



## Chairman's foreword

by Brian Izzard, Chairman



When I started to attend the MVA Reunions in 2015 I certainly did not foresee that one day in the near future, I would have the honour to be your Chairman. As I said in my brief introduction at the last Reunion – when Peter asked if I might be interested my first thoughts were 'flattered to be asked' followed by 'what am I letting myself in for'!

In fact, my decision to join the MVA was prompted by Peter himself after a chance meeting in the High Chelmer precinct when I was doing some voluntary work manning a stand.

Following a period with HM forces, Peter first joined Marconi in December 1950 and started work in the Installation Drawing Office (IDO). He then had a rewarding career and held many posts particularly in the Broadcast Studio equipment arena where our paths first crossed in the late 60's. He served in Contracts and later as Sales manager for many years when he quite literally travelled the world. Eventually, management decided to give him a well-earned rest from the high pressure sales environment and he was appointed Publicity Manager with broad responsibilities including the press and advertising. He finally quit full time employment in 1996 having been awarded an MBE for services to overseas

sales in 1995.

Moving on to the MVA – Peter first joined in 1975 and was elected to the Committee in 1980. He then became vice chairman in 1986, temporary chairman in 1996 and finally served as our Chairman for an unbelievable 20 years from 1999 – not forgetting also serving as our President in 2013. Veterans will recall Peter's dedication to preserving the Marconi name in Chelmsford and his battles with the council on siting of memorabilia and 'Wireless' instead of 'Radio' on the welcome to Chelmsford sign!

I am sure that Veterans will want to join myself and the entire MVA Committee in offering our profound thanks to Peter for all of his efforts and support to Veterans and the MVA over more years than any of us would think possible. He will be a hard act to follow.

### Moving on ....

A little about myself. I joined Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company in 1960 as a student apprentice on a so-called sandwich course – the joys of the New Street Apprentice Training Centre and all that filing – metal not paper!

Over the next 27 years I spent most of my time in Broadcasting Division working in engineering, installation, contracts, marketing, sales and R&D. I confess to having hung up my screwdriver fairly early in my career and concentrated on matters commercial and legal with a helping of finance and accounts from time to time. I spent 18 months as an expat in New York and ended my time with Marconi as manager of Central Division.

I moved on to join STC which was soon taken over by what became Nortel

Networks where I stayed until I retired from full time employment in 2001. Yes, I have specialised in companies that disappear or end up going into administration!

Since retirement, I have done quite a lot of voluntary work (Essex Air Ambulance and Citizens Advice) and have also served as a member nominated Trustee for my Nortel UK pension fund since 2008. I worked for a short time for the government Pension Wise service and do voluntary work for the Pensions Ombudsman service. From engineering to pensions – quite a leap!

### So, what have your Committee been up to in the past year?

I took a look at various aspects of MVA activities and have made a few changes:

- ◆ We have given the website a facelift so many thanks to Mark and Chris. Please take a look – your comments would be much appreciated.
- ◆ We have also generated a new look for this newsletter – again, your thoughts would be welcomed and thanks once more to Mark for all his efforts.
- ◆ A small change to the constitution is proposed for your consideration – it seems more appropriate to re brand MVA Friends as Associates

We struggled trying to contain the costs for the Reunion lunch and have had to increase both the lunch cost and the annual subscription whilst excluding the cheese and biscuits course from our meal. Before taking this decision, we looked at costs for alternative venues and came to the conclusion that our current venue is still cost effective mainly because Hamptons Sports and Leisure continue to support our event by waiving

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**Please ensure that you indicate your agreement to the MVA keeping your personal details otherwise we will be unable to contact you in the future and will have to remove your information from our database – so please send the form back with a cheque for your annual subscription even if you can't attend the 2020 Reunion lunch**

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venue hire charges. We would like to thank the management of Hamptons for this ongoing assistance. Rest assured that we will continue to monitor suitable alternatives for future years.

May I draw your attention to the Questionnaire on the back of the Reunion application form which contains seven questions for you to respond to with space to add your own comments on a couple of topics. You will quickly note that most of the questions are aimed at understanding your views in case we have to take further action to contain rising costs and also embracing at least some modern technology.

We continue to be supported by Leonardo UK for our newsletter printing and postage costs so I am sure you will all want to join myself and the Committee in expressing our profound gratitude for this valuable service. I know we could resort to email communications but I for one still like papers in my hand for some things rather than a screen!

Whilst on the subject of finances, many of you may have noticed that we are gradually eating(!) into our bank balance and annual subscriptions (plus voluntary donations) are our only source of income. This is not an issue in itself since it is your money, but we do have to take a view on how much longer the MVA might be expected to exist! Food for thought!

I had some concerns about our approach to the latest data protection requirements (GDPR) so you can no longer see lists of current veterans and their former places of employment on the website. You will see that the Reunion Application Form explains our GDPR approach and asks you to tick the box (just above the Absent Friends section) to indicate your agreement to the MVA keeping your personal details.

Do you know of any former work colleagues who might qualify as Veterans and be interested in joining us? Do let us know or ask them to contact our

Secretary. Also, I note that our Committee is somewhat Marconi Comms heavy – if any Veteran from other parts of Marconi might be interested in joining us then do let our Secretary know and we will keep your details on record for when a vacancy occurs.

### **Now some information about the plans for our Reunion :**

Our President this year is our former Secretary, Veteran Barry Powell who is joined by his guest Professor Schnurr, who was one of Barry's former lecturers at the Mid-Essex Technical College. We look forward to hearing about his association with Marconi students and some entertaining anecdotes!

As most of you will know, 2020 is the Centenary of the world's first entertainment broadcast by the operatic soprano Dame Nellie Melba on June 15, 1920 from our New Street factory. I am delighted to tell you that the author, journalist, broadcaster and historic consultant Tim Wander has agreed to join us at our 2020 Reunion together with his wife Judith. Tim worked for Marconi for some 17 years worldwide including at Writtle and he published "2MT Writtle – The Birth of British Broadcasting" in 1988 as well as a number of other Marconi related publications. He has also been associated with the Hall Street Museum project and the Sandford Mill Museum. He is currently actively involved in preparations for exhibitions and lectures in Chelmsford to celebrate Dame Nellie Melba's historic Radio concert.

### **In Summary ...**

We are indeed privileged to have two guest speakers for this special 2020 celebration of our founder Marconi and it is fitting that the annual Reunion falls on his birthday. I look forward to welcoming you all to the Reunion – get your reservations in early!

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## Secretary's Soapbox

by Colin Fletcher

The 2020 Reunion promises to be an event not to miss, such is the hope of the Management Committee; not only is this the Centenary of the Dame Nellie Melba broadcast, the Reunion is being held on Marconi's Birthday – 25th April.

But before getting too carried away, a serious note. As mentioned by the Chairman in his 'foreword' we have had to raise the cost of the annual subscription and Reunion tickets. This has been forced on us by two factors: the gradual erosion of the Association's funds and a significant change of approach in the menu provided by Roamers.

In order to limit the erosion of funds the Management Committee have reluctantly increased the subscription fee by £2.00 to £8.00 (Veterans) and £5.00 (Friends).

With regard to Roamers. in the past the Management Committee would choose the Reunion lunch from either the 'standard' or 'gourmet' menu published by Roamers. However, this year it came as a surprise to find that the menu selection had changed dramatically and was now catering for wedding parties rather than the more conventional sit-down meal that we Veterans are accustomed to. The revised menu split each course into separate price ranges creating a dilemma for the Management Committee. The most expensive selection, with cheese and biscuits, would have cost £43.00 (Veterans) and £48.00 (Friends). Hence the decision to choose the most economic menu without cheese and biscuits.

Why are we still here? As the Chairman pointed out this location is appropriate from a historical viewpoint and still provides the best total price. In order to

keep the price low, the choice was limited and the Management Committee have chosen to dispense with cheese and biscuits, which would have added a further £4.00 to the ticket price.

As Secretary, I receive feedback after the Reunion. Last year there were complaints from some Veterans, who drive to the Reunion, about the price of wine being included in the ticket price and as drivers they were unable to drink alcohol. Please note that wine is not included in the ticket price; it is paid for by the sale of raffle tickets, but not fully – this topic is addressed in our questionnaire on the back of the Reunion application form. However, the ticket price does include the current year's coaster, some of which are now collectors' items.

