

The British Broadcasting Corporation

A
QUESTION
OF
TRUTH

A record of correspondence with the British
Broadcasting Corporation 2003/2004

This record has been sent to the Chairman and the Vice Chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation, members of the House of Lords, members of the House of Commons and the Chairman of the Ofcom.

June 2004

A question of truth

BBC News presenting fiction as fact

Introduction

On 22nd June 2003 BBC Radio 4 national news carried a major feature concerning the Bishop of Reading. The BBC chose to give considerable prominence, as a news item, to a report which had apparently estimated “that about a quarter of clergy are gay”. The BBC gave no indication in their broadcast of the source of this news item and clearly made the decision not to attribute it to any research project, organisation or individual.

From the beginning, many people questioned the truth of this BBC news item and believed that the public had been misled. In order to establish the truth, persistent efforts were made over many months to obtain information about the source of the estimate to which the BBC had given so much prominence. The BBC were specifically asked to provide full supporting evidence of their broadcast statement. They have been totally unable or unwilling to do so. No research document has been produced. The original request for the source of the ‘estimate’ has led to protracted correspondence from which it has become clear that the original broadcast claim was entirely fictitious.

It has transpired that, although it was not presented as such in the broadcast, the statement was in fact the personal guess or opinion of the correspondent. It did not in fact refer to any particular research study which had been carried out.

While admitting that this was ‘unfortunate’, the BBC has made no effort to apologise for the lie which they broadcast. Thus, a serious breach of acceptable editorial standards has been tolerated. Although this issue is comparatively minor, an extremely serious principle of truthfulness in public service broadcasting has been raised. Licence fee payers have every reason to expect the Governors of the BBC to give this serious attention, particularly in view of the Hutton Inquiry.

It should be noted that before the BBC published their claim –

- **No action was taken to verify the research documentation**
- **No effort was every made to identify the individuals who had supposedly carried out the research and to confirm their integrity**
- **No steps were taken to ascertain the identity and credibility of the sponsoring research institute or body responsible for the work**
- **No efforts were made to confirm the accuracy of the figures quoted in the claim**
- **No action was ever taken to establish the date, location and methodology of the research**

In short, the BBC grossly misled the public. Since this matter was brought to their attention –

- **No correction has been broadcast**
- **No admission has been made by the BBC that they were seriously at fault**

The record of correspondence

On 24TH JUNE 2003 a letter was sent to Helen Boaden, the Controller of BBC Radio 4 concerning this news item. The letter was not a complaint, but a straightforward request for information. It stated **“We have carried out a considerable amount of research into homosexuality and we are extremely interested to know when this**

report was published, by whom it was published and who carried out the basic research. We are sure that the BBC will have checked the authenticity and reliability of this report and we would be very grateful if you could let us have the information requested as soon as possible".

Ms. Boaden failed to acknowledge or reply to this letter and a further letter was sent to her on the 9TH JULY 2003 stating ***"We would be glad to hear from you in view of the fact that since we wrote to you a number of reliable researches have seriously questioned the integrity and authenticity of the figures quoted in your programme"***.

On 9TH JULY 2003 all letter, (posted 13TH JULY), was sent by Claire Prosser (Chief Assistant to Stephen Mitchell, Head of Radio News) saying that ***"Helen Boaden had asked her to reply to the letter"***. Miss Prosser was clearly unable to answer any of the specific questions put to Miss Boaden. She did, however, quote an admission by the BBC's Religious Affairs Correspondent – ***"There has been no formal survey."*** Thus, the BBC news item had no foundation in established fact and, therefore, the public had been misinformed. In her letter Miss Prosser quoted the BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent as saying ***"My information comes from numerous conversations"***. Thus a highly contentious statement presented as truth was based on purely anecdotal hearsay. The Correspondent did not say ***"in my opinion"***. The listeners were left to assume that it was true when it was not. To make matters worse, the Correspondent was then quoted as saying ***"It's actually estimated that a third of clergy are gay"***. Once again he gave no reliable evidential in support for this statement.

