

COLOUR TV EXPERIMENTS - SOME REMINISCENCES BY MALCOLM BURRELL

From about 1957, the BBC broadcast NTSC 405 line transmissions most Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons between 15.30 and 16.30, presumably originating from their unit at Alexandra Palace but broadcast from Crystal Palace. There were some night-time transmissions but I never saw those. I believe they had only one colour telecine machine at the time. There was, therefore, a brief interval at about 16.15 to change reels if a lengthy film was broadcast. Normally they'd stick to industrial documentaries like THE POWER TO FLY, DIAVOLEZA, SONG OF THE CLOUDS, HOMEMADE CAR (yes, even then). Occasionally a feature film might be serialised. Usually it was SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON but there was another with Lloyd Bridges about a mountain but I can't recall the name.

Sometimes they'd get away with over-running with feature films and sometimes make it to about 16.35 or 16.40 before somebody (presumably at the P.O.) pulled the plug for an abrupt change to Test Card 'C'!

Normal schedule was as follows:

Afternoon	Test Card 'C' broadcast nationally
15.30	COLOUR BARS locally generated LP, harp sichord or Scottish bands
15.55	Initially colour test card slide (Experimental Colour Transmission)

	Later, Colour Tuning Signal slide (picture of Sylvia Peters)
16.00	Film
16.15 approx	Interval - music with selected colour slide(s) e.g. 'Telephone Box, Eskimo Nell, Woman in hat etc.
16.20	Concluding reel or shorter film
16.30 approx	Caption card 'BBC EXPERIMENTAL COLOUR TRANSMISSION' (artist's palette) followed by slide THE END.

Variations included things like 'Part II follows Shortly' being scratched onto 35 mm film and inserted in the slide scanner during the interval of SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON. Very early transmissions which used the two Marconi 3-tube (RCA) cameras substituted the live programme but this must have been expensive (no colour VTR) to repeat every other day, which probably accounts for the quick change to film material. The 'live' programmes consisted of much what is shown in BBC Engineering Monograph pictures - a light entertainment following the same script each time using singer Marion Keene and Elton Hayes - 'the wandering minstrel' - I think with a barrow 'selling hot chestnuts' (don't say Johnnie Morris!). If we ever did a program, it would be interesting to interview these people!

[A snippet of these programmes can be seen in the 1959 film 'This is the BBC'-AE]

In 1961 or 1962, there had been a strong lobby for 625 lines (especially from C.O. Stanley of Pye). It was the time of the last REAL Radio Show at Earls Court and the BBC had rigged a colour studio behind glass panels. I assume they used 625 lines NTSC - I don't know but I saw some excellent pictures of Judith Chalmers on circular-screen monitors. Those huge RCA/Marconi cameras were there although one seemed to be sulking (fallen over?) in the corner. These were the days just before Pilkington but there were already some slimline sets demonstrating 625 line mono pictures plus a very poor colour demonstration from an EMI colour camera around the GEC stand, I think.

Do you remember the Radio Shows ? 'All the Fun of the Fair of the Air'! I went to one in 1957 - it was really something with off air and locally generated pictures from pop groups, live studio cameras and even telecine. These were the 'magic' days of tv and the BBC frequently broadcast programmes from Earls Court. Think of forgotten names like Spencer-West, Valradio and Ambassador! We had a real electronics industry then but its collapse was imminent - caused not by competition from the Far East but by the credit squeeze of the era and that most people were happy with the sets they had.

I've just remembered later 405 colour. Around 1960 the BBC broadcast colour during the morning test transmissions. These must not be confused with the transmission of a monochrome picture bearing the caption 'BBC TRADE TEST TRANSMISSION'.

Usually, around 10.00, there was a switch to an asynchronous Test Card

1972 (BBC2) and Friday August 4th 1972 (BBC1). A change in tape speed at the BBC from 15 ips to 7.5 ips meant that 60 minute sequences could be compiled instead of the old 30 minute ones. Some tapes (notably the BBC2 ones) lasted for an average of 72 minutes, and one tape on BBC1 ran for 75 minutes! Along with this change was the sad loss of the BBC signal - it was almost as though the hallmark had been withdrawn. There were six new tapes on BBC2 in the May, and three on BBC1 in the August. All in one go! It was quite confusing at first especially as the tone was now being transmitted every fifteen minutes; it was very hard to work out where one tape ended and the next began. Still, all good stuff, plenty of variety!

These hour long tapes will be discussed in the final and third part, covering 1973 - 1983 when trade test transmissions were officially discontinued. Once again, I would like to hear from anyone with an interest in this subject, also anyone who made any recordings and may like to swap some, please get in touch. If you have a copy of the Colour Receiver Installation film then God will surely abundantly bless you in Heaven! You can contact me at 20 Seymour Road, Stourbridge, DY9 8TB. Bye for now.

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