

#### 4. CHAPTER FOUR - BBC MANCHESTER – A HISTORY

- 4.1 A brief history of the BBC is contained at Chapter 2 of the Savile Report. In respect of BBC Manchester, the book *2ZY to NBH: An Informal History of the BBC in Manchester and the North West* by Ian Hartley with a foreword by Hall (published in 1987) has been helpful<sup>10</sup>. Hartley explains that, in 1922, the Post Office agreed to grant a two-year licence to the British Broadcasting Company. This led to the establishment of London and regional radio broadcasting including in Manchester (through BBC North), where the BBC opened a radio station known as 2ZY. The licence was signed on 15 December 1922. On 1 January 1927, the British Broadcasting Company became a Corporation under Royal Charter and, in 1929, radio operations began transmission from Broadcasting House in Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester. These premises included several radio studios, a newsroom, bar, canteen and a Central Apparatus Room. The premises also housed Radio Manchester (from 1970) and Television Studios N and P. The Piccadilly Gardens site was used until 1981 when BBC Operations moved into New Broadcasting House in Oxford Road, Manchester.
- 4.2 1936 saw the advent of the first regular television service, initiated by the BBC. The service was suspended during the war, but resumed in London in 1946. In October 1951, the Holme Moss transmitter was opened and, with it, a television service in the North of England. In 1954, the BBC purchased its first television studio outside London on Dickenson Road in Rusholme, South Manchester. Formerly a church, the premises had been converted into a film studio by Mancunian Films. The premises were then refurbished and opened by the BBC in April 1956. A month later, the BBC's rival Granada Television began broadcasting. The Dickenson Road studio was used by the BBC until 1973 and was demolished in 1975.

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<sup>10</sup> I. Hartley, *2ZY to NBH: An Informal History of the BBC in Manchester and the North West*, Willow Publishing, 1987.

Programmes such as *It's a Knockout* and *Top of the Pops* were produced there.

- 4.3 The BBC daily regional television news was launched on 30 September 1957, and initially, the whole of northern England was covered as one region from Manchester. By 1959, however, it appears that there were separate news operations covering the North West, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire areas and the North East and Cumbria areas. Also in 1959, a news studio started broadcasting from Broadcasting House in Piccadilly Gardens. By the mid-1960s, some 13 different premises were being used by the BBC in Manchester. Piccadilly Gardens housed regional television, the Playhouse housed the BBC Northern Radio Orchestra, the Dickenson Road studio housed Network television, and the BBC also had studios at Milton Hall and Houldsworth Hall. Administration was housed in St Peter's Square, film processing was on Lever Street and the BBC's Outside Broadcast Department was housed on Stockport Road, Levenshulme.
- 4.4 Plans for a new television and radio headquarters had been under consideration since 1953. A site was bought, and detailed planning began in 1967. Phase one of the development, New Broadcasting House, was completed in 1975. This first phase provided a general purpose television studio, processing and other facilities.
- 4.5 Meanwhile, the *Broadcasting in the Seventies* Report, published in July 1969, marked a change of structure for Manchester. The report undertook a review of the BBC's network radio and regional broadcasting structure, concluding that the three large Network Production Centres in Bristol, Birmingham and Manchester, each having its own television studio, should be increasingly used to produce programming for national broadcasts across the United Kingdom.

- 4.6 As a result of this report, in 1970, eight new regions were created. BBC North West covered Manchester and surrounding areas such as Liverpool and Chester, with the old BBC North name being taken by the newly created BBC region based in Leeds. A Newcastle-based BBC North East region was also established.
- 4.7 New Broadcasting House in Oxford Road, Manchester, was the home of BBC North West from 1981, following a move from Piccadilly. New Broadcasting House was home to radio and television at network and regional levels as well as providing rehearsal space for the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra.
- 4.8 1986 saw further change to the regional structure. Five new regions were created, each managed by a Head of Broadcasting. Manchester became the centre of the BBC North West region (which included Cumbria), bringing together network radio, regional television and local radio stations under one management team.
- 4.9 In 1990, BBC North West, BBC North and BBC North East merged to become BBC North. The headquarters were in Manchester.
- 4.10 In 2011, BBC North moved to Media City in Salford Quays, Manchester.

