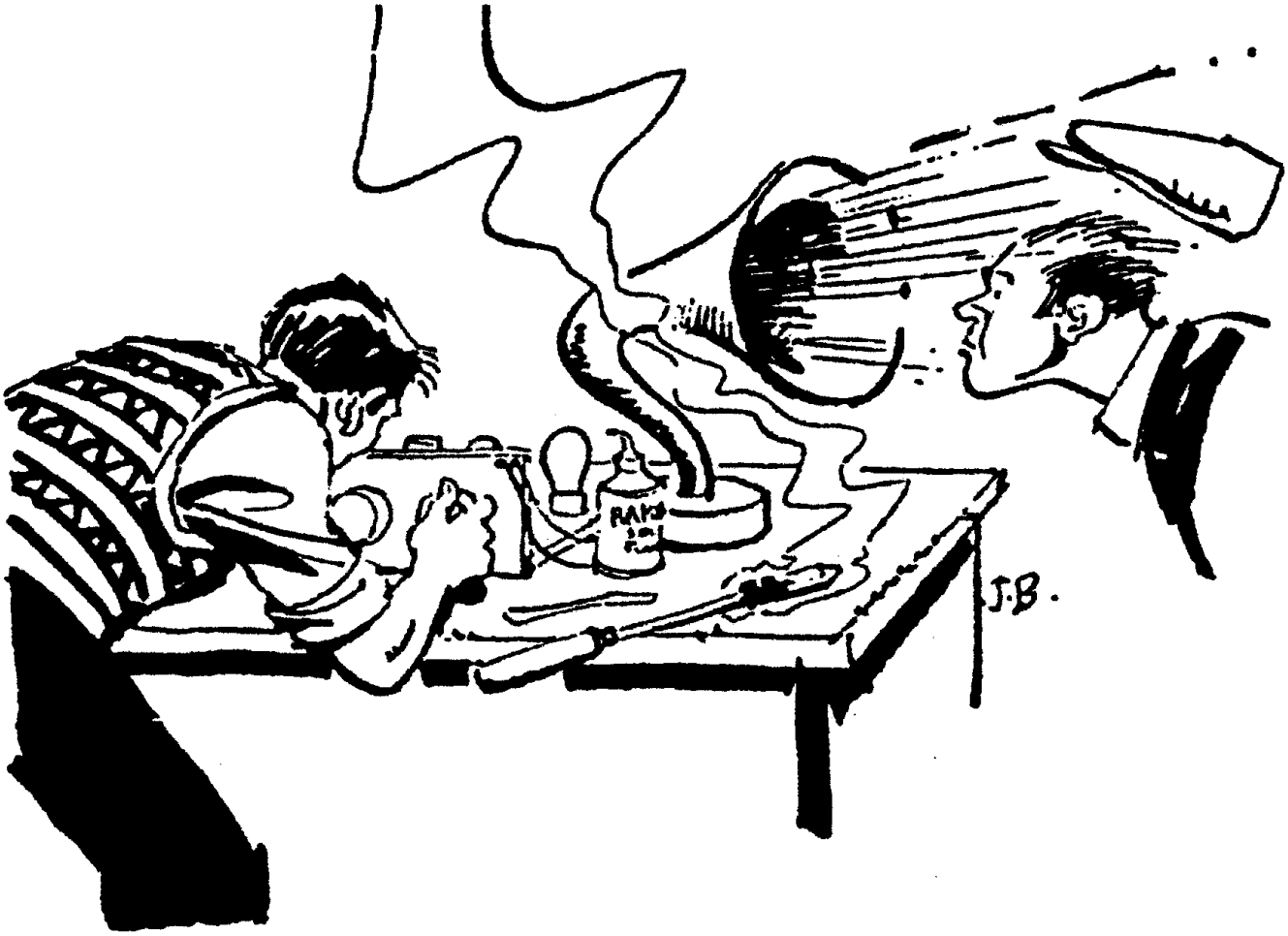
THE SOCIETY OF THE FRIENDS OF ORKNEY WIRELESS MUSEUM

BULLETIN



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Hello and welcome to issue No. 2 of this year's bulletins.
I am pleased to report that visitor numbers this year have again shown an increase. Bill Wright who keeps detailed records stated that we had 2819 paying visitors this year, up 4% on last year. Our best day was on the 4th of June with 70 paying visitors and our best week was week ending the 7th July with 193 visitors. Interestingly the visitor numbers for parts of July and August showed quite a significant drop on last year but recovered again later. This could partly be put down to the magnificent summer we have had, but also shows how numbers from Cruise Liners can easily swing the balance. This is understandable when you think how many things there are to see in Orkney in such a short time. Encouragingly, visitors from some Cruise Liners have stated that they had been told about the Museum on board ship.

