

THE HERITAGE OF BRITAIN

AN attempt to assess the Briton's heritage from the past and at the same time to see how he stands with regard to the future was made last year in a BBC programme, *The Heritage of Britain*. Broadcast to mark the Festival of Britain, the thirteen half-hour programmes were heard in both the Overseas Service and the Light Programme. Now they are to be broadcast from NZBS stations.

"Take away all the trappings of wishful thinking, and we still have certain very definite assets," Paul Johnstone (who produced several of the programmes) wrote in introducing the series in the *Radio Times*. "Grant our sentimentality, our muddled thinking, lack of logic, distrust of cleverness, there still remains a core of toughness, of moral resolution, that is none the less priceless because it is best seen to advantage in times of difficulty."

Linked by the common framework of a fine musical theme, specially composed for them by Sir Arthur Bliss, the individual shape of *The Heritage of Britain* programmes was left to the various styles of the men and women who wrote and produced them. These include such well-known people in the world of broadcasting as Colin Wills, Wynford Vaughan Thomas and Jenifer Wayne. In form the programmes vary from the full-scale dramatised historical feature which follows the changing character of "The British Abroad" to documentaries in which (for example) "The Briton at Work" will speak for himself.

A number of accidents of history and geography have produced the British people, and some of these are considered in the first programme, "The People"—the story of many peoples and small kingdoms uniting in one co-ordinated whole "tolerating individuality and idiosyncrasies, but abhorring tyranny." (Or, to quote Colonel Walter Elliot, the fusion of Celt and Gael, Anglo-Saxon and Norman, has created "a quick, tremendous, inventive people.")

Colin Wills, who wrote the second programme, "The British Abroad," begins his story at the beginning, explaining away the fact that the Ancient Britons were not great travellers—their coracles were not built for long sea voyages. But he goes on to give some lively sketches of periods when the British *did* travel and weren't always welcome, for they sometimes took along with them invading armies. He concludes that though times have changed the Briton is still to be found (if not always readily recognisable) flying oceans, spanning continents, building bridges and roads and ranging the world generally.

Crafts and Arts

The British have a great tradition of craftsmanship, which can be traced back without difficulty through twelve centuries, and something is said about this in "The Briton at Work." Today this craftsmanship may take the form also of industrial "know-how," skill in research and technological flexibility, but probably in no other country is there the same large body of skilled, experienced craftsmen.

Impressions of "The British at Home," "The Land" (which has helped



An old straw thatcher insists on as high a standard as he knew in his youth

to give the British people many of their characteristics), "The Briton at Leisure" and "The Briton at School" complete the first half of the series.

The more intangible aspects of the British heritage as they stand today are examined in the remaining six programmes. The first of these, "British Taste," takes the form of a discussion