Now back to where the article started - the Centenary. As reported by the Chairman we have two guest speakers: Professor Lew Schnurr, the guest of this year's President, Veteran Barry Powell, and Tim Wander. Tim will be known to some of us and is now working on the final drafts of his latest book

### From Marconi to Melba...

#### The Centenary of British Radio Broadcasting Chelmsford 2020

commemorating the historic 1920 broadcast. Hopefully his article in this year's newsletter will have whetted your appetite and encouraged you to purchase a signed copy by the author. With luck, copies will be available at the Reunion. I make no apologies for the shameless plug. Yours truly will be eager to purchase a copy.

Tim's talent not only includes books but extends to the theatre. He has written a play to celebrate the Centenary. The play, **'The Power behind the Microphone'**, will be playing at the

Civic Theatre from 15th to 20th June. Book early to avoid disappointment.

If you wish to know more please contact me at [Secretary@marconi-verterans.org](mailto:Secretary@marconi-verterans.org).

## Coaster Swap Shop

If you have any coasters from previous years and would like to swap them for coasters also from previous years then, provided they are in good condition, bring them along to the Annual Reunion. This is subject to availability and excludes coasters from the current Reunion.

## New Web Site

by Mark Watson-Lee

I was tasked by the Management Committee to set up a new web site for the Marconi Veterans Association. The previous web site had been running for around 15 years, and after all this time most web sites need a refresh, also the technology behind them improves. The previous web site was on Chris Gardiner's family host provider, who generously funded the costs, and used the free WordPress system.

Years ago when I ran some of the Marconi / Selex web sites you only needed to cater for desktop and laptop screens. Nowadays you have desktop / laptops / tablets / smartphones / TV's and several browsers in use, so you need to use a Content Management System to automatically reformat the web page depending on what device you are viewing it on. The CMS systems use code written in php, and a database (MySQL) to store all the data, so the html pages are generated automatically to suite the device you are using.

The first task was to make a copy of the original website onto a new URL ([www.marconi-veterans.com](http://www.marconi-veterans.com)) so that all the original data / articles would be

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preserved.

We have then set up a new host contract owned by the MVA and moved the original [www.marconi-veterans.org](http://www.marconi-veterans.org) URL to the new host (now in the EU, was previously USA). The new web site started in October 2019 and runs on Linux servers (as most of the web does).



I have selected Joomla as the CMS system as this is an 'open source' system maintained by thousands of enthusiastic coders, and you get all facilities you need for free. Some other systems (such as WordPress) you only get basic facilities for the free version.

With the new web site the articles on the front page will be time limited – e.g. notification about an event will disappear after the event. But articles such as the newsletter will always remain in the menu.

## Newsletter

by Mark Watson-Lee  
[newsletter@marconi-veterans.org](mailto:newsletter@marconi-veterans.org)

I have taken on the task of formatting of the Newsletter from this year. I am using Microsoft Publisher to create the document, but of course rely entirely on what articles have been submitted by the Members for the content.

Up until October I thought this Newsletter would be much shorter than last year, however a substantial article

from Tim Wander to celebrate the Centenary of British Radio Broadcasting has added many pages, so now not everything submitted can be included this year, but maybe used next year.

## Report of the 83rd Veterans Reunion - 6 April 2019

by Ken Earney

Chairman Peter Turrall introduced our President for this year, John Bower, someone he has known for much of his employment with Marconi Communications, a career spanning 32 years from apprentice to manufacturing manager. Popular not only with colleagues but also with many other people he met during his work or whilst playing sport, particularly cricket: he was captain of the Marconi Cricket Club first eleven and a renowned bowler and last wicket batsman.



At work he could be relied on to satisfy orders within often very tight, at times seemingly impossible timescales. Peter used one quote to sum up the man - "The impossible is sometimes possible - leave it to me".

In reply John outlined some of those 32 years, slipping in a few amusing anecdotes along the way. In 1955 he applied to Marconi's and successfully gained a craft apprenticeship as an instrument maker. He remembered on his first day being sent to Dawson's Test and asked by Tom Summers if he knew Ohm's Law. When he said he did he was told to await arrival of two electric trucks (the ones with the driver at the front). The trucks duly arrived carrying light bulbs, several hundred, so armed with sockets and switches from Tom Summers he set about his first job – testing the light bulbs.

Apprenticeship provided a rich fund of such stories. In Section 16, the Christmas shop draw, first prize a whole chicken - complete with feathers and innards! An ex-boxer Dusty Miller won the prize and after a lunchtime pint or two at the Wheatsheaf proceeded to pluck the chicken, feathers going everywhere encouraged by the compressed air guns they all had on their benches. Having plucked the chicken Dusty then decided to cook it over his bench-top Bunsen burner. At this point the works superintendent George Barratt arrived to tell them they could go home early it being Christmas Eve, but when he saw the feathers everywhere he insisted that every one be collected and put in the bins before they left. John never did find out if Dusty enjoyed the chicken!

As an apprentice he had his first brush with the new-fangled printed circuit boards. Then, coincident with being transferred from craft to technician apprentice, spells in the Projects Office under Dennis Cofflin, and Sub-Contracting Division working for Jack Brookes and Dick Carrol. This move led to his meeting the secretary with whom he will be celebrating a Diamond Wedding anniversary in 2020. Then, an entirely different environment, development in Building 46. One memorable moment from his final apprenticeship attachment in Receiver Test was on a night shift performance testing ECM Cable and Wireless. Whilst taking their midnight snack of baked beans on toast someone poked his head around the corner of the equipment and said "My, that smells good!" It was King Hussein of Jordan.

Following apprenticeship, Test Methods Engineering, then subsequently joining Ron Kitchen working in Advanced Testing Techniques, including auto-testing. His first management role was to run the Auto-Test section, then on to manage

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Widford, move Mobile Radio down from Coventry with manufacture at Beehive Lane and commercial at Marrable House.

Whilst involved with the studio manufacturing of a large number of OB vehicles he was asked to join Peter Turrall to meet a potential Middle Eastern customer wanting a Mk VIII OB van. Over lunch they discussed details of the requirement and were then asked for a ball-park estimate of the selling price. When Peter told them "about £750,000" he was mortified to learn they had a budget of a million, so we'd left £250K on the table. After lunch, when being shown telecines in TV Test they asked how much two would cost. John's reply was £250,000 of course. It was the only contract that bore his name and signature!

He joined Bill Barbone's Space and Microwave division manufacturing equipment for amongst others Goonhilly Down and the Falklands, finishing his Marconi career after a final move to volume manufacture of the RC690 mobile during which he was head-hunted by Philips Radio Communication Systems at Cambridge. He said: "Whatever success I had was primarily due to the loyalty of all those who worked with me, and the apprenticeship and training I was so fortunate to receive, I would go so far as to say the best in the world."

He finished by going back to the first time he entered the lecture room at SE Essex Tech when the student sitting next to him shook his hand and said "Hi, I'm Bert Smith". The friendship has endured to this day and he was delighted that Bert Smith accepted the invitation to be his honoured guest.

## Address by Honoured Guest Albert Smith (Bert)

Bert Smith has known John Bower for over sixty years. They first met at South East Technical College when embarking on an ONC electrical engineering course, John and most of the students coming from either Marconi, Plessey or the Post Office and following the light current route, whilst Bert and another fellow student chose the heavy current path. The uniting factor was that they were all aspiring engineers, and the two disciplines got on well together exchanging lots of good-humoured banter along the way. ("You electronics folk can do wonderful things, but without us and anywhere to put your plugs you couldn't do a thing!"). He and our president have maintained their friendship to this day, he attending John's wedding nearly 60 years ago whilst John, a year later, served as his Best Man.

After completing his HNC he joined a Liverpool-based building services company McGough and Vickers whose business was electrical installation contracts. He worked on projects on the M4 motorway, a coal mine in Rugeley, power stations, a teacher training college to mention a few, along the way being made the manager of their London office at the age of 28, later becoming Chairman and Managing Director of the company, from which he retired in 2001.

In his speech John Bower lamented the demise of apprenticeships, and the polytechnics of yesteryear becoming universities but Bert Smith didn't fully agree, saying that with the new emphasis on STEM subjects successful efforts are being made to reintroduce apprenticeships, and that's vital - if we want the outstanding engineers of the

future they must be trained from the outset.

He closed by thanking the Reunion for the opportunity to speak to us on the day.