Once again we have to say a big thank you to all our volunteers who have again provided such an excellent service. (The comments in our visitor book and on Trip Advisor clearly show this)

These were:-
Sandy Firth, Kim Foden, Fraser Garriock, Bruce Gorie, Liz Gilmore, Jack Hargreaves, Billy Jolly, Tim and Lisa Kennedy, Peter Leith, Peter MacDonald, Margaret Mainland, Nicol Manson, Catherine -McIver, Bob Presland, Norrie Rendall, Bill Stevenson, Peter Stokes, Dennis Walls, Allan Way.

Again we owe a special thanks to Liz Gilmore our Museum Treasurer, Robert Grieve our 'Friends' Treasurer and shop manager, Bill Wright who keeps an eagle eye on our float change, and daily record sheets.

Two of our Stalwart volunteers Peter Leith and Margaret Mainland are retiring this year. We shall miss them both and wish them all the best for the future.
Once again the Museum attended the annual Orkney Vintage Club Rally at Hatston. This year's Rally was bigger than ever, with large displays of Tractors, Cars, Stationery Engines and Motorcycles. A large display was also available indoors and the Wireless Museum had on show a number of Black and White Televisions representing sixty years of television in Orkney, 1958 – 2018. (An article on this subject is being prepared). We have always had close ties with the Orkney Vintage Club with Nicol Manson, Bill Stevenson, Allan Way and Peter Leith regularly displaying at the Rally with Tom Stevenson from the Museum of Communication also a regular volunteer. Kim Foden's husband Robert was also present with a display of British European Airways memorabilia. Robert looked very convincing dressed in a full BEA uniform, (I'm not sure how many holiday bookings he made)!

At this year's Science Festival the Wireless Museum linked up again with the Museum of Communication from Burntisland for the story 'Big Bill and the guns of Alamein', with Serena Sutherland, Tom Stevenson, Dorothy Brankin and Sandy Firth taking part. The talk took place in Stromness this year.

Last but not least, in what must be considered a major change in the running of the Museum, Bill Wright and Sandy Firth are both retiring. Bill and Sandy have played an active part in the Museum for nearly thirty years. When Jim MacDonald passed away in 1988 his family took on the reigns for a couple of years or so, but it was always known that to survive it would have to spread its wings. Bill along with Sandy and Arthur Flett had been close friends of Jim for many years and along with some of Jim's family formed a Trust. This lasted for many years until the Museum eventually became a limited Company. Bill provided much experience in the forming of the Trust and other legal matters and was also known for organising various special event radio stations at the Museum. Sandy often used his technical skills to build and repair cabinets, and was also known for giving talks and interviews inside the Museum. I know that I often drew on their experiences and knowledge when working with equipment. It has to be said that the prospect of taking over their responsibilities and workload was a concern for the other directors who were already fairly busy people, but help has already started to appear from some of our Museum friends.

Thank you Bill and Sandy for helping save Orkney's radio heritage for nearly three decades.

TUNING OUT …….



Bill and Sandy looking forward to a well- deserved retirement from the Museum after nearly 30 years involvement. (Although I have a funny feeling we have not heard the last of them yet!) Edit

Reports of GB2OWM Operations: Museums' Weekend, and Orkney Science Festival

During the GB2OWM operation over the Museum's Weekend we again experience difficult conditions. The 11-year sun cycle is just about at its nadir and so the ionosphere was in 'poor shape' for radio communication, and, as has been mentioned in reports before, the amount of RFI (radio frequency interference) being generated around Kiln Corner has been steadily increasing over the years in which I have been involved with the station (not that the two are linked--I hope). For the first time, in April this year (Marconi Day), they showed as S9 on the incoming signal strength meter, which means that interference was as strong as the strongest incoming signals. Something had to be done . . . now read on.

For this operation, we made our first attempt at using a remote listening antenna. This is an antenna located at some distance from the museum where the RFI is much lower and the received signal sent over the internet to my phone or a computer, and by so doing we bypass the RFI at Kiln Corner. The technology to receive over the internet to a computer or phone using BT FON, proved difficult to get going satisfactorily; however, some contacts were made, but most of all, it highlighted points we needed to address before the Science Festival operation in September. There is little point in describing the difficulties further. 45

Contacts (6 Museum Stations), 10 countries.
Operators:Ed—GM0WED,Colin—GM0IFM,David—MM5DWW

GB2OWM Operation in the Orkney Science Festival took place, as usual in the afternoons of the days of the festival and the Saturday morning. Thanks to Jim--GM8WKJ, we used his remote antenna, a magnetic loop, and we bought a MiFi from Vodafone which is a WiFi device which connects to the data side of the Vodafone phone network. With the two 'magic boxes' which Jim has, we managed to get this system operating well for receive, except for a pulsing noise, which was at times annoying, and that we had not succeeded in getting the remote tuning of the antenna working; this meant that we could only listen to a very narrow band-width, without having to phone Jim and ask him to re-tune the antenna--not an easy thing to do because he was on holiday in Aviemore; nevertheless, thanks to daughter Emma, we did find a better frequency on Saturday, and centred on that.

