

## BBC Director-General listing

### **John Reith**

*Lord Reith of Stonehaven, Sir John Reith, 1889-1971*

General Manager/ Managing Director, British Broadcasting Company 1922-1927

Reith is identified with the BBC's public service aims to educate, inform and entertain. A Scottish engineer, he became General Manager of British Broadcasting Company in 1922. He resisted the US commercial radio model and campaigned for the BBC's Royal Charter. He hated the idea of television but allowed its development. He resigned in 1938 to become the Chairman of Imperial Airways. During World War 2 he was MP for Southampton, Minister of Information and Minister of Works. Later he led various commercial and public organisations but felt unappreciated and under-employed. He publicly criticised competition in broadcasting and falling standards until he died.

### **FW Ogilvie**

*Sir Frederick Wolff Ogilvie, 1893-1949*

Director-General 1938-1942

Ogilvie was an economics academic and former Vice-Chancellor at Queen's University, Belfast. He was Director-General during the early war years, when the press and Government questioned the BBC's existence. He defended BBC independence but is thought to have shown lack of leadership. Programme services, especially Overseas broadcasting increased in his time. However, delays and overspending meant he was replaced in 1942 by a joint team of RW Foot and Cecil Graves. Reith wrote in his autobiography "I was quite sure he was not the man for the BBC". Ogilvie later became Principal of Jesus College, Oxford and was a vocal critic of the post-war BBC.

### **Cecil Graves**

*Captain Sir Cecil George Graves 1892-1957*

Joint Director-General 1942-1943

Graves joined the BBC in 1926 from the military. He was the first Director of the Empire Service and deputised for both Reith and Ogilvie. He was Reith's choice for Director-General and shared the job with RW Foot when FW Ogilvie resigned. He was responsible for programming while Foot took administrative control. He had often been ill during his BBC career and finally retired in 1943.

### **RW Foot**

*Robert William Foot OBE, 1889-1973*

Joint Director-General 1942-1943

Director-General 1943-1944

A former solicitor, Foot became General Manager of the Gas, Light and Coke Company. In 1941 he was asked to investigate BBC overspending and inefficiencies and was appointed joint Director-General soon after. He decentralised BBC management and improved relations with the Government. He was essentially an administrator and after Cecil Graves retired, Editor-in-Chief William Haley managed programming. In 1944, Foot returned to the mining industry to become chairman of the Mining Association.

### **William Haley**

*Sir William John Haley KCMG, 1901-1987*

Director-General 1944-1952

Haley was a journalist and ex-editor of the *Manchester Evening News*. He joined the BBC in 1943 and became Director-General in 1944. He established the BBC's role after the war including the new Home, Light and Third Programmes. Haley was especially proud of the Third Programme and was less interested in television. He defended the BBC against competition in his evidence to the Beveridge Committee. He went on to edit *The Times* and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* before retiring to his native Jersey. He was widely respected and uniquely esteemed by Lord Reith.

### **Sir Ian Jacob**

*Lt-Gen. Sir Edward Ian Claud Jacob, 1899-1993*

Director-General 1952-1959

Jacob was a professional soldier, serving as Military Assistant Secretary to the British War Cabinet. In 1946 the BBC asked him to run the European Service. He went on to manage all Overseas Services, then took a sabbatical at the Ministry of Defence in 1951. In 1952 he returned as Director-General. Jacob liked corporate planning and led the BBC without interfering much with programmes. His ten-year plan included regional television and the second channel. Jacob promoted the BBC as the national broadcaster when ITV began and audiences dropped. Staff liked him. He left the BBC on 31st December 1959, having groomed Hugh Carleton Greene as his successor.

### **Hugh Carleton Greene**

*Sir Hugh Carleton Greene OBE KCMG, 1910-1987*

Director-General 1960-1969

Greene was the brother of novelist Graham Greene. A former foreign correspondent, he joined the BBC to head the German Service in 1940. He went on to be Director of News and Current Affairs and Director of Administration. In 1960 he was appointed Director-General. He aimed to bring the BBC up-to-date and helped encourage a new era of programming. Highlights included *That was the week that was*, *I'm sorry I'll read that again* and current affairs programmes like *Man Alive* and *Nationwide*. His Pilkington Committee evidence helped renew the BBC's Charter. Staff admired his leadership and robustness towards the Government and Chairman Lord Hill. Greene's marital problems led him to resign and he then uniquely joined the Board of Governors. He served 2 years, defending the BBC's editorial independence from interference, before retiring to run the family Greene King Brewery.

