

Association Newsletter

Lulled into a false sense of security

The 2006 edition really wasn't too much of a problem to deal with, given my background in sharing with my wife the production of our village newsletter. The main difficulties came with setting up my own template, and sifting through the pile of articles that had been submitted to Peter after his appeal in the 2004 edition, prioritising the ones for inclusion in my first issue and those which would ultimately appear in subsequent years' editions, or on the website. The scanning and editing of lots of sheets of A4 and putting it on the page is all pretty routine stuff.

The 2007 edition was almost a breeze, with a stockpile of backlog items held in readiness against the possibility of insufficient new contributions through the year, then with a number of really good new contributions coming in.

So this time I thought 'a doddle - no need even to switch on the computer until the New Year'. A bad move. No sooner had I put finger to keyboard than we were plagued with a misbehaving operating system (or hardware?) - repeated crashes, random spontaneous rebooting etc. One day, any number of crashes, the next day none at all. Took it to 'my man' who replaced a suspect power supply module - OK for a couple of days, then misbehaving again. We'd got to the time in January when we needed to start preparing the February edition of the village newsletter in parallel, but whilst we were experiencing continual interruptions, we were able to carry on working. If it was handed over to the man for a proper investigation it would be away for an indeterminate period. Therefore soldiering on was the least worst option, which is what we're doing. As I type this, some light relief from shoehorning the last few items into spaces where they don't really fit, I'm about a working day away from the press deadline: I might just make it.

Honour for Veterans' Chairman

Charles Rand, Chairman of Marconi Veterans' Association and this year's President, has been awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honours list. The award was made for his services to sport in Essex (specifically football) where he has played, refereed, assessed other referees and been a long serving member of the Essex Olympian League Management Committee.

Charles, who lives in Chelmsford, was for many years Chief Production Engineer of Marconi Radar Systems, Writtle Road, Chelmsford when John Sutherland was Managing Director. His footballing career started at the age of 15 in 1946 when he took part in his first competitive game for the Mid-Essex Technical College, but his involvement in the sport increased once his playing days were over. He was one of the founder Committee Members of the Olympian League when it was formed in 1966, so-called as it was an Olympic year. He started as Fixture Secretary until 1971 and was also Publicity Secretary in 1968/69, refereeing in the League simultaneously.

He was Honorary Secretary from 1971 until 1973 when he was made Vice-Chairman, being elected Chairman in 1978. This was a position he occupied until the end of the 1999/2000 campaign and that year he was named the League's first ever Patron. Conducting around 270 referee assessments during that time, the culmination of the 2003/04 season saw his efforts recognised on a countywide scale as he received the Essex County Football Association's Award of Merit. Not intent on stopping there, he continued refereeing under 12s' matches until the ripe old age of 75!

He said 'I was overwhelmed when the letter from the Prime Minister's Office arrived and I am deeply thrilled to receive this in recognition of my long association over many years with Essex football. Within hours of the release of the news I had the press visiting. I needed to keep it a secret from them for the six weeks since I received the news up until the New Year, which was the hardest part'. The presentation will be made at Buckingham Palace mid-February when wife Betty and his two daughters will accompany him.

The Marconi Veterans' Association Committee offer congratulations to Charles and wishes him a speedy recovery from his recent illness.

With thanks to Peter Turrall and the Essex FA website for information used in this article.



Mailbag

A number of letters this year are from correspondents seeking information whilst researching their family history, or for the preparation of articles or books. If no contact detail appears with the letter then please direct any information, or your own contact details for the enquirer, to Barry Powell or to the editor.

RAF Aerial Erectors

David Kniveton wrote in September 2007 seeking assistance with a book he is writing about the activities of RAF Aerial Erectors, and asking how he could gain access to the archives. He was given a number of possibly helpful leads - and told the sorry story of the archives. The letter is reproduced here. Although the book is written it has not yet been published and any additional contributions, if helpful, can be incorporated, so if anyone can assist he would welcome the contact.

Email davidkniveton@fsmail.net. I have his postal address. Ed.

He writes:

About eight years ago I was in touch with Gavin Baxter, Assistant Archivist at the GEC Archives whilst researching for a book I am writing about the Royal Air Force Aerial Erectors. The time delay is due to me suffering various health problems, but now I am fit and well and determined to finish the book.

The letter I have from Gavin Baxter states that I have full permission to use the photographs etc that he was kind enough to send me.

Now that I have picked up my pen again I find that shortly after being in contact with Gavin the archives have disappeared, or at least to me they have. After a lot of searching on the web I came across a GEC newsletter from 2006 where you were taking over as editor.

I understand now that GEC made a gift of the archives to the local council. Can you please shed any light onto the archives now? Are there any contact details available?

Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Colwyn Bay College, and 'The Marconi Scientist Mystery'

Richard Shaw, February 2007

Many thanks for another excellent issue: full of interesting information, much of it vital material for anyone engaged in historical research. Do you deposit a copy with the British Library or any other archive from which it could be made available in the future? (Currently we don't, but we intend to lodge copies with the Essex Records Office. Ed.)

Of particular interest to me was the article by Felix Mascarenhas whose name is familiar and whose path I crossed more than once without, I think, ever meeting.

The first time was at Colwyn Bay Wireless College, which he left in the year I first went there. The second occasion was the Cardiff depot in Mountstuart Square, which I think he must have left before I started there in 1956. Perhaps we shall finally achieve a sighting at the reunion in April.

The article, 'The Marconi Scientist Mystery' I found most intriguing. I had not read Tony Collins' book, 'Open Verdict', but I was immediately reminded of an article that appeared in the News of the World on September 7, 2003. Titled, 'The Kelly Conspiracy', it asked, 'Are the deaths of 25 scientists linked?', and named 25 'of the world's top scientists - including Dr David Kelly - [who] have died mysteriously in the past two years.'