## AGM

Following the speeches and a brief adjournment, the AGM commenced under Peter Turrall, his last duty as chairman. The minutes of the AGM held on 21 April 2018 and the financial statement for the year ended 31 December 2018 were approved. Peter then announced his retirement as chairman. After thanking the members for all the support they have given him over many years he handed over to Vice-Chairman Eric Peachey.

Following a spontaneous three cheers from the gathering for the service Peter has given, Eric Peachey announced that all management committee members were retiring but were submitting themselves for re-election for a further twelve months: they were duly re-elected en-bloc. To refill the vacancy on the committee resulting from Peter's resignation he had nominated Brian Izzard. (This had been announced by Peter earlier in the afternoon's proceedings, and Brian had given the gathering a very brief potted CV): this nomination was approved and the management committee elected him as chairman at its autumn meeting on 23 September 2019.

During Brian Izzard's brief address, in anticipation of the association's likely participation in the Centenary events of 2020, he appealed for anyone with project management skills who might like to assist to get in contact with our secretary Colin Fletcher or any one of the committee members. Similarly if any Veteran has any suggestions or comments to make on what the MVA

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should or should not do, please get in touch with Colin or any other committee member. He closed by saying, tongue in cheek, that he'd run an eye over the accounts and had been a little perturbed that there seemed to be no slot for chairman's remuneration!

## EMAILS / LETTERS

### Deckhand

Email from David Gilbert

I worked on the Marconi Elettra III the whole of 1971 and 1972.



The first year we went right round England stopping to give demonstrations of the radio radar fish finders to the local Fishermen. When in Scarborough, after the free drinks and delicious spread, one of the fisherman left and he jumped down into his boat going straight through the bottom!

In the 2nd year we went to the Mediterranean, and got caught out in the Bay of Biscay by a mistral wind which we were not expecting, and that was only time I saw the skipper Bert Christie worried!

Luckily the 6th fleet came to our rescue with an aircraft carrier (I think it was called Enterprise) which escorted us for 3 hours to calmer waters.

We got impounded in Dubrovnik in a security dock for a few days, as Marconi London had not done the paperwork for us to be there - armed guards etc.!

When we were going up the Yugoslavia coast line, about 1 mile offshore, and shells were landing all round us from shore batteries practising, with me hanging on to the ship's siren and the skipper on the radio. They at last saw us, (the skipper was a destroyer captain in the war I believe).



We called in at Malta for 3 week refit (service). One night Don, Nigel and I went for a drink. A large Bacardi cost 6 old pence and a bottle of coke 1 shilling. We did rather over do it and myself and Nigel fell off the gangplank into the harbour in our best suits.

Sicily was next then Capri followed by several Italian ports then Spain and home. Back to the London river for a couple of weeks then back to Poole in Dorset which was our base.

### Who was Captain Henry Joseph Round MC?

*A brief trip through a long and busy life by David J.K. Jervis*

**H**enry Joseph Round was a great man.

His 85-year life was packed with achievement and adventure, crammed full of invention and creation.

Described in one publication as having 'shaped the course of British history' and another as being the 'father of British broadcasting', he was awarded the Military Cross in the First World War and the coveted Armstrong gold medal from the Radio Club of America in 1952.

His determination to progress the world of electronics and radio further and further into the unknown was relentless and astonishing, resulting in the registering of 117 patents during his career.

He has been described as the 'unrecognised' pioneer and, while it is true he didn't receive any civil honour like a knighthood or make front page headlines with celebrity status, he was recognised as a genius within the electronics field and, if you dig deep enough, one can find plenty about him on the invention that would have excited him beyond belief - the internet, the world wide web.

Whether working in London or Chelmsford as Guglielmo Marconi's personal assistant and chief engineer; constructing radio stations in the upper reaches of the Amazon river; working with the Americans in New York or earning a secret name - Captain X - among the shadows of British Intelligence, Henry Round was constantly pushing boundaries in the world of radio and broadcasting.

Even with this insatiable desire to invent, he was a caring and generous family man, devoted to his seven children and numerous grandchildren.

Before returning to look at his professional life, it is important to note that the balance he achieved between work and family meant he was very much loved as father and grandfather.

As far as his work is concerned, his family are immensely proud of this brilliant man - a pride that constantly rises as more is discovered about his life.

To fully understand the work of Henry Round requires a deep dive into a world of thermionic valves, triodes, oxide coated filaments, anodes, wireless telephony, amplitude control modulation

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systems, receivers, transmitters, magneto-strictive devices, nickel transducers, oscilloscopes and a host of other devices and processes in a lexicon unintelligible to most people.

Maybe his own understanding about how complex was this work is demonstrated in a quote from Round's acceptance speech when receiving the Armstrong Medal. Talking technically about valves, he made the aside: "or what my wife calls them, bottles."



Talking, or reading, technology - Round's natural language - is best followed in more academic documents than this one but there are key episodes in his professional life that must be highlighted.

- In 1912, when just 29, he was delegated to lead a team on a hazardous task in Brazil to improve the quality of vital transmissions from two radio stations on the upper reaches of the Amazon. It was an incredibly difficult task with serious obstacles in such a mosquito-ridden environment but he succeeded in his mission to everyone's satisfaction, proving himself again an engineer of resource and unusual ability.
- During the First World War, Henry Round became known as 'Captain X' in British Military Intelligence. He installed electronic direction finding equipment in stations across the entire western front and the British Isles. On May 30 1916 his equipment revealed movements in the German fleet off Wilhelmshaven in the North

Sea. The British fleet set sail to intercept them and the momentous Battle of Jutland took place which put paid to any further attempts by the enemy to gain supremacy of the oceans. Round's crucial role in this was revealed in 1920 by Admiral Jackson, First Sea Lord at the time of the battle, and he was awarded the prestigious Military Cross.

- During the Second World War he worked for the Admiralty on developing sonar to discover and track the movements of enemy submarines. He remained working on echo sounding with Government until 1950.
- In 1952 he was awarded the prized Armstrong Gold Medal by the Radio Club of America 'in recognition of his contributions during half a century to the radio art, and especially of his revolutionary developments during World War 1 in the fields of direction and position finding and the high amplification of short-wave signals.' A sad postscript is that E.H Armstrong took his own life in 1954 and a letter from Round to the RI of America ended: "I salute the spirit of my great friend."



In between the wars he was prolific in his work, focussing much of his time on valve and microphone development.

Between 1921 - 31 he was chief of Marconi Research and was involved in the famous wireless broadcast of singer Dame Nellie Melba in 1920 and, in 1924, his Marconi-Sykes magneto phone (microphone) facilitated the first outside

broadcast of a songbird, a nightingale singing as cellist Beatrice Harrison played nearby.

He developed valve after valve; he directed the installation of wireless transmitters; he produced a gramophone recording system and designed a large audience public address system which was used to relay King George V's speech at the Wembley Exhibitions and he registered patents on synchronising sound with pictures on cinema films.

And so, he continued his work as a persistent inventor and creator.

## In Memoriam

We extend our sympathy to the families of those who have died.

*For an up to date list please refer to our web site:-*

<https://www.marconi-veterans.org>

Menu > Members > In Memoriam

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Recently notified to our secretary:-

Mr. A Porter; Mr. AA Parks; Mr. AD Condon; Mr. AD Slocombe; Mr. AD Stevens; Mr. AVG Martin; Mr. BC Bruce; Mr. CJ Arnold; Mr. DB Huber; Mr. DE Weston; Mr. DJL Brown; Mr. DW Hills; Mr. ED Overy; Mr. EH Gildersleve; Mr. F Wilde; Mr. FW Boot; Mr. G Harris; Mr. GR Jinman; Mr. HJ Barker; Mr. IW Bendall; Mr. JA James; Mr. JB Goodacre; Mr. JDS Clarke; Mr. JG Pickering; Mr. JM Leadbeater; Mr. JV Simpson; Mr. K Watkins; Mr. MF Macken; Mr. MF Steeds; Mr. MC McNeil ; Mr. MK Kavanagh; Mr. NF Tovey; Mr. NJL Lockett; Mr. PJ Eves; Mr. RE Adams; Mr. RH Reynolds; Mr. RPJ Boram; Mr. RW Ives; Mr. SE Clarke; Mr. WE Blakemore; Mrs. IFA Vaughan

