

JOHN PEEL

Biography

BBC
RADIO



97-99 FM

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Teenage Kicks

1939 - 1959

John Peel always prided himself on maintaining an anti-establishment attitude and on his ability to back the underdog. He was anti-establishment because he knew how the establishment worked - he'd been part of it and he didn't like it.



Born in Heswall, Cheshire on 30th August 1939, John Robert Parker Ravenscroft was the son of an upper middle-class cotton merchant.

John was sent away from home at 13 to be educated as a boarder at the prestigious Shrewsbury School in Shropshire. He was shy and quiet at boarding school where the head boys bullied him. He preferred to shirk off games of rugby in favour of kicking back with a choice selection of rare vinyl.

He also snubbed the class system by becoming an avid Liverpool FC fan. Football was something that was seen to be a very working class passion and certainly not a suitable pursuit for a well-educated boy, but he was adamant he wouldn't fall in with the "Heswall Henrys" of his school.

His housemaster R. H. J. Brooke remembers John well and encouraged his "more wayward pursuits", allowing him to listen to "very noisy records in the study next door to the library." John described Reverend Brooke as "the greatest man I ever met" and Reverend Brooke certainly saw potential of a kind in John's writing, as can be seen on one of his school reports:

"Perhaps it's possible that John can form some kind of nightmarish career out of his enthusiasm for unlistenable records and his delight in writing long and facetious essays."

As soon as John had said goodbye to boarding school, he was bundled off to serve in the military as one of the last National Servicemen. National Service was compulsory for all men aged 18 and over, and it meant John had to serve a 3 year stint. It has since been abolished.

Ever the non-conformist, John wasn't a fan of the military and recalled of his experience:

"The Army said afterwards, 'At no time has he shown any sign of adapting to the military way of life.' I took it as a compliment."

We Gotta Get Outta This Place!

1960



After 'doing time' in the National Service, John jumped on the first plane out of Liverpool and headed straight for the United States.

It was 1960, rock 'n' roll was causing convulsions all over the world and adults were in uproar about the devil's music corrupting their children. Naturally, John just had to see what it was all about. So he headed to Dallas, Texas where he worked under the pretence of finding out more about cotton mills in order to impress the folks back home.

For nearly a year he worked in the Dallas Cotton Exchange, progressing to selling crop insurance in West Texas. But sure enough, it wasn't long before the lure of music pulled him in other directions and before he knew it, he'd bagged his first ever job as a radio presenter!

Kick Out The Jams

1961 - 1964



John's first foray as a radio DJ was at Dallas, Texas station WRRR where they failed to give him a penny for his efforts. But money wasn't his manna and he wasn't deterred. Rock 'n' roll had truly arrived Stateside and John Peel was hooked.

With Beatlemania causing mass hysteria amongst American teens, he found the passport to success lay in his Liverpoolian lilt. Despite being educated at a posh boarding school, Peel hammed up his Scouserisms and it wasn't long before he moved to a full-time disc-jockey placement at Dallas' KLIF.

John said of that period: *"I became a Beatles expert, but of course I hadn't been in Liverpool for years and didn't know anything about them. In those days, though, America was full of DJs who were all called James Bond who pretended to be English and were really Canadian and who were all Ringo's cousin. I don't know why they chose Ringo. So, in the sense that I wasn't called James Bond and I really did come from England, I was almost unique."* (NME)

In 1963, John found himself on the frontline of one of the most significant political moments in modern history ... the shooting of American President, John F. Kennedy - a story he was very proud of telling. After the assassination, John bluffed his way into the midnight press conference, where Lee Harvey Oswald was charged with the murder of Kennedy, by claiming to be a stringer for the Liverpool Echo. A film of the conference exists, showing John in the background, in his own words, "looking like a tourist."

