



2021 Chairman's Foreword



by Brian Izzard, Chairman

I have had a pretty good first year – been thrown out of our reunion venue, cancelled the reunion at short notice and had two members of the Management Committee resign – not bad for starters...

Seriously, when I became Chairman in 2019, I was not expecting the challenges associated with the sale of Hamptons Sports & Leisure to the Chelmsford Muslim Society and the Covid-19 pandemic!

Hamptons agreed to honour existing reservations, so the 2020 Reunion could have continued complete with a fully functioning bar but it was clear that we would need a new venue for 2021 onwards. The preparations for the 2020 Reunion were well advanced (I had even prepared my speech!) so it was extremely disappointing to have to cancel the 2020 Reunion due to the pandemic lockdown. Fortunately, there was no financial exposure to the Association.

An investigation to find an alternative venue was conducted and the venues most suited to the needs of the Annual Reunion were Channels (but only available for weddings on a Friday and Saturday) and Pontlands Park. After I visited both venues, the Management Committee chose Pontlands Park for the April 2021 Annual Reunion and AGM. We had to move quickly on this since weekend weddings often book up venues a year or more in advance!

Pontlands Park is situated in extremely pleasant grounds and we would need to use their Marquee (with attached bar) to accommodate the usual number of Reunion attendees. Pontlands Park is also very close to the old Baddow

Research site and where the CH Tower is located.

The CH Tower was granted Grade II Listed Building status in November 2020. For further information visit our web site <https://marconi-veterans.org>. Also read the article on page 9 of this Newsletter.

As we approached the end of 2020 it was becoming increasingly clear that it was most unlikely that a Reunion could take place in April 2021 – such events were then limited to 15 attendees and we would have needed to maintain the social distancing 2 metre rule – imagine the size of a table to seat just 6 of our members! The availability of vaccines was just being announced so we reasoned that April was likely to be too early to help us and since Pontlands Park had a Saturday available, we took the decision to move the 2021 Reunion to

Saturday, 18th September.

So what did we achieve ...

First, thanks to all of you who completed the survey incorporated in our 2020 newsletter – your preferences were quite clear and have been used to plan the 2021 Reunion. Please refer to **page 3** for a summary/analysis of all responses. Also, thanks to all who ticked the data protection (GDPR) box giving us permission to contact you and keep/use your personal details. This newsletter will only be sent to Veterans/Friends who ticked the box when returning their 2020 Reunion application – if you know of any members who did not return a 2020 application form then they need to do so to get this newsletter.

- We have now moved into the 21st Century and have set up online banking so members can choose to pay their annual subscription/ Reunion costs by BACS and receive their tickets by email. As one member said in the survey – the MVA was the only organisation he ever wrote a cheque to!

- The Management Committee decided that the subject of the 2021 Coaster would be the CH Tower following its Grade II status as noted above.
- We now have two vacancies on the Management Committee. Interested? – I would particularly like to encourage non-Marconi Comms Veterans to apply so we can broaden the Committee representation.
- Since the 2020 Reunion had to be cancelled, our 2020 President, Barry Powell, will address the 2021 Reunion, and as planned, will be supported by his guest Professor Schnurr who was one of his former lecturers at the Mid-Essex Technical College. We look forward to some entertaining anecdotes!
- Veronica Reed has kindly agreed to be our 2021 President

Until last year, Veronica was the Manager at Hamptons Sports and Leisure.

Veronica started with Marconi in 1965 at the Small Quantity Group (SQG) at Widford, where they turned out amongst other products Radar aerials and Outside Broadcast Vans.

In 1987 Veronica moved to the Marconi Athletic and Social Club (MASC) and in 2008 took over from Ralph Coates as Manager.

In 2012 Veronica was heavily involved in the relocation and rebuilding of the MASC at the Hamptons location. It was her responsibility to ensure the facilities met the requirements of MASC members. In 2017 the premises were sold to Hamptons.

Many of us may not be aware that Veronica was unable to attend the Reunion lunch as she worked behind the scenes ensuring each Reunion was a success. Now that she has retired, she will be able to sit down with other Veterans and Friends. It is only fitting she does so as our President for 2021.

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[Proposed change to Veteran eligibility period](#)

I have thought carefully about the current 21 year minimum period of total service with Marconi companies to qualify as a Veteran.

When I joined Marconi in 1960, it was not uncommon for UK employees to serve 20, 30, 40 or even 50 years with the same company. Over the years, this practice has changed significantly, and employees have become much more likely to work for many companies over their careers.

I asked myself what length of service would clearly move an employee from a specific job opportunity to a long term career choice. I came up with 15 years – arbitrary I know, but somehow it feels 'right'. I consulted our Patron, Robbie Robertson, and he has given me his support on this issue. Following a robust discussion at a Management Committee meeting, a unanimous decision was taken to recommend that the constitution be changed from 21 years to 15 years. This will be on the agenda at the 2021 AGM.

[And finally, my thanks ...](#)

- to Don Mott (sadly no longer with us—see Obituary on page 13) and Ken Earney for their many years of dedicated service on the Management Committee.
- to Leonardo UK for our newsletter printing and postage costs. Their ongoing support is invaluable and very much appreciated
- to all members of the Management Committee for their continued support with particular mentions for our Secretary Colin who certainly has the lion's share of the work needed to keep the Association (and myself!) on track, and to our website/newsletter editor, Mark, who keeps everything instantly up to date.

[Secretary's Soapbox](#) [- The best laid plans...](#)



By Colin Fletcher, Secretary

What a year 2020 was! Last year I wrote:

"The 2020 Reunion promises to be an event not to miss..."

Unfortunately a single cell virus decided that this was not to be. The result was the cancellation of the 2020 Reunion.

As you will have seen, the 2021 Reunion is now scheduled for September. We have also arranged with Pontlands Park to carry over our deposit to 2022 if this becomes necessary.

