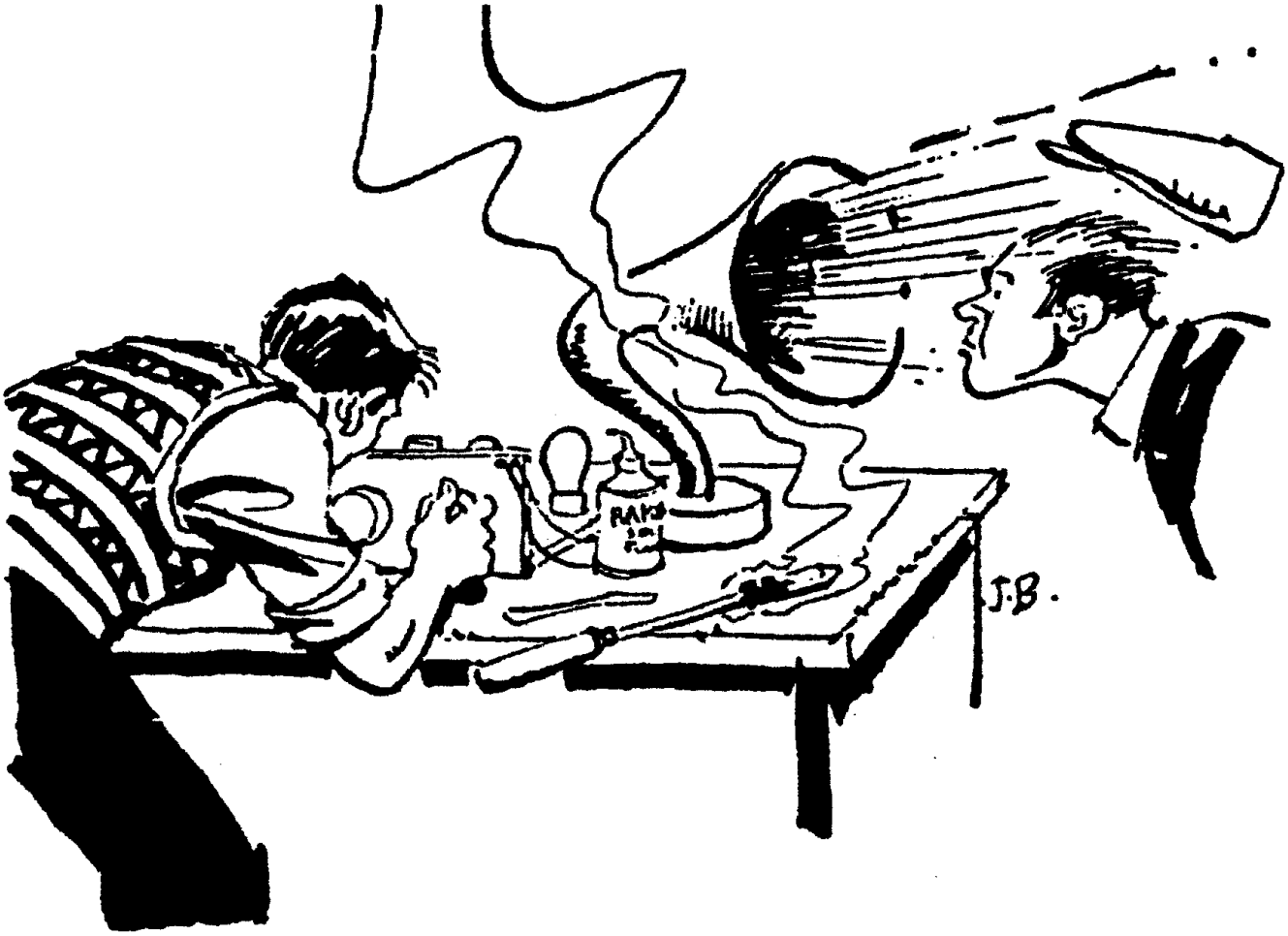
THE SOCIETY OF THE FRIENDS OF ORKNEY WIRELESS MUSEUM

BULLETIN



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Greetings from our first edition of the bulletin for 2018.