One year later, John moved to Oklahoma City to join one of the city's radio stations, KOMA, where he spent the next 18 months. He married a local girl, Shirley Anne Milburn, with whom he had a stormy relationship. They divorced in 1971, and he rarely discussed the marriage. He also underwent his first name change, dropping the 's' from his surname. He later explained why - "The Americans apparently believed 'Ravenscroft' was too much for any one person to remember."

The metamorphosis from Ravenscroft to Peel was almost complete.

Kick Out The Jams

1961 - 1964

Contd.



John was paired up with a comedy jock on the breakfast show, but his northern wit was lost on his co-presenter and he was soon shunted off to an evening slot before eventually being given the boot by KOMA.

John said of the experience: *"Since I was the last guy they'd taken on, I was the first they got rid of when the going got rough. So ... I went off to work in California where I started taking drugs and leading a generally depraved kind of life."*

John ended up finding his feet at KMEN radio in San Bernardino, California.

California Dreaming

1965 - 1966

John Peel loved to throw the rulebooks out of the window when it came to DJing and when he landed a dream job on the West Coast he really started to flex his musical muscles.

In Dallas and Oklahoma he had reluctantly stuck to the playlist, playing popular tracks for screaming teeny-boppers and Beatles fans. But at KMEN in California he began to act like the broadcaster British audiences are familiar with and played pretty much whatever he liked. San Bernardino's location helped too; John was only 60 miles east of Los Angeles - an ideal location for checking out gigs and hanging out with bands. LSD was everywhere, bands like The Yardbirds and The Doors were hot names to drop and Peel was right there in the middle of it all, sucking up music and spinning discs as fast as he could find them.



John said of his time at KMEN: *"I started to play records that I wanted to play. Previously it had been all chart stuff. But I had to do six hours over the weekend and I thought, if I was going to do six hours, then I'm going to play what I want to play. I started to play blues things, Doors, Love, Butterfield Blues Band and Jefferson Airplane. I worked there for 18 months and then ran foul of the law and thought I'd better leave."*

Music legend has it that San Bernardino's local sheriff had it in for KMEN and its radical DJs, so, fearing the slammer and possible deportation, John booked a flight under his middle names and flew back to the UK, leaving his American career behind.

London Calling

1967

"I had been working on radio in America since 1961. I came back here in '67 and was by and large unemployable at the time. I hadn't anything to come home to. Just luck really, being in the right place at the right time: music lovers might argue the wrong place at the wrong time."



The Britain John returned to when he flew back from the States was a far cry from the one he'd left behind seven years ago. John may have been hanging out with The Doors in LA and enjoying the 'summer of love' in San Francisco, but Britain was also undergoing a mad metamorphosis, and the swinging Sixties were well and truly raging. The Beatles were hanging out with hippies and the Rolling Stones were telling people to 'get off their cloud'. Radio broadcasters had to admit that "the times, they were a changin".

The days of stuffy BBC presenters with cut glass accents and double-barrelled surnames were numbered. Despite the cultural revolution going on, the BBC found it tough to move with the times. The relatively new rock 'n' roll phenomenon meant that kids just wanted to hear more and more records. But the state-run BBC had to continue to play live dance-hall bands, more familiar to the 1940s and 50s, to tie in with the mainstream tastes of UK audiences. The BBC also had to play a certain amount of live music, according to the Musicians' Union, to ensure that performing musicians could make a living. This was called the 'Needle Time' restriction.

But the teenagers were screaming for rock 'n' roll and psychedelic grooves. If they couldn't find them on the BBC they'd get their kicks elsewhere. John Peel was just the man for the job. As he couldn't find work as a radio presenter on British soil, his first broadcast in the UK actually took place on a boat at sea! Pirate radio was born and John Peel was captain of the good ship Radio London where 'Needle Time' was non-existent and playlists were thrown out of the window.