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## THE CENTENARY OF BRITISH RADIO BROADCASTING

### DAME NELLIE MELBA SINGS!

**Tim Wander.**

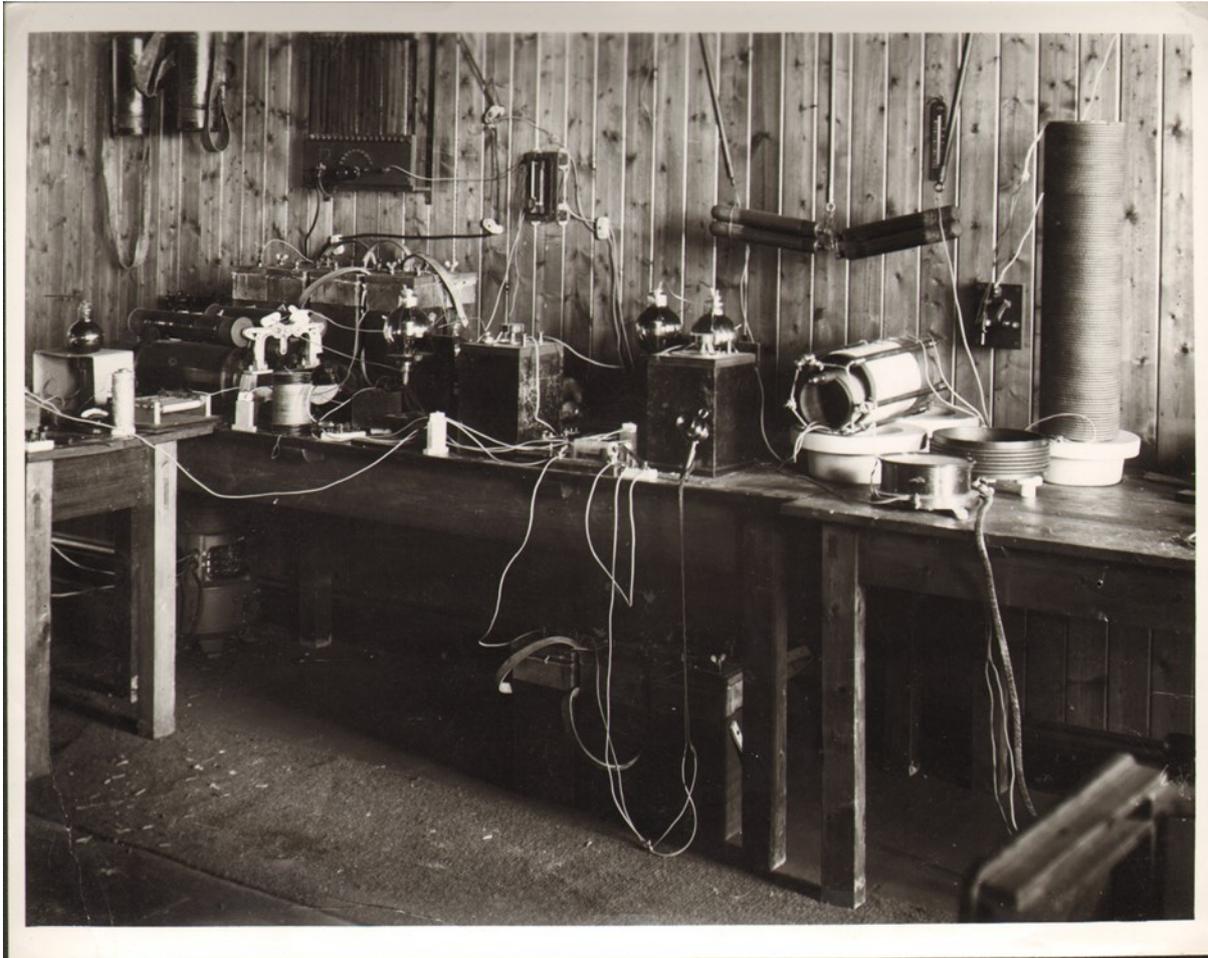
During WW1 the science of wireless telephony – sending and receiving speech instead of Morse code-- had taken huge strides. Based on new developments in thermionic valve technologies, at the Brooklands, Joyce Green and later Biggin Hill research stations, the Royal Flying Corps had developed lightweight reliable telephony equipment capable of over 100 miles' range, including air to air communication. This technology would soon enable the birth of civilian mass air transport in 1919, with the Writtle based Airborne Wireless Development Department under Peter Eckersley providing the first air traffic control systems, coupled with accurate direction finding based on H.J Round's work during the First World War.

In early 1919, really as a piece of pure blue sky research, The Marconi Company began a project to research and develop a new range of high power wireless telephony transmitters, pushing the bounds of this new, but still low power technology. The equipment they produced would become known as 'panel sets', each capable of transmitting at different output powers, 0.25 kW, 1.5 kW, 3 kW and 6 kW. The Company also started design work on a range of high power valves to meet the requirements of these new transmitter designs. In March 1919, just four months after the end of the First World War, one of the new 3 kW wireless telephony transmitters was installed at the Ballybunion station in Ireland under the direction of Captain Henry Joseph Round.



**Captain Henry Joseph Round M.C.**

H.J. Round joined the Marconi Company in 1902. A brilliant engineer, during his life long career with the Marconi Company he added much to the science of thermionic valves, made significant developments to ASDIC radio direction finding, and pioneered many other areas of wireless technology. His pioneering work with radio direction finding won him the Military Cross, and resulted in the Battle of Jutland, the largest naval battle of the First World War.



### The Ballybunion Station

Despite references in several publications, the Ballybunion Station was not built by Marconi, and never operated commercially. The station was built by the Universal Radio Syndicate, who started construction in 1912. The station had not obtained a commercial licence by the time World War 1 started and the company went into liquidation in 1915. A sister station at Newcastle, New Brunswick, built to the same design as Ballybunion, suffered a similar fate. The Marconi Company bought the two stations from the liquidator in 1918, mainly to prevent their use by potential competitors. The Marconi Company did not use the stations commercially, but found them to be useful and remote research locations, including communication with the R34 Airship in July 1919. The contents of Ballybunion were sold for scrap to a Sheffield based scrap merchant, Thos. W. Ward in 1925.

After the new transmitter was installed in Ballybunion, H.J. Round's colleague, Marconi engineer W.T. Ditcham began broadcasting a regular daily experimental speech 'programme' over 12 days on a wavelength of 3,800 metres using the call sign YXQ. By 1919, Bill Ditcham had accumulated a huge wealth of experience in every aspect of wireless communication. Back in 1906, he had started working for the De Forest Wireless Telegraph Syndicate, and in 1912 had moved to work with Grindell Matthews, who had started to experiment with speech telephony. His ambitious claims and plans for his stations near Letchworth were cut short by the First World War and his Company went bankrupt. After war service, W.T. Ditcham inevitably joined the Marconi Company, and started working alongside H. J Round as his *Dr Watson*. At this time Ditcham and Round probably knew more about high power radio speech transmission than any other engineers in the world.

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Ditcham and Round's experimental Irish transmissions were all carried out during the hours of daylight between 10.00am and 1.00pm. The principal objective of these tests was to prove that with the combination of the new oscillating valve transmitter and the modern Marconi valve receiver only a small amount of power was required to transmit telephonic or telegraphic messages across the Atlantic. The tests were also designed to provide data on what would be required to develop a commercial telephony operation over such a range. The tests were successful and W.T. Ditcham became the first European voice to cross the Atlantic, where [a] Mr. W.J. Picken was in charge of the receiving apparatus at Louisburg, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The signal from the station was heard very clearly, via a small frame aerial 6 feet square using a Type 55 Receiver, both at Chelmsford and Louisburg.

The success of this initial experiment in Ireland was to lead to far greater things. In late December 1919 the Marconi Company installed and began testing a 6kW telephony transmitter at its main Chelmsford factory located in New Street. Operating under an experimental Post Office transmission licence, and using the radio call sign MZX, its sole purpose was again to investigate the properties and problems associated with long distance high power speech transmission. The new Chelmsford transmitter fed into a huge 'T' shaped wire aerial that was suspended between two massive, 450ft high masts, set 750 feet apart, known locally as the 'drainpipes'. These huge steel tubes had dominated the Company's New Street works and the town since they were erected in 1919. Five sets of insulated stays connected each mast with four steel anchors set into 100-ton concrete blocks. Normally the new trials would not have raised much comment as the company was always testing new equipment at its Chelmsford sites. But this time something extraordinary occurred, almost by accident.

