

Association Newsletter

Ordeal by readership

I survived! At the 2006 Reunion, Raymond Rowe said very kind things about my first effort with the newsletter, and a number of you have expressed similar sentiments subsequently. Thank you, I must have done something right. I do have a little worry at the moment however. Where no photos are supplied with contributions I like to insert photos or graphics which have some relevance to subject matter of an article to relieve the acres of text and give the publication a less dense feel. You will see what I mean in this issue. However, you might feel that this is an unacceptable use of space which could otherwise have been used to include another contribution or two. Are there too many pictures and too few words? Please let me know what you think, by post, email, or in person at the reunion in April. (Contact details on page 2.)

Not many contributions came in over the last twelve months, so I have dipped into the backlog going back to '05. Some of the articles are extracts from much longer pieces. Anyone who has a memories of the company - amusing and lightweight, serious and thoughtful, from the trivial to the technical (but not too technical) - please jot them down and send them in, with pictures if you have them. They don't need to be lengthy: the longer the article the more the cutting and editing I have to do! And on the subject of the backlog, you will recall that a number of articles were to have been posted on the website: this didn't happen but I promise that this year it will. The first to appear, barring any technical hitches, will be the MIMCO Manager D Robertson's report to London following his release from Japanese internment in 1945. Any posted on the website will appear in their entirety.

New Street site - the latest

Peter Turrall, Vice Chairman, Marconi Veterans Association

Messrs Ashwell Developments of Cambridge, the owners of the Marconi Communication Systems site at New Street, now occupied by Selex Communications, are in regular consultation with the Planning Department of Chelmsford Borough Council concerning the proposed development of this valuable nine and a half acre site.

An outline planning proposal has been submitted which covers the removal of several of the large buildings and the complete removal of the factory. The 1912 front building which already has a preservation order on it, will remain, although there will be several modifications to cover possibly an area for exhibition of Marconi products and a few offices. Despite previous rumours this building will not become a hotel.

The large four storey Marconi House and Building 720 with the corrugated roof will also be removed, allowing the site to have shops and residential areas laid out with gardens and a heritage walkway which will depict the history of our company.

Part of the area adjacent to the New Street Security Office and close to the railway line will be removed, allowing a walkway and road which will lead to the railway station. The Power House and the two cottages plus the tower on the opposite side of the railway line will remain. It is hoped in this area some of the company's artefacts can be on view with possibly modern presentation facilities of voices of past employees and also film footage.

To ensure the history of the company and its employees is preserved, the undersigned has joined with the developers and their heritage and conservation experts in some of the planning and decision making areas. Over the coming months a team of photographers and audio crew will be contacting many ex-employees to obtain stories of life within the company during their employment. If you are interested in this aspect, then please contact the Editor who will be pleased to pass on this information. If you have any artefacts which could be permanently loaned, then these could form part of the heritage trail through the site. Your assistance in this latter respect would be most welcome.



On page 12 of the last issue, Stanley Fisher promised to send a recent photograph of him standing outside the main New Street entrance. It seems appropriate to place it here accompanying Peter Turrall's news of the proposals for the New Street site.

Mailbag

The Baddow photo

In the last newsletter, on page 5, we carried a picture of a group of Baddow engineers taken in 1939. The location of the photo was uncertain, and there were gaps in the list of names. I've received two letters on the subject, from Ian Butt and Cyril Marshall.

Ian Butt writes:

It shows (on the front row) Percy Beanland and FE Sainsbury as numbers 14 and 15 - I think this should be 12 and 13.

I hope with returns from the Veterans you may be able to publish a more complete list of who's who, since most of the engineers/boffins were really at the forefront of Marconi's later expertise in new design etc, apart from all the technology that appeared during World War II.

I assume you know that Chick (Mac) Mackenzie died recently.