In endeavouring to defend his position the BBC Correspondent had the audacity to quote a supporting statement which he purported Archbishop Coggan had made. Yet again, he gave no source for his highly unlikely claim and no factual evidence regarding his quoted statement.

Continuing to defend the BBC news item, the Correspondent then made the remarkable statement that ***"There is a settled view among clergy"*** as to the proportion of homosexuals amongst them, i.e. over 25%. Yet again, the BBC Correspondent failed to substantiate his curious claim.

On 17TH JULY 2003 a detailed statement was sent to Miss Prosser pointing out the obvious inadequacies of her reply. The letter also said ***"I would be glad if you could furnish us with the source of the statement which you have attributed to Archbishop Donald Coggan"***.

On 17TH JULY 2003 a letter containing the statement was sent to Mr. Simon Milner with the request that it be brought to the notice of the Governors in view of its ***"immediate public importance"***. This ten-point statement headed 'BBC News presenting opinion as Fact' including reference to the Department of Health Omnibus Survey which revealed that only 1% of men practice homosexual sex. This, of course, contrasted dramatically with the suggestion broadcast by the BBC.

On 23RD JULY 2003 (posted on 27TH JULY) a letter was sent by Natalie Vine, P.A. to the Head of Radio News saying ***"Claire Prosser is currently on holiday but someone from this office will be in touch when she returns"***.

On 7TH AUGUST 2003 a letter was sent from Simon Milner in response to the request that the statement be presented to BBC's Governors. The statement was in fact not given to the Governors on the ground that direct referral would ***'bypass'*** the BBC's ***'formal process'***. He said ***"It is open to you to refer your concerns to the Programme Complaints Unit"***.

On 21ST AUGUST 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Milner in which it was stated ***"We are aware of your internal procedures for making complaints, but wrote to you because we believe the BBC Governors have ultimate responsibility for upholding standards"***. It was also stated ***"We are still awaiting the reply from Mr. Mitchell's office, which was promised almost a month ago. We have not even received the requested acknowledgement of receipt of letter from Miss Boaden"***. It was then stated ***"We will send the original***

submission for the attention of Mr. Steele, the Head of your PCU in accordance with your 'formal process'".

On 21ST AUGUST 2003 a letter was sent to Miss Boaden – **"We wrote to you on 17th July and specifically asked if you would personally acknowledge receipt of our letter. We are surprised to have received no response whatsoever from you and would point out that this does nothing to strengthen public confidence in the Corporation"**.

On 21ST AUGUST 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Mitchell, Head of Radio News, **"We wrote to you on 17th July 2003 and your PA responded on 23rd July to say someone from your office would be in touch when Claire Prosser returned from holiday. As we have heard nothing from you we are submitting a complaint to Mr. Steele, Head of your PCU. We are, frankly, surprised at your personal apparent lack of interest. As you are doubtless aware, there is growing public concern about the bias in your news programmes and this lack of response only adds to this concern"**.

On 21st AUGUST a letter was sent to Mr. Steel of the PCU which stated **"We have been in touch with the secretary to the BBC's Governors and enclose a document for your attention. We were promised a response to this on 23rd JULY but have not received one"**.

On 1ST SEPTEMBER 2003 a letter was sent by Mr. Stephen Mitchell stating that he stood by the original response from his department.

On 3RD SEPTEMBER 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Mitchell stating that his reply makes it quite clear that **"a guess became an estimate which in turn became a report and was presented by the BBC as fact. If you defend this process, it clearly raises fundamental issues concerning the truthfulness of BBC news. You undoubtedly presented private opinion as public fact"**. Reference was again made in this letter to the failure of the BBC and its Correspondent to furnish the source of the statement attributed to Archbishop Donald Coggan. The letter stated **"We have received no response to this request and we can only assume that this claim, along with your broadcast claim, is fictitious"**.

On 11TH SEPTEMBER 2003 Mr. Mitchell wrote to say **"I have nothing to add at this stage"**. He totally ignored the presentation of opinion as fact and failed to respond to the query concerning Archbishop Coggan which had been raised to defend the BBC's position.

