for its local content, they frequently mentioned BRMB's local identity; many even expressed extreme satisfaction with the style and immediacy of its news coverage.⁶⁸⁵ With the IBA having forced the station to adopt a different attitude among its presenters, it was also now perceived as having more friendly and interesting presenters than any other station. Furthermore, with the IBA steering BRMB away from its supposed rivalry with Radio One, most of those using radio for music or entertainment thought less of BRMB than its BBC

⁶⁸³ Lannon, K., *Audience Reactions to Beacon Radio and Requirements of a Wolverhampton and Black Country ILR Service* (London: IBA Research Department, February 1986), (Ofcom documents: 1-23101301), paras. 1.7, 8.1, 10.2; *Audience Reaction to BRMB Radio*, paras. 1.5, 1.18.

⁶⁸⁴ *Audience Reaction to BRMB Radio*, para. 6.6.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid*, paras. 1.8, 1.9, 8.1.

competitors – Radio One or Radio Two; only 19 per cent of respondents identified music as the reason why they listened to BRMB.⁶⁸⁶

The same could be said for Beacon, where more people listened for information rather than music; like BRMB, local content and phone-ins were seen as its greatest strength.⁶⁸⁷ Importantly, in light of Beacon's previous troubles many of those questioned had noted great improvements at the station. Sixty-one per cent thought that Beacon had enhanced its output - a substantial figure given that two-thirds of those questioned were claiming to have listened since the station began in 1976. Many thought it now provided a better service of news (local, national and international), current affairs and sport, though when it came to music some still preferred one or more of the BBC's national stations.⁶⁸⁸ Though no other stations were mentioned were mentioned, the proportion of listeners mentioning Beacon's local identity (23 per cent) as a reason for listening was indeed higher than a number of other ILR stations; this was probably due to the new management and its effort to bring the station closer to the community.⁶⁸⁹

These later IBA surveys did not indicate any age or social group and so it is therefore difficult to attribute their findings to any particular demographic group. The only exception was the findings on ethnic listening, which were examined earlier. By comparing the IBA's results with those of the earlier BBC perception report it can, however, be supposed that BRMB and Beacon were now appealing to an older, more middle class listener. The BBC's report showed that younger people looked to music as their main reason for listening, but in the IBA reports music and entertainment were downgraded in the overall list of priorities. Information and phone-ins were now given as the main reason for listening to BRMB and Beacon, which was the same reason why older listeners had previously chosen BBC Radio Birmingham.

It will be worthwhile highlighting some of the negative reactions to the programming of BRMB and Beacon, which the IBA perception reports had revealed. Not everyone was happy with the political and religious coverage on BRMB, or Beacon; some of those participating in the surveys thought that their chosen station could improve its content in

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, paras.1.5, 10.3, 6.7.

⁶⁸⁷ *Audience Reactions to Beacon Radio*, para. 6.4.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, paras. 6.6, 1.20.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid, para. 8.1.

these areas.⁶⁹⁰ Some of those questioned also felt that more airtime could be given to local opinion.⁶⁹¹ Interestingly, some of the new initiatives at Beacon had gone unnoticed. The majority of respondents claimed to have never listened to some of its newer specialist programmes. Whether this was because these programmes were aired during the less popular evening listening period is open to debate, but it should be noted that of those claiming to have listened few expressed any particular opinion regarding their content or appeal.⁶⁹²

Building Community Support

When Beacon was under its previous administration it was not just the IBA that was dissatisfied with its lack of local coverage. There was a strong feeling locally that Beacon was not representative of the local community. The effort by its new management to provide an enhanced community output has already been seen. Now it will be seen how they sought to build bridges with what was in effect a disenfranchised community. In 1981 the newly appointed press and public relations officer, Peter Noyes, described to *Broadcast* how the station was making sure it was seen as part of the community.⁶⁹³ Outside activities were enhanced with new initiatives; these included a series of orchestral concerts and involvement in a number of charity events. Beyond pop-oriented road shows, outside broadcasts now covered events which ranged from local fetes to the Shrewsbury Flower Show.⁶⁹⁴ Beside the weekly *Brass Tacks* programme, which was still broadcast from a different pub each week, the daily news and current affairs phone-in, *Topic*, now occasionally came from venues such as schools or community halls. With the sponsorship of a local speedway team, the Beacon Wolves, the station also established a strong presence in the area's sporting calendar.⁶⁹⁵ Finally, there were the charity events. A sponsored bike ride between Wolverhampton and Bridgenorth, which became an annual event, raised £3,200 for the charity MIND; and a 36-hour radio marathon marking the International Year of the Disabled raised £14,500.⁶⁹⁶

Effort was made to rid Beacon of its supposed Wolverhampton bias. This included the broadcasting of local council debates and local councillors being involved in the station's

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid, para. 10.3; *Audience Reaction to BRMB Radio*, para. 1.11.

⁶⁹¹ BRMB ibid, para. 13.2; *Audience Reactions to Beacon Radio*, para. 15.2; Pierson interview.

⁶⁹² *Audience Reactions to Beacon Radio*, para. 10.4.

⁶⁹³ *Broadcast*, 27 April 1981.

⁶⁹⁴ *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 28.

⁶⁹⁵ *Broadcast*, 30 March 1984.

⁶⁹⁶ *Express & Star*, 12 August 1982; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1982* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1982); *Beacon Radio Progress Report March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 28.

phone-ins and current affairs coverage. By using ‘lock up’ studios, an idea originally proposed in the licence application, reporters could provide instant reports from any of the area’s main towns.⁶⁹⁷ To create a sense of locality, broadcasts and publicity were also referenced to each individual town, an idea copied from the *Express & Star* with its various local editions. On air references to each town - “the current temperature in ...” - and localised personalised station identification jingles were supplemented by the handing out of localised car stickers. With the popular and wholesome image which he forged while working at ATV, Tomlinson played a crucial role in forging a closer relationship with the community. Local authorities and business organisations were previously Beacon’s main critics.⁶⁹⁸ Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce even wrote to the IBA asking it to remove the station’s contract.⁶⁹⁹ Tomlinson strove to reach out to such organisations. He opened a much needed dialogue by encouraging organisations to take a more active role in the station, either through getting their message across via its programmes or simply by encouraging their members to use it for their advertising. It was not just the business community he was interested in. With talks about local radio to schools, community centres, even the local councils, he also attempted to get the wider community involved with Beacon. According to Tomlinson a more congenial relationship was formed: “...from the metropolitan boroughs, from politicians, from businessmen, from the movers and shakers, they all began to respect Beacon”.⁷⁰⁰ Indeed, this respect was no more evident than his being appointed chair of the Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce, previously one of the station’s fiercest critics.⁷⁰¹ Coming just two years into Tomlinson’s tenure as chief executive this demonstrated the amount of confidence which the local business community was now having in the station.

“I was a walking PR guy”, Tomlinson stated in interview, and ‘PR’ was an appropriate way to describe his station’s effort to win over the community. Gaining community support had two benefits. First, as an ILR operator there was the duty to become part of the local community. Second, and more subtly, it helped to win over audiences and increase revenue. It became part of the overall marketing strategy: from 1983 onwards

⁶⁹⁷ Alan Graham, proprietor of Midland News Association, interviewed by the author, 22 July 2005; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1983* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1983).

⁶⁹⁸ Tomlinson interview, 26 January 2004.

⁶⁹⁹ Tomlinson interview, 12 July 2004; Saga Radio licence application.

⁷⁰⁰ Tomlinson, interview, 12 July 2004.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid*; *Beacon Radio Progress Report, March 1981 – March 1982*, para. 4.

charity and other such work was listed under ‘press and PR’ in the company reports.⁷⁰² Indeed, the press coverage that this generated was used to good effect. “Pulling Beacon closer to the community was excellent for ratings and was excellent for revenue ... the increased column inches provided free publicity”, Pierson later observed.⁷⁰³

BRMB undoubtedly took a similar view. According to Pinnell, BRMB’s success in profitability and audience share was due to its community commitment (see previous chapter). Community-based programming, local charity work, broadcasting from exhibitions such as those held at the city’s Bingley Hall (and later the National Exhibition Centre) and sponsored music concerts all provided examples of this. Despite the IBA thinking there was a distinct lack of local content in programming, these outside activities continued into the 1980s. Indeed they increased. In coordination with the Birmingham Education Department the ‘Mr. Tranny’ road safety campaign, which consisted of a walking transistor radio, visited schools throughout the area.⁷⁰⁴ Music sponsorship also continued, though this was not unique to BRMB: under ILR regulations each station was obliged to spend three per cent of its net revenue on locally originated music. The now annual CBSO concerts were supplemented with a series of Sunday ‘Coffee Morning’ concerts at the city’s Museum and Art Gallery and a series of ‘early music’ concerts which were designed to introduce young people to classical music. During 1981 BRMB also played a major role in promoting other events including Birmingham’s multi-racial ‘Concord’ arts event, regular Jazz concerts and performances by the Warwickshire Youth Orchestra.⁷⁰⁵ Involvement in the arts also included the sponsorship of a number of plays; *Death Trap* at the Hall Green Little Theatre (1984) was one such example.⁷⁰⁶

BRMB’s enhanced community involvement also involved more charity work. The Susan and Friends Appeal (1981) provided over £80,000 which helped create a network of local centres for the care of spina bifida and hydrocephalus sufferers. Utilising sixty volunteers, who helped distribute collection envelopes, a special event was staged in the city’s Chamberlain Square, where listeners were invited to hand their donations to a selection

⁷⁰² *Beacon Broadcasting Annual Report, Year Ending 30 September 1983.*

⁷⁰³ Pierson, e-mail, 15 May 2007.

⁷⁰⁴ *BRMB Progress Report January 1980 – January 1981*, para. 20; *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 26.

⁷⁰⁵ Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1982* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1982); *BRMB Progress Reports January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 25.

⁷⁰⁶ *Birmingham Broadcasting Annual Report, Year Ending September 30 1983.*

of celebrities.⁷⁰⁷ A series of annual ‘Walkathons’ followed on from the success of Susan and Friends. Using Birmingham’s 25 mile outer-circle bus route as a course, which circumnavigated most of the city’s outer suburbs, the first event in 1983 witnessed over 24,000 walkers and brought in over £210,000. By 1987, when the average attendance was now 30,000 walkers, almost two million pounds had been raised over the previous six years - all going to charities which ranged from MENCAP through to the National Children’s Homes.⁷⁰⁸ As well as helping to fulfil its community remit, these events helped to enhance BRMB’s public profile. Like music sponsorship, they made a valuable contribution to the station’s promotions portfolio. Indeed, as Stoller pointed out in the case of music sponsorship, for most stations it was a cost effective way of using their statutory duties to their own advantage.⁷⁰⁹ As the IBA noted in its 1981 *Progress Report*, apart from the money raised for charity the cross-media cooperation and goodwill engendered were of immense value to the station.⁷¹⁰ Similar to Beacon, rather than appearing under ‘community affairs’ in the company’s annual reports, as was previously the case, by 1983 these events were being listed under the heading of ‘promotions’ - alongside other promotional activities such as the BRMB parachute team, BRMB hot air balloon and BRMB Entertainer of the Year event at the Night Out theatre/restaurant.⁷¹¹

In the months before the re-advertisement of the Birmingham franchise it was no coincidence that the IBA had noted an increase in BRMB’s promotional activities.⁷¹² When the franchise was re-advertised in the summer of 1983 the only opposition to BRMB was Radio Heartland, whose consortium was led by Phil Sidey, a former head of BBC Birmingham and a founder member of Radio Leicester – the BBC’s first local radio station, and Doug Ellis, chairman of Aston Villa football club. Heartland believed it had a case in providing a better service than that provided by BRMB. After almost ten years of BRMB, it stated in its application, the time had arrived for a change in emphasis. Not criticising BRMB on its record, Heartland set out an agenda of “competitive” news, split-frequency broadcasting and a service which consisted of “less pop” and more “sweet middle of the road

⁷⁰⁷ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 24; David Bagley, BRMB publicity and sales manager 1979-1986 marketing director 1986-1993, managing director 1993-1997, interviewed by the author, 26 January 2004; *Sunday Mercury*, 12 April 1981; *Birmingham Broadcasting Annual Report, Year Ending 30 September 1981*.

⁷⁰⁸ *Birmingham Post*, 2 May 1983 and 4 May 1987; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 23 August 1983.

⁷⁰⁹ Stoller, p. 82.

⁷¹⁰ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 24.

⁷¹¹ *Birmingham Broadcasting Annual Report, Year Ending September 30 1983*.

⁷¹² *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981 – January 1982*, para. 4.5; *Broadcast*, 4 September, 1983.

music”.⁷¹³ Though the exact reason why Heartland was unsuccessful in its application remains unknown, an examination of its application provides some possible answers. Their plan to provide alternative programmes on medium wave and on VHF would have been problematic. Already the AIRC (the Association of Independent Radio Contractors - ILR’s representative body) was pressing for split frequency programming, and in any case, the IBA would have had to apply for Home Office approval for it to allow such a move. In providing local news Heartland presented the vague notion of encouraging listeners and station staff to provide stories. While there was no mention of a local newsroom it suggested that listeners would phone in with information and that its own employees, from the chair through to the sales people, would be provided with vehicles equipped with telephones. Finally, still endeavouring to provide a community-based service whilst at the same time abandoning phone-ins may have proved costly; it has previously been seen how the phone-in proved a cost effective way for BRMB to fulfil this obligation.⁷¹⁴

Importantly, the Heartland directors had underestimated the public support for BRMB. It is unknown whether Heartland had access to the IBA’s audience report, but other than its already mentioned findings, this indicated that there was no “appreciable demand” for a service other than that provided by BRMB.⁷¹⁵ Besides, when it came to the test of the public meeting, which was attended by five hundred people, Heartland’s belief that BRMB’s “stereotyped” output had produced a “disinterest” amongst its listeners was proved incorrect.⁷¹⁶ During the application process the *Birmingham Post* had contrasted David Bagley’s optimism against a refusal by Pinnell to be complacent. “Capital and LBC successfully won their new contracts”, Pinnell told the *Post*, “[but] the feeling in some quarters is that the IBA may make a change with BRMB”.⁷¹⁷ In reference to the situation locally, he also had allegedly told Bagley that “many will be out to get the station, many with axes to grind”.⁷¹⁸ It is unclear who or what these ‘quarters’ were. His fears were unfounded, however. “Thumbs up for BRMB franchise” and “Case of ‘BRMB rules’ at popularity test” headlined the local press the day after the public meeting. Almost everyone present praised the station. Trade unionists, councillors, business representatives and members of the public

⁷¹³ *A Summary of an Application to the Independent Broadcasting Authority for the Local Radio Contract in Birmingham* (Birmingham: Radio Heartland, 23 August 1983), pp. 1, 3, 5; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 28 September 1983.

⁷¹⁴ Heartland application, pp 1, 2-3, 4-5.

⁷¹⁵ *Audience Reaction to BRMB Radio*, para. 1.19.

⁷¹⁶ Heartland application, p. 1.

⁷¹⁷ *Birmingham Post*, 11 November 1983.

⁷¹⁸ Bagley, interview.

all agreed that BRMB should retain the franchise. Support was such that at one point the chair of the meeting had to ask if anyone objected to BRMB. The result was one criticism that a non-West Indian was presenting the West Indian programme.⁷¹⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that BRMB and Beacon Radio both recognised that access to the airwaves, and therefore audiences, depended on full cooperation with the regulator. It has also shown how community involvement played two key roles. Community involvement formed part of ILR's statutory remit; it was a prerequisite to maintaining the franchise. With being seen in the community also proving good for ratings and revenue, it also played a major role in the station's marketing strategy – an issue which will be addressed in the next chapter. By 1979 Beacon realised the importance of co-operating with the regulator; as well as correcting past mistakes the board and its new management looked to a closer involvement with the IBA. The appointment of a readily acceptable managing director and a PSB-experienced programme controller not only pleased the IBA, but it showed a willingness to produce programmes which were more in keeping with ILR's duty as a public and community broadcaster. Importantly, the suspension of one deejay and an ending of the Red Hot promotions contract showed how the station was willing to make a break from the past. A similar situation existed at BRMB. By 1979 the IBA was reporting reduced information content and an element of blandness in its programming. With a new programme controller BRMB instigated swift changes to meet the concerns of its regulator. Having implanted the required changes, in both cases BRMB and Beacon achieved some degree of success. From the IBA performance and audience reports it was evident that both were winning widespread support, not just from the regulator but from their audience too.

This broad overview must be set within the context of the period. Even after 1979, broadcasting policy under the new Conservative government was still influenced by the paternalist ethos. Influenced by Annan, there still existed the emphasis on 'meaningful' speech and the requirement to put public and community before profit. Indeed, Annan was merely reflecting the left-wing fashion for community broadcasting. During the mid to late 1970s, and almost throughout the 1980s, left-wing organisations such as the Local Radio Workshop and the Community Media organisation were putting local radio under the microscope. The contemporary feeling was that local radio had failed to provide for the

⁷¹⁹ *Birmingham Post*, 25 October 1983; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 25 October, 1983.

whole community and that there was a need for newer community-based radio stations. With Annan and the then Labour government taking a similar view, the IBA felt obliged to insist on increased community coverage. This was undoubtedly the driving force behind the IBA's wish for more minority coverage in BRMB's mainstream programming. Nationally, the land based pirate radio stations were symptomatic of the alleged failure to provide sufficient minority programming. The West Midlands had several pirate stations with Birmingham's PCRL being the biggest and more organised. With the pirates not paying for access to the airwaves, and not being subject to the IBA's exacting standards, they were disliked by the legal ILR operators and the regulator alike. For BRMB the increased minority coverage was also an attempt to take the impetus out of PCRL's cause.

BRMB and Beacon were a microcosm of the debates which surrounded local radio. BRMB's participation in providing local organisations with the experience of using radio was almost certainly a response to the demand for an increased access to local radio. Beacon demonstrated the professional barriers which were preventing the smaller local community groups from reaching the air waves. It carefully selected who it would have on its programmes; programme director Bob Peirson did not want Beacon to be a 'do-gooding' radio station which provided a platform for each and every interest. Wright's criticism of BRMB's tabloid, populist, news service would have certainly resonated with the Local Radio Workshop's belief that the two profit driven ILR stations in London had failed to provide a full and comprehensive news service. His censuring of West Midlands' local radio for its apparent lack of political coverage would have also proved a useful example for Wasco and Mosco (1992) and their belief that a comprehensive political coverage in the media process was prerequisite to a successful democracy.⁷²⁰

A number of agendas were at work as BRMB and Beacon entered the 1980s. The need to preserve the franchise was the first. To do this they had to work with the IBA and to abide by the rules which governed ILR. While it went to some lengths to improve its presentation standards, when it came to information and content it seemed that BRMB was only willing to meet the IBA half way, however. The station would only placate the IBA in its call for a more informative output. While it went some way to enhance its PSB provision, time and again the IBA noticed how BRMB's promises of further improvement were

⁷²⁰ Mosco, V. and Wasco, J., (eds), *Democratic Communications in the Information Age* (Toronto: Garmond Press, 1992), p. 6.

unfulfilled. The subtext to the *Progress Reports* for BRMB after 1979 proved testament to this. The BRMB licence was not at stake, however. Beacon's licence was and to preserve it the station had to go further in winning the support of the regulator. Following the IBA's refusal to renew its licence in 1979, the station was now paying full attention to the IBA's constructive criticism. With J. Clement Jones taking immediate charge after the departure of Oliver and Mackenzie, programme schedules and managerial control were more in keeping with the station's duty as a responsible public broadcaster. Within time the new management of Tomlinson and Pierson had gained the confidence of staff and regulator alike; optimism had replaced despondency. Music policy was changed. The rotation of top-40 hits through to album tracks and golden oldies was replaced with a more melodic 'Radio Two' format. To become more readily identifiable to the listener, presenters' personalities were also allowed to develop. Daily features and informative phone-ins supplemented locally originated documentaries. Undeniably, Oliver and Mackenzie had already introduced many features, specialist music shows and information spots for example; but rather than music with information the emphasis was now on information supported by music. The important fact was that over time Tomlinson and Pierson had fulfilled their appointed task. With the station now addressing all age groups, it was attaining a genuine 42 per cent reach across all age ranges. Moreover, the new management team had nurtured Beacon into what was arguably a model ILR station. Indeed, Beacon was to be the subject of a special feature on ILR in the IBA's 1984 yearbook.⁷²¹

Targeting a wider audience was BRMB's second agenda. Other than a token reference to Birmingham's large Irish population BRMB's ethnic and minority programming was still consigned to the off-peak listening periods, even after the IBA had called for its increased coverage in the daily schedule. "We all play the ratings game" stated Pinnell, and evidence suggests that this remained the driving force behind his station's programming. Beyond the mid-morning's informative content the rest of the BRMB day remained almost entirely devoted to chart music. The IBA had to recommend a better use of interviews and features during the afternoon period. According to the IBA, chasing ratings explained why speech was abandoned for music in 1979, when the station tried to address a loss of 250,000 listeners. In the wider context the IBA was coming down harder on stations which seemed to put commercial considerations before their public service responsibilities. Its criticism of

⁷²¹ 'A Day in the Life of Beacon Radio' in Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Television and Radio 1984* (London: IBA, November, 1983), pp 160-162.

BRMB's increased music output may have represented an insistence on more speech, but the mere fact that BRMB was chasing the Radio One audience demonstrated the station's mindset. Indeed, in its audience report the BBC had reported that BRMB's mix of entertainment and music was appealing more to the younger 16-49 year old audience.

This leads to the third agenda: the responsibility of the IBA to ensure ILR stayed within its regulatory remit. ILR had to provide a public service whilst at the same time remain commercially viable. On the one hand, there was the need to satisfy the regulator, and on the other, there was the need to build and maintain an audience. Despite ensuring ILR was foremost a public service broadcaster, the IBA recognised that a purely information-led content would impede commercial survival. It was necessary to ensure operators were not 'destroyed by the weight of regulation'.⁷²² While it persuaded, at times badgered, franchises to uphold their remit to inform and educate, a degree of leeway existed when it came to entertaining the audience. Music remained the main method with which ILR attracted audiences and the IBA rarely interfered with ILR's music content: it was an area the IBA felt unable to assess.⁷²³ The BBC found people, albeit younger people, preferred BRMB and Beacon's mix of music and information over the staid output of its own Radio Birmingham. Later IBA reports pointed to a preference for news and information over music. Whilst this may have been due to a shift in the composition of the BRMB/Beacon audience, it undoubtedly showed how the IBA were encouraging stations to provide a more informative output. As the previous chapter pointed out, it was a question of getting the balance right. Where BRMB and Beacon's greatest strengths were seen as local news, phone-ins and local involvement, music remained the bond between station and audience. With the emphasis on information blended with music, both built substantial audiences.

⁷²² Thane, e-mail.

⁷²³ Barnard, p. 81.

Chapter Six

1980-1985: Business Operations and the Changing Nature of West Midlands ILR

Attention will now turn to the business aspect of BRMB and Beacon after 1979. In Chapter Three's discussion on ILR in the wider context it was seen that during the 1980s a period of declining revenue and falling audiences was caused by economic recession and the competition for advertising from both new television channels and newer forms of media such as cable and satellite television. This caused the AIRC, the Association of Independent Radio Contractors, to pressure the IBA to relax its rules on ILR. The IBA did relax its rules; but this decision was influenced mainly by the Conservative government's emphasis on consumer choice. The regulator was also more concerned about the financial stability of its franchise holders than any pressure from the AIRC. Chapter Three also showed that ILR was developing into two types of station. The city-based metropolitan stations were developing apart from the smaller, provincially based stations. With the IBA relaxing its rules on station ownership there was also the development of regional or semi-national groupings of station. Some of the larger city-based stations even sought Stock Market floatation. London's Capital Radio and Glasgow's Radio Clyde joined Liverpool's Radio City on the Unlisted Securities Market, for example.

