

***Frocks and Powder Puffs***  
***Dr Vanessa Jackson***

When Joyce Hawkins joined the BBC in December 1958 as a wardrobe supervisor, and sole member of the costume department at their Gosta Green studio in Birmingham, she inherited 'a small room with sink, an industrial sewing machine, a telephone and a cupboard containing a box of assorted aprons, a coat circa 1930 and just one Elizabethan sleeve.'<sup>1</sup> It was an inauspicious start to a long and creative career spanning over thirty years. Joyce was one of a number of women working in craft areas of television production, in the BBC Midland Region, who were able to navigate satisfying, innovative and collaborative careers, in a period when women in other areas were struggling for opportunities. Women who worked, and indeed, headed departments, in below-the-line roles from 1950s-1970s were pioneers who helped build BBC television production in the UK nations and regions. Working in costume and production design presented women with the potential for promotion to senior roles. They established departments and patterns of working which were replicated until the 1990s, when John Birt's organisational changes resulted in outsourcing, which decimated the BBC in-house craft bases<sup>2</sup>. The work these women performed, and the impact of their efforts, has not yet been fully recognised. This article seeks to redress this omission. Drawing on oral history interviews and written memoirs, the article considers questions around working conditions and practices, gendered workplace niches, job satisfaction and the collaborative nature of television production.

Scholarship on women working in television and film production frequently focusses on influential individuals: directors, writers, and cinematographers, with traditionally female

dominated professions, such as costume, being positioned as 'women's work'.<sup>3</sup> This foregrounding by scholars of elite women challenging male dominated roles, can lead to the wider study of women's labour in television craft areas being neglected. Costume and production designers create physical worlds for characters to inhabit on screen. When done well, these worlds are almost invisible, becoming organic extensions of the characters' personalities and the settings for their dramas. This invisibility can extend to the female workers undertaking this creative labour.

Although limited in its scope, this study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the work of costume and production design in the early years of BBC television production in the English regions. This is an area which has received very little scholarly attention to date, and has wider relevance to both the BBC and independent broadcasters in the United Kingdom, as well as in other countries.

There is a distinction in film and television budgets between 'creative' roles (above-the-line) and technical or craft labour (below-the-line). Within below-the-line roles there are nuances in terms of budgetary allocation, and therefore of economic power, with production design often receiving a higher percentage of the production budget than the costume department. The line is a physical line on the budget sheet. David Hesmondhalgh describes those above-the-line as being responsible for creating symbolic meanings, with those below it considered as technicians or craftspeople who work with their hands.<sup>4</sup> This is a somewhat crude and problematic distinction, which ignores the creative labour of many, so called, 'below-the-line' workers, including those in costume and production design. Scholars, Deborah Jones and Judith Pringle note that 'above-the-line' talent, including producers, directors and writers, help maintain their status by referring to those 'below-the-line' as 'workers,' with there being, in effect, a 'creative class division'.<sup>5</sup> This perpetuates the

divide, and ignores the creative and collaborative nature of television production across all departments; it also has repercussions in terms of craft labour in film and television being overlooked by researchers, despite this area accounting for the majority of workers.<sup>6</sup> A greater volume of scholarly work has been undertaken into below-the-line roles in film, as opposed to television production, by academics including Miranda Banks, Deborah Jones, Judith Pringle, Helen Warner, Erin Hill and Melanie Williams.<sup>7</sup> Many of their observations, for example Melanie Williams' view that it is the job of feminist film scholars 'to overturn the marginalization, devaluation and invisibility of women's work, including in the realm of costume', apply equally to television production.<sup>8</sup> That perspective is one of the motivations of this research study.

Miranda Banks argues that the invisibility of the costume designer's work on-screen marginalises the recognition of their work. It is no coincidence that the costume profession is female dominated, leading to it being undervalued and often dismissed as 'women's work'.<sup>9</sup> Emphasising this point, Erin Hill notes that occupational segregation perpetuates male domination in roles with the most power and prestige, whilst women's roles have little visibility<sup>10</sup>. Despite Banks' and Hill's work considering film and television production in the United States, the same conclusions can be applied to a UK context. With roughly equal numbers of men and women, production design, unlike costume and make-up, is not female-gendered, but it is still a below-the-line role, which frequently does not receive the recognition it deserves. It is likewise, under-researched by scholars.

Research into this area of television production is important to fully appreciate the creative contribution women have made both to television texts, and in developing cultural and production practices through their labour. Angela Coyle, writing in the 1980s, argues that television production processes are organised around male experiences and needs,

with women being excluded due to the organisational forms and culture of the industry.<sup>11</sup>

The dominant models of production are masculinised, and little academic work has been undertaken around how production processes and ways of working are adapted in female-led, below-the-line departments. As Miranda Banks points out, scholars need to understand how hierarchies of power in production, distribution and reception affect the production process and the finished product.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, to fully analyse historic media texts, an appreciation of the production context is necessary, as this alters the reading of the text, as well as the understanding of the media itself.

In addition, exploring the production practices of female-led departments can provide us with a nuanced understanding of the complexities of power dynamics and production practices. Occupational segregation by gender may reinforce male dominance in powerful roles, but it can also present opportunities for women. Melanie Bell in her study of female editors on short films in post-war Britain, concludes that the low status of the sector resulted in women's careers gaining traction, enabling some to reach senior roles and take the creative lead.<sup>13</sup> The same observation is likely to be applicable in other female dominated roles. However, Angela Coyle concludes that the few women who pursued managerial grades compromised their feminine status and never quite measured up to masculine expectations.<sup>14</sup> It is not clear what these expectations were and if this perception is reflected in the experiences of the women in management themselves, nor whether these observations apply to both above and below-the-line departments. The wider purpose of this research is to make the history of the women working in television design departments, including in managerial roles, more visible and to better understand the production cultures they engendered.

