# The Society of the Friends of Orkney Wireless Museum

# BULLETIN




**VOLUME: 29 No. 2 DECEMBER 2020**

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# NEWS :: EVENTS :: REVIEWS :: NEWS :: EVENTS :: REVIEWS

Hello and welcome again to another edition of the 'Friends' of Orkney Wireless Museum Bulletin.

After one of the most peculiar years in history we must look forward to the better news that vaccinations may be around the corner to tackle the issue of Covid – 19.



*The Longhope lifeboat equipment*

Although the Museum has been closed for the season, events continued to take place.

Earlier in the year we were pleased to gift some radio equipment to the Longhope lifeboat Museum. This equipment had been rescued from being dumped after receiving after a tip-off from a friendly local. (It literally was pulled out from a skip). It is believed to have come from a lifeboat in Orkney, but after much research (even contacting RNLI headquarters) we were not able to find out which one. It was made by Coastal Radio of Aberdeen. It should make a nice addition to the small museum in Longhope where the current lifeboat is based.

Another item from our store which is on the move is a Gaumont projector believed to have been used in WW2 in Orkney. It too has had a close shave of being lost to posterity. The story about it was that it used to belong to local projectionist, the late William Scollie. He had stored it in the new cinema at Pickaquoy, and after his death the cinema were having a clear out. Thanks to Bob Presland, it was saved and stored in the old arts theatre. When it in turn was being closed Bob pushed me to take it for the Museum (I did not know its relevance at that time). It now has a home at the wartime cinema in HMS Tern at Twatt in Birsay where it belongs.



*The Gaumont projector with reels, now in HMS Tern in*

As well as the Museum having its own well established Museum web site, Kim Foden has been busy establishing a new Facebook page where she has done much to publicise the Museum (see separate article).

During the lockdown I managed to spend time at our store cataloguing our WW2 military equipment. This turned out to be quite a large job, since everything had to be described, measured, marked with catalogue number and taken out and photographed (some 60 + items). Then came the turn of the televisions! We have some 50+ televisions, and if you wish to see them yourself have a look at Kim's new Facebook page under 'The Orkney Wireless Museum.' Fraser Garriock continued to catalogue our books and has now completed most of them.

Lastly we must mention the loss of our long-time companion, ex Trustee and Director Bill Wright. Bill had not long retired from the Museum and even though he had reached 90 years of age still had an active mind which you could call on for advice. My links with Bill go back about thirty years when he, Sandy Firth, Arthur Flett and three of my brothers established a Trust after the death of the founder to keep the Museum going. Bill played a large part in establishing the Trust and latterly the Limited Company. I think he secretly enjoyed all the ins and outs of running a Company and made an excellent Chairman which will be hard to follow.



Bill, who originally came from Yorkshire, was already well known for the special event stations he arranged around Orkney and in the Museum itself. He was often to be seen at the Hoy Half Marathon's with RAYNET (Radio Amateurs Emergency Network) - keeping tabs on all the runners taking part. In my mind he was a born leader and held the respect of all those who worked with him. Orkney is a better place for having had him.

On the day of Bills funeral a number of volunteers gathered outside the Museum in respect as the hearse went past. Others stood outside St Magnus Cathedral and Broad Street. This included lawyers and Police officers. (Bill was a retired Procurate Fiscal).

Museum Director Ed Holt has inherited all Bill's radio amateur equipment and has spent quite a few weeks going through Bill's lifetime collection of radio paraphernalia. Ed has already generously donated some of Bill's personal radio equipment to the museum along with many of his bound magazines and files, all in good order. Ed is also working on an article covering Bill's radio amateur days in Orkney which we will be using in our next bulletin about June 2021.

It remains to be seen how the Museum gets on during 2021, but we are ever hopeful things will improve. Best wishes till then. P.McD



*Bill's late wife Anne at an early special event station in St Margaret's Hope in the 1990's*

# The Orkney Wireless Museum's Facebook Page is the Cat's Whiskers.

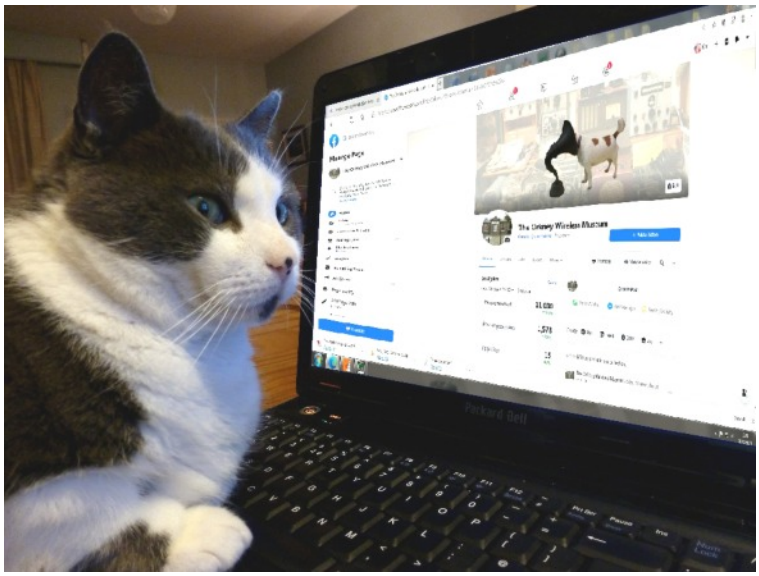
Kim Foden

The organisers of Scotland's Doors Open Day 2020 decided that, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, their event this year would be held on-line. Visitors would be able to take virtual tours of venues rather than enter the actual buildings. We had enjoyed a busy, fun weekend last year as part of the DOD weekend and, because we had not been able to open this summer at all, we wanted to be part of DOD 2020.
They asked us for a short film or a live tour.

