



My Year!

I have mentioned before that I often listen to the radio while working on my woodblock prints. I have many stations set as 'favourites', broadcasting from the US, Canada, and various European countries, but the one that I come back to more than any other is the BBC, of course based in England.

The variety of programmes they offer online is simply beyond belief. Not only do they have dozens of separate channels each running 'live' 24 hours a day, but also have a vast menu of pre-recorded programmes available 'on demand', so that you don't have to worry about what time it might be in England - you can listen to something whenever it might be most convenient for your own schedule.

They started a new radio feature last week - a series of 50 weekly episodes that I am definitely going to follow right to the end. Each programme in the series is one hour long, and features a selection of clips from their historical archives from a particular year. There is no commentary or explanation - all we hear for one hour is the 'raw' history: news clippings, sports reports, segments from radio programmes of the day, and of course samples of the music and movies that were popular. As it happens - and this is what really caught my attention when I saw the announcement of the new programme - they chose to begin their series with the year 1951, and will move forward from there one year at a time.

1951 was the year of my birth, so of course my interest was piqued, and indeed I wasn't disappointed.

Now I have to admit right up front that I didn't sit there nodding as the program proceeded, "Ah yes, I remember that well ... and that too!" I of course 'remember' nothing at all from 1951 (nor for many years after that). But it was very interesting to listen to the events and music - all of which I am basically familiar with from my general knowledge of history and culture - and have them put into a framework which gave me a better understanding of just 'when' they really happened. I now feel that I understand just a little bit more clearly, the culture into which I was born.

"Although petrol rationing has now ended, the government has said that coupons will continue to be required for clothing, meat, cheese, tea, soap, and coal ..."

This bit of news wasn't actually new to me; I have heard my mother talk about the post-war rationing system, and I think she still has a ration card for little 'baby Bull' in her keepsake file. But what an astonishing idea - that I have actually lived under a system where each family was permitted to purchase xx ounces of meat, or only a certain amount of tea. It hardly seems credible.

What hardship 'I' endured! I'll have to remember to talk to my daughters about this: "You have no idea how difficult life was for your father when he was younger ..." Do you think they will be interested? :-)

Something else that struck me during the course of the programme were the historical figures whose lives overlapped with mine. To me, Winston Churchill and King George VI are historical figures, not real people, as it were. But no, there they are; Churchill winning an election just a couple of weeks before I was born, and the King falling ill of lung cancer that same autumn (he will be dying in the next programme).

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>

And the music! The pop of the early 50s is so bland and saccharine that it is difficult to understand how anybody could have found it enjoyable. 'Mockingbird Hill', 'Shrimp Boats Is A Coming', 'Come On A My House' ... It was almost enough to make me switch the programme off! I now have a much better understanding of just how it was that rock music was able to sweep that all away just a few years later. Finally, there was music with vitality and relevance!

But that's still a few weeks away - I mean, a few 'years' away! I'll be following the progression of this programme all the way up through the course of the entire 50 years. If it sounds interesting to you too, then please visit the BBC website, and look for the programme entitled 'Sounds of the Twentieth Century'.

What happened in *your* year?

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>