All, it seems, worked in similar fields. 'Many of the specialists - some world leaders in the development of weapons grade biological plagues - died within days of each other', the report continued. 'Ten were killed in plane crashes, one caused by a 'stray' surface-to-air missile.'

'Five died after apparently being mugged at home and three were shot.'

'Two, including Dr Kelly, committed suicide while another was stabbed to death. One was gassed in a laboratory's air-locked rooms, another was mown down while out jogging. And one mysteriously fell off a bridge after suffering a 'dizzy' spell.'

There appears to be no direct connection between any of these 25 deaths and those of the 25 Marconi scientists. But although both groups worked in several different fields, all had military, or potentially military, uses.

Consequently, even if one discounts ten per cent of those deaths as possibly accidental, the fact that so many such scientists met unnatural deaths in so short a time tends to challenge a belief in coincidence: a challenge that seems strengthened by the apparent lack of any further news of official investigations.

A letter from Keith Hughes in Dovercourt last March regretted his not being able to attend the reunion, and went on to say:

Thank you for the 12-page news letter - it had some very interesting news. As a Welshman I had a particular interest in the Colwyn Bay story (P2) and also to read the letter from Fred Kenyon on the late Derek Greiss. Both Fred and Derek were good friends of mine years ago and I would like to write to Fred in Australia - would you be able to give me his present address?

(A further contribution on Derek Griess' involvement with HF/DF in WW2 appears on page 7)

The wisdom of the Saturday supplements

Bills travel through the mail at twice the speed of cheques.

Success always occurs in private, and failure in full view.

The Marconi Lancia

The following letter from author and researcher on all aspects of motoring history Michael E Ware was received by Barry Powell last June.

This is a very long shot but you might be able to help. I am writing a book on a wide range of motoring subjects, one of which is cars that have been adapted to run on railways. I enclose a page (*see relevant paragraph extracted below*) which talks about a Lancia car on the railway that ran to the Marconi Telegraph Station in Ireland. Please do you have any knowledge of this Lancia 'locomotive', and other photographs of it or any idea of what happened to it when it was life expired, when ever that was. It is thought that it was returned to Chelmsford at some time.

Any help you can give me would be appreciated.

'Alcock and Brown, after their momentous 16½ hour flight across the Atlantic in 1919 in their Vickers Vimy, crash landed in Derrygimlagh Bog in Ireland. This location was some 4 miles south of Clifden in Connemara and adjacent to the pioneering Marconi Wireless Station. The only means of transport to this outpost was a two-foot gauge railway. Its principle locomotive was a conversion of an Edwardian Lancia, the adaptation being undertaken by Marconi engineers at their works at Chelmsford and delivered by sea and rail to Clifden. The famous aviators had their photograph taken seated in the Lancia locomotive.'

Barry Powell replied:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Lancia 'locomotive' at the Marconi Telegraph Station in Ireland.

With the break-up of Marconi Corporation (GEC as was), GEC Marconi Communications Ltd has now become SELEX Communications Ltd, a Company owned by Finmeccanica of Italy.

Whilst there is no Company Historian, members of the Marconi Veterans' Association may have some relevant documents, photographs or reminiscences which may be of use to you. I will circulate your letter to the other members of the committee, who may have contacts who can help you, and arrange for your request to be published in the next issue of our annual newsletter (January 2008) which will reach some 1200 Veterans. Should any information come to light, I will pass it to you.

The Marconi collection of archived documents and artefacts is now in the care of the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford who may also be able to assist you.

Would any veteran able to assist with information please direct it to Barry Powell or the editor who will forward it to Mr Ware.

The Baddow tower - further thoughts

Bill Fitzgerald, March 2007

Further to your note in the newsletter on the Baddow tower, I am wondering if there is any point in having the tower listed! The only advantage gained might be to delay its destruction. All the owners would need to do would be to declare it 'unsafe'.

If a listing was given and honoured, who could be persuaded to re-erect it and where? Bawdsey perhaps, but all the listed towers they had are gone. The cost to dismantle the tower, from the top down, to transport it, to re-erect it and paint it would be extremely costly. Perhaps we could get a mobile phone company to erect it at Sandford Mill (God forbid).

Sorry to be an old pessimist but we must consider the facts. Whatever happens the tower cannot stay at Baddow if the site is sold for residential use. A swift charge of explosives at each leg - and goodbye!



Could you get your spies at Baddow to see if the structure is being cared for. The tower is of mild steel and requires care to prevent corrosion. I think I know now why English Heritage is reluctant to list it!

In passing, did you get a copy of the plan of the factory, in colour, from the developers? Has anybody combed the site for any artefacts? I spent hours in that building on top of the white building checking the Marine Radar linearity against the echoes from the avenues. Has anyone been up there since?

Bill Godden's memory of a 'Barnacle Buster' brought memories flooding back. It was developed in Building 38 (by the Marconi Road gate) where Marine Radar and Echo sounders were developed. Johnny Glasgow was the engineer assisted, or should I say that he was frustrated, by the attentions of Captain Round! Is Johnny a veteran, I would like to hear from him? (*Yes, John Glasgow is on the Register of Veterans.*)

Memories of Marconi Radar

David Ashman

I visited the website of the Marconi Veterans' Association because of the fond memories and admiration I always held for the Marconi Company. Watching and reading about the demise of the company at the start of the millennium from Asia was extremely painful. An absolute travesty for employees and the Chelmsford community.

I worked for Marconi Radar in Great Baddow for just two and half years in the sixties, holding a relatively junior position in the Air Traffic Control section and then with Systems A team.... or was it Systems B team? During my short time of employment I worked under Don Eastaugh and then, on the Systems team, worked for Roger Woodcock and Ian Donaldson. I greatly admired their technical skills, know-how and man management skills.