On 18TH SEPTEMBER 2003 a further letter was sent to Mr. Mitchell pointing out that his letter of 11th September caused concern. It said **"A very important principle is at stake. It is not a question of conflicting news or opinion. In your national news you broadcast a lie. We would have thought that in your capacity as Head of Radio News you would have exercised your responsibility to ensure that the public is not misled. No correction to your false statement has been broadcast and no apology made"**. It was further asserted **"There never was any research project or inquiry which came to the conclusion you presented. There never was any report coming to the conclusions you publicised. What you presented as fact, your Department now admits as being merely the private opinion of one of your Correspondents. This is totally unsatisfactory"**. Again the issue of Archbishop Coggan was raised **"We would suggest that you take steps to obtain from your Correspondent the source of the surprising statement he has attributed to Archbishop Coggan"**. It was further added **"The truth about this, too, does matter"**. No response was received from Mr. Mitchell who clearly took no steps to establish the truth about the Coggan quote.

On 3RD OCTOBER 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Milner referring to his letter of 7th August. It stated **"We did as you suggested and wrote to Mr. Steele on 21st August. Since then we have received neither an acknowledgement nor reply from Mr. Steele or anyone else in the BBC. May I draw your attention to the fact that it is now three months since this matter was first raised with your Corporation. I am sure you will agree that this is not acceptable"**.

On 9TH OCTOBER 2003 Mr. Fraser Steele, the Head of Programme Complaints wrote and said **“Thank you for letter of 21st August – and my apologies for the fact that because of an oversight it wasn’t acknowledged at the time”**. On 31ST OCTOBER 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Fraser Steele, Head of Programme Complaints stating **“We are assuming that you are now instituting your complaints procedure on the basis that the information with which you were provided on 21st August 2003”**. It was also stated that on 23rd October we received a letter from Stephen Mitchell giving his opinion that **“There is little purpose in you and I continuing to exchange views”**. It is entirely within the prerogative of this BBC Department to stop correspondence. It does not alter the fact that the lie which was broadcast nationally by the BBC four months ago has still not been withdrawn.

On 14TH NOVEMBER 2003 Mr. Fraser Steele, wrote a letter in which he stated that the BBC had **“conducted intensive research’ into the background figures given in their estimate”**. Mr. Steele took it upon himself to give a quotation from Dr. Coggan which was irrelevant to the issue, but notably failed to give the source of the original quotation raised by the BBC Correspondent in defence of his position, which must, therefore, be regarded as spurious. Mr. Steele’s ‘extensive research’ led him to quote two newspaper articles, neither which gave any evidence-based conclusion. Mr. Steele then went on to quote information given to him by the BBC Correspondent concerning published findings by Tony Coxon in the late 70’s and early 80’s. He had a figure about these unpublished ‘findings’ but defensively said **“It is not possible to be sure”**. In an endeavour to still further defend the BBC’s untenable position, Mr. Steele quoted a controversial book by Ben Fletcher of the University of Hertfordshire. **Again, no factual basis was presented and even Ben Fletcher concluded that the proportion of clergymen was considerably less than the BBC’s ‘estimate’.**

Mr. Steele then had the audacity to quote a totally unsubstantiated statement made by a gay campaigning body about clergy – **“It is believed that in England between a quarter and a third are homosexuals”**. Mr. Steele presented this part of his argument even though he admitted **“It is hard to determine whether their methodology is as rigorous as that used by professional academics”**. Furthermore, he admitted that the campaigning body frequently briefed newspaper journalists. These presumably included the BBC Religious Correspondent. It in no way absolves the BBC from publishing an untruth.

Undoubtedly aware that the BBC had got its facts wrong, Mr. Steele stated **“Correspondents are expected not only to report the facts, but to use their professional judgement and specialist knowledge to ‘analyse and contextualise events’”**. In defending the BBC’s Correspondent, Mr. Steele conveniently avoided the central question as to where the BBC Correspondent got his facts. Mr. Steele is fully aware that had the BBC Correspondent said the LGCM had estimated any figure for practising homosexuals among the clergy, it would have been immediately discounted. Mr. Steele brazenly said **“On the basis of the results of our enquiries we have found that there are indeed estimates.... that 25% of the clergy are homosexual”**. Thus Mr. Steele is suggesting that the BBC has the right to broadcast ‘estimates’ however unreliable and unsubstantiated the source.