At the time of the cancellation many Veterans and Friends had paid for the Reunion lunch. So began the task of organising refunds and credits and thanking those who donated the cost to the MVA coffers. Rest assured, I have a full list of those who received a refund, have a credit or made a donation.

This year also sees a change to the way payments are managed; it is now possible to pay the MVA for the Reunion lunch, subscriptions and merchandise via BACS internet banking as well as by cheque.



2020 saw the introduction of a new coaster design. Unfortunately this coaster did not reach as many Veterans and Friends as in previous years. However should you wish for a coaster

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Marconi Veterans' Association 2020 Survey

No. of Responses = 265

	No.	% Incl. No pref.	% Excl. No pref.	Result
Question 1 If it became necessary to change the venue for our reunion from Hamptons to somewhere else within or on the outskirts of Chelmsford then would this create a problem for you?	Yes = 10 No = 191 No preference = 64	3.77% 72.08% 24.15%	4.98% 95.02%	no problem
Question 2 In past years we have had four courses at our lunch. To try and contain increasing costs, we have dropped the cheese and biscuits for this year. Please tick ONE of the following boxes to indicate your preference going forward:	Full four course 29 Start,main,dessert 124 Start,main,cheese 32 No preference = 76	10.94% 46.79% 12.08% 28.68%	15.34% 65.61% 16.93%	3 Course
Question 3 The cost of the wine provided at our lunch is subsidised by the proceeds of the raffle and general MVA funds. To keep lunch and annual subscription costs as low, would you accept the need to purchase your own drinks at the bar?	Yes = 157 No = 32 No preference = 76	59.25% 12.08% 28.68%	83.07% 16.93%	Buy own
Question 4 Reunions have been traditionally arranged on a Saturday which is the most popular (and probably most expensive) day of the week. If we were to propose another day then would this work for you?	Yes = 159 No = 32 No preference = 74	60.00% 12.08% 27.92%	83.25% 16.75%	Different day
Question 5 If the need arises, would you be happy to receive future email communications?	Yes = 159 No = 46 No preference = 60	60.00% 17.36% 22.64%	77.56% 22.44%	Email
Question 6 We intend to continue to send out the annual newsletter and invitation to the annual reunion by post. If we provided the opportunity to a) complete an online form to order lunch, b) pay annual subscription/lunch costs by bank transfer and c) receive your ticket via email then would you use this facility?	Yes = 129 No = 82 No preference = 54	48.68% 30.94% 20.38%	61.14% 38.86%	Internet
Question 7 We think that the provision of a 'free' Marconi themed coaster for all members who attend the reunion lunch is a fitting memento of the occasion. Do you want to continue to receive this each year?	Yes = 149 No = 39 No preference = 77	56.23% 14.72% 29.06%	79.26% 20.74%	Free coaster

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Just send an email to :-

secretary@marconi-veterans.org

or phone 01245 267696 for coaster costs and postage / packing.

Once in a while unusual events occur and so far this year I have been informed of the finding of a lost watch and an old Marconi Fire brigade Land Rover (see articles) and a request for a photograph of the Marconi WWI memorial that used to hang in the Foyer of Marconi House, New Street. In the last case a relative of the fallen was conducting research into the family history.

On a final note I wish you all a happy and healthy 2021 and may we meet up once again at the annual Reunion.

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 2021 and 2020 Reunions.

Web Site

by Mark Watson-Lee

Website: marconi-veterans.org

Clearly this year has been unprecedented in that all events which would have been given in person have instead become 'on-line' presentations, mainly using Zoom.

So the web site has been used to provide links to the various on-line lectures. A number of lectures for the Marconi 2020 events were moved on-line. The Marconi play by Tim Wander was performed live in the Civic Theatre, and transmitted via a 'YouTube channel' - however they did have technical problems with the live version, so a recorded version was then posted on YouTube.

The Chelmsford Science and Engineering

Society also moved all lectures on-line.

With a web site you are always on the lookout for stories which would be of interest to our membership. If you have any information which would be suitable to put on our web site please email: **newsletter@marconi-veterans.org**

Newsletter

by Mark Watson-Lee

newsletter@marconi-veterans.org

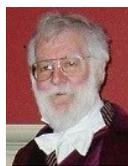
The 2020 Newsletter had a substantial article from Tim Wander in it, so it totalled 20 pages. It was also posted to around 1,000 addresses.

As always around October each year I am 'hoping' for more input as we start with very little to put in the Newsletter. Our members survey which went out with the 2020 reunion letter showed that we only have around 350 active members, so this newsletter will only be posted to this group. However, anyone can read it on our website of course.

If you have any article for next years Newsletter please email to:

newsletter@marconi-veterans.org

Marconi Heritage Group



by Alan Hartley-Smith

<http://www.marconiheritage.org/>

It has been a very interesting year since the last issue which didn't have an MHG report but Tim Wander's magnum opus on the Melba Centenary summed up the principal interest for 2020, and incorporated trailers for the next two years, centred on the Marconi peacetime heritage activity in the 1920s of broadcast radio communication, and was also embedded in the Essex2020 events which included a Chelmsford Civic

Society/Chelmsford Science and Engineering Society presentation on the Marconi contribution to the development of computers. Later we had the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, which also carried the story forward from the rapid developments from telegraphy to telephony during the first world war, but this time into the preparations for a potential second conflict, which again resulted in major developments culminating in the new technologies of radar and the emergence of the discipline of electronics which postwar opened up new avenues of commerce for the Company. (note to editor – get a story from the Monday Men at Sandford Mill on the growth of television).

