

# NZBS Speed Section Counts Time in Split Seconds

IN spite of its name the Talks Section of the NZBS is not always (*The Listener* has found) the most vocal and communicative branch of the Service. It's obliging enough—you can borrow anything you want so long as it's safely on record, in a script or on a disc. But ask Talks to tell you about one of its own special chores and you're lucky if you get a 100-word summary, which boils down to the fact that whatever it is doing is "just an ordinary job." And modesty, as any journalist will tell you, is not enough.

So when *The Listener* had listened with admiration for some days to *The Queen's Day* and *Royal Progress*, and had been told (in 100 words) how they were compiled, it took up the invitation to visit the Wellington Production Studios to see for itself how these programmes are made. There it heard the raw material being stock-piled, saw scripts being shaped and reshaped within minutes of deadline, and shook with sympathetic fright while technicians twiddled knobs and started and stopped discs in what could so easily have been the wrong places but apparently never were.

*The Queen's Day* and *Royal Progress*, as everyone now knows, are Royal Tour programmes made up of extracts from broadcast commentaries, supplemented by eye-witness accounts and interviews from NZBS commentators. This supplementary material, along with some of the descriptive matter used in the programmes, is not broadcast at any other time, so that these magazine programmes are not simply

the pickings of the day's broadcasts. Late evening and morning events are covered in *The Queen's Day*—broadcast after the 12.30 p.m. Weather Forecast—which also looks forward into the afternoon. *Royal Progress*, broadcast after the 9.0 p.m. Weather Forecast, covers the events of the whole day, but gives greater weight to those of the afternoon.

As *Listener* readers will know, all broadcast commentaries on Royal Tour events are fed by line to Wellington, where they are recorded by six tape recorders—three sets of two—specially installed in the lounge of the Wellington Production Studios. Supplementary material is also received there at pre-arranged times. Any of the three inward booths can use any of the three inward lines at any time, and as Bill Smith, technician in charge of the unit, explained, a distribution amplifier in each booth ensures that the booths are so isolated that any switching in one booth can't interfere with the programme being received in either of the others. Lines from the recorders to the adjoining control room make it possible to replay any tape there and to re-record selected parts on tape or disc; and audition speakers give the production team a choice of hearing either what is being recorded or what is being replayed in any booth.

Members of the Talks Section production team, under the Supervisor of Talks (J. H. Hall) are Keith Hay, Peggy Magee, Trevor Williams, Ross Martin, Bill Roff and Chris Pottinger. This team works three to a shift, which starts before the first broadcast for the day and goes on till after the last. Up till now it has been anything up to 14 hours. Production for the day doesn't end with the broadcast of *Royal Progress*, for after that the *Women's Ses-*

*sion* item for the next day, and next morning's "trailer" for the day's broadcasts, have still to be recorded.

How does the Talks Production team go about its work? As the broadcast and supplementary material comes in during the day, one or more of its members listen, stopwatch in hand, for the sort of material that, briefly introduced, will contribute to a word picture of the day's events. As each extract is selected it is replayed from the tape and recorded in duplicate on disc in the control room. People who have never seen anything but an ordinary commercial recording may not know that a disc of the sort used in the Royal Tour magazine programmes has a series of tracks with a narrow strip of uncut disc between each. These tracks or cuts are identified on the script which contains the final shape of the programme in this way:

**DISC 1 SIDE 1 TRACK 4 Begins:**  
"I think it's more than likely . . ."  
**Ends:** ". . . biggest crowd in Rotorua's history." Dur. 20 seconds.