A frequently noted challenge when conducting research into women's history is gaining access to sufficient relevant sources. Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley identify gendered gaps in archives and histories of television, and a lack of interest in preserving the history of everyday programming culture.<sup>15</sup> This has relevance to this study, as the women I interviewed worked across all genres of programming, from twice-weekly live soaps to weekly factual studio shows, as well as outside broadcasts and live and recorded dramas. A large proportion of the programmes they worked on were never recorded, and therefore few traces of the media texts exist, except in a handful of photographs and production documents and in the memories of those who watched or worked on them.

Melanie Bell notes that historically women in below-the-line roles are rarely recorded in official records, meaning that alternative research methods are required.<sup>16</sup> I have been unable to visit the BBC Written Archives in Caversham personally, to ascertain the extent to which this statement is true in the production context I am investigating. However, as the working lives of women in below-the-line roles seem to be largely absent from public and institutional archives, feminist researchers must frequently resort to oral history methods to highlight the experiences of female production workers. Through undertaking the oral history process, they create new primary sources.<sup>17</sup> Of course, these sources can have weaknesses as well as strengths. There are issues over verifying the accuracy of memories, and in considering the power dynamics of the interview and the influence of the interviewer on the interviewee's testimony. Despite these potential shortcomings, oral history allows us to construct a coherent picture from a partially remembered past.<sup>18</sup> As Alessandro Portelli urges, it is relatively easy to verify facts from other sources, and it is the emotional truth and lived experience evident in oral histories, which is where their advantage lies.<sup>19</sup> Oral history creation is a collaborative process, where

the interviewee may reflect on their lived experience and make previously unnoticed links, articulating the meaning of what they have and have not done.<sup>20</sup> It can, therefore, be a very valuable research tool, especially where documentary evidence is lacking.

As noted above, the scholarly focus on elite female directors, writers and producers, distracts academic interest from less visible, traditionally female-dominated roles, which also has an impact on how we analyse research data. Helen Warner, in her study of US costume designers notes that the androcentric nature of production histories has led not only to a lack of knowledge around female-dominated professions, but a failure to provide ‘appropriate analytical tools and theoretical frameworks to make sense of them’.<sup>21</sup> However, Miranda Banks argues that feminist production studies provide a framework to analyse power dynamics, cultural and social capital, and feminine approaches in often overlooked production communities. She emphasises the need to draw from different disciplines in investigating questions of gender in historic, industrial, and aesthetic frameworks, understanding their interconnected nature.<sup>22</sup> Researchers, therefore, benefit from gathering the testimonies of practitioners, enabling an analysis and understanding of the production process, and recovering and curating histories that may not yet have been told.

In light of non-existent media texts, and the paucity of other relevant sources, in order to investigate women’s historic below-the-line production experiences, I conducted interviews with a number of costume and production designers. The women included Costumer Designers: Joyce Hawkins, Pat Godfrey, Ann Doling and Gill Hardie, and Production Designer, Margaret Peacock. When the interview transcripts were analysed, common themes emerged. These included the nature of particular roles; working conditions

and practices, including teamworking and job satisfaction; attitudes towards design departments; management and being pioneers in the work they did.

### *The BBC in Birmingham*

The BBC has enjoyed a long presence in Birmingham. In November 1922 a broadcasting station was established in Witton, a Birmingham suburb, transmitting its first radio broadcast only twenty-four hours after the first BBC transmission in London. When the British Broadcasting Company was dissolved and became the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1927, Birmingham became the headquarters of the Midland Region, covering a large area from the East Coast in Norfolk to the Welsh border, and from Nottinghamshire in the north, to the Cotswolds in the south.

In the 1930s the BBC's experimental television service began at Alexandra Palace in London, and the feminisation of costume and make-up began. The BBC in the 1930s, along with other large employers, like the Civil Service, imposed a marriage bar on women workers. However, there were special rules in the BBC's application of its bar allowing married women to work as television make-up and wardrobe assistants, as these roles were deemed traditionally undertaken by women.<sup>23</sup> The Second World War presented opportunities for women particularly in technical areas like engineering, as men took up positions in the armed forces. Hundreds of women were recruited as technical assistants in radio. However, after the war, as the men returned, the women tended to lose their skilled technical positions<sup>24</sup>. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the television services became established, including in the UK nations and regions, and in 1955 a former cinema and boxing stadium was transformed into the Gosta Green television studio in Birmingham. This enabled television programmes to be transmitted live in black and white. The studio

developed a reputation for producing live drama series including *Swizzlewick* (BBC1, 1964), *United!* (BBC1, 1965-7), *Flying Swan* (BBC1, 1965), *The Newcomers* (BBC1, 1964-69) and *The Doctors* (BBC1, 1969-71), as well as a host of one-off plays and factual series including *Farming* (BBC, 1957-88), *Gardening Club* (BBC, 1955-67) and *Keep-Fit with Eileen Fowler* (BBC, 1957-73).<sup>25</sup> Producer Peter Dews led the drama productions, which included classics such as *She Stoops to Conquer* (BBC, 1961), which was Derek Jacobi's television debut. Judi Dench, Thora Hird, Eileen Atkins and Michael Caine all appeared in Gosta Green productions in the 1950s and 1960s. The Birmingham studio was described in the 1960s by drama critic Kenneth Tynan, as the 'Mecca of television drama'.<sup>26</sup> All these programmes were serviced by the in-house costume and production design departments. In 1971 all production in Birmingham was consolidated on one site at BBC Pebble Mill, with the Gosta Green studio being closed.