### ***What happened next was to change the world.***

The early days of radio broadcasting were to be dominated by the enthusiasm and continual pressure generated by a growing band of radio amateurs. It seems these pioneers were always listening in, patiently 'tickling their cat's whisker' receivers. A growing number also started to experiment with ever complex arrangements of the new thermionic hard valves. During WW1 a huge number of people had been trained (mainly by the Marconi Company) in the use of wireless equipment, many more had seen it in use on a daily basis. This interest was accelerated after the end of the war as the Government immediately dumped large quantities of ex-surplus electrical, wireless equipment and the new 'hard' vacuum valves on to the civilian market.

But in January 1920 the content of the first Chelmsford transmissions left much to be desired. Ditcham and Round simply followed the Company prescribed format standard speech tests for telephony transmission. But weeks of continually repeating railway station names from Bradshaw's train timetable, broken only by the occasional time check, could drive even the most dedicated of company men to distraction. Ditcham's normal routine was:

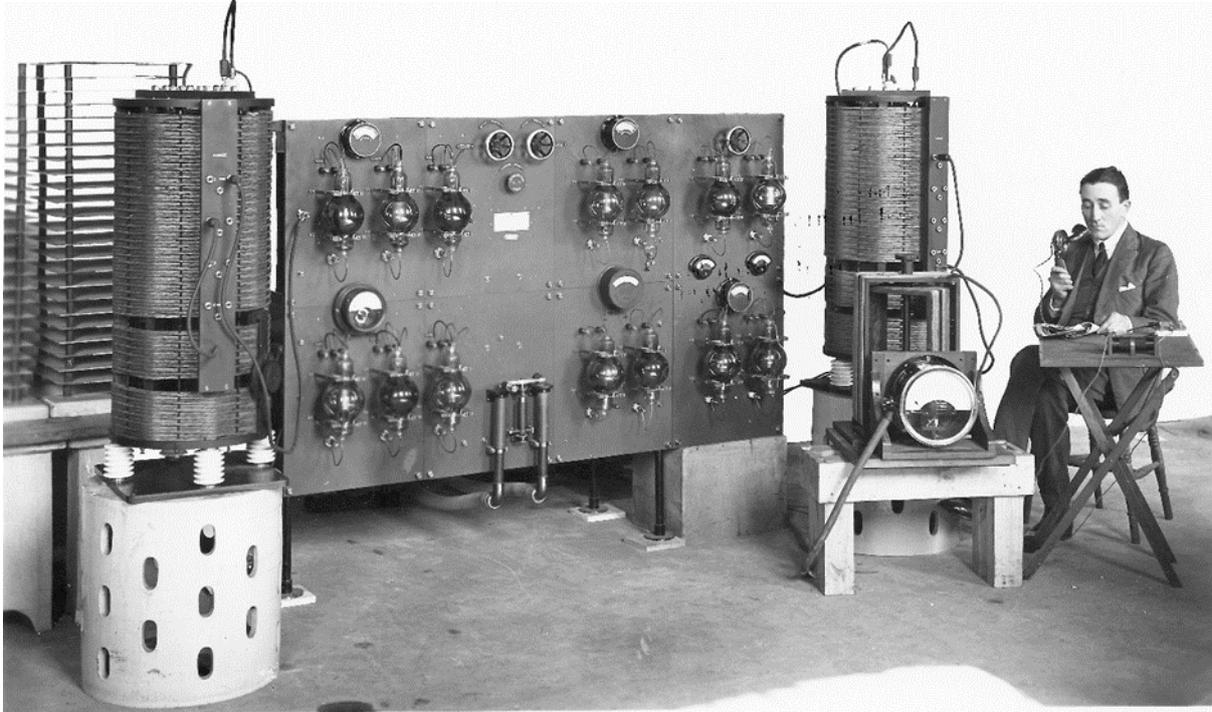
*'MZX Calling; MZX calling!*

*This is the Marconi valve transmitter in Chelmsford, England, testing on a wavelength of two thousand, seven hundred and fifty metres. How are our signals coming in today? Can you hear us clearly?*

*I will now recite to you my usual collection of British railway stations for test purposes. The Great Northern railway starts at Kings cross, London and the North Western Railway starts from Euston: the Midland railway starts from St Pancras; the Great Western .....Boston to Great Grimsby, New Holland and Hull. Boston departs at two forty-four, six fifty, nine twenty, one forty-five....'*

Having tested at length in Ireland, and now repeating themselves in Chelmsford, the Marconi engineers quickly become very bored with normal proceedings. They now decided to do something totally different. On the 15th January 1920 they started the first ever true speech 'broadcasts' in Britain by transmitting a programme

of speech and gramophone music from the Marconi Chelmsford works. Included in this was what was to become Ditcham's regular 'news service', all transmitted from the New Street Research Department's Laboratory.



**W.T Ditcham and the Melba Transmitter**

The famous picture of Ditcham seated by the transmitter in the high power test department. But as with many Marconi publicity photographs of the time the background behind Ditcham and his transmitter was 'blacked' or 'whited' out, so as not to advertise how basic the engineer's surroundings really were.

These first, historic and very informal broadcasts could well have gone unnoticed, but two hundred and fourteen appreciative reports soon arrived from amateurs and ship's operators alike who had listened in. The radio amateurs were enraptured to finally hear words and music on their radio sets, and they reported this in glowing terms to the Marconi Company. The Chelmsford station had been heard from Norway to Portugal, with regular reports over 1,000 miles and the greatest reported distance being 1,450 miles. A telegram from Madrid in January 1920 reported exceptional signal strength and quality. The engineering team realised that they had stumbled on something quite extraordinary. It was time to become more ambitious. The 6kW transmitter was quickly replaced with one rated at 15kW input with MT4 and MR4 valves made in the Marconi-Osram works in Hammersmith. Ditcham, Round and another Marconi engineer, Mogridge were all involved with the design work and set about their task with great enthusiasm.

Then, for a brief period from 23rd February until 6th March 1920, their continuing tests became a regular and scheduled series of 30-minute broadcast radio programmes. These were aired twice daily at 11am and 8pm and were designed from the outset to be a regular wireless telephony news service which would take up to 15 minutes, leaving time for three or four short musical items. With W.T. Ditcham as '*head cook and bottle washer*', organising programmes, announcing news and music items, he was ably supported by the Head of the Marconi Publicity Department, Arthur Burrows and Mr W. Petterigill. Varied staff from the Marconi works were roped in and tasked with organising the short transmissions of musical items. These included

Mr G. W. White, (a brilliant pianist), Mr A. V. Beeton on oboe and Mr W Higby on clarinet. Vocalist Mr Edward Cooper from the Marconi works had a good tenor voice and also performed with a local band *Freddie and the Funnions* run by local business man and entertainer Freddie Munnion. He knew a young soprano, Miss Winifred Sayer, who was in the same group. He suggested she should be invited to take part in the Marconi concerts. Although Miss Sayer was on the clerical staff of the neighbouring factory, Hoffmanns, and so would have to be paid, this idea was approved and a programme of concerts began to be prepared.



**Miss Winifred Sayer**

The first lady to sing on British Radio. Miss Sayer was announced by W T Ditcham, sitting by the transmitter panel, its valves flashing blue and close to overloading. 'Hello....MZX calling. This evening for a change we have a vocalist; a lady vocalist too, you'll be glad to know, so I will now ask her to start on her first song. Will you start now, please?' Nothing could have been more incongruous; the young girl standing on a stone floor strewn with packing cases and nervously holding the 'telephone' to her lips. The first song she sang was an Edwardian ballad called 'Absent'.

Ditcham and Round's lively series of concerts and news programmes transmitted from the Marconi New Street Works had also not gone unnoticed by the established print media. The newspapers were soon to become very wary of the potential of this new mass communications medium, mainly because it challenged their virtual news monopoly. But it was a newspaper that started the next phase of the story of British broadcasting with the intervention of Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe. Northcliffe was the proprietor of the *Daily Mail* Newspaper group, and was an influential and successful newspaper owner who founded the *Daily Mail* in 1896. He had then revolutionized the British press. His format was simple. Keep the stories less than 250 words, and include a murder every day. But it worked. The papers' content also had to fit into his *personal idea* of what was newsworthy, but his newspapers reached one in six of every British household, and he had even rescued *The Times* newspaper in 1908.

It was Lord Northcliffe who now commissioned the first radio broadcast by a recognised professional artiste of international standing. He chose none other than the famous Australian Prima Donna, Dame Nellie Melba. He said that there was '*only one artist, the world's very best*'...

