

Chris Chaloner – BBC Radio Science Unit

I was seconded to BBC Science Radio Unit at Bush House for 4 weeks beginning at the end of August 2003. It was a tremendous opportunity for an ordinary 'Joe' like me to see how the sophisticates from the big city interpret the work of scientists.

I arrived ready to be bored and stuck in a corner reading, but was pleasantly surprised to be launched in at the deep end, researching for producer Helen Sewell some programmes for a cross network HIV/AIDS season that has recently been broadcast. I soon became familiar with the International Direct Dialling codes for those countries worst affected by the epidemic, and the vagaries of less technologically sophisticated telecoms systems.

After a week of this sort of research, I was given a microphone headphones and a DAT recorder and sent to do vox pops in Trafalgar Square and Covent Garden. By way of introduction to the terrors of accosting people on the street in this way, I was given an easy topic to start with – I was to ask people about AIDS awareness campaigns how their personal sexual behaviour had changed and whether they used condoms. I must be the only person ever to have been ejected from Covent Garden, when a man in a green uniform asked me to leave after 10 minutes of interviewing.

Much of the time early in the placement was taken up with studio interviews. After many more sojourns to the World Service studio for interviews, either live or by ISDN line, the second week ended, and I was to prepare for the BA festival of science in Salford. This was a bit of a homeward bound job for me, as I did my first degree in Applied Chemistry at Salford. In those days, chemistry was housed in 'The Tower Block', and all 12 floors had to be accessed by means of the Paternoster lifts – scary devices whereby you watched a small wooden platform approach and leapt on it when it was roughly level with the floor you were standing on! Getting off was never boring, either.

Anyway, several of the Media Fellows and I set about recording interviews with as many interesting folks as we could get our hands on, including Lord Robert Winston and Professor Colin Blakemore, not to mention a number of eminent scientists who were talking on the lost contribution of Islamic scientists. We recorded numerous interviews and sent them to BBC Radio Lancashire for editing and broadcast.

My final week was taken up by Science in Action, and during this phase of the placement I finally managed to do get my hands on Sadie. She's the BBC in house digital editing system. Fascinating how you can reduce 25 minutes of interview to 3 or 4 and yet still sounding flowing and natural.

My time as a media fellow flew by. It was interesting, exciting and ultimately eye-opening and I am so glad I 'went for it'. I would encourage anyone even

vaguely interested to get on and apply for the chance of an experience of a lifetime.

Finally, the thank you's. I want to thank the BA and Deborah Cohen of BBC Science Radio Unit for making the whole adventure possible; Helen Sewell, my mentor for the first 2 weeks; Martin Redfearn for his warm welcome; Julian Siddle for his laconic sense of humour; Stephen Dunleavy for his gentle good humour and intelligence; Gareth Mitchell, who made it look easy; All the staff at Bush House who made my stay more satisfying than I hoped and less terrifying than I feared; and last but most definitely not least Esther Ingram, Orla Kennedy, Anton Immink and all the other media fellows for bringing the FUN.