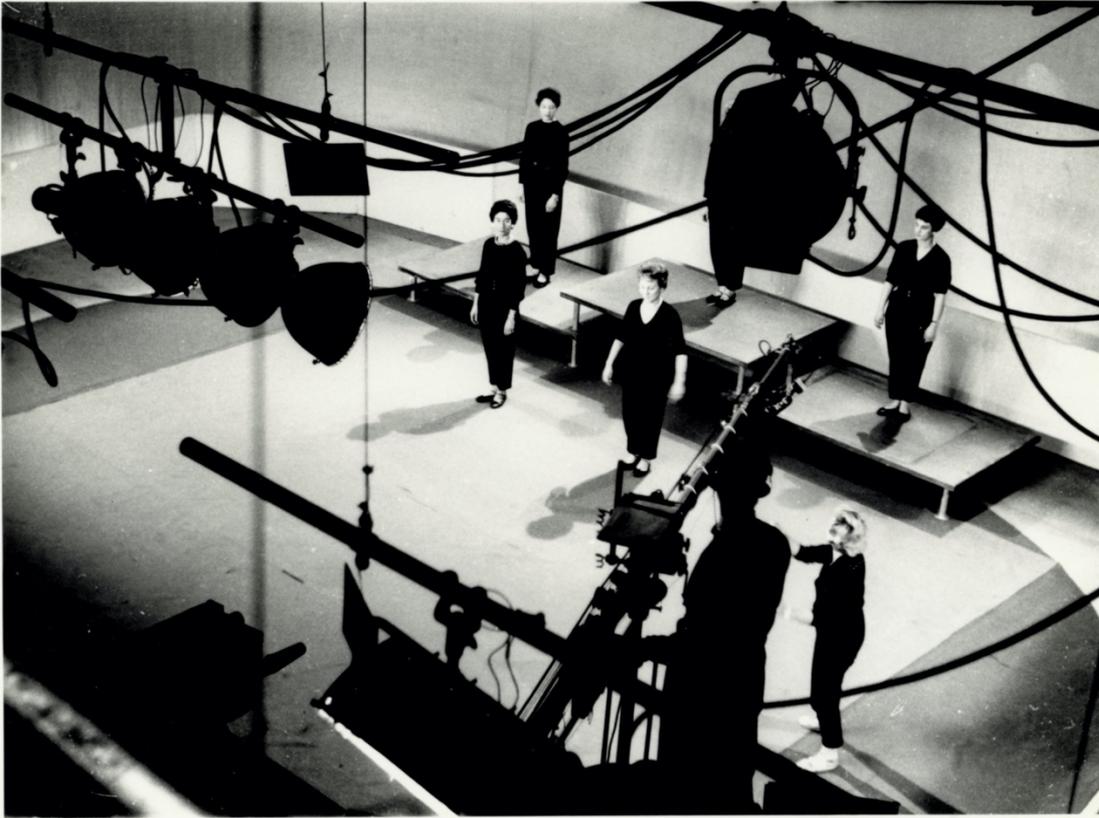
The women who participated in this study all worked in the Gosta Green studio in the 1950s to the 1970s in below-the-line roles, across both factual and drama output. Many of these women subsequently worked at other BBC centres including Pebble Mill, Cardiff, Bristol and Television Centre in London.



*Figure 1: BBC Gosta Green Studio circa 1960, photograph by Roger Davis*



*Figure 2: 'Gardening Club' rehearsal at Gosta Green circa 1960, photograph by Roger Davis*



*Figure 3: 'Keep-Fit with Eileen Fowler' at Gosta Green circa 1960, photograph by Roger Davis*

### *The Work of Costume and Production Designers*

The work of costume and production designers is complex and nuanced. As Miranda Banks explains it requires, 'skill, discipline, humility, creativity, attention to detail, and speed – all on budget.'<sup>27</sup> In addition to these demands, the interviewees spoke about the diplomacy and tact in managing artists, negotiating with other departments and suppliers, and the importance of teamwork. Ann Doling likened the role to 'being a social worker' because you are trying to keep everyone happy – the director, your staff, the artists – whilst managing your budget and fighting for what you need.<sup>28</sup> Costume designers liaise with producers and directors regarding the requirements of the programme including the style and period, as well as the logistics. They design the costumes, – although according to Ann, on many programmes, especially factual television, this was a small or non-existent element

– hiring, buying, altering, or having garments made by costumiers, in addition to organising the wardrobe needs of all those on screen.

There is a defined hierarchy of roles within costume, with dresser as the entry level, followed by wardrobe mistress/supervisor, assistant designer, designer, senior designer, and Head of Costume. The dresser prepares the artist for the camera; the wardrobe supervisor organises and checks all the costumes, lining them up for the respective artists; the assistant designer helps with fittings, takes artists shopping, and makes sure the dressers know who they are dressing; the designer plans and sources the costumes and liaises with production and other departments including make-up and production design. Although it is often thought of as a feminised department, the interviewees explained that there were many male costume designers working for the BBC, as well as male dressers employed to get male actors ready.