Set within this context, this chapter will consist of two parts. The first part will address BRMB and Beacon's commercial performance between 1980 and 1983. It will show that worsening economic conditions were to have a profound effect on each station. The chapter will also show that BRMB was developing into one of the larger city based ILR stations while Beacon remained as one of the small to middling sized stations. Moreover, besides dealing with the recessionary pressures of escalating costs and a declining revenue, Beacon was burdened with its own unique operational problems. An income which did not match the size of its audience, the need to provide for several disparate towns and having to share a sizable part of its transmission area with another ILR station were the additional issues it had to contend with. The second part of the chapter will then turn to the developments during and after 1984. Despite the short respite provided by an improved income, both stations were to witness a further decline in revenue; BRMB was also to experience a reduced audience. Though this was not the first time BRMB and Beacon had faced such difficulties, events in the national arena were to have a profound effect on the ways in which they would address these concerns. Pressure from the AIRC for a

deregulation of ILR, and the IBA loosening its grip on the network, created a new situation at the local level. Being the bolder of the two, BRMB adopted a lighter approach to its public and community responsibilities while, like most of the smaller stations, Beacon remained within ILR's PSB-led remit, though the board did wish for the IBA to ease its financial burden.

1980-1983: Reduced Revenue and Declining Profit

Both stations were in a good financial position as they entered the 1980s. Like the rest of ILR they both benefited from the technicians' dispute which had blacked out ITV during the autumn of 1979. For the year ending September 1980 both had attributed a 32 per cent (BRMB) and a 16 per cent (Beacon) increase in revenue to the ITV strike.⁷²⁴ In spite of this, with ITV resolving its dispute and the onset of recession both were soon to see a reversal in their fortunes. With recessionary pressures causing advertisers to cut their budgets, both were to undergo a prolonged period of declining revenue, and therefore falling profit. The previous chapter showed how both were under IBA pressure to improve their programming. In particular, they had to improve their informative content and to make their output more representative of the local community. It was only through redundancy amongst some of the non-programme staff, and other cost cutting measures, that the two stations were able to maintain their programme standards whilst at the same time withstand the worst effects of the recession.

BRMB and Beacon were no strangers to recession. They had managed to cope with reduced advertising revenue during the previous economic downturn. However, whilst advertisers were again cutting their budgets, the market for their advertising was now more aggressive. There were now more media outlets willing to capture their trade. Take, for example, the growing number of free-sheet newspapers which were published by the local press. Free-sheets had been in existence since the 1960s, but with the local press also suffering the effects of the recession it was becoming increasingly dependent on these free door-to-door publications. Indeed, with the declining circulation of their main titles the guaranteed circulation of the free-sheets provided a useful tool with which to attract more

⁷²⁴ Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1980* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1980); Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Reports and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1980* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1980); Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Beacon Radio: Progress Report, April 1980-March 1981* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0411/02), para. 43.

local advertisers.⁷²⁵ In this respect, their effect on ILR cannot be over emphasised. By 1984 free-sheets were believed to be attracting as much as five times more local revenue than ILR.⁷²⁶ A similar situation undoubtedly existed in the West Midlands for the Birmingham Post and Mail Group (BPM) and the Midland News Association (MNA) were providing door-to-door publications. Though no data is available regarding their impact on BRMB and Beacon, evidence did suggest that both were in competition with the local press. Sarah Thane, a former senior officer for the IBA's Midlands region, noted that there was "no love lost" between BRMB/Beacon and the two newspaper groups, even though the latter were major shareholders in the two stations.⁷²⁷ A degree of industrial espionage even existed concerning a certain Beacon board member. According to the former Beacon chair, Alan Henn, one particular MNA board member would often report Beacon's plans back to his newspaper group, and therefore help his newspaper group to counter any new sales initiatives which the station had come up with.⁷²⁸

With the recession causing national companies to cut their advertising budgets the lucrative national revenue was also under threat; a situation which would worsen with the arrival of breakfast television and the fourth television channel. Chapter Three showed how as an industry ILR was already making moves to persuade advertisers to use ILR on a national basis. From campaigns and features in the national and trade press through to conference presentations, companies and their agencies were encouraged to use radio as part of their national campaigns. Advertisers were already basing their campaigns on the ITV regions so from 1981 an effort was made to replicate ITV's regional set-up. Neighbouring ILR companies joined forces to provide advertisers with a whole region of radio stations and those in the Midlands were no different. Overseen by the already established Independent Radio Sales (IRS), which acted as a clearing house to link advertisers and their agencies to the new company, BRMB, Beacon, Mercia Sound (Coventry), Radio Trent (Nottingham) and later Radio Wyvern (Hereford and Worcester) joined forces to create Midland Radio Sales (MRS); though the board of Nottingham's Radio Trent were initially reluctant to join.⁷²⁹ The

⁷²⁵ Williams, K., *Get Me a Murder a Day! A History of Mass Communications in Britain* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 219-220.

⁷²⁶ Barnard, S., *On the Radio, Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Feynes: Open University Press, 1989), p. 89.

⁷²⁷ Sarah Thane, IBA Midlands Regional Officer 1974-1985, in e-mail to the author, 18 March 2008.

⁷²⁸ Alan Henn, former chairman of Beacon Radio, and Bernard Blakemore, former Beacon Radio director, interviewed by the author, 3 October 2005.

⁷²⁹ *Broadcast*, 16, 23 February 1981; Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1981* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1981); Independent Broadcasting

survival of Midlands ILR depended on regional selling, BRMB managing director David Pinnell told the trade journal *Broadcast*. “It must come, and the obvious regions are Scotland, the North, the Midlands, the South, East Anglia and Wales ... radio should be sold in the television areas”.⁷³⁰ Creating MRS may have indeed been a move to counter Central Television, the Midlands ITV franchise holder, who was proposing a similar venture. The exact motive behind Central’s move to create Central Radio Sales remains elusive, but if created Central would have arguably dominated all national advertising on the region’s broadcast media.⁷³¹ Whilst Central was to make a similar though again unsuccessful move in 1983, when MRS members were complaining of increased commission charges from IRS, MRS was nonetheless successful: within a few months of operation its members were almost topping the IBA’s league of stations with the highest revenue growth.⁷³²

It was soon apparent that BRMB was taking a more aggressive approach to its business operations. It was to leave MRS after only eighteen months of membership. Though refusing to pay a higher commission to Independent Radio Sales was the reason BRMB gave for leaving the venture, it could be suggested that BRMB was looking to its own affairs.⁷³³ As the largest station in the group, BRMB would have probably benefitted less from the grouping than the smaller members, but without a major station at its centre with which to attract advertisers the remaining members were effectively left to their own devices; moreover, being on its own BRMB was now in competition with MRS for the available national revenue.⁷³⁴ BRMB was also expanding into other media outlets. Pinnell believed that to survive in an increasingly competitive market ILR would need to invest in both new and existing forms of media.⁷³⁵ The new form of media he was referring to was cable television, and as soon as the Thatcher government announced in 1983 that it would introduce cable BRMB stated its intention to enter the new medium. The station revealed its plan to team up the *Birmingham Post and Mail* in its proposed cable service; it was to provide an input to the *Post and Mail*’s BPM 403 information network.⁷³⁶ New ILR stations were the

Authority, *BRMB Radio: Progress Report, January 1981-January 1982* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0413/01), para. 55.

⁷³⁰ *Broadcast*, 16 February 1981.

⁷³¹ *Broadcast*, 11 April 1983.

⁷³² *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981-January 1982*, para. 55.

⁷³³ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Regional Office Staff Report on Progress of BRMB Radio During 1983: Ninth Year of Broadcasting* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/68/04), para. 2.a; *Broadcast*, 11 April 1984.

⁷³⁴ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981-January 1982*, para. 55.

⁷³⁵ *Broadcast*, 21 June 1982.

⁷³⁶ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 9 May 1983; *Staff Report on Progress of BRMB During 1983*, para. 2.a.

existing media. As far back as 1978 Pinnell was indicating that BRMB would help to establish a new ILR station. When in its White Paper on broadcasting the then Labour Government was setting out its plans for more local radio stations, Pinnell was pinpointing Worcester as a station where BRMB would like to provide assistance.⁷³⁷ Now the new stations had become a reality, under Pinnell's leadership BRMB was acquiring a 20 per cent stake in Radio Wyvern, which was to serve both Hereford and Worcester. It was now common for the larger stations to invest in the newer smaller stations. With start up costs and heavy taxation causing a paucity of interest in ILR as an investment proposition, the IBA were encouraging the established operators to provide help for the struggling newcomers. This was undoubtedly the case with Wyvern, though its transmission area covering Redditch, which was in the south of the BRMB area, was in all probability an added incentive for BRMB to invest. The move to provide technical and training assistance for the station, indeed to introduce Pinnell as a senior board member, was arguably to counter what would have been another competitor for local revenue.⁷³⁸ Finally, the creation of BRMB Holdings Limited provided the opportunity not just for further acquisitions but also for a possible listing on the Unlisted Securities Market.⁷³⁹ Under the plan Birmingham Broadcasting Limited (BRMB's full title) became a wholly own subsidiary of BRMB Holdings Limited, and this allowed for the day-to-day operation of BRMB to be kept separate from its expanding business activities.

While Stock Market floatation came later in the decade, it was its financial astuteness and marketing activities that differentiated BRMB from its ILR neighbours. Where some invested the extra income earned during the ITV dispute BRMB retained theirs in the bank, so instead of losing on what may have been costly ventures the money was earning interest instead.⁷⁴⁰ Effort was also made to avoid paying the IBA's secondary rental, which was described by some within ILR as an obscene tax. From previous chapters it can be remembered that once a station's profit reached five per cent of total revenue the station would be liable to pay an additional, or secondary, rental. As well as preventing the larger stations from making excessive profits, the money raised would be set aside for the future development of ILR. In its early years BRMB joined the other large stations in making

⁷³⁷ *Birmingham Post*, 27 July 1978.

⁷³⁸ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *BRMB Radio: Progress Report, January 1982-January 1983* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/68/04), paras. 5, 6; *Broadcast*, 21 June 1982.

⁷³⁹ Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1984).

⁷⁴⁰ Peter Tomlinson, Beacon Radio managing director 1979-1984, interviewed by the author, 12 July 2004.

substantial payments in secondary rental, but by careful accounting it was now able to reduce the amount it was paying and instead use the money for its own development.⁷⁴¹ Each year, as soon as it was known how much profit the company was going to make, money which should have gone to the IBA was used to partly fund the publicity budget; the BRMB hot air balloon and the BRMB parachute team were both financed via this route.⁷⁴² This formed part of the increasing promotion of the station, which came with the appointment of David Bagley in 1979, its new promotions manager (See Chapter Four). The company had always used multi-media campaigns to publicise the station but in an increasingly competitive market these were becoming even more important. Under Bagley's guidance an extensive mail-drop and television campaign occurred between autumn 1981 and spring 1982 while a similar campaign in early 1983 also used bill boards and advertisements on the sides of buses. Whilst these proved a useful method with which to improve public awareness of the station, these and other campaigns were also used to good effect during JICRAR audience measurement periods and, importantly, during the re-licensing of the franchise (see Chapter Five).⁷⁴³

BRMB's assertive sales and promotions techniques reopened past conflicts with Beacon. There was never an easy relationship between the two in this area: in his history of ILR Stoller described the situation as "a little more than border skirmishes but just less than full scale warfare".⁷⁴⁴ Previously it was Beacon that took the predatory stance. While the station was under the management of the commercially aggressive Jay Oliver, a Beacon road show in the car park opposite the BRMB Birmingham studios was one example of the antagonistic activities which Beacon would undertake. This blatantly hostile tactic caused BRMB to retaliate with an outside broadcast from Dudley town centre - which was within the BRMB/Beacon overlap area.⁷⁴⁵ With Peter Tomlinson now in charge of Beacon the IBA believed that both stations were beginning to live with one another; Tomlinson was making

⁷⁴¹ Stoller, T., *Sounds of Your Life, The History of Independent Radio in the UK* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2010), pp. 132-133; David Bagley, BRMB publicity and sales manager 1979-1986, marketing director 1986-1993 and managing director 1993-1997, interviewed by the author, 26 January 2004.

⁷⁴² Bagley interview.

⁷⁴³ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982-January 1983*, para. 4; *Regional Office Staff Report on BRMB During 1983*, para. 2.a.

⁷⁴⁴ Stoller (2010), p. 73.

⁷⁴⁵ Bagley interview.

an effort to create a more congenial relationship, not just with the local community but also the regulator and other stations.⁷⁴⁶

It was BRMB that was now strengthening its presence, however, especially within the overlapping Black Country towns of Dudley, West Bromwich and Walsall. It was also looking to promote itself further afield, and this was nowhere more apparent than in its increasing use of promotional car stickers. With daily competitions designed to encourage listeners to use these on their vehicles, for most stations (ILR and BBC) these proved a valuable marketing tool. Apart from in the common overlap, neither BRMB nor Beacon was allowed to advertise itself outside its designated operating area. Car stickers provided the opportunity for both to promote themselves throughout the whole of the Birmingham and Black Country area: the IBA could control the promotional activities of each station but it could not restrict the journeys of the travelling public. As Bagley later pointed out, “from time to time he [Pinnell] would tour the Black Country and count the car stickers ...if he counted more Beacon stickers we would get a roasting and [be] told to organise a promotion or something - simply to get more stickers over there”.⁷⁴⁷

BRMB was also increasing its sales activities, and it was Beacon complaining to the IBA that caused a ‘tit for tat’ situation to develop between the two. BRMB’s hard line sales tactics was affecting its revenue from the important Black Country area and this caused Beacon to ask the IBA to consider a reduced trading area when awarding the new Birmingham licence. BRMB likewise complained about a new Beacon logo that used the words ‘West Midlands’ in a subheading. According to BRMB this implied that Beacon was serving the whole of the West Midlands area, which included not just Wolverhampton and the Black Country but also Birmingham and Coventry. Though the logo had been introduced by the previous Beacon management, to appease BRMB the IBA instructed Beacon to use the words ‘Western Midlands and the Black Country’ instead in the subheading, and to change the letter headings to read ‘Wolverhampton & the Black Country.’⁷⁴⁸ Probably in answer to Beacon’s request for a smaller Birmingham trading area, the IBA also asked Beacon to

⁷⁴⁶ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982-January 1983*, para. 7; Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Staff Report on Beacon Radio, March 1982-March 1983* (Ofcom Documents: A/D/0047/07), para. 2.9.

⁷⁴⁷ Bagley interview.

⁷⁴⁸ *Staff Report on Beacon Radio, March 1982-March 1983*, para. 2.d; memorandum, IBA Regional Officer to IBA Director of Radio 5 May 1983 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

consider a marketing area that used council instead of transmission boundaries, which would have effectively ended the overlap between the two stations.⁷⁴⁹

Though it is unknown whether the plan to redraw the trading areas was also put to BRMB, the main concern of the IBA was the commercial viability of Beacon. Despite the regulator being pleased with the improved programming, the Beacon board was considering further redundancies - this time amongst key programme staff.⁷⁵⁰ By spring 1981 it had exhausted the extra funds gained during the ITV strike, and with no foreseeable improvement in its revenue it was expected to move into overdraft with the bank.⁷⁵¹ It seemed that the extra revenue generated by the strike had produced a false sense of security: despite declining sales Beacon was still implementing expensive building alterations which included a new newsroom and other studio alterations. Worse was the decision to take part in what turned out to be a poorly performing video entertainments venture. This consisted of the recording and sale of music by various artists. The venture was in two stages: the first involved the production of music videos, a growing market given the increasing popularity of home video recorders; the second stage involved the recording of a series of light music concerts which would then be sold to television and radio companies throughout the world. It was the second stage which failed to live up to expectations. Despite selling in five countries and to two ITV regions, sales apparently failed to reach the expected level. The Beacon board decided to invest an additional £26,000 to fund further promotion; but this caused the venture to look increasingly unattractive. This took the Beacon investment to £50,000, and given that the station only held 26 per cent of the whole venture it seemed that the financial outlay was far exceeding the expected returns. Indeed, in his company report the chair failed to indicate exactly what the expected profits would be.⁷⁵²

Poor investments and a predatory BRMB aside, there were inherent difficulties with the Beacon franchise. Despite the IBA now seeing Beacon as a ‘model’ ILR station, the regulator acknowledged that the station was burdened with its own unique operational problems. A 1985 report on the station regretted that it was in the “unfortunate position” of

⁷⁴⁹ *Staff Report on Beacon Radio, March 1982-March 1983*, para. 2.d.

⁷⁵⁰ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Beacon Radio: Progress Report, April 1980-April 1981* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0411/02), para. 44.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid*, para. 45.

⁷⁵² Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Beacon Radio: Progress Report, March 1981-March 1982* (Ofcom documents: A/X/0413/03), para. 50; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1982* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1982).

falling between ILR's two main alternatives: it had neither the commercial advantages associated with a big city station nor the flexibility or manpower efficiency of a smaller operation.⁷⁵³ Furthermore, it only had the revenue of a small station while it had to provide for an area usually associated with the bigger city based stations. Comparing Beacon with two similar sized stations, the *Progress Report* for 1982 noted much the same. Nottingham's Radio Trent had a broadcast area which was only three-quarters that of Beacon yet it represented a similar sized audience. This was partly the reason for Beacon's relatively poor revenue, and partly its struggle with overheads. Similarly, despite it having a similar sized income and coverage area, the overheads of Radio Victory in Portsmouth were 25 per cent less than those at Beacon.⁷⁵⁴ The *Progress Report* also pointed out that neither Trent nor Victory broadcasted 24-hours a day.⁷⁵⁵ Beacon also had to contend with a transmission area which consisted of several disparate urban areas. Instead of just one urban centre, as was the case with Trent or Victory, Beacon was to provide for several towns, each with their own distinct character and identity. Importantly, neither Trent nor Victory shared a sizable portion of their broadcast area with another ILR station. As the 1985 report pointed out, the running of a 24-hour service was "perhaps a prerequisite" to the competition with BRMB, particularly with it fiercely competing for audiences and local sales.⁷⁵⁶

Notwithstanding these difficulties, three major developments helped to improve Beacon's financial position. Alongside the previously mentioned cost cutting measures, these helped turn a projected pre-tax loss of £64,000 into a profit of £67,000 for the financial year 1981-1982.⁷⁵⁷ A reduced rental to the IBA was the first development. Each year the IBA would increase the amount each station had to pay in rental; this helped cover the increasing cost of administrating ILR. To ease the financial plight of some of the smaller stations, in 1981 the IBA elected to reduce the amount of rental they had to pay. Beacon was one of eight stations to have its rental reduced; it was now to pay £100,000 per annum instead of the original £112,000.⁷⁵⁸ Secondly, Midland Radio Sales had also helped it attract a higher portion of the more lucrative national advertising. "It [MRS] has given us identity ... it is without question a feather in Beacon's cap to be referred to in the same breath [as BRMB]",

⁷⁵³ Unattributed IBA report on Beacon Radio, early 1985 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

⁷⁵⁴ *Beacon Progress Report, March 1981-March 1982*, para. 42.

⁷⁵⁵ *Staff Report on Beacon Radio, March 1982-March 1983*, para. 2.c.

⁷⁵⁶ Unattributed IBA report on Beacon, early 1985.

⁷⁵⁷ *Beacon Progress Report March 1981-March 1982*, para. 42; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1981* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1981).

⁷⁵⁸ *Express & Star*, 7 August 1981; *Broadcast*, 10 August 1981.

managing director Peter Tomlinson told *Broadcast*.⁷⁵⁹ Chapter Four highlighted the problem of Beacon being overlooked by national advertisers when they used radio as part of their national campaigns. With Birmingham the largest and most central city in the West Midlands conurbation, believing it provided for the whole area they were choosing BRMB over Beacon. Despite BRMB still capturing a greater share of nation sales, with the help of MRS Beacon's balance between national and local income was now more evenly split. Whereas before MRS the balance was 40 per cent national to 60 per cent local, by 1982 it was 46 per cent national and 54 per cent local.⁷⁶⁰

A more efficient local sales department was the third and more significant development. Despite reporting a 'sluggish' West Midlands economy the company was attributing a trading profit of £43,000 for the year to 30 September 1982, and slightly over £100,000 the following year - with a promised dividend of ten per cent - to a more effective sales team and a new computerised sales system.⁷⁶¹ Credit was given to Alan Mullett, who had replaced Alan Blackburn as sales manager in summer 1981; Blackburn had left after only twelve months to take a sales position at the Grampian ITV franchise.⁷⁶² According to *Broadcast* it was the better use of market research and Mullett's comprehensive system of staff training that had resulted in a thirty-five per cent increase in local sales.⁷⁶³ With local revenue increasing by 46 per cent in the months to February 1982, Beacon had achieved the highest growth rate ever recorded for an ILR station.⁷⁶⁴ A more affable relationship with local businesses also helped: in conjunction with Tomlinson's effort to win over the area's business community the station's much criticised hard sell, 'foot in the door', sales tactics - a complaint previously levelled against the station by many local businesses - also came to an end. Importantly, Mullett's success in increasing sales received widespread recognition. Besides it being reported in the pages of the local and trade press, the IBA and other ILR operators were examining his staff training methods with interest. Indeed, to further boost its income Beacon wasted no time in marketing his training scheme to other ILR companies.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁵⁹ *Broadcast*, 21 June 1982.

⁷⁶⁰ *Beacon Progress Report, March 1981-March 1982*, para. 11.

⁷⁶¹ Beacon Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1982*; Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1983* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1983).

⁷⁶² *Broadcast*, 21 June 1982.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁴ *Express & Star*, 18 August 1981; *Beacon Progress Report March 1981-March 1982*, para. 49.

⁷⁶⁵ Beacon Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts*, year ending 30 September 1982 and year ending 30 September 1983; *Beacon Progress Report March 1981-March 1982*, para. 49; *Annual Staff Report on Beacon, March 1982-March 1983*, para. 2.b.

Against the backdrop of economic recession and a changing media landscape each station therefore adopted a distinctive attitude toward their operations. By branching into the cable television network, investing in newer ILR stations, undertaking extensive marketing campaigns and preparing for Stock Market floatation BRMB was looking to diversify and expand its business. Though burdened with its own unique difficulties, with its smaller revenue Beacon was unable to replicate such ventures. While it also undertook publicity campaigns, and invested in the making of music videos, with its limited funds it could not match those of its larger neighbour. In essence this is what marked the stations apart, but what finally differentiated their approach to operations was the differing ways in which they were replacing staff. The previous chapter showed that both suffered the departure of many talented and experienced staff. Besides making greater use of existing personnel, at Beacon many were replaced by government funded placements. As it was better placed to offer training facilities, BRMB was to use its own trainees who were funded by the IBA's secondary rental fund; these were to provide a cost effective replacement to those leaving. In 1981 there were three trainees, in news, general programming and engineering, and these joined the initial six who had all moved onto other stations, both ILR and BBC.⁷⁶⁶

BRMB 1984 –1985: Towards a 'Lighter' Operation

By the end of 1984 and into 1985, revenue and audience share were both in sharp decline. This was to have a profound effect on the way BRMB would address its responsibilities as an ILR operator. The need to reduce costs and to increase its audience meant it was to adopt a 'lighter' approach to its output; music and 'chatter' would now take precedence over the duty to provide information and 'meaningful' speech.

First, there were the reduced profits. Despite the short respite of a 20 per cent increase in revenue during the financial year 1982-1983, like ILR in the national context income and profits returned to their steady decline, however. Though income continued a slight increase, the pre-tax profit of £166,000 during 1983-1984 was down on the previous year's £194,000.⁷⁶⁷ 1984-1985 was even worse: overall income was down by nineteen per

⁷⁶⁶ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1981-January 1982*, para. 7.