John signed up for Radio London in March 1967, broadcasting during the week from midnight until 2am. Wonderful Radio London – or The Big L – was also where John went through his second, and permanent, name change. Working for an illegal station demanded that he protect his identity. At the station's on-shore offices, on Mayfair's Curzon Street, a secretary suggested he drop Ravenscroft in favour of a more listener-friendly moniker.

John Peel the broadcaster was born.

London Calling

1967

Contd.

John named his programme The Perfumed Garden, taking its title from a notorious book of the time – an erotic novel not dissimilar to the Karma Sutra, which was perfect considering the swinging times in which it was being broadcast!



The Perfumed Garden blossomed and celebrated the weird and the obscure. John refused to play hit lists and top 40s, preferring to concentrate on underground acts such as Tyrannosaurus Rex, Captain Beefheart, John Fahey and Fairport Convention. He also played albums in their entirety, which was considered to be crazy at the time and would never have been allowed at the BBC. If there was a rule in radio, then Peel took great delight in breaking it. He also read out poetry and articles from radical street press publications such as Oz, and he'd discuss politics. All of which made for compulsive listening.

During his six months at sea, aboard the good ship Wonderful Radio London, he really honed his skill as a DJ. In stark contrast to other DJs, such as Kenny Everett and Tony Blackburn, who were loud and 'crazy', John was softly spoken, and he developed a self-effacing delivery that created an intimacy with his

listeners. He encouraged them to write letters or phone in to share their views - he made people feel like he was talking to them and them alone.

John told Listener magazine: *"You had a remarkable two-way dialogue with the audience which is not possible to simulate on land. You put the show out completely on your own in the bowels of a rotten ship three miles out at sea. You knew the audience felt a little bit daring listening to you."*

Eventually the law caught up with the pirates and Radio London closed on August 14, 1967. The BBC had plans to launch its own pop station, and John, yet again, was in the right place at the right time. He joined the BBC's new music station, Radio 1, which went on air the following month.

Top Gear!

1967

John's first show for BBC Radio 1 was called Top Gear, which he co-presented with former Radio London DJ Pete Drummond. It went to air at 2pm on Sunday October 1st, 1967, and it promised sessions with some of the hottest names in the music business. John Peel got the job by the skin of his teeth as BBC bigwigs thought he was too much



of a loose cannon. But Top Gear producer, and BBC veteran of 10 years, Bernie Andrews, had his eye on Peel and demanded that he present the show. Andrews became John's advocate, convincing BBC bosses to give John the opportunity to stay at the station - albeit on a six-week contract - even though his style was at odds with the "stuffy establishmentarianism" of the BBC.

Immediately, John and Bernie started to book sessions from artists John thought worthy of recognition. The Peel Sessions on Top Gear attracted the likes of Pink Floyd, David Bowie, Captain Beefheart and the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band.

The Peel Sessions, now as famous as the man himself, were born.

John adopted Top Gear as his own programme, complete with solo billing which came with new-found freedom to play whatever he liked, whenever he liked.

Night Ride

1968



Once within the walls of Broadcasting House, John's celebrity began to grow. He was in demand as a DJ and he also began to write columns for the newly emerging music press and sleeve notes for the LPs of his favourite artists.

In January 1968 John was asked to present another Radio 1 show, similar in style to his Perfumed Garden show on Big L. The show was called Night Ride and went out on Wednesday nights from midnight until 1am, establishing John's reputation as a nocturnal DJ. Night Ride was where John came into his own. During the first broadcast in March, John announced: *"This is the first of a new series of programmes on which you may hear just about anything"*.

The Perfumed Garden may have been "out there", but 'Night Ride' was about as leftfield and outrageous as it got. John Lennon and Yoko Ono came in and played a cassette recording of their unborn baby's heartbeat over the air, and Downing Street was horrified when, during a debate about sexually transmitted diseases, Peel happily declared he had once caught a venereal disease and that more should be done to educate teens about the risk of STDs. There was a riot going on in radio land and John Peel was at the front holding the banner!