Throughout this same year occurred a massive shift from person-to-person to person-to-camera/computer interaction enforced by the coronavirus pandemic, which has accelerated the adoption of online electronic methods for both communication and commerce, changing the whole fabric of daily life from education, work and leisure to the services and facilities currently used for business, manufacture, entertainment and travel all of which will need to be completely altered in ways in which the Company would certainly have been involved no doubt to the delight of its Founder, more's the pity for its disappearance. As a consequence much use was made during the years' celebrations with most events becoming "virtual", interestingly greatly increasing the "attendance" and drawn from both local to world-wide audiences. With our online wikis covering the heritage of all aspects of the Company we feel the Marconi Heritage Group is well ahead of the trend, and recently the British Library has formally requested archiving of the whole set.

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The Marconi Fire Brigade— or Go To Blazes

by Colin Fletcher, Derek Peto and David Robson

As sometimes happens the secretary receives unusual phone calls. An example was the one I received from David Robson (neither Veteran nor Friend), who restores Land Rovers. An old Marconi Fire Brigade Land Rover had come into his possession and he was wondering if I would be interested in some photographs of the vehicle. Seeing the opportunity for a newsletter article, was I going to refuse? Certainly not! I later received the following from David.

This became a topic of conversation in 'The Fletcher's Arms' (see the article – The Lost Watch). And resulted in an email from none other than Derrick Peto who provided some background information and recollections along with some taken from the Internet.

A couple of weeks ago you mentioned a Land Rover converted to be a small fire appliance. The volunteer fire crew at New Street was mostly made up of guys from the maintenance dept, i.e. from the Carpenter's Shop, Plumber's Shop, Electrician's Shop etc.



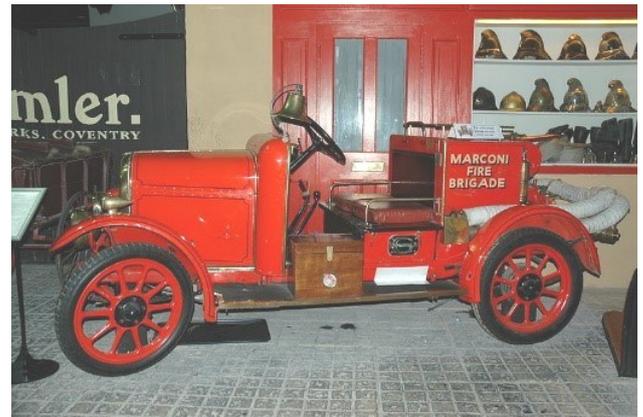
At that time each workshop employed dozens of workmen and had its own manager, deputy manager and secretary. The total number of employees in the maintenance department amounted to hundreds of people;

The original Marconi fire engine was made by a firm called Gwynne but was acquired in a dreadful state. The apprentices lovingly restored and rebuilt the Gwynne over many years in their own time at the Apprentices Club in Drivers Yard. Older men who had been apprentices when young were very angry when the Gwynne was removed by GEC Marconi at Coventry and forcibly taken there.



I used to go out to the car park by B720 to watch the volunteer fire men run-out their hose and attach it to a hydrant and then aim to try to hit a target and knock it over. When under water pressure it took a few guys to keep hold of the polished brass nozzle of the hose and prevent it from getting away and snaking all over the car park

The slow and ancient Gwynne appliance was not much use if the crew had to rush to a fire at Baddow or Waterhouse Lane or one of the other sites so a red Land Rover was purchased and converted to be a small fire engine.



The Lost Watch

By Colin Fletcher

Sometimes there is a happy outcome to events even years after the initial event. Such is the following case.

As secretary my contact details are a matter of public knowledge and I am used to receiving phone calls and emails from a variety of sources. One morning in early June, the phone rang, and a pleasant lady asked me if I could help. She had found a 25 year Marconi long service ladies watch in Chelmsford and wondered if I could trace the owner, one Marilyn Martin. Now if a Marconi employee has received a long term service award there is a strong possibility he or she is a Veteran.

A quick check of the records showed that there was indeed a Marilyn Martin listed as a Veteran. Result! Not quite. The records showed that she was not on the mailing list. This often happens when people retire and move and omit to inform the secretary of a change of address. So now I am stuck with a conundrum; what to do?

Before the Covid-19 outbreak I would meet up with some old work colleagues for a lunchtime drink and meal once a week. When the lockdown occurred in March I set up a Zoom account for the sole purpose of opening a virtual public house – The Fletcher's Arms. One of my

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patrons is someone many of you know – Derrick Peto. During the course of the next session I asked Derrick if he knew how I could contact Marilyn Martin. He said he didn't know any details so I left it at that.

Imagine my surprise when a few days later I received an email from Derrick with Marilyn's contact details. Derrick had contacted Rod Somers, who then contacted Jackie Poulter who was still in contact with Marilyn. Result at last! I sent an email to Marilyn and in a reply she confirmed that she had lost the watch in 2012/2013 and reported the matter to the police.

A quick visit to the kind lady who had found the watch and the watch was now in my possession. I then wrapped the watch in bubble-wrap popped it into a padded envelope and posted the watch to Marilyn.

And so after of period of 7 to 8 years the watch was reunited to its rightful owner. The last I heard the watch was ticking away.

Many thanks to all those who helped.

Chelmsford Bridge 153

by G.Mannering and Brian Ady
Photos kindly provided by Chis Hawkins,
the editor of the Railways magazine.

We might recall those black and white days as lacking all the traffic sign clutter we are used to now, when it seems that if a gap should appear then by some Highway Department logic, it must be filled by a sign. Yet we certainly made up for it with signs for everything else.

Take glorious Bridge 153 east of Chelmsford station on the main line to Hatfield Peverel, in 1956. No double yellow lines, no height/width restriction notices; instead every inch is plastered

with adverts for long-vanished icons of the age, Lockheed brakes for instance.

Everyone worked on their own cars/ motor bikes remember, back then, and changed their own brakes - when's the last time you were concerned about the actual brand of a component used in your car?

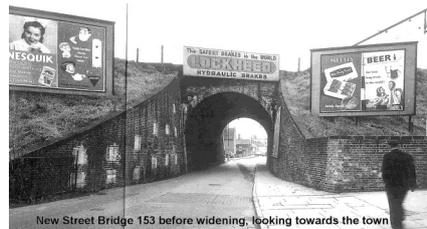


Photo taken from New Street looking towards the town.

