

# PRESS RELEASE

## Unique living history exhibit lost as council withdraws support

*The demonstration of Marconi television equipment at Sandford Mill in Chelmsford, maintained in working order by volunteers, has been dismantled after the council's museums personnel imposed new rules.*

*For immediate release – 2 August 2021, Chelmsford* – Sandford Mill in Chelmsford, as part of Chelmsford Museum, held a collection of artefacts from the history of television and radio, including the hut from which the UK's first regular entertainment broadcasts were made. For nine years, a group of highly qualified volunteers, many of them Marconi veterans, maintained television studio equipment dating from the 1960s and 1970s and demonstrated it to the public on open days. These volunteers donated thousands of hours of work and sourced historic parts from all over the country, all at no direct cost to the council, and created a unique living history exhibit.

Recently volunteers received a letter from the council's museum manager, Dave Finkle, informing them that "volunteering... will now only be periodically permitted... subject to approval and resources," that "volunteers will be asked to retrieve their own possessions," and that "physical handling, working on or moving accessioned objects must be agreed only by curatorial staff." Subsequent communication gave the volunteers a deadline of "a couple of weeks" to destroy thousands of hours of work and scatter the collected equipment back across the country.

Finkle goes on to state that these changes are necessary under an accreditation process. Chairman of the Marconi Veterans' Association, Brian Izzard, suggests that the accreditation process could have been satisfied while maintaining the exhibit. "Equipment can be inventoried without destroying the collection, maintenance of working exhibits is done by many museums, and the suggestion that the volunteers lack the expertise to properly handle these objects is emblematic of the council's disregard for their efforts and their expertise."

Izzard goes on, "At Duxford I recently explored inside a preserved Concorde, and as a pilot I was able to actually fly a vintage Harvard aircraft. And yes, the Imperial War Museum at Duxford is accredited under the very same scheme that Chelmsford Council is pursuing for its museum – so why could the same not have been done at Sandford Mill? Requiring donated and borrowed equipment to be removed makes the council's own collection less complete, and means it's almost certain that none of the collection will work, or be demonstrated to anyone, ever again."

A publicly-owned exhibit of this sort of was nationally unique. It was hugely popular with visitors keen to learn, through experience, about the industrial heritage of Chelmsford and the UK, as well as the global legacy of Marconi's work – especially as we approach the hundredth anniversary of scheduled UK broadcasting in 2022.

This press release is issued jointly by:

**The Marconi Veterans' Association**, which arranges activities and promotes the friendship and cordiality of Marconi Veterans – all as engendered by our first President, Guglielmo Marconi himself. See <https://marconi-veterans.org/>

**The Chelmsford Civic Society**, which aims to stimulate public interest in and appreciation and care of the history, appearance and character of Chelmsford. See <https://www.chelmsfordcivicsociety.co.uk/>

**Chelmsford u3a**, an independent charitable organisation that is devoted to the education of older people and believes in the positive attributes of life-long learning. See <http://www.chelmsfordu3a.org.uk/>

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### Images



*The Marconi equipment demonstration at Sandford Mill operating in late 2019*



*The exhibit after the council's plans were implemented in July 2021*