On 24TH NOVEMBER 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Steele stating **“You say you have conducted extensive research, but in fact you have failed to find anything which supports the specific statement which is the cause of this complaint. Your quotations from guesses made by journalists are interesting, but quite irrelevant. You refer to an unpublished report. You refer to a highly controversial book which, in any case, does not support the figure you quoted. You refer to an article published by the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement which again has no foundation of fact”**.

“You say that your Correspondents are expected to report the facts, but in this case your Correspondent reported fiction and no evidence whatsoever has been provided for the guess which your Correspondent made. When was it made? By whom was it made? On what foundation was it made? We have not been told and the public were undoubtedly misled in believing that this was a properly researched claim”.

The letter stated **“The BBC should have made it abundantly clear that it was the personal view of one of their correspondents”**.

The letter referred to the quotation attributed to Archbishop Coggan, advanced by the BBC Correspondent in his own defence. The letter referred to a previous letter to Claire Prosser – **“We wrote to her on 17th JULY asking her for the source of the statement. She never replied. We wrote again on 3rd September to Stephen Mitchell, pointing out that we had received no response to this. Again this request was ignored.**

Almost five months have now elapsed since this matter was raised and our confidence in the ethical standards of the BBC have been shaken. We are now referring this to the Governors Complaints Committee.

On 27TH NOVEMBER 2003 Fraser Steele freely admitted that on the question of the quotation attributed to Archbishop Coggan **"Our enquiries have not led us to anything which would substantiate the statement that he estimated that a third of clergy were gay"**. It can only be assumed that this quotation presented by the BBC's Correspondent, together with the original 'estimate' was a total fiction. This attitude of dismissing truth appears to be symptomatic of the internal procedures of the BBC insofar as Fraser Steele said **"I am not concerned with what has been said in earlier correspondence..."**. Regarding the spurious quotation attributed to the Archbishop he simply said **"I am not in a position to comment on it further"**.

On 2ND DECEMBER 2003 in a letter to Mr. Steele it was stated **"In the BBC's letter of 9th July it was clearly stated by your Religious Affairs Correspondent that Archbishop Donald Coggan had estimated that a third of the clergy were gay. This statement was totally untrue and has no foundation whatsoever in fact. On challenging the BBC to give supporting evidence, they persistently dodged the issue until now months later you freely admit that you can find nothing to substantiate this statement"**. The letter went on **"It is morally wrong to attribute to someone, words which they have clearly never spoken. We are astonished that you should say that what has been said by your Religious Affairs Correspondent has no bearing on your judgement. It has, in fact, very considerable bearing on your judgement insofar as it illustrates the readiness of your Religious Affairs Correspondent to make statements which are not true. I would point out that Claire Prosser could easily have admitted that this statement had no foundation, but she chose not to do so, presumably in the belief that the BBC is beyond criticism. She never even bothered to respond – we received no further letter from her"**. The letter concluded **"You have produced not a scrap of evidence that the original statement, presented as news, was anything other than fictitious"**. Copies of this letter were sent to Mr. S. Milner and Miss C. Prosser.

On 2ND DECEMBER 2003 a letter was sent to Mr. Milner stating **"It has now been established beyond all reasonable doubt that the BBC repeatedly broadcast a news statement which had not the slightest foundation in fact and which was grossly misleading. It was simply an untruth. The readiness of the BBC Correspondent to quote in defence, a further totally unsubstantiated statement by Archbishop Coggan is indicative of a scant regard for truth. In our judgement and that of many who knew the Archbishop, this 'quotation' along with the original 'news item' is a complete fabrication. We believe this behaviour does immense damage to the integrity of the BBC"**.