Nesquik, launched in 1948, is still with us in some form though back then it was almost ubiquitous and again the Ascot water heater has its descendants too.

Beer was advertised generically back then, by the Beer Barons though BEER 1/2, THE BEST LONG DRINK IN THE WORLD sounds a trifle contradictory.

The photo of the bridge taken from New Street is looking south under the GE main line running east-west above, left to right, with the station off to the right.

Opposite the Marconi works we had the extensive Chelmsford Goods Yard, long since gone.



Photo taken when standing on the bridge towards the Marconi New Street Works

Like nature and a vacuum, traffic management understandably enough abhors a bridge like this and they are now an endangered species. This one

long ago was modernised out of existence.

The nearest Marconi works block has now gone but the Marconi main building with the clock tower and flagpole, is still there, but now apparently head office for a cosmetics firm.

(Editors Note: We have an article in the 2019 Newsletter edition showing this bridge being demolished and replaced)

An extremely sorry tale...

by Ken Earney

... from an authoritative source: Duxford Radio Trust (DRT) has been given notice to quit the Imperial War Museum's site at Duxford after 32 years support to IWM

A number of veterans will have visited IWM Duxford over the years and found their way into the Duxford Radio Trust's (DRT) exhibitions in two buildings, 177 and 178, located either side of the large Gibraltar Gun, and adjacent to the American Air Museum. Building 177 housed the exhibition radio transmitting station and a display of radio equipment principally with a land warfare theme, together with a working replica of the Wireless Operator's position from the RAF Lancaster bomber. Building 178 was an interactive display and demonstration room, which housed a display of working conserved or restored radio, navigation and radar equipment principally with an aviation theme.

There are two Marconi angles to this item. One of our now deceased veterans, George Rawlings, who I think carried out PDS work in EOSD at Basildon, was actively involved in the restoration and setting to work of a significant amount of this equipment. George was a bit of an outsider because due to Duxford's proximity to Cambridge most of DRT's working volunteers are former Pye Telecoms engineers. The second angle is

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that for our 2011 reunion Denis Willis, at that time the vice-chairman of Duxford Radio Society (it didn't become a trust until 2016), kindly lent me one of their working R1155s because the one that I owned wasn't in a fit state to put on display in a working condition.

But now the DRS/DRT presence at IWM Duxford is no more. IWM has closed the Duxford volunteer Radio Section and told DRT to remove all its equipment from the Duxford Airfield site - without a valid reason. This came about after new mandatory commercial terms and conditions for the continued presence at the site were introduced by IWM. DRT were unable to comply quickly enough with these demands due to other specific conditions insisted on by IWM, which would have contravened health & safety and radio regulations. When one set of conditions was eased slightly, allowing others to be met, DRT was then given notice to quit.

As I said at the start, a very sorry and messy story. However, at the time of writing the signs are that the management team now have the prospect of a satisfactory indoor environment for both maintenance and storage of the equipment, and discussions are ongoing for reasonably local museum space for the displays. The DRT Phoenix may be about to arise from the ashes.



Working complete ARC-5/SCR-274-N 'Command' radio installation as fitted to USAAF B17 and B24 aircraft.



Working replica of the RAF Lancaster Bomber Wireless Operator's station

Both photos copyright Richard Howes

You will find a comprehensive overview of DRT's activities – its work in collecting, conserving, restoring and demonstrating aircraft and ground military radio equipments to the public, together with further information on this current situation at: www.duxfordradio.org This link can also be found on the Marconi Veterans Association website.

Marconi in South Wales

from David Cannon

Situated close to the south Wales coastline betwixt Penarth and Barry is the attractive limestone St. Lawrence Church at Lavernock.



A small church which appears to date

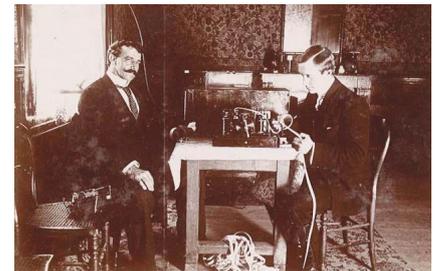
back to 1769, with an interesting link to radio history.

On 13 May 1897, Marconi sent the first ever wireless communication over open sea – a message was transmitted over the Bristol Channel from Flat Holm Island to Lavernock Point near Cardiff, a distance of 6 kilometres (3.7 mi).

The message read "Are you ready".

Marconi was assisted by George Kemp (a Cardiff Post Office Engineer) who recorded how the experiments progressed:

"Mr Marconi's apparatus was set up on the cliff at Lavernock Point, which is about twenty yards above sea-level. Here we erected a pole, 30 yards (27 m) high, on the top of which was a cylindrical cap of zinc, 2 yards (1.8 m) long and 1-yard (0.91 m) diameter.



George Kemp on left, Marconi right

Connected with this cap was an insulated copper wire leading to one side of the detector, the other side of which was connected to a wire led down the cliff and dipping into the sea.

At Flat Holm Mr Preece's apparatus was arranged, the Ruhmkorff coil also giving 20-inch (510 mm) sparks from an eight-cell battery. On the 10th May experiments on Mr Preece's electromagnetic transmission method were repeated, and with perfect success.

The next few days were eventful ones in the history of Mr Marconi.

On the 11th and 12th his experiments were unsatisfactory – worse still, they were failures – and the fate of his new system trembled in the balance.

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An inspiration saved it. On the 13th May the apparatus was carried down to the beach at the foot of the cliff, and connected by another 20 yards (18 m) of wire to the pole above, thus making an aerial height of 50 yards (46 m) in all.

