



# The Listener

Historical Archive 1929-1991



**The digital archive  
of the acclaimed  
BBC publication**

# THE LISTENER HISTORICAL ARCHIVE, 1929-1991

One of the most influential culture, media and politics publications to emerge in the 20th century, *The Listener* was a weekly periodical established by the BBC under its first Director-General Lord Reith in 1929. Now, for the first time, the complete run of the archive – from 1929-1991 – is unlocked in a rich, online research environment. *The Listener* Historical Archive enables users to search across 125,000 pages of the publication, all newly digitised from originals in full colour.

The rise of broadcast media is arguably the most transformative event in modern society. Through the online archive researchers can trace the journey of publishing and broadcasting in the 20th century and assess the profound impact it had on shaping events and society. Multiple search paths, browse options and limiters allow users to pinpoint results quickly from a wealth of transcripts, interviews and reviews and explore topics as far-reaching as daily life during World War II, 20th century poetry and science broadcasting.



Home page



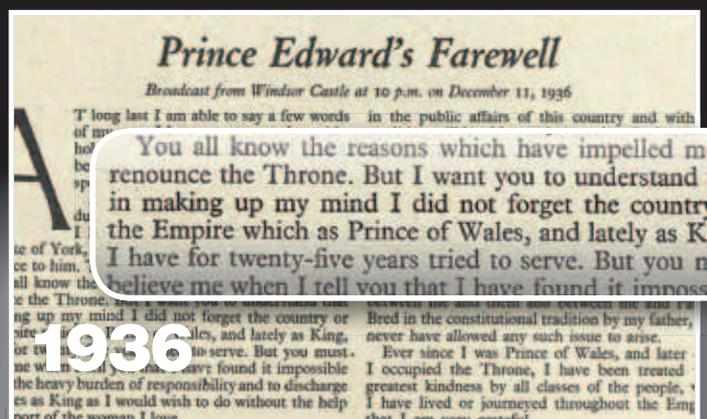
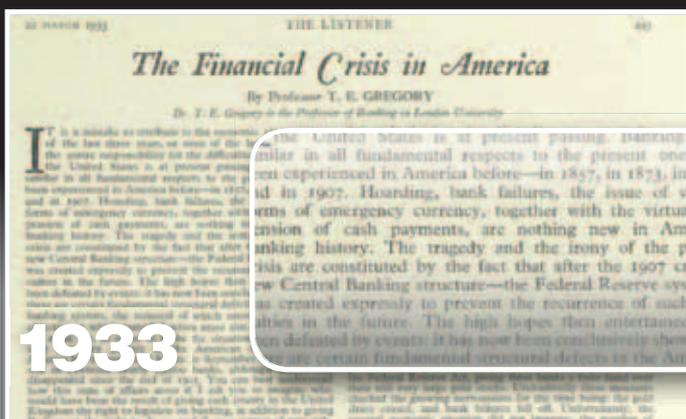
Advanced Search



Article Display



Browse issues



## TO INFORM, EDUCATE AND ENTERTAIN

At the heart of *The Listener* was the BBC's cultural mission to inform, educate and entertain the general public, acting as the intellectual counterpart to the BBC listings magazine, *Radio Times*. The very first edition of *The Listener* expressed its intention "to preserve the text of certain broadcast talks in a regular and more or less permanent form". For more than six decades, the magazine reproduced broadcast talks on radio and later on television, thereby extending the 'life' of a programme. The archive provides present-day researchers with one of the few means of accessing the transcripts of many of these early BBC broadcast recordings as well as the rich commentary that surrounded them.

The importance of *The Listener* for researchers is its range and it quickly developed from a broadcast magazine into a cultural journal, becoming a focus of British literary and intellectual life. From science and technology, politics, economics, popular culture, literature and the arts, researchers can find a wealth of material spanning Henry Moore's essay on sculpture in the 1930s to Prime Minister Atlee's announcement of the launch of Britain's National Health Service in the 1940s; from a post-mortem of The Beatles after their break-up in the 1970s to popular science programme *Horizon's* ground breaking reports on AIDS in the 1980s.

## LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

The journal dedicated pages to major literary and musical programmes by the BBC (which was and remains the largest commissioner of music and drama in Britain) and regularly featured in-depth reviews of books, films and art exhibitions. Anyone interested in researching or studying the critical reception of books, films, music or the visual arts and determining how the wider public responded to 'high' and popular culture in the 20th century will find the archive an invaluable resource.

*The Listener* occupied a central place in the literary life of the 20th century, frequently the first national weekly publication to publish a new poem by a major modern writer. By seeing where a poem first appeared and reading the subsequent critical reactions to it by fellow writers, researchers can gain unique insight into the context surrounding a writer's work.

The magazine built a reputation for discovering new literary talent and, particularly under the editorship of J.R. Ackerley (editor from 1935-59), provided a platform for major 20th century writers like:

- W. H. Auden
- Sylvia Plath
- Christopher Isherwood
- Stephen Spender
- Philip Larkin

For literature researchers, transcripts of writers' broadcasts and interviews help capture the 'writer's voice' and chart the ongoing relationship between writers and the medium of broadcasting. More than 60 years of interviews with famous 20th century authors include Kingsley Amis in the 1950s, Vladimir Nabokov in the 1960s and Ian McEwan in the 1970s providing primary source material crucial to an understanding of a writer's work and life. Among the edited versions of writers' broadcasts researchers can find more than 100 broadcasts by E. M. Forster delivered between 1928 and 1963 which provide revealing insights into Forster's attitudes and beliefs.

George Konig © Getty Images



**Craftsmanship**  
By VIRGINIA WOOLF  
Broadcast on April 20

to consider each separately would take too long. Let us then simplify and assert that since the only test of truth is length of life, and since words survive the chops and changes of time longer than any other substance, therefore they are the truest. Buildings fall; even the earth perishes. What was yesterday a cornfield is today a bungalow. But words, if properly used, seem able to live for ever. What some writers will have two languages at their disposal, one for fact, one for fiction. When the biographer has a useful and necessary fact, as, for example, that O went to college and took a third in the year 1892, so with a hollow O on top of the figure five, novelist is forced to inform us that John rang the door a pause the door was opened by a parlourmaid

**1937**

**Death of the Young Warrior**  
ALISTAIR COOKE on John F. Kennedy

It may well be impossible to add any sensible or unwilling to witness or permit the close looking of words to when ably. The violence say some of sympathy er this be new Administration-not here. For I cannot see, certainly in the last thirty years, when the ser as a poet, so tired looking- labour and character, system of disappointment. That user word to use, but grief is a general term that s of sorrow. And I think that what sets off this t of other great Americans of our time the

covers all kinds of sorrow. And I think that what sets off this death from that of other great Americans of our time is the sense that we have been cheated in a stroke, by a wild but diabolically accurate stroke, of the promise of what we had begun to call the Age of Kennedy.

that the old men who had handled the uncertain second war had had their day, and that there was a of young Americans ready not to ignore the wind forefathers but, if need be, to fight for it. It would say more heavily or more exactly that it was a fight would have to be negotiated with, but that, as at itself was not negotiable.

Now, even in the moment of knowing that the

**1963**

**“The Listener was where the British did their thinking.** Literate and engaged, it had the mild irony of all the best of British culture. Unlike most magazines it combined reflections on politics and what was in the news with the arts: but not from any partisan clique. The only thing you signed up to when you bought *The Listener* was informed scepticism and wit. The online archive is a seam of pure gold for researchers, politics, writing, theatre and social observation, but it offers many delights for browsers as well.”