1968 also saw John's first television appearance. He appeared as a regular pundit on music, poetry and art on the radical alternative arts show, 'How It Is'. Whilst espousing the virtues of Captain Beefheart or some other outrageous band or book, a particularly pretty and feisty member of the 'How It Is' studio audience caught his eye. Sheila Gilhooly eventually was to become John Peel's second wife. Alongside music, she was the love of his life.

Flower Power & a New Producer

1969



Although Night Ride was off air, the BBC kept Top Gear in its regular Sunday afternoon slot. In April, Bernie Andrews produced his last show for John, having taken on another programme for Radio 2. Bernie was replaced by John Walters, whose partnership with Peel lasted more than 20 years.

Another big event of the year was when John volunteered to chauffeur Captain Beefheart and his band of crazies on their UK tour, driving them to gigs in a hired Mini. Beefheart remained a friend of John's throughout his life. Not content with hanging out with rock stars, Peel found himself pressing vinyl when he started his own record label, Dandelion, named after one of his pet hamsters.

Eighteen artists released 27 albums (plus one compilation) during Dandelion's three-year existence. Among the acts were Gene Vincent, Tractor, Stackwaddy, Siren and, bizarrely, Bill Oddie.

"I ran Dandelion really just to record a friend, Bridget St. John. It went through CBS, Warner Brothers and Polydor - using their money. The only hit single was Medicine Head's 'Pictures in the Sky'. Though we had a number one in the Lebanon, by an artist called Beau."

Fame, Festivals & The Faces

1970 - 1973

John Peel jumped into the psychedelic seventies with a firm desire to keep his finger on the pulse of music and to make sure his listeners knew their Black Sabbath from their T Rex.

Top Gear was attracting audiences in their droves and the Peel Sessions were swinging along nicely, racking up live sets from the likes of Fleetwood Mac, Jethro Tull, Elton John, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Joni Mitchell, Soft Machine, Joe Cocker, The Faces, Genesis and Free amongst others.

With the explosion of amazing music being listened to by millions, festivals started to spring up all over the UK.

John was one of only a few thousand attendees at 1971's Glastonbury Fayre, now known as Glastonbury Festival. One of Peel's many favourite memories involved slogging to the top of nearby Glastonbury Tor with T.Rex's singer, Marc Bolan.



In October, John made his first and possibly most infamous appearance on Top Of The Pops. The Faces, led by Rod Stewart with Ronnie Wood on guitar, were good friends of John's and asked if he would mime playing the mandolin whilst they played their hit 'Maggie May'. The band played the song with Peel strumming along in the background, and finished up by kicking a football around the stage.

In the same month, Radio 1 moved Peel's Top Gear to Wednesday evenings, from 10pm until midnight. By February 1972 he was also broadcasting in the same slot on Friday nights. More movements were just round the corner. By October 1972, Radio 1 became a full-time 24-hour station, but the only effect on John's show was a sideways move to Thursday nights.

The Wedding Present

1974 - 1979



On August 31st 1974, John married Sheila Gilhooly. The reception was held in London's Regent's Park, with Rod Stewart as best man. John wore Liverpool colours and proudly walked down the aisle to 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. His relationship with Sheila was one of the most important things in his life.

Pretty soon, John was listening out for something other than the hottest new tunes. The pitter-patter of tiny feet soon filled John and Sheila's thatched cottage in a small village near Stowmarket in Suffolk. They had four children and all of them were given a special name in cheeky reference to John's beloved Liverpool FC - William Robert Anfield, Alexandra May Anfield, Thomas James Dalglish and Florence Shankly.