We decided to make a short film to introduce the museum and feature one aspect of the collection. We chose the Italian memorabilia and photographic archive regarding the Italian prisoners of war who were taken to Orkney in order to help build the Churchill Barriers.
The timing of the event coincided with the updated reprint of the museum's publication, Churchill's Prisoners. Written by museum founder, the late James MacDonald, it tells the story of the Italians in Orkney.

DOD organisers wanted an on-line presence where they could access our film, and then link their visitors back to view our page. So, The Orkney Wireless Museum was set up and running on Facebook in July. Unfortunately, DOD forgot to publish our link on their web site for their viewers to find us in the future. Oh well.

Although it has been, and still is, a steep learning curve for me to get to grips with running the page, you can see from the photo that I was not totally self taught. As well as Gray Puss, Fiona at The Orkney News has been a great help. They both gave me encouragement.



I try to keep the content light, varied and interesting to everyone who dips into the page. Albums have been started which showcase some of the museum's exhibits, as well as otherwise unseen items in our store. Photos of one item which had puzzled us at the museum for some time were posted with a plea for information. The answer came from the United States, along with more followers to the page.

We include links to web sites which will expand information on some of the features.
Visitors to the page can also find three videos made by my husband, Robert. The First Flight around the World, via Orphir records the successful attempt by a team of Americans in 1924. There is an animated film depicting first flight across the North Sea in a powered aircraft piloted by Tryggve Gran, and our own museum film.
The page gives us a platform to advertise the book, Churchill's Prisoners and our Christmas cards featuring Ginger, the RAF wireless operator.

Running the page is interesting and fun. It aims to encourage interaction as well as keeping us on the map at least until we can reopen, but probably beyond that time.

You can find us on Facebook at **The Orkney Wireless Museum**.

https://www.facebook.com/The-Orkney-Wireless-Museum-107840767686286/?view_public_for=107840767686286

# Discovering Wee Fea

Ian Collins

*Ian first came to Orkney for a family holiday 10 years ago and whilst visiting the Lyness Museum he happened to notice an impressive looking building on the hill nearby which intrigued him. He did not manage to visit the building on this occasion but took note to explore it next time he came to Orkney. This building was the former Royal Navy Communication Centre on Wee Fea. Ian who has an interest in landscapes and photography went on to produce a detailed site description and survey of the building (a copy of which is in the Orkney Archive and Library). Since then Ian, has held various photographic exhibitions including one called 'Not Just Concrete' at the Orkney Museum in Kirkwall which explored wartime remains in Orkney. He would like to make a request for anyone with photographs or artefacts that are associated with Wee Fea to get in touch. This may form part of an exhibition being planned for 2023 to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the opening of Wee Fea. (Anyone able to assist please contact him at iancollins@doctors.org.uk). Edit.*

At the crossroads next to the Hoy Hotel above Lyness is a sign pointing to the picnic spot and view-point of Wee Fea. After a fifteen minute walk up the unsurfaced track beside a stretch of woodland, the landscape opens up and reveals the striking outline of the Central Communication Building and Staff Office (CCB&SO), once the nerve centre of Naval operations at Scapa Flow and far beyond. The site affords a vast panorama that takes in most of Scapa Flow including the islands of Flotta and Fara and the settlements of Lyness and Rinnigill. There is a fine view of the Hoy hills, Mainland Orkney, South Ronaldsay, South Walls and, on a clear day, the mountains of Caithness.



*The CCB&SO from the north. Photograph from 2007.*

At the outbreak of WW2 the Admiral Commanding Orkney and Shetland (ACOS) was based on board HMS Iron Duke, a dreadnought class battleship built in 1912 and moved to Scapa Flow during September of 1939. This ship was attacked and damaged by the Luftwaffe the following month and subsequently beached at Ore Bay to prevent her from sinking, an incident that led to the removal of key facilities from this ship to dispersed locations on shore at Lyness. The main ACOS offices were moved close to the shore at the Head of Right, and the telephone exchange to a timber building surrounded by a blast wall close to the junction of North Road and Haybrake Road in Lyness (still standing at OS grid reference ND 3039 9468). This exchange handled ACOS telephone and tele-printer communications to and from submarines, boom gate vessels, signal stations and Scapa Flow defences. The main radio transmitting and receiving station appears to have been based on the WW1 vintage depot ship HMS Greenwich until the wireless station at Gallow Tuag in South Walls became operational in February 1941. The obvious vulnerability of these sites to aerial attack led to proposals to establish a well protected 'splinterproof' staff office and communication centre on the slopes of the hill above Lyness known as Wee Fea.