The interviewees also mentioned a hierarchy of television genres to work on from a design perspective. Factual shows were considered less creative than dramas, with continuing dramas and series being less prestigious than one-off or period drama serials. These divisions tended to be reflected in the design budgets, with budgets for factual shows being generally lower than those for dramas, especially period dramas. The women I interviewed worked across all genres, but had their favourites. Gill Hardie explained the process of beginning work on a drama:

I love doing the character. I liked the period shows best, but they were the hardest to work on. You read the script first. If there's a book attached to it, a period book like *Jane Eyre*, you read the book as well. You start getting ideas in your head. And you read the script through once, then you read it through again, and you tab it, you mark every page of the script with the change of day, what day it was... and then you start thinking about what you're going to do, who you're going to use, the costumier you're going to use.<sup>29</sup>

Despite drama being more prestigious, it was not necessarily the most popular to work on. For Ann Doling, the genre she most enjoyed working on was light entertainment, relishing creating costumes for comedy sketch shows. Pat Godfrey also enjoyed working on entertainment shows like *Top of the Pops* (BBC1, 1964-2006). Joyce Hawkins emphasised the complexity of her role as sole costume designer at Gosta Green, attending rehearsals, meeting actors for fittings at costumiers, taking actors shopping, and then arranging transport for the costumes from London to Birmingham. Pat described many of the productions she worked on at Television Centre, after Gosta Green and Cardiff, as 'shopping shows', those not requiring costumes to be specially made. She worked on factual series like *Blue Peter* (BBC TV, 1958-present) and *Top of the Pops*, but also on modern-day drama series, where most of the costumes were sourced from existing BBC stock, and therefore, did not require the creative designing of period drama.

The pre-production elements required a combination of creative design, organisation and management of production, staff, and artists, but the shoot demanded additional skills. Both Gill and Joyce talked about the importance of the costume department in building the confidence of the actors before a performance. This is an under-appreciated aspect of the role. Joyce mentioned needing to reassure pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy before he gave a virtuoso performance at Gosta Green. She also reminded actors in *The Newcomers*, worried about their fluffed lines, that the soap was being tele-recorded rather than live, meaning their mistakes would be edited out. Gill recalled the challenges of working with an actor who could be a bully, but was also very nervous and having to tell the odd white lie to manage his ego. For example, she pretended to re-fit a jacket that he was unhappy with, when it already fitted perfectly. In a similar vein, Pat talked about the challenges of working with actors with drink and drug habits. She was asked by production

to look after an actor with a drink problem who insisted on going to the pub, and had to try and ensure that he did not drink too much. These interventions are not considered part of the role of the costume department, and yet all the women interviewed mentioned them. They form part of the 'intricacy of the artistry, and the hidden – and gendered labor' of costume design, observed by Miranda Banks.<sup>30</sup>

### *Production Stories*

The women interviewed all had stories to tell about the productions they had worked on. These included the 'war stories' and 'against-all-odds allegories' that U.S. academic and producer/director, John Caldwell, describes as typical of below-the-line workers.<sup>31</sup> Joyce Hawkins told the story of Judi Dench's performance on the live drama *Hilda*

*Lessways* (BBC, 1959):

as Judi entered the studio her elaborate cascading bustle fell to the floor in a heap of satin and lace....as the direction "standby studio" rang out, I was on my knees frantically pinning it back up. Judi remained calm and I spent the scene huddled behind a sofa on set.

The story illustrates some of the attributes necessary for television production success, namely quick thinking, and a proactive attitude. Another of Joyce's 'against-all-odds' tales related to location filming for *The Case of Private Hamp* (BBC TV, 1959), where:

army cadets from a private school were used as extras. The bleak and cold conditions were exacerbated by firemen using their hoses, so the boys showed initiative by making a fire from wreckage timber to dry their sodden uniforms. Called for action, they rushed out in a cloud of steam. The khaki dye made pretty patterns through their string vests!<sup>32</sup>

This, again, is an amusing story of resilience, in addition to illustrating television production working methods.

Other stories related to the difficulties dressers faced, including prejudice and disrespect. One interviewee related how an actress took exception to being dressed by a Black dresser, and made inappropriate demands. Because the actress had intricate henna designs drying on her hands, she asked the same dresser to wipe her bottom after she visited the lavatory. The dresser did as requested, but the costume designer, when it was reported to her, complained to the actress that this was highly inappropriate. Another reported incident, which also tested boundaries, involved young male actors deliberately stripping naked in front of young female dressers, something designers warned their dressers about. These 'war stories' illustrate how costume workers could be treated disrespectfully, in large part due to being female, but they also demonstrate the necessity of tolerating difficult artists and show how senior staff supported more junior colleagues.

Alongside the 'war stories' and 'against-all-odds' tales, were stories that John Caldwell would term 'genesis myths', which he noted were more typical of above-the-line workers.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Joyce stated:

we were pioneers of innovative stories, being the first, in 1967, to examine the lives and problems facing our immigrant population with a play, *The Dark Man* [BBC TV, 1960], starring Earl Cameron, and a series, *Rainbow City* [BBC1, 1967], featuring Gemma Jones and Errol John in a mixed-race marriage.

She views costume as an integral part of the productions, using 'we', not 'they'. Costume staff, in her eyes, were not incidental to the making of 'innovative stories', but rather were a crucial part of the creative process, and co-creators on programmes with the production team. This demonstrates that the divide between the production team and craft workers did not necessarily exist in the eyes of these workers, and that Caldwell's differentiation in the tales told neglects the complexities of how productions work as collaborative endeavours.