The Secretary of the Board of Governors Programme Complaints Committee wrote on 12TH DECEMBER 2003 to say that the Committee would be considering this matter on 28th January 2004.

On 17TH DECEMBER 2003 a letter was sent to Mrs. Hughes stating **"Our members find it quite extraordinary that as it has now been established beyond any doubt whatsoever that the BBC presented an untruth as a fact, there should be such a protracted complaints procedure"**. It was also stated **"Will you please pass on to your Committee our very strong dissatisfaction at the way in which the BBC is handling a perfectly straightforward issue"**.

On 30TH JANUARY 2004 the Secretary of the GPCC said that the findings of the Committee would be ratified at its next meeting on 18th February 2004.

On 24TH FEBRUARY 2004 Sir Robert Smith enclosed a copy of the decision of the Committee on this matter. The Committee in their decision stated **"The Committee noted that it was the role of specialist correspondents such as Robert Pigott to form professional, journalist judgements on the basis of a wide variety of conversations and contacts in their field of expertise. It was satisfied that Robert Pigott had done this in the case of the estimate of the percentage of gay clergy, and that he had the appropriate authority and expertise to form this judgement"**. The Committee observed that the use of the phrase **"It is**

estimated that ...' had been 'overly specific and gave the impression of mathematical analysis underlying the estimate'. It concluded, however, that, 'although this was unfortunate, it did not amount to a serious breach of the BBC's editorial standards'.

It is highly significant that in their findings the Committee do not refer to factual reporting, rather to 'judgement'. The news item concerned was in no way a 'judgement'. It was presented as a matter of fact.

On 30TH MARCH 2004 a letter was sent to Sir Robert Smith stating ***"It is with great regret that we write to inform you that we consider your response to be totally unsatisfactory and a matter of grave public concern. We believe it established an extremely dangerous precedent in defending the right of the BBC News to present personal opinion and conjecture as fact. In doing this you seriously damage the integrity of the Corporation and are in danger of opening the gates for the BBC to be used as an instrument of propaganda.***

The findings of your Committee refer to a 'complaint' being registered with the Controller of BBC Radio 4. This statement, which you propose to publish, is both untrue and misleading. We wish to make it very clear to you personally that the original letter was not a complaint. It was a straightforward request for information. We would draw your attention to our letter in which we specifically stated 'We are extremely interested to know when this report was published, by whom it was published and who carried out the basic research. We are sure that the BBC will have checked the authenticity and reliability of this report and we would be very grateful if you could let us have the information requested as soon as possible'. The fact of the matter is that our team of doctors and medical scientists was anxious to obtain the document to which your programme alluded, for research purposes. This was a simple request for information and it is wrong for you to refer to this initial letter as being a 'complaint'". Referring to the use of the word 'unfortunate' the letter proceeded ***"With great respect, Sir Robert, broadcasting untruth is not 'unfortunate', it is indefensible.***

In future, presumably the BBC can preface any lie or outrageous statement with the phrase 'it has been estimated' and this be absolved of giving any substantiation whatsoever.

Your Committee refers to your correspondents forming 'professional' judgements. The medical, legal and scientific professionals within our Community would not dream of forming professional judgements without appropriate evidence. Nowhere in your correspondence have you given any substantive and reliable research documentation. The various defensive quotations fail to provide the most elementary supporting evidence.

To make matters worse, you presented to us a statement by your correspondent attributed to a former Archbishop of Canterbury, which can only be regarded as spurious because neither the BBC nor your correspondent have been able to substantiate this quotation". The letter said ***"We have spoken to many who heard the news items on the day in question. Without exception they were all under the impression that the statement was rooted in some report, opinion poll or research document, as opposed to the vivid imagination of your correspondent. Neither they nor ourselves remotely considered that it was merely the personal opinion of your correspondent. They have without exception been shocked to discover that they were misled by the BBC".*** The letter continued ***"In your finding you quoted the Head of Programme Complaints citing 'research sources' in support of the original guess. This is totally erroneous – no serious and relevant research data was ever cited. In contrast with this the BBC is fully aware that we provided very reliable, fully authenticated and sourced evidence indicating that the original claim was exaggerated.***

For many years the BBC had a well-deserved reputation for truthful reporting, but you have succeeded in deeply damaging our confidence in the BBC and the way in which it deals with public response. We are of the opinion that there is an immediate and urgent need for a new and perhaps impartial investigatory procedure to be set up within the BBC, if its reputation is to be repaired".