⁷⁶⁷ Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1984).

cent, and in its annual report the company blamed a 21 per cent decline in national revenue on the miners' dispute and the effect it was having on industrial confidence.⁷⁶⁸

Crucially, the ability to attract advertisers depended on the size of the station's audience, and the number of listeners was falling. After the substantial loss in audience in 1979 it was only through careful scheduling and improved programming that BRMB managed a return to its audience winning ways: by spring 1982 it was capturing 28 per cent of the available audience - making it the most popular radio station in its area.⁷⁶⁹ 1984 saw a sharp reversal, however. According to the IBA the average hours people listened to the station were down by 47 per cent on the previous year; moreover, BRMB was only capturing nineteen per cent the available audience – making it now third in popularity behind BBC's Radio One and Radio Two.⁷⁷⁰ In its *Annual Report* for 1984, besides the new breakfast and fourth television channels BRMB was blaming newer forms of home entertainment, computers and video players for example, for this loss in audience.⁷⁷¹ Whilst BRMB was following ILR nationally in attributing its reduced audience to the new television channels, the reference to home computing and video recorders was surprising. With videos and home computing still in their infancy their impact on radio listening would surely have been negligible. Moreover, the visual nature of the new media suggests that they would have been more of a threat to television viewing. In explaining the lost audience it seemed that the company was looking for excuses, possibly to appease a discontentment amongst shareholders. With the station falling behind the BBC national stations it seemed that BRMB was not stating the obvious: it was losing its audience while other radio stations were either gaining or holding onto theirs.

A resurgent Radio One and Radio Two was one factor to consider. For their first fourteen years of operation Radios One and Two shared common programming during the evening and weekend periods and it was not until the eighties that they began to enjoy extended broadcasting hours. According to Beerling, extended hours in 1980 had resulted in a six per cent increase in Radio One's listenership, and with it being afforded its own full

⁷⁶⁸ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, February 1985-February 1986* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/68/04), para. 6; Birmingham Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1985* (Birmingham: Birmingham Broadcasting, 1985).

⁷⁶⁹ *BRMB Progress Report, January 1982-January 1983*, para. 61.

⁷⁷⁰ Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, January 1984-January 1985* (Ofcom documents: A/A51/01/68/04), paras. 1, 7; *Broadcast*, 29 June 1984.

⁷⁷¹ Birmingham Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

weekday service in 1981, and a full weekend service in 1984, there was undoubtedly further increases in audience.⁷⁷² It was probably for this reason BRMB again thought it should adopt a Radio One type service. After highlighting the causes for its lost audience its 1984 report continued to state how “strong efforts” were being made to improve listenership and hours of listening: it had gone for a “brighter” image both in presentation and the music format.⁷⁷³

Although the report went on to briefly highlight a continued commitment to public service and community content, it was obvious that a lighter approach to its PSB responsibilities was going to be adopted. Driven by the apparent need to attract audiences from Radio One and Radio Two, and at the same time reduce costs, the new schedules for autumn 1984 witnessed significant changes. Sports and religious coverage continued, as did minority programming and specialist music shows, but as the IBA noted, other equally important areas were either cut back or dispensed with entirely. Classical music, for example, now only featured during the Sunday arts programme – it previously had its own programme.⁷⁷⁴ The daytime community-based features were dispensed with and the more informative serious material was demoted to the late night programme.⁷⁷⁵ The ninety-minute news and current affairs phone-in programme *Newsline Briefing* was also shortened. It retained the half-hour news magazine, but the previously hour-long phone-in was reduced to just one hour a week during the evening music show.⁷⁷⁶ The documentaries unit was also disbanded, meaning a return to the previously ad-hoc nature of documentary making and a greater use of the ILR programme sharing scheme.⁷⁷⁷

Music and presentation was also changed so as to attract specific audiences. Music was still selected to match Birmingham tastes, but according to the IBA the effort to find the optimum audience meant it varying between a Top 40 and a more ‘melodic’ Radio Two style.⁷⁷⁸ A combination of both styles was eventually settled on, though to appeal to younger listeners a Radio One style of presentation and a more lively evening show, making a greater use of live local music, during the main student listening period, was adopted; a new package of faster paced station identification jingles was also introduced. The Radio One style of

⁷⁷² Beerling, J., *Radio 1, the Complete Story of Britain's Favourite Radio Station, BBC Radio 1* (Victoria, B.C. Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2008), pp. 42, 152.

⁷⁷³ Birmingham Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

⁷⁷⁴ *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, February 1985-February 1986*, para. 4.e.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid*, para. 4.f.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid*, para. 4.d.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, paras. 4.a, 3.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, para. 4.a, 4.e.

presentation entailed a more relaxed and humorous approach, and this was causing the IBA to believe that some of the presenters were returning to their self-indulgent ways (see Chapter Five). The IBA also thought that the relaxed style of presentation was making the reduced informative content even worse. Moreover, at times the apparent lack of interview technique amongst a number of the presenters clashed with the new slicker sound and was therefore making the station sound unprofessional.⁷⁷⁹ Despite these concerns the IBA's Local Advisory Committee still believed that BRMB was operating within its ILR remit, though it was critical of the changed format.⁷⁸⁰

Above all, the IBA thought the changes were having a negative effect on the BRMB audience. For instance, a new '20/20' news format during peak listening times, which entailed the main newscast on the hour being supplemented with the headlines at twenty-minute intervals (twenty minutes past and twenty minutes to the hour) was thought to be "superficial and repetitive"; like the schedules in general, the IBA felt it was confusing to listeners.⁷⁸¹ As in 1979, poor management decisions were responsible for the initial and continuing loss in audience: the company was now trying to target a specific audience and it could not decide which it should attract, the IBA thought. This was the reason for the frequent changes in music and programme schedule; as the former senior presenter Ed Doolan later lamented, "they could never get the figures right ... every time there was a [audience] survey he'd [programme director Bob Hopton] change the format ... he kept changing the way it worked, so when the figures came out they meant nothing ... they were for the previous schedule and not the one they were using at present".⁷⁸²

The IBA's officers also reported that the station was losing its respect within the community. The officers felt that whilst BRMB was still highly regarded for its charity and promotional work, even as an entertainment station, its continued emphasis on music and "personality presenters" meant it was no longer seen as an "influential" information-based station.⁷⁸³ The decline in local content was affecting its relations with a number of influential community groups, and according to the IBA this was being exploited by some community

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid, para. 4.b.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid, para. 5.

⁷⁸¹ *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, January 1984-January 1985*, para. 4.c; *Broadcast*, 29 June 1984.

⁷⁸² Ed Doolan, BRMB presenter 1974-1982, interviewed by the author, 9 April 2008.

⁷⁸³ *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, January 1984-January 1985*, paras. 4.a, 5.

pressure groups.⁷⁸⁴ Without doubt the unpopular changes to the Afro-Caribbean and Asian programmes had provided ammunition of those arguing for the introduction of community radio, even for the local pirate radio stations. The Afro-Caribbean community felt abandoned when the *Reggaetivity* programme was renamed *Callaloo* and given a wider music range.⁷⁸⁵ Similarly, whilst changes to the *Geet Mala* programme were designed to attract younger listeners, at the same time they were alienating its older audience. Older listeners thought that the young female brought in to present the show had been awarded an ‘unmerited honour’, a situation which was worsened by the fact she was also unmarried.⁷⁸⁶

This loss of respect was no more apparent than in the critical press coverage BRMB received during a dispute with the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) between June and July 1985, and the public opposition to the management’s position.⁷⁸⁷ Nationally, ILR technicians and journalists were staging disputes over pay and conditions; the previous October Beacon witnessed an NUJ walkout. The dispute at BRMB, however, centred on the withdrawal of its evening and weekend local news service, and was only settled when the management agreed to hold quarterly discussions over staffing levels and to employ two freelance journalists on a temporary basis.⁷⁸⁸ The unions’ response to the reduced local news service and the resulting job losses indeed had resonance with the national situation, where the unions were joining the likes of Radio Clyde’s James Gordon in opposing ILR’s cost cutting. As Chapter Three pointed out, with ILR pressing for deregulation they feared for the future of commercially funded public broadcasting, and for the unions there was also the prospect of redundancies amongst their members. The dispute at BRMB had followed a similar walkout over the sacking of Tony Butler, the popular sports editor. It was the support of local councillors and a three thousand name petition calling for his reinstatement that probably forced BRMB to hear an appeal on behalf of Butler and therefore end the dispute. The outcry against the management’s decision to sack Butler, and the press coverage this engendered, indicated public feeling toward the management’s position.⁷⁸⁹ The anger toward the BRMB management during this later dispute was much wider. It was not just listeners and councillors who were showing their support for the NUJ: local authorities and the wider

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid, para. 5.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid, para. 4.e.

⁷⁸⁶ Thane, e-mail.

⁷⁸⁷ *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, February 1985-February 1986*, para. 5.

⁷⁸⁸ *Express & Star*, 17 October 1984.

⁷⁸⁹ *Birmingham Express & Star*, *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 22, 23, 25 June 1984; *Sunday Mercury*, 24 June 1984; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 27 June, 6 July 1984; *Birmingham Post*, 11 July 1984; *Broadcast*, 13 July 1984.

union movement were also throwing their weight behind the union's position.⁷⁹⁰ In commenting on the dispute John Taynton, deputy news editor and station NUJ leader, accused BRMB of renegeing on the promises it made in 1981 during the re-licensing process. The union's argument was that a reduced local news service was a "sell-out" from that which was promised in its licence application; the station no longer provided the service with which it had not only won the franchise but also won with the support of both the union and the wider community.⁷⁹¹ Feelings about the issue even prompted letters to the IBA at its London headquarters. In writing to the IBA chair and its Director of Radio West Midlands County Council, Birmingham City Council and the public sector union NALGO (National and Local Government Officers Association) each backed the union. Pinnell also wrote to the IBA chair accusing the local authorities of taking an apparently political stance. The city and county council were both under left wing administrations and were boycotting the station in one way or another, the City Council refused to use BRMB for its advertising for instance.⁷⁹² He also accused the local press of misrepresenting BRMB in their reports of the dispute. The *Birmingham Evening Mail* had quoted Pinnell as stating that the future of BRMB lay in music and entertainment and not in local current affairs or specialist programming. According to Pinnell he intended this for publication after the dispute had ended, but by publishing his comments beforehand the paper was effectively providing the union with much needed ammunition.⁷⁹³

Irrespective of when they were intended to be made public, Pinnell's comments showed the true sentiment behind the changes to BRMB's programming. This was a definite change in attitude. Right from the start of BRMB, even at the beginning of 1984 when he was surveying its first ten years of operation, Pinnell had referred to BRMB as a "public service at the heart of the Birmingham community".⁷⁹⁴ About twelve months later, however, he was contradicting this by telling the *Evening Mail* that BRMB could no longer be "all things to all people". Faced with increasing competition it now had to be more specific about which audience it wanted to target: "we have to decide what our listeners want most and give it to them ... the only real competitor for listeners we have ever had since we started is Radio

⁷⁹⁰ IBA Office Notice, 29 July 1985 (Ofcom documents: R/3002/4/2).

⁷⁹¹ *Annual Staff Report on BRMB Radio, February 1985-February 1986*, para. 5; various IBA correspondence (Ofcom documents: R/3002/4/2); *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 6 July 1985.

⁷⁹² Correspondence: chair, West Midlands County Council Consumer Services Department to BRMB managing director; BRMB managing director to IBA chair, 12 August 1985 (Ofcom documents: R/3002/4/2).

⁷⁹³ Correspondence between IBA Director of Radio and BRMB managing director, 15, 17 July 1985 (Ofcom documents: R/3002/4/2); *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 6 July 1985.

⁷⁹⁴ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 20 February 1984.

One and that is where we would like to go”.⁷⁹⁵ Whilst he had always stated that BRMB saw Radio One as the main competitor for audiences, importantly the emphasis on community was no longer there. It seemed no coincidence that in between these two differing comments the AIRC (Association of Independent Radio Contractors – ILR’s representative body) was toughening its stance over the control of ILR: it was calling for the IBA to lighten its grip on ILR. Pinnell was chair of the Association’s marketing committee, and with his senior position he undoubtedly would have been involved in formulating AIRC policy. Indeed, at the Heathrow conference of all the ILR companies (see Chapter Three) in June 1984 he presented a paper in which he advocated the deregulation of ILR: “we should not be afraid of freedom: ILR has nothing to lose but its chains”, he stated.⁷⁹⁶ As the AIRC was winning ground in its demands so he seemed to seize the opportunity for BRMB to relax its attitude toward its PSB and community remit. In his 1984 annual report the BRMB chair was welcoming a relaxation of the IBA’s rules, and perhaps influenced by his managing director’s increasingly commercial stance, he was indeed arguing for further deregulatory measures.⁷⁹⁷

The BRMB of 1985 was a far cry from that which existed in 1974. The once relatively harmonious station was now marked by disquiet and upheaval. Attempts to change the station had enraged many, from presenters and audiences through to unions and local authorities. It seemed there was disenchantment at the station’s senior level too. The IBA reported that both Pinnell and almost the entire board had lost interest in the station; it noted that Pinnell was now spending more time in London on AIRC business.⁷⁹⁸ It was almost certain that the board and its managing director were disillusioned with the fact that audiences and revenue were in decline and that its investments were not living up to their expectations. The involvement in Wyvern was not going to plan; the IBA recorded the board as not wishing “to repeat their experiences at Wyvern”.⁷⁹⁹ The Worcester based station was not yet in profit and there was a police investigation into the shares of original Wyvern consortium, Severn Valley Radio, though nothing seemed to have come of the police inquiry.⁸⁰⁰ From a hand written IBA note it was also apparent that Beacon was talking to

⁷⁹⁵ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 6 July 1985.

⁷⁹⁶ Stoller (2010), pp. 119, 143-144.

⁷⁹⁷ Birmingham Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

⁷⁹⁸ Memorandum to IBA Director of Radio, 6 September 1985 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰ Unattributed IBA note to Director of Radio, 28 August 1985 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07); *Broadcast*, 6 April 1984; *Birmingham Post*, 20 February 1984.

Wyvern over a possible merger.⁸⁰¹ Beacon had already struck a deal to provide its overnight service to the other Midlands stations, including Wyvern, and now it was in negotiation with the company in which BRMB held a substantial holding.⁸⁰² When discussing the future of BRMB Pinnell had already told the *Evening Mail* that some ILR stations would have to merge if they were to survive, though a Beacon-Wyvern merger was perhaps not quite what he was referring to: according to IBA documentation he had been making references to a possible merger between BRMB and Beacon.⁸⁰³ Whichever way he was thinking, the BRMB board may have felt sidelined by Wyvern's actions; indeed the regional officer of the IBA had reported animosity between Pinnell and certain members of the Wyvern board.⁸⁰⁴ For Beacon a possible Beacon-Wyvern merger would have helped counteract an increasingly predatory BRMB. We have already seen its stance with Beacon over sales and promotion, but by the nature of its developing attitude BRMB was also losing favour the other Midlands ILR stations. Even the IBA felt it was wasting time and effort on "squabbles with its ILR neighbours".⁸⁰⁵ One squabble was undoubtedly over BRMB leaving Midland Radio Sales in 1983. According to the IBA, BRMB's withdrawal aroused the suspicions of its remaining members as to BRMB's commercial objectives.⁸⁰⁶

Beacon 1984-1985:

The Departure of Tomlinson and a Toughening in Attitude toward the IBA

After 1984 Beacon continued with its heavy bias towards public and community broadcasting. Its audience also continued to rise: during 1983-1984 it attained a reach of over 41 per cent.⁸⁰⁷ The loss of £127,000 for the year ending September 1984 marked the return of its financial problems, however.⁸⁰⁸ This, alongside the AIRC's uncompromising stance in its call for ILR to be deregulated, provided the precursor for Beacon to resume its tough stance with the IBA. It also allegedly caused the departure of Peter Tomlinson as managing director; though as will be shortly seen, the reasons behind his leaving will remain a matter for debate.

⁸⁰¹ Undated hand written IBA office note (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

⁸⁰² *Birmingham Post*, 31 January 1985.

⁸⁰³ Memorandum to Director of Radio, 6 September 1985; unattributed note to Director of Radio, 28 August 1985; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 6 July 1985.

⁸⁰⁴ Unattributed note to Director of Radio, 28 August 1985.

⁸⁰⁵ Memorandum to Director of Radio, 6 September 1985.

⁸⁰⁶ *Staff Report on BRMB during 1983*, para. 2.c.

⁸⁰⁷ *Staff Report on Beacon Radio*, para. 5.a; *Broadcast*, 21 December 1984.

⁸⁰⁸ Beacon Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

Tomlinson left Beacon at the end of 1984, and according to some it was his apparent failure to deal with serious problems in the sales department that led to his dismissal.⁸⁰⁹ Despite disappointing national sales, a substantial part of the company's losses were due to its inability to capture local advertising. In its *Annual Report* a £20,000 shortfall in local sales was blamed on the sudden resignation of Mullett, after a three-week illness, and the loss of six key sales personnel - one killed in a traffic accident and five through resignation for reasons unknown.⁸¹⁰ Mullett left in October 1983 and it was three months before Nigel Fincham was brought in as his replacement.⁸¹¹ Tomlinson tendered his resignation on 16 November and left the company on 31 December 1984.⁸¹² Those claiming that Tomlinson was dismissed believe that this was because of his delay in appointing a new sales manager. Though the paper reported that he was leaving on the best of terms, according to the *Express & Star* he had refused to comment whether his departure was voluntary.⁸¹³ The advocates of his dismissal looked to his personality as the reason for his failings. "Peter Tomlinson was a wonderful after dinner speaker and a great cricketer," former director Bernard Blakemore stated in interview; "as a result, he was in great demand, he had a tremendous personal aura and that, of course, was to our advantage. But he seemed to lack the ability to manage, because of his persona, and we came to the point where: a) we were running short of money, and b) we had a very good guy who was his deputy."⁸¹⁴ The deputy Blakemore was referring to was Bob Pierson, the programme director, and in another interview Pierson himself elaborated further: "he convinced everyone the downward trend [in sales] was just a blip and things would get better ... Peter was very persuasive, he could convince people of anything and he persuaded everyone there wasn't a problem".⁸¹⁵

Despite anecdotal evidence pointing to Tomlinson's dismissal, there is strong documentary evidence which suggests that he never saw his future at Beacon. In 1982 he told Peter Rhodes of the *Express & Star* that once he had established a managerial record at Beacon he would return to television, "ideally as head of an independent production

⁸⁰⁹ Bob Pierson, Beacon programme controller 1980-1985, Beacon managing director 1985-1987, interviewed by the author, 2 June 2007; George Ferguson, former senior presenter at Beacon, interviewed by the author, 2 September 2005; Henn and Blakemore, interview.

⁸¹⁰ Beacon Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

⁸¹¹ Memorandum from regional office to IBA Director of Radio, 3 August 1984 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

⁸¹² Beacon Broadcasting, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

⁸¹³ *Express and Star*, 14 December 1984.

⁸¹⁴ Pierson interview; Henn and Blakemore interview.

⁸¹⁵ Pierson interview; Pierson in e-mail to the author, 12 May 2007.

company”.⁸¹⁶ According to a memorandum between the IBA Director of Radio and the IBA chair this is what Tomlinson apparently did. While the memorandum outlined the resulting changes in management, it indicated that Tomlinson was leaving Beacon to run his own commercial production company.⁸¹⁷ Stating that his departure was in good faith, a resignation press release indeed referred to his plan to leave twelve months beforehand, only to remain until the station’s fortunes had improved.⁸¹⁸ Which was the case, for during Tomlinson’s final year as managing director the new fully trained sales team, and the income from the syndicated overnight service, had helped the company achieve a pre-tax profit of £9,000.⁸¹⁹

It is clear that Tomlinson’s departure was used to draw a line under the company’s financial difficulties. In interview Blakemore did not go as far as stating they had sacked Tomlinson: he merely said that the company was running out of money and that they had a good deputy to replace him. Blaming Tomlinson for the company’s difficulties would have proved useful in two respects. Not only would it have shown to other businesses, and potential advertisers, that the company was getting a grip on its operations, it would have probably helped to pacify the shareholders. The memorandum from the Director of Radio to the IBA chair stated that the Beacon board did not want Tomlinson to remain as an executive director, or if he was to return they did not want him to do so immediately.⁸²⁰ In reference to the latter point, a hand written IBA note indicated that the Beacon chair would welcome Tomlinson back at some time in the future; a point which was confirmed when the chair outlined the management changes to the IBA Director of Radio.⁸²¹

When outlining the management changes to the IBA Director of Radio, the Beacon chair also seized the opportunity to criticise the IBA over the costs it was continuing to impose on the station. He first acknowledged the IBA’s help in turning the station around after its turbulent period while under the control of Oliver and Mackenzie. He then went on

⁸¹⁶ *Express & Star*, 4 May 1982.

⁸¹⁷ Memorandum, IBA Director of Radio to IBA chair, 7 December 1984 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

⁸¹⁸ Beacon Radio press release, 17 December 1984 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

⁸¹⁹ Other stations included Radio Wyvern (Hereford and Worcester), Mercia Sound (Coventry) and Signal Radio (Newcastle-under-Lyme); Beacon Broadcasting Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984* (Wolverhampton: Beacon Broadcasting, 1984); *Express & Star*, 4 October 1984; *Birmingham Post*, 31 January 1985.

⁸²⁰ Memorandum, IBA Director of Radio to IBA chair, 7 December 1984.

⁸²¹ Unattributed IBA hand written note, 7 December 1984 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07); letter, Beacon chair to IBA Director of Radio, 8 January 1985 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

to stress that "you will understand when I say that I will have some very disgruntled shareholders to convince at our AGM ... I still find it difficult to explain the disproportionately high rental and the high sums paid in performing rights by this company, especially when it is in a loss making situation".⁸²² This was not the first time the Beacon chair had argued for a reduced rental. The first occasion was in 1977, just after Beacon had come to air, and after the IBA had increased its rental. Here, just as he doing so in 1985, he was protesting against the seeming obstacles which the IBA were putting in front of the station's viability; he complained of the IBA's "lack of understanding toward a company just eighteen months into operation".⁸²³

This was arguably the start of the station's troubled history with the IBA; where the chair through to the managing director had little understanding toward the regulated nature of British broadcasting. Now, in 1985, with relations between Beacon and its regulator being more cordial the chair was more subtle in his protest to the IBA over its rental. He noted the IBA's new policy of allowing stations to expand into other ILR areas, and was using this as a leverage to win a better value for the money which Beacon was paying in rental. Chapter Three showed how the combination of high taxation and economic recession was causing a paucity of newcomers to ILR. With the poor financial performance of the existing ILR operators the IBA was also collecting insufficient secondary rental for it to expand the network. Faced with the challenge of introducing new ILR areas but without the luxury of new consortia to apply, this forced the IBA to invite existing license holders to extend their coverage into the adjacent new areas. Armed with this knowledge the Beacon chair looked to the possibility of Beacon expanding into the Shropshire towns of Shrewsbury and Telford. The Beacon contract was not due for renewal until the end of 1986, but as he suggested, should Shropshire be included in the new franchise when it was re-advertised he would immediately surrender the current Beacon licence and then reapply for the new enlarged

⁸²² Beacon chair to IBA Director of Radio, 8 January 1985.