In 1976 John gave punk a push into the mainstream. Whilst listening to a newly acquired stack of records, he came across the debut release from an unknown New York band called The Ramones. 'Judy Is A Punk' was the final track of John's show that night. The following night, 'Blitzkrieg Bop' got a spin. Punk had arrived at the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The new genre gained momentum quickly - thanks in part to John's enthusiasm. John's prog rock and hippie playlists morphed into a stream of three-minute punk nuggets, featuring the likes of the Sex Pistols, Clash, The Damned, Buzzcocks, Siouxsie & The Banshees, The Jam, and a little-known band from Northern Ireland called The Undertones. Their track, 'Teenage Kicks' hit John hard when he heard it for the first time in September 1978. He played the track back-to-back on his Radio 1 show, and it remained a firm favourite.

Christmas 1976 also saw the broadcast of the first Festive 50 chart. Never intended to be an annual ritual, the Festive 50 was an audio free-for-all, a chance for loyal listeners to choose their favourite tracks, no matter how old the music. Most of the songs in the first ever poll came from the past decade rather than from the past year. As a result, The Beatles, The Doors and Jimi Hendrix made an appearance, even though none of them were around at the time.

Despite a few teething problems, the Festive 50 ran every year around Christmas time. In 1982 the all-time chart was replaced by a year-only chart, but was briefly revived for the Millennium.

New Decade, New Music

1980 - 1984



As the new decade dawned, John was still besotted with punk and the injection of venom it spat into a stale music scene. But his endless quest for the new and obscure meant that he was constantly looking for something that was going to shake things up a bit. By January, John had recorded sessions with UB40, Simple Minds and Bauhaus. His playlists were becoming ever more eclectic, and reggae tracks were making their first tentative outings on the BBC.

The close of 1982 heard John playing artists from yet another new musical direction: hip-hop. Now, any listener tuning into Peel would be likely to discover Dick Dale sandwiched between Grandmaster Flash and Robert Wyatt, with a bit of punk, reggae, new wave and Krautrock thrown in for good measure. Lovely.

New Decade, New Music

1980 - 1984

Contd.

The 1980s saw commercialism and marketing become the major driving forces behind getting bands onto the radio, but John remained determined to back the underdogs of the musical underground. Between 1980 and 1982 John had embraced sessions from New Order, a fledgling Pulp, The Cure and Cocteau Twins.

Ironically, this was also the period in which John made the majority of his memorable appearances on Top Of The Pops. Although his first go at presenting the programme was in 1968, and his only other time on the show had been as part of The Faces' line-up in 1971, in the 80s, he suddenly found himself presenting TOTP and introducing bubbly pop-tastic, big-haired acts like Bucks Fizz and Nicole - acts that totally went against the grain of Peel's underground ethos.



Despite having to pay lip service to big-name, charting stars on Top Of The Pops, Peel continued to discover new bands and rope them in to record sessions. Peel's producer, John Walters, saw a band from Manchester perform at the University of London with a be-coiffed lead singer who had a fondness for dancing with daffodils. The Smiths were discovered and they played their first Peel Session in September 1983. Guitarist Johnny Marr penned The Smiths' classic 'This Charming Man' especially for the session, claiming they didn't have enough songs to play.

Another Peel favourite was discovered during a show when John told his listeners that he was hungry. A plucky fella from Essex turned up to the Maida Vale studios with a copy of his demo and a Biryani curry in hand. Billy Bragg was rewarded for his efforts by being offered a session on the spot.

Other Peel-championed acts during this period included The Jesus And Mary Chain and The Wedding Present, whose lead singer, David Gedge, would become a lifelong friend of the Peel family. Gedge continued to record sessions for the show, even after The Wedding Present dissolved, under the name Cinerama.

You'll Never Walk Alone

1985

In 1985, John was shocked by events surrounding his beloved Liverpool FC. In May, John and his wife Sheila travelled to see Liverpool play Italian team Juventus in the European Cup Final, held at Heysel Stadium in Belgium. Trouble on the terraces led to the collapse of a supporting wall and 39 Juventus fans died before the game had even kicked off. John was deeply disturbed by the events of the day and he didn't go to matches for several years. This event also fuelled a personal fear of large crowds. Liverpool were banned from European competitions for the next six years.