From Cyril Marshall:

Roy Simons comments on the photo did trigger my memory of those times. I was in the Test Department at New Street in 1934, having joined the company in 1929 as an apprentice. I agree with Roy in that the photo was taken at Writtle, not Baddow. However, I'm certain that Mervyn Morgan is number 10 in the back row. I recognise a few more faces:- second row 5 JF Hatch, 7 VJ Cooper, 8 NW Jenkins, and 15 in the back row is Watts from R&D Workshops. Front row 13 FWJ Sainsbury, I remember him as a tall person and responsible for the Sainsbury design equipment cabinet. Like Roy, there are other faces that I recognise but am unable to remember names.

On Colwyn Bay Wireless College

- Richard Shaw

Peter Robinson's news of Colwyn Bay Wireless College was of particular interest, since I was a student there in 1941-42 before joining the Marconi Marine Company, and I have been able to pass news of its website to another old boy who was there in 1948. We first met in 1982 when I came to live in a village near here and he and his family were next door but one. We both worked for the Marconi Company in its various incarnations until our retirements, and he was delighted to have the news. I had returned to the Wireless College in 1948, just missing my future colleague who left the previous term, and enjoyed another eight years or so at sea and three on the shore staff in Cardiff.

Regarding Marconi's statue, I find its treatment by the Borough Council (which commissioned it) quite disgraceful. Of course it should stand in the centre of Chelmsford. If it were not for Marconi, Chelmsford would have been

neither wealthy nor famous, but just another county town. Its councillors need a damn good talking to!

I was sorry to read of the death of John Sutherland who, as Managing Director of Marconi Radar Systems, presented me with my certificate as a Marconi Veteran. I recall that we could have either a presentation watch or a sum of money worth rather less.

As I already had a watch but was rather short of the other, and my car battery was nearing its end, I asked for a replacement (obtainable at a discount from a local garage) instead of the watch, and the balance in cash! I think he was a little surprised by my unusual request, but granted it nevertheless, thereby making me probably the only Marconi Veteran whose membership presentation included a chit for a lead acid battery.

Pleased the association still exists

- Bernard de Neumann

I'm very pleased to see that the Marconi Veterans' Association still exists, as I thought it had become defunct since I no longer receive any mailings from you. (*Prof de Neumann is one of the lost and found referred to on page 12. Ed.*)

I became a Marconi Veteran in 1986/7 I think: I joined Marconi Research Labs as a mathematician in 'Mathematical Analysis' of Mathematical Physics with Jozef Skwirzynski. I left MRL in 1988 to take up an appointment as Professor of Mathematics at The City University, London, and am now retired.

You may care to note for the newsletter that a portrait of me by the noted artist John Wonnacott, won the 2005 Ondaatje Prize (£10,000 plus a gold medal) of the Royal Society of Portrait Painters last May. See for example: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4486329.stm> Consequentially, as a professional mathematician, I have now added to my cv that I am mathematical model - and am, somewhat uniquely, a living breathing example rather than an idealised representation!

The wisdom of the Saturday supplements

To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism - to steal from many is research.

Experience is something you don't get until just after you need it.

Please send articles for next year's newsletter to:

- Ken Earney, Editor, Marconi Veterans' Association Newsletter, 59 Willow Crescent, Hatfield Peverel, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 2LJ
or email keneaney@hotmail.com
- or to Barry Powell via mail, email or phone to his usual address/phone number
- or via the 'Contact us' link on the Marconi Veterans' website - www.marconiveterans.com

Report of the 2006 Veterans' reunion

The 70th annual reunion was held, as usual, at the MASC in Beehive Lane Chelmsford. Our president this year, Veteran Raymond Rowe, was introduced by Veteran Ewan Fenn. Raymond's working life as an engineer from 1946 to 1988 spanned a wide spectrum of technologies from microwave link through space communications and troposcatter to broadcasting. He joined Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company as an engineer in the HDB Group at Writtle in 1955, and save for a very brief interlude at Cossors in the 60s, he remained with the company until his retirement in 1988 whilst acting Divisional Manager of Broadcasting Division.