Conditions still managed to test us, but altogether 105 contacts were made in 21 countries, namely: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain, Wales. The radio used for the remote operation was a Yaesu FT857D. Sideband (SSB)—where one speaks into a microphone, gave us 12 countries; however, I took in my Elecraft K3 and when no one was about (except poor young Robert, who nobly gritted his teeth and sat it out) I used CW (Morse) to make 21 contacts (QSOs) in 14 countries. CW is a favourite mode of mine, and a QSO can be made under poorer conditions that can be made by SSB, often at a greater distance and on bands where conditions preclude SSB QSOs. CW is fine when no one else is there, but is about as interesting for any visitors as listening to a QSO in Navaho.

My thanks go to Robert GM1MWK for keeping me company, particularly on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons (and we got him ‘on the mic’), Glenn - 2M0DES, Hamish - MM6OGU, Jack - MM3ILO, David - MM5DWW, and two visitors - Erik - PA1ET (from The Netherlands) and William - M0WJE (from the Cambridge University Wireless Society). Particular thanks go to Jim - GM8WKJ for the remote use of his station and the equipment he supplied, and the Board of Orkney Wireless Museum for the purchase of the ‘MiFi’.

. . . and we must not forget Bill - GM3IBU who called in every session and kept us going whenever things got a little slack. Next operation is Marconi Day in April 2018.
Ed Holt—GM0WED



Jack - MM31LO



Hamish - MM6OGU and Ed - GMOWED

Visitors to the Museum

One Sunday at the Museum I had the pleasure of meeting visitor Paul Clement who was taking part in the Orkney Science festival. Paul had his 'Matrix transformations with a raspberry pi and a laser' interactive invention at the Saturday Family day at the local Church Hall, which went down very well with the students present. He also went on to tell me some of his electronics background which I thought very interesting, and can be read here: Edit.

The first widescreen TV was the Thomson 39 inch (cathode ray tube). It could display 4 "picture in pictures," i.e. you could watch 4 other channels on small squares in the main picture all at the same time. I had the very first one in my house when the Ferguson Enfield Labs closed down! I designed the Scart interface and the phase locked loop search tuning for it.

We also designed the very first high definition TV called the "high scan" which used 1250 lines in place of the standard 625 to give higher definition.

That was way back in 1991...Ferguson got taken over by Thomson Consumer Electronics before Mrs Thatcher put her proverbial foot in it by bringing in rival Japanese companies and sponsoring them, and what with the astronomical 16-18% interest rates with Nigel Lawson as exchequer at the time which caused many people to lose their homes (I just about held on to mine) we were forced, like many other companies in that terrible recession, to close down. I had the good fortune to spend 6 months after the closure of Ferguson, working in Germany, (commuting weekly, all expenses paid), for Thomson the parent company, developing a multi-scart interface for the widescreen TV. The main problem with the 39 inch cathode ray tube was a short MTBF (2000 hours) and of course it was extremely heavy.

After I left Thomson Consumer Electronics there was very little work going due to a bad recession. I went on to develop switch mode power supplies for Advanced Power Conversion for Claude Lyon and eventually ended up with a change of career and went on to teach Maths and English in Thailand.



Paul with his equipment at the Orkney Science Festival

I received the following Email from volunteer Liz Gilmore who had some interesting visitors:

'Isn't it about time that you charged us for the pleasure of being volunteers?

A couple of Americans came in today. They explained that they had given up ocean-going sailing in their own boat and now just go on cruises. The gentleman was delighted by the collection – particularly the bits referring to Radar.

At the start of the war he was working on Radar and it was decided that he should be the one to fly over to England with the first five crates of Radar equipment for the RAF. He was not at that stage in the services, but the powers that be knew that he had to be able to go to the Embassy to draw cash for expenses, and he had to be able to requisition transport, so he needed military rank. He needed a fairly high rank to be able to carry out his mission so he became a Colonel – at the age of 21.

When he got here the only transport he could get was an ambulance so he loaded up and drove off. On a dark night, somewhere in the Midlands, he was overtaken by a Jeep being driven at speed. A few miles on he came across the crashed Jeep with two badly injured soldiers. He said that he could not remember the details but he managed to drag them into the ambulance and deliver them to a military base.

The lady told me that she is the same age as our Queen. I thought that she looked amazing for 92 and even thought that her husband might be a bit younger. He is in fact a bit older and will be 100 on 2 October. They remained on their feet for the whole visit but neither used a walking stick'.

On another occasion a letter arrived at the Museum:

Dear Sirs,

Whilst on our recent cruise we visited your museum, with our son Michael who is a huge wireless fan. We had a lovely long chat with the charming lady who was in the Museum that day, and we promised to send her some magazines that had been in the family for many years. They were taken out to Australia in 1958, and brought back here in 2013 when our family moved here for what was expected to be a two year sojourn. Some five years later we will be returning to Australia next year and your museum seems the perfect repository for Bill Lovell's magazines.