*ACOS Offices at the Head of Right, Lyness. Nothing now remains of these buildings. Detail of a photograph from file ADM 116/5706 held at The National Archives, Kew. This photograph dates from the early years of WW2.*

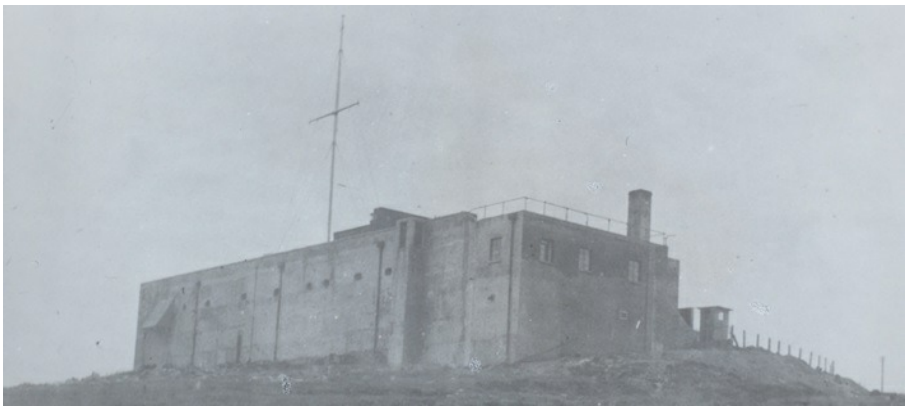


*The remains of the telephone exchange at the junction of North and Haybrake Roads in Lyness. Note the concrete blast walls and associated earth banking. Photograph from July 2017.*

A secret memo of June 1942 describes the plan as follows: "This scheme provides for a double storey rectangular building of reinforced concrete construction with accommodation on the first floor protected against 500lb. bombs, and a lower storey in which the most important staff could be housed, protected against 1,000 lb. bombs." A subsequent memo suggests that the architect John Brandon-Jones was responsible for designing the building, and whilst it has not been possible to track down any original plans or drawings, war diaries in the National Archives show that the CCB&SO was built by "B" Company Royal Marine Engineers and that construction began in early 1942. The war diary describes how the project progressed and also the problems of building in such a challenging environment. For example, the entry for the 14th of October 1942 is "Store carrier ship sunk, materials lost." Many days of work were lost to foul weather. The digging of trenches across saturated moorland to carry cables from the building down to Lyness was especially challenging. Even when the building was completed, the GPO could not install its communication equipment until the structure had been dried out, a process that was delayed by shortages of steel for making the ducting of the heating and ventilation system. Given the size and complexity of the project it seems remarkable that Admiral Sir Lionel Wells and his staff of about 270 were able to move into the new building on Saturday 4th of September 1943, less than 20 months after construction began.

The CCB&SO is a large structure. It measures 43m by 17m and is approximately 14m tall at its south-east corner. It is set into a steeply sloping site such that upper floor is effectively at ground level on its northeast aspect. There are two main floors and a two storey signal bridge or lookout on the flat roof. The exterior walls appear to be of brick and mortar construction and approximately 38cm thick (excluding the cement rendering). The reinforced concrete flat roof and first floor are supported on massive reinforced concrete beams which run across the width of the building. The flat roof was waterproofed using a thick layer of bitumen, much of which is still intact. The centrally placed rooms on both levels are formed into a protected inner core with walls 24cm thick.

The fortress and block-like mass of the building would at first glance seem to be strictly utilitarian in its design, though it could be argued that there are clues that point to its naval origins such as its relatively long and narrow form, the use of porthole windows down either side, a mast, and a centrally placed lookout up on the roof that bears some resemblance to a ships' bridge.



*Photograph dated 23rd of October1945. Showing the main south-east aspect and the 'extension' to the north-east end. From ADM 116/5790 courtesy of The National Archives Kew.*

War diary entries mention how the plans for the building were amended during the construction process so as to include 'WRNS rest-rooms'; this perhaps accounts for the appearance of the north-east end which has large openings for windows, a lower parapet, and a visible join-line with the main block of the building all of which can be seen in the above photograph. This photograph also shows what looks like a sentry post close to the flight of concrete steps. These steps lead up to a doorway, into a small lobby, past the entrance to the rest-rooms and into the upper floor of the main building.

Nowadays, anyone entering the building will find themselves walking on a carpet of animal droppings or through pools of slurry. There are nesting pigeons, scattered bones and maybe a sheep carcass. It is hard to imagine that this place was once warm, dry and full of activity. There is a large foyer-like open space that gives access to one of the two interior stairwells, two small rooms, a long corridor and a dramatic stretch of long open rooms illuminated by eight porthole windows. However, these open spaces are deceptive. Timber and plasterboard remnants along with marks on the ceiling show that the two long rooms were once sub-divided by partitions into six separate rooms, each with one or two portholes and linked by one long narrow corridor. Likewise, most of open space in the 'foyer' was occupied by a room also constructed of timber and plasterboard, some of which remains in place. The outline of this room is clearly visible on the ceiling.



*A photograph from 2018. The wooden frames on the floor are believed to be the remains of blackout panels that would have been used to cover the portholes. The outlines of dividing walls are visible on the ceiling.*



A photograph from late 1944.
Courtesy of the Orkney Library and Archive.