The Museum is now ticking over nicely, with visitor numbers at the present time looking very good. It is hoped that we can at least match last year's successful season.

We had a heart- warming return of most of our regular volunteers but due to illness we had a few spaces in our rota to fill up. We were very fortunate in managing to recruit some new ones. These are Tim and Lisa Kennedy, Nicol Manson, and Catherine McIver. Tim and Lisa have been regular visitors to Orkney over the years and have a love of Orkney's history. They are presently enjoying their time volunteering at the Museum. Nicol is a member of the Local Vintage Club and keen researcher of family history and military history. He worked as a joiner for most of his life and latterly as a caretaker for Orkney Islands Council. Catherine worked in the Education department at Orkney Islands Council and latterly was a volunteer at CLAN (Cancer linking Aberdeen North) for ten years. Catherine's late husband, the late Bob McIver, had an interest in the Museum, and had hoped to become a volunteer until health issues intervened. Pictures of our new volunteers are shown elsewhere in the bulletin.

Most of the changes to the displays this year were mainly cosmetic. About two years ago Dougie Corse from Kirkwall donated a box of old Radio Times to the Museum. It took me some time to search through these old Radio Times, but I soon came to realise the quality and rareness of what was contained in them. Some issues dated from the early 1930's and were in almost 'as new' condition. Liz and Pete Stokes from the Museum went to town with them and produced a marvellous new display board showing copies of some of the covers. Volunteer Bob Presland had celebrated his 80th Birthday last year and made a generous donation of £100 which we used to do the improvements. (Hope you don't mind me mentioning your age Bob). Kim Foden has been doing research on her father and Uncle Jimmy's work during the wartime, (See separate article), and we placed some long overdue pictures of both of them next to their early Televisor which is on display. A new display was also prepared in the outside window.



Bob unveils the new display board

The Museum publication of the colour version of the 'Churchill's Prisoner's' booklet has been selling very well. It is almost certain that a re-print will have to be ordered soon. Robert Grieve has restocked out shop with lots of new goodies, with the embroidered 'Wireless Museum' ski hats doing particularly well. He has also continued to update our web site with new information. Our thanks are also due to John Leith for supporting the Museums Website.

At our Museum Store in Orphir our nearby neighbour Alan Clouston has kindly offered to keep an eye on the building when we are not around, our thanks to him.

To end with, I have a couple of confessions to make about some 'bloomers' contained in the last bulletin. The cover should have read Volume 26, No 2, not Volume 27, No 2! Also the article about Quack Medicine which referred to equipment donated by Rosemary Newton from Stronsay should have read Rosemary Newton from Sanday. Sorry Rosemary about that, but if you will forgive me, the Islands are quite close to each other!

Edit.



New Volunteer Catherine McIver

GB2OWM REPORT
31st INTERNATIONAL MARCONI DAY
Saturday 21st April 2018

Due to circumstances beyond our control, we did not take part this year.

Our next scheduled activity is the second International Museums Weekend 23rd -24th June.
After that is Orkney International Science Festival - 6th to 12th September.

Bill Wright, GM3IBU

Experimenting, hoping and trying

Wireless in the lives of two Orkney brothers.

Jack and Jimmy Twatt born in 1910 and 1915 were curious Orkney boys who dabbled in all things radio. In Jimmy's own words we can gain an insight into this enthusiasm.

Some time in 1923 was the first time I ever saw or heard a radio receiver. He was 8 years old at that time. *My brother Jack had been invited by one of his school friends to come and listen to his father's new wireless set. Of course, we had to listen using headphones. At that time loudspeakers were rare and needed powerful sets to drive them. Putting on the headphones I felt transported. Signals were loud and clear, the voices and music apparently coming to life in the middle of my head, and not coming out of a box a few feet away. I felt I was in the distant studio and experienced a feeling of privilege; a feeling which I have not experienced since on any loudspeaker system however good. The set was quite small with only one valve which stood out on top where it lit up the room. The set had a crystal with cat's whisker detector.*



The Twatt family: l-r Jimmy, Mary (nee Leonard), James and Jack.