The letter posed the question ***"Would you also kindly let us know whether the decision of your Committee was unanimous?"*** Sir Robert Smith did not reply to this letter. The secretary to the GPCC merely stated ***"thank you for bringing your further points to our attention".*** Neither she nor Sir Robert answered the question as to whether the decision of the Committee had been unanimous.

On 15TH APRIL 2004 a letter was sent to Sir Robert Smith requesting that ***“you, as Chairman of Governors Complaints Committee, ensure that in any further BBC publication this is not referred to as a complaint. It was a request for information”***. Sir Robert did not reply to this letter.

On 15TH APRIL 2004 a letter was sent to Mr. S. Milner, Governance and Accountability of the BBC stating ***“We regard the response of the BBC at every stage in this correspondence, as being grossly unsatisfactory”***. It was stated ***“We wish the Chairman and Governors of the BBC to be aware that a very dangerous precedent has now been established in which exaggeration and distortion are deemed acceptable. This will inevitably undermine public confidence in the BBC’s editorial standards. We would be glad if you would bring this matter to the notice of the Acting chairman of the BBC and particularly our letter to Sir Robert Smith of 30th March 2004 and perhaps you would be so kind as to confirm that this has been done”***.

On 19TH APRIL 2004 a letter was sent by the Secretary to the GPCC in response to the request that the original submission be described as ‘a request for information’ rather than a complaint. She dismissed this, saying ***“It is not appropriate, ... that your appeal is characterised in this way. As a result, the account will be published in the terms of the GPCC finding. ... the only variation is that the account will be anonymised”***.

On 30TH APRIL 2004 a letter was received from Mr. S. Milner in which it was stated ***“I have noted the comments you make about the BBC’s complaints process. The matter you raise regarding whether or not you actually made a complaint was examined in detail in a letter to you from Poppy Hughes, Secretary of the Governors’ Programme Complaints Committee, dated 19th April”***. Referring to the GPCC Mr. Milner said ***“there is not higher authority on this matter in the BBC”***.

On 20TH MAY 2004 a letter was sent to Mr. S. Milner stating ***“You will recall that on 15th April I asked you to bring our grave concerns to the notice of the Acting Chairman of the BBC and in particular our letter to Sir Robert Smith of 30th March. I asked if you would kindly confirm that this has been done. As we are making preparations to publish this correspondence, I would be glad if you would confirm that this has in fact been done”***.

On 1ST JUNE 2004 (posted 6th June) a letter was sent by Mr. Milner stating that the Acting Chairman of the Governors ***“was not a member of the GPCC and so was not shown a copy of your letter. This is because there is no higher authority in the BBC than the GPCC with regard to complaints. The Board receives a full account of the GPCC business, in the minutes of meetings and in the findings of the Committee. Any Board member can therefore raise issues with GPCC if he or she wishes”***.

On 22ND JUNE 2004 a letter was sent to Simon Milner stating ***“It is just twelve months since the BBC broadcast its inaccurate and misleading statement.***

It is noted that the BBC has repeatedly refused to correct or withdraw this item. Will you please note that it still remains our desire that the Chairman and full Board of Governors are made aware of this matter and of our total dissatisfaction”.

Conclusion

The above record illustrates how the British Broadcasting Corporation has responded to a simple and straightforward enquiry from the public.

Although the subject matter itself is of minor importance, it raises an extremely important principle, namely the responsibility of a public broadcasting service to broadcast truth and avoid the dissemination of untruth. The BBC ought to be totally committed to evidence-based practice. The public were clearly given erroneous information which the BBC have refused to correct. When faced with all the evidence the BBC stubbornly refused to admit

that they are in error. Worse than that, they have condoned the use, in defence of their position, of a fictitious quotation attributed to an Archbishop of Canterbury.