### *Hours, Conditions and Attitudes*

The work of costume and design required punishing hours, due both to preparation time prior to recording or broadcast, and also time needed to clear up afterwards, something mentioned by all the women. Gill remembered doing a run of three nights, averaging twenty-one hours each night and realising the toll it took on her and colleagues. On a series featuring the *Beverley Sisters*, Joyce worked until midnight altering twenty-one dresses, with no assistance. Whilst working on *The Doctors*, she described the weekly ritual of finishing in the studio at 10pm, having to pack the costumes up, travelling thirty miles to the Cotswolds, then unpacking everything to be ready to start filming at 5am.

When working at Television Centre, Pat, along with two colleagues, decided to take action. Some weeks they were working in excess of one hundred hours. They went to management to fight for a seventy-two hour maximum working week. Their campaign was escalated to just below Director General level and took around two years to secure agreement. She did not remember the Association of Broadcasting and Allied Staff (ABAS) Union being particularly supportive in the process. Even after the agreement, they had to fight with productions to stay below the seventy-two-hour limit, along with maintaining a ten-hour break between shifts. She saw it as ongoing 'niggle' that you could not let slide. The assumption from production was that you would complete the work, despite the hours. She mentioned other battles with production to make sure you had the resources required, including the number of staff, facilities, and the budget to do a good job. This illustrates that relations between production and resource departments could become strained due to limited time, staffing and budgetary constraints.

However, there were benefits. The long hours resulted in costume, make-up and design staff being relatively well paid. Ann described the money as 'tremendous'. Those working on productions were classed as irregular hour workers and were paid for the actual hours they worked. Pat also explained that they always had equal pay within costume and other design departments, with male and female designers being paid the same rate. 'At that time, when women were paid far less than men, we considered ourselves to be very lucky, and we used to say, well, the BBC is an equal pay employer, we get the same as the men.'<sup>34</sup> This view is corroborated in contemporary reports.<sup>35</sup> However, this neglects the fact that having female-dominated roles made equal pay very difficult to reinforce.<sup>36</sup> Grading and therefore pay were also not necessarily equivalent between departments. For example, a make-up artist, who joined the BBC in 1968, interviewed in a recent study complained that make-up designers were two grades below costume designers, and never achieved parity.<sup>37</sup>

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the interviews was the attitude towards costume, make-up, and production design. Pat mentioned middle management being dismissive and thinking of them as 'silly little women in costume and make-up'. She felt that higher management were unaware of what they did, and how valuable it was. She and her colleagues just, 'accepted it and didn't think too much about it'. She mentioned an incident when a colleague was awarded a BAFTA for a production. At the award ceremony, a male member of management told her that they could just call people up off the street to do her job, illustrating the lack of understanding of the role. Gill described some members of the production team and crew thought the costume and make-up staff, 'were just a nuisance and got in the way', because of making last minute adjustments to actors on set. She said, 'they would call us frocks and make-up, powder-puffs. So, I think that fairly well sums up how they thought of us'.<sup>38</sup> These attitudes demonstrate the gendered and

hierarchical views which prioritise male labour.<sup>39</sup> Ann felt that on factual shows costume was considered less important than make-up, whilst on period dramas, costume was crucial, and therefore more prestigious.

The public recognition given to roles via programme credits substantiates these attitudes, with early dramas not crediting costume in the *Radio Times*. For instance, in the Gosta Green drama, *Hilda Lessways* (BBC TV, 1959), costume designer, Joyce Hawkins was not credited, nor was the make-up designer, however, Margaret Peacock received a production designer credit. The same is true for many other programmes of the period. For example, in *The Case of Private Hamp* (BBC TV, 1959), shown in figure 4, Joyce Hawkins was not credited in the *Radio Times*, although the production designer was.



Figure 4: Photograph by Roger Davis of 'The Case of Private Hamp' (1959). Producer Peter Dews on the left in glasses. The soldier in profile is actor Noel Johnson (known for playing Dick Barton on radio), playing Lt. Hargreaves.

As noted earlier, costume had a predominantly female workforce, as did make-up, whilst production design had roughly equal numbers of men and women. The undervaluing of the work of female dominated craft departments results in these roles being uncredited, whilst

male dominated roles such as cameraman, invariably received credit. The fact that production design was mixed in terms of gender led to greater valuing of the role, but also meant that women workers were subject to discrimination. Production designer Margaret Peacock remembers quite a lot of animosity towards women:

In Television Centre there were just four of us [women] and we really had to fight our way a bit. When I came to Birmingham, the old engineers were always a bit sniffy about women, you know, it's a man's job, it wasn't experienced with costume and make-up, but with production design, I think they really felt the way one works against their rigid structure. They were probably wary of the way we worked.<sup>40</sup>

This statement reflects attitudes which were articulated in the 1973 report, *Limitations to the Recruitment and Advancement of Women in the BBC*, which demonstrated that the corporation remained a 'bastion of extremely prejudiced views'.<sup>41</sup> The rigidity mentioned, regarding ways of working, particularly from male-dominated technical departments seems to have been at odds with the pragmatic approach employed by women like Margaret and Joyce in ensuring that the job got done, even if their methods might have been unorthodox at times. For example, in the early days of Gosta Green, Margaret even commandeered the Head of Centre's chauffeur driven car to transport props for a children's harvest festival programme. Ann, joining the costume department in 1966, explained that she was not conscious of discrimination, and accepted the gender biases of particular departments as the norm, because feminist ideas were very new.

The lack of understanding, and under appreciation of female-dominated craft areas extended to their need for facilities. When the studios moved from Gosta Green to Pebble Mill in 1971, Joyce discovered that her Wardrobe department would be in phase two of the development and her staff were housed temporarily in the basement with no natural light. The small drip-dry area had an electric point at floor level, which was clearly a safety hazard.

