

Charles Wheeler, doyen of British foreign correspondents, dies

Sir Charles Wheeler, one of Britain's best-known foreign correspondents - a man who shunned the glamour of anchoring television programmes for the good old business of reporting, has died at the age of 85.

Wheeler, the BBC's longest-serving foreign correspondent, made his name in India while covering the flight of the Dalai Lama from Tibet to India in 1959.

But it was as the BBC's chief US correspondent that he became a household name for his coverage of the Watergate scandal, in which he was often ahead of the American press corps.

In an age when journalists were rapidly becoming the news themselves - or at least coveted such status - Wheeler shunned such celebrity.

When he returned to Britain from the US, he was "taken aback and not entirely gratified to learn that he had become a national celebrity", said an obituary published Saturday.

Idolised by foreign correspondents, Wheeler thought it was the business of teachers and preachers - and not journalists - to pontificate. He famously brought this into practice by refusing to give his personality the pride of place in his 1996 five-part television series 'Charles Wheeler's America'.

While Wheeler was an excellent news reporter, in later years he became particularly adept at explaining and interpreting foreign societies for British audiences - reporting with insight and compassion.

BBC director General Mark Thompson described Wheeler as "utterly irreplaceable".

"To audiences and colleagues alike, Charles Wheeler was simply a legend," he said, while Mark Damazer of BBC Radio 4 added: "Everything he did was shot through with compassion and wisdom."

Wheeler is survived by his wife Dip Singh, whom he married while still in India in 1962, and two daughters, one of whom is married to London Mayor Boris Johnson.

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