

How Does The BBC Know What Listeners Think Of A Programme?

(By R. J. E. Silvey, BBC Listener Research Director, in the "Radio Times")

LET'S take a particular instance, an imaginary one. To begin with, someone has a Bright Idea, for that is the way broadcasts are born. A feature producer thinks an interesting programme could be made about censuses, and sketches out a plan for treating the subject.

The Bright Idea is accepted—but not without some misgivings. So the Listener Research Department is asked for a subsequent report on the way listeners have received the programme. Listener Research is told that the title is to be "Numbering the People," that the subject will be treated historically, beginning

question would be dealt with separately. Finally, a summary, which might read like this:

"Numbering the People" attracted an audience of normal size for a feature programme broadcast in the Home Service early in the evening. Most of the listeners who heard it found it interesting and enlightening (it was awarded higher marks than the average), though there was some feeling that rather too much had been compressed into the time. On the whole, the broadcast seems to have been regarded as a smooth production which listeners found easy to follow, though there were a few complaints that the medieval episodes were confusing. Except for a

BBC Listener Research Department; FEATURE PROGRAMMES Panel
PLEASE post this form back on the Sunday after the programme;
Don't DUTY-LISTEN to this programme.

FP3/49a

"NUMBERING THE PEOPLE" Tuesday, 31st November, 1943. 8.30-9.00 p.m.
Home Service.

1. Did you find this programme easy to follow? QUITE EASY/RATHER
DIFFICULT/VERY DIFFICULT.
If not, where did the difficulty arise?
2. What was your opinion of the production of this programme?
EXCELLENT/GOOD/ADEQUATE/POOR/VERY POOR.
Space for comments:
3. Do you think that too much or too little was attempted in the time?
TOO MUCH/ABOUT RIGHT/TOO LITTLE.
Space for comments:
4. In the light of your answers, how many marks do you give this broadcast?
(Maximum 10.....).

with the Old Testament days, telling of various attempts at census-taking in the Middle Ages, with all the violent superstitious opposition which they encountered, and showing the importance of the Census in administration. The whole will be treated dramatically, rep. actors will play the parts, and little or no music will be used. With this information, the Listener Research Department draws up a brief questionnaire, as shown on this page.

A copy of this questionnaire is sent to each of the 600 members of the BBC Feature Programme Panel — ordinary listeners up and down the country who have volunteered to help. They are all people interested in feature programmes, but by no means necessarily uncritical of them. Not all will complete this questionnaire. They are particularly requested not to listen to it out of a mere sense of duty. All the BBC asks is that they should complete the questionnaire if they happened, in the ordinary course, to listen to the programme.

After the broadcast, the completed questionnaire will flow back to Broadcasting House, and the work of analysis will begin. Weighing carefully all the points of view, a research assistant will produce a draft report, usually running to one page of foolscap. This will show how big an audience listened to the broadcast (she gets the estimate from another Listener Research activity, the Survey of Listening); how this audience compares with those for other similar broadcasts; how many marks the broadcast earned from panel members; again how this compares with marks awarded to similar programmes. Why listeners liked or did not like "Numbering the People" would merge from the rest of the report, where the answers to each

few listeners who found it hard to believe that as late as 1931 there were people who falsified their ages on the census returns, the matter of the broadcasts was not the subject of much comment. A number of listeners spontaneously praised the restrained use of music."

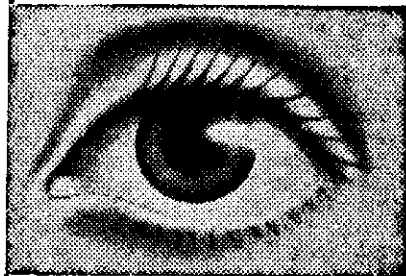
Such a report would please any producer, though he might be momentarily indignant that anyone should cast doubts on his facts!

Even after that there might still be more evidence from Listener Research. The BBC's Local Correspondents might report that, on the day after, listeners were talking about it and possibly praising it in pubs and clubs and buses and trains. A typical report would be: "Several people in our works canteen remarked that they had heard this programme and found it very interesting. They all said they'd no idea before how important the Census was."

From History to Doctors

PROBABLY there are not many listeners of the popular ZB quiz session "History And All That" who could say off-hand exactly how long the session has been running, even if the answer were worth £19. However, although the session has been going for a long time, there will be many listeners who will be sorry to hear that it is now being replaced. The consolation the Commercial Division offers is the promise that "A Doctor's Case Book," which will take its place, is in the front rank of popular radio serials, and is said to conform to the saying that books about doctors, dogs and fishing are inevitably best-sellers.

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