Result, The instruments which for two days failed to record anything intelligible, now rang out the signals clear and unmistakable, and all by the addition of a few yards of wire"

In 1948 the Cardiff Rotary Club attached a bronze plaque to the church wall to mark 50th anniversary of the first wireless signal being transmitted across open water.



Bawdsey Radar Trust

by Ken Earney

The only time the newsletter has given any coverage to the activities of the trust was in my first edition as editor in 2006. Shame on me. Things have moved on since then. This small museum, housed in the original WW2 transmitter block adjacent to Bawdsey Manor, tells the story of the development there in the late 1930s by a team of engineers and scientists, led by Robert Watson-Watt, of the first successful radar early warning system to detect approaching enemy aircraft.



A photomontage of the now dismantled CH masts as they would presumably have been seen from the quay in 1940

This initial success was followed by the construction of a chain of radar stations at key locations along the the east and south coasts of Britain which was then integrated into the world's first ground-controlled interception network system devised by Air Chief Marshall Hugh Dowding - The Dowding System. This system was vital in defeating the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain in 1940. Podcasts, display panels, hands-on demonstrators, written and oral histories tell this story. The museum also deals with subsequent aspects of radar in WW2 and beyond.

My most recent visit was in June last year and I was extremely impressed by its transformation from the derelict state of the transmitter block I'd seen prior to the start of restoration with money from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic England and others in 2017: this impression will chime with many who watched the BBC2 series 'Restoration' in 2004.

The project has led to its being awarded Suffolk Museum of the Year in 2019.



Above, display interior before restoration.

In the Trust's autumn newsletter major attention was given to the **80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain** in mid-September. There is an interesting graphic produced by the RAF Benevolent Fund, also to be found on their website, which shows which nations' airmen fought alongside British pilots in that conflict. Sobering reading for those who say "we won the Battle of Britain" - do they realise who "we" were? With British pilots were those from Australia, Austria (*an odd one this, needs investigation*), Barbados, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Ireland, Jamaica, New Zealand, Newfoundland and Labrador, Poland, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, USA. (*Apparently Newfoundland and Labrador were considered to be a separate dominion from Canada at that time.*) Polish pilots, the next most numerous after Britain, played a very significant role with their two squadrons, 302 and 303. Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding's summary of their contribution was: "Had it not been for the magnificent work of the Polish squadrons and their unsurpassed gallantry, I hesitate to say that the outcome of battle would have been the same."

The British Forces Broadcast Service has produced a short film which focusses on the Dowding System: they spent a day in early September filming at Bawdsey, and also at Bentley Priory, the site of Fighter Command HQ.

See: <https://bcove.video/3ofvqCT> (link is also on the MVA web page > Useful Links)



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This video also has a brief segment in fields off Hanningfield Road showing the Baddow CH mast in the background as the presenter introduces radar into the narrative.

Do look at the BRT website for a wide range of material about the history of the first days of radar, its importance to the Battle of Britain effort and on through WW2, reminiscences of some of the dwindling number of men and women who worked there, links to podcasts on directly related topics, family activities. There is a must-see section regarding the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and what arrangements have been made for safe reopening after easing of the local summer lockdown restrictions.

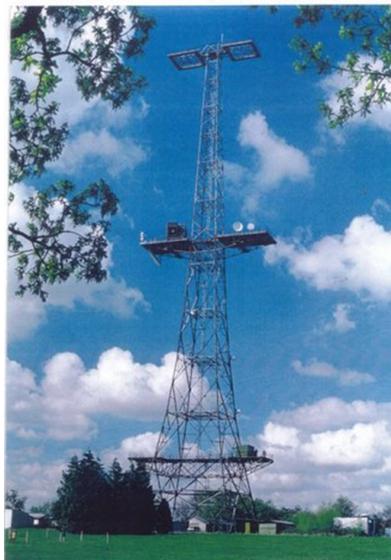
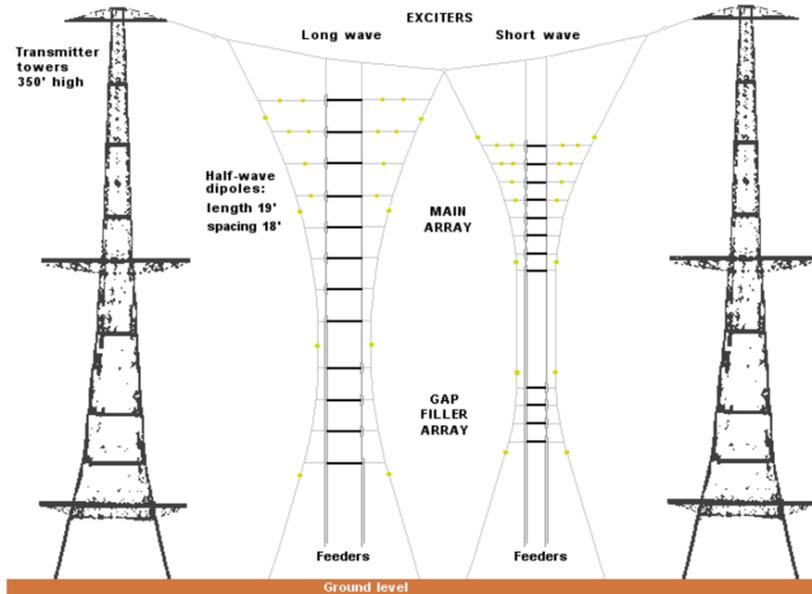
<https://www.bawdseyradar.org.uk/>
There is a link to it on the MVA website. And if you have an interest in many aspects of our armed services, explore what BFBS has to offer - <https://www.bfbs.com/>

The CH Tower Baddow

by Colin Fletcher, Ian Gillis, Alan Hartley-Smith

For many Veterans the news that the Chain Home Tower at Great Baddow has now achieved a Grade II listing is long overdue. Since 1956 the CH Tower has been a prominent landmark in Great Baddow and a testament to the pioneering engineers of radar technology.