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By 1920, Melba was probably the most famous singer in the world. Between 1904 and 1926 Melba had made almost 200 recordings, and she had triumphed in the opera houses of Europe and America. She had first sung in Covent Garden in 1888 and maintained her position in the golden age of opera for over 25 years, as her voice was remarkable for its even quality over a range of nearly three octaves, and for its pure, silvery timbre. Today her name is also associated with four foods, all of which were created by the French chef Auguste Escoffier. Peach Melba, a dessert, Melba sauce, a sweet purée of raspberries and redcurrant, Melba toast, a crisp dry toast and Melba Garniture, chicken, truffles and mushrooms stuffed into tomatoes with velouté. The current Australian 100 dollar note features the image of her face.

In her lifetime, Dame Nellie Melba achieved international recognition as a soprano, and enjoyed an unrivalled 'super-star' status within Australia, if not the rest of the world. But despite the angelic voice that Nellie Melba was admired for, she was also known for her demanding, temperamental and diva like persona. She was famous for making last minute decisions before a performance, and would often deliberately upstage other sopranos during their performances, grabbing the attention for herself. She felt that three words: '*I am Melba*', were sufficient to explain her every wish or whim and she tolerated no rivals. So it was this temperamental superstar that Lord Northcliffe wanted to bring to the new wireless audience, but getting the great lady to agree to sing was difficult. Reputedly when she was first approached the singer remained adamant that her voice was not a matter for experimentation by young wireless engineers and their '*magic play boxes*'. It took all the persuasive talents that Lord Northcliffe could muster and a huge £1,000 fee, all paid for by the *Daily Mail*, to get her to agree. Northcliffe had one other advantage. Melba, born on 19th May 1856, was now nearly 64 years old. By the time of the Chelmsford broadcasts she was approaching the end of her career, and the promise of considerable newspaper publicity was something he knew Melba would not refuse.

Lord Northcliffe apart, it was really Arthur Burrows and Tom Clarke who should take the credit for the whole concert idea, and then for making it happen. Burrows was the publicity Manager for the Marconi Company, and Tom Clarke was the News Editor of the *Daily Mail* and assistant to Northcliffe. Clarke had been a signals officer during the war and had known Burrows from the end of the war, and shared his interest in radio. Ten years earlier, the *Daily Mail* had promoted and encouraged aviation to its audience of vast numbers of ordinary people. Now its favourite project was radio broadcasting. In 1919 a *Daily Mail* reporter had roamed Hampstead heath, listening to messages from Chelmsford, while another had travelled by train to the coast with a portable receiver in his suitcase. In May 1920, the *Daily Mail* included two columns of news '*collected by wireless telephone*', and soon after a permanent wireless receiving station was installed in the *Daily Mail* offices. Clarke wrote that '*these things seemed sheer wizardry in those days*'. So Melba had agreed to sing for the wireless and a contract had been signed. But there was just one problem. There was nowhere suitable for her to do it. In 1920 it was totally impractical to move transmitting equipment and aerials to any of the great concert halls of Europe. The great Dame Nellie Melba would have to come to The Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company's New Street Factory in Chelmsford, Essex. Amazingly she agreed to leave the bright lights of the London stage for one night, and travel to a remote Essex factory. There would be no dressing room, no orchestra, no stage, no lights and in reality, possibly no audience. Or at least not one that the good lady would recognise.

The 'Australian Nightingale' was booked to give her now historic thirty-minute radio concert from the Marconi Chelmsford works, on 15th June 1920. But the concert announcement apparently sent the Marconi engineering team into a controlled panic, as they were given very little time to prepare. It was thought that the 'best place' in the whole factory for the singer to perform was the first floor, executive directors and senior staff dining rooms at the front of the New Street Works, adjacent to New Street. With mahogany panelled walls, thick carpets and stylish period decor, the rooms were directly accessible from the main works en-

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trance via an impressive main curved staircase. This was considered a 'fitting' location for the great lady and would maintain the image of the company. So the Marconi Company's executive dining rooms were to become this country's first, professional radio broadcast studio. The engineers' initial plan was to connect the transmitter, located at one corner of the works through to the new studio at the front of the building. This meant laying in a long, land-line cable right across the New Street works, run it up the outside stairs, down the top floor corridor and into the executive dining room. This would allow the singer to perform in pleasant surroundings, and keep her isolated from all the engineering and the engineers.

A huge amount of effort was also brought to bear on trying to improve the general quality of the microphone and transmitter circuits, but time was short. The cable was duly laid in, but almost at the last moment, during final testing on the day of the concert, it completely burnt out due to the high frequency current induced by test transmissions. The cable apparently actually burnt 'like a fuse' up the stairs. These tests also managed to destroy the modulating valves in the transmitter, causing great consternation among the already panic stricken engineering staff. A hurried engineering meeting was called. The engineers were in favour of cancelling the broadcast, but this was considered impossible due to Dame Nellie Melba's concert schedule. Burrows also pointed out that to cancel now would cause massive damage, both to the reputation of the Marconi Company and to the cause of radio broadcasting in general. So the decision was made to relocate the great lady's performance to the other side of the Marconi works, actually a disused packing shed, immediately next to the big valve transmitter room. When the great day arrived and despite the valiant efforts of all concerned, the packing-shed was still a gloomy place, its floors and walls bare of any decoration. The building was also still full of innumerable wires and pieces of equipment, although a thick pile carpet had been placed on the floor, almost at the last moment. All the engineers could do now was wait.

On 15th June 1920, Dame Nellie Melba travelled to Chelmsford by train from London, wearing a black dress and a large white hat. At the station she was picked up by a chauffeur driven car and was then taken on a very long tour around Chelmsford, to eventually arrive at the front of the New Street works. On a route advertised beforehand she was greeted by well organised, waving and cheering crowds before arriving at the main entrance, which in reality is just a few hundred metres from the train station. Accompanying Dame Nellie was her son George Armstrong, together with his wife, and two of Melba's accompanists, Frank St Ledger and Herman Bemberg, one of whose songs she was to perform. The party also included Arthur Burrows, head of the Marconi Company publicity department as her official escort, Marconi Managing Director Godfrey Isaacs and his wife, Lord Northcliffe and his friend and colleague from the wartime propaganda bureau, Sir Stuart Campbell. Dame Nellie Melba was first shown around the works, including the transmitting equipment and the huge antenna masts by Arthur Burrows. Burrows remarked that from the wires at the top her voice would be carried far and wide. Her comment has become a piece of radio folklore: '*Young man*' she exclaimed, '*If you think I am going to climb up there you are greatly mistaken.*'

It was a testament to Burrow's amazing vision and determination that every experiment, trial and concert that built the foundations of British broadcasting over the next six years always had Arthur Burrows' guiding hand behind them. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 1920 he was there again. It seemed that all was set for the great event, even the transmitter ran up without any problems. Before she could begin singing, Dame Nellie insisted that she must have her favourite pre-concert dinner of partly-cooked chicken, pink champagne and unleavened white bread. This clause, or menu, was specially written into her contract. After her hearty meal in the Directors dining room, Dame Nellie was escorted across the works to the 'studio'. She passed no immediate comment on the room (to the relief of the engineers who had even try to hurriedly whitewash parts of the walls) and seemed unworried by the Spartan surroundings. Her first glance at the studio floor brought her initial reaction, a firm kick at the new carpet. Dame Nellie announced to the assembled personages of the Marconi Company: '*First of all we'll get rid of this thing!*' Dame Nellie was not a woman to be ignored so the new

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carpet was hastily rolled to one side revealing the bare and un-swept stone warehouse floor. The newly hung curtains also suffered the same fate.

As the concert time approached the engineers were worried. To fail now, with the whole world listening, might well endanger the cause of radio broadcasting for years to come. The newspapers had already proclaimed that: *At a quarter past seven this evening a great singer will hail the world by a long trill into space. Thousands of people on land and at sea are eagerly looking forward to hearing the glorious voice of the Australian Nightingale Dame Nellie Melba swelling through space into their instruments.'*

After an interval for photographs and other formalities the programme was arranged to start. The transmitters were run-up, but just as Dame Nellie was about to sing, the last photographer in the transmitter room let off a flash bulb. The engineer on the switch panel saw the reflected flash, panicked and instantly pulled out all the switches, immediately powering down the entire apparatus. While Dame Nellie watched patiently, St Ledger prepared his music, ready to accompany Melba on the piano and the painful process of transmitter warm up had to be gone through again. It was to be only a minor technical hitch. Ditcham was now happy. On a perfect summer evening, it seemed that anybody who could pick up wireless waves throughout the country held their breath as Dame Nellie Melba stood in front of the microphone. Even this was something of a compromise, consisting of a telephone mouthpiece with a 'home-made' horn of cigar-box wood fastened to it during the final afternoon's testing by Marconi engineers, desperate to improve sound quality. The whole contraption was suspended from a modified hat rack by a length of elastic. The microphone and its fragile cone has survived intact to this day; a powerful artefact from the very dawn of radio broadcasting.