Jean Seaton, Professor of Media History and Official Historian of the BBC. The University of Westminster

## POLITICS & SOCIETY

Widely respected for its coverage of arts and culture the magazine's readers also valued its reviews of political and social issues and events. Unlike rival publications with party political leanings, *The Listener* provided a balanced overview, allowing today's researchers the scope to explore an issue from multiple perspectives. *The Listener* reflects the BBC's proximity to power, acting as an eyewitness to the major issues of the day and providing researchers with an informed critique of the 20th century as it happened; from Anthony Burgess writing on the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, to Alistair Cooke's much-loved 'letters' on post-war American culture and the columns of the BBC's political editor, John Cole, in the 1980s. The magazine's reach was global with detailed coverage of revolutions in the Middle East including Egypt (1952), Libya (1967) and Iran (1979).

## SEARCH FEATURES AND FUNCTIONALITY

- Basic Search
- Advanced Search by index types – Entire Document, Article Title, Caption, Contributor Name, Keyword, Record Number
- Browse by Issue or Contributor
- Sophisticated Image Viewer. Grab, pan, zoom, and crop images.
- Marked List and Search History
- Save, Print, Bookmark and Email results
- Gale named user account to save searches, results and notes between sessions
- All articles and image captions are fully text searchable with hit-term highlighting
- Fuzzy Search – low, medium, high
- Limit Searches by Publication Date, Article Type or Illustration Type



Christopher Lee

### Iran: searching for a strategy

'There can be no final victory,' one of the ayatollah's Islamic fighters told me once, 'until the people stand, with guns in their hands, in the rubble of the shah's palace.'

1979

STEPHEN FRY

### Smoke Now, Burn Later

Frankly, my body is my town and I will not be told what to do with my business means suitability, and I find my

1988

## CONTRIBUTORS

**The *Listener* developed a reputation for outstanding writing, featuring contributions from the major writers, artists, social commentators and thinkers of the 20th century:**

- T.S. Eliot
- George Orwell
- E. M. Forster
- Bertrand Russell
- Seamus Heaney
- George Bernard Shaw
- Aldous Huxley
- Dylan Thomas
- Henry Moore
- Virginia Woolf
- Iris Murdoch
- John Maynard Keynes

By the 1980s, *The Listener* was still attracting the brightest talents: Stephen Fry, Ian Hislop and Lynne Truss all wrote regular columns for the paper.

## ARTICLES

**Users will find a diverse range of essays, interviews and reviews including:**

- 'The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' by George Orwell (1941)
- Alistair Cooke's famous *Letter from America* series (1946-2004) and *From Our Own Correspondent*
- Wyndham Lewis, art critic for *The Listener*, wrote a series of articles on young British artists including Francis Bacon (1946-1951)
- 'E.M. Forster on his life and books', recorded by David Jones (1959)
- 'Vladimir Nabokov on his life and work', an interview with Peter Duval Smith (1962)
- Essays to accompany Sir Kenneth Clark's landmark art history series *Civilisation* (1969)
- 'Leaders or Megaphones' by Anthony Smith on student protests (1968)
- 'Unemployment in the Seventies' by Dorothy Wedderburn (1971)
- 'Watergate and the Editors' (1972)
- 'Adolescence and after – an interview with Ian McEwan' with Christopher Ricks (1979)
- 'The Eye' by David Wilson, the first of several articles based on the *Horizon* popular science series (1969)
- 'The Tories Taste Power' by David Marquand (1979)
- 'Confronting Terrorism' by Paul Wilkinson (1987)