We very much enjoyed our cruise around the Northern Isles, and Michael would love to come back to your Museum again. He loves radios – we loved the memories you exhibits brought back.

Yours

Kevin, Valerie and Michael O'Neill.

The following letter arrived some time ago, but it is hoped to follow it up with a story at some point:

Dear friends,

Following my recent visit to Orkney I am enclosing, as promised, a booklet describing the Wireless in Wales collection and Museum. It was set up by my brother, David Jones, shortly before he died in 2008. The Denleigh Museum focuses on the importance of wireless for the Welsh language and culture. It has attracted considerable interest from radio buffs and also from Welsh historians and language specialists. I hope you find the booklet interesting and wish you well with Orkney's own Wireless Museum.

Maggie Winters.

Friends of Orkney Wireless Museum,

Treasurer: Robert Grieve, c/o Orkney Wireless Museum, 1 Junction Road, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1LB
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Donations to the Museum

A year or two ago Doug Corse from Kirkwall came into the Museum with an interesting looking box. Contained in the box were a large No of Radio Times and Radio Magazines which dated from about 1930's onwards. It was only during the winter that I eventually managed to get round to studying them and began to realise the quality of the magazines, some were in like new condition. They became the basis of a new wall display in the Museum. I eventually contacted Doug to find out how he came to have such a fabulous collection. He explained that friends Malcolm and Alison Milner from Hoghton near Preston had been the source. Alison Milner gives the story of the magazines here:

My brothers, sisters and I had a rather eccentric Aunt, Ruth Charlton Brooks, She lived, almost all her life, in the house her parents, Dr and Mrs. W.G.H. Brooks, had built in Walton-le-Dale in Lancashire, a house which was quite large as my Grandfather was the village Doctor and his home incorporated the surgery, dispensary and waiting room.

Auntie Ruth was a hoarder and made full use of the available area! She was definitely not interested in tidiness. There was trouble if any of the family offered to move anything to clear a space and so, when she died, the house was jam-packed with almost ninety years-worth of accumulated belongings, both rubbish and treasure. For instance, there were copies of "Good Housekeeping" from 1925 when the house was built, through to modern times, "National Geographic" also and many other magazines and newspapers, all muddled up with family items, items of Victorian clothing, old toys etc.

Our family tried to find relevant homes for as many items as we could, eg. School books to Beamish Open Air Museum. My husband, Malcolm, used to work with Doug Corse in Lancashire and having stayed in touch, we've been invited to stay with him and Jen in Kirkwall for several years. Thus, we knew about the Orkney Wireless Museum and thought it the ideal place to take all the copies of "Radio Times" which Auntie Ruth had kept over the decades, when we visited in 2017.



Ruth Brooks(on the right), with her parents and my Mother, Hester between them.

My Aunt was a keen musician, so I imagine that was one reason she kept hold of the copies, but really, I don't think she wanted to throw anything away! I also remember her determination to listen to The Archers. Woe be-tide anyone who phoned or visited her when that was on the radio!

She would have been very pleased that the copies ended up in the Museum for the benefit of others who would appreciate their contents.



Alison and Malcolm Milner with an early edition of the Radio Times and Radio Magazine.

Wartime Receiver

Les Mather from Derbyshire contacted the Museum this year with the offer of a very interesting wartime receiver which should fit right into our displays. He even managed to deliver it to Orkney! Edit.

Many thanks to the Museum for getting back to me regarding the Hallicrafters receiver. I am glad I have found it a good home. Here's a little more background about the receiver, though this is pretty much all I know:

The set was originally owned, I believe from new, by Cecil Cleland, G2CN. He was a wartime voluntary interceptor. I don't know where he was based at that time (though I dare say this could be established from old call books) but I suspect it was Northern Ireland as I have an early but undated QSL card (which I will leave with the set) giving an address in Bangor, County Down.

Meanwhile my father, Harry Mather, a young RAF electrician, was working at the Bletchley Park outstations at Stanmore and Eastcote in NW London, where he maintained Turing Bombe machines. I suspect they first met in the 1950's, when both were living in Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire. My father developed an interest in amateur radio at that time and was involved in the local club, though he didn't obtain an amateur radio licence himself until many years later when he retired.

Cecil Cleland passed the set on to my father sometime around 1977, when I was developing my own interest in amateur radio (I'm licensed as G8OKI, thanks to an enthusiastic physics teacher at school, but not currently active in the hobby). The set hadn't been used for some years, but my father (who sold and repaired televisions and radios for a living) got it going and I remember it performed very well.

It would have been around that time that they each learned of the other's connection to Bletchley Park - nothing had been said before the first books were published in the 1970s.