### **Charles Curran**

*Sir Charles John Curran 1921-1980*

Director-General 1969-1977

Curran was the first ex-grammar school Director-General. He served in the Indian army but left to work in the BBC Talks department. He resigned after a dispute to edit *Canadian Fishing News* but came back in 1951 to BBC Monitoring. Subsequent posts included Secretary and Director of External Broadcasting. The Board of Governors liked him but staff described him as a poor decision-maker. He was a good administrator but may have lacked the personality needed for a troubled time: industrial action, declining License Fee revenue, Government clashes, commercial radio and Lord Hill's interference in programme-making. He worked better with new Chairman Michael Swann. He was not a television expert but oversaw a classic era of increased licence-fee income and many successful dramas, documentaries and comedies. While Director-General he was President of the European Broadcasting Union for 3 terms. In 1977 he became Managing Director of news agency Visnews. He died of a heart attack in 1980.

### **Ian Trethowan**

*Sir James Ian Raley Trethowan, 1922-1990*

Director-General 1977-1982

Trethowan left school aged 16 to join the *Daily Sketch* as an office boy. He became a print journalist then a political broadcaster for ITN. He joined the BBC in 1963 as a parliamentary commentator, fronting parliamentary magazine programme *Gallery*. He was the first Managing Director of Radio in the new era of Radios 1-4 in 1967. He took over as Director-General in 1977, a time of shrinking Licence Fee income and criticism from the Government and the Annan Report. He was committed to political impartiality despite being a member of the Conservative Party and defended ITV's controversial *Death on a Rock* broadcast. He was described as an intelligent, warm and genial man. He survived a heart attack in 1979 and stayed in office until he was 60. Afterwards, he served on the board of many organisations, including Thames Television and the British Council. He died of motor neurone disease.

### **Alasdair Milne**

*Alasdair David Gordon Milne, 1930-*  
Director-General 1982-87

His long BBC career included producing influential programmes like *Tonight* and *That was the Week that Was*. He went on to be Controller of BBC Scotland and Managing Director, Television. The Government frequently interfered with the BBC during this time and appointed politically sympathetic Governors like Chairman Marmaduke Hussey. The transmission of current affairs programme *Real Lives* brought Milne into conflict with both Government and the Board of Governors. Milne fiercely defended the BBC's editorial independence and described the Board as "a bunch of amateurs". After a series of conflicts he was forced to resign in 1987. He published an autobiography in 1988.

### **Michael Checkland**

*Sir Michael Checkland, 1936-*  
Director-General 1987-1992

Checkland was a Chartered Accountant and joined the BBC Finance Department in 1964. He was Director of Television Resources and Chairman of BBC Enterprises before becoming Director-General. The Board of Governors thought he would counter the Peacock Report's criticism and restrict BBC spending. Checkland described his objectives as introducing efficiency measures, diverting money towards programmes and accommodating new independent production quotas. He was committed to saving money but vocal about the BBC's independence. He had hoped to stay until 1995 to see out a new 5-year plan. Instead his term was extended until 1993 and Deputy Director-General John Birt was announced as his replacement 21 months in advance. Checkland eventually resigned in 1992 after he made critical comments about Marmaduke Hussey in public. Since resigning he has been director of organisations including Visnews and the NCH - Action for Children.

### **John Birt**

*Lord Birt of Liverpool, Sir John, 1944-*  
Director-General 1992-2000

Birt's long career at London Weekend Television included producing *World in Action* and heading News and then Programmes. He joined the BBC in 1987 as Deputy Director-General with a remit to manage News and Current Affairs. He devised, with Michael Checkland, an internal market system, which encouraged producers to choose between BBC suppliers and the outside market for their facilities. Soon after he took over as Director-General he was severely criticised after it was revealed that he had joined the BBC as a freelance, his services contracted to the BBC through a personal company. He subsequently became a member of staff. As Director-General from 1992 he oversaw the BBC's involvement with online and digital services and restructured further by separating broadcasting and commissioning. His reforms and management style were unpopular among staff, but he is credited with securing the BBC's future in the digital era with a favourable Charter and licence fee settlement. He resigned to become the first Director-General since Lord Reith to sit in the Lords, where he sits as a cross-bencher. He has advised the Prime Minister on crime and the railways.

### **Greg Dyke**

*Gregory Dyke, 1947-*  
Director-General 2000-2004

His pre-BBC career was in commercial and independent television, including TV-AM, TVS, Pearson and Channel 5. The BBC Board of Governors valued his commercial experience when they appointed him Director-General. He changed BBC reporting lines so that he worked more closely with programme-makers and introduced measures to save money in non-programme departments. He resigned after the Hutton Report, investigating the death of government weapon's expert David Kelly, condemned the BBC's editorial decision to broadcast a report about the government's decision to go to war in Iraq. He is now Chancellor of the University of York.

### **Mark Thompson**

*Mark John Thompson, 1957-*  
Director-General 2004-

Mark Thompson began his long BBC career in 1979 as a production trainee. He worked on programmes including *Nationwide* and *Newsnight* before becoming Editor of the *Nine O'Clock News* and *Panorama*. In 1992 he became Head of Features, then Head of Factual in 1994, Controller of BBC2 in 1996, Director of Nations and Regions in 1996 and Director of Television in 2000. He left in 2002 to become Chief Executive of Channel 4. He was appointed Director-General in May 2004.