⁸²³ Letter, Beacon chair to IBA, 15 July 1977 (Ofcom documents: A/A51/0167/01). The Beacon chair had already drawn attention to an apparently weak medium-wave signal, which according to him was losing Beacon its audience and therefore revenue - IBA file note and letter to Beacon, 7 April 1976 (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/02). The IBA curtly replied that it was the quality of the output rather than the quality of signal that attracted audiences, moreover, in some places the Beacon signal was stronger than that originally planned and that the station's rental had not been increased accordingly - IBA internal letter, 22 February 1977; letter, IBA Director of Radio to Beacon chair, 28 February 1977 (Ofcom documents: A/E/0145/02). Whilst the Beacon chair may have had a case concerning the signal strength, Beacon's evening medium wave signal on 303 metres was occasionally drowned out by a Russian 'blocking' signal designed to stop propaganda being broadcast into Eastern Europe from West Berlin (*Sunday Telegraph*, 30 October 1977), the attitude of the IBA was almost certainly tempered by the station's then poor programming performance.

franchise.⁸²⁴ The chair was looking to improve Beacon's ability to attract national advertising revenue, and he knew that the IBA was unlikely to advertise the new area of Shropshire in its own right. As he stated, adding Shropshire to the existing Wolverhampton and Black Country area would provide Beacon with its own "unique audience base"; it will no longer be dependent on a broadcast area which shared a sizable overlap with BRMB.⁸²⁵ Importantly, he believed the potential for Beacon to increase its lucrative nation revenue would justify the IBA's demand for an apparently high level of rental.⁸²⁶

It seemed that by 1984-1985 Beacon had resumed its bullish attitude toward the regulator; an attitude which was previously restrained by its need to placate the IBA in order to maintain the franchise. Twelve months before his departure, Tomlinson had written to the IBA chair questioning its attitude toward the Beacon franchise. As Tomlinson stated, "what had previously been an extremely good and rewarding relationship had now turned into a lack of understanding". The annual rental had just been increased by £8,000 to £120,000 and Tomlinson thought this to be unfair given his station's disproportionately poor showing in national revenue. It was already well known that owing to its overlap with BRMB Beacon was performing badly with regard to its national advertising. By showing how this was causing Beacon to be well below the ILR percentage of national income per head of population Tomlinson was using this as a leverage to win a reduced rental.⁸²⁷ Taking into account these and the feelings of Beacon chair, the important fact is that this renewed attitude towards the imposed costs on Beacon was probably driven by the events in the national arena. As the industry pressed for a more congenial operating environment, like his counterpart at BRMB, time and again after 1984 the Beacon chair would call for a reduction in rental and copyright fees.

Conclusion

These final two chapters concerned the development of BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio during the early 1980s. The previous chapter concentrated on programming and demonstrated the role of the IBA in ensuring that each maintained required amount of public and community content. It also showed how each station recognised the importance of meeting the regulator's wishes, particularly Beacon who had previously failed as a

⁸²⁴ Beacon chair to IBA Director of Radio, 8 January 1985.

⁸²⁵ Ibid; Beacon Broadcasting *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1984*.

⁸²⁶ Beacon chair to IBA Director of Radio, 8 January 1985.

⁸²⁷ Letter, Beacon managing director to IBA chair, 25 January 1984 (Ofcom documents: A/D/0047/07).

responsible ILR operator. This chapter has concentrated on their commercial operations, and has shown that the polarisation of ILR into two types of station was being brought to the local level. BRMB was typical of the larger city-based stations. Beacon, on the other hand, represented the small to middling sized ILR station, notwithstanding its own unique operational problems.

When referring to BRMB, former IBA regional officer Sarah Thane felt that it was during the 1980s that the larger ILR stations were becoming more commercially “hard-nosed”.⁸²⁸ From the discussion in the previous chapter it was evident that its programming was shaped by the desire to maximise audiences. Examine the IBA’s *Progress Reports* for BRMB up to 1984 and appeasement is probably the best word to describe how the company responded to the IBA’s call for a more informative output. Even the IBA noted that promises to implement new ideas and innovations were often unfulfilled; even improvements to existing programmes were slow to happen. Here, in this chapter, it was evident that falling audiences and a declining revenue was causing BRMB to critically review its approach as public and community broadcaster. With a reduced amount of information and an increased emphasis on music and entertainment it was looking to a ‘lighter’ form of output.

Increased community participation compensated for the reduced local content in its programming. Sponsorship of the Birmingham International Jazz Festival and other similar music events supplemented the already popular annual Walkathon charity events and regular concerts by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. The previous chapter showed how the duty to become part of the local community also became part of each station’s marketing strategy; outside activities such as charity work or outside broadcasts were good for winning over audiences and increasing revenue. From 1983 the annual reports for BRMB and Beacon began to list charity and other similar events under marketing and PR. This they continued to do so, but now, in its 1985 report, BRMB was actually admitting that these formed part of its effort to attract audiences.⁸²⁹

Managing director David Pinnell was the driving force behind BRMB. He was appointed as chief executive because of his sales work at ATV and his experience of running commercial radio stations in South Africa. Now he was putting this commercial experience

⁸²⁸ Thane, e-mail.

⁸²⁹ Birmingham Broadcasting *Annual Report and Accounts, Year Ending 30 September 1985*.

to good effect. By 1985 he was stating that the primary aim of BRMB was to attract the Radio One audience. While just staying within its remit to provide public and community programming BRMB was steadily adopting a Radio One style output. BRMB was also toughening its commercial activities. With the available evidence it is difficult to pinpoint the exact feeling between BRMB and its regulator, but Thane did detect a developing tension between the IBA and the larger stations.⁸³⁰ There was disappointment over BRMB's continued commercial approach, especially a developing friction between it and the other ILR stations. First there was BRMB's competitiveness with Beacon, then the debacle over its membership of Midland Radio Sales. At first Pinnell stated that the survival of ILR depended on it adopting regional selling, only for BRMB to withdraw from the regionally based MRS a few months later – leaving the remaining members without the major station with which to attract national sales. Rather than assisting in the effort to attract more national advertising to the region, by looking to its own affairs BRMB was causing suspicion as to where its commercial loyalties actually lay.

The commercial attitude of BRMB also caused the friction with its constituent community. When the franchise came for renewal in 1983 BRMB retained the Birmingham licence with overwhelming community support. With the same community up in arms over its reduced local coverage this was in contrast to the situation a few months. Union and local authority protest epitomised the opposition, though their actions must be put into context. The unions were already arguing against the deregulation of ILR. They feared for the future of commercially funded public service broadcasting and, moreover, the jobs of their members. Though Birmingham City Council and West Midlands County Council were not as extreme as some other local authorities, it is conceivable that their actions against BRMB were politically motivated. Their response to BRMB's actions may well have represented the political polarisation of that period; where a selection of far-left councils made a point in opposing the right wing policies of the Thatcher government and objected to any form of commercialism.⁸³¹

It was the policies of the Thatcher government that helped BRMB broaden its horizons, however. In summing up the cumulative effects of the events during the 1980s Marwick believed that it was the combination of political and economic developments that

⁸³⁰ Thane, e-mail.

⁸³¹ Marwick, A., *British Society Since 1945*, (4th edition), London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 275-283, 335.

helped create an “enterprise economy”.⁸³² Government incentives to help business and the introduction of new media platforms allowed BRMB to expand into new areas. The investment in Radio Wyvern was undoubtedly helped by tax relief on investments of up to £40,000 in unquoted companies. The introduction of cable television also enabled BRMB to expand into a new media platform. Helping the Birmingham Post and Mail Group with its BPM 403 cable service helped it break into the fledgling cable industry. The culture of economy and saving also spilled over to BRMB, though the enhanced cost effectiveness was as much due to having to survive with declining revenue. Secondary rental helped pay for trainees, who in turn were used to replace those people leaving the station, though this ended as the secondary rental fund dried up. It is well documented that because of the economic difficulties the larger stations were not generating enough profit to be liable to pay secondary rental. If BRMB was typical of the larger ILR station it is questionable whether this was the full story. While it cannot be denied that economic circumstances caused poor takings, it seemed that astute accounting also had a role to play. BRMB’s publicity budget was partly funded through the money which should have gone to the IBA in secondary rental. Indeed, the failure to collect secondary rental caused the IBA to offer some new ILR areas to the existing franchise holders, the regulator had insufficient funds with which to advertise and process new contractors, and this provided the larger operators with the opportunity to increase their audience base, and therefore their national and local revenue.

Beacon had a different tale to tell. It would have benefited from following BRMB’s chosen path, but it was the fear of again upsetting the IBA that prevented it from doing so. Arguably, the problems that came with the Beacon franchise were previously masked by the station’s heavily formatted output and its effort to be as cost effective as possible. The disproportionate ratio of revenue to costs, having to provide for several disparate towns and living in the shadow of a station which was attracting a larger portion of the lucrative national advertising revenue were all problems it had to contend with. In one way or another, these problems were successfully overcome by its new management, however; as well as satisfying the IBA’s demand for better a management control and an output which was more in line with its duty to as a responsible ILR broadcaster.

⁸³² Ibid, pp. 242, 264.

Some believed that Tomlinson's departure was far from harmonious; some even questioned his ability to run a radio station. There was consensus that he failed to address an impending financial crisis. Like Pierson, however, he was only trained in the ethos of public service broadcasting; and it was this lack of commercial experience that was most likely the cause of his failure to see the dangers of falling sales. Former presenter George Ferguson maintained that it was himself and Phil Bryce - another former presenter and head of the station's commercial production department - that taught Tomlinson "everything he knew about radio"; though there was no other evidence to support this assertion. Bryce had apparently joined with Ferguson, and an outside person, Paul McCann, to create the Sound House commercial production company, and it was through this which they had allegedly taught Tomlinson about radio and the role of the IBA.⁸³³ Management failures and the supposed need to be trained in the workings of radio aside, the important fact was that Tomlinson and Pierson had achieved their appointed task. They had 'turned the station around' and transformed it into a model ILR station. To summarize the previous chapter, removing Beacon's heavily formatted sound and making the station more readily identifiable to its audience. Increased informative content with enhanced daily features and phone-ins were supplemented by locally originated documentaries. Importantly, to build bridges with the area's social, business and municipal life and ensure a more congenial relationship with the local community

It was their belief in public service broadcasting that separated Tomlinson and Pierson from their predecessors. Tomlinson joined those in the national context who rejected the IBA's relaxed rules for ILR; he too feared for the future of an independent public radio service.⁸³⁴ When pressuring the IBA to reduce its rental he was to emphasise that 'draconian' cost cutting and a reduced information-led service would be the only way in which the station could face its increased operating costs.⁸³⁵ Reduced programme content was what the IBA seemed to be allowing with BRMB, however. Chapter Three highlighted the appointment of John Whitney as IBA Director General in 1983, and how this marked the change into a more commercially sympathetic regulator. The chapter also highlighted the divisions this had caused within the regulator, where its officers at administrative level were reluctantly accepting the Authority's lighter regulation of independent broadcasting. This chapter has

⁸³³ Ferguson, interview.

⁸³⁴ Tomlinson, interview.

⁸³⁵ Beacon managing director to IBA chair, 25 January 1984.

shown how these divisions were reflected at a regional level. The IBA's Local Advisory Committee was generally supportive of BRMB and its lighter form of output - like Whitney they recognised the economic conditions under which it operated. The local committee believed the station still operated within its regulatory remit, even after the reduction in its local and informative content. This marked the committee apart from the traditionalism of the regional officers who were charged to oversee the ILR stations. The LAC comprised laymen, an assortment of people from various walks of life who were regularly appointed into their positions. The regional officers were the 'professionals' who had been trained in the exact details of ILR's statutory remit to inform, educate and entertain. Most likely to have been involved with ILR since its inception during the 1970s, it was this latter group that may have found a lightly controlled ILR quite alien. Moreover, they could now only observe the developments at BRMB; no longer could they register their disappointment towards its reduced community and informative content. This marked the IBA's change from a regulator which controlled ILR into an IBA which was merely overseeing the franchises. This was no more evident than the changes to the style and format of its *Progress Reports*, which were now called *Staff Reports*. Slimmer and less detailed than those previous, as the new title suggested, these were now merely reports, a commentary on the operations of each station. Gone were the detailed analysis of each station's progress and suggestions toward possible improvement. Even the recommended objectives put forward by the IBA chair for each station had disappeared.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the comparative history of two West Midlands ILR stations, BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio, between 1972 and 1985. It has identified the conflicting influences under which these stations operated. In doing so, it has contextualised ILR within the changes in economic and political circumstances which occurred during that period, and considered how these impacted on the regulation and operation of the network. ILR was a community-based public radio service which was funded by the sale of advertising time. The survival of each station depended on the income it could generate, but any commercial initiative was constrained by a legislative and regulatory framework based on the British model of public service broadcasting. This model was applied to commercial television during the 1950s, and was subsequently applied to ILR. The alternative American model of commercial broadcasting was rejected by successive committees of inquiry into the shape and future of broadcasting; and British commercial broadcasting was effectively a compromise between the requirement for public service and commercial viability. The phrase ‘independent broadcasting’ described this compromise: the new television and radio services were to provide a public service *independent* of the BBC, and were *independently* funded through the sale of advertising time.

With memories of the explicitly commercial “pirate” radio stations still fresh in people’s minds, the regulator of ILR had to show that the new independent radio service would not simply be a continuation of these stations. Based on the (1972) Sound Broadcasting Act, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) established a system of regulation that would require its franchise holders to adhere to a strict set of programme and technical standards. To survive each holder also had to be commercially viable, however; and, as this thesis has demonstrated, the success with which they dealt with this situation was determined largely by the personalities and approaches of their respective management teams.

So what made a successful ILR station? Having the right people in charge and an appropriate balance in terms of previous experience and broadcasting expertise, BRMB provided an example of a station with the right conditions to make a successful ILR station. From the beginning it was headed by a managing director with a commercial background and a programme controller who was experienced in regulated public service broadcasting; a managing director who ensured the station’s commercial viability and a programmer who

guaranteed that the station complied with the regulations concerning output. Indeed, by having managers from both ends of the broadcasting spectrum ably showed the tensions involved in running an ILR station: the PSB programme director, John Russell, welcomed the pressure of having to provide a public and community-based service while the commercial managing director David Pinnell always looked to the ‘bottom line’ and apportioned the available finance accordingly.

Subject to slight variation this was the management model which most ILR stations adopted. A commercially experienced chief executive was also in charge of Piccadilly Radio in Manchester, for instance. Its managing director, Philip Birch, had previously run the 1960s Radio London pirate ship. Piccadilly also had a public service programme controller, in Colin Walters, formerly of the BBC. Crucially, Birch’s commercial ambitions were restrained by Walters’ information-led programming; besides the station being praised for its entertainment value, the programming formulated by Walters ensured that Piccadilly was one of the most informative stations on ILR in terms of community content and its news and current affairs.⁸³⁶

Beacon Radio was unique. It clearly demonstrated what happened when a station had the wrong balance and the wrong people in charge. At Beacon both the managing director and the programme controller were from a primarily commercial broadcasting background. Whilst under the control of Jay Oliver and Allen Mackenzie, Beacon showed how a commercial approach to its operations would bring the station into direct conflict with the ILR regulator. Beacon’s deficiencies in terms of local coverage and its aggressive sales tactics caused some parts of the local community to reject the station out of hand, with some calling on the IBA to remove the Beacon licence. Almost every aspect of the Beacon operation was designed simply to make money. The balance between public service and commercial viability was lost as commercial ambition took precedence over its duty as a community-based informative medium. Stoller has argued that Allen Mackenzie’s programming kept Oliver’s commercial aspirations “just on the right side of the rules”.⁸³⁷ But the evidence in this thesis suggests otherwise as Mackenzie looked only to programming that would maximise audiences, and regarded music and entertainment as more important

⁸³⁶ Stoller, T., *Sounds of Your Life, The History of Independent Radio in the UK* (New Barnet: John Libbey, 2010), p. 60.

⁸³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 73.

than the need to educate and inform. Despite Mackenzie being allowed to run the Radio Tay ILR station in Dundee after leaving Beacon, it can be argued that the IBA had questioned his ability to create the required programming and still held him partly to blame for the problems at Beacon.

This thesis has examined each ILR station as a business, and like all businesses there were many factors which determined their success or failure. The operational history of BRMB and Beacon was shaped by their origins. The principal movers in establishing the companies were two local newspaper groups who since the 1960s had sought to enter commercial radio. Knowing that the Sound Broadcasting Act (1972) would restrict local newspapers to a 20 per cent holding, and they would not have full control over their companies, they each established a consortium of predominantly local investors. They also knew that to win the franchise their company had to satisfy the IBA that it would be commercially viable and would operate within ILR's remit to inform, educate and entertain. The Birmingham Post and Mail Group, publisher of the *Birmingham Post* and *Birmingham Evening Mail* titles, took an interest in almost every aspect of their station. From the outset it ensured that BRMB was a credible contender for the Birmingham franchise and, later, that its operations complied with IBA regulations. This approach was not replicated at Beacon and the station quickly ran into difficulties.

Once the station was in operation it was equally important to work within the rules as laid out by the IBA. The replacement of Oliver and Mackenzie by Tomlinson and Pierson in 1979 demonstrated the need to 'play by the rules'. As commercial broadcasters, each ILR station was dependent on its listeners. To generate revenue it needed to sell an audience to advertisers. Building an audience depended on gaining access to the airwaves and, with the IBA as gatekeeper, it was necessary for each station to abide by its rules and regulations. It was only after the IBA had refused to renew its licence that Beacon recognised the importance of working with the regulator, and not against it. With Tomlinson and Pierson as managing director and programme controller respectively after 1979, steps were taken to ensure that Beacon would operate strictly within the rules governing ILR.

A station's success in building and maintaining its audience was determined by its approach to programming. The presenter's personality, music policy and the style of output were all important. With the use of regular community-based phone-ins and a music policy

specifically tailored to the Birmingham audience, BRMB met with some success in constructing an audience-winning schedule. In particular, Russell wanted presenters to whom the audience could relate; despite demanding high standards he allowed presenters to develop their own style of presentation. Beacon took a very different approach, with its heavily formulated sound, where presenters, or deejays, were not only forbidden to allow an accent to seep through, but also to play a record out of sequence. Beacon's uniform, 'robotic', format did little in building an audience; despite trying to sound 'professional' the station still had a relatively poor audience share. Similarly, it was only after it allowed presenters to become patronising and self-indulgent, and adopted schedules which listeners found confusing, that BRMB also began to lose audience share.

The approach to programming only formed part of the equation, however. To survive as an ILR operator managerial control and style of management was equally important. A lack of management control brought Beacon into direct conflict with the IBA, yet when it came to internal station politics too firm a management style could prove equally disastrous. Crace of the *Sunday Telegraph* referred to the fun and youthful ambition at Beacon, though beneath the surface there was an element of fear.⁸³⁸ Simply by the nature of their oppressive style of management, and their heated rows, Oliver and Mackenzie created hostility between management and staff. The efforts of the new management in turning the station around were initially hampered by the mistrust in management which the previous administration had engendered. BRMB showed that it was a case of getting the balance right. A strong decisive management met some success; a weak argumentative administration achieved few results, often with the wrong decisions being made. In 1980, in the case of BRMB, the failure to properly address a falling audience was (according to the IBA) down to indecision amongst the managers on how best to tackle the problem.

As with all businesses, success also depended on decisions made at boardroom level and the ability to take hold of opportunities as they arose. At both BRMB and Beacon it was clear that maintaining the franchise and the ambition to make money were the driving forces behind the decisions made at boardroom level. Any relaxation of the regulatory stance was seized upon as a commercial opportunity. BRMB was representative of the larger metropolitan stations in this respect; as the IBA relaxed its grip on ILR so the station lost no

⁸³⁸ *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 October 1977.

time in scaling down its commitment to community broadcasting. Beacon adopted a similar line, though its past troubles meant that during the 1980s it continued with its community programming. Right from the beginning it had a maverick attitude towards the IBA. On more than one occasion the chair of Beacon would complain to the IBA that he had shareholders to please. Protests against increases in the IBA rental and the escalation of record copyright fees were the mark of a chair for whom the quest for profit was more important than providing a community radio service. Importantly, the commercial motive behind each station became more apparent when the chairmen of each company attended the Heathrow Conference of all ILR stations in 1984 (Chapter Three). This marked the beginning of ILR's change from a licensed commercial radio service with the duty to inform its listeners to a business tightly focused on maximising audience numbers. According to Richard Findlay, then managing director of Edinburgh's Radio Forth, it was here that the "commercial momentum began" and that ILR could finally "start making money".⁸³⁹

As well as exploring the relationship between an ILR station and its regulator, this thesis has demonstrated the changing nature of the IBA's control over the network. Much depended on the political party in power and the influence it brought to bear on the IBA. First, there was a toughening of the IBA's regulation of ILR during the 1970s. With Labour coming to power in 1974, and the Annan report on the future of broadcasting recommending more 'meaningful' speech and an increased emphasis on community in ILR, the IBA was encouraged to take a harder stance regarding stations that seemed to be putting commercial considerations before their duty as a public and community broadcaster. As ILR entered the 1980s there was a gradual change in the IBA's control of the network. The ability to appoint those in charge was the main power a government had over the IBA (and the BBC). Between 1981 and 1984 the 'high minded' Lady Plowden and Brian Young, who were appointed under a Labour Government, were replaced by the more business-minded Lord Thomson and John Whitney. Thereafter the public-service remit remained, though the emphasis was now on preserving the financial integrity of ITV and ILR. Whilst having to operate in an increasingly competitive market the television and radio franchises were faced with the inflationary pressures of increased costs and declining advertising receipts. With a network suffering from a declining audience and falling revenue the IBA wanted to secure the commercial survival of ILR.

⁸³⁹ Stoller, pp. 142-152.

These changed attitudes were reflected through the IBA's various progress reports for BRMB and Beacon. This thesis has shown that the annual progress reports were an integral part of the IBA's oversight of ILR. They demonstrated how the IBA was initially concerned with almost every aspect of a station's operation, which the 1979 progress report for Beacon Radio adequately demonstrated. The report's in-depth analysis clearly showed the concern of the IBA and the Local Advisory Committee regarding Beacon's overtly commercial orientation and inadequate control over output. Annual progress reports relating to BRMB were similarly instructive. BRMB's attempt to target the Radio One audience in 1979, and again in 1984-1985, were extensively tabled, as was the dwindling local coverage and reduced informative content, both of which were to receive vehement condemnation. The later reports clearly showed the IBA's relaxed approach to its control of ILR. The briefer and less detailed progress reports from 1983 onward were indicative of a new attitude and a regulator that was more concerned with ILR's financial survival than with the broadcaster's duty to inform and educate.

This thesis has also provided local perspectives on research within the wider media studies field. It has encapsulated the political and social debates of the 1970s and 1980s with regard to broadcasting and broadcasting policy. The IBA and its regulation of BRMB and Beacon provided material for discussion on British public service broadcasting and the evolutionary nature of British broadcasting policy. Likewise, the different approaches to presentation and format, and how this gained or lost audiences, sheds light on broadcasting's political economy, where the importance of the audience cannot be overstated. Indeed, BRMB's apparent neglect of ethnic coverage in its daytime programming, and the consequent proliferation of pirate stations in the West Midlands, help to illuminate academic work centring on the audience and demonstrate what Morley and others have described as a lack of minority coverage in the mainstream media.⁸⁴⁰ The extent to which the IBA encouraged BRMB and Beacon to include such coverage demonstrated the importance attached by the regulator to the public service remit, and the service provided to minority audiences in particular. Beyond work in the wider media studies field, this thesis must also be considered in relation to that specifically dedicated to ILR. Thus, while work by Baron, Carter and Stoller has provided an extensive commentary on the history of ILR in general, the

⁸⁴⁰ Morley, D., *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 125-127.

work here has focused more closely on the operations of particular stations and the local contexts in which they worked. Importantly, it has revealed the human side to ILR, and how it was shaped by personality and personal aspiration.