The Twatt family's first set was a four valve receiver known as the Family Four and was built by Bill Mackinson around 1925. (The Mackinsons moved to Canada in 1927 but their name lives on at Mackinson's Corner, the Uppie goal for Kirkwall's Ba' game.) The set had a loudspeaker and, given a big aerial, it was even a good performer in the winter sport of staying up until around 2am, when if conditions were favourable, listening to American medium-wave broadcasters.

I'm afraid the day came when Jack and I took the Family Four completely to pieces and, over the next weeks, months and years used parts plus new components to progress to designing and building various receivers. One of our hi-fi aims was to hear organ pedal notes and bass instruments, which were almost inaudible. They did eventually manage this.

But where did the power come from in Kirkwall to do all this?

Jimmy explained, *In the early 20s, the war being over, the time came for the Royal Naval Air Station at Houton, Orphir to be closed. It had depended on a large electric power station consisting of three diesel generating sets, stand-by battery, magnificent central switchboard, all contained in a corrugated iron building. Kirkwall Town Council bravely bought the lot and set it up on Junction Road. Streets became electrically lit and customers were connected to one or other side of the 3-wire system.*

Radio enthusiasts made haste to throw out their HT dry batteries to install instead small lead-acid rechargeable HT batteries of up to 120 volts.

The DC mains system was a great boon to the town, but to gain power outside the burgh would require a change to AC. The county had to go through another war before that could be achieved.

And what was to be heard in Orkney in the 1920s?
Again in Jimmy's own words, *By day there was the BBC from Aberdeen and Essex. By night there were any number of foreign stations. Almost at any time there was, forcing its way through, the Morse signalling of Wick Radio with its ancient spark transmitter. A more interesting set of transmissions came, twice a day, from three more isolated lighthouses in Orkney, namely Auskerry, Copinsay and Suleskerry in voice communication with the Northern Lighthouse Board Centre in Stromness, which acted as net controller... On at least one occasion, a visiting three-piece band, in Orkney for the agricultural show season, was invited into the Stromness 'studio' to give a concert to the three lighthouse crews, and others in the know.*
Not much news emanated from these lighthouses until a large cargo ship, the Hastings County*, ran ashore on Auskerry in June 1926. She seemed to be laden with luxury items, from miniature radios (the first we saw) to two large high class yachts as deck cargo.*

In 1956, while Orkney was theoretically outside the range of the nearest transmitter operating at Meldrum near Aberdeen Jack believed that, with some effort, pictures could be received in Kirkwall. An amplifier was built, a huge wooden mast was procured and an aerial constructed to top that. When conditions were right, a snowy picture could be seen. Television arrived officially in Orkney with the opening of the transmitting station at Netherbutton in Holm in time for Christmas 1958.
The following quote from *The Orkney Herald* dated 15th May 1956 reads,
With an estimated population of 20,400 persons and a total of 5,394 wireless receivers, Orkney has rather more than one wireless for every four inhabitants. This figure was given by the Post Office the other day... The most astonishing figure, however, is that given for the holders of television licences. These now number 74.
Remember, Orkney's television transmitter opened at the end of 1958. Like Jack, Orcadians were experimenting, hoping and trying.

However, 25 years earlier, in 1931 Jack and young brother Jimmy had built, from bits and pieces, a 30 line spinning disc televisor in the hope of being able to resolve experimental radio signals originating from the Baird Television Company's laboratory in London and later BBC transmissions from Broadcasting House, London. The transmissions took place on week days between 11pm and 11.45pm. The family home would fill up with hopeful locals who, when conditions were right, did indeed see pictures by wireless. Eventually, however, the Baird spinning disc system was dropped in favour of the preferred cathode ray tube to display the picture.


Jack Twatt

During his time as a radio instructor in Royal Artillery signals during WWII, Jack was a pioneer of VHF communications. However, he had to be content to have radio as his hobby for most of his life. He was owner/editor of local paper *The Orkney Herald* and later a DECCA navigation engineer.
He was always proud of his younger brother Jimmy who, after studying in Edinburgh and Imperial College, London, secured work with Marconi as a development engineer on broadcasting transmitters, becoming the company's resident engineer at the BBC's Droitwitch transmitter.