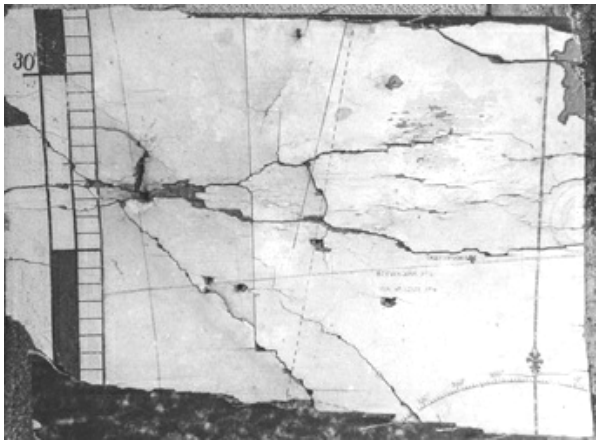


*The same room in 2018.*
*Note the mounting plate for the ships' clock and the conduit around the perimeter.*

Contemporary photographs give a sense of what the now empty interior once looked like. The above shows the largest room in the basement and part of a row of fourteen workstations, some of which appear to be equipped with Admiralty CR100 receivers (one of which is now on display in the Museum, along with one of the work lamps and filter boxes attached to the wall in this photograph). The reinforced concrete roof beams and ventilation ducting are clearly visible. During construction, the number of each workstation was marked onto the concrete floor with red paint, some of which can still be seen. The workstations were connected via a deep conduit that runs around the perimeter of the room. In the corner of the 1944 photograph is the edge of a desk, perhaps the one that remains in situ to this day. The wire mesh of a Faraday cage can now be seen where the plasterboard has fallen from the ceiling. Not visible in these photographs is a hatchway in the opposite wall that opens into an ante-room and thence to two substantial rooms in the heavily protected core of the building. It seems likely that one of these inner rooms was the location of the plotting table and map, a fragment of which is also in the Museum collection.



*One of the two large rooms in the protected inner core of the basement. Photograph from 2018*



*A fragment of the plotting map, recovered in the 1970s by James MacDonald, founder of the Orkney Wireless Museum. Photograph courtesy of Peter MacDonald.*



*The telephone switchboard c.1943-1945*
*Photograph courtesy of the Orkney Library and Archive*



*The switchboard room in April 2018*

Also in the basement was this telephone exchange switchboard, staffed by members of the Women's Royal Naval Service, which at its busiest handled 8,800 calls per day. There were connections to sites all around Orkney as well as the UK mainland. Lines were connected to the main battleships by a submarine cable attached to mooring buoys. This photograph of WRNS staff at work in 1945 was used by myself for a photographic project that involved enlarging the women's faces and placing them on the wall close to where the individuals would have been sitting when the original image was made.

From the National Archives we have details of the complex telephone and teleprinter installation and their connections to sites around Orkney and the mainland; there is even a list of telephone extensions on file. By contrast, there is little information about the radio system specifications. A memo of October 1942 mentions 'adequate space on the roof…to accommodate the various aerial arrays' and also the need for VHF links to installations at Dunnet Head, Ward Hill, the Sector Operations Room in Kirkwall, Fair Isle and Thurso.



*An enlarged section of a photograph from 1945. The CCB&SO and its three masts are on the right. The rows of huts are part of The Royal Marine Engineers Camp. The lighter shaded building in the foreground is Ore Burn Cottage. From ADM 116/5790 courtesy of The National Archives Kew.*



*The rigging pole and remains of a mast base on the slope below the CCB&SO in 2018*

Contemporary photographs show that the CCB&SO was equipped with three aerial towers. The remains of the concrete mast bases, short sections of ironbraced woodwork and a lone rigging pole with a pulley can still be found on the hillside, and on the north-east end of the building is a metal plate that once supported six glass insulators over a conduit to a room that may have been home to transmitting equipment. The other important means of communication was a signal lamp mounted on the roof close to the signal bridge, from where there is a panoramic view of Scapa Flow.

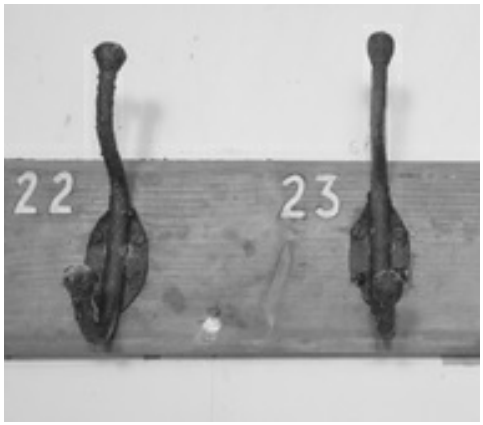


*'Wrens using a 20" signal projector'. c.1943-1945 Photograph courtesy of Orkney Library and Archive.*