On a lighter note, back at Broadcasting House, John was shaking up the authorities yet again. In 1985 the Peel/Walters office was so overcrowded with records, half-eaten toast, coffee cups and general tat that a BBC busybody delivered a memorandum to say that the office was contravening the Health and Safety At Work Act!

Fifty Years of John

1986 - 1989

In 1986, John managed to disentangle himself from *Tops Of The Pops* - he'd never made a secret of feeling uncomfortable with the programme (although he'd still make the odd appearance in the 90s). He gave up television almost entirely, only resurrecting his small screen presence during the mid-90s, for the BBC's Glastonbury coverage and various one-off projects.

Musically, in the mid-to-late 80s John unearthed some unusual gems. He covered world music, Welsh-language indie bands and, in 1987, a hardcore invasion, headed-up by the brief and brash Napalm Death.

In October 1988, the John Peel Show moved to an earlier time slot, going forward an hour and a half to 8.30pm. It was the first schedule change for John, who'd enjoyed a lengthy and comfortable run of broadcasting at the same time every night, for over ten years. His audience figures doubled.

The end of the 80s was a time of mixed emotions for John. Another football tragedy struck in the summer of 1989 when 96 Liverpool fans were crushed to death at Sheffield's Hillsborough Stadium during the FA Cup semi-final versus Nottingham Forest. John reacted by opening his next show with Aretha Franklin's version of "You'll Never Walk Alone", before bursting into tears on air.



Happier times were just round the corner. Friends organised a 50th birthday party for John at London's Subterranea Club, featuring live performances by The Fall and The Wedding Present amongst others. John was also presented with an award for being 'a decent bloke', which he received with tears in his eyes.

Musically, John always looked to the future and his final shows of 1989 included tracks by Happy Mondays, Stone Roses, Inspiral Carpets, Pixies, Tad, Mudhoney, James, Morrissey, De La Soul, 808 State, Senseless Things, Jesus Jones, New Order and a fledgling Nirvana.

From The Archers to Nirvana

1990 - 1997



John fulfilled a lifetime ambition in 1991, appearing on his favourite show, Radio 4's daily soap opera, *The Archers*, as himself.

As far as music radio went, John was spoilt for choice. Nirvana, the defining band of the early 90s, first played a Peel Session in 1989 and revisited the show in 1990 and 1991. Other notables inducted into the Peel hall of fame included The Charlatans, The Lemonheads, The Farm, Ride, and PJ Harvey.

John also escaped being sacked as Radio 1's new controller, Matthew Bannister, scythed through the station's older DJs. John's credibility saved him, but he watched his Radio 1 colleagues disappear, including Bob Harris, Tommy Vance, Alan Freeman, Johnnie Walker, Gary Davies, Simon Bates, and Dave Lee Travis, who famously launched an attack on the BBC's management during his last show.

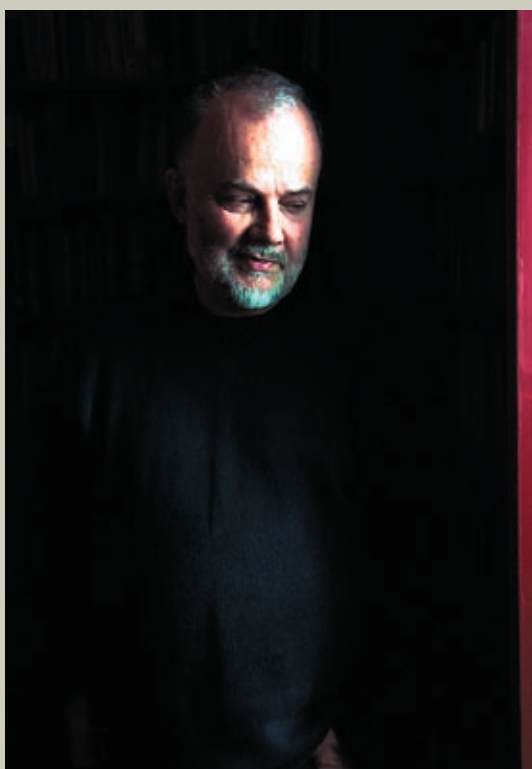
Despite being the last of the old school of Radio 1 DJs, John took great pleasure in working with the new breed of young broadcasters including Steve Lamacq and Mary Anne Hobbs. John played the surrogate father role to Hobbs, handing over to Mary Anne every week before her Tuesday night Rock Show. In 2004 Mary Anne commissioned a bespoke neon sign and gave it to John for his 65th birthday. The sign read 'Dream Dad'.

