
Yvonne: Hello, I'm Yvonne Archer and this is "6 minute English". And with me today is Callum Robertson. Hello Callum!

Callum: Hello Yvonne.

Yvonne: Now today's topic is about an extraordinary document which has been kept secret for more than thirty years but it's now been made public. It's been kept in a place where other documents and records are kept about Britain's history and that place is called the National Archives. But before we find out more about this extraordinary document, I've got a big question for Callum and it's about the British National Archives. Callum, when were they started? Was it

- a) 800 years ago
- b) 850 years ago – or
- c) 900 years ago

Callum: I haven't got a clue really so I'm just going to guess at 850 years ago.

Yvonne: Right, whichever answer is right, it was a long time ago! We'll find out later on.

Now during the 1970s, the British government felt that a nuclear attack was a real possibility.

Callum: Yeah, I'm old enough to remember those times – the times of the Cold War. It was quite a scary time when you look back on it now.

Yvonne: Hmm. The government got together with the BBC and wrote a secret script. It was to be recorded and broadcast every two hours if there was a nuclear attack.

Callum: Now that must have been a very difficult script to write.

Yvonne: Exactly, but that's what the BBC and the government had to do. And when it was written, it was hidden away in the National Archives ready for use. But recently, the script was 'declassified'. Callum, why don't you explain that for us?

Callum: Well if there's a document which is meant to be secret, then it's 'classified'. It's given a classification like 'Top Secret' and only a few people can see it. But when it becomes public - after thirty years in Britain, these documents can be made public – we say it's been 'declassified'. So a 'declassified' document is a document that used to be secret, you couldn't see it, but now, everyone can see it.

Yvonne: Now before we find out what was in that nuclear script, let's look at some of the language that we'll come across. Callum, people get confused by the word 'casualties'...

Callum: Well the word 'casualties' is a noun and it's to talk about not just the number of people who are killed, but are also killed or injured in an accident or a war.

Yvonne: Thanks, Callum. Now as we listen to a reading of part of that declassified nuclear script, try to find out what three things the script was asking people to do...

FROM A REPORT BY MARK SANDERS

This is the Wartime Broadcasting Service. This country has been attacked with nuclear weapons. Communications have been severely disrupted, and the number of casualties and the extent of the damage are not yet known. Stay tuned to this wavelength, stay calm and stay in your own homes.

Yvonne: Oooh, that makes me feel really cold.

Callum: It's definitely quite chilling to listen to that as though a nuclear attack has already happened.

Yvonne: So what three things did the script ask everyone to do, Callum?

Callum: Well, it told people to 'stay tuned' which means, don't change your radio channel, keep listening to this one for news and information. It told people to 'stay calm' – because of course, panicking in an emergency isn't useful. And finally, the script asked everyone to stay at home – don't go outside.

Yvonne: Thanks, Callum.

Now the government and the BBC discussed what should go into the secret script from 1972 to 1975!

Callum: ... three years - that's a long time. It's a lot longer than we have to write a "6 Minute English" script!

Yvonne: It certainly is – that's for sure. But then, we don't have to write scripts that are really that important, do we? I've another chilling extract for you from the nuclear script which explains why people were being asked to stay at home...

FROM A REPORT BY MARK SANDERS

Remember, there is nothing to be gained by trying to get away. By leaving your homes you could be exposing yourselves to greater danger.

Yvonne: So trying to 'get away' – to run away from home might have been even more dangerous for people than staying inside their homes. Do you happen to know why they said that Callum?

Callum: Well, there'd be a number of reasons. One, if there's a nuclear attack, then there's a danger of radiation sickness in the air. You'd be a little safer staying at home. But also, you know, there could be panic on the streets, the traffic would be chaos, it would be very dangerous. So, best to stay at home – safest. That's what they believed.

Yvonne: That sounds sensible. Anyway, here's something a little less frightening: the declassified records show that one government official felt it was really, really important for someone from the BBC, with a voice that most people knew and trusted, should be the one to record the announcement. And this was because the government didn't want people to believe that the BBC had been 'obliterated' – totally destroyed – gone forever!

Callum: Well that just shows how important the BBC was - and of course, still is today for many people around the world!

Yvonne: Absolutely. Now Callum – today's big question was: When was the British National Archives started? And your answer was...

Callum: Well I said 850 years ago - but it was just a guess.

Yvonne: Ahh – it was a good guess – you were 50 years out. It was 900 years ago.

Callum: 900 years ago. Oh dear, wrong again.

Yvonne: Never mind! Well, we hope you've enjoyed today's '6 Minute English'. And do join us again next time for more.

C + Y: Goodbye!