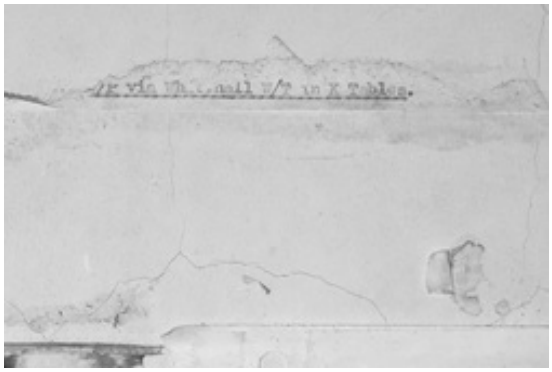


The signal bridge in 2018

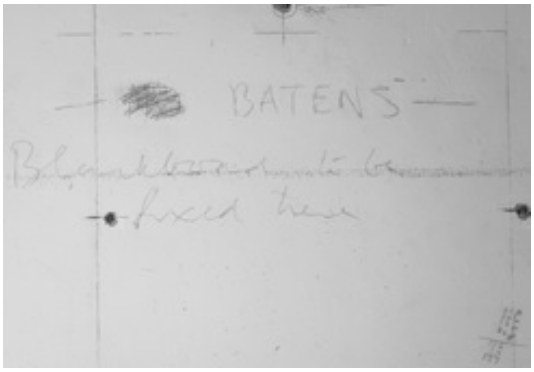
At first glance, the building appears to have been stripped of almost everything, though local residents have told me of how much furniture and paperwork was still in place in the mid 1960s. Some folk remember the large plotting table and map being in situ. It seems probable that the large-scale removal of materials and damage to artefacts began in the 1970s and certain that by the time the Wireless Museum's founder recovered some of the items on display, the plotting-room map had been destroyed. The most substantial remains are of the heating and ventilation plant in the basement complete with its furnace, heat exchanger and blower housing along with lengths of ventilation ducting throughout the building. Most rooms still have their light switches and associated electrical trunking in place. Here and there are there a lampholder hangs from the ceiling. In the basement is a workshop, complete with the rotting remains of a workbench. An almost complete row of 71 numbered coat-hooks are in the corridor opposite the telephone switchboard room. Upstairs, in a dark corner is a solid fuel range cooker with two separate ovens, one marked 'Baking' and the other 'Roasting'. A closer look around the building reveals a few surprises such as the tantalising remains of a naval message slip that have somehow survived over 70 years despite the damp and decay.



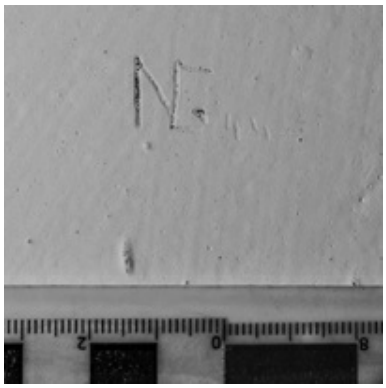

*Part of the row of 71 coat-hooks. Photo from 2019*



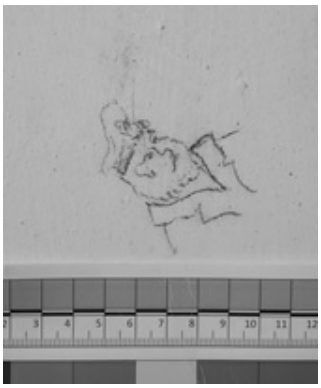
*A fragment of a message slip pasted to a wall.*
*It reads: " /P via Whitehall W/T in K Tables"*
*Photo from 2019*



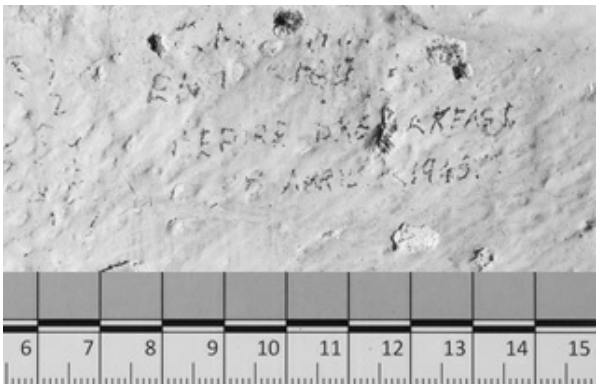

*Pencil marks left by the builders*
*"Blackboards to be fixed here"*
*Photo from 2019*



*Inscribed graffiti " NG '44 "*
*This mark is 2cm across and has been overpainted with whitewash.*
*Photo from 2019*



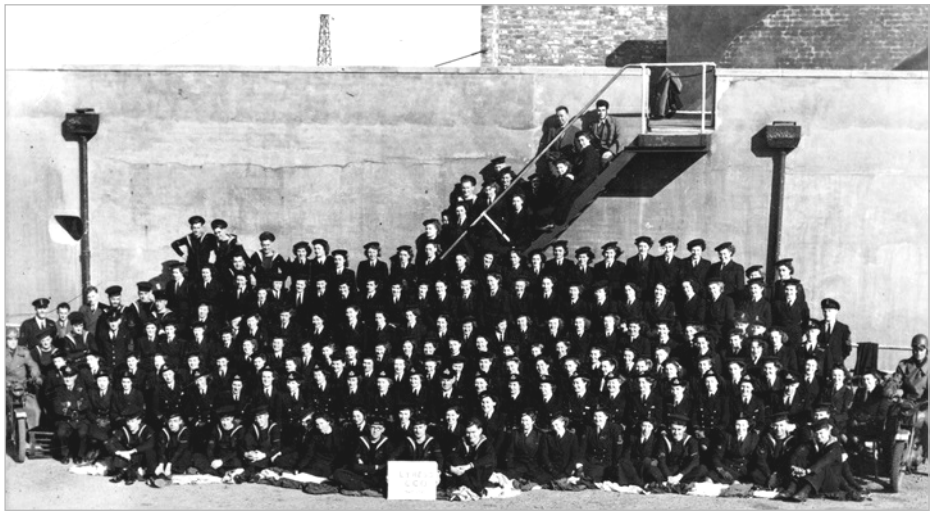
*Pencil graffiti.*
*Photo from 2019*



*Pencil graffiti. The last two lines appear to read "before breakfast 8 April 1945"*
*Photo from 2019*