My technical interest and work was involved with primary ATC Radar systems. Marconi Company introduced me to digital signal processing. I found an additional challenge in computers as I was drawn into the world of Marconi Myriad Computers and trained as a programmer at the Writtle Training Centre.

I enjoyed happy and satisfying employment at Marconi Radar with good prospects. What more could I want. I had the best job in the world and was, it seemed to me, surrounded by most of the best people. Unfortunately this wasn't to last. Family problems made it necessary for me to resign and return to working and living in London. Eventually the computer systems skills given to me by Marconi took my career into the financial sector. The Marconi managers also gave me a model upon which to build my own management style. My career prospered as a result.

Since those very happy days I've worked in many 'blue chip' companies, worked in over 100 countries, encountered a variety of modern managers, survived culture change programmes, participated in 'customer first' workshops, endured immersion in the quality management way whilst generally trying to stay up-to-date with modern management methods. I suppose these have made their mark on me and indeed have probably contributed to my career which has taken me all over the world and given me much satisfaction. However when I reflect on the companies I've worked for, the managers I've served, and the satisfaction I experienced, despite all the advances in 'methods' none exceed the personal satisfaction I experienced working for and serving the Marconi Company.

Having visited your website from my desk in Singapore and experiencing the pleasure of linking to one of the very happy periods of my life, I just wanted to express my appreciation to the Marconi community for the contribution they made to my life and career.

Scottish Signal School (Glasgow Wireless College)

Vix Kennedy - vixykins2@googlemail.com

I'm wondering if you or any of your members know anything of the Scottish Signal School, also referred to as the Glasgow Wireless College, which was at 15 Newton Place, Glasgow during the war?

My son's great grandfather is listed as principal there between 1942-1946 and then he moved his family to Rhodesia. This is all I know! Rhodesia at that time was the new world and many people moved there to help build the country, much like Australia and New Zealand. I assume he would have been doing a similar trade there and been involved in wireless communications.

I'm pretty sure he would have left there as it became Zimbabwe, and may have gone to South Africa or more likely USA or even returned to Scotland, but I'm sure he would have remained in the trade.

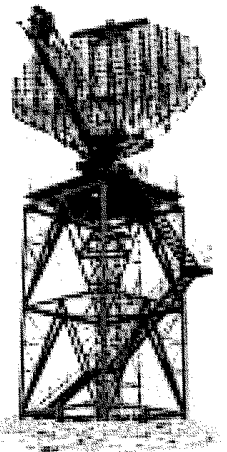
His name was Charles Theodore Kennedy and he was married to an Annie Elizabeth Gibson. They had a son in 1944 called Raymond. If any of your members know anything about the school or remember him as a principal I'd love to hear from them!

History of ATC and airport radar

L A Thomas, Swansea

I am doing research on the history and development of ATC and Airport radar systems in the UK for the post war years, and write to you in the hope that some of your members may be able to assist me with any trade literature or general technical knowledge of the sets that Marconi designed and manufactured. I am led to understand that the former radar archives are no more, and to date have obtained information from early issues of aeronautical journals, technical magazines eg Marconi Review, and from the official files at the National Archives. The official files refer to the planning and siting of ATC radars, but do not provide any general details of the equipment, and often contain lobe diagrams. If any of your members have any information on the following Marconi radars I would be interested to hear - S232 series, S264, S264A, S264 A/H and the S650 series.

I recently placed a reader's request letter in an Essex newspaper for information on the above but had a very poor response.



Elsie, the Squigger-Bug

Normally the Squigger-Bug is kept below the threshold on a lead (often a short grid lead). If this lead is lengthened, the creature appears above the threshold and becomes self-excited by continually repeating her curious cry, a kind of variable mew. When fully excited she dives into the nearest closed circuit round which she races, tail in mouth, at incredible speed. The presence in a transmitter of the female of the species attracts the male (in this case, one Mike R O Henry by name). Mike has on several occasions tried to choke Elsie with the grid lead, but the reluctance with which she reacts to his coercive force ensures that there is no change in Elsie's characteristic curves.

When chased out of a transmitter, the female Squigger-Bug goes immediately to earth by way of the nearest bypass, digging herself in with a circular movement of ever-increasing radius, and finally disappearing with a loud report, leaving behind a characteristic odour of burnt bakelite and a pile of brass filings. Hence the Pyramids.

This, the only specimen of the well-known parasite which has survived captivity, answers to the name of Elsie Ratio. She has a magnetic personality although her head is a perfect vacuum. The female is very voracious and, owing to her self-capacity, is able to eat excessive amounts of grid currants and a little anode feed. The latter is kept in a tank coil and comes out of a tap. The Squigger-Bug eats from a quartz plate (which in wartime was reduced to a pintz plate), and is accustomed to feed from positive to negative. She is much perturbed if fed the other way, a process known as negative feedback.

Her bent-up chassis is inductive (abbrev. infinitely seductive) and her component parts are colour-coded giving an attractive skin-effect. Vanity is responsible for the full-wave in her antennae, although this Hertz antennae unless padding capacities are used.

From the first issue of the Marconi Mariner, Vol. 1, No.1, July-August 1947 with thanks to Jimmy Leadbitter

He was very wrong, but lived...

Tom Gutteridge - a contribution from December 2005

An occasional reader of the Newsletter, I have been interested to read other people's contributions to this little bit of Marconi history: here are some of mine.

I joined Marconi Test Department from the Chelmsford Tech in 1943 and leaving in 1974, my memory of those times is hazy but I think Mr Robb, who had an office in the front building, was the Chief of Test.