My father continued to use the set for some years but it was stored in the garage some time before his death in 2000. It came to light again when I cleared the house and garage after my mother's death in 2013. *Les mentioned to me that later in the war his father also did some maintenance on the highly secret Colossus Computer. Edit.*



Harry Mather

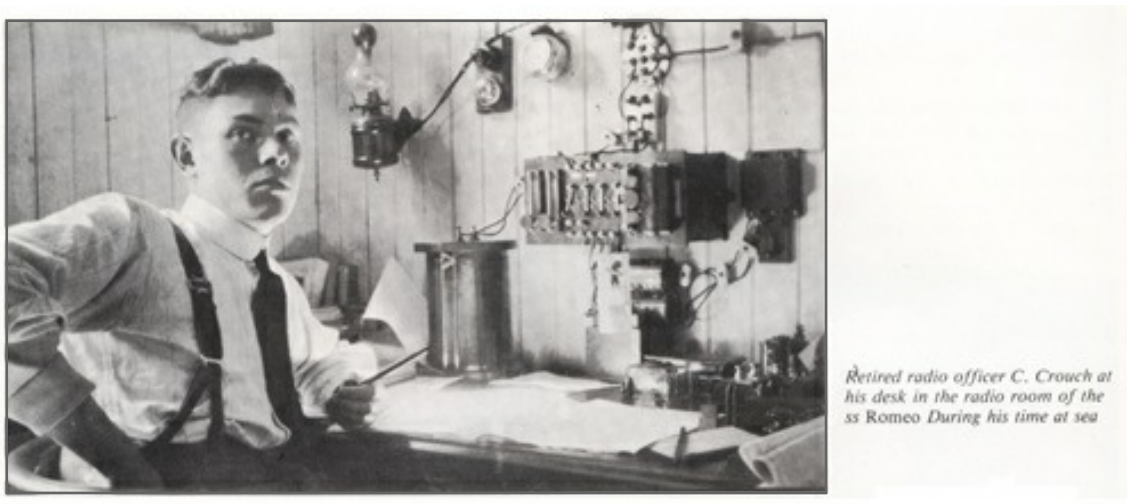


Les Mather inside the Wireless Museum with his Fathers American made Hallicrafters receiver. It was originally used in the wartime by Cecil Cleland who was a voluntary interceptor (otherwise known as a Secret Listener).

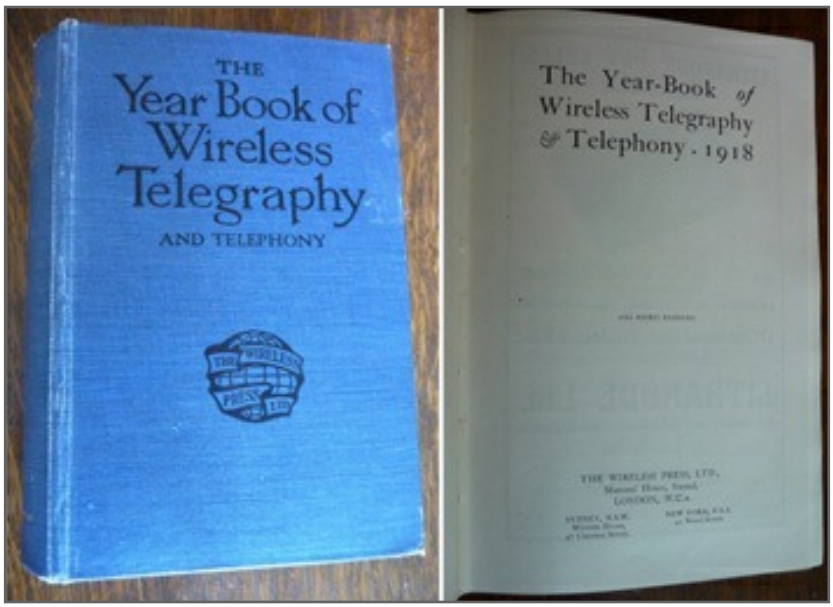
A donation of books to the Museum

Dr Peter Crouch from Birmingham contacted the Museum earlier this year with a list of books which had belonged to his late father. His father had worked for a branch of the Marconi Company in 1918 so I knew the books would be interesting for the Museum collection. Peter gives us some background to his father here:

My father Cecil Charles Crouch was born in Lucknow, India in 1900 where his father was serving in the British Army. He went to sea as a radio operator for the Marconi International Marine Communication Company Limited in October 1918 shortly before his 18th birthday. He travelled the world with a number of shipping companies before coming ashore in 1926. He then followed his older brother in joining the BBC as a radio engineer, working at a number of home and overseas transmitting stations around the UK including Burghead in North East Scotland. Cecil retired in the early 1960's as Assistant Engineer in Charge at the Rampisham short wave overseas transmitting station in Dorset. He passed away in 1981.