In 1996, John faced a tough personal challenge. Whilst at the Isle Of Man TT Races with fellow DJ Andy Kershaw, John learned that Sheila had suffered a brain haemorrhage. Although Sheila made a complete recovery, John was understandably shaken.

A happier event took place during one of his last ever Top Of The Pops appearances. John was wrapping up a link to camera when Michael Aspel appeared behind him, tapped John's shoulder and presented him with the infamous This Is Your Life big red book. A moving half-hour followed, with John recounting stories from his past and meeting friends, including an old colleague from Dallas. John, always ready with the waterworks, was visibly touched.

OBES & Home Truths

1998 - 1999



In 1998 John was invited to curate the prestigious Meltdown Festival: a two-week-long celebration of contemporary arts, hosted by London's Royal Festival Hall. The festival gave John the chance to plan his own programme, with a line-up of Peel favourites including Atari Teenage Riot, The Delgados and Cornershop. Meltdown coincided with the 1998 France World Cup, which meant that one night, Gorky's Zygotic Myncki had to wait until after 11pm to take the stage whilst England lost to Argentina. (Nonetheless, Peel was happy because Liverpool's Michael Owen scored, so the match wasn't all bad!)

In November, John went to Buckingham Palace to receive the Order of the British Empire. He did recognise the family name by insisting on being called John Ravenscroft, even after Buckingham Palace had him listed as Peel. Nevertheless, he would now be known as John Peel OBE.

John seemed to earn a gong every couple of years during the 90s and 00s, including Melody Maker's DJ Of The Year eleven times, the Sony Award for Broadcaster Of The Year in 1993, NME's 1994 Godlike Genius Award, numerous honorary degrees and doctorates, another Sony Gold Award in 2002, and in 2003 an induction into the Radio Academy's Hall Of Fame, alongside the Goons, Alan Freeman, Richard Dimbleby, Annie Nightingale and Alistair Cooke.

John hadn't only operated within the confines of Radio 1. He'd been broadcasting on the BBC World Service and he'd accumulated 30 years on the British Forces Broadcasting Service, BFBS. He also began broadcasting on VPRO Radio3 in the Netherlands and on Radio Eins in Germany. The advent of internet broadcasting and his shows being available on bbc.co.uk/radio gained John many more listeners around the world.

OBEs & Home Truths

1998 - 1999

Contd.

However, John's biggest new project was a new show on Radio 4. He began presenting Home Truths in 1998. When he took on the job, Peel requested that it be free from celebrities, as he found real life stories more entertaining. Stories from real British families flooded in.



John's 60th birthday in August 1999 coincided with the many retrospectives and celebrations surrounding the end of the millennium. The Radio Times put him on its front cover with a headline that read 'Do You Think I'm Sixty?', BBC Two televised a 'John Peel Night', which included a Peel documentary with contributions from anyone who was anyone in music. John's actual party was not televised, but it was a cracker nonetheless. The Fall, Cinerama and Dave Clarke all performed live. Perhaps the most magical part of the night came when John was presented with a gift from The Undertones' Damian O'Neill.