In his reply, Raymond detailed some of the highlights of his career, and of the Marconi Company. Some quotes from his speech that are worthy of note.

'If there was a place in the world in trouble then either we (in Marconi) had been there just before or we soon would be.'

'Who knows what else there is to come. I believe we probably saw the best of it; the work was still very much hands on. The engineers of today, because of the computer interface, are a bit more remote from the end product...'

'So we were there at a very influential period of Marconi's, probably the most important time since the beginning of radio. The name Marconi did not need explaining to any one that I met in my travels for the company.'

'As Marconi Veterans we perhaps do not really understand how important our group is. We are among the relatively few who really knew what Marconi's meant. I am sure that all of us are proud that we can trace our company back to the beginnings of radio.'

Raymond then introduced the Guest of Honour, Robert Wellbeloved C.Eng, FIEE. Bob was formerly Chief Engineer (Transmitter Operations) for the IBA and latterly an independent consultant for many UK and overseas organisations, mainly on Digital TV transmissions. He joined Marconi Communication Systems in 1956 on a four year Graduate Apprenticeship followed by installation work on behalf of Broadcasting Division before joining the ITA in 1965 as a Transmitter Engineer.

In his speech Bob noted that it was just 50 years since he had joined Marconi-MWT. He used 50 years as his theme and posed three questions - what would he have done differently over the last 50 years, what have been the most significant changes over this time, and would he have preferred a different 50 year period for his working life?

The answer to the first was - very little. In responding to the second question he cast a wry eye over many things that have changed in the last 50 years, some good, some bad, but even some of the goods were not unalloyed.

He would not have wished to change the time slot of his career and noted that the late Victorian era had abysmal living standards and a much lower life expectancy. The early 20th century had two world wars and the depression. And would he like to be leaving University in 2006 with the prospect of working until 2060? Definitely not!

Veterans' reunion 2007

The 2007 reunion will take place on Saturday 14th April at the MASC, Beehive Lane, Chelmsford, commencing at 1.00pm. This year's President is Professor Roy W Simons, OBE, CEng. Roy served with the company for 43 years, joining MWT in 1943 with the major part of his career in radar. In 1965, with the restructuring of the Company, he became Technical Manager of Radar Division, and with the subsequent merger with GEC, he was appointed Technical Director of Marconi Radar Systems, a post that he held until just before his very busy retirement in 1986. His leisure time is devoted to a number of musical interests. He will be introduced by Marconi Veterans' Association Chairman Charles Rand, previously Works Manager at Writtle Road.

The Guest of Honour will be Dr John C Williams OBE, FREng, Hon FIEE who for a number of years was Director of The Marconi Research Centre at Gt Baddow, Chelmsford and later was Secretary and Chief Executive of the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) in London.

News from Kwazulu Natal

Barry Powell received the following email from Jack Mayhew last March:

Many thanks for the latest news letter which I have just received. It is very much appreciated. I must give you my latest postal address as we have just moved. (Barry has the address for anyone wishing to contact Jack). We have a magnificent view from our new house and can see the Indian Ocean in the far distance. Unfortunately a few weeks before we moved I had a stroke but I am pleased to say that although I was paralysed down one side I am now able to walk a few steps again. Please pass my congratulations to Ken, the new editor of the newsletter, but please ask him if and when he uses my name again would he please add the last three letters to my surname! Kindest regards.

Jack refers to the item on page 10 of the last issue, under 'Some more Marconi bibliography', attributed to Jack May. I was thrown by his email username - jackmay. Many apologies Jack. Ed.

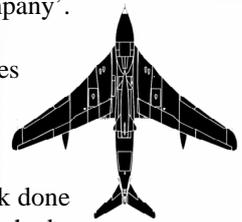
What's the rate of exchange for kudos?