During WWII Jimmy assumed responsibility in the company's Echo Sounding Laboratories where he was involved in the design of the underwater supersonic buoy. These were used as navigational aids to guide naval surface ships and submarines into landing places on the enemy coast. The design work and trials on the development models were carried out within about nine months. The early buoys were laid by surface ships or submarines at periscope depth. Later models could be fired from a submarine's torpedo tubes thus avoiding possible observation by the enemy, but this had required some involved design work to adjust the buoyancy.

Having completed the design, Jimmy was then involved with sea trials on both ships and submarines, an experience he was not likely to forget. The supersonic signals were transmitted at pre-determined intervals and could be heard by a ship's ASDIC for a distance of five miles. After a set time, or if they were swept up by minesweepers, they were designed to self-destruct!
The buoys were successfully employed in the Mediterranean and on D-Day.

Jimmy Watt, as he was known within the company, had a distinguished career at Marconi having been in charge of Maritime Development including communications and radar. Eventually he was appointed Technical Manager of the Maritime Division. As a Manager he was highly respected technically and well liked by his staff.



Jimmy Twatt

18th October 1955 *The Orkney Herald*

SOOAN SIDS

We rubbed our eyes the other morning, for only a few fields away on a prominent chimney we saw an absolute outsize among television aerials. We thought that this must be the first one in Orkney, but we are credibly informed that there are now three in town. The owners of these do not expect to get pictures which are worth seeing, but they intend to have fun operating beyond the outside fringe of the new Aberdeen station. The chances at present of obtaining consistently good reception in Orkney are so poor that we cannot even regard these aerials as a portent.

Having said that, we must admit to having seen excellent TV pictures in Orkney. Reception on Wednesday was first-class and we watched entranced even that incredible opening programme, a discussion on thumb-sucking. We felt then that there was more than an element of truth in the old man's comment, "Soon there'll no be a sock mended in the county". But later in the week, when the screen yielded nothing but a fluorescent blizzard, we felt that after all television in Orkney is indeed in the thumb-sucking stage.



A generous donation

During 2017 the Museum received a call from Barry Steele from Essex. He had in storage, military radio gear, which dated from the cold war Era and wondered if he could donate it to the Wireless Museum. Since Barry lived in the South of England it was a very generous gesture to send it all up to Orkney. It all duly arrived on a pallet and amounted to quite a lot of equipment. I asked Barry if he could give us a bit about his background and interest in radio and he sent me the following:

'I started work in 1970, as a lab technician with an American communication research company, S.T.L. based in Harlow, Essex. I left to work with the Marconi Company of Chelmsford, Essex to work on test, calibration and repair, particularly of test equipment. During that time I was awarded a trophy called 'The Morse Key', this was for achieving the best examination marks in the U.K. in the City and Guilds exams for Radio and T.V. Repair. I also managed to achieve the best U.K. marks the following year in video repair. In 1977 I left to do some travelling around the world'.



Barry being presented with his Morse Key Trophy

'I became a lifeguard in 1983 for a section of Essex County Council, and obtained casual work, which included first aid, security plant maintenance and out-door pool manager. It was rewarding to be in control of public safety and to rescue and save life, especially of the young. Because of my electronic background and an interest in survival I collected the dated military radio and electronic equipment. The area sports and leisure executive, Mr Tom Gunnie, an ex S.B.S. physical training instructor and boxer became a trusted friend of mine'. *Tom had this to say about Barry :*

'Barry Steel was a loyal and integral member of Tendring District Councils Leisure Team. His life- saving skills were called on many time over the years and he was affectionately nick named 'The Rocket Man' due to his rapid response to life threatening situations. Being a former Royal Marine, I appreciated Barry's radio interest, and being a Scot, I am pleased with his choice of Orkney's Wireless Museum for his equipment!'