This was clearly evident in the oral testimony collected for this thesis. With regard to Beacon, anecdotal evidence was collected from a wide range of people, ranging from the former chair and directors through to junior managers and broadcasting staff. Though Allen Mackenzie died some years ago, Jay Oliver, who also sadly passed away during the final stages of the thesis, provided a wealth of information. Chapter Five has already documented the trepidation that existed while Beacon was under the control of Oliver and Mackenzie. Many ex-Beacon staff was more than keen to share experiences of working at the station, and it could be said that they wanted to get *their* side of the story across. This created one of the major problems in completing this thesis. Crucially, unproven - and unprovable - allegations were levelled at management and staff and *vice versa*. It was deemed unwise to repeat these here unless they could be supported by other evidence.

The fact that so many were anxious to tell their story indicated the importance of Beacon in the history of ILR. Research for this thesis had uncovered a large body of popular interest in the early years of ILR. It was, after all, Britain's first licensed commercial radio service and, at the time, each ILR station had its own unique style and character. A search of the internet reveals a proliferation of websites dedicated to ILR, especially Beacon. Though there are a number sites concerning BRMB, the proliferation of sites dedicated to Beacon emphasised the extent of interest in the station, especially in its first embodiment between 1976 and 1979. Chapter Four contrasted Beacon's slicker, flashier, youth-orientated studios with the 'dull' business-like atmosphere at BRMB; one former Beacon presenter even likened the station to sex, drugs and rock n' roll. It seems that its initially maverick operation, and its somewhat unique 'mid-Atlantic' sound, has caused Beacon to be viewed with the same kind of romanticism as the 1960s offshore pirates.

1984-1985 was judged the best point to finish this thesis. Such were the developments in ILR after this date that it was thought a separate investigation would be needed to cover them adequately. A brief survey of these developments can offered, however. On a national scale ILR had come of age. With an increasingly competitive media market and a changed political environment it was now finding its feet as an industry in its

own right. More than ever before it was willing to question the very essence of the original (1972) Sound Broadcasting Act. Buoyed by the Thatcher government's continued emphasis on deregulation and the merits of market forces the AIRC was more assertive in its dealings with the IBA.⁸⁴¹ To highlight this increased forcefulness Stoller, indeed, pointed to Norman Bilton, managing director of Radio Wyvern, who he reported as telling everyone that the IBA was "an expensive bureaucracy living off the back of radio" - the relationship between it was ILR was no longer "master and servant" and that "the old deference had gone".⁸⁴²

The direction of ILR after 1984 was dictated by events in the political arena.⁸⁴³ Economic and broadcasting policy on both the sides of the Atlantic was dominated by the liberal policies of the Thatcher and Regan governments, and it was the easing of taxation and regulatory control that provided ILR with a more congenial operating environment. In March 1986, despite only introducing it in 1981, the Conservative government removed the 40 per cent levy on the profits of the ILR companies. With the ending of the recession this helped its profitability: by the end 1986 two thirds of all ILR companies were reporting a profit.⁸⁴⁴ With encouragement from the Home Office the IBA also relaxed its rules on programme sponsorship, thus making the medium even more attractive to advertisers. Stations such BRMB and Beacon benefited from having their programmes and information spots, such as traffic and weather reports, being directly sponsored by advertisers - a boon for advertisers who could now have their name associated with a specific type of programme or information slot. The Home Office deciding to end 'simulcasting' in 1987 (ILR was simultaneously broadcast on medium wave and VHF) also allowed the ILR companies to diversify their output and target specific audiences. With XTRA-AM and WABC each playing classic hits and easy listening music, BRMB and Beacon both began a new medium wave service aimed at the older (30-55) audience.⁸⁴⁵ With Radio One still attracting the lion's share of the younger listeners, this allowed for their existing VHF service, especially in the case of BRMB, to be dominated by a Radio One type output.

⁸⁴¹ Stoller, pp. 164-165.

⁸⁴² Ibid, p. 163.

⁸⁴³ Barnard, S., *On the Radio, Music Radio in Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), p. 90; Stoller, pp. 162-164.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid, pp. 163, 165.

⁸⁴⁵ *Express & Star*, 5, 13, 14 January 1989; *Birmingham Post*, 3, 4 April 1989.

Local events also took BRMB and Beacon in new directions and set the agenda for their future development.⁸⁴⁶ As with all the other ILR stations in which it had a stake, in 1986 the Canadian Selkirk organisation sold its significant holding in Beacon to the Australian Charlford Communications group, which was a subsidiary of the larger Darling Downs organisation. Crucially, Charlford adopted a more ‘hands-on’ attitude which caused Bob Pierson to abruptly resign as Beacon managing director, claiming that Charlford was interfering too much in the day to day running of the station.⁸⁴⁷ Again being the only applicant, Beacon also retained the Wolverhampton and the Black Country franchise when it was re-advertised in 1986, which now had the additional adjacent area of Shropshire.⁸⁴⁸ Like some of the other smaller stations, throughout the remainder of the decade Beacon struggled to maintain a strict control of its finances, however, which was partly due to its insistence on maintaining its high PSB-based programme standards. Developments at the station were also marked by an attempted management takeover and several boardroom coups.⁸⁴⁹ The attractiveness of new ventures as the economy improved meant major shareholders Tarmac and the Midland News Association relinquished their shares in the station, opening the door for the existing managers to consolidate their holdings.⁸⁵⁰ This was a somewhat unsuccessful attempt to counter the Earl of Bradford who, after having already amassed a substantial holding in the company, looked set to gain control by purchasing some of the newly available shares – a move which was to cause consternation at the IBA which was concerned that one individual should not have a controlling stake in a station.⁸⁵¹

BRMB became increasingly representative of the growing chain of metropolitan city broadcasters. In 1986 David Pinnell retired as managing director and was replaced by Ian Rufus, who immediately adopted an even more commercial approach to the BRMB operation, even looking to a takeover of Beacon.⁸⁵² Through merger and Stock Market floatation it then continued to expand and dominate Midlands ILR. First it merged with Coventry’s Mercia Sound to form Midlands Radio Holdings (MRH). Then, after a much publicised failure to merge with Piccadilly Radio, a move which was thwarted by Owen

⁸⁴⁶ See appendices for a chronology of the developments at BRMB and Beacon.

⁸⁴⁷ *Express & Star*, 3 January 1987, 2, 11 February 1987.

⁸⁴⁸ *Birmingham Post*, 23 October 1985, 17 January 1985, 16 April 1987; *Express & Star*, 22 October 18 1985, 16, 22 January 1986.

⁸⁴⁹ Bob Pierson, Beacon programme controller 1980-1984, Beacon managing director 1985-1987, interviewed by the author, 2 June 2007.

⁸⁵⁰ *Express & Star*, 29 August 1985; *Birmingham Post*, 17 January 1986.

⁸⁵¹ *Express & Star*, 5 August 1985.

⁸⁵² *Birmingham Post*, 12 May 1986; *Express & Star*, 12 May 1986.

Oyston and his Miss World Group who had made a predatory offer for the Manchester station, BRMB and MRH merged with Radio Trent (with stations in Nottingham, Derby and Leicester) to create a Midlands-wide grouping of stations. Crucially, like other city-based stations, the amalgamation of the BRMB-led MRH and Trent created a group large enough for Stock Market floatation.⁸⁵³

In 1993 the larger Midlands group was sold to London's Capital Radio for £17 million.⁸⁵⁴ Capital's ability to create a network of city-based ILR stations was facilitated by the 1990 Broadcasting Act which radically changed the shape and regulation of ILR. It was after the 1990 Act that ILR finally became something akin to a commercial radio service. Besides changing the rules on station ownership the Act allowed for the introduction of Independent National Radio. Since the mid 1980s the AIRC had been campaigning for a national independent radio service. In anticipation, it announced in 1985 that the word 'local' would be dropped from the title of the service its members provided, and that the network would simply be referred to as independent radio.⁸⁵⁵ Importantly, the 1990 Act replaced the IBA with two 'lighter touch' regulatory bodies, the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Radio Authority. The AIRC had long believed that ILR should be taken out of the jurisdiction of the IBA and be assigned a more non-interventionist regulator. In providing evidence to the Peacock Committee (1985-1987), and again during the debate on the Conservative's 1987 Green Paper on broadcasting, it argued that ILR should be given the same operational freedom as that enjoyed by the press.⁸⁵⁶ As well as the concessions already made by the IBA and the Home Office it seemed that with the 1990 Act the AIRC had got finally got its way; it was the culmination of a process which had begun with the 1984 Heathrow conference.⁸⁵⁷ A 'hands-off' regulation, an easing of the rules on shareholders (allowing a further consolidation of ILR ownership), the removal of almost all of ILR's public service obligations and allowing the ILR companies to operate their own transmitters,

⁸⁵³ *Express & Star*, 12 May 1986, 16 January 1989, 25 May 1989; *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 16 January 1989, 17 January 1989; *Birmingham Post*, 12 May 1986, 4, 7, 8 February 1989, 2 February 1990; *Financial Times*, 22 December 1988, 4, 7, 8 February 1989, 31 March 1989; *Guardian*, 22 December 1988, 4, 7 February 1989, 21, 31 March 1989; *Times*, 22 December 1988, 4, 7, 8, 21, 22 February 1989, 21, 23, 31 March 1989, 21 February 1990; *Sunday Times*, 28 January 1990.

⁸⁵⁴ *Birmingham Post*, 23, 27 January 1993.

⁸⁵⁵ Barnard, p. 88.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁷ Street, S., *Crossing the Ether, British Public Service Radio and Commercial Competition 1922-1945* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006), pp. 209-210.

instead of renting them from the regulator, were just some of the changes which the AIRC had been arguing for.⁸⁵⁸

Besides further deregulatory measures during the rest of the 1990s, the final death knell for ILR as a public service broadcaster came with the creation of Ofcom in 2003. Replacing the ITC and the Radio Authority, Ofcom was an all-encompassing regulator which would oversee all British media. With an increasingly converged world-wide media market, and the competition which this engendered, it was now thought permissible for the ownership of independent radio to be consolidated into just a handful of organisations. The most dramatic change was allowing the Capital Radio Group to merge with GWR Radio to form the larger GCap company – which was to own the majority of the former ILR stations. It was at this point that BRMB and Beacon finally came together under a common ownership. GWR, Great Western Radio, had already purchased Beacon and Worcester's Radio Wyvern, and since 1993 Capital had sold it nearly all the remaining stations in the Midlands Radio Group.⁸⁵⁹ Capital only retained the larger BRMB station and now, having merged with GWR, BRMB was joining Beacon in the GCap portfolio of stations. Importantly it was GWR which was effectively taking over Capital to create a group which would dominate the nation's independent radio network.

One can only provide an overview of ILR after the mid 1980s. There were other factors to consider as it moved into the 1990s and beyond. The issue of community radio and the introduction of local community-based stations also figured in its later development. As did recession, for by the end of the eighties and well in the nineties the Thatcher 'revolution' had all but ended and the boom had turned to 'bust'.⁸⁶⁰ With an over-heating economy Britain witnessed the return of high inflation and rising unemployment. Moreover, being obsessed with monetary targets the Thatcher administration, and the Major government which had replaced it, believed high interest rates were the way to counter rising inflation.⁸⁶¹ By October 1989 the interest rate had reached an eye watering 15 per cent, which not only make borrowing more expensive but also squeezed advertising budgets as industry and commerce struggled to meet rising costs. There is, therefore, clearly scope for taking the

⁸⁵⁸ Crisell, A., *Understanding Radio* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed., 1994), p. 38.

⁸⁵⁹ *Times*, 27 December 1993.

⁸⁶⁰ Neil, A., *Full Disclosure* (London: Pan/Macmillan, 1997), p. 301.

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 301-302.

story of ILR up to the present day. Research for this thesis has made great use of material released under the Freedom of Information Act and the thirty year rule, and it is these facilities that would help an investigation into BRMB and Beacon beyond 1985.

There is also a possibility for an investigation into the local press and its relationship with commercial radio. When considering Britain's tradition of cross-media ownership, little detailed work exists regarding commercial radio and the involvement of the local newspapers. The Pilkington inquiry into the future of broadcasting between 1960 and 1962 provided the impetus for many newspaper groups to establish their own local radio companies. It had been appointed by the same Conservative government that had introduced commercial television, and there was anticipation that it would also recommend the introduction of commercial radio. Newspaper groups, fearing potential competition for advertising revenue, were prime movers in the establishment of ILR stations across the country. In this respect, Radio Forth in Edinburgh and Downtown Radio in Belfast was little different to Beacon and BRMB. By using the same research methods employed here it should be possible to embark on a similarly detailed study regarding the influence of local press on ILR more generally. Lord Iliffe and Alan Graham, key players in the two newspaper groups that created BRMB and Beacon, were amongst those wanting to share their experiences of dealing with radio, and they will surely be not alone. Likewise, Jordan's directories of new companies provide details of all new radio companies established during the 1960s, as do the company reports for the newspaper organisations, large and small.

In brief, this thesis has identified a number of key factors that determined the respective fortunes of Beacon Radio and BRMB. The choice of people who would run the station was important. It was important that each station worked within the rules that governed ILR; to maintain the franchise each station had to work closely with the ILR's regulator, the IBA. During its first ten years of operation ILR was a commercial radio service set within a heavily regulated PSB regime. It was therefore essential to have managers who not only recognised that the station had to be commercially viable, but also that it would prove to be a responsible public service broadcaster. In all, it was the attitude and personality of the people chosen to run each station that determined its success or failure as an ILR operator.

Independent Local Radio (ILR) in the West Midlands, 1972-1984: a comparative study of BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio.

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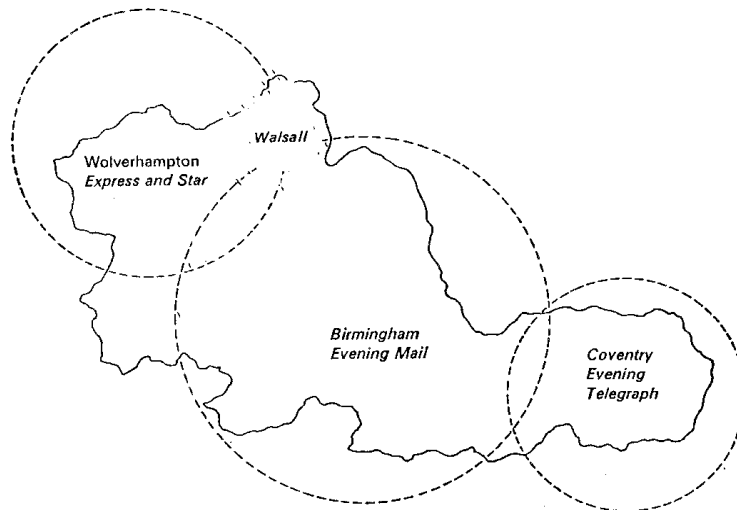
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Appendix I

The Birmingham Post & Mail Group and the Midland News Association*

With the *Birmingham Post*, *Birmingham Evening Mail* and *Sunday Mercury* titles, forming part of the newspaper interests of Lord Iliffe the Birmingham Post and Mail Group was the larger of the two newspaper groups. The Wolverhampton based Midland News Association was a much smaller operation. Owned by the Graham family, MNA newspaper interests lay mainly in the *Wolverhampton Express and Star* and *Shropshire Star* (not shown on map) evening titles. Though they shared an overlapping circulation area, which consisted mainly of the central Black Country towns of Dudley, Walsall and West Bromwich, each had their own distinct circulation area. While the *Birmingham Post* and *Sunday Mercury* were regional editions which provided for the whole of the Midlands region, BPM's *Evening Mail* was restricted to Birmingham, north Worcestershire and southeast Staffordshire; MNA's *Express & Star* and *Shropshire Star* provided for Wolverhampton, the industrial Black Country, South Staffordshire, Shropshire and northwest Worcestershire. Consolidating their domination of the West Midlands' newspaper market, both groups also published a number of free weekly newspapers: the *Chronicle* series (MNA) and the *Weekly Advertiser* (BPM via its West Midlands Press subsidiary). Both groups also operated their own chain of newsagents, Stars News Shops (MNA) and Dillons Newsagents (BPM). Besides owning the tour operator Midland Air Tours, the BPM also had a number of other media interests. The group had small holding in ATV, the Midlands ITV franchise holder, and through his holding company Yattendon Investment Trust Lord Iliffe also owned the *Burton Daily Mail* and *Coventry Evening Telegraph*; his nephew, Robert, was also a director of both concerns. As well as Birmingham Broadcasting, the BPM also owned three other non-operational Birmingham-based radio stations; Coventry Broadcasting, which was to later contest the Coventry ILR franchise, was also subsidiary of the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*.



Source: 'The Provincial Press in the West Midlands', in *Ethnicity in the Media: an Analysis of Media Reporting in the United Kingdom, Canada and Ireland* (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), pp. 45-62.

Appendix II

The Birmingham Broadcasting and Beacon Consortia (Including directors and senior officers)

Birmingham Broadcasting Limited

Final Consortium Members and their Shareholdings upon Commencement of Broadcasting

	% Shares	
	Voting	Non-voting
Birmingham Post and Mail Group Limited*	10.00	15.00
Birmingham Co-operative Society Limited	6.00	9.00
Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds Limited	6.00	6.67
Automobile Association	5.00	5.00
General and Municipal Workers Union (J., Mason+)	5.00	5.00
Lewis' Limited	5.00	4.16
D., Pinnell	5.00	1.67
V. H., Johnson (hold in trust for youth organisations)	4.00	2.67
Midland and Northern Securities Limited	3.59	2.33
Davenports C. B., Limited	3.00	2.00
Delta Metal Limited	3.00	3.33
Imperial Metal Industries Limited	3.00	6.17
Tube Investments Limited	3.00	2.67
ATV Investments Limited	2.50	8.92
West Midlands Press Limited*	2.00	3.08
Berrows Organisation*	2.00	2.50
Burton Daily Mail Limited*	2.00	2.08
Lichfield Mercury Limited*	2.00	0.75
Tamworth Herald Limited*	2.00	0.75
Allied Breweries UK Limited	2.00	1.33
Debenhams Limited	2.00	1.33
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry	2.00	1.33
Mitchells and Butlers Limited	2.00	1.34
Snipemead Limited	2.00	1.33
R., Davies	2.00	1.67
<i>Express and Star</i> (Wolverhampton) Limited*	1.00	2.00
Assn of Professional Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs	1.00	1.50
J., Russell	1.00	0.17
C., Coombs+	1.00	0.17
J., Ferguson+	1.00	0.17
R., Jaffa+	1.00	0.17
D., King+	1.00	0.16
Sir Frank Price	1.00	0.17
J., Saville+	1.00	0.16
B., Zissman+	1.00	0.16
Other individuals holding less than 1%	2.70	0.67
Reserved for staff	1.30	2.42

*Represents newspaper interests

+Former Birmingham Independent Radio members

Original consortium members not taking share options:

Dennis Howell MP (Labour)
Sir Kenneth Corley (chairman – Joseph Lucas Limited)
M Kendal (commercial director - Joseph Lucas Limited)
V., Johnson (Bovis Building Group)
B., Foyle (managing director – Boxfoldia Limited)

Directors and Executive Officers

Directors

A. J., Parkinson (Birmingham Co-operative Society)	Chairman
D., Pinnell	Managing Director
J., Russell	Programme Director
R., Davies	Sales Director
K., Hayes	News Editor
G. N., Battman (Birmingham Post & Mail Group)	Financial Director
J., Mason (General and Municipal Workers Union)	
Miss B., Foyle	
J.K., Howard (Guest, Keen and Nettlefolds)	
E., Swainson (Imperial Metal Industries)	

Officers

R., Barlow	Publicity & Promotions
A., Butler	Sports Editor
Reverend A., Nin	Religious Advisor
K., Hayes	News Editor
L., Trethewey	Company Secretary
D., Wood	Chief Engineer

Source: Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Report and Accounts 1973-4* (London: IBA, 1974); Independent Broadcasting Authority, *ITV 75* (London: IBA, 1975).

Birmingham Post and Mail / Birmingham Broadcasting Directors

Before and after it was awarded the Birmingham ILR franchise, there was much criticism of Post and Mail's and its involvement in Birmingham Broadcasting (*Birmingham Post*, 9 March 1973, *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 10 March 1973). Much of this criticism stemmed from the sharing of directors between the two groups. The situation was as follows, Birmingham Broadcasting consortium was formed under chairmanship of Eric Clayson, who was a director of the BPM. Clayson resigned the Birmingham Broadcasting chair in October 1972 to take the chair at the BPM; at Birmingham Broadcasting he was replaced by John Parkinson. Immediately after winning the franchise, J. L., Brown resigned as deputy chair of Birmingham Broadcasting to replace Clayson as chair of BPM (*Birmingham Post*, 9 March 1973). When Birmingham Broadcasting commenced broadcasting as BRMB, Geoffrey Battman remained as financial director at both the station and the BPM. Directly responsible to David Pinnell, BRMB managing director, Battman emphasised his role as being purely advisory (*Evening Mail*, 10 March 1973). Though councillor Howard Marks (Labour) was to criticise the IBA, Baroness Sharpe - the chair at the public meeting - in particular, for ignoring the issue when raised (*New Statesman*, 13 July 1973), this may well have been a reason for licence offer being conditional on Birmingham Broadcasting absorption of members of Birmingham Independent Radio - the runner-up group.

Beacon Broadcasting Limited

Final Consortium Members and their Shareholdings upon Commencement of Broadcasting

	% Shares
Selkirk Communications Limited	30.56
Midland News Association*	20.38
Tarmac Limited	12.23
Lopex Limited	12.00
H. J., Hill & Associates	5.00
Midland-Yorkshire Holdings	3.33
T&A Henn Limited & family of A.W., henn	2.20
Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club (1923) Limited	2.00
Roy Can Nominees	2.00
Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen	2.00
Dunbar Nominees (For M., Mander, M., Jackson and Dunbar and Co Limited)	1.83
West Midlands Press Limited*	1.67
ATV Investments Limited	1.00
Holderes of less than 1%	3.80

*Represents newspaper interests

Other original members of consortium:

Turner and Newall Limited

Walsall Cooperative Society

Directors and Executive Officers

Directors

A. W., Henn	Chairman
J. C., Oliver	Managing Director
K., Baker (Selkirk)	
B. F., Blakemore	
C., Cromarty Bloom (Selkirk)	
M. J., Gray (Midland News Association)	
C. J., Halpin	
H. J., Hill (H. J., Hill Associates)	
J., Ireland (Wolverhampton Wanders)	
J.C., Jones	
B. P., Woodman (Tarmac)	

Executive Officers

A., Mackenzie	Asst Station Manager / Programme Controller
P. J., Stevenson	Sales & Marketing Manager
M., Stewart	Senior Newscaster
G., Ferguson	Senior Presenter
B., Warburton	Senior Engineer
P., Brice	Commercial Services Manger
J., Plant	Company Accountant

Source: Dunbar and Company Limited, *Beacon Broadcasting Limited, Issue of 349,900 Ordinary Shares of £1 Each at Par Payable in Full on Application* (Birmingham: Dunbar and Company, April 1975); Independent Broadcasting Authority, *Annual Report and Accounts, 1976-1977* (London: IBA, 1977).

Appendix III

Other Consortia Contending for Birmingham ILR Franchise*

Birmingham Independent Radio

Chairman: J., Saville

Station manager: D., Maitland

Other members:

C., Coombs (chairman – S and U Stores, Birmingham City Football Club)

D., Detheridge (journalist and broadcaster)

J., Ferguson (chairman and managing director – BSR Group)

O., Franklin (journalist and broadcaster)

Marques of Hertford (President of the West Midlands Tourist Board)

R., Jaffa (Solicitor and former *Daily Mail* Journalist)

Jill Knight MP (Conservative)

S., Kester (former ABC television star)

D., King (Solicitor, Magistrate, President of Birmingham Royal British Legion)

J., Madin (Head of the John Madin Design Group)

D., King (Solicitor, Magistrate, President of Birmingham Royal British Legion)

J., Madin (Head of the John Madin Design Group)

J., Mason (regional secretary of the General & Municipal Workers Union)

D., Salberg (managing director of the Alexandra Theatre)

Alderman Henry Watton (Labour - former leader of Birmingham City Council)

J., Taylor (Birmingham sound recording studios - Hollick & Taylor)

Councillor B., Zissman (Conservative)

R., St. Jolliffe (Solihull accountant)

Frank Windsor (actor)

The maximum holding by any person or body: 16%.