## TRANSCRIPTS

**The archive provides a wealth of transcripts from broadcasts including:**

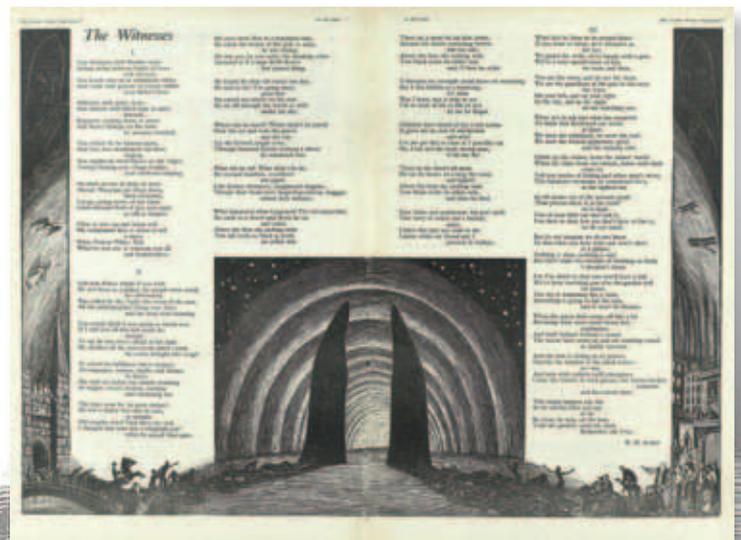
- King George VI's message to the British public at the outbreak of WWII (1939)
- Prime Minister Atlee announcing the launch of the National Health Service (NHS) (1948)
- *Panorama*, BBC's flagship current affairs programme (1950s – 1980s)
- British Historian AJP Taylor's series of TV lectures (1957 – 1967)
- Royal Institute Christmas lectures including Sir David Attenborough (1973), astronomer Carl Sagan (1977) and Ian Stewart (1997)



'E.M. Forster on his life and books', recorded by David Jones (1959)



The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda' by George Orwell (1941)



W.H. Auden's poem 'The Witnesses' (1933)

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **W.H. Auden's poems** first published in *The Listener* include 'The Witnesses' (1933)
- Transcript of **King Edward VIII's abdication speech** (1936)
- The essay '**Craftsmanship**' by **Virginia Woolf** was taken from a radio broadcast 'Words Fail Me' - noted for being the only surviving record of Woolf's voice (1937)
- Transcript of **George VI's speech at the outbreak of WWII** (1939)
- The first national weekly to publish a poem of **Philip Larkin's 'Ultimatum'** when the poet was just 18 years old (1940)

- **Special issues marking anniversaries for the BBC** include the 25th anniversary issue (1961)
- The transcript of the first television interview with **Solzhenitsyn** after he was deported from Russia (1976)
- **Lynne Truss's regular column 'Margins'** (1988-1991)
- **Stephen Fry's regular column** (1988)
- British Historian **AJP Taylor's series of TV lectures** (1957 – 1967)
- Royal Institute Christmas lectures including **Sir David Attenborough** (1973), astronomer **Carl Sagan** (1977) and **Ian Stewart** (1997)

*The Listener* Historical Archive addresses the multi-disciplinary need for a digital archive in 20th century studies, especially in the post-1945 era, opening up a vast area of research for academics and students in Media and Journalism, Communication and Cultural Studies and more broadly 20th Century History, Literature, Politics and Arts.

The rise of broadcast media transformed 20th century society. As one of the main records of publishing and broadcasting in the 20th century – including transcripts of programmes - *The Listener* Historical Archive is an indispensable research and teaching tool.

**Find out how *The Listener* Historical Archive could make a contribution to research in your institution.**

**For a free trial, pricing or further information contact [emea.marketing@cengage.com](mailto:emea.marketing@cengage.com)  
[www.gale.cengage.co.uk/thelistener](http://www.gale.cengage.co.uk/thelistener)**



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## **GALE HISTORICAL NEWSPAPERS**

*The Listener* Historical Archive belongs to the Gale Historical Newspapers Collection, including:

*The Economist* Historical Archive, 1843-2006  
*Financial Times* Historical Archive, 1888-2006  
*Illustrated London News* Historical Archive, 1842-2003  
*Picture Post* Historical Archive, 1938-1957  
*The Times* Digital Archive  
*Times Literary Supplement* Historical Archive

Each collection is cross-searchable on the Gale NewsVault platform allowing users to view the past from multiple perspectives.

To find out more visit [www.gale.cengage.co.uk/gale-newsvault.aspx/](http://www.gale.cengage.co.uk/gale-newsvault.aspx/)

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