The 360 foot high tower was originally one of three erected at RAF Canewdon in 1937 and was used to support the curtain arrays supplied by the Marconi Company. It was relocated from south-east Essex to the Marconi Company research site at Great Baddow in 1956. Constructed of galvanized steel frame with timber and steel mesh flooring to the mid-level platforms it was mounted on a reinforced -concrete foundation.



In 1938 the system became operational and continued throughout the war in spite of jamming by the Germans. The availability of 200MHz and 600MHz equipment in 1942 reduced the significance of the jamming by the Germans, which by now had become more intense.

It should be noted that the Chain Home was not only the first early warning radar network in the world, but also the first fully operational military radar system.

For more web links refer to MVA web site

ADOLF My part in his downfall

by Robin Reynolds

(With apologies to Spike Milligan.)

I was born at a very early age, in St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington on Winston Churchill's 60th. birthday. Now it appears it is a favourite venue for Royals to be born. My parents were living in Seaview, Isle of Wight at the time and my mother probably pulled a few strings with some of her friends to give birth there.

So I was nearly five years old when war was declared and obviously did not know what that entailed until six anti-aircraft guns were deployed not far from our back fence. We were right on the coast and had a panoramic view of the Solent right across to Portsmouth and Southsea from an upstairs window. What we did not know at the time was that we were in a direct line between Ventnor which had a CH Radar and Portsmouth an important naval base. We often found complete incendiary bombs in the garden which we used to collect up in the morning after a raid. The filings of the case were ideal for making sparklers as it was magnesium. We did not have

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an air raid shelter as such but a reinforced room within the house and used to shelter in there underneath a large strong table.

Father was in the Home Guard and was the sergeant of the local platoon. He had been wounded in WW1 so was not eligible for call-up. My brother was an RAF apprentice and my sister was a Land Girl. One day Father arrived home with a Lewis gun, covered in grease and it had probably been in storage since WW1. He had been told to strip it down, clean off the grease and re-assemble it in readiness in case it was needed. My brother was home on leave at the time and helped him with the task, I was told to keep well away but I could watch if I wanted to. Just as well I did watch as neither of them could re-assemble it so I did it for them.

Later on things were starting to get a bit more difficult, the Channel Islands had been occupied and they thought we would be next. Our local sweetshop closed and the owner who was Jewish thought it wise to leave the island. I was put down to be evacuated to Canada but fortunately the ship was full and I would have to wait for the next crossing. I say 'fortunately' because the ship, the SS City of Benares got sunk by a U-Boat just off the coast of Ireland with great loss of life. Food was getting difficult to obtain despite rationing as it had to be shipped across the Solent. Meat in particular was in very short supply so it was decided that we would breed rabbits primarily for their meat but we also had fur as a bi-product. Another thing we were advised to do was to assemble various tinned foods, to place them in large biscuit tins and bury them in the garden as an emergency supply in case we did get occupied. I often wonder how many tins are still buried in gardens.

We were fairly lucky as we had a large garden so vegetables and fruit were in

plentiful supply. Also being right on the coast fish were available with a little bit of luck. If there had been an air raid during the night and bombs had been jettisoned in the Solent then if the tide was right we could collect 'bombed fish' on the beach. A bit burnt but mostly edible.

The view from the upstairs window was one of my favourite spots if there was any action but I was often reprimanded for watching dogfights in case any stray bullets came our way. The shipping was also quite spectacular and safer to watch but the Dunkirk evacuation went by almost unnoticed as we did not know what was going on until it was virtually over. The Navy took over Seaview pier and I suspect something top secret went on there probably with small boats. We befriended one of the Petty Officers from there and naturally did not ask but we were not even allowed to know his name. We always had to call him PO. Someone had the bright idea of getting all the kids to collect waste paper during the summer school holiday with a prize for the one who collected the most and a party with the prizes given out. I collected the most as it happened and was awarded First Prize, a box of pencils. I was a bit miffed about this actually because I thought I should get third prize. No one had explained to me that First Prize was better than Third Prize.

When I was about 8 there was a bit of a lull in the fighting around us and for some reason we moved to Berkshire where we hardly knew there was a war on. We lived in Sunninghill in a house virtually opposite the entrance to Windsor Park and not far from the end of Ascot racecourse. It was obviously after the Americans had joined in the war as one time we were queuing in the local fish and chip shop, and I always remembered an American serviceman in front of us ordering 36 portions of fish and chips. So another late supper for us.

I think we only stayed there for just under a year and then moved to Surrey. I was a bit older then and more independent so I got more involved in what was going on. We moved to a farm labourer's cottage in Abinger Hammer directly on to what is now known as the A25. There was the railway line behind us which went from Redhill to Reading, known as the 'Reading Rattler' and we had a narrow lane alongside us known as Beggars Lane which led up to the North Downs past a sand pit and on to two chalk pits. The chalk pits were used by the army most days for rifle practice and for grenade throwing and after school we used to go up to see what souvenirs we could find such as spent cartridge cases and pieces of hand grenade. One lad took home a complete sticky bomb that he had found but I don't think his dad was well pleased with that as it was probably still live. The other side of the A25 we faced a large area of watercress beds which were fed with water from the river Tillingbourne. It was not very deep and could be waded across in most places but that was not good enough for us as we wanted to swim. So several of us boys used to build a dam across the river until it was just about deep enough. We were enjoying ourselves there one summer afternoon when we could hear a lot of gunfire and thought it a little strange as we could also hear bullets whistling overhead. On investigation we discovered that an ammunition train had caught fire and was stationary just outside Gomshall station and bullets were flying everywhere. We managed to get home OK by keeping low and crawling along in the watercress beds sheltering from the bullets behind the banks of the cress beds.