Consortium supported by Old Bank Securities – merchant-banking section of United Dominion Trust.

Birmingham City Radio (Radio Brum)

Founder: Anthony Blond (author and London publisher – Blond and Briggs)

Station manager: D., Davies, formally of Coventry, now residing in London. Davies helped establish Radios Luxembourg and Normandy; during the war helped establish several Middle Eastern radio stations.

Leading members:

B., Rose (Birmingham financier with Singer and Friedland – director of the Neville Group)

O., Hahn (chairman of BKL Alloys, director of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, governor of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, former president of Birmingham Chamber of Commerce)

Councillor Stan Yapp (Labour)

Other members:

A., Bridgewater (head of the Careers Research Centre Cambridge, former member of the Council of the Open University)

K., Harper (founder member of Stourbridge Players, film producer and agent)

D., Ingman (formerly in advertising)

J., Stanley (Pye deputy managing director)

G., Playfair (London criminologist, broadcaster and writer)

Peregrine Worsthorne (deputy editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*)

Just over a half of those involved, have Birmingham connections.

Consortium supported by Robert Morley's Mecca Group after withdrawal of merchant bankers, Singer and Friedland.

* Other than an unnamed consortium led by Alderman Francis Griffin, which failed to release details.

Source: *Birmingham Post*, 9 September, 22 September, 9 November, 7 December 1972.

Appendix IV

Comparative Programme Schedules for BRMB Radio and Beacon Radio

BRMB Radio

1974, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984 and 1985

February 1974

(This schedule was compiled using the BRMB programme leaflet, *261 The Sound Way to Spend Your Day*, February 1974)

Monday to Friday

- 0500 Kevin Morrison 'Breakfast Show' (music with news, weather and traffic reports).
This included:
0800-0810 extended newscast
- 0900 Brian Savin and Norma Scott 'Mid-morning Show' (music with information for the housewife, including relevant phone-in)
- 1200 Peter Windows 'First Edition' (news and current affairs phone-in).
This included:
1300-1310 extended newscast
- 1400 Ed Doolan (music, features and studio Guests). This included:
1500-1600 Alan Leighton (consumer and legal affairs phone-in)
1630-1700 'Tradio' (sell, buy or swop phone-in)
1700-1830 Ed Doolan 'Talk-in' (current affairs phone-in)
- 1830 Keith Hayes 'Final Edition' (extended newscast)
- 1930 Robin Valk 'The Rock Show' (rock and progressive music with news and information for younger people). This included:
2100-2130 'Evening Report' (extended newscast)
- 2300 John Howard/George Fergusson 'Late Show' (light music and studio guests)
- 0000 News and Close

Saturday

- 0600 Breakfast Show (music with news, weather, traffic reports and what's on)
This included:
0800-0810 extended newscast
- 0900 John Russell (music with 'what's-on', features on general DIY and motoring, birthday and wedding dedications and 'Bride of the day' spot)
- 1200 Tony Butler (sport, music and listeners' calls). This included:
1830-1845 extended newscast

1900	Nicky Steele 'The Sound of Soul' (soul music)
2100	'Evening Report' (extended newscast)
2130	Jazz
2300	Easy-listening music
0100	News and close
Sunday	
0700	Ed Doolan 'Breakfast Show' (music, news, weather and what's on) This included: 0800-0810 extended newscast
1000	Norma Scott (music and dedications, including link to BHBN – Birmingham Hospitals Broadcasting Network)
1230	'Sunday Edition' (phone-in on the week's news)
1400	'The BRMB 40' (chart music)
1830	Peter Windows (community phone-in, involving local organisations and community leaders)
2000	Brendan Power 'Folk on Sunday' (folk music)
2100	'Evening Report' (extended news report)
2130	'Music in the night' (easy listening music)
2230	Reverend Alan Ninn 'Open Line' (personal and spiritual advice phone-in)
0000	News and Close

September 1978

(Source: *Birmingham Post*, week commencing 11 September 1978)

Monday to Friday

0200	Terry Griffiths 'Night Shift' (music and topical information for overnight workers)
0600	Les Ross 'Breakfast Show'. This included: 0800-0810 'Newslines' (extended newscast)
0930	Stewart White 'Mid-morning Show' (music with information for the housewife, including relevant phone-in). This included: 1030-1045 'Newslines' and sport
1230	'Newslines' (extended newscast)
1245	'This Lunchtime with Ed Doolan' (news and topical phone-in)
1400	Nicky Steele (music and studio Guests, includes 'Tradio')
1800	'Newslines' (extended newscast)
1815	Sport

- 1830 (Monday–Thursday) ‘Talk-in with Ed Doolan’ (news and topical phone-in)
 (Friday) Tony Butler ‘Sport’s Talk-in’
- 2000 Robin Valk (rock and progressive music with news and information for younger people)
- 2300 Paul Brown (music)

Saturday

- 0200 Dave Barnes ‘Night Shift’
- 0600 Mike Hollis ‘Breakfast Show’
- 1000 Nicky Steele (music, entertainment news and what’s on)
- 1400 Tony Butler (sport, music and listeners’ calls)
- 1900 Robin Valk (classical music)
- 2200 ‘Black Music with Erskin T’

Sunday

- 0600 Mike Hollis ‘Breakfast Show’
- 1000 Les Ross ‘Round the World Phone Calls’ (music with phone calls linking families abroad)
- 1300 Brian Savin ‘Country Jamboree’ (country music)
- 1500 Kath Williams and John Russell ‘Pow Wow’ (children’s music programme)
- 1700 Paul Brown ‘Record Breakers’ (chart music from the 60s and 70s)
- 1900 ‘Arts for Arts Sake’ (arts – theatre, music and exhibitions)
- 2000 ‘Geet Mala’ (music, news and information for Asians broadcast in Hindu)
- 2300 Bob Dickenson ‘Open Line’ (personal and spiritual phone-in)

September 1980

(Source: *Birmingham Post*, week commencing 15 September 1980)

Monday to Friday

- 0200 John Slater ‘Night Shift’
- 0600 Les Ross ‘Breakfast Show’. This included:
 0800-0810 extended newscast
- 0930 Mike Hollis ‘Mid-morning Show’ (music with information for the housewife, includes relevant phone-in)
- 1230 Roger Day (music, news and information). This included:
 1245 Sport
 1300-1310 ‘Newline’ (extended newscast)
- 1430 Nicky Steel ‘Afternoon Show’ (music and studio Guests, includes ‘Tradio’)
- 1730 ‘261 Tonight’ (main newscast, current affairs discussion, sport and financial report)

1830 Ed Doolan 'Talk-in Doolan' (news and topical phone-in)
(Wednesday) Tony Butler 'Sports Special' (live football)
(Friday) Tony Butler 'Sports Forum' (sports phone-in)
1930 (2100 Wednesday) Stephen Rhodes (chart music)
2200 Robin Valk (rock and pop music)

Saturday

0200 Terry Griffiths 'Night Shift'
0600 Mike Hollis 'Breakfast Show'
1000 Stephen Rhodes (music requests)
1400 Tony Butler *sport*, (music and listeners' calls)
1900 Suman Kang (genre unknown, presumably ethnic content)
2100 Paul Kelly 'Jazz Notes'
2200 Tony Mody 'Souled out on Saturday' (soul and reggae music)

Sunday

0200 Terry Griffiths 'Night Shift'
0600 Mike Hollis 'Breakfast Show'
1000 Roger Day (music and entertainment news)
1200 Stephen Rhodes (music requests)
1400 'Ed Doolan's Sunday Funday Show' (children's music programme)
1600 Paul Brown 'Record Breakers' (sixties and seventies chart music)
1900 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)
1930 Suman Kang 'Geet Mala' (music, news and information for Asians broadcast in Hindu)
2100 John Watkins 'Concert Hall' (classical music)
2300 John Austen 'Open Line' (personal and spiritual phone-in, with features and studio guests)

September 1982

(Source: *Birmingham Post*, week commencing 6 September 1982)

Monday to Friday

0200 Steve Dennis 'Night Shift'
0600 Brendan Kearney 'Breakfast Show'. This included:
0800-0810 extended newscast
0900 Nick Meanwell 'Morning Call' (music, features, comment and information). This included:
1100-1200 '2-Way Radio' (interactive link and daily phone-in)

- 1200 Stephen Rhodes 'Thru 'till Twelve' (music and features). This included:
1300-1310 extended newscast
- 1400 Phil Riley 'The Afternoon Affair' (music, guests, information and features)
- 1600 John Slater 'Hi Way' (music, travel information and features)
- 1745 'Newline Briefing' (in-depth news, discussion and phone-in)
- 1930 (Monday) Documentary (in-house and networked documentaries)
(Tuesday) Phil Riley 'Superrock' (rock music)
(Wednesday) Brian Savin 'Country Jamboree (country music)
(Thursday) Brendan Kearney 'Top Twenty Show' (latest chart music)
(Friday) 'Perspective' (networked current affairs documentary)
- 2000 (Thursday) Robin Valk 'Ride of the Valkyries' (classical music)
(Friday) Phil Riley 'Soul Train' (soul music)
- 2030 (Monday) Suman Kang and Tony Huq 'Geet Mala' (music, news and information for
Asians broadcast in Hindu and Bengali)
- 2200 Norman Wheatley 'Late on' (easy listening music with 'light-hearted' features). This
included:
2300 extended newscast

Saturday

- 0200 Steve Dennis 'Night Shift'
- 0500 Kris Kennedy 'Early Riser'
- 0800 Brendan Kearney 'Razzamatazz' (music, interviews, competitions and chat for
children)
- 1000 Roger Day 'Solid Gold Saturday' (past hits)
- 1300 Tony Butler (sport, music and listeners' calls)
- 1830 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)
- 1900 'Profile' (networked biographical documentary)
- 2000 Paul Kelly 'Kelly's Eye' (disco and latest chart music)
- 2300 Nick Hennegan 'Romantica' (easy listening music with a romantic theme)

Sunday

- 0300 Bob Belsey 'Dawn Flight'
- 0700 Roger Day 'Weekender'
- 1000 Mike Owen 'Not Round the World' (music and family dedications)
- 1200 Stephen Rhodes 'Requests' (music requests)
- 1400 Nick Hennegan and Roger Day 'Whaddaya Want?' (latest music and requests)
- 1900 Kris Kennedy 'Reggativity' (reggae music)
- 2100 Lyndon Jenkins 'Music of the Masters' (classical music)

2300 Reverend John Austen 'Open Line' (personal and spiritual phone-in with features and studio guests)

September 1984

(Source: *Birmingham Post*, week commencing 3 September 1984)

Monday to Friday

0200 Bob Lawrence 'Dawn Flight'. This included:
0300-0400 news feature

0600 Les Ross 'Breakfast Show'. This included:
0800-0810 extended newscast

0900 Nick Meanwell 'Morning Call' (Music, features, comment and information). This included:
1100-1200 '2-Way Radio' (interactive link and daily phone-in)

1200 Brendan Kearney 'Lunch-on' (music and dedications)

1400 Stephen Rhodes 'Afternoon' (music, celebrity guests and features)

1600 Norman Wheatley 'Hi Way' (music, travel information and features)

1800 (Friday) Gorge Gavin 'Sports Forum' (sports phone-in, interviews with local and national sporting personalities)

1900 (Monday-Thursday) John Taynton 'Newline Briefing' (in-depth news, discussion and phone-in)

1900 (Friday) Steve Dennis 'Disco-Tech' (disco music)

1930 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)

2000 (Monday) Focus (networked documentary)
(Tuesday) Robin Valk 'Superrock' (rock music)
(Wednesday) Brian Savin 'Country Jamboree' (country music)
(Thursday) Robin Valk 'Summer Season' (arts and classical music)

2030 (Monday) Suman Kang and Tony Huq 'Geet Mala' (music, news and information for Asians broadcast in Hindu and Bengali)

2100 (Wednesday) 'Perspective' (networked current affairs documentary)
(Friday) Kris Kennedy 'Reggativity' (reggae music)

2200 (Friday) Phil Riley 'Soul Train' (soul music)

2200 (2300 Friday) Norman Wheatley 'Late On' (easy listening music with light-hearted features)

Saturday

0200 'Night Flight'

0600 Steve Dennis 'Saturday Starter'

- 0900 Kris Kennedy 'Solid Gold Saturday' (past hits)
- 1100 John Slater 'Dial A-D' (music and dedications)
- 1300 George Gavin (sport, music and listeners' calls)
- 1800 'You Never Had it so Good' (genre unknown)
- 2000 Steve Dennis 'on the Level' (genre unknown)
- 2300 Charlie (O'Neil) 'Romantica' (easy listening music with a romantic theme)
- Sunday**
- 0200 'Night Flight'
- 0600 Kris Kennedy 'Early Riser' (music)
- 0730 Chris Allen 'New Day' (religious magazine)
- 0800 Brendan Kearney 'Razzamatazz' (fast paced fun and music for children and younger listeners)
- 1000 Les Ross 'Round the World' (music with telephone calls to friends and family abroad)
- 1200 Stephen Rhodes (music requests). This included:
'Newline Briefing' (extended newscast)
- 1500 Jenny Wilkes 'Whaddaya Want?' (latest music and requests)
- 1700 John Slater 'Top Thirty' (chart music)
- 1900 Phil Riley 'Soul Train' (soul music)
- 2000 Kris Kennedy 'Reggativity' (reggae music)
- 2100 Mark Steyn 'Well, Did You Evah' (genre unknown)
- 2200 Brian Savin 'Country Jamboree' (country music)
- 2300 Michael Hartley 'Open Line' (personal and spiritual phone-in with features and studio guests)

April 1985

(Source: *Birmingham Post*, week commencing 16 April 1985)

Monday to Friday

- 0200 Steven Dennis (Monday) Charlie (Tuesday-Friday) 'Nights'. This included:
0300 Wednesday 'Perspective' (networked documentary)
- 0600 Les Ross 'Breakfast Show'. This included:
0800-0810 extended newscast
- 0930 'Brendan Kearney in the Morning' (music, information and chat. Includes 'wind-up' telephone calls, studio guests - star names and people in the news - and live telephone calls to shop, office or factory workers)

- 1230 'Afternoon with Stephen Rhodes' (music, chat and information on events in the Midlands. Includes recorded visits to listener's homes, work places or social centres)
- 1530 John Slater 'Slater' (music, news, travel information, entertainment features)
- 1800 (Monday-Thursday) Clive Wilkinson 'Newline Briefing' (main newscast with discussion and local and national current affairs phone-in)
- 1800 (Friday) George Gavin 'Celebrity Sports Forum' (sports phone-in and interviews with local and national sporting personalities)
- 1900 (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday) Nick Clarke (latest chart sounds, new albums and interviews with pop stars)
- 1900 (Friday) 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)
- 1930 (Friday) Robin Valk 'Roots, Rock, Reggae'
- 2100 (Thursday) 'Performance' (recorded national and local music)
- 2100 (Friday) 'Geet Mala' (music, news and information for Asians broadcast in Hindu and Bengali)
- 2200 (2230 Friday) Nick Meanwell 'The Late Show'

Saturday

- 0200 Steve Dennis 'Nights'. This included:
0300 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)
- 0630 Brendan Kearney 'Razzamatazz' (fast paced fun and music for children and younger listeners)
- 1000 John Slater 'Slater on Saturday' (music and dedications, including 'Saturday Brides Call' and 'Dial-a-Dedication')
- 1400 George Gavin 'BRMB Sport' (sport, music and listeners' calls)
- 1800 'Juke Box Saturday Night' (un-hosted music dedications show with the 'Masked DJ'). This included:
2100 'Perspective' (networked documentary)
- 2300 Charlie (O'Neil) 'Romantica' (easy listening music with a romantic theme)

Sunday

- 0200 Steve Dennis 'Nights'
- 0600 Chris Allen 'New Day' (religious-themed music and chat)
- 0800 Nick Clarke 'The Sunday Show' (latest hits with 'Trivia Quiz')
- 1000 Les Ross 'Round the World' (music with telephone calls to friends and family abroad)
- 1200 'Stephen Rhodes Requests' (music request show)
- 1400 Phil Riley 'The Valve' (multi-media news, with music, cinema, theatre, book and video)
- 1700 'The Network Chart Show' (networked chart show)

- 1900 Brian Savin 'Country Jamboree' (country music)
- 2200 Michael Hartley 'Open Line' (personal and spiritual phone-in with features and studio guests)
- 0100 'Performance' (recorded national and local music)

Beacon Radio

1977, 1978, 1980, 1982

1977

(This schedule was compiled using the Beacon Radio programme leaflet, *Introducing Colour Radio*, 1977)

Monday to Friday

- 0600 Chris Harper (music with news, weather and traffic reports, includes 'Sound Track Snatch' competition based on famous films)
- 0900 Mark Williams (housewives' music show, features and regular visits to housewives - at home or at the shops). This included:
0900-0906 extended IRN newscast
1130-1200 'Swap Shop' (phone-in)
- 1200 George Ferguson (music with regular visits to workers at their work place)
This included:
1200-1206 extended IRN newscast
1430-1500 'Swap Shop' (phone-in)
- 1500 Mike Baker (music and travel, with 'Record Roulette' and Beacon Ballot' competitions)
- 1730 (Friday) Sport
- 1800 Helen Armitage 'Topic' (news and current affairs phone-in). This included:
1800-1806 extended IRN newscast
- 1930 'KKJ Pop Show' (pop music, including listener's requests)
- 2200 Mick Wright (easy listening music, including 'Beat the Intro' competition)
This included:
2200-2206 extended IRN newscast
- 0100 News and close

Saturday

- 0600 Mark Williams (music, weather, traffic reports and what's-on)
- 1000 George Ferguson (music and on-air wedding dedications)
- 1400 Chris Harper and Mike Stewart [news editor] (music and sport)
- 1800 Dick Fisher (music and interviews with politicians, sports personalities, artists and musicians)
- 2100 'KKJ Disco Spectacular'
- 0100 News and close

Sunday

- 0600 Dick Fisher (music and on-air hospital dedications)
1000 Jay Oliver 'Beacon 30 Top Pop Singles' (chart music)
1200 Mick Wright 'Beacon 30 Albums' (album chart)
1600 Dave Owen 'Beacon 30 Breakers' (new releases entering the Beacon play list)
1800 Mike Baker 'American Hot 100' (American chart music)
2200-0100 Munro Jack (easy listening music, including film scores, music from the shows and other non-'needle-time')

November 1978

(This schedule was compiled using an untitled Beacon Radio programme leaflet)

Monday to Friday

- 0200-0600 John Warwick / Peter Craig 'Late Night Beacon' (music and topical conversation)
0600 Bob Snyder 'Breakfast show' (music including spoof phone-calls)
0900 George Ferguson 'Mid-Morning Show' (includes 'Swap Shop' and 'Melting Pot' topical phone-in)
1300 Dick Fisher 'Afternoon Show'
1600 Chris Harper 'Drive Time'
1900 'Newsday' (extended newscast)
1930 'Topic' (news and current affairs phone-in)
2030 (Monday) 'The Big Band Show' (jazz)
(Tuesday) 'Beacon Country' (country music)
(Wednesday) 'Brass Tacks' (live show from a different public house each week)
(Thursday) 'Paint it Black' (soul and reggae)
(Friday) 'Stick it in Your Ear' (new releases)
2200 Mick Wright 'Music into the Night'

Saturday

- 0600 John Warwick 'Breakfast Show'
1000 Bob Snyder 'Mid-Morning Show' (music and dedications)
1400 George Ferguson and Pat Foley 'Saturday Sport' (music and sport)
1800 Pat Foley (sports editor) Mike Stewart (news editor) 'Sports Topic' (sports phone-in)
1900 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)
1930 'Supergold Saturday' (past hits)
2200 'KKJ Disco Spectacular'

Sunday

- 0600 John Warwick 'Breakfast Show'
0900 'Kid's Stuff' (music, competitions and chat for children)

1100	Dick Fisher 'Wine and Roses' (music and dedications)
1400	'Andy Anderson American Hot 100'
1600	KKJ 'West Midlands Top 40'
1900	'Jankhar' (Asian language programme)
2000	Gerry Laing 'Opus' (arts programme, including classical music, theatre and book reviews)
2300	Reverend John Hammersley 'Ring for Action' (personal and spiritual phone-in)
0200	Peter Craig 'Late Night Beacon' (music)

June 1980

(This schedule was compiled using a Beacon Radio press release, *Programme Information, Week Commencing, 16 June 1980*)

Monday to Friday

0600	Allan Sherwin 'Breakfast Show' (music with news, weather and traffic reports). This included: 0645 Farming Report 0800 'Newsday' (extended newscast)
1000	George Ferguson 'Midmorning Show'. This included: 1000-1100 'Melting Pot' (phone-in on household problems) 1100-1200 guest interview 1230 Farming spot
1300	'Newsday' (extended newscast)
1330	(Monday) Peter Noyes Thomas 'Topic' (consumer affairs phone-in) (Tuesday-Friday) Bob Pierson 'Topic' (current affairs phone-in)
1430	Richard Glynn 'Afternoon Show'. This included: 1500-1600 'Swop Shop' (Phone-in)
1800	'Newsday' (extended newscast and phone-in)
1900	(Monday) Alan Sherwin 'In Those Days' (historical and educational programme on Black Country life during the eighteenth century onwards) (Tuesday) Pete Clements 'Beacon Country' (country music) (Wednesday) Tony Richards 'Big Band Jazz' (Thursday) Barry Curtis 'Paint it Black' (soul and reggae) (Friday) 'Sports Topic' (sports phone-in)
2000	(Monday) J. Clement Jones 'In the West Midlands Now' (contemporary information about the West Midlands) (Friday) Tony Richards 'Out and About' (live music from local venues, including community centres and hospitals)

- 2100 Mike Baker 'Beacon Music into the Night'. This including:
2300-2310 'Newsday' (extended newscast)
- 0100 Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon' (music and selected repeats of features from during the day)

Saturday

- 0600 Greg Bance 'Breakfast Show'
- 1000 Mick Wright 'Midday Show' (music and dedications)
- 1400 Pat Foley 'Sports Line' (sport and music)
- 1800 Mike Baker 'The National Top Forty' (chart music)
- 2100 Andy Wint 'Saturday Night Party' (chart music, includes 'Brass Tacks' – a visit to a different public house each week)
- 0000 Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon'

Sunday

- 0600 Greg Bance 'Breakfast Show'
- 0800 Peter Noyes Thomas and Judy Rhoden 'Kid's Stuff' (music, competitions and chat for children)
- 1000 Mick Wright 'Supergold Sunday' (past hits and information on past events, including 'what's on' spots)
- 1400 Allan Sherwin 'Wine and Roses' (music and dedications)
- 1800 'Sunday Magazine' (local news review)
- 1830 'Decision Makers' (networked political magazine/documentary)
- 1900 Kevan Brighting 'Off-Stage on-Stage' (local theatre, book and film reviews)
- 2100 'Jankhar' (information and music for Asians broadcast in Hindustani, Punjabi and Bengali)
- 2200 John Hammersley 'Sunday Evening' (personal and spiritual phone-in, including modern religious music and information on the church and its local activities)
- 2300 'Sunday Theatre' (recorded drama productions)
- 0000 Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon'

September 1982

(Source: *Birmingham Post*, week commencing 6 September 1982)

Monday to Friday

- 0100 Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon' (music and a repeat of selected features from the previous day)
- 0600 Gordon Astley 'Breakfast Show'. This included:
0645 Farming Report
0800 'Newsday' (extended newscast)

0900	Andy Wint 'Mid-Morning Show' (including 'Melting Pot' phone-in on household problems)
1200	Richard Capron 'Mid-Day' (music with news and news phone-in)
1500	Peter Craig 'Afternoon Show' (music, including 'swop shop' phone-in)
1730	'Newsday' (extended news report)
1800	Pat Foley (sports news)
1815	(Monday-Thursday) 'Topic' (current affairs phone-in) (Friday) Pat Foley 'Sports Topic' (sports phone-in)
1900	(Monday) 'Paint it Black' (soul and reggae)
1900	(Tuesday-Thursday) Allan Sherwin '1922' (music and topical information for younger people, includes revision notes advice phone-ins) (Friday) Mike Baker 'New Spins' (new releases)
2100	(Monday) 'Showcase' (networked documentaries)
2200	(2100 Friday) Tony Paul 'Music into the Night'
Saturday	
0100	Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon'
0600	Peter Craig 'Beacon Breakfast'
1000	Mike Baker 'Morning Show' (music and dedications)
1400	Pat Foley and Pete Clements 'Sport with Pat and Pete' (sport and music)
1800	Tony Paul 'The Top Thirty' (chart music)
2000	Tony Richards 'Beacon Jazz'
2200	Mark Steyn 'Beautiful Music' (easy listening music)
0000	Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon'
Sunday	
0600	Peter Noyes Thomas 'The Breakfast Programme'
0800	'Kid's Stuff' (music, competitions and chat for children)
1000	Paul Yarnall 'Supergold Sunday' (past hits)
1400	Dick Fisher 'Wine and Roses' (music and dedications)
1800	Harold Fuchs 'In the West Midlands Now' (contemporary Information about the West Midlands)
1900	'Jankhar' (information and music for the Asians broadcast in Hindustani, Punjabi and Bengali)
2000	Mark Steyn 'Beacon Classics' (classical music)
1000	John Hammersley 'Sunday Evening' (personal and spiritual phone-in, modern religious music and information on the church and its local activities)
0000	Pete Clements 'Late Night Beacon'

Appendix V

Brief Chronologies of Birmingham Broadcasting and Beacon Broadcasting Based on Press Reports

[Items from other sources]

Birmingham Broadcasting Limited

1961 March: Birmingham Broadcasting Ltd is registered by Pinsents, solicitors to the Birmingham Post and Mail Group.

1970 June: As the Conservatives regain power with the promise to introduce independent radio the *Birmingham Post* surveys the strength of local interest in commercial radio. *Post* reports that newspaper groups in Birmingham, Coventry, Nottingham and Nuneaton have all formed commercial radio companies; Birmingham Chamber of Commerce are also believed to be interested in establishing a station. Alderman Sir Frank Griffin (Conservative) envisages a service operated by a commercial consortium under licence to the local authority.