Round later remembered that he had great difficulty placing Melba in the makeshift studio, especially as she continually told him that she knew all about it. The distances between microphones, singer, accompanists and the small grand piano were all critical in maintaining as high a quality as possible and Dame Nellie's position had been marked on the floor. She eventually stood about a yard from the microphone.

A hushed silence fell over the first-ever broadcast studio, and Arthur Burrows announced on air: *'Hallo, Hallo, Hallo!'* *'Dame Nellie Melba, the Prima Donna, is going to sing for you, first in English, then Italian, then in French.'* He then apologised for not having control over the *'atmospherics'*. A single chord was struck and at 7.10 p.m. precisely listeners heard their first fleeting notes as Dame Nellie ran up and down the scale. This preliminary sound checks brought a flurry of adjustments in the studio, the engineers swinging condensers and tapping meters.

It was, as the *Daily Mail* reported, a remarkable scene. Outside the 'studio' a large crowd had gathered, but the police requisitioned to keep order were not really required as everyone stood in almost reverential silence. The first lady to broadcast from the Chelmsford site, Miss Winifred Sayer had also been invited. She remembered peeping around the door to watch the amazing scene as it unfolded. Inside the room, a group of VIPs had assembled that included Mr and Mrs Godfrey Isaacs, Mr and Mrs George Armstrong, Lord Northcliffe, Dame Nellie's son and daughter-in-law and Sir Campbell Stuart. Dame Nellie called her first long silvery trill her *'hallo to the world'*, and the world seemed to be listening. All over the country wireless enthusiasts frantically tickled their cat's whisker crystal sets, desperately seeking a stronger signal. Headphones were clamped tighter, whole households lapsed into hushed silence. Dame Nellie took a deep breath, and began to sing: A newspaper reported. *'Punctually at a quarter past seven'. 'The words of 'Home Sweet Home' swam into the receivers. Those who heard might have been members of the audience at the Albert hall'*. This rendition was followed by Hermann Bemberg's *'Nymphes et Sylvains'* (in French), Puccini's *'Addio'* from *'La Boheme'* (in Italian), and Bemberg's *'Chant Venitien'*. Mr. Frank St Leger played the first two songs in the programme and Bemberg, the French Composer, played the third.



**Dame Nellie Melba Sings at Chelmsford, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1920.**

The first professional artiste on British Radio. The Marconi Company was embarrassed about the Spartan surroundings that Melba had to sing in. All images of the concert had the background blacked out – if anyone has seen one showing the original room please contact the author!



**The Location of Melba's Studio. Marconi's New Street Works. 1920.**

History was being made from a disused packing shed in the middle of a huge factory. However, as Captain Round later recalled, the transmitter that had initially behaved very well during the concert, started to play up at the start of Melba's third song. Listening in anxiously on a wavemeter in the equipment room, H.J. Round watched in horror as mid-way through the rendition, one of the transmitter valves started to fail. Then Chelmsford went off air. Shouting instructions for the valve to be changed, he immediately rushed from the transmitter room to the shed where Melba was singing and waited for her to finish the last song. The repair had not taken long, but as far as the world was concerned the concert had abruptly ceased and her third song had been almost completely lost. Thinking quickly on his feet Captain Round called out: *'Madame Melba, the world is calling for more'*. Dame Nellie Melba replied: *'Are they? Shall I go on singing?'*

This was exactly what Round had hoped for, but whereas he had expected just one more song to make up for the partially lost one, in fact the good lady sang four more. While Round was 'pleading' for another song, W.T. Ditcham had corrected the fault and a minute or two later the notes of a piano again floated into listeners' front rooms. After a brief pause for further adjustments to the transmitter, Dame Nellie gave a further encore, repeated *'Nymphes et Sylvains'*, and then sang the first stanza of *'God Save the King'*. It was over. They had done it. Without further fanfare, Burrows stepped to the microphone and simply said: - *'Hallo, Hallo, We hope you have enjoyed hearing Melba sing, Good Night!'*

The wireless sets of the nation, indeed the world then lapsed into silence. The concert was over. The great lady had sung her considerable heart out and the assembled audience both inside and outside the studio spontaneously applauded. It was now up to the engineers to have relayed this to the audience with the

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clarity it deserved and hope that the partial failure had been compensated for by the extra songs. They knew that the audience was potentially huge and liable to be very critical, indeed nearly 600 new licences had been issued in the two months leading up to the broadcast.

Within days the Marconi Company was to receive its answer as enthusiastic letters from the four corners of the world poured into the Chelmsford office. Radio amateurs and ships' operators alike reported how they had listened in and sung along. Every commercial station in the world had tuned in and the concert had been received with surprising clarity, and it was voted a great success. The amateur radio enthusiasts even amused themselves during the concert by listening in to the wireless station operators at the new Civilian air traffic control radio stations at Lympe and Croydon discussing the performance between the songs.

Miss Sayer, the first Chelmsford concert artist, remembered the broadcast and had been personally invited by the Marconi engineers. Actually Winfred went home a little disillusioned. She had heard Melba, but not with the added magic of hearing her via a radio. She was not even introduced to Melba who simply swept by her, Winifred remembered that she was *'a most peculiar looking woman'*. For everyone else it had been a night of success.

Burrows and Clarke had successfully organised an historic event. Round had saved the programme, but regretted not being able to actually hear the concert. Ditcham's transmitter had behaved well, if not perfectly, and his engineering team had made it all happen. For Isaacs his company had scored a huge publicity coup at no real cost. Lord Northcliffe's paper carried the story for the rest of the week. The radio amateurs had listened into their first quality broadcast and Melba had made history. Dame Nellie Melba's historic *'Hallo to the World'* had been heard with surprising clarity on every kind of wireless set imaginable. A large proportion of the 400 or so immediate replies that the Marconi Company received were from listeners using nothing more than a simple crystal set. These included excellent reports from several Welsh listeners, but the record went to Mr. P.S. Smith on board the SS. Baltic at a distance of 1,506 miles, again using nothing more than a 'cats' whisker' crystal wireless set. The concert had been a resounding success, Dame Nellie's voice had spanned the world and produced excellent signal reports from Sultanabad in Northern Persia, and from Madrid and Berlin in Europe. It even appeared that the popularity of these experimental wireless stations had mollified the somewhat reticent attitude of the Marconi Company toward the possibilities of using wireless telephony for entertainment purposes.

You would expect that British radio broadcasting would explode into life from these experiments during the first part of 1920. More concerts followed from famed Danish Tenor Lauritz Melchior and Dame Clara Butt, who both sang from the Chelmsford New Street works.

Despite the fact that entertainment broadcasting was rapidly gaining favour with the general public, on 23rd November 1920 the Postmaster General spoke to the House of Commons. He announced that the experimental broadcasts from the Marconi Chelmsford Works were to be suspended on the grounds of *'interference with legitimate services'* and for the time being no more trials would be permitted. Each experimental music programme from the Chelmsford, New Street site had to operate under a special Post Office permit, and there were to be no more permits. In reality there was also a political element to the closedown demand, as the Post Office was already seriously worried about its long held 'communications monopoly' in the British Isles.

But it would be another two years before British Broadcasting would come to pass. It would need the talents of the irrepressible Peter Eckersley (who started this story), working in a small hut in a partially flooded field on the edge of the village of Writtle and a new call sign – '2MT' or Two –Emma –Toc.

But that, is, as they say, a whole new story. (Probably best told in 2022?)

## The Centenary of British Radio Broadcasting

### DAME NELLIE MELBA SINGS (Again!)

By Tim Wander

Plans to commemorate the centenary of the start of radio broadcasting, the early experiments and Melba's historic concerts are ongoing. They are now wrapped into a whole year of creativity, science and industry in Chelmsford and across Essex. Details of this are elsewhere within Council websites.