Things were building up to D-Day by then and convoys of troops and armour were continuously passing on their way towards Portsmouth along the narrow A25 in the front of our cottage. It was also very narrow through Shere where I

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went to school. We had to cross this busy road at lunchtime to go to the village hall for our school dinner and it was there that I witnessed a young lad get knocked over by an armoured car in his haste to get across the road.

In the days just before D-Day a lot of military vehicles parked up along the road side hidden from above by the overhanging trees so we knew something big was going on. We heard the news of the invasion on the early morning BBC news and I remember it was lovely sunny morning with barely a breath of wind just like it was this year. Not long after D-Day we started to receive the V1 Doodlebugs which were so unpredictable as they appeared in all sorts of odd places. One arrived fairly close by just skimming over the hedge tops, one landed in Abinger Common Churchyard and one arrived just as us kids were sitting down to our school dinner. Later on the V2's were being launched but none came near us thank goodness. One Saturday morning when we were playing in the sand pit we heard a strange whooshing sound which grew louder followed by a bang. We had no idea what that could be so rushed home to discover we were OK but the neighbouring cottage had been hit by something which did not explode. The old lady who lived there had been killed and we were totally mystified as to what it was until we learnt later that it was a reserve fuel tank from a Mosquito that had been jettisoned in error.

We naturally followed the progress of the war on the BBC news and were overjoyed when VE day was announced. We didn't live in a street as such so did not hold a street party but were invited across the road to a bunch of houses where the watercress workers lived and shared in their party. About this time I took the school exam which was the precursor to the 11 plus and passed to go to the Grammar School in Guildford.

We heard the news of the nukes being dropped in Japan on our trusty old Phillips wireless set and looked forward to peace being declared there. We were back in Seaview on holiday when Victory in Japan was announced and joined in the celebrations there. I managed to get my leg burned by a Thunderflash that exploded too close to me but that was all. Eventually the prisoners that the Japanese held were released and shipped back to UK. I remember that our neighbour's son came back minus his tongue which the Japs had removed.

Very soon after that we moved to Holland-on-Sea so I never went to Guildford Grammar school and the Clacton County High was full so I had to go to the local Secondary School for two years and then take the exam that got me into Colchester Tech. But that is another story.

The B and R Story

by Robin Reynolds

It was way back in 1984 or thereabouts, we had been unsuccessful in selling S511 to the Americans with our demonstration at the Grand Canyon airport but we caught the eye of the Canadians who bought five systems including the one at the Grand Canyon. This was to be installed at the Canadian Forces Base at Lahr in Germany to replace the S654. They were not too sure if their power supplies would be suitable so asked for a survey to be carried out on site. The people chosen to go were Alf Lund of the Power Equipment section at New Street and Harry Cole in ATC Systems.

Near the time, Alf Lund had another important engagement so asked his No. 2, John Biggs to take his place. Even nearer the time, Harry Cole found something more important to do so I was asked to replace him. So we turned up at the Canadian Forces check-in desk at Gatwick and told them that Lund and

Cole would not be travelling with them today but Biggs and Reynolds would.

Now any other day it would have been OK, but as it happened the two notorious train robbers, Biggs and Reynolds had escaped from prison only a few days earlier. After a bit of leg pulling we were loaded on to the old Boeing 707 and set off for Germany. Just before we were due to land they announced that the runway at Lahr was being re-surfaced so we would land in Baden and would be taken to Lahr by road to Lahr and collect our luggage there.

Unfortunately our bags had been left on the plane and were by now on their way to Canada.

More hilarity followed when we arrived at the Hotel Lowen with no baggage and I explained to the boss, in my best German, that Lund and Cole had been replaced by Biggs and Reynolds when on his desk the newspaper Die Zeitung bore as its headline that Biggs and Reynolds were wanted by Interpol. We were well received however and I think we even got a free beer out of it.

We got our bags back eventually, mine came via New York but a few items were missing and now had new owners somewhere.

One interesting thing I learnt talking to John Biggs was about German railways. As we travelled by bus to Lahr we passed very close to a railway line and he told me that he designed the motors used in their locomotives when he worked at Crompton Parkinsons. He told me that all their trains ran on a supply at 16 2/3 Hz. I think it was done to stop people stealing electricity but made me wonder how Eurostar get a train to run from St. Pancras to Frankfurt. All suggestions on a postcard please.

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EMAILS / LETTERS

from Helen Pengelly (nee Edgar)

When I was 17 I worked in the wages office with Audrey in 1970 and her son Michael worked in the drawing office.

I don't know their surname which makes it difficult!

Can anybody help at all as I have happy memories, especially the pub playing darts at lunchtime.

from Nuhman Saheed

I am trying to locate Mr. Daniel James Joseph and engineers assigned to the Radar refurbishing project for the Jeddah and Dhahran Airport radar during the year 1991-1992.

If you are able to help please reply to secretary@marconi-veterans.org

OBITUARY:

Geoff Hardcastle - 1940 to 2018

by Ken Earney

In last year's newsletter I contributed to the item on Fred Boot who died in July of 2019. On a visit to his wife Peggy at their home in Tiptree late in the year she gave me a box file of documents and photos that Fred wanted to go to Marconi archives after his death. Looking through the material there were a couple of photos of Marconi College staff members and others, amongst them the one shown here of a group which included Geoff Hardcastle, one of the college's principal lecturers, and in the centre left his daughter Sarah. More on that later.

I wanted to know if Geoff was still alive and living in the Southend area so that I could contact him about Fred's death. Apparently Fred and Peggy would

occasionally meet Geoff and his wife Ann socially, but in the period running up to and on Fred's death they had lost touch. Asking Colin our Secretary yielded nothing about him, so I next contacted someone in the swimming world in Southend, fellow veteran Reg Ramm, who in a short while came up with contact details for Geoff's son David.