September: Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Christopher Chataway, rejects proposals for commercial stations operated by local authorities. Rejection follows a delegation consisting of Frank Griffin and other representatives from authorities in Manchester and London.

1971 March: *Birmingham Post* publishes details of the form it believes commercial radio in Birmingham would take. Rivalling that of BBC Radio Birmingham, the service will cover both Birmingham and the Black Country. At least six groups are reported to be interested in the Birmingham licence.

November: Second reading of the Sound Broadcasting Bill. With it being apparent that ILR contenders will need to show a degree of diversity and localism, and local newspapers being restricted to a twenty per cent holding, the BPM indicates that it may form a consortium of local interests to bid for the Birmingham service.

1972 March: BPM announces its intention to form a consortium, which will be headed by 49 year-old David Pinnell.

June: Minister of Posts and Telecommunications announces that there will be twenty-one ILR areas, the first being on air within twelve to fifteen months. Birmingham City Council considers an application for the Birmingham licence. IBA sets out its rules for governing Independent Local Radio (ILR).

July: Whilst outlining the IBA's plans for the service the *Birmingham Post* reports that the Birmingham station could be on the air by late 1973 or early 1974.

September: Pinnell, managing director of Birmingham Broadcasting Ltd, announces that the company will shortly reveal its plans for the Birmingham ILR licence. Pinnell emphasises that though the BPM is a major shareholder, Birmingham Broadcasting will be independent of any other local media. Birmingham City Radio announces the membership of its consortium.

October: IBA invites tenders for the Glasgow, Birmingham, London and Manchester ILR franchises. Newspaper proprietors intending to take a stake in stations in their circulation area are invited to declare their interest by November 10. Decision on winning consortium is expected the following March. Three-year contract for Birmingham will cost £75,000 in the first year, £85,000 in the second and £95,000 in the third.

November: Merchant bankers, Singer and Friedlander, withdraw backing for Birmingham City Radio. Though Singer and Friedlander refuse to comment, in a *New Statesman* article Anthony Blond reveals the cause as high rental and copyright costs. Eric Morley's Mecca Group replaces Singer and Friedlander as financial backer.

December: Day before closing date for applications (8 December), Birmingham Independent Radio announces its intention to apply for the Birmingham franchise. Alderman Frank Griffin also announces his being chair of a forth consortium, though he refuses to name its members or title.

1973 January: A few days before being interviewed by the IBA for the Birmingham franchise (30–31 January) Birmingham Broadcasting release the details of its consortium. At the IBA public meeting (31 January) reference is made to the ATV and BPM involvement in Birmingham Broadcasting: ASTMS union warns of local advertising being controlled by the “commercial and financial big boys”. According to *Television Mail* the Birmingham public meeting witnessed a low turnout, unlike Glasgow and Manchester which were well patronised.

February: IBA announces the two short-listed consortia: Birmingham Broadcasting and Birmingham Independent Radio. Both are invited to London of a second interview with the IBA Board.

March: IBA announce successful applicants for Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester. Birmingham Broadcasting wins the Birmingham franchise. IBA also announces its intention to investigate the incorporation of “other elements, including newspaper interests” in each of the three winners. In Birmingham the IBA want Birmingham Broadcasting to absorb some elements of the runner-up, Birmingham Independent Radio. Birmingham Broadcasting board meet to discuss the terms offered; station expected to commence spring 1974. Company will broadcast from the former ATV studios in Aston. For fear of being adopted by rival broadcasters Pinnell refuses to discuss programme details, but reveals that programmes will be centred on “popular” music. While congratulating Birmingham Broadcasting it on its success, West Midlands County Councillor Stan Yapp, member of the Birmingham City Radio group, is concerned over its connection with the Post and Mail. Fearing a conflict of interests Alderman Griffin also draws attention to the fact that both share the same financial director, Geoffrey Battman. Battman states his role in Birmingham Broadcasting is that of financial adviser to shareholders; he will not take an executive position. Upon being appointed chair of the BPM J. L., Brown resigns as deputy chair of Birmingham Broadcasting. 10 March: Birmingham Broadcasting opens talks with Birmingham Independent Radio with view of offering a limited shareholding. 12 March: new Birmingham Broadcasting chairman, John Parkinson, emphasises that the newspaper organisations will only have a minority shareholdings in the company. It is understood that a small share holding will be allocated to the Midland News Association, proprietor of the *Wolverhampton Express & Star*. As directors formally accept franchise offer the IBA officially announce the details of Birmingham Broadcasting (including its shareholders) and its broadcast area. Shareholders now include former members of Birmingham Independent Radio. To be named BRMB, station will broadcast to 1.7 million people over a VHF area which will reach from Burton-upon-Trent to the north and to Redditch in the south. Medium wave service will attempt to match that of VHF. Newsroom will have a staff of twelve including the news

editor. Initially broadcasting for eighteen hours a day, Pinnell hopes station will eventually provide a 24-hour service.

May: Reg Davies appointed sales director.

June: *Birmingham Post* editorial highlights BRMB's approach to music and news, according to editorial statistics show that more women listen to daytime radio. On press involvement, editorial also emphasises Pinnell and his view that BRMB and the BPM complement one another with regard local advertising.

July: Birmingham born and former BBC Birmingham technical officer, David Wood is appointed chief engineer. In a letter to the *New Statesman* Councillor Howard Marks (Labour) again refers to the BPM's involvement in Birmingham Broadcasting. Marks criticises the IBA, Baroness Sharpe in particular, for ignoring the issue when raised at the public meeting.

September: While the adjacent five-story office building is being converted for the use of BRMB, work commences on the demolition of the Alpha Television studios. *Erdington News* reports that BRMB's religious advisor Alan Nin will move away from the conventional form of religious broadcasting. His two-hour Sunday programme will concentrate on "general social subjects", while three-minute slots each morning will attempt to reach a large number of lay people. Birmingham born Keith Hayes appointed news editor. Hayes previously worked on Canadian news stations.

November: John Hedges appointed BRMB community manager; *Birmingham Post* describes his position as unique in local radio. Former pirate DJ, Brendan Power appointed as commercial producer. In an attempt to draw advertisers BRMB shows what can be expected from the new service: 230 People attend a BRMB presentation at Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. Besides outlining the proposed community coverage and programme policy, specimen commercials are played accompanied with details of advertising rates.

December: Company announces start date as being two weeks behind schedule. Pinnell blames the fuel crisis for the delay.

1974 January: A month before BRMB commences broadcasting BBC Radio Birmingham opens a studio and information centre in New Street from where it will broadcast a new weekly series, *80 New Street*.

February: IBA start test transmissions for the Birmingham ILR service. 7-8 February: with slogan "The Sound Way to Spend Your Day" small advertisements for BRMB appear in *Birmingham Post* and *Evening Mail*. 18 February: advertising campaign culminates with half page advertisement juxtaposition to advertisements by WEA and Warner Brothers records which congratulate BRMB on the start of its new service. 19 February: BRMB starts broadcasting.

March: In an interview with *Campaign* Pinnell states that BRMB has achieved a 50/50 split between national and local advertising. NOP poll undertaken for BRMB shows that its daily audience is 208,000 adults, a sixteen per cent reach of the available audience. According to Pinnell nearly half of the local population aged fifteen and over have listened to BRMB, more than three-quarters of which were favourable of the station's programmes.

April: An opinion poll puts BRMB's weekly audience at 572,000.

July: Station claims weekly audience of 670,000, of which fifty eight per cent are over the age of 35. With 182,000 against 132,000, station states it has a larger youth audience than Radio Luxembourg.

August: Councillor Howard Marks accuses BRMB's phone-in programmes of being dominated by Right-Wing pressure groups. BRMB admits it has aired many National Front supporters, but states that calls are not selected purposefully. Due to the amount of callers, Alan Nin's Sunday evening advice programme is extended by two hours. An Open-Line Club has already been established to support the programme.

September: Against the ongoing economic difficulties BRMB forecasts an improved financial outlook. Though only forty per cent of advertising time was sold between July and August, figures are expected to double during the autumn. Poor results blamed on the summer being a "slack time for advertising in any medium." Pinnell believes the local advertiser "still needs to be coaxed into trying radio advertising". Success of the company's new commercial production unit and new telephone sales operation enables it to engage in major national and regional advertising projects.

October: BRMB start a series of programmes which target child adoption. Produced in conjunction with Birmingham Social Services, project receives local and national press coverage.

December: Beacon Broadcasting is the only applicant for the Wolverhampton ILR franchise; franchise will cover twenty per cent of the BRMB broadcast area. Putting the lack of interest down to the financial state of commercial radio the BRMB chair doubts whether any ILR station is in a profit-making situation, though he believes BRMB will shortly return a modest profit.

1975 January: BRMB confirms up to six redundancies among administrative staff. Emphasising station is not losing money it believes that now in operation economy measures can be taken.

Mid January-February: In run up to its first anniversary of broadcasting a flurry of *Birmingham Post* and *Evening Mail* articles highlight BRMB's success in attracting both advertisers and audiences. With eighty two per cent of advertising time sold the company reports a small profit for the final three months of 1974. Now costing up to £50 per minute company has increased advertising rates by twenty five per cent over the past twelve months.

Late February: For it to be "closer to the community" company announces an increase in outside broadcasts. Having already broadcast from last year's *Evening Mail* Ideal Homes Exhibition it plans to similarly broadcast from this year's Boat and Leisure Show. As part of station's requirement to support local musicians, BRMB announce plans to broadcast from Birmingham Town Hall.

March: A detailed article in *Music Week* highlights BRMB's link with the music industry, particularly BRMB's help in promoting new artists. Alongside the financial plight of other ILR stations BRMB calls on the IBA for immediate review of its £95,000 rental fee. Call follows Beacon Broadcasting's failed share offer of 349,000 in £1 shares and the IBA decision to waive LBC's remaining nine-month rental of £168,000.

April: IBA renews BRMB annual licence.

May: Research by Research Surveys of Great Britain show BRMB as having a higher percentage of housewife listeners than any other ILR station. BRMB's weekly audience rises to more than 750,000, resulting in it being the second most listened-to station on ILR. Station's daily audience is 500,000.

August: Company sacks Alan Leighton. Dismissal follows an on-air outburst against the company's decision to end his daily legal advice programme.

October: BRMB announces it is to sponsor a series of CBSO (City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra) concerts.

1976 February: On the eve of station's second birthday JICRAR figures put BRMB's audience reach at thirty nine per cent. Annual IBA rental increases to more than £100,000.

April: Beacon Radio starts broadcasting. Even though both can be received in each other's area neither BRMB nor Beacon envisage any competition; Pinnell believes both stations will be identified within their respective broadcast areas. BRMB's licence is renewed by the IBA.

October: Both BRMB and Beacon apply to IBA for permission to broadcast twenty-four hours. BRMB states it is ready to commence the following Monday while Beacon claims it can commence immediately. Sunday 17: BRMB commences twenty-four broadcasting.

1977 Brian King joins BRMB as a newsreader, three months later he becomes its first documentary producer.

April: NUJ annual conference raises concern over the news coverage of many ILR stations and the disparity with what they promised in their licence applications. During debate BRMB deputy news editor Michael Henfield calls on the IBA to "check manifestos against performance". Pinnell considers that BRMB has one of the best news services in the country. IBA renews BRMB's contract for third year running.

July: JICRAR figures show BRMB as having a weekly audience of 1,157,000, listening for an average of 12.3 hours per week. This compares to Beacon's weekly audience of 548,000.

October: *Sunday Telegraph* publishes a comparative article on local radio in the West Midlands; it compares the "slicker, flashier, youth orientated" Beacon with the "businesslike" atmosphere at BRMB and BBC Radio Birmingham.

1978 February: BRMB advertises its fourth birthday party at the Top Rank Suite in Birmingham.

June: According to JICRAR figures BRMB has overtaken Radio One as the most popular station in the West Midlands. Compared to twenty eight per cent for Radio One and one percent for Radio Birmingham, station claims just over thirty one per cent of the total weekly listening figures. Over past twelve months BRMB audience has reached 1,316,000, a reach of fifty per cent. Survey puts Beacon's audience down slightly to 510,000 – thirty three per cent reach. Pinnell attributes BRMB's success to its community commitment.

July: When the broadcasting White Paper envisages the expansion of local radio BRMB offers to help establish other West Midlands ILR stations. Pinpointing Worcester, Pinnell believes that while a new station may not be viable BRMB could assist with capital, experience and programmes.

1979 January-March: In build up to station's fifth birthday local press articles concentrate on BRMB and its presenters. Emphasis placed on community involvement and the close relationship with listeners. Thanking its audience for making the station a success, BRMB advertise its various programmes in the *Birmingham Post*, *Evening Mail* and *Sunday Mercury*. Fifth Birthday: five children with the same birth-date are presented with a moneybox, stamp and coin set and a copy of a newspaper of 19 February 1974; they will be

monitored every five years to check on their progress. Fifth birthday party held at the Top Rank Suite.

April: BRMB's documentary, *The Midland's Gun Massacre* receives favourable reviews in the national press. Produced by Andy Webb, programme also broadcast on London's LBC and Sheffield's Radio Hallam.

September: In an effort to win back 250,000 listeners supposedly lost to Radio One, station undertakes a major reshuffle in daytime programming. Ed Doolan's lunchtime phone-in and chat show ends and music will now feature throughout the day. Doolan retains his evening phone-in.

October: A *Sunday Mercury* article compares BRMB with Beacon Radio. While Beacon suffers a troubled relationship with the IBA the chair of the IBA Local Advisory Committee give BRMB a positive review. Recent loss of audience put down to a "peaking" of the station's success.

1980 April: Thirty five year-old Bob Hopton replaces John Russell as programme director. Hopton previously programme director at Radio Tees. Audience research shows BRMB has a twenty six per cent reach.

May: Mercia Sound starts broadcasting in Coventry. While service area overlaps the south west of Birmingham, Mercia has no intention of encroaching on BRMB.

June: During a Common's debate on BBC cuts, Peter Snape (Labour, West Bromwich) accuses the region's commercial radio DJs of sounding more American than Midlanders. Claim hotly disputed by DJs and managers on all the region's stations.

December: Birmingham City Council's General Purposes Committee accepts a proposal by Councillor Mike Lyons for the City to begin formal talks with BRMB regarding its council meetings being broadcasted; BBC Radio Birmingham has already requested to broadcast a meeting as part of a series on the workings of local government. Councillor Clive Wilkinson claims that during his informal talks with the stations both were unenthusiastic at the idea.

1981 April: BRMB stages Susan and Friends charity event in Birmingham's Chamberlain Square. With an estimated fifty thousand people attending, the event raises more than £50,000 to help handicapped children.

May: IBA stop a live BRMB broadcast from the Rachams department store; BRMB had already taken over a large window display and Lord Mayor Councillor Kenneth Barton was to be interviewed as part of the store's centenary celebrations. IBA rule that only live commercials could be broadcast from the store.

August: A report by Birmingham University lecturer Dr. Tony Wright pinpoints the apparent inadequate political coverage on all three of the areas local radio stations; report written as part of an IBA research fellowship scheme. While praising the "professionalism" of BRMB's newsroom, Wright feels that the phone-in programmes were marred by inadequate preparation. BRMB promotions manager David Bagley refutes Dr. Wright's claims.

September: JICRAR figures show that BRMB weekly audience has grown by two per cent to 1,066,000. Beacon and Coventry's Mercia Sound have also gained while BBC Radio Birmingham and Radio One and Radio Two have all lost listeners.

November: BRMB announce it will spend £35,000 on sponsoring seven CBSO concerts beginning in January.

1982 February: Dr Wright's report published. BRMB and Radio Birmingham refute claims; BRMB states that Wright's work was conducted two years previously and over just one week.

July: BRMB report that its weekly audience has increased to 1,102,000.

October: Radio Wyvern starts broadcasting in Worcester. Formed in 1977 the Wyvern consortium consists of a number of local shareholders including Birmingham Broadcasting. Former BRMB journalist and Mercia news editor Mike Henfield, becomes programme director at Wyvern.

1983 General: Brian King wins second place in a Current Affairs and Documentaries award.

May: Almost 24,000 people take part in the BRMB Walkathon. Event centres round the twenty five mile Outer Circle bus route and raises money for MENCAP. BRMB announces at a Cable Conference (organised by West Midlands County Council and the Birmingham Film Workshop) that as soon as the Government gives the go ahead it intends to expand into cable television.

August: BRMB announces that Walkathon raised £213,000. Besides donating cash for the refurbishment of a MENCAP home in Washwood Heath, £15,000 is also donated to the *Evening Mail* Ultrasonic Scanner Appeal.

September: Under new rules introduced by the 1981 Broadcasting Act the three-year 'rolling' contracts are to be replaced by fixed term licences - IBA therefore re-advertises the Birmingham ILR licence. Headed by Aston Villa Chairman Doug Ellis and ex-BBC manager Philip Sidey Radio Heartland announces their bid for the Birmingham licence. Confident it will retain its licence BRMB forecasts a profit of £200,000 for 1983-1984 (on a projected income of £3,130,000).

October: 24: During the re-licensing process BRMB receives overwhelming support at the IBA's public meeting. Support such that chairman, IBA Deputy Chair Sir John Riddell, has to ask twice for any opposition to BRMB retaining licence.

November: *Birmingham Post* reviews the applications by BRMB and Heartland. Pinnell draws attention to the support for BRMB and attributes BRMB's success to its community commitment; he points to the sixty one per cent of Birmingham listeners who tune into the local service of news and information. Pinnell not complacent: he feels that after retaining the LBC and Capital contracts the IBA may make a change in Birmingham. He refutes Heartland's claim that BRMB is principally a music station playing chart music for the younger audience.

1984 February: On its tenth anniversary of broadcasting BRMB retains the Birmingham ILR franchise; the *Evening Mail* and the *Sunday Mercury* provide extensive coverage. JICRAR figures: BRMB almost twenty nine per cent, BBC Radio One almost twenty seven per cent and Radio WM almost three per cent; BRMB believes it is reaching sixty one per cent of the available audience. Plans are announced for a 'Tenth Birthday Party in the Park' event with proceeds going to the Prince's Trust. Following the abrupt resignation of its managing director the previous December Pinnell still believes that Worcester's Radio Wyvern will be a success and that BRMB will "watch its progress with interest and enthusiasm".

May: Second Walkathon raises £315,000 for the deaf, autistic children, cerebral palsy sufferers, the Prince's Trust and the Young at Heart organisation. Forty thousand people take part.

October: BRMB donate a control desk to Solihull Technical College so it can set up its own radio station [BRMB chair John Parkinson is college principle].

1985 February: BRMB plan major programme changes. With a concentration on music rather than talk it will aim for a 'Radio One' type of output. Specialist programmes may be dropped and breakfast presenter Les Ross may be replaced by Brendan Kearney; Ross could move from breakfast to a mid-morning slot. Dismissing a BBC survey that shows BRMB has lost a significant amount of listeners over the past three years, station claims to still have a reach of thirty four per cent.

May: 30,000 people brave cold and wet conditions to take part in the third Walkathon. Event raises £414,000; so far over £1 million has been raised for charity.

July: Though no time period is given the *Birmingham Post* reports that BRMB has lost £500,000 in advertising revenue. Pinnell believes that the IBA relax its rules on ILR BRMB will pursue programmes which would appeal more to the younger listener. He believes that the company's survival is dependent these changes, the essence of the station has always been pop music and that BRMB can no longer cater for all tastes. A cut back in the newsroom has already led to a continuing dispute with journalists; half of the local bulletins are dropped, current affairs programmes and documentaries are abandoned. Because of their actions ten journalists are locked out by the management. Newsroom spokesman John Taynton believes that the company is reneging on the commitments it made when re-applied for its licence: station not providing a true local radio service for Birmingham and the Midlands. Predicting possible mergers between stations, Pinnell believes that the West Midlands cannot support five commercial radio stations: BRMB, Beacon, Signal Radio (Stoke on Trent), Mercia and Wyvern. Audience survey by Research Surveys of Great Britain puts Radio One on thirty nine per cent and BRMB on thirty five per cent; while BRMB has gained sixty thousand listeners since last summer, Radio One, Radio Two and Radio WM have all lost listeners.

1986 April: George Gavin named as Sport's Broadcaster of the Year at the annual Sony Awards.

May: David Pinnell retires as BRMB managing director and is replaced by Ian Rufus, former managing director of Coventry's Mercia Sound. Rufus indicates that BRMB may attempt mergers with Beacon Radio and Mercia Sound; he believes that regional consolidation is the only way to resist competition; *Birmingham Post*: unsuccessful talks have taken place with Beacon. Beacon managing director Bob Pierson rejects idea: emphasising Beacon's association with Darling Downs (Charlford) and its reach of 1.8 million people compared to BRMB's 2.2 million - "there is nothing in common with the Beacon's Black Country area and BRMB's Birmingham." BRMB announces a profit of £250,000 for 1984-85, and an audience reach of at least 50 per cent.