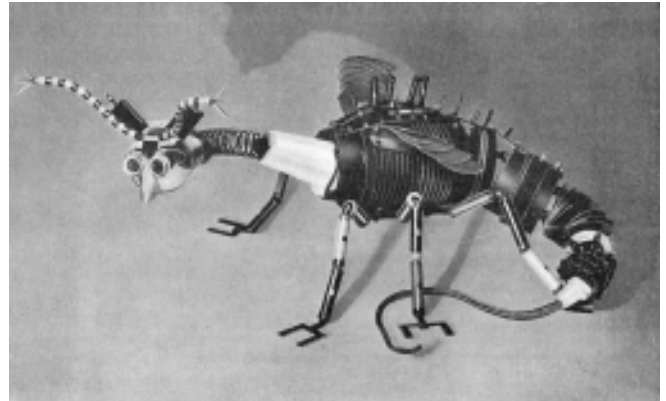
As a junior, I started with the boring job of testing components like capacitors, inductances, Muirhead drives and coils. The area for testing coils was at the end of the girls' winding shop upstairs. A dangerous place for self-conscious young men! Later I moved on to High Power Test. This was the 'big bang' area – before Safety at Work rules and regulations! SWB 8s and SWB 11s for the Admiralty were a fairly steady work load and later, high power Broadcast Transmitters.

High Power Test was run by Mr Whiteman and later by V J Sandy. Among the 'oldies' were G C Baker, and Mr Wylie - who I think suffered as a Marine Operator earlier in the war. Then there was Alfie Amos, Tommy Tomlinson, Doug Hills, Ecclestone and many others whose names have slipped my memory. G C Baker would regale us with the excitement and problems of taking his nanny goat(s) on the back seat of his open Riley car to visit Sandy's goat the previous evening.

We were handling lots of kilowatts but I don't recall anyone getting seriously hurt: even a young man known as 'fearless Fearman' who insisted that power was off at the wall and proceeded to put a screwdriver across the terminals of a SWB 8 transmitter to prove it. Unfortunately he was very wrong, but lived to explain loudly that it was somebody else's fault!

In the exposed corner by the entry to the High Power Test was a lash-up to provide very high voltages (like lightning!) mainly for testing or proving high voltage insulators. Very, very high voltages were generated (enough to make your hair stand on end!) and it took a bit of know-how to set up the tuned circuits to get the required voltage. Wylie was good at this.

The transmitters were built in the workshop below Marconi House opposite the canteen. I cannot immediately recall the name of the foreman but the chargehand was Charlie Pashley. I think he had been involved in the Altmark event off Norway in the Second World War and survived. I got to know many of the fitters. They were a good and friendly lot, some of whom later worked with me on overseas installations. At the entrance to Marconi House (or just behind) there was an entrance to



Squigger-Bug (♀) - Parasiticus Preposterous. Germinated, incubated, and brought to maturity in the laboratory of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Marine Development Section 1.B

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The Marconi Site, New Street, Chelmsford

Peter Turrall

The new owners of the Marconi factory and offices, Messrs Ashwell Developments of Cambridge, have submitted proposals for the redevelopment of the site to Chelmsford Borough Council and right now discussions with the council's Planning Department are taking place.

The latest date for Messrs Selex (who are at the moment the occupiers) to leave the site is July 1st this year. After this date the developers will, providing planning permission is granted, move in to start the first phase of the redevelopment which probably will be the demolition of the factory and associated buildings. The main front building housing offices will remain as this is already covered by a preservation order.

On behalf of the Veterans' Committee, I have had negotiations with Chelmsford Borough Council Planning Director as well as the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Arts and Heritage. The council, whilst in favour of a Heritage Centre which the Veterans' Committee would like in the front building, are unable to offer any finance for this to become reality. The finance, if any, to house archives, memorabilia and other documentation must come from other sources and hopefully from the developer. Already discussions in this direction have taken place, but the developers have other important aspects which must be considered before a Heritage Centre can come to fruition. Therefore it will be sometime before we can take the next steps.

Meanwhile, I am gathering memorabilia, documents and other Marconi related items. Hopefully one day these can be catalogued and held in the Heritage Centre at New Street. Please, whatever you do, make sure anything you possess in this area is made available to the Veterans' Association and not put into the bin, now or whenever you pass on. Quite recently we have been given a complete set of microphones, some made at New Street, all beautifully mounted on wooden stands.

The initial outlay to get the Heritage Centre under way looks to be in the order of £50K. This is because a considerable amount of work to get toilets, water, electricity, modifications to the building and heating sorted out is necessary. This area has been vacated for a number of years and certainly would have to be sorted out before we could offer the public access to the site. Parking is also a problem but eventually this will be overcome once the site is cleared.

Your committee is considering any shortcuts available to finance even a small area of the site to house documentation and memorabilia and this will be discussed at the reunion.

Meanwhile, it is hoped to record on audio disks the voices of people who worked in the Company and already a list of possible names has been drawn up. If you have some stories to relate of your time with the Company, then please advise the undersigned who will take all details and if appropriate, will make in due course arrangements for a recording to be made. The most modern equipment will be available for this purpose but here again it will cost money to carry this out and funding will have to be sought.

Your Veterans' Committee has given the go-ahead to a proposal I made to them of preparing a book of memories from people who worked for the Company. More details will be given at the reunion but, if you have any story no matter how small or long, please put this to paper and send either to the undersigned or our secretary Barry Powell. Again, it will cost a lot of money to produce and we are looking for ways to finance this. Timescales dictate that during the next 12 months information will be gathered and edited. Preparation for printing requires a further few months, meaning that the book will be ready for sale in about 18 months time. The anticipated cost will be around £15 each and we will need to sell at least 1,500 to make the project worthwhile. The title of the book is likely to be 'Memories of Marconi in Chelmsford - Gone But Not Forgotten'.

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the lower ground area or cellar where the archives and records were kept in the care of an old RN sailor who took part in the Zeebrugge attack in the First World War. He certainly had several fingers missing. I can't think what I was doing there but he was always good for an interesting chat. Another link to the First World War was Diggins who was a sort of general helper around Power Test. He would cheerfully relate the most unpleasant experiences of fighting in the trenches.