Geoff was born in York in September 1940 and died on 25 January 2018. He was a senior lecturer in TV techniques when I encountered him. I'd been transferred along with a number of others from Airadio to EOSD in the early Weinstock reorganisation days. About 12 – 15 of us were put on a month-long mornings only electro-optical systems techniques induction course in 1970. Geoff

and Fred Boot I think dealt principally with TV techniques, they both knew their topics very well and had an easy-going engaging style of putting the material over, leaving the feeling that one had a pretty good grasp of it. Some years later, at that time involved with customer training proposals, I saw further evidence of this when Geoff was presenting material for external customers here in the UK. A group of Singaporeans at the college in 1984 appreciated that easy and effective way he presented his topics to them (and they were intrigued to learn that a British Olympic swimming medal-winner in the LA Olympics that year was his daughter Sarah).

In the group photo Geoff is second from left and Fred Boot fifth from left – at the back peering over everyone's heads. In the forefront holding the right-hand corner of the display board is Ian Donaldson, college principal, whilst the person holding the other corner is Geoff's daughter Sarah, one of GB's women's Olympic swimming champions. (In another photo of Sarah and Ian

Donaldson, the certificate at the centre of the board proves to be for the 1983 European Aquatics Championships in Rome where she won bronze in the 800m women's freestyle at the age of 14. However, I think she looks older than that so the occasion could have been for any of her subsequent successes up to World Aquatics Championships in Madrid in August 1986.



If anyone can identify any of the staff (or other) members in this photo above please get in touch via the editor.

Following the closure of Marconi College in 1997 Geoff continued designing and presenting technical training courses in a freelance capacity until 2005.

Geoff was married to Ann, a swimming coach who played a major part in coaching their daughter. They also had a second daughter Jane and a son David who still lives in the Southend area. Geoff was clearly dedicated to furthering Sarah's swimming career, getting up at 5am to take her to Southend swimming baths at Warrior Square for daily training sessions.

OBITUARY: Bernard de Neumann

The death of this gifted mathematician has been reported as occurring on the 18th April 2018 at the age of 74. He worked at Marconi Baddow from 1963 until 1988 in the Mathematics Group with Jozef

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Skwirzynski. He left to become Professor of Mathematics at City University. A more detailed obituary is on our web site.

OBITUARY: Ron Cummings

by Malcolm Mack

Edwin Walter Gordon (Ron) Cummings was part of the Services Equipment Division, RAF Orby intake in the early 1950s. He was the Field Services Project Controller for the NATO Sites in the 1960s. During his career he probably went to most of the NATO countries. In 1966 he was running the APOLLO Ascension Island installation. In 1973 he was the Technical Manager of SAGEU, where I first met him. He was Project Manager for Martello S723 Denmark (LAGER) project, and took over the UK (LIME) Project as well, until the final handover in 1989, when he retired.



Ron was a steady hand on the helm whilst the major engineering disasters were mounting around us. We called him Rocket Ron; not because of the speed of action, but the smoke emanating from his pipe, and his unperturbed manner as he steamed along creating order. I understand that he had an illustrious war service; but he never spoke about that. He was a real man-manager; the type that went out of fashion in the new era of Project Management. Where everything and everyone became a

commodity of the work package, to be bought or sold; and which ultimately was heading for the oblivion of going out of business.

I still remember the occasion when Ron bought me a half pint of beer at the Liverpool Station bar, as we waited for the train back to Chelmsford. This was an understated celebration, that after a meeting with MOD at Turnstile House, High Holborn, we had finally been able to handover a very small part of S723. His words at the time are still true today for any job. 'If you sort out the small parts, the big parts fall into place.' Perhaps a statement of the obvious, but when you are up to your neck in alligators, draining the swamp is not your highest priority, even though it was your original intention.

I worked for him for three years on S723, and at the end, it felt like an honour to have done so.

OBITUARY: Donald Mott

by Peter A.T Turrall MBE

Don, as he preferred to be known, was a real Chelmsford boy having been born in West Avenue on the Chelmsford Boarded Barns Estate.

His early schooling was at Kings Road Junior School in Chelmsford before he won a Scholarship exam and entered the local King Edward VI Grammar School.

He was according to all reports, a good scholar but, he had great interest in

sports and played football for the School team. At times he was a big centre back and also a Goal Keeper.

It was this latter position that he after leaving school, played for the Old Chelmsfordians Football Team which was made up of ex KEGS pupils.

He was a keen supporter of all Essex Football and at one time served on local Football Committees.

A long serving Marconi employee, after obtaining his Accountants exams, joined Marconi Marine in Chelmsford. He later transferred to Marconi Communication Systems New Street where for many years he was Financial Director under Managing Director Tom Mayer.

He was a widower with two sons one of which lives locally, the other a Banker in Hong Kong.

OBITUARY: Ted Jeffery

by Colin Drake

Ted Jeffery died in December in Aylesbury. Ted joined as an engineering apprentice during WW2. His entire adult career was spent on Radar equipment's in both design and design management appointments. Most of that time was with H.N.C. Ellis-Robinson (E-R) with whom a close bond was formed. Ted's ultimate appointment was as Design Office Manager - Airspace Control Division.

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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 > Membership > In-Memoriam

Notified to our secretary from Nov 2019 – Dec 2020:-

Miss BA Allerton; Mr. J Andrews; Mr. P Bickers; Mr. JE Bower; Mr. AH Boyce; Mr. RT Brocklesby; Mr. PR Burlong; Dr. G Busby; Mr. HM Carter; Mr. D Cooper; Mr. EE Cranfield; Mr E.W.G Cummings, Mr. J Donachie; Mr D.G Gray; Mr. D Gutteridge; Mr. G. Hardcastle; Mr. NE Harrington; Miss B Herries, Mr J.B Hibble; Mr R.E Jackson; Mr E.W Jeffery; Mr. R Jones; Mr. R Lester; Mrs. PA Lodge; Mr. MC McNeil; Mr. RV Moss; Mr D.A.S Mott; Mr. JA Nicholson; Mr. JW Pearce; Mr. DR Polley; Mr. ME Rita;