The public has been given wrong and misleading information and hence this record has been published. IT IS A QUESTION OF TRUTH.

June 2004

The above correspondence was in the name of the Maranatha Community. Maranatha is a national movement of over ten thousand members including General Practitioners, Paediatricians, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Teachers, Youth Counsellors and many others active in service to the Community in both professional and voluntary capacity.

The Maranatha Community,
102 Irlam Road, Flixton, Manchester M41 6JT
Tel:0161 748 4858 Fax: 0161 747 7379
Email: office@maranathacommunity.freeserve.co.uk

SEE PAGE 10 GIVING AN UPDATE OF CORRESPONDENCE SINCE THE INITIAL DOCUMENT WAS PRODUCED.

Update (2nd December 2004)

The following is the record of correspondence since the publication of 'A Question of Truth'.

It illustrates the way in which the BBC refuses to recognise its error and seeks to separate itself from listeners and viewers.

On 20TH MAY 2004 a letter was sent to the Secretary of the BBC in which it was pointed out to him that he had been asked **"to bring our great concerns to the Acting Chairman of the BBC"**. He was specifically asked to confirm that this had been done. On the 7TH JUNE he replied that as the Acting Chairman of the Governors was not a member of the GPCC he was **"not shown a copy of your letter"**.

On 23RD JUNE 2004 a copy of the above document was sent to Mr. Grade, the Chairman of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The letter stated **"Although the particular subject may be considered of minor importance, we believe an extremely important principle is raised. The BBC clearly broadcast a statement which was untrue, yet they have resolutely defended this. Furthermore, their correspondent has quoted a fictitious statement in defence of their position. We wish to register with you, as Chairman, our total dissatisfaction in this matter and would be glad if your Board could be made aware of the unsatisfactory situation"**.

NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED TO THIS LETTER.

On 20TH AUGUST 2004 a further copy of this document was sent to Mr. Grade in which it was said **"We would be glad if your Board could be made aware of the unsatisfactory situation"**.

NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED TO THIS LETTER.

On 16TH SEPTEMBER 2004 a letter was sent to Mr. Grade stating **"It has now been established beyond any reasonable doubt, that the BBC knowingly broadcast a statement which was totally untrue and without any foundation"**. It was pointed out to him that this **"raises an immensely important principle in terms of broadcasting standards and the integrity of the Corporation"**. He was specifically asked to give his personal response to pass on to a special meeting which had been arranged to consider this matter.

NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED TO THIS LETTER.

On 25TH OCTOBER 2004 a further letter was sent to Mr. Grade **"may we respectfully ask for the courtesy of a response to these letters and at least an acknowledgement that you have had sight of them and also the statement 'A Question of Truth'"**. It was pointed out to him **"We have a profound unease at the way this matter has been dealt with and our confidence in the BBC has been shaken"**.

NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED TO THIS LETTER.

On 9TH NOVEMBER 2004 a letter was sent to Mr. Grade in which it was stated **"thousands of our members are shocked and dismayed that we have not received an acknowledgement or reply from you ... referring to letters dated 20th August, 16th September or 25th October 2004"**. It was pointed out to him **"It occurs to us that our correspondence may have been intercepted and before we formally register a complaint with the Secretary of State, we would be glad of your personal confirmation that you have had sight of the correspondence and also the document 'A Question of Truth'"**.

NO REPLY WAS RECEIVED TO THIS LETTER.

By 1ST DECEMBER 2004 it was not even known whether the Chairman or the Board of Governors had even had sight of this document or the letters personally addressed to the Chairman, in June, August, September, October and November. The only conclusion to be drawn is that correspondence has been deliberately kept from the sight of the Chairman or that he made the unlikely decision of totally ignoring correspondence on a matter raising very serious questions about the truthfulness of the BBC News Service.

Note:

This matter did not start as a complaint but rather a legitimate and reasonable request for information which the BBC has singularly failed to provide. It raises questions about the truthfulness of the BBC News Service.