In due course I went into the services for a spell and on my return became involved on overseas installation work, but that's another story.

Sandford Mill Museum

Marconi Day, Saturday 26 April 2008

International Marconi Day commemorates Guglielmo Marconi's birthday. Your chance to visit the Marconi collections, see the new exhibition in the Marconi broadcasting hut, and explore the mysteries of radio transmission and Morse code with Chelmsford Amateur Radio Society. Entrance free, 10am - 5pm

Summer Sundays - 3, 10, 17, 24 August 2008

The Engine House is open on Sunday afternoons throughout August. See the museum's industrial collections and visit the Discovery Zone! Entrance free, 2 - 5pm

The role of Derek Griess in WW 2

Arriving just at the time that the obituary of Derek Griess appeared in the last newsletter, Bryan Everett passed on to Barry Powell further background to Derek's WW 2 career which came to him from Fred Kenyon in Australia. He writes:

Herewith copies of information from Fred Kenyon regarding Derek Griess' wartime work with Marconi installing HF/DF equipment. Fred was most anxious to lay hands on Derek's passports and I just couldn't understand why this was so - I now know.

(In the documents received from Bryan Everett was a list of 33 passport entries from April 1940 to June 1945 covering the area of the Atlantic from Liverpool to Portugal, West Africa, South Africa, St Helena, the Caribbean, the USA and Canada, evidence of a number of transatlantic crossings over that period. Ed.)

Fred's letter to an aunt of Derek's in York notes that a significant part of Derek's wartime career was associated with the installation of HF/DF (Huff-Duff) equipment at coastal stations on both sides of the Atlantic in support of the Royal Navy's North Atlantic convoy escort duties. It played a crucial role in containing the U-boat threat.

The foregoing was a preface to a page from Fred giving more detail of this period, which follows here.

During World War 2 there was a period from the commencement of the conflict in September 1939 when Britain was totally dependent on sea traffic across the Atlantic when supplies from America were vital. This was particularly so after Britain was isolated following the fall of France.

German U-boats were very successful sinking allied shipping, often sinking as many as sixty per cent of the ships in a convoy. Tactics were changed, and convoys were escorted by the Royal Navy using destroyers and frigates fitted with a number of new weapons. One of the most important of these was direction-finding equipment using high frequency radio (HF/DF) nicknamed Huff-Duff. The German U-boats hunted in packs and they communicated with each other and with Berlin when they surfaced every twenty four hours to charge their batteries. They assumed that if they broke radio silence only briefly with encoded signals they could not be traced.

Britain developed Huff-Duff using seaboard and land-based equipment so that even a brief HF signal could be registered and tracked from a number of receivers, allowing an exact location of the transmission to be immediately established and providing a bearing for the escort vessels to locate the enemy. The Marconi Company was involved in installing Huff-Duff stations around the Atlantic in British colonial countries which fortunately bordered the whole Atlantic coast. Derek Griess was the young (26) qualified radio engineer chosen for this urgent mission in May 1940. During the next five years he travelled constantly to many places around the North and South Atlantic coast from Halifax Nova Scotia and the West Indies and British Guiana in South America, across to Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast of Africa and even St Helena, a tiny island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.



The result of all this effort was that in Spring 1941 the escort vessels sailing out of Liverpool suddenly started to be very successful in locating and sinking the enemy U-boats. The German Admiral Dönitz lost some of his best U-boat commanders and the leader of the British Royal Navy escort ships Captain Frederic John Walker (known popularly as Johnnie Walker) became a hero being awarded four DSOs and a knighthood. From this time leading up to the D-Day invasion on 6 June 1945 the Atlantic gateway was open to massive amounts of traffic bringing the armaments that enabled the successful invasion of Europe.

(Background to Huff-Duff and the Battle of the Atlantic at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huff-Duff>. Google that and Frederic John Walker for a number of other relevant articles)

I have a copy of the list of Derek Griess's wartime passport entries, and would be happy to email a copy to any veteran requesting it. Also, a paper copy of this and the Wikipedia article to any veteran who is not internet-enabled - so long as there aren't too many! Ed).



*North Atlantic convoy, and below left, an HF/DF set..
(Photos - source: www.mikekemble.com)*

Report of the 2007 Veterans' reunion

The 71st annual reunion, at the MASC in Beehive Lane, Chelmsford, took place on Saturday 14th April. The president for the year, Professor Roy W Simons, was introduced by MVA Chairman, Charles Rand. In his introduction Charles touched on their shared past in Marconi Radar, first at Baddow, then later at Writtle Road when he was Chief Production Engineer during Roy's time as Technical Director.

Roy Simons reviewed the Marconi companies' involvement in radar systems design and manufacture, from Marconi's anticipation of the concept of radiolocation, when in 1922 in an address to the American Institution of Electrical Engineers (AIEE) he said '...it should be possible to design apparatus to radiate or project a beam of rays, which rays, if coming across a metallic object such as a ship, would be reflected back to a receiver..', until the time of his (Roy Simons') own departure from the Marconi Radar Systems Ltd in 1986.

The company's first practical involvement in radar came with design of the aerial arrays for the Chain Home system in the mid 1930s, moving then during WW2 into manufacture of many radar systems, particularly for gunnery and naval surveillance, and also notably large-scale manufacture of magnetrons.

His own introduction to radar at the end of the war, under R J Kemp, was involvement in the design of a radar for the Marine Company - the basis of Radiolocator.

Subsequent notable milestones over the following years included a major contract for refurbishment of the wartime air-defence radar system of the United Kingdom during the late 40s/early 50s - a total of 20 sites for the RAF, design and manufacture of the Type S247 radar, the Queen's Award-winning S600 series, GWS Sea Wolf system for the Royal Navy, the formation of Marconi Radar Systems in 1969, and the last major surface radar that the company produced, another Queen's Award winner, Martello. Over these years two parallel product lines for radar systems materialised, one for HMG business and the other for private venture (predominantly overseas) business.

