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Contributor: Robert Rowland

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What I had inherited was a remarkable staff of producers which had been appointed. I took over in seventy-three. On the staff there were eleven PhDs, there's one Fellow of All Souls. And the BBC took a very brave decision and a very remarkable decision, which was in that, in appointing people to the Open University they would appoint people for their academic quality and train them into being producers rather than appointing producers and make them into academics. It was thought by the BBC that if the BBC producers were to be effective on course teams they had to have the academic respect of the academics. And if an academic said 'you can't do that' the BBC, the BBC producer should be in a position to say 'I disagree with you', or vice versa. So that was the basis of the understanding of the recruitment was 'let's appoint people who are academically well endowed and turn them into producers'. Consequently there was a bunch of extremely clever people and lively people and young people, and I felt very privileged to be successful in getting the job and managing them. All taking place in a remarkable place called Alexandra Palace in north London, which was seen when it was built as a, soon after it was built as a kind of white elephant but has, has played a major role in, in television developments. It was the first home of television in the world, it's got a blue plaque on the building to say that. And then the old studios, Studio 'A' and 'B' are still there but they've been left. I think there are holes in the roof and there's pigeons nesting in them. It was the home of television. It then became the home of television news, which was remarkable. Well, led the way in news development. We were, with in fact with many problems along the way although we can't go into that here. And in sixty nine news left and OUPC, the OU Production Centre was set up in, in the old news set up in Ally Pally. And the building there was built on grounds which were owned, I believe, by the Cecil Rhodes family up in Highgate and it, supposedly when the 'Ally Pally' was built there were a lot of objections to this huge building and there was a witch, a supposed witch lived on a hill, who supposedly put a curse on the building, and soon after it was built Ally Pally burnt down and some people thought the witch's curse had come true. When I was running Ally Pally after the (after the news left) the OU came along and this is another world first with the OU. So we had the world's first television service, the world's first news service and the world's first Open University.

And in 1981 the place burnt down again. It was a tremendously powerful fire, the biggest fire seen in, in London since the war. And it didn't burn down, the Palace burned down but not the BBC side. The irony was, and I'm digressing here, but the irony was that when the BBC came to Ally Pally in 1936 and, and took over the building the local authority was so concerned about the fire hazard of television that they built a fire wall between the BBC's side of the Palace and the rest of the Palace. On the day of the fire I remember the fire brigade coming to me and saying 'Mr Rowland we're sorry, we think the corridor, the wall to the corridor into the studios is going to burst and the flames will come through and the whole thing will be destroyed'. But marvellously that wall held so the side of the Palace which survived the great fire of 1980 was saved, was saved by the wall built to protect the rest of the palace from television. So OUPC survived that experience and we all moved to

Milton Keynes in 1981 planned and executed by an extraordinarily nice man, who was my chief assistant called David Kennard who taught me a great deal about management. I was very young when I got the job, I was about thirty six, I think thirty six or so. And David was a very remarkable ADC, if that's the word. And he masterminded the move to Milton Keynes. Egotistically I said we should move on July the 6th, which was my birthday. We'd planned the move on, for July the 6th two or three years in advance and we hit, and the wagons rolled as they say on the very day - which was a great triumph for David Kennard. And we missed very little production time. We had about two days where we didn't produce anything but the whole system was grafted into the move and the move grafted into the system so it worked very well.