Joyce's office was shared with make-up, several floors away and had no telephone. This state of affairs illustrates the lack of regard towards the costume and make-up departments, in contrast to male-dominated areas like scenic services, who were provided with a spacious workshop and storage area.

### *Motherhood*

The BBC considered itself pioneering in offering specific staff maternity leave and pay as early as the late 1920s.<sup>42</sup> After WWII, maternity leave became widespread in the UK, and was enshrined in legislation through the Employment Protection Act 1975<sup>43</sup>. However, long hours and the likelihood of weeks away on location meant that motherhood was a challenge for female design staff in the post-war period. This chimes with research that many women who were successful at the BBC until the late 1970s, were childless.<sup>44</sup> Gill said that motherhood would have been impossible for her because of the demands of the job, and she remembered colleagues who left because of their children. The 1971 report, *Women in Top Jobs*, mentions a widely held perception that pregnant women would leave the corporation.<sup>45</sup> Despite the BBC's support for working mothers at an institutional level some within the Corporation found ways to make their continued employment difficult. Pat talked about discrimination, describing a colleague at Television Centre in the 1970s, who was forced to leave, as it was allegedly written into her contract that women could not continue working if they had more than two children. She later returned but had to reapply when a vacancy occurred. She also remembered a male administrator who would deliberately book women returning from maternity leave on to location dramas as their first job back, to make sure they could cope with being away from home. This individual's

approach was at odds with reports from other women that the BBC was fairer than some other employers in the treatment of working mothers.<sup>46</sup>

Joyce successfully managed to combine motherhood with her costume designer role:

On Christmas Eve 1961 I gave birth to my son, Stephen, and became a rare member of Staff. The BBC did not have many working mothers in those days! In 1965 Stephen's sister, Caroline arrived. This latter occasion was during the run of *The Flying Swan*, with film star Margaret Lockwood, a charming and very professional lady who took delight in speculating on the sex of my expected baby.

Joyce seems to have been unusual in the BBC in the 1960s being a costume designer, a working mother and leading a department. Ann also became a working mother of three young children. She juggled childcare between her mother and husband, eventually going freelance to be able to spend more time with her children. She remembers Joyce, as her manager, being very supportive and allocating programmes that she knew Ann would be able work into her schedule, illustrating how important sympathetic management was.

### *Management and teamwork*

Working in female-dominated departments, such as costume and make-up did provide opportunities to progress into management. The phenomenon of female-dominated departments presenting women with the prospect of senior positions has been noted by others.<sup>47</sup> The managers of costume and make-up at Gosta Green and Pebble Mill were consistently female, although this was not necessarily the case elsewhere. For example, the BBC Head of Costume in London was male, as mentioned in the *Women in Top Jobs* report.<sup>48</sup> However, management roles came with challenges as well as opportunities, and did not appeal to some women. A reluctance to progress into management was

articulated by two of the participants. Pat decided to stay as a senior costume designer and avoided swapping the creativity of that role for what she considered a nine-to-five administrative role. Gill also did not want to give up the enjoyable parts of her work to take on managerial responsibilities. This chimes with observations that many 'women were reluctant to be promoted away from close contact with the studio or camera'.<sup>49</sup>

Margaret Peacock did become Head of Design at Gosta Green and continued this role at Pebble Mill. Although an effective manager, she talked of missing being able to design as much as she would have liked, particularly as her department grew in size. Her management style was collaborative and enabling. She spoke of putting together a team who would do anything to please the directors. This attitude engendered a culture in Birmingham of, 'everybody working together to get a good show; whereas in London, you've got to abide by that rule and abide by the other rule, oh dear me'. The smaller size of Gosta Green seems to have facilitated less rule-bound working practices. Margaret also spoke of the difficulties of managing staff with 'their foibles and their peculiarities' and of allocating people who would be amenable to the directors. This remark illustrates that even in the era of the 1950s to the 1970s the hierarchy of power in production lay with the editorial team, and particularly the director.

As the sole costume designer at Gosta Green, Joyce was managing a team from the beginning of her time there. Like Margaret, she surrounded herself with a cohesive group of workers. She used informal recruitment methods, including employing students from a local drama school and dressers from Handsworth School of Dress Design on a casual basis. Pat Godfrey was one of these students and spent her Friday and Saturday evenings dressing actors on live dramas. This experience was what led her to a career in costume. She remembers the Head of Costume at Television Centre being impressed by the drama output

of Gosta Green, which she put down to Joyce, because she was so good at her job. Pat also remembers Joyce's firmer side:

She took no casualties. Really, I mean, if she had a strong feeling about something she would dig her heels in and fight for what she felt was right. And I'm sure a lot of the management either probably thought, "ahh that woman" or, they admired her for the philosophy. You know, she was really great.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1980s, Angles Coyle wrote that female managers sacrificed their femininity and were considered ineffective by their male colleagues.<sup>51</sup> However, Margaret and Joyce developed a resilience and an aura of authority, which they retain to this day. There is no indication they jeopardised their femininity, whilst they established very effective departments of staff who respected and kept in touch with each other long after they had retired, demonstrating the extent of their social capital. They seem to typify the warmth and humanity towards colleagues, along with an understanding of other people's problems, that are mentioned as attributes of successful female managers.<sup>52</sup>

The teams that women like Margaret and Joyce established were crucial in creating a productive working environment. The women I interviewed all spoke very positively about their colleagues and the teamworking involved in their work. Joyce remembers:

My colleagues at Gosta Green were without exception friendly and cooperative. Together we were a great team, taking pride in our work, sharing and helping to alleviate problems and rejoicing together at our successes, a splendid example of collaboration between all skills.<sup>53</sup>

The women had close working relations, which is illustrated by the fact that they are all still in contact with Joyce, fifty years after the close of Gosta Green; she continues to be a BBC matriarch into her nineties. Pat also mentioned the importance of close working relationships with colleagues in different design disciplines, especially between the make-up and costume designer, interpreting together the look of the character, and both building the

confidence of the actor, in different ways. She likened it to a family, especially when you could be on location with them for up to three months at a time. She mentioned still meeting up with colleagues at least once a year, even though they are geographically scattered. This spirit of collaboration typifies the production culture engendered by the working practices of female-led, below-the-line departments. I would argue that this is what differentiates them from masculinised models of production.