He concluded by saying that the Marconi Company was the leading supplier of radar systems to the world and he was proud to have been associated with the work of his colleagues in Marconi Radar Systems as the Technical Director for its first 17 years.

MVA Vice Chairman Peter Turrall then introduced the Guest of Honour, Dr John Williams OBE, FEng, HonFIEE. John Williams was for a number of years Director of the Marconi Research Centre at Great Baddow, and later Secretary and Chief Executive of the Institution of Electrical Engineers.

Dr. Williams shared some reminiscences of Lord Weinstock, to whom he had to report for about eight years, and interspersed his speech with various anecdotes about meetings with Lord Weinstock and some of the subterfuges used to prevent him from finding out too much about the particular operating company, and how it was necessary to explain the existence of certain staff who Lord Weinstock might otherwise consider excessive to the business.

Lord Weinstock was obsessed with not wasting money or resources and would take the opportunity at budget meetings to probe into particular areas. He was not interested in details of long term strategy; in fact in a memo to all MDs he said that making money from running businesses that GEC knew something about was the companies only strategy and we were forbidden to use the word in future monthly reports. Talking about memos from Lord Weinstock, one managing director was surprised to get a response from Lord Weinstock to his monthly report which started 'your monthly report is not entirely unsatisfactory'. The MD considered this the height of praise and framed the memo for posterity.

Dr Williams offered another anecdote that beautifully illustrated the focus on avoiding waste of money - and how it might be sidestepped. On a visit to Great Baddow, Lord Weinstock asked why it was necessary to employ two gardeners at the site. It was explained that they were necessary to keep the grass down to minimise HF path losses between transmitter and receiver antennae.

He concluded by emphasising his great respect for Lord Weinstock's management style and his prudent business approach, and wondering how different things might have been for the Company had he not bowed to City pressure and handed over the reins when he did.

Veterans' reunion 2008

The 2008 reunion will take place on Saturday 12th April at the MASC, Beehive Lane, Chelmsford, commencing at 1.00pm. This year's President is Veteran Charles Rand MBE, chairman of the MVA Standing Committee and previously Chief Production Engineer, Marconi Radar Systems Ltd, based at the Writtle Road complex. He will be introduced by Professor Roy W Simons OBE, CEng, FIET, CPhys, FInstP, last year's President. During the AGM, Peter Turrall will give an update on the impending redevelopment of the New Street site, and Robbie Robinson, former Managing Director of Marconi Communications Systems Ltd and a member of the Pensions Consultative Committee will update Veterans on the telent/Stanhope Pensions Trust pension situation and answer any questions that Veterans may wish to ask.

A project anecdote of times past

E J (Ted) Haydon

I'm thinking about the time around the early to mid eighties. Do you remember those days, when we worked hard and when the opportunity arose played hard. It was a time when we looked forward to going to work; it was intellectually challenging and best of all it was fun. I guess around the mid-eighties things changed, but let's not dwell on that.

An annual event was entertaining our customers to lunch on HMS Belfast. As those of us who were fortunate enough to attend these occasions will remember, the form was pre-lunch drinks, wine with the meal, and there was always plenty of this, and of course when dining with the Navy, the obligatory bottle of port which is passed around at the end of the meal until it is empty. Negotiating your way home after that was quite an art. I understand that some more 'experienced' diners would venture out in the evening to a night club but I know nothing of these activities!

On one particular occasion after lunch I was invited to join a naval officer and his wife for dinner that evening. They lived during the week with their dog on a longboat moored on the Regents Canal. We met his wife from work and dined at a Greek restaurant somewhere in Camden Town. Having done justice to a couple more bottles of wine, it was suggested that we adjourn for coffee to the boat. Now, I can vaguely remember arriving, but must have passed out before coffee, as the next thing I remember was the dog licking my face at 6am the next morning. After thanking my 'hosts' for the night's impromptu stay, I hurried home just in time to meet my wife on the doorstep as she left for work. I can still remember her words as she cycled off - 'Oh! You made it then'.

I reported in around 10am explaining to my boss the reason for my lateness. He, whom shall remain nameless (MVB), then told me he had been woken up that morning by the cleaners in a railway carriage in the sidings at Southend. I think I was slightly peeved that he was at his desk working before me!

But then it was business as usual. Happy days!

This contribution injects a Basildon flavour into this issue. We did things differently there - or did we? Ed.

Photo - Anders Isaksson www.isazone.com



Research - military radio

From Peter R Jensen

Email: jensenpr@ozemail.com.au

Website: www.hyparc.com

I recently came across a copy of the Marconi Veterans' Newsletter and saw that it contained a wealth of material which could be particularly useful for the book that I am starting to assemble. You may recognize my name from a couple of books that have dealt with the development of telecommunications over the last 100 years. I notice that one of them is referred to in the newsletter, 'In Marconi's Footsteps - Early Radio'. The more recent book, 'From the Wireless to the Web', was published in 2000.

Needless to say, the newsletter came to my attention courtesy of the internet and the redoubtable search engine Google.

The book that I am working on is provisionally entitled 'Wireless as War', and in it I am aiming to explore the development of radio technology from 1901 in South Africa to probably the 1960s when my military service was undertaken as a National Serviceman. As for the earlier books, it is intended to do this through a series of narratives dealing with actual events, and for this reason the Marconi Veterans represent an interesting source of potentially relevant experience.

In addition to Military Radio as used by the conventional fighting forces, I am also particularly interested in clandestine radio communications and its development. This is because the demands for light weight and compactness led to a series of developments that influenced radio design during the years following the war. In this context, I am currently involved with a group of radio amateur historical radio society people to replicate the Paraset of 1943, an interesting early portable transmitter receiver that was used by SOE in its efforts to undermine the Nazis in France.