New Volunteers



Tim and Lisa Kennedy



Nicol Manson

Stories from the Museum

I'm sure all our Museum volunteers have stories to tell about the people they have met at the Museum, it is one of the more enjoyable aspects of working in the Museum and you just never know who could call along. With the advent of the Cruise Liners it could be anyone from a Space Scientist to someone who recognises their first Transistor Radio.

Volunteer Bill Stevenson had a visit from a Mrs June Sellers from Bletchley in Bucks in April, and he Emailed me with the following: 'You may be interested to know that today I sold a Spitfire Tea Towel to a Mrs June Sellers. She told me her aunt is Mary Ellis who was in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) during WW2 and she flew a variety of different aircraft to deliver them to airfields where they were needed. She now 101 and can still drive her car to Morrison's for her shopping'.
'She was featured in the recent television programme about the ATA and since then she has had celebrity treatment at Morrison's'.

Here is a link to her interview on the TV.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-42987894/the-101-year-old-woman-who-flew-spitfires-in-ww2

Volunteers Liz Gilmore and Pete Stokes states: 'There was a huge liner at Hatston pier and several of the passengers came in. One was an English lady who came in alone. She looked around and said that her husband would just love it here but that he was not very mobile and had great difficulty in getting off the ship. That morning he decided that just could not make it to shore. She had a good look around and bought one of our Orkney Wireless Museum bookmarks with Morse on it. She commented that her husband knew Morse and would be amused'.
'During the afternoon the lady returned, this time with her husband. He was dependent upon a push-along walker and very short of breath. She was right, he absolutely revelled in seeing the collection'.
'The gentleman had been a radio operator in the Royal Signals and had served in Malaya. He said that he could not remember Morse but we knew exactly that was going to happen next. Yes, within five minutes he was tapping away and delighted with his progress. He greeted the 19 Set like an old friend. It was at this point that he jettisoned the walker and showed me how he used to strap the Morse key to his leg. His wife whispered to me that he could not normally stand without his walker, OWM had obviously made both of them very happy indeed'.

Volunteer Nicol Manson had a visit from Tessa courage and her husband who had come off the Liner 'Boudicca' on the 24th of May. Tessa Courages's father was Garry Maufe M.C. and her grand uncle was Thomas Harold Broadbent Maufe V.C. One of the actions which earned Thomas Maufe his V.C. during the First World War was, under intense artillery fire, repairing unaided, the telephone wire between the forward and rear positions, thereby enabling his battery to open fire on the enemy. Garry Maufe earned an MC for his dashing relief of a besieged unit at Mezzano in Italy in the Second World War. Tessa's husband was the Grand Nephew of Vice Admiral Sir David Beatty.