In terms of directly commemorating these earliest days of broadcasting history, Chelmsford Museum services are planning an exhibition, opening in March 1920. Entitled *'On Air: Chelmsford's Global Experiment'*, this will be well worth a visit, as is the recently reopened Oakland's museum. In addition, a 'souvenir' book, *'From Marconi to Melba...'* (with a very limited edition badge) will be available. This will be a numbered, signed and limited edition. MV members will be offered a pre-order option as soon as I get it finished! The book pays homage to the 'original' 1974 anniversary of Marconi's birth booklet and will tell the full story of the birth of Broadcasting, the experiments, Melba's concert and beyond. It will be in a high definition A4 format with many new and enhanced photographs.

The key part of the celebration is a new stage play to be held at the Civic theatre in Chelmsford for five nights, opening on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2020. Called - *The Power Behind the Microphone* – written by Tim Wander and Felicity Fair Thompson. Yes, that was also the title of Eckersley's biography and his story weaves through the play as it tells the story of the experiments and concerts during the summer of 1920. Indeed, at exactly 7:10pm on June 15<sup>th</sup> 2020, it is hoped that Melba will take to the stage to sing

as least part of her concert again. Please watch the normal theatre advertising and I recommend that you book as quickly as possible! I suspect (and hope) it will be very popular.

OBITUARY:

### Gerald Arthur (GERRY) Fulcher 1928 – 2019

HEAD OFFICE ACCOUNTS 1952 – 1977  
by Brian Southwell

Although he had served a shade under, I think, 25 years Gerry – again I think – never thought ever to claim to be a MV, living far from Essex. This obituary is for those MVA members who do remember him on the third floor of Marconi House. E.g. Don Mott, Roy King, Valerie Cleare and John Shrigley. Although short of the then qualifying service he was presented with the inscribed gold watch on "retiring", at 49, to marry. He kept it for the "best" and wore it only in more recent years. (Mine stopped!).

Gerry, a qualified accountant, joined Head Office Accounts and mostly being H.O. Accountant, finally occupied the Chief Cashier's chair (money in and out, salaries). He once went to India, to Delhi office, to sort out some clerk's errand ways with the local cash (it ain't arf 'ot!). He commuted daily by bicycle and train from Holland-on-Sea (Clacton).

After "retirement" and getting a Rover 2000 saloon car, Gerry moved with Doris his wife (ex British Railways HQ, Marylebone), also "retired" – on pension – plus her mother, to be near other relatives (Ross-on-Wye), to a large bungalow at Colwall Green on the Herefordshire flank of the Malvern Hills chain. They holidayed as far as the Isle of Skye, a favourite.

When Gerry could no longer drive (an ear balance problem), he and Doris did their alternate week shopping and lunch trips by the one village taxi for years – to

Great Malvern (Waitrose etc.) and in the opposite direction to Ledbury (Bank – most important). Longer distances included Church Stretton, Shropshire. Gerry also did day-return trips (\*another firm) back to collect a Clacton lady friend to give her a 'country' holiday!

Poor health, especially ulcerated lower legs, caught up with both, who had 'zimmer' frames, which did battle trying to pass through doorways.

Doris died in summer 2015 after fading away, but with four-times-a-day paid for Social Services helpers, Gerry carried on – "Financial Times on Saturdays, supplement to daily "Telegraphs". Etc. etc.

For his 90th birthday in January 2018 he had a celebratory hotel Sunday lunch party for relatives and local friends – too far to travel to, so missed that.

Gerry sent Xmas card for 2018 (he had missed organising them, some years) but succumbed to a brief illness in Hereford, in the second week of January – again too far to go in winter for a funeral.

R.I.P.

OBITUARY:

### Derek Edwin Weston

by Marion Lodge (Mrs) nee Weston

My brother Derek sadly passed away on 25th July after a short battle with an aggressive form of liver cancer. He was 84 years old.

As a teenager Derek was in the 1st Widford Scouts and played the violin in the Technical College orchestra and the Essex Youth Orchestra where he was first violinist. Derek joined Marconi's in 1951 from the Mid Essex Technical School and became a Design Draughtsman, eventually becoming a Chartered Mechanical Engineer.

He completed his National Service in the

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

RAF and worked in various places including Bentley Priory and The School of Land Air Warfare in Salisbury, some of his work was covered by the Official Secrets Act.

Derek left Chelmsford with his parents in 1961 to live in Tolleshunt Knights. Derek enjoyed motoring, music, photography, collecting coins and postcards, astronomy and bird watching. Later in 1979 Derek and his parents returned to live in Broomfield. Derek retired aged 60 years in 1995 and looked after his parents as they became more frail, and passed away.

Derek had to give up motoring in 2008 as he had operations for glaucoma and macular degeneration which were unsuccessful; so, he took to riding his bike again, and when his eyesight deteriorated further, he walked everywhere, even the 6 mile round trip to Chelmsford to visit the Dentist. He was unable to attend the annual dinners of the Veterans Association for this reason he did not want to bother anyone. Until 2018 he continued to live at Broomfield, but moved to sheltered accommodation in Wendover to be near his sister Marion, for what was to be the last year of his life.

#### OBITUARY:

### Fred Boot 1934—2019

By Sue More, Peggy Boot, Ken Earney

Fred was born in Derbyshire, one of three brothers. His father was in the army so he grew accustomed to travelling abroad with the family from an early age. In Hong Kong in 1939 Fred and his parents were on the last troopship to return to England before the outbreak of WWII. Post war, unable to join the rest of the



family when his father was posted to Nigeria he had to remain in England to finish his education. It was during that time he met Peggy Pattenden who was to become his lifelong partner when they married in 1957.

When he left school he joined the RAF for his National Service but stayed for 5 years, learning about radar during his service. On leaving in 1958 he joined the company at Basildon - part of the attraction of Basildon was the house that came with the job. Coincident with the birth of their son Phillip three years later he was seconded to Nigeria to join a team of Marconi College instructors training young Nigerians who would operate and maintain a Marconi multi-channel radio system linking all areas of their large country. (*The newsletter carried an article about this period of Fred's career in the 2018 edition, page 11*).

On return to the UK in 1965 they came to live in Tiptree and Fred started as a lecturer at Marconi College. It was during 1970 that I came across him when around fifteen young engineers and technicians were transferred from Airadio Division to Electro-Optical Surveillance Division during one of the first big GEC reshuffles. EOS realised it needed to get this motley crew up to speed with their techniques so sent us on a month of mornings-only sessions to do so. It was Fred that taught us the CCTV techniques module, and I was immediately impressed with the clarity of his explanations carried out in a friendly and engaging manner. I met Fred on a number of occasions since that time, during the '80s and '90s when I was responsible for organising customer training courses, and it was always the same old Fred, ever professional, helpful and friendly. It was the same for me later when attending a number of his WEA courses.

He became Vice Principal at the college remaining there until his early retirement on its closure in 1997, a great sadness for him. However, he continued to travel abroad to deliver teaching in Europe and further afield. Meeting the foreign students at home and abroad

was always one of the highlights of the job.

Alongside his working life came his increasing love of and involvement in wildlife conservation and the local environment to the extent that it became a second career. One of the first members of the Essex Wildlife Trust, he later became Vice Chairman and then Chairman in 1995. He was a tutor for the Essex Federation of the WEA and naturally his enthusiasm for the Essex Wildlife Trust seeped into his WEA courses, dealing with topics including 'Coastal Ecology', 'Wildflowers of Britain' and 'Woodlands in Trust', well illustrated with many photographs. His most recent course in Tiptree 'The effects of Climate Change on Human Evolution' is highly relevant today.

An enthusiast for aspects of his home village, he co-wrote 'The Creation of a Village' with Aubrey Davenport and was instrumental in managing the restoration of Tiptree Heath, the largest remaining lowland heath in Essex. He organised working parties to clear the scrub which allowed three heathers to flourish, and set up the charity 'Friends of Tiptree Heath'. Everything he was involved in was meticulously documented so that anyone who took on that work afterwards had clear guidance and a much easier job.

Fred died on 19 July 2019. Rest well, Fred

*This tribute is a combination of extracts from the eulogy given at Fred's funeral service on 19 July, one by Sue More (Chairman, Tiptree WEA) in the Autumn 2019 WEA Essex Federation newsletter, and my own recollections of Fred. Thank you to Peggy Boot for a copy of the eulogy and the loan of her Order of Service for Fred's photo, and to Sue More for permission to quote from her tribute.*  
Ken Earney

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