The more accessible and well lit wall surfaces of the upper level are covered with graffiti which has accumulated since the building was abandoned; much of it using quite large scale lettering and often declaring the date and the writer's name. By contrast, a careful search will reveal marks that appear to have been made whilst the centre was operational (presumably in breach of military discipline). These are often located in inconspicuous spots, are small or very small in scale and executed in pencil, crayon or by deep scratching; some have been partially obliterated by paint or whitewash. In the gents toilets there are pencil drawings and lines of verse that must have been made whilst the artist was sitting on the WC. The majority are not suitable for reproduction in this family magazine!

We have only a little information about working conditions at the CCB&SO. There was a total staff of about 270, most of them being 'Wrens', members of the WRNS. The oral history collected by Virginia Schroder in her book 'Bloody Orkney?' includes some memories of former Wrens, one of whom described the interior of the building as resembling a ship. Another recalled panoramic views of the Fleet in Scapa Flow, the lack of tea breaks and the absence of canteen facilities; staff had to supply their own cocoa for the night shift. The shift-work pattern seems to have followed that of naval watches. Staff were usually transported from their residential camp to the CCB&SO by bus, though there is reference to a shift of communication staff needing to be roped together when they walked up Wee Fea in a winter storm.



*The board reads 'Lyness CCO May 1945'. This photograph was taken against the north-west aspect of the building. Courtesy of Orkney Library and Archive, file ref: L730-4*

There can be little doubt that the building would have been kept

warm and dry for the well being of communications equipment. Much of the extensive heating and ventilation ducting can still be seen. The heating plant was coal fired and would have required the constant attention of a stoker who would also have had to move fuel from the scuttle and dispose of the ash. There is a large ventilation opening over each of the two internal stairways, one of which still has the slats in place; perhaps the building needed additional ventilation and cooling in the brief Orcadian summers? The photograph below, dating from 1945, shows how these openings were protected with a large metal hood. Although most of the building is windowless the interior must have been well lit as there are light fittings throughout. The remains of a few blackout panels (consisting of chicken-wire on a wooden frame once covered by black cloth) can still be found.



*Detail from the 1945 photograph showing protective hood.*



*One of the two stairwells and its ventilation panel in 2017*



*Exterior view. Photograph from 2018*

Compared with most of the wartime remains in Orkney, the shell of the CCB&SO is in good condition and largely intact; to some extent this reflects the high quality of its construction as well as the fact that it was designed to offer protection from aerial attack. The most obvious structural problems are the separation of the ventilation stack from the south-west face of the building and the ingress of water through a missing patch of the bituminous roof covering causing corrosion of metalwork and flooding of several rooms.



*←The ventilation stack in 2019 showing separation from the main building.*
*The surrounding area has now been roped off.*

*View of the roof from the southwest in 2018.→*
*On the left are fragments of roof covering blown into a heap. Water has pooled in the resultant defect and slowly drains into the rooms below.*





*From the south-east. Photograph courtesy of Catherine Grivas 2018*

And what of the future for this remarkable building? It is Category A listed and described as being of both local and national significance, though the fate of the recently demolished WW1 recreation hall in Lyness gives little cause for optimism. Should any attempt be made to slow its deterioration? Whilst not exactly beautiful, it is undeniably a striking and perhaps elegant presence in the landscape of Scapa Flow. It is also an important memorial to the upheaval of WW2 and will prompt future generations to ask what happened here and why. My personal view is that a modest investment to waterproof the roof, repair drain pipes and stabilise the ventilation stack would help preserve this monument and maintain the integrity of the unique collection of archaeological sites in Hoy & Walls.

# A letter to the Editor ……

Dear Mr MacDonald

The latest edition of your Bulletin has just arrived and I have enjoyed reading it as usual. Thank you. The article on Radio Luxembourg brought back memories of its "H Samuel Everight" time signal and pleas from one Horace Batchelor from K.E.Y.N.S.H.A.M, to use his football pools system! I used to listen in my bedroom at night and remember one bright sunny day finding my much younger brother under the bedclothes, with the bedroom curtains closed and the wireless switched on. He was, he said, trying to find Luxembourg as I had told him we could only receive it properly after dark!

Anyway, I wondered if members might be interested in a radio station which broadcasts today from the other end of the UK. It is easily accessible on the internet, which is how I listen to it. Like Orkney Wireless Museum, it is run and funded entirely by volunteers and operates 24 hours. Billing itself as the nostalgia station, it plays no material beyond the 1960s, and there is extensive material from the 1920s, the 1930s, 1940s and the 1950s too. Not only music but old comedy shows - and even the original "Music While You Work". They play the records most modern radio stations ignore. There is no news to depress and the presenters are nearly all 60+ (some 80+!), the very few advertisements are for local businesses in the broadcast area and at set times.