With up to 20 cuts in a programme, and sometimes only a word or two of

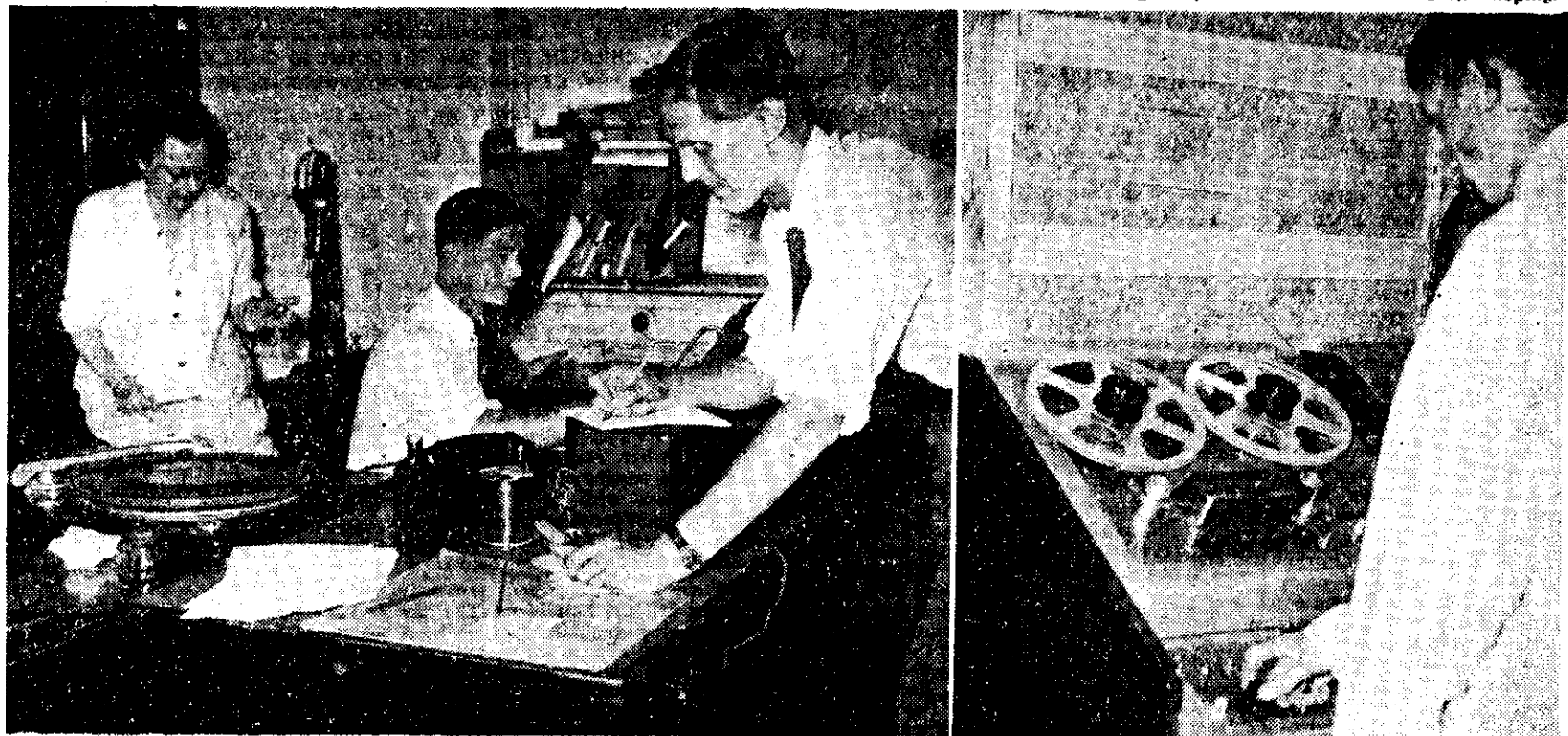
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narration between cuts, a technician must move fast to keep the programme going. The two "panel" technicians chiefly responsible for this are Jack Hoare and Graham Hunt, who have with them Ron Glenn and Peter Slocombe.

Since these magazine programmes are being heard twice every day—or almost every day—throughout the Royal Tour, it is important that they should be varied as much as possible, so the choice of cuts and the arrangement of the programme is not as simple and straight-

forward a job as it seems. Much thought goes into the preparation of the script, which is made up of "headlines" and brief passages of narration to introduce and link the recorded items. Sometimes, however, it must be changed at the last moment. When broadcasts are running into the time when the programme is on the air something especially good might have to be added, in much the same way as a newspaper man adds a "latest developments" paragraph to his story just before his paper goes to press.

When for one reason or another *The Queen's Day* or *Royal Progress* doesn't take shape till close to the time of broadcast the scene in the Wellington Production Studios is, to an outsider, pretty close to chaos. Members of the production team dart from one room to another with slips of paper carrying their cryptic notes of last-minute cuts which are quickly found on the tapes. (Even then it is apparently not too late for a technician to play a tape so as to cut a superfluous "and" from the start of a sentence if that will make the programme flow better.) Under ideal conditions the whole programme is recorded on tape and simply played over at the time of broadcast, but conditions had been ideal only once when *The Listener* called last—and we were "lucky" enough to strike one day when the last cut was made a minute or two before the broadcast and the whole programme went straight on the air as it was being produced. The occasion hadn't yet occurred, we were told, when a really hot piece of "stop press" was fed straight into the programme as it was broadcast live from another station—but from the look in the eye of the steel-nerved technician, fresh from a session with cues and cuts of split-second timing, we gathered that it was quite possible, and that he was still hoping.



LEFT: Peggy Magee, Graham Hunt and Bill Roff check and time one of the items for a "Royal Progress" programme. RIGHT: Peter Slocombe, one of the technical staff, monitors a commentary being fed from landline to tape-recorder