As legend has it, Damian was in his loft one day and found the original hand-written lyrics for Peel's all-time favourite song 'Teenage Kicks'. As it was John's birthday soon, and as he loved the song so much, Damian framed the lyrics and gave them to John at his party. John was suitably moved, yet another rock 'n' roll circle was complete, and the world of music looked on approvingly.

Travelling to the End

2000 - 2004

At the start of the new millennium, John Peel was working more than ever, with Home Truths, an internet radio presence, World Service and as an increasingly in-demand voice-over artist. But he still found time to introduce the White Stripes, The Datsuns, The Strokes and The Hives to the UK.

However in July 2001, John's close friend and former producer, John Walters, died suddenly.

Peel wrote of his relationship with Walters in a Radio Times column: "I have always characterised the relationship between us, in an irritatingly self-conscious parody of (Paul) Klee, as that of a man and his dog, each believing the other to be the dog." Walters' production partnership and friendship with Peel lasted more than 20 years.

In March 2002 John made an appearance on the television programme Room 101, presented by comedian Paul Merton. Guests on the show pick a certain number of personal irritants to banish to Room 101. John was on good form, trying to get rid of Essex, death and beards. He was in such high spirits that he even did the unthinkable and wore an Everton FC shirt as a joke for Paul Merton.

After a trip to New Zealand, John had caught the travel bug and the Daily Telegraph picked up on this, commissioning Peel as a travel writer - a sort of indie Michael Palin.

There was one final schedule change for John in 2003, and his show was put back to 11pm. John was still getting top ratings, in fact he was more popular than ever, but he found the new time tiring. He also had a new grandchild to fuss over - Archie, whom he adored and was proud to "vigorously grandparent".

John also finalised a book deal for an autobiography, 100,000 words long to be delivered by March 2005, but the book was never finished.

On October 25, 2004, John had a heart attack whilst on a working holiday in the Inca city of Cuzco in Peru. He died suddenly, with his wife Sheila by his side.

Travelling to the End

2000 - 2004

Contd.

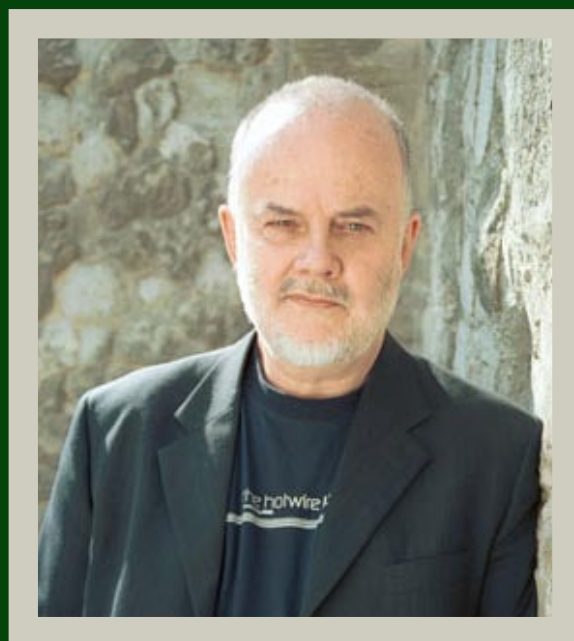
Tributes arrived from bands, fans and supporters from all around the world. Among the first to pay their respects were such seminal British artists as Blur, Oasis, and New Order. Prime Minister Tony Blair also paid tribute.

Radio had lost an original voice, musicians had lost a champion, fans had lost a hero and Britons had lost their favourite uncle. John Peel's death was mourned by teenagers, their parents and even their grandparents.

Peel often spoke wryly of his eventual death. He once said:

"I've always imagined I'd die by driving into the back of a truck while trying to read the name on a cassette, and people would say, 'he would have wanted to go that way.' Well, I want them to know that I wouldn't."





JOHN PEEL

30th August 1939 - 25th October 2004