

"HERE IS THE NEWS And This Is -



**Robert
Harris** ★

**Derek
Prentice** ★

**Neal
Arden** ★

**Robert
Beatty** ★

**Norman
Claridge**

HERE are the portraits and potted biographies, supplied by the BBC, of five men who are heard regularly as announcers in the "London Calling" programmes. All have come to radio from the stage.

It gives him a sense of reality and the feeling that it is as useful work as any that he can do at present. His main interests are old houses and travelling. He has visited America several times. He was offered a broadcasting contract in Australia last year, but refused it because he did not wish to leave England while the war was on.

- Reading It"

MANY listeners to the BBC's Empire Service must at times have sat up with a jerk on hearing the voice of the announcer—"Gosh! I know that voice!" before the voice announces its name as that of ROBERT HARRIS—the man who played opposite Jane Cowl in New York in Noel Coward's *Easy Virtue*, opposite Peggy O'Neil in Barrie's *Little Minister*, and as Oberon in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, opposite the Titania of Gwen Ffrangcon Davis—to mention just a few of the parts in which he has made his name.

Robert Harris is not at all like the conventional idea of an actor. Built on a rather slight scale, he has aquiline good looks and the quiet, observant manner of the man who is more used to watching life go by, rather than playing an active part in it. He is a Somerset man, born there in 1900, with the addition of a Chinese background in early years. His father was Commissioner of Maritime Customs out there. Thereafter Harris's background was conventional for a bit. He was at Sherborne and Oxford, where he took English Literature, but also discovered his own taste and flair for the theatre in the Oxford University Dramatic Society. From there he went on to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and then with Basil Dean for three years, getting his first important part in one of the early Clemence Dane plays.

Too young for the last war—he was expecting his commission when the Armistice was signed—Harris now finds himself too old for this one. Hence his joining of the BBC in June, 1940, as a news reader. He likes the job because

A SOUTH AFRICAN with an English upbringing, a man who is keen on all sports, and expert at none; a fresh and friendly individual with a delight in elaborate leg-pulls—those are the outstanding features of DEREK PRENTICE, who is best known to overseas listeners as a news reader and announcer in the BBC's *London Calling*.

Prentice was born in South Africa, and still has relations in that Dominion. After a childhood in England, he was at Winchester and Oxford, and extended his knowledge of the world by studying also at the Sorbonne in Paris and spending a working holiday at Bonn in Germany. Games and learning languages have been among his chief interests, and he hastily disclaims any competence at any particular game. He has also walked over a great part of the Continent, and was in fact learning Russian with the object of going to Moscow when the war broke out.

In 1925 Prentice went seriously to work and joined a firm manufacturing motor and aircraft instruments eventually reaching the stage of being a tester for instruments fitted to the Schneider trophy machines. Eventually, however, his undergraduate enthusiasm for the stage reasserted itself, and for five years following 1933 he had an unbroken theatrical career—Bernard Shaw plays and Malvern Festivals, at the Open Air Theatre in London's

Regent Park, and with the Birmingham Repertory Company. One of his most famous parts was that of the French professor in *French Without Tears*. He is especially proud of having god-fathered Emlyn Williams on to the stage—that was when they were both at Oxford—and of having been told by Bernard Shaw that he had "the face of a born idiot." He once duped an English literary club into accepting him as a visiting German student, not for days, but for a matter of months.

Prentice is married to Catherine Welford, an Australian girl from Melbourne, has a daughter now just over a year old, and he especially abominates women wearing trousers.

AN actor who started his stage career at the age of two, became an optical student, then a policeman in Southern Rhodesia, a salesman of farming implements, and then an actor again via the road of film commentator. That in brief is the career of NEAL ARDEN who is now heard as an announcer on the BBC's Empire Service.

Born in London in 1909 of theatrical parents, Arden made his first appearance on the stage at the age of 2. He hated it and at the age of 4 was so stubborn that he preferred a thrashing from his father to any further appearance. From the age of 9 to 16 school (the Royal Masonic) saved him from the theatre for a bit, and when he left school he at once got his nose down to the grindstone of optics, largely in order to avoid the pressure on him to return to the stage. When he was eighteen the lure

of adventure brought him out to South Africa, and, declaring he was twenty, he got accepted by the B.S.A. With them he served the full three years, and after that he took a turn selling farming implements. When that palled, he returned to London, joined the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, and went touring with provincial companies.

By 1934, Arden had made contact with the BBC, and for three years did much broadcasting in the Drama Department and in the Children's Hour. He has figured, especially as "Rat" in the radio version of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. He also did a good deal of work in commercial radio. The outbreak of war found him in the Queen's Westminsters, in which he was a sergeant until March, 1940, when he was discharged as medically unfit. Since then he has been concerned in the making of films for the Ministry of Information, especially as a film commentator. He has appeared in *Atlantic Ferry* and *Pimpernel Smith*, played in the Harrogate Repertory Company, and also in the radio feature *Under Your Tin Hat*. He has only lately joined the regular staff of the BBC as an announcer.

THE first London job of ROBERT BEATTY, now one of the British Broadcasting Corporation's Empire announcers, was that of playing the part of a corpse in a small theatre for 7/6 a night. He has come to life since then. Previously his career was Canadian, and included his "life's bad minute." That occurred when, as a very amateur airman, he was doing a vertical turn too near the ground, and his engine cut out. Since then he has been more careful.

Robert Beatty is a tall, dark man with that deep chest voice so characteristic of the North American Continent.

(Continued on next page)

Close-ups Of The BBC's Empire Announcers