Given the foregoing, I wonder if you can suggest a means to obtain access to the newsletter. Are you aware of it being provided to any organisation in Australia, which I where I am based? (*Peter Jensen has been directed to the website to access back editions of the newsletter, and Barry has sent him hard copies of issues which do not appear on the website. Ed.*)

Apropos 'In Marconi's Footsteps - Early Radio', if there are other veterans of the Marconi Company who are interested in obtaining a copy, I have a stock of new books that came from the publisher when they decided to declare the book out of print. The going rate is £35 Sterling which includes postage on an airlifted basis and involves approximately 2 week or less delay from receipt of funds which can be a Sterling cheque as I have an account in the UK.

With kind regards and thanks in anticipation of your response.

The changing times...

Alan Hine, February 2007

As you spoke about hearing any scraps of news, I thought I would put pen to paper.

I worked at Marconi Basildon for 36 years and have been retired for 16. However I met a couple of work mates in town that still worked at the new SELEX building and was asked to pop in and see some of the other lads, and have a cup of tea and a natter. Having just reached my 80th birthday I thought it would be nice to pay them a visit. My son kindly took me by car and I made my way to the reception area. The woman rang a supervisor I had worked with, who arrived on the scene. He made off to make arrangements for a photograph and pass. But when he returned he said the powers that be would not issue one because of security, so I was not allowed to enter. This perhaps is not the sort of letter you would like to print but I was very annoyed and felt like speaking my mind. (So much for 36 years service!)

Aeronautical Memories

Roderick Mackley, February 2007

Thank you for the Newsletter which arrived this morning. I am most impressed by the way you have put this issue in particular together which constituted an absorbing read.

There is something very special about the dear old Marconi Company and its old members - I am still very, very proud to have spent so many years of my working life, firstly in the Company's Commercial Department and subsequently in the Aeronautical Division and the Radar Company and I just cannot understand those people who have said that work was a bore - I can honestly say that I enjoyed every minute of every day.

Eric Walker's memories of life at Lawford Lane is of particular interest as I really started my Marconi life there, joining Aeronautical Division for two weeks in late 1946 and staying for seventeen years before moving on! Eric's account broadly confirms mine - he, like me, enjoyed the light-hearted, hard-working regimen there, almost like the RAF in which I had served during WWII but in civilian clothes! I will avoid repeating myself - my very warm memories of those early days were described in the January 2005 Newsletter.

It pleases me to see that Radar is being celebrated this year, and that my old mate, Roy Simons, is this year's President. It grieves me though that I shall be unable to attend the Annual Reunion because of a health blip which, to date, six specialists have been unable to diagnose. Thankfully it is not life-threatening, just a wretched inconvenience!

I have now been retired for twenty years all but one month - doesn't time fly?

Alfred H Howarth

John Howarth, Cumbria

This letter appeared in the October/November 2007 of 'Radio Bygones' journal, and as the result of an exchange of correspondence with John Howarth it is reproduced here. If anyone can help in his researches, please contact him directly via email on GMIVKG@mail-me.org.uk, or pass any information or your own contact details for the enquirer to Barry Powell or to the editor.

I am researching the career of my father, Alfred H Howarth, as a Marconi-trained 'Sparks' or Radio Officer.

What little information I have at present indicates that he served on board the ocean-going tug Flying Breeze during WW1. This would be the first vessel bearing that name, as I understand that the one he served on was replaced by another with the same name at a later date.

From the end of WW1 till the early thirties he served as 'Sparks' on board many Merchant ships, mainly of the 'tramp' variety, sailing around most of the globe.

Unfortunately, the Marconi Company seems to have fragmented recently and I am unable to ascertain where the records of this company are deposited. In particular I am interested in any records of the Marconi Radio Operator branch, who would have been his employer.

I would appreciate any help that anyone out there can give me in either locating these records, or any other information that would give me a lead in locating further information.

Pat O'Hanlon, Radio Officer

Patrick O'Hanlon, Holden, Massachusetts, USA

Email: OHanlon_Pat@emc.com

I have just read with great interest the latest (April 2007) Marconi Veterans' Association newsletter, in particular, the recollections of Felix Mascarenhas.

My uncle, Pat O'Hanlon, was also a Marconi Marine Officer during WW2, during which time he received recognition for good work when his vessel was torpedoed. He trained at the Marconi school in Liverpool or North Wales during the 1930s. Unfortunately, I do not know which shipping line he was attached to during peace time, but I do know that he subsequently worked for the British government in some communications capacity.

I am researching my family tree and Pat O'Hanlon was my uncle - he passed away some years ago. I would be extremely grateful if you could point me to any information that would perhaps help me find out a little more about my uncle and his career in radio communications.

You know you've had too much of modern living when your dining room table is now your home filing cabinet.

Postscript to MIMCO Singapore 1942 to 1945

Extracts from Mr Duncan Robertson's report to company management following his release from Japanese internment in 1945 were published under this heading in the 2006 newsletter, and the full text, less the missing page, was recently posted on the website entitled Singapore 1942. Scanning recently through the bound volume of the first editions of the Marconi Mariner covering 1947 to 1950 I can add this postscript.

When in 1942 the Japanese armies were forcing their way down the Malayan Peninsular, the work of the depot carried on almost up to the day when Singapore was finally occupied. The Depot Manager, Mr Duncan Robertson, and his Technical Assistant, Mr H Thompson, left Singapore by ship in an endeavour to reach the Dutch East Indies. Unfortunately, their vessel was intercepted by a Japanese warship and sunk after a short but intense bombardment. Mr Thompson was killed and Mr Robertson taken prisoner and carried off into captivity.