### *Pioneering Spirit*

The BBC in its early decades, as Kate Murphy has explained, was a place where women could excel. Its pioneering spirit, sense of modernity and the support of Lord Reith, presented attractive career opportunities for middle-class, predominantly white, women. However, these favourable conditions ebbed and flowed, and in the 1970s diminished as bureaucracy, professionalisation and conformity masculinised the corporation, creating a discriminatory environment.<sup>54</sup> There were discriminatory practices in the regional production centres, as well as in London, but there also seems to have been a continuation of the pioneering spirit as television production developed and became established in the immediate post-war period.

Production designer, Margaret Peacock was one of the pioneers in the establishment of network television in the English regions. She set up teams and devised operating systems. Approached by the producer, Barry Edgar<sup>1</sup>, she was involved in the establishment of the Gosta Green television studio in the 1950s. Barry Edgar visited Margaret, who was then working in Television Centre in London, 'I hadn't even seen Gosta Green Studios then.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Edgar was part of a media dynasty. His father, Percy Edgar was an important figure in the early days of the BBC in Birmingham prior to WWII. His son, David Edgar is a playwright.

There was nothing there at all. No facilities whatsoever. No workshops, no buyers, no props'. She remembers Edgar wanted to stage a mixture of programming, including variety and music, and so, she, 'went up with three scene-hands from Television Centre and a lorry. It was a matter of borrowing stuff from London to use'. She talked about many people in Birmingham moving across from radio into television, to staff these new programmes, and described the way of operating in the beginning as 'amateurish', because of trying to find people to do what was necessary, when you had not yet established your own group of workers around you.<sup>55</sup> The story is of how a broadcast centre was started from nothing, requiring huge collective effort and the establishment of professional codes and ways of working.

### ***Conclusion***

The women studied for this article made a meaningful contribution to the development of television production in the post-war period. They were pioneers in their own departments, building productive and collaborative teams and helping shape the working practices that became industry norms. They did face difficulties over excessively long hours, discrimination regarding the value of their work to a production and juggling work with caring responsibilities, but they worked together to improve their labour conditions.

Despite the privations and challenges they faced, all had long, and for the large part, satisfying careers. Pat felt that costume had given her 'a fabulous career', which she thoroughly enjoyed, crediting Joyce with providing her first opportunity. Ann described her career as 'amazing, wonderful ... I loved the whole thing at the costume department from beginning to end; loved it, all of it'. Being creative in their roles provided immense satisfaction. Pat said that what she misses since she retired is, 'the excitement of reading

the scripts and planning it all in my head without the involvement of all the people who could upset the applecart'. The women particularly enjoyed the collective endeavour across all departments to produce the best televisual show they possibly could. They felt part of the production process, not removed from it. The fact that Joyce is still in touch with all the women I interviewed, over fifty years since the Gosta Green studio closed, demonstrates the closeness of the working relationships they built, which several of the interviewees described as like a family.

This study casts light on the intricacies of the work of female below-the-line workers in both costume and production design, in terms of managing staff, budgets and logistics, production and artists. It demonstrates the creativity required, but also the importance of transferrable skills such as influencing and negotiating, whilst being sensitive to the needs of artists and their role preparation. In addition, it provides an insight into the culture and practices of female-led craft departments from 1950s to the 1970s, which created productive and supportive work environments, particularly for other women.

The small scale of the study leaves room for further research concerning the history of women's 'below-the-line' labour in television production, including the application of additional methods to complement oral history testimony, for example through archival records and private collections. In addition, there is more work to be done on the pioneering history of production in the English regions from the 1950s onwards, encompassing engineering and editorial roles in addition to design departments.

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<sup>1</sup> Joyce Hawkins, written memoir shared with the author in September 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Tristan K O'Dwyer, 'Managing Change in Broadcast Organisations: BBC Producer Choice Twenty Years On', *Journal of New Media and Mass Communication*, 1/1 (2014), 1-11, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Fortmueller, 'Gendered Labour, Gender Politics: How Edith Head Designed her Career and Styled Women's Lives', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 38/3 (2018).