Radio Officer C. Crouch at his desk in the radio room of the SS Romeo, early 1920s



One of Cecil Crouch's early books which his son Peter Crouch donated to the Museum (The Year-Book of Wireless Telegraphy & Telephony – 1918).

A donation from one of our volunteers

Museum Volunteer Dr Allan Way who had recently moved to a new house, brought in some items of interest for our collection. Allan already has a history of working in electronics, working for thirteen years with Beckman Instruments in Southern California designing and producing Spectrophotometers. Later Allan taught electronic engineering at the University of Surrey in Guildford. Allan originally comes from America where he obtained a Bachelors and a Masters in California. He later achieved a PHD at Surrey. Amongst the items Allan donated were a number of books and a particularly interesting portable radio (dating from around the late 1920's) called the 'Jupiter straight five'. Allan explained that he had managed to get it working in the past and it should be possible to get it working again. Allan is already well known in local vintage club circles where he played an active part with his 1929 Ford Model A motor car. We thank him for his kind gesture.



Allan with the Jupiter Straight Five portable radio

A Fairy Story by Ed GM0WED

“You’ve heard of the expression; ‘Mañana’: well, we don’t have anything that urgent here;” so runs the mission statement of NoCom, a new licensing agency for communication licences in the UK.

I needed to check the procedure for transferring the amateur radio club licence and call sign for the Museum from Bill to me, Ed. I was pretty sure I knew how to do it, but it does no harm to check . . . apart from raising the blood pressure. Despite this risk, I telephoned NoCom. The first thing that happened was that I, who was paying for the telephone call, was obliged to listen to a recorded message telling me how much I can now carry out ‘on line’, ‘Simply log on to www.nocom.org.uk and go to . . .’ It was at this point that I wondered, since I was told to simply sign on, how one could complicatedly sign on to a web site? Had I believed the message that what I needed to do could probably be transacted on line, I would have discovered after twenty to thirty minutes of searching, and a rise in blood pressure, that reassigning a club call cannot be done on line, and I would have had to make another telephone call, and listen to the same message, at my expense, telling me how, by simply…. But I already knew the transfer couldn’t be done on line, so I stuck to my initial phone call—that was some time, temper and blood pressure saved. Perhaps having to pay to listen to irrelevant messages as an issue, the morality of which, I should take up with NoCom.

I received an appropriate form from NoCom delivered by a postal service, completed it, and with the minute of the Committee authorising the transfer I returned it to NoCom, with the names of two officials of the Board. Don’t lose sight of this point about two officials.

I awaited the return of the documents making the transfer. I waited … and waited … and waited.

After a few weeks I telephoned NoCom, and yes, they had received my application and it was to be dealt with in one or two working days. (Isn’t that always the way: one phones up after waiting patiently for days, only to find that had one waited just two more days, one could have saved the cost of the call and having to listen at one’s own expense to a message telling one how much one can carry out on line by simply ….
I awaited the return of the documents making the transfer.

After a few days, I got an e-mail informing that neither of the two officials named in the letter accompanying the request for a transfer should be the intended call-sign holder . . . oops, my mistake, I had named myself. I corrected my mistake and returned the correction by e-mail the same day.

I awaited the return of the documents making the transfer. I waited . . . and waited . . . and waited.

After a few weeks, I telephoned NoCom (and no, this is not a repeat of any previous paragraph) and, after listening yet again to the message, at my expense, how I could ‘simply log on to the NoCom site . . .’, I got through to a human being, and was told that there was a difficulty, not with the information provided, that was now all in order, but ‘the computer’ would not issue that club call sign. Now this was interesting, computers are controlled by two things, the accuracy of the person giving the brief to the programmer, and the accuracy of the programmer, neither of whom was the hapless NoCom person to whom I was speaking, and, were I a short-fused person would have been receiving the sharp edge of my tongue by now. As it was, I was wise enough to know that systems involving computers are not to be depended upon (as confirmed by my computer-controlled car); so, the blood pressure remained low, and my sympathy for the NoCom operative was made clear. The operative would try to get it sorted and would get back to me.

I awaited a return call or e-mail. I waited . . . and waited.

A few days later, I phoned again, after the initial irrelevant message at my expense telling me how much can now be carried out by 'simply . . .', the conversation of a few days earlier was repeated.

(I wonder if you can guess what is missing in the text here?)

A few days later I telephoned bright and early, and, after listening to … repeated the conversation with a new operative—the first operative was not yet in the office. It was a computer problem, and I was reassured that the paperwork from me was all in order. Phew! They had hoped that the IT department (IT = IndolenT) would have addressed the issue over the weekend. He would chase it up. I repeated the conversation that it was unfair that the NoCom operative on the phone should receive the anger of the customer, while the IT guys sit in glorious isolation from the customer. I expressed the hope that the NoCom operative I was speaking to got paid more than the IT guys, since it was they who took the brunt of the IT failures. Ribald laughter emitted from the phone.