Eric Walker

This extract from a much longer piece by Eric Walker - for all of his Marconi career an Airadio man - focuses on some of the less serious aspects of the life of the avionics (although I'm not sure that the term was in common parlance then) engineers inhabiting the Writtle huts in the 50s. Mike Lawrence, who served in the DO at Writtle and for a while at Basildon, has expanded Eric's original article with additional material and turned it into a hand-crafted booklet with a very limited production run - Eric and Mike both have two copies, the Writtle village archivist another and there is a sixth copy at the Sandford Mill Musuem. It is well worth reading in its entirety, and we shall endeavour to make it accessible on the website.

When I arrived at Writtle in 1951 we were housed in wooden huts. The only brick-built facility was the workshop. Historically, Les Mullin's team occupied the original 2MT (2 Emma Tock) hut of early broadcast fame, in which part of the 1922 installation was still visible. Geoffrey Beck's Air Navigational Aids team occupied a relatively new wooden Hut A. We later expanded to Hut AK as our team grew in number and parallel projects were undertaken.

Beck's team was formed to develop Green Satin, a military project funded on a cost-plus basis by the Ministry of Supply. The equipment is well-described in Chapter 42 of W J Baker's 'History of the Marconi Company'. Briefly, it was a self-contained airborne navigational aid, which used the Doppler effect to measure the ground speed and drift angle of an aircraft from which present position and other navigational attributes could be deduced. 'Self-contained' means independent of ground-based aids. The accuracy of Green Satin depended on high-precision waveguides in its aerial, both in dimensions and in the slotting process which was coped with by Charlie Swanborough in the waveguide section at New Street. Green Satin was a considerable step forward in the art of air navigation. The project derived from work done at TRE Malvern, a Ministry establishment, by Johnny Clegg and George Thorne. Experimental models had been made by Mervyn Morgan's team at Baddow and we, at Writtle, had to develop a design into production, just as fast as we could. The programme was classified secret and was urgent, as it was needed for the Canberra aircraft and the V bomber force (Valiant, Victor and Vulcan, although only the latter two were fitted). We handmade eight development models followed by thirty 'crash-production' models before full production was undertaken at the New Street works.

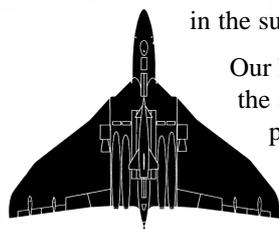


Green Satin was a challenging project to a very tight timescale. It was an exciting programme for a team of mainly young engineers to work on, and we worked very hard, with good team spirit.

Starting time was 7.45am in the workshops and 8.15am for design staff; and we clocked-in. Knocking-off time was supposed to be 5pm, but we rarely left until much later. We worked 6 days a week and often on Sundays when the programme required us to. The notion was, if something needed doing you stayed and did it. The only times you left work unfinished was when it was not possible to complete it for one reason or another. This habit of working long hours stayed with many of us even when the pressure finally came off. You felt you were letting the team down if you worked to the clock. Those who did leave on time, for domestic reasons, usually took briefcases of papers home with them.

Jumping ahead a bit, when we had successfully put Green Satin into production, Bernard MacLarty came to thank us and said that our efforts had earned kudos for the company. We were brash enough to ask what the rate of exchange for kudos was and if it would benefit us? He took it in good part. But there seemed not to be such a thing as a bonus in those days. The idea was that if you did a good job you might move up the ladder and take on more responsibility for perhaps more pay. I saw records of staff reviews where senior management debated at length whether Bloggs should receive an increment of £12 or £15 per annum.

