FOR YOU, THE WAR IS OVER

The new Director-Generals were a combination of the obvious choice and a totally leftfield outsider thrown into the role by circumstance. When Robert W. Foot was hired by the Ministry to, essentially, audit the Corporation, it wasn't a stealth overture to conquest. There may have been a sense that Ogilvie's time was numbered, but there were no plans on anyone's part for Foot to actively take over the BBC, even as one half of a two-headed chimera with Cecil Graves.

Graves was the obvious choice to take over from Ogilvie, with or without Foot, and not just because he was Ogilvie's deputy. Born in 1892, son of a future editor of both The Spectator and Punch and nephew of a Foreign Secretary, he certainly had the necessary establishment chops for a Director General. Not only did he go to public school - which almost went without saying in those days anyway - but he went to the exact same public school - Gresham's, in Norfolk - as John Reith had, and was a well-liked figure there, often returning to participate in sports days or trophy presentations.

He had been with the BBC since shortly before incorporation, joining in 1926 as an administrator. From these humble beginnings he rose to become Assistant Director of Programmes by 1929, then was entrusted by Reith to direct the nascent Empire Service from 1932 to 1935. Finally he became Controller of Programmes for the rest of Reith's tenure, and was heavily tipped to take over from the Great Man. That would have been fine by Reith himself - though not his very first choice, Graves was at least a healthy second behind the aging Charles Carpendale. The fact that he also hailed from the environs of Aberdeen did nothing to hurt his chances; his status as a fellow Old Greshamian even less.

This might have been what scuppered his chances in the end, however; the last thing the Board wanted to do was pander to Reith now that they'd finally got rid of him. They deliberately went with an outsider, and it's safe to say it didn't pan out. Now Graves finally got his chance. Unfortunately, by now he was extremely ill.

Graves had fought in the First World War, but only briefly; serving as part of the British Expeditionary Force in France, he had the dubious honour of becoming one of the conflict's very first POWs, captured barely more than a month after hostilities broke out, and thereby spending almost the whole of the War in the nightmarish conditions of the semi-improvised prototype Stalags. He survived, but like many of his fellow prisoners took with him an involuntary and unwanted souvenir, in the form of tuberculosis.

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So upon finally acceding to the throne (or half of it) as the BBC's equivalent of Antonin Chernenko some forty years early. He was the obvious choice for the role, but he'd been even more so the last time it was vacant, when he wasn't deathly ill. He'd already totted up a vast amount of sick leave during the course of his BBC career due to his raddled lungs, and was almost at a point where on any given day he was as likely to be absent as not.
However, it's far from certain that his health issues, extensive and notorious though they were by then, actually had any bearing on the unusual job structure the Governors chose for F.W. Ogilvie's replacement. Instead of one Director-General in charge of both pursestrings and artistic output, there would be two. One to control and direct programming and the practicalities of broadcasting, and one to administrate the financial and business side of things. Graves, the BBC lifer, was the former. The latter was the slightly bewildered Foot.

A year earlier his concerns had been coal, coke and natural gas, and the most efficient ways to extract them from the earth and then distribute them to the nation. Then a temporary advisory job, essentially helping the Corporation out with their spreadsheets, had spiralled out of control and ended with him, almost inexplicably, as Director-General of the BBC. Admittedly, he was only really half of a DG, and had an experienced broadcasting head alongside him to take the other half, but unfortunately that broadcasting head had lungs like Swiss cheese and was increasingly unable to discharge his duties. Oh, and there was still a world war going on. It all made for a less than fruitful period for the Corporation.

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