Shortly thereafter an e-mail arrived, a payment of £20 needed to be made before the licence could be issued. The e-mail helpfully provided me with a link to NoCom's payment site. I clicked on it; hey presto, there it was. At last, something I could do by simply logging onto the web site. I am registered with NoCom, so all I needed to do was enter my User Name and Password. I duly entered 'Frustrated' as my user name, and 'AreU?' as my password. And hey presto, I was in—I am joking. Up comes the message:

> There were some errors
>
> Your login attempt has failed. Make sure the user name and password are correct.

Of course, neither of them was actually wrong; so now what does one do? Try again . . . same result. I went to the link to register a new password to be sent to my frustrated@nosuch.com e-mail address. An e-mail arrived with a helpful link back to the NoCom payment site, an identical e-mail to the former e-mail. I clicked on the link and tried to sign in again . . . you've got it, one of the details was incorrect. I repeated this procedure several times. There was obviously what is known in the IT world as a 'broken link'.

I phoned NoCom the next morning, and after listening to the message, at my expense, telling me … simply …, I spoke to an operative, who did not seem in the least bit surprised at my failure to log in, and he knew exactly what to do—I guess I was not the first. More condolences about them being in the front line for the IT department's failings. A new password was quickly created by the operative. I went to the sign-in page and signed in—successfully and changed the password back to what it was originally. The end is in sight. (If you believe that you are . . ..) Up came the message on the screen:

> **Welcome to the Online Payment system**
>
> We are sorry but we are currently experiencing some system problems please try again later.

I actually didn't have that much time to try again later, the initial operation under the NoV was only a few days away.

I will stop this fairy tale now, because I can feel my blood pressure rising as I type this out.

Suffice it to say, this fairy story started on 12th March. Not one to habitually leave things to the last moment, there was plenty of time for the transfer to be effected[1] , the transfer only needed to be made in time for an operation from the Museum on 23rd June. It was by now 20th June on which date an e-mail arrived with the Club licence call sign in my name. Is this the end of the story? 'Fraid not. The call sign the Museum uses is a permanent variation (NoV) on the issued club call, so application now had to be made for a variation with the club call as the host licence, and this of course can simply be made on line. Do you really think so? No it couldn't; a form had to be e-mailed to me, for me to print, fill in, scan, and e-mail back. I did it immediately.

I got the NoV for the permanent special call on 21st June 2018 - after101 days and, I joke not, one heart attack later.

NOCOM MISSION STATEMENT

NoCom aims to provide the best service possible to our clients. We simply do this by using the very latest technology, reducing human contact and the associated possibilities for error.

NoCom is a low-stress employer, we operate a policy where nothing is as urgent as 'mañana'.

Ed Holt—GM0WED

Whilst every effort has been made to avoid any similarity to any organisation, radio amateur, radio amateur call sign issued or to be issued in the future, the author wishes to state that any perceived similarity is purely coincidental and no slight is intended. This article is intended for the eyes of the reader only, and any other person who reads this in error should simply …. .



[1] I doubt it, but you may be interested to know that at this point I spelled effected e f f e c t e d, with an 'e' and two 'f's, and the computer told me to spell it a f f e c t e d, with an 'a' (a completely different word); so I ignored that instruction and instead, deleted an 'f', and spelled it e f e c t e d, with one 'f'; and the computer told me this was not the correct spelling, it should be spelled with two 'f's, thus: e f f e c t e d—just as I had done in the first place.

Sixty years of Television in Orkney

David Hutchinson

The following article originally appeared in 'The Orcadian' in November 1988 under the title 'Thirty years of Television in Orkney'. I thought it an excellent article at the time, and David kindly gave us permission to use the same story again now with the new title of 'Sixty years', *Edit*

December 22, 1958 is a date which very few Orcadians will remember now, but on that cold and frosty day television officially came to Orkney.

The former R.A.F. Station at Netherbutton in Holm, which had been part of the nation-wide R.A.F. or radar chain during World War 2, had now been acquired by the B.B.C. For several weeks TV engineers had been hard at work installing equipment in time to bring television to Orkney for Christmas.



To begin with the station operated on a temporary aerial on low power but by December 1959 the one remaining steel pylon had been heightened by 500 feet and, with the new aerial, began broadcasting at full power.

Looking back on the early days of TV it's hard to realise that the familiar box in the corner of the living room has been part of our lives for thirty (now sixty) years. But television was not a new novelty in Orkney because when the BBC opened their station at Old Meldrum in Aberdeen in October 1955 one or two enthusiastic Orcadians found that with a fringe area receiver they could pick up TV programmes direct from Aberdeen.

Around the Kirkwall area TV antennas on huge poles in the garden began to appear. The Robertson's at Jackson Cott, Pat Sutherland at Weyland Terrace, Harry Cordock at Holm Road and Jack Twatt at Bignold Park were just a few of those who had the luxury.