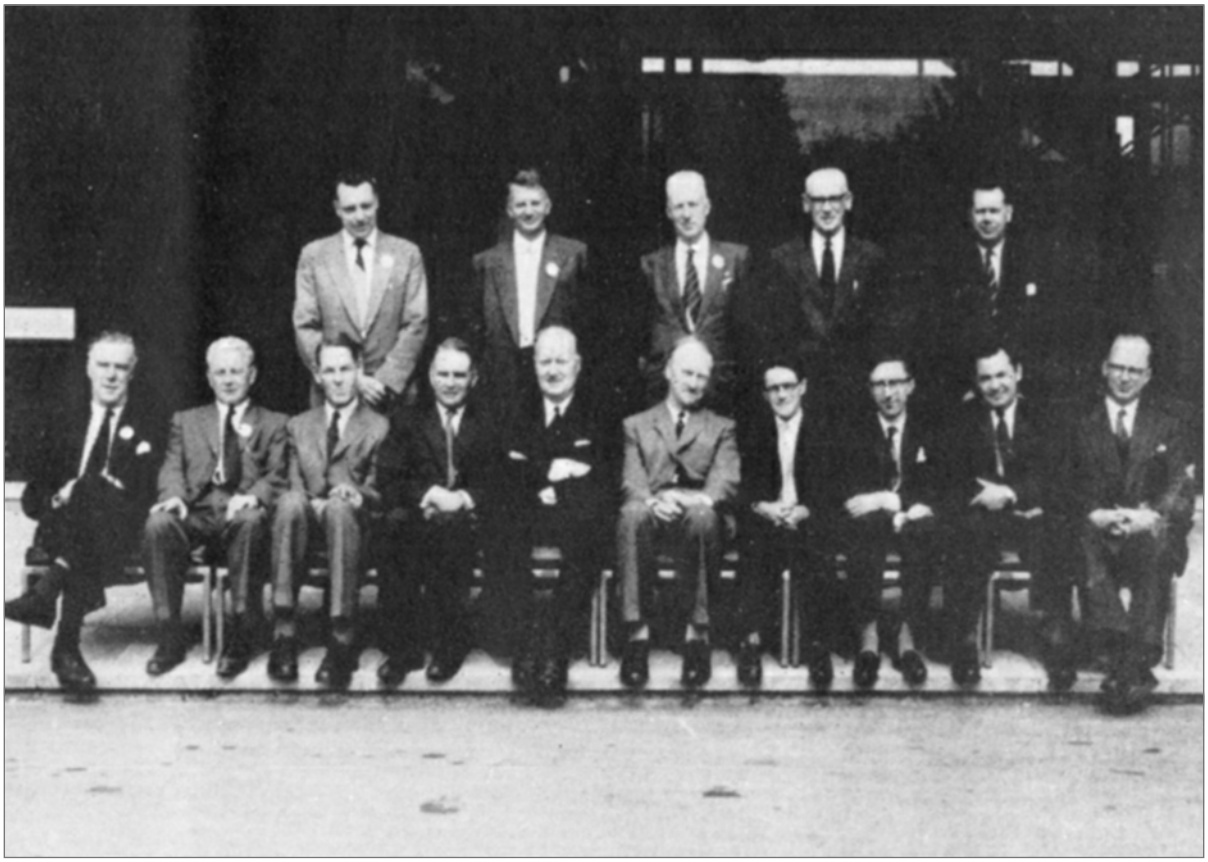
Soulisquoy, Mayfield and Netherbutton – The People.

Len Wilson.

Robert Foden's piece about Soulisquoy and Mayfield in the December 2017 issue caught my interest for I had some connection to the people named.

Cyril Phillips.

When I joined the then Ministry of Aviation in the 1960s I was posted to the Telecommunications Engineering Establishment at Gatwick where Cyril Phillips was head of Telecommunications. Later, when I worked at Edinburgh Airport, Cyril was the Chief Telecommunications Officer Scotland. In the photo, taken when TEE opened in 1961, Cyril is seated, middle front, wearing the grey suit.



Senior staff at TEE Gatwick, June 1961. Cyril Phillips is centre front in the grey suit.

Len Chapman.

I never met Len Chapman but about twenty years ago I interviewed his widow, Jemima Learmonth, when she lived in Berstane Road, Kirkwall. Unfortunately she was unable to tell me anything of his work, for it was top secret and he obviously kept it that way. Len had trained and worked with Watson-Watt, the radar pioneer so, at the start of WW2 his knowledge and ability made him invaluable to the RAF. He was placed in charge of the fledgling radar station at Netherbutton with the rank of corporal. Obviously deemed to be senior enough for this upstart department that nobody knew anything about.

When one of the top brass called from London one day the conversation went thus.....

"Netherbutton. Corporal Chapman speaking."

"Put me through to your CO."

"I am the CO."

He got rapid promotion and ended his service as Squadron Leader.



Len Chapman

Tom Patterson.

The third name to catch my attention was Tom Patterson. I never knew Tom but had more in common with him than any of the others. We had both served as MN Radio Officers and he was one of my predecessors when, after the war, he was in charge of telecommunications and navigation aids at Grimsetter (now Kirkwall Airport). He was also secretary to Orkney Strathspey & Reel Society ten or more years before I assumed that role. I have been told that Tom was Wireless Operator on the *Dunara Castle* when she evacuated the last inhabitants of St Kilda in 1930.



Tom Paterson

Footnote: Len Wilson himself has had a long career in radio and was Engineering Manager for Kirkwall and Wick Airports. When he sent me this article I thought it would be relevant to include some photographs of Len to compliment the article. I have pleasure in showing them here – Edit.