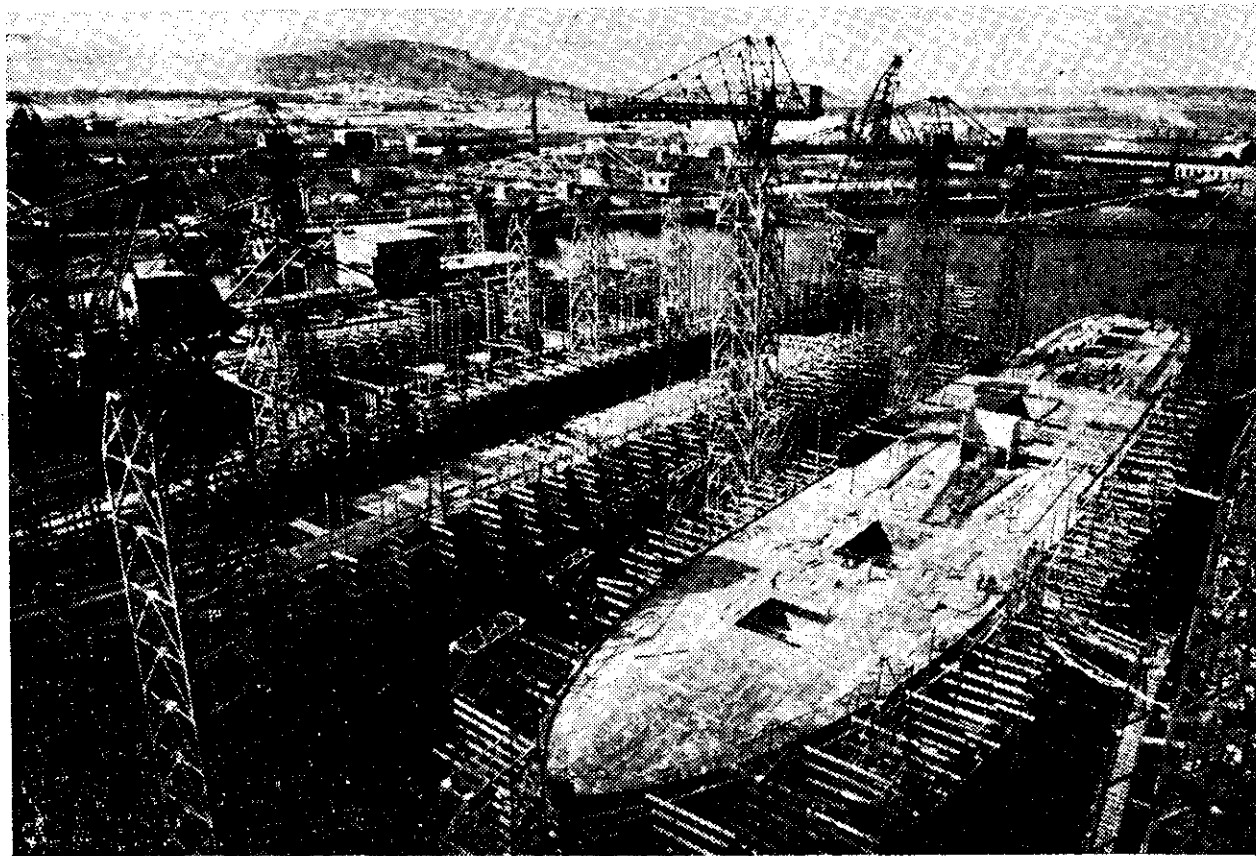
between W. Macqueen-Pope (theatrical historian), Walter Allen (literary critic), Boyd Neel (musician and conductor) and Geoffrey Boumphrey (writer and historian), who introduces the programme.

The idea that the tradition of freedom in Britain grows out of the character of the British is discussed in the second programme, and in the third, "The Lion and the Unicorn," the British constitution is examined. Then there is a study of the enquiring mind—an attempt to show that a general interest in the world about them, and a delight in asking themselves questions about it, has been a characteristic of Britons, from kings, on the one hand, who supported and encouraged all kinds of learning and missionary activity, to the amateur botanist or the organiser of a field club, on the other. This programme includes comments by Sir Ernest Woodward, Professor of History in the University of Oxford, the distinguished scientist Sir Robert Watson-Watt, and Bertrand Russell.

The Last Laugh

The final programmes provide something of a contrast. The Briton is shown at bay in "This Fortress," written by Major Lewis Hastings, who shows that beneath an apparently casual and peace-loving exterior are a pugnacity and an inventive genius for new ways of waging war that become most evident when fortune is at its lowest ebb. Finally, in "The Joke's On Us," Stephen Potter brings his analytical mind to bear on the British sense of humour. He illustrates his theory by quoting writers from Chaucer to Osbert Sitwell—and he has powerful support from Joyce Grenfell.

The Heritage of Britain will start from 2YA at 7.30 p.m. on Thursday, January 24, and from 1YA at 2.0 p.m. and 4YA at 4.0 p.m. on Sunday, January 27. It will start from 3YA, 2YZ and 2XN during February and later will be heard from other YZ stations and the remaining five principal X stations.



The industrial "know-how"—Belfast Shipyards, one of the world's greatest shipbuilding plants