Singapore was finally liberated by the British on September 5th, 1945, and the former local staff of the depot, Messrs Andrew B Pinto, W M Wambeck and Ibrahim Shariff, reported for duty on September 7th. Mr Duncan Robertson arrived back from internment on September 18th and thus, after nearly four years' break, the work of the depot was restarted. Mr Robertson, as a direct result of his internment, was at that time a very sick man, badly in need of a long rest. With the closing of the depot at Mombasa the Company transferred the European staff there to Singapore. Messrs J I Morse and E Dalton arrived in the Colony by air in November 1945, with Mr Morse as Acting Depot Manager.



By March 1949 Mr Robertson is recorded as being back in position as Depot Manager (*see photo - Duncan Robertson, seated, is the fourth from the left*), and then retiring from the Company on the 30th June 1949.

Auxiliaries Anonymous

A very brief extract of the chapter in the 'Book of Chelmsford' by Gilbert Torrey (publ.1985) mentioned in the 2006 edition, to slot into the last awkward space. Non-Chelmsford Veterans - please forgive the indulgence.

At the start of WW2 the covert British Resistance Organisation was established to become active in the event of a German invasion, organised into local cells or patrols of 6-8 men with good local knowledge who could blend into the landscape and be useful in a tight corner. Underground bunkers were constructed as bases. A local group of cells in Chelmsford, Wickham Bishops, Hatfield Peverel, Terling and Boreham was commanded by Capt Keith Seabrook, a farmer from Little Leighs.

The Chelmsford patrol, whose bunker was in woodland adjoining Hanningfield Reservoir, was led by HC Berry, with the rank of Sergeant, later succeeded by WT Macnab, and comprised R*W Bartle, K*N Carter, BC Ager, AG Taylor and HW Pratley (*some doubt over these initials). With the exception of Pratley and Taylor, and this is really the point of including this item, they were all from the Test Department of MWT in New Street, in their twenties and thirties at the outbreak of war, and were undoubtedly recruited for their knowledge of radio and radar in addition to their other qualities. Pratley was in Marconi Research at Great Baddow, and Taylor was with LNER (as it then was) at Liverpool Street Station.

In Memoriam

We report the death of the following Veterans notified to the secretary from the copy date of the last newsletter to the 31st January 2008. We extend our sympathy to the families of those mentioned.

GV Akerman, M Argent, A Bass, HG Brace, JC Brooker, WE Chatley, K Denham, Mrs VE Duckett, FA Dutton, DWH Ellis, Mrs S Fagg, RW Fenton, LC Gurney, Mrs C Howe, R Hubbard, H Jackson, D Keith, MF Lavan, WA Lewis, JF Ling, KB Maynard, KAJM Murphy, DE Norman, KE Reeve, AG Ruddock, J Smith (1940), JA Stewart, J Sutton, AS Tate, R Tonkin, SH Trudgill, Mrs SA Tyler, RD Walter, PA Ward, AP Warwick, J Watt, EJ Westmoreland, WH Yardley.

Tom Watson - Works Dentist

Peter Turrall

Not a Veteran but Works Dentist from 1957 until he retired, Tom Watson died on 3rd January 2008 aged 95. He used to live in Chelmsford but moved several years ago to Brandon near Thetford. I play golf with his son Alan Watson every Sunday. If you intend to send a letter of condolence please forward it to me and I will hand it to Alan the following Sunday.



In keeping with a thread running through much of this issue - Marconi Radar - this aerial view of the Writtle Road site was taken in 1994 from a hot air balloon by Ray Strudwick

To members of the GEC (1972) Plan Pension

Robbie Robertson, January 2008

I know that many of you are concerned about the current state of affairs with regard to your pensions; this note is an attempt to explain the present position.

telent,* the small remaining core of our company, was bought by Pensions Corporation, a major finance and insurance group, in November last year. telent is the owner and sponsor of the company which administers our pension fund, Stanhope Pension Trust (SPT). SPT is a legal UK entity, controlled by a board of trustees (directors); the appointment of trustees is regulated by UK law, and historically we have had a board of 3 trustees appointed by telent, 3 appointed by the Pensions Consultative Committee acting on behalf of Fund members, and three independents, chosen by telent, and appointed with the approval of the Government Pensions Regulator. One of the independents has been chairman of the board.

Your three member nominated directors (MNDs), together with the independent chairman, have been extremely active and effective on your behalf. As soon as news of the possibility of a takeover emerged, they approached the Pensions Regulator (PR), asking that he use his powers to protect our fund. The PR agreed to their request, and three Independent Trustees (ITs) were appointed by the PR as additional trustees of the Plan for six months from 19th October 2007. The primary objective of the ITs is to ensure that future pension benefits continue to be protected, and that this objective receives

independent consideration. The appointment of the ITs has had no effect on the day to day operation of the pension fund, which continues unchanged. The ITs are in position until 18th April 2008; if, at that date, the PR is still concerned about ownership/control of the SPT Pension Fund, then their appointment will be extended.

Because of the prompt and effective early action of the independent chairman and the MNDs, your pensions remain secure; I feel that the subject is now so well reported and publicised that this security is assured for some time to come. Your Pensions Consultative Committee has ex-Chelmsford pensioners Mick Elliot and me among its members, and continues to monitor the ongoing position closely; the pensions office will be issuing an update newsletter soon.

**For those Veterans not familiar with this remnant of MCSL, yes, it really does start with a lower case t! Ed.*

Please send articles for next year's newsletter to:

- Ken Earney, Editor, Marconi Veterans' Association Newsletter, 59 Willow Crescent, Hatfield Peverel, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 2LJ or email keneaney@hotmail.com
- or to Barry Powell via mail, email or phone to his usual address/phone number
- or via the 'Contact us' link on the Marconi Veterans' website - www.marconiveterans.com