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- <sup>4</sup> Miranda J. Banks, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, 87-98, 89.
- <sup>5</sup> Deborah Jones and Judith K. Pringle, 'Unmanageable Inequalities: Sexism in the Film Industry', *The Sociological Review* 63/1 supplementary (2015), 37-49, 42.
- <sup>6</sup> Mark Banks, 'Craft Labour and Creative Industries', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 16/3, (2010), 305-321, 317.
- <sup>7</sup> Miranda Banks, 'Gender Below-the-Line'; Deborah Jones and Judith Pringle, 'Unmanageable Inequalities'; Helen Warner, 'Below-the-(Hem)line: Storytelling as Collective Resistances in Costume Design', *Feminist Media Histories*, 4/1 (2018), 37-57; Melanie Williams, 'The Continuity Girl: Ice in the Middle of Fire', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10/3 (2013), 603-18.
- <sup>8</sup> Melanie Williams, 'The Girl You Don't See', *Feminist Media Histories*, 2/2 (2016), 71-106, 72.
- <sup>9</sup> Miranda J. Banks, 'Gender Below-the-Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies', in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (London: Routledge, 2009), 87-98, 91.
- <sup>10</sup> Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press 2006), 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Angela Coyle, 'Behind the Scenes: Women in Television', in *Women and Work: Positive Action for Change*, eds. A. Coyle. & J. Skinner (New York, New York University Press, 1988), 58-79, 58.
- <sup>12</sup> Miranda J. Banks, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, 87-98, 96.
- <sup>13</sup> Melanie Bell, 'Rebuilding Britain: Women, Work and Nonfiction Film 1945-1970', *Feminist Media Histories*, 4/4 (2018), 33-56, 52.
- <sup>14</sup> Angela Coyle, *Women and Work*, 58-79, 59.
- <sup>15</sup> Rachel Moseley and Helen Wheatley, 'Is Archiving a Feminist issue? Historical Research and the Past, Present and Future of Television Studies', *Cinema Journal*, 47/3 (Spring 2008), 152-158.
- <sup>16</sup> Melanie Bell, 'I owe it to those women to own it': Women, Media Production and Intergenerational Dialogue through Oral History', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 18/4 (2021), 518-537, 521.
- <sup>17</sup> Shelley Cobb and Linda R Williams, 'Histories of Now: Listening to Women in British film', *Women's History Review* 29/.5 (2020), 890-902. 892.
- <sup>18</sup> Birsen Talay Kespglu, 'Pressing the "Record" Button for Hearing Women's Voice in the Past', in *Women's Memory: The Problem of Sources*, ed. Fatma Ture (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) 107-126, 121.
- <sup>19</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different?' in *The Oral History Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), eds. Perks, R. & Thomson, A. (Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2006), 48-58, 32.
- <sup>20</sup> Shelly Cobb and Linda R Williams, 'Histories of Now', 890-902. 899.
- <sup>21</sup> Helen Warner, 'Below-the-(Hem)line', 37.
- <sup>22</sup> Miranda J. Banks, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, 87-98, 95.
- <sup>23</sup> Kathryn R Terkanian, *Women, Work, and the BBC: How Wartime Restrictions and Recruitment Woes Reshaped the Corporation, 1939-45*, Doctoral Thesis, Bournemouth University (2019), 44.
- <sup>24</sup> Emma Sandon, 'Engineering Difference: Women's Accounts of Working as Technical Assistants in the BBC Television Service between 1946-1955', *Feminist Media Histories* 4, 4 (2018), 8-32, 20
- <sup>25</sup> Kenneth Bird, *From Pioneers to Pebble Mill* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1971).
- <sup>26</sup> Joyce Hawkins, 'Pinto at Pebble Mill', *Prospero* (December 2013), 4.  
[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/my pension/en/prospero\\_dec\\_2013.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/my pension/en/prospero_dec_2013.pdf).
- <sup>27</sup> Miranda J. Banks, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, 87-98, 91.
- <sup>28</sup> Ann Doling, interview with the author, 2022.
- <sup>29</sup> Gill Hardie, interview with the author, 2021.
- <sup>30</sup> Miranda J. Banks, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, 87-98, 95.
- <sup>31</sup> John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 38.
- <sup>32</sup> Joyce Hawkins, memoir, 2021.
- <sup>33</sup> John Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 38.
- <sup>34</sup> Pat Godfrey, interview with the author, 2021.
- <sup>35</sup> Michael P. Fogarty et al., *Women in Top Jobs*, 164.
- <sup>36</sup> Jeannine Baker and Jane Connors, 'Glorified Typists' in No-man's Land: the ABC Script Assistants' Strike of 1973', *Women's History Review* 29, 5 (2020), 841-859, 841.
- <sup>37</sup> Melanie Bell, 'I owe it to those women to own it', (2021), 518-537, 525.

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- <sup>38</sup> Gill Hardie, interview, 2021.
- <sup>39</sup> Melanie Bell, 'I owe it to those women to own it', (2021), 518–537, 52.
- <sup>40</sup> Margaret Peacock, interview, 2021.
- <sup>41</sup> Douglas Moran, *Limitations to the Recruitment and Advancement of Women in the BBC* (1973), BBC; Suzanne Franks, 'Attitudes to Women in the BBC in the 1970s – Not So Much a Glass Ceiling as One of Reinforced Concrete', *Westminster Papers*, 8/3 (2011), 125-142, 130.
- <sup>42</sup> Kate Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: A History of Early Women at the BBC*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 90.
- <sup>43</sup> Employment Protection Act 1975, (c.71), (London: The Stationery Office).
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 137.
- <sup>45</sup> Michael P. Fogarty, A. J. Allen, Isobel Allen, and Patricia Walters, *Women in Top Jobs*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971), 209.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 209.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 191.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 189.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 61.
- <sup>50</sup> Pat Godfrey, interview, 2021.
- <sup>51</sup> Angela Coyle, *Women and Work*, 58-79, 59.
- <sup>52</sup> Michael P. Fogarty et al., *Women in Top Jobs*, 204.
- <sup>53</sup> Joyce Hawkins, memoir, 2021.
- <sup>54</sup> Kate Murphy, '“New and Important Careers”: How Women Excelled at the BBC, 1923-1939', *Media International Australia* (2016), 161/1, 18-29.
- <sup>55</sup> Margaret Peacock, interview with the author, 2021.