I am talking about "Angel Radio", based in Havant, Hants. Easily found by an internet search, they have a very good App for an iPad or other tablet, which provides an instant connection or you can listen through their website which is *www.angelradio.co.uk* . Callers into the programme come from around the world so its fame is spreading far and wide and it is probable some members already know about it.

Best wishes to all at the Museum

Terry Warburton MBE



**PICTURE FROM THE PAST**

*Ian Stallard of the Orkney Men's Shed who made and assembled our central 'bridge' display stand in 2019.*

# Sergeant Patrick Gorie of the Orkney Territorial Army

Bruce Gorie

1433864 Lance Sergeant Gorie, P (Patrick or Pat) joined the Terriers in 1938 and by August 1939 had been promoted, probably to Lance Sergeant. Bill Hepburn, from Holm and now Kirkwall, told of his brother's first night on watch after war had been declared when Sergeant Gorie issued rifles but no bullets as he was worried that the young lads might get excited, or frightened, and do damage to someone or something if armed with live ammunition.

Pat spent much of the war in various Coast Defence batteries around Orkney including Stanger, Ness, Scad, where he organised getting bags of cement down to build the new battery – shift six 1 cwt (50 kilo) bags over a mile or so of heather from the road to the cliff top and 'the rest of the day was your own', Graemsay, Rerwick and Hoxa come to mind. At Rerwick one of the soldiers shot the tame jackdaw because it had 'borrowed' something he valued. I don't think the soldier was forgiven.

A recent find in my 'archive' was a letter from HM Inspector of Taxes, 61 Dempster Street, Wick, dated 7th October 1941, relating to Income Tax due to be paid by Pat on his Army Pay for the 1940 tax year, and this clarifies dates of his promotion from the rank of Lance Sergeant to Sergeant and then Battery Sergeant Major. The dates and rates of pay noted were as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 6th April 1940 to 16th May 1940 | Lance Sergeant at 5/3d. (27 pence) a day. |
| 17th May to 5th September 1940 | Sergeant at 6/- (30 pence) a day |
| 6th September 1940 … | B.S.M. 12/6 (62½ pence) a day |

He remained at these dizzying heights until after the war when, back in the Terriers, he was promoted to Second Lieutenant shortly before the Territorial Army was disbanded in its post war form.

At a meeting in the Archive Department of Kirkwall Library in November 1988, Mr David Steele and Mrs Anne Manson explained that they wished to get reminiscences from past events and suggested he might write about World War 2 which they knew nothing about. The following is an extract from his record of some of his wartime experiences.

Rereading my father's paper, I rather think the anti-invasion training photographs in the Museum's collection would have been taken with the Terriers before, rather than during, the war.

Pat recollected, "I will begin with events in Orkney leading up to 3 September, 1939. As Hitler became more aggressive, Britain realized that we would have to rearm and started with a large increase in the Territorial Army all over Britain.

The first unit to be formed was a half battery of Heavy Anti-Aircraft Guns for the defence of Lyness and Scapa Flow with another half battery from Caithness. This was recruited early in 1938 and was trained and ready by the time of the Munich crisis when Neville Chamberlain came home with his 'Peace in our time' Treaty with Hitler.

As it was pretty obvious this was a put off dodge on Hitler's part we continued re-arming as he also did. It was then decided that as in World War I, Orkney should raise a regiment of coast defence Territorials and the Orkney Heavy Regiment Royal Artillery was formed and a Company of Fortress Engineers to man the Coast Searchlights. This company of FEs later was converted to RAs too. These two units of about 400 men were recruited in late 1944 (should read 1938?) and their guns were ready having been quickly mounted at the time of the Munich Crisis and manned then by regular army NCOs and men. 2 – 6" guns at Ness Battery and 2 – 6" guns and 1 – 4.7" gun and searchlights at Stanger Head on Flotta.



*Anti-invasion training at the Harray loch. Seated in the Dinghy is Sergeant Patrick Gorie, Orkney Territorial Army and later Battery Sergeant Major, Orkney Heavy Regiment.*

The TA trained at their drill halls at Kirkwall and Stromness and the North Isles men at Shapinsay, Sanday and Stronsay, and some gun drill and firing at Stanger, and then in July 1939, at a firing camp at Kinghorn in Fife. Just before we returned we were addressed by the Chief Instructor in Gunnery for Scotland and it was a surprise to be told that we were being trained for WAR and that would probably be in about a month – and it was! On 23rd August the advance parties were called to their war stations and on the 24th the remainder of us got our 'blue papers' to report with full kit at the drill halls that evening. My war station was Stanger Battery on Flotta and we proceeded to Scapa Pier then by ship to Flotta in the darkening and then marched to the Battery in the darkness.

Both the Fleet and us were now on full war footing and the guns were fully manned from the 23rd by the advance party and then our duty watch took over. It was a surprise to realize we were no longer 'just terriers' but regular soldiers. It was well that we didn't know then that we would be for at least another six years.

Some optimists said 'Oh, we will be home by Christmas.' Hitler had other ideas though. On 1st September he marched into Poland. The allies gave him till 11am on 3rd September to go back or we would declare war.

That morning all of us not on duty were at a church parade in the dining hall waiting 11am and word came that we were at war. 'The balloon had gone up' was the expression they spoke of at that time. It really made no difference to us as we had been under war conditions for 10 days, black outs and all.