Two photographs of Len, one as a Radio Officer age nineteen and another taken in retirement.

Presentation of a Horn Speaker to the Museum

Innes Sutherland from Kirkwall contacted the Museum recently regarding some equipment he wished to donate to the Museum. Innes operated one of the last repair workshops for Television and Radio in Kirkwall until he closed his doors some years ago. It was the equipment and components from this workshop which he was offering the Museum, (A rather unique offer). Also quite a few years ago Innes loaned the Museum a magnificent early Horn speaker which stood proudly on one of our shelves. The speaker had belonged to one of his relatives who had a passion for radio on the Island of Skye where Innes also came from. Innes, shown with the Horn speaker above, has now donated it to the Museum's permanent collection. Our thanks goes to Innes for all his generosity.



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Bill Stout and his Sony ICF-2001D solid state receiver

My first job overseas, from 1980, was in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea, where I worked for the National Computing Centre, a data processing agency which served many government departments. In those days PNG had no TV service, while local (commercial) radio was very limited in its news reporting. PNG NBC broadcast on its single channel in Pidgin and Hiri Motu as much as in English - and the advertising jingles got very irritating. There was very little international news coverage. Very early on I realised that I needed a short wave radio receiver to keep in touch with what was going on in the world. I purchased a very high quality Yaesu receiver and I used it to tune in to the BCC World Service every day – and to Voice of America and Radio Australia a little less frequently, usually when BBC reception was poor.

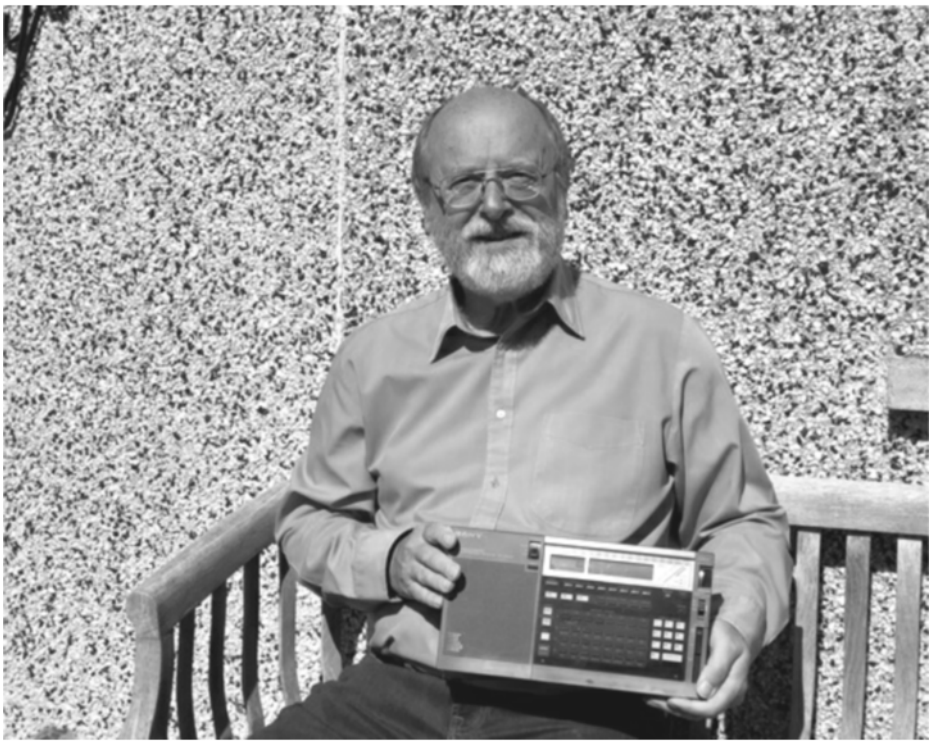
When I left PNG in 1986 I sold my Yaesu to a colleague, thinking I would have no more need of a short wave radio receiver. However, less than a year later I found myself working overseas again - in Hong Kong, for International Computers Ltd (ICL), as a database consultant on a large project for the container-port operator, Hong Kong International Terminals (HIT). I then regretted the loss of my Yaesu receiver, even though public broadcasting in Hong Kong was of a different order of quality to that in PNG. (The South China Morning Post had better international coverage than the Post Courier of PNG too!) At that time, the BBC East Asia relay station was still not relaying broadcasts over FM, and the only way to receive the World Service was via short wave, albeit with very good reception in Hong Kong. So I went shopping – where better than in Hong Kong! When I came across the Sony ICF-2001D I felt it would be perfectly adequate, realising I didn't need a high-end specialist short wave receiver in the Hong Kong environment.