The undoubted pioneers of television in Orkney were Jack and Jimmy Twatt who as school boys in the 1930's had built their own televisor, using the Baird spinning disc system and they were able to receive experimental TV pictures broadcast on the medium waveband after radio had closed down for the night.

The TV sets of the 1950's were cumbersome affairs by today's standards. Mahogany and walnut polished cabinets containing dozens of valves glowing like a Christmas tree full of lights and giving off as much heat as an electric fire.

For weeks before the opening day of the new station, television sets of all shapes and sizes began arriving in Orkney and one local Kirkwall businessman brought them in by the plane load. The number of companies in the UK who were manufacturers of TV sets in the 1950's was quite staggering as we were the world leaders in this field. Here are just a few of the manufacturers names that I can remember now: Phillips, Bush, Pye, Decca, Marconi, Ferguson, Regentone, Baird, G.E.C. Invicta, Ever Ready, Peto Scott, White Ibbotson, Sobell, Murphy, Emerson, Ultra, R.G.D., Ferranti, HMV, Ecko, Dynatron, Alba and K.B.



Television sets by the plane load (Picture: Orkney Herald)

One by one the rooftops of Kirkwall and Stromness began to sprout the familiar H type aerial which, compared to today's antennas, were enormous. Fifty to eighty guineas was the asking price for this new home entertainment which was quite a lot of money in those days when the average weekly wage was barely £10.00; unlike today when you can easily buy a new colour portable from a weekly pay cheque and have change.

The effect of this new home entertainment was to have devastating consequences on the social life of Orkney. For months after it arrived Orcadians were content to stay at home and watch this new electric window on the world.

One of the first casualties of the new medium was the local cinema. In the 1950's Orcadians thought nothing of having a night out at the pictures two or three times a week and in those days the local cinema had two houses week nights and three houses on a Saturday. The effect of Television on the community was to have a profound influence on our lives in many ways. The sight of people in TV created new demands in clothing fashions and household goods because once it had been seen on telly everybody felt they also had to have it.



In those days 99 per cent of all television programmes were 'live'. The only method of recording programmes was on film but in April 1958 the BBC unveiled on a panorama programme VERA (Video Electronic Recording Apparatus) which enabled them to record pictures and sound on magnetic tape and replay it immediately. The effect of this machine was not only to revolutionise television programme production but it was the forerunner of what we know today as the home video recorder.

The style of television presentation in the early days was much more serious than it is now and TV announcers appeared on camera dressed in dinner suits and bow ties, the only TV presenter on our screens today who sports a bow tie is Sir Robin Day. Producing an evening of television live in the 1950's must have been a nightmare for programme producers because no matter how carefully things went during rehearsals, on the air programmes often overran and on the occasions when they finished early the time between programmes was padded out with an interlude film of a potter working at his wheel or a kitten playing with a ball of wool. Today's programme production is timed down to the last second. The hour between six and seven in the evening was an interlude to allow young viewers to get their homework done, but with the arrival of a commercial television channel the hour between six and seven became a battle ground. It became known as prime viewing time. The BBC countered the attack by producing what was to become their most popular evening programme Tonight hosted by Cliff Michelmore and an array of reporters who were to become household names such as Fyfe Robertson, Macdonald Hastings and TV's most travelled reporter, Alan Wicker.



Monday nights viewing in 1958 started with Tonight followed by the hilarious adventures of an American army sergeant called *Bilko*, who is still going the rounds on our screens. This was followed by an episode of a drama series and then Richard Dimbleby on Panorama opened a window on the world affairs. The News at nine o'clock was followed by a documentary film and then at ten in the evening it was off to the Carlton Room, Maida Vale and *Victor Sylvesters Dancing Club* which alternated weekly with *Come Dancing* in which

various regions of the UK competed against one another for the coveted title of UK Dance Champions. Then, at the witching hour of 11pm it was *Epilogue* and evening programmes came to an end with the National Anthem.



R.G.D. Television

Television situation comedy in the 1950's relied mainly on American imports such as Bilko, Burns and Allen, Bob Hope and Jack Benny, but such home grown talents as Tony Hancock, Charlie Drake, Benny Hill and Frankie Howerd were good but I often felt they were overshadowed by the slicker American shows, and it was only in the 1960's that British 'sitcom' took off with *Steptoe and Son*, *That Was The Week That Was* and *Dad's Army*. Today television has expanded beyond our wildest dreams and instead of one channel, we now have four in colour and poised on the horizon is the prospect of an unlimited number beamed into our homes from outer space via satellite. But I don't think I shall ever forget the magic of that night 30(60) years ago, when on a small flickering screen the caption card appeared and TV announcer Alex Mackintosh said 'tonight we welcome viewer for the first time in Orkney'.
Television had arrived.