1987 May 3: 33,000 people raise £12,000 in annual Walkathon. Main beneficiary is National Children's Homes Appeal for Handicapped Children. Walkathon has already purchased 30 minibuses for handicapped groups from the £1.3 million previously raised.

September: *Observer Magazine* publishes detailed article on BRMB's thirteenth-birthday celebrations: special attention is given to the station's relationship with listeners and community at large.

1988 March: With IBA approval Birmingham Broadcasting makes move to merge with Mercia Sound. If successful, new company will be entitled Midlands Radio Holdings Ltd (MRH). While Mercia directors approve of merger, Birmingham Broadcasting's Company Secretary offers all Mercia shareholders one BRMB share for every two they hold in Mercia. Merger will cost Birmingham Broadcasting £1.1 million. Birmingham Broadcasting also reveals a previous year profit of £493,000. On same day of takeover bid, the IBA announces a new

franchise for Banbury and Oxford. BRMB indicates that the newly merged company may bid for this new franchise, thus creating a Midlands wide network.

April: On closing date of the offer BRMB receives acceptances for 92 per cent of Mercia shares. On same day Rufus indicates an intention to float the newly merged company on the United Securities Market, and eventually bid for one of the forthcoming national radio licences. With BRMB and Mercia operating as separate subsidiaries, MRH will have a staff of 90, cash resources of £1.75 million and an annual turnover of £4.91 million. Benefits of merger will include the ability to jointly market the two stations to national advertisers.

May: 1: BRMB sixth Walkathon. 30,000 take part raising an estimated £400,000. This brings overall total for all Walkathons to £2 million. Event sponsored by Ansells Brewery.

December: Rather than Stock Market floatation MRH agrees to an offer from Manchester's Piccadilly Radio for a £13 million merger; Piccadilly is already on the Stock Market. Move is latest in a string of ILR mergers and takeovers. MRH shareholders offered either 11 new Piccadilly voting shares, and 33 new Piccadilly non-voting shares for every four Midlands shares, or a cash alternative. [The original Piccadilly ILR consortium, Manchester Independent Radio, consisted of remnants from the unsuccessful Birmingham City Radio Consortium – see November 1972 above] For year ending September 1988 MRH announce a pre-tax profit of £1.1 million on £5.1 million turnover. Piccadilly: pre-tax profit is £1.4 million on £9.39 million turnover. Merged company will be entitled Piccadilly Communications. Rufus: while maximising advertising revenue and prepare both for the deregulated environment which is being proposed by the Government, both companies will retain their local bases. Targeting the 35-50-age range on BRMB and Mercia's MW frequencies, MRH announce the introduction of Xtra AM. MRH also announce a planned expansion into satellite broadcasting and bids for the national radio and local television franchises.

1989 January: IBA agree Piccadilly merger. Piccadilly's shares increase by 4p to a record 235p. 12: Home Secretary allows local radio stations to use split frequency broadcasting.

February - March: MRH-Piccadilly merger fails. Owen Oyston's Miss World Group, which includes the Red Rose radio group, makes a hostile £35 million bid for Piccadilly; if successful the fully merged company would contravene IBA rules on market share, which restrict radio companies to no more than 15 per cent of the total ILR audience. After drawn out discussion and Stock Market speculation Oyston finally encourages the Piccadilly board and shareholders to accept his Miss World offer and abandon the MRH deal.

April: Rufus: since failed Piccadilly merger MRH has received numerous approaches regarding a takeover; company is still looking to merge with another ILR company, listed or unlisted. Rufus believes company could still go for its own Market quotation. April 4: Xtra AM launched. Aimed at older listeners by playing classic hits, breakfast presenter Les Ross moves over to the new station and Phil Riley is appointed its programme controller. MRH spends £100,000 quadrupling BRMB's FM transmitter strength, reports of signal being heard in Morecambe.

May: 30,000 people raise £330,000 in the Ansells sponsored Walkathon. Money raised will help improve the children's ward and burns unit at Birmingham Accident Hospital. Mercia Sound stages its first Walkathon which attracts 10,000 walkers; money raised will go to Coventry's Walsgrave Hospital Cancer Appeal and the Mercia Charity Snowball. BRMB undertakes a joint venture with Birmingham Junior Chamber of Commerce and the *Birmingham Post* to stage the 'Know Your City Centenary Trophy 1989'. Creating the largest ILR group outside London, MRH announces a planned merger with Nottingham's Radio Trent. Rufus states that it has been a long-term aim to merge the East and West

Midlands ILR stations. Trent operates Radio Trent in Nottingham and Derby, and Leicester Sound. Trent's main shareholders include JC Bamford excavators and Crown Communications, which also has sizeable stake in London's LBC. Upon merger a new parent company will be formed.

June: Ron Coles, managing director of Radio Trent, becomes managing director of Midlands Radio. BRMB enters a £50,000 sponsorship deal with Coca-Cola, deal follows Coca-Cola's decision to introduce a six-month regional advertising campaign; money will help pay for either a new road show caravan or an up-grade of the existing vehicle.

1990 February: On announcing plans for Stock Market floatation later in the month, Coles indicates the possibility of acquiring Beacon Radio; Beacon refutes claim that talks have taken place. On news bulletins BRMB claim that less than 300,000 adults "bother to listen to Radio WM". Not previously seeing Radio Birmingham/WM as a rival, move comes after WM claims to have "eclipsed" BRMB in terms of listeners. JICRAR figures: combined weekly BRMB/Xtra AM – listeners tuned in for c13 hours, a 22 per cent of average listening. February 26: Valued between £20 million and £25 million, Midlands Radio introduces its Stock Market floatation. Sponsored by Lazards and Cazenove, floatation comes by way of an introduction with Midlands' main shareholders, Yatterdon Trust, JC Bamford and Crown Communications, agreeing to release a small number of their shares (around 5 per cent in total). Floatation will help company raise capital for further acquisitions or part of the £30 million needed to introduce a national independent radio station. Midlands reports a pre-tax profit of £2.17 million for 1989. More than 80 per cent of profits came from advertising revenue, the rest from commercial production, training courses, co-producing factual programmes and concert promotion. BZW forecast pre-tax profit of £2.6 million for 1990. After floatation, Midlands hope to increase stake in Radio Wyvern from 17 to 20 per cent.

May 6: Both BRMB and Mercia stage Walkathons. BRMB raises an estimated £250,000 from its new shorter 16.5 mile route.

June: Coles reiterates an interest in establishing a national station. If the Broadcasting Bill is passed the company will make an offer for a franchise in the autumn; finance likely to come either from borrowing, the Stock Market, or a consortium of "like minded radio colleagues".

1991 December: BRMB's Phil Holden named Top Radio Comedy Personality at the British Comedy Awards.

1992 September: Radio Authority release plans for a new regional station for the West Midlands, and new incremental independent radio stations for Wolverhampton and Birmingham. Authority believes there is no problem with stations setting up alongside BRMB and Beacon. Authority will invite tenders next year.

December: *Birmingham Post* reports that Allied Radio will join EMAP in considering a takeover of Midlands Radio. Based in Woking, Allied already owns a number of stations in the south of England, including Fox FM in Oxford; Allied already owns 8 per cent of Midlands Radio. Capital Radio, with an audience of more than 3 million, also believed to be making an agreed £16 million bid for Midlands.

1993 January: Midlands announces a £17.7 million sale to Capital Radio; takeover will make Capital the country's largest independent radio group. While Midlands' shareholders are offered 130p cash for each share, until the deal is processed shares are suspended at 112p. With takeover both Capital and Midlands believe they will have a better chance of capturing national advertising. John Parkinson, Midlands chairman and managing director, will become a non-executive director of Capital. Allied Radio receives £1.43 million as it accepts Capital offer for its 8 per cent holding.

February: JICRAR figures for last three months of 1992 show that BRMB and Xtra AM has captured more than one million listeners.

December: Capital Radio agrees to sell part of Midlands Radio to GWR. While keeping Birmingham Broadcasting, Capital will sell Mercia Sound, Radio Tent and Leicester Sound to GWR for £4.8 million cash and one million ordinary GWR shares (total cost £11 million). Capital's holding of GWR will increase from 4.2 per cent to almost 20 per cent. Also acquiring Beacon Broadcasting in a separate deal, GWR will fund the deals through an £8.7 million share offer. *Times* reports that Capital/GWR move will enable both groups to take advantage of an improved advertising market. Rather than the national market, GWR which already owns stations in Bristol, the West Country and on the Isle of Wight, concentrates heavily on local advertisers.

Beacon Broadcasting Limited

1960 November: [The Midland News Association (MNA) registers the Express & Star Radio Company (company renamed Beacon Broadcasting upon Independent Local Radio becoming a reality)].

1971 March: Government publishes White Paper detailing plans for local commercial radio. Wolverhampton may be one of the later stations to open.

1972 June: The IBA set out its rules governing Independent Local Radio (ILR). Midland News Association indicates an association with Beacon Broadcasting consortium.

1974 March: IBA proceed with the first thirteen ILR stations, plans for Wolverhampton are ‘well ahead’. Planning permission is sought for the site of the Wolverhampton transmitter; the IBA is likely to advertise for tenders within next few months - station should be on air in 1976.

July: The Home Secretary names Wolverhampton as being one next batch of ILR stations. IBA plan to meet the local authorities to arrange permission for the transmitting site.

August: IBA states that before advertising for a contractor it must first find a transmitter site. IBA indicates that the Government wants all the remaining ILR stations to be on the air by the end of 1975 and if site is not found Wolverhampton will have to wait until 1980 before it can have a station; six planning applications have so far been rejected. Stiff local opposition to a site at Gospel End - Staffordshire County Council twice refuses permission. Permission finally granted after Beacon presents a petition of support. Wolverhampton Trades Council requests Wolverhampton Corporation not to support commercial radio; Kenneth Jones is both chair of Lower Penn Parish Council (a main opponent to the Gospel End site) and spokesman for Wolverhampton Trades Council. Alan Graham, MNA proprietor and a director of the Beacon Broadcasting consortium, asks West Midlands County Council to become financially involved with Beacon. Graham indicates that due to the “current financial crisis no finance will be forthcoming other than that of the *Express & Star*. West Midlands County leader Stan Yapp (Labour) believes that county involvement in commercial radio would be “logical”, though he is unsure of legal position [Yapp was a member of the Birmingham City Radio group which bid for the Birmingham franchise – see BRMB above]. Wolverhampton Borough Council discusses local radio though mood not helpful towards commercial radio.

December: Beacon Broadcasting Limited is the only contender for the Wolverhampton franchise.

1975 January: IBA hold public meeting to discuss the Beacon Broadcasting application.

February: IBA provisionally announce Beacon Broadcasting as the winner of the licence; Beacon highlight problems with finance.

March: Jay Oliver appointed chief executive of Beacon Broadcasting. Oliver expects station to commence October 1. Issue for 349,000 £1 shares is published by Dunbar and Company.

April: Because of a lack of interest director Bernard Blakemore announces an extension to the share deadline; if there is no further interest the “company’s future will rest with the IBA”; sets a deadline of April 30 for the company to find its finance.

May: the necessary finance is secured after last minute talks with new and existing shareholders: the Selkirk Communications organisation provides a substantial funding, though Beacon is still short of a reported £170,000. The trade press reports that a Beacon

failure would seriously jeopardise the Government's plan to have a full national network of stations on the air by the end of 1975. Because of its reduced finance Beacon abandons its plan for an office and studio complex at the prestigious Burntree House. Station still plans to be on the air by the end of 1975.

1976 April 12: Beacon Radio 303 comes to air. While BRMB can be heard in Wolverhampton press reports show that Beacon's medium wave test transmissions could be heard throughout Birmingham. Neither David Collins, Beacon promotions manager, nor David Pinnell, BRMB managing director, sees a problem of competition - each station will have its own 'geographical' audience.

October: Station applies to the IBA to broadcast twenty four hours, BRMB has already applied.

1977 May: Planning permission is refused for the station to park its outside broadcast caravan outside its studios.

July: JICRAR results: at the end of its first year of broadcasting Beacon claims to have captured one third of West Midland's listeners. While praising his station's success Jay Oliver refers it being IBA experiment to see the outcome of two ILR stations operating within the same area; reference comes in response to the fact that BRMB had a higher listening figure.

October: *Sunday Telegraph* publishes a comparative article on local radio in the West Midlands; it compares the "slicker, flashier, youth orientated" Beacon with the "businesslike" atmosphere at BRMB and BBC Radio Birmingham.

1978 January: After eventually winning IBA approval station embarks on a nine-week period of experimental twenty four hour broadcasting.

June: JICRAR results: with a weekly audience of 510,000 Beacon still claims a third of all listeners in its broadcast area. This compares to BRMB's reach of twenty eight per cent (1,316,000 listeners) in its area - making it the top station in the region in terms of listeners.

October: Beacon announces an expansion of its service, new schedules to include more specialist programming.

November: After the experiment nine week period station introduces a permanent twenty four hour service.

1979 June: Resignations of Jay Oliver and programme director Allan Mackenzie coincide with the IBA's refusal to renew the station's contract. J. Clement Jones takes temporary charge as 'director in charge of administration'. According to the company's annual report the resignations culminated from talks between Oliver, Mackenzie and the Beacon board. Senior management indicate a desire for a complete change of direction, they are unhappy with the stations 'sound and life style'. The IBA's main criticisms are a lack of local identity and lapses in programme control. As the IBA review output tapes the company agrees to have licence talks.

August: A six-second delay system to introduced, all phone-in calls can now be monitored before they are broadcast.

September - October: Presenters: following an incident at a local disco freelance presenter KKJ is taken off his weekly disco show. Breakfast presenter Bob Snyder resigns over complaints surrounding his on air phone call to the General Secretary of the Labour Party.

Programming: new programme schedule is under review by the IBA; contract to be reviewed in the autumn. Peter Tomlinson is appointed as the new managing director; new programme director to be appointed shortly. A decline in people listening to Midlands ILR is reported, Beacon audience is down to 486,000 – the lowest for all three of the midlands ILR stations. Announcement that Beacon is to be re-launched: management, presenters and the programme schedule will all see changes; station will increase its news and feature programming by ten per cent and become more community based.

October: A *Sunday Mercury* article claims that while several ILR stations were reporting losses Beacon had made a small profit during its first two years of operation; station was one of only six stations to have paid a dividend to its shareholders. Beacon ranks as eighth in terms of advertising revenue. Retiring chair of the IBA's Local Advisory Committee believes that Beacon's problems were caused by "certain controversial personalities", not all the directors – they had "done their best to put on a good service". Only six of the original 32 staff remain at the station.

1980 January: The Automobile Association takes over Beacon's traffic reports.

April: Beacon finances a local councillor to attend an exchange visit to Germany; visit will include his taking part in a live three-hour show.

June: During Commons debate West Bromwich Labour MP Peter Snape accuses the West Midlands' commercial radio DJs as sounding too American. Programme director Bob Pierson rejects the allegation.

October: Presenter Pete Wagstaff leaves to take up a new post with Australian radio. New breakfast presenter Chris Ashley is introduced.

1981 May: Listening figures indicate an increase to 565,000 listeners a week, an increase of two per cent.

July: *Express & Star* reports that one sixth of station's forty eight staff had recently handed in their notices; resignations included those from the newsroom, including its editor Mike Stewart, sales manager, Alan Blackburn and disc jockey Jon Scragg. Pierson accuses the newer ILR stations of 'head hunting' the station's staff.

August: After much lobbying within the industry Beacon has its IBA rental reduced by £12,000 to £100,000. IBA puts reduction down to a redistribution of rental fees to help small to medium sized franchises. Alan Mullett replaces Alan Blackburn as sales manager.

September: The annual JICRAR results show a one per cent increase in listeners, this compares to BRMB increasing its audience by two per cent and nearly all the BBC stations making losses.

October: To mark International Year of the Disabled a twenty four hour appeal raises £14,000.

November: Listeners increase to 578,000 per week, average hours people now listen increases to almost eleven hours.

1982 May: An article in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* reports on Peter Tomlinson's success in turning Beacon around. Success put down to making staff more community conscious, reducing the "pop and prattle" and more local based programming. Article reveals Beacon's increased community involvement including the sound archive at the Black Country Museum.

Sales: local sales now growing faster than any other ILR station. A loss of £80,000 was returned in 1981, as against a profit in 1980 - Tomlinson puts loss down to increased investments.

July: Listeners increase by just over nine per cent to 632,000, average weekly listening is now eleven and a half hours; success partly attributed to more programming for young adults. Gordon Astley of ATV's *Tiswas star* joins the station.

August: Technicians and journalists threaten industrial action over a national pay claim.

1983 January: Sponsored cycle ride organised in association with Penn Cycling Club and Wolverhampton Lions raises over £5,000 for the charity MIND.

April: Beacon journalist abandons attempt to become a councillor in Newport Shropshire; it becomes apparent that he will contravene impartiality rules under the 1981 Broadcasting Act.

1984 July: Staff cuts due to a reduction in advertising revenue – Tomlinson states that company overheads are too high and Beacon is reviewing its staffing levels. Policy of not replacing staff means two newsroom vacancies remain unfilled and the redundancy of a receptionist. Rumours of ten redundancies are rejected. Though advertising revenue is low it is believed that July will show an increase.

September: Year-end financial results show Beacon has lost £137,131 on a turnover of £1.5 million.

October: Norman Bilton Radio Wyvern's new managing director indicates that it may join Mercia Sound and Signal Radio in sharing Beacon's overnight service. Beacon journalists hold hour-long meeting over a national dispute with the ILR companies; a work to-rule continues.

December 14th: Peter Tomlinson leaves the station; he refuses to state whether he was leaving voluntarily. Tomlinson is replaced by programme director, Bob Pierson.

1985 January: In a project co-funded by British Telecom Beacon links-up with Signal Radio, Radio Wyvern and Mercia Sound to provide programmes throughout the night. While programmes will be provided by Beacon, all stations will have joint control.

April: [Annual report: Beacon announces a loss of £127,151 for the financial year ending September 1984. This is against a profit of £53,975 during the previous year. Turnover was also down to £1,382,273 from £1,538,000. Losses blamed on weaknesses in the advertising department and slow growth in advertising volumes nationally. Selkirk reported to be "equable" about the station's difficulties].

August: Earl of Bradford hopes to become a director of Beacon Broadcasting but rejects the claim that he is planning a takeover coup; Earl plans to increase his holding from ten to twenty-five percent. In a counter move managers, led by Bob Pierson, plan to purchase shares held by Tarmac Construction and Midland News Association, some shares will be allocated to the Earl of Bradford; move to be ratified by the IBA. Despite losses, largest shareholder Selkirk Communications will continue to back the station.

October: Beacon's licence expires December 1986. IBA put Beacon's licence out to tender with the plan to extend the franchise area into Shropshire, providing an additional 300,000 listeners. Beacon looks into possibility of extending service - winning contractor will need to

purchase its own transmitting equipment for the new area. With it being the only bidder it seems likely that Beacon will retain the franchise.

- 1986** January 16: Closing date for applications. No fresh bidders - IBA refuses to 'rubber stamp' Beacon's application. Licence will extend the station's audience to approximately 1.8 million, making it the eighth largest ILR station in geographical terms. IBA blames lack of interest on the high cost of establishing a new station. Whilst expecting to announce small profit of £4,000, Beacon estimates expansion to cost around £160,000. Increased area predicted to generate pre-tax profits exceeding £150,000 within four years. Beacon hopes to launch new service on January 1 1987.

April: Australian media group, Charlford Communications, purchases Selkirk Communication's 30 per cent holding of Beacon Broadcasting. Charlford, UK subsidiary of Darling Downs Television, also acquires Selkirk's shares in twelve other ILR stations.

May: Birmingham Broadcasting's new managing director, Ian Rufus, suggests station could become the region's largest independent radio operator by taking over both Beacon and Coventry's Mercia Sound. Beacon's Bob Pierson rejects idea, emphasising Beacon's association with Darling Downs and its reach of 1.8 million people compared to BRMB's 2.2 million. "There is nothing in common with the Beacon's Black Country area and BRMB's Birmingham."

- 1987** January - February: Bob Pierson resigns as managing director and is replaced by sales director, Alan Mullett. Pierson resigns over differences of opinion with Chalford Communications, which, he claims, took an increasing interest in the station's day to day running. Pierson: while he converted losses into surplus, his authority was being increasingly undermined. Mullett is the fourth managing director since 1976. Programme director, Richard Caperon, also announces his resignation.

March: Charlford Communications forms a consortium with the Red Rose Radio group to bid for one of the three proposed national independent radio licences.

April: Beacon announces that the new Shropshire service will commence July 14. New area will add 172,000 listeners to the existing 1,628,000. With Shropshire being largely rural, station will now have a more varied reach. The new Shrewsbury office will employ three sales staff, two news reporters and a receptionist; station also looking to open an office in Telford, which may become the base for its Wolverhampton reporters. Move into Shropshire will be overseen by Pete Wagstaff. Beacon reports pre-profit of £62,000 during previous year, first quarter of 1987 shows an improvement on this figure.

June: Presenter suspended for remarks on royal ladies.

- 1989** January: Following the Home Secretary's decision to allow spit-frequency broadcasting, Beacon announces its intention to split its MW/VHF frequencies. Playing easy listening, middle-of-the-road music, the new MW service will named Radio WABC (Wolverhampton and the Black Country). Service commences Sunday January 15, Pete Wagstaff appointed programme director of new service. 'Beacon FM' will continue to present its pop orientated service.

May: As he fails to take up an option on a new share issue worth £693,000, Lord Bradford loses overall control of Beacon; his holding is reduced from 51 to 42.4 per cent. Similarly, chairman Alan Henn also reduces his holding from 26.2 to 21.8 per cent. IBA reported to be happy with the development as Lord Bradford can now be "out voted" by other shareholders. It is reported that Henn and Bradford will lose further holdings when senior management take

up their share options in 1991. Beacon, now entitled Beacon Broadcasting and Communications, looks to purchase a 12 per cent holding of Pan-European Radio Holdings at a cost of £240,000; company also looking to bid for other British radio stations. Announcement that station will double the size of its Wolverhampton headquarters at a cost of £110,000.

1990 February: In announcing Midlands Radio's Stock Market floatation, the *Birmingham Post* indicates that the group may attempt a merger with Beacon. In the absence of a formal offer Mullet refuses to comment. Midlands managing director Ron Coles states that Beacon is an option for expansion.

1991 March: While ruling out redundancies, an effort to reduce costs and change the station sound causes in a shake-up of presenters; reduction in costs is to counteract the effects of the recession and a slump in advertising revenue.

July: Alan Henn retires as chairman and is replaced by the Earl of Bradford; Henn remains a director.

November: Beacon Broadcasting announces an interest in the new Telford ILR licence. Announcer Stephen Rhodes resigns after disagreements with programme director Pete Wagstaff.

1992 September: Radio Authority release plans for a new West Midlands regional station, and local incremental stations for Wolverhampton and Birmingham. Authority believes there is no problem with stations setting up alongside BRMB and Beacon. Believing there is room for another station in Wolverhampton Beacon's Peter Wagstaff announces that the company will apply for the new licence. Authority to invite tenders next year.

December: Listening figures put Beacon/WBC's weekly audience at 602,000.

1993 February: JICRAR figures for last three months of 1992 show that Beacon has the greatest penetration in its broadcast area with 387,000 weekly listeners; in Birmingham and the Black Country station shares 7.4 per cent of the overall audience.

December: GWR pays £3.7 million to purchase Beacon Radio. While directors will share a £1 million windfall, the Earl of Bradford, who owns 49.5 per cent of Beacon, stands to lose £610,000. Though gaining c£200,000 from the winding up of the company, the Earl must buy £810,000 worth of shares from GWR to cover his Beacon guarantees.

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