It was quite an interesting time seeing all the ships of the Home Fleet arriving at their war station, Scapa Flow. Our guns covered the main entrance to the Flow so they all came and went close below us and we were to get to know them as we were warned by the naval signal station (the PWSS) of the names of all ships passing. Occasionally, if a ship had not been authorized to pass or if it was about to enter a minefield, the Navy ordered us to fire a 'Bring To round', that is, to fire a sand filled shell ahead of the ship as a warning.

One of our gunners became so good at recognition of the ships that the Navy would send for him if they couldn't recognize any ship coming towards the entrance.

On 31st August 1939 the naval ships in Scapa Flow were 6 Battleships, 2 Battle Cruisers, 1 Aircraft Carrier, 12 Cruisers, 17 Destroyers, 7 minesweepers, other Fleet Auxiliaries, Boom Defence ships, Drifters, etc.

By this time we were settling in to army life, our huts were very strong wooden huts, which had been put up before war broke out as was the case at Ness Battery. We had no beds at first but after a day or so had straw mattresses on the floor, we also had electric light but water and drains were not ready yet. We had outside latrines some distance from the huts and the greatest danger we ever had was to reach them in the dark, having to go over 12 ft deep drains on narrow planks and sometimes a sea of mud. Eventually the drains were finished by the only means available, extending them to a shoot over the cliff into Hoxa Sound - there was a popular name for it.

On the whole we were lucky compared with 226. They still had no huts and spent months under canvas (luckily it was a fine autumn), they did though have the satisfaction of being in action quite a lot in the early months while Coast Gunners never fired a shot in anger.

There was no excitement for the first few weeks, just training and look outs when on duty watch. After a few weeks we got a few nurses for a sick bay, not nearly enough to go round.
Then on 14th October I came off watch at 1am, went to bed and was wakened as usual by an orderly with a mug of tea and the news 'the Royal Oak is sunk and the BOP burnt out'. The Royal Oak was one of the battleships which was lying near the Gaitnip cliffs about 2 miles from Scapa Pier, and the BOP was the Battery Observation Post, which I had left at 1am, was a temporary iron erection with a wooden shelter attached for the lights detachment not on lookout. The fire was caused by an explosion in an oil heater in the shelter, and it destroyed our rangefinder, searchlight controls, all communications and other equipment and the duty watch were lucky to escape the flames through the drop front of the BOP. The equipment was quickly replaced and the BOP ready for action."

From Orkney Pat moved south as progress was made against the enemy and spent time at Alnwick in Northumberland and was in Portsmouth for a period – I remember him saying he had to help sort out the remains of a hundred or so people killed when a bomb fell on an air raid shelter. It was a case of putting enough bits that made approximately the right weight for a human into body bags. Not a nice job.

He finished his war in Emden in Germany where he was part of the occupying forces and from where he 'liberated' the two wireless sets I grew up with, one a splendid wooden one, the other a small black Bakelite affair. They came out of a barge full of radios confiscated from the German population in an attempt to stop Nazi propaganda being heard. These were kept going until one couldn't get new valves and a new set was required, a year before VHF arrived in Orkney. Having been assured that VHF would never reach Orkney, Pat saved £5 by buying a set without VHF. As you might imagine he was not happy when VHF arrived the following year courtesy of the Netherbutton Radar Mast.



*Sergeant Pat Gorie (centre)*

# The Ocean Letter.

Len Wilson

The main purpose of the Radio Officer's (Sparks) position on board ship was safety at sea but once the job became established shipping companies found that contact with their skippers round the globe was invaluable. Most of the job was keeping a listening watch on the distress and calling frequency, 500 kc/s., with a range up to about 300 miles. Ships chatted informally to each other on a daily basis, exchanging bits of news and noon positions. This was an informal safety measure, ensuring that if a ship disappeared somebody would have a recent last known position. All ships were listening in, so each Sparks would build a mental picture of shipping activity in the vicinity.

In 1957 I was serving as a young Radio Officer on the SS Philosopher, call-sign MAQV, belonging to T & J Harrison of Liverpool, sometimes known as “Hungry Harrisons” or “Two of Fat & One of Lean”, from the funnel colours. That was not true in my time, for we were certainly well fed. We were outward bound with a general cargo for La Guaira in Venezuela, then round the Caribbean and on to the Gulf of Mexico.




When chatting to a passing oil tanker, Regent Royal, in mid Atlantic, her Sparks advised me they were due in Cardiff shortly before Christmas so I seized the chance to send home a few seasonal greetings by Ocean Letter.
The Ocean Letter was a cheaper way of sending a message. It was transmitted to a passing ship that was homeward bound and they stamped and posted it in the UK.

The OL had gone out of fashion and was not commonly used in the 1950s and 60s. This was the only occasion I witnessed their use. I suppose people could, by that time, afford to send a proper telegram if they needed to.

The SS Philosopher spent Christmas and New Year in Lagunillas and Bachaquero, down the East side of Lake Maracaibo, Venezuela.




*Wireless Operator,Ginger the cat (and family)*
*at home for Christmas.*
*Post World War II.* *Courtesy of Alistair Foden*

A MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL OUR FRIENDS
AND VOLUNTEERS