As things transpired, FM broadcasts were introduced by the BBC East Asia relay station a year or two later and the Sony was still eminently suitable for receiving them. As far as I recollect, when I moved from Hong Kong to Singapore in 1994 to take up the post of IT Operations Director for DHL Asia-Pacific, the Far Eastern relay station based nearby was already providing an FM feed for local broadcast too. In any case my Sony continued to provide an important communication link to the outside world.

As time went on, and the Internet became a more immediate news source I used the radio less and less. It ended its days, after I returned to Orkney in 2009, as a sophisticated alarm clock to wake me up in time to hear the morning broadcast, Around Orkney, on BBC Radio Orkney. As a councillor on Orkney Islands Council it was essential to keep up with the local news – and to get early warning of any controversies likely to blow up and spoil the day.

As a footnote, the BBC moved the East Asia relay station from Hong Kong to Thailand in 1997 in preparation for the handover of the territory to China. Sadly when the broadcasting licence came up for renewal the BBC was unable to reach agreement with the Thai government and broadcasts ceased on 31 December, 2016. The station has now closed, without replacement, leaving the Indian subcontinent and China with a much-degraded or absent service.

Bill Stout
8 November, 2017



Bill with his Sony ICF – 2001D receiver

Biographical note: Bill Stout was born in Kirkwall, where he attended the Grammar School until 1965. After a somewhat prolonged and chequered period of university study he followed a career in IT, beginning as a computer programmer with the Metropolitan Police in London. Following his three-year stint in Singapore, he moved to successive roles with DHL in Kuala Lumpur, London and Prague. These roles included Chief Information Officer for Asia-Pacific and the Middle East; Global IT Operations Director; and Chairman of the Global Design Authority – a Chief Technical Officer role. From 2012 to 2017, Bill served on the Orkney Islands Council.

News Bite

BT's Speaking Clock in now over 80 years old!



"At the third stroke,
the time will be (hour), (minute), and (second) seconds."

Britain's famous Speaking Clock is now over 80 years old. The Speaking Clock was the first of the pre-recorded information services in the UK, provided through telephones. Created for people who wanted to know the time and did not have a watch or clock to hand, the clock was initially only available in the London directory area, with the first British Speaking Clock introduced on 24th July, 1936. In its first year the service registered nearly 13 million calls, and went nationwide in 1942.

The service was obtained by dialling the letters TIM (846) on a dial telephone, and hence the service was often colloquially referred to as "Tim" However this code was only used in the telephone systems of the cities of London, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester.

Source BT Archives



Wilfred Pickles was an English actor and radio presenter. He was a proud Yorkshireman and went on to be an occasional newsreader on the BBC Home Service during the Second World War. He was the first newsreader to speak in a regional accent rather than the perceived perfect English of the day, a deliberate attempt to make it more difficult for the Nazis to impersonate BBC broadcasters.

His most significant work was as host of the BBC Radio show 'Have a Go' which ran from 1946 to 1967 and launched such catch phrases as 'How do, how are yer?' And 'What's on the table, Mabel'. The series attracted a weekly audience of over 20 million, and a mailbag of around 5,000 letters a week. In 1954 he took the show to television with the programme 'Ask Pickles' which ran until 1956. In 1950 he was awarded the OBE for services to broadcasting. (Source of information Wikipedia)

Due to the newly introduced general data protection regulations GDPR,
the Friends Society has decided not to publish names and addresses of our members
in this issue of the bulletin.