Our work, though intense, had plenty of fun in it. On Guy Fawkes day rockets were fired, suspended on a wire strung from near the hut to down the field. Fireworks figured quite a lot at other times. Much skill was put into secreting bundles of bangers in other peoples' workplaces, which went off when you (or they) operated power switches. The ballistics expert was Ray Walls. But Arthur Adam earned the medal for concealment. One evening we blew up a bundle we had dropped between the walls of his hut (AK). Next morning, when we came to work, we searched our hut for the response we knew must be there. In vain. He waited until mid-morning before activating it. He must have worked half the night to put in the subterranean wiring. Beck put a stop to it after that, for fear of fire, or mayhem.



Our hut was very cold in the winter, the only heat coming from a few hot-water radiators (by courtesy of the stoker Bill Crabb) and of course the heat generated by the concentration of bodies and active high-powered equipment and test gear. In the summer it was too hot, even with open windows. We had a water tap and basin in the hut, so the bright-ideas squad, led again by Ray Walls, ran a suitably punctured hosepipe along the ridge of the hut roof. Water pressure was then adjusted until drips just came off the eaves before evaporating. Much experiment was needed to get the leak wetting pattern just right to cover the roof.

Continued on page 5

A plea for information

Hello, I wonder if you could help me.

My name is Don Simpson, I am an employee (1974 - present) of Marconi Radar/MRC SL/Alenia/Marconi/AMS/Bae Systems Insyte (who next?), but I'm interested in my father's career. I have a little bit of info, but not much, and I can't get a clear picture from my mother (Dad is now deceased - December 1983)).

His name was Stanley Simpson, he joined Marconi some time round about 1952/3/4 (confusion about the actual date). At that time he was manager (?) of the Electrical Goods department at Perth Co-op (Scotland) and previous to that had been running his own small business servicing accumulator driven radios. His addresses would have been 111, Mildmay Road, Chelmsford, and, after that, Glenorchy, South Street, Great Waltham. His birthdate was 13 August 1909. My understanding is that he was approached by Marconi, either because of articles that he had written into Wireless World, or possibly through his RAF service (he was a radio technician, spent the entire war in Palestine/Kenya).

Would the Association be able to access any employment records that could confirm his employment dates (he left around 1957 to go back to Scotland), his position (I understand he worked at Writtle) or possibly confirm how and why he was approached? I'm just interested to try to find the real facts about him.

Curious that I should have ended up in the same 'old' company as him, in the same town again.

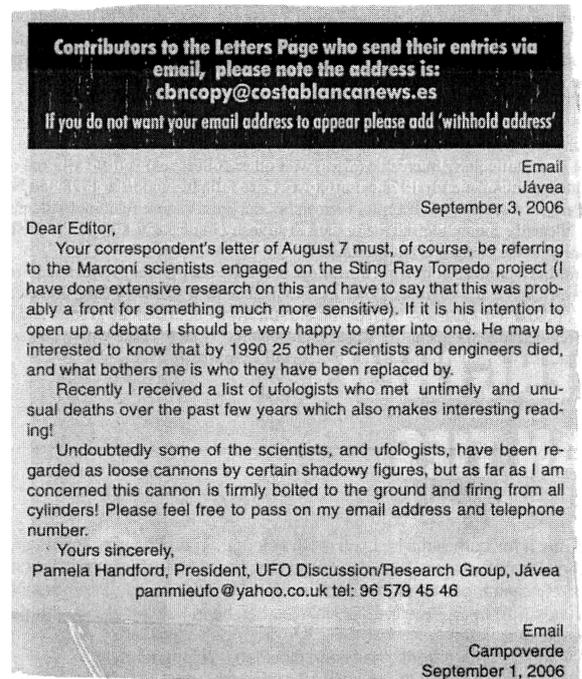
Don Simpson, PDM Team Lead, Chelmsford, BAE Systems Insyte.

Barry has explained that the Association has no access to any employment records, and furthermore that they may have been archived so that even HR Departments have difficulty in accessing them. Don's only hope therefore appears to be one of you. Does anyone remember a Scot, Stanley Simpson, who appears to have worked at Writtle in the mid 50s. Please send any reply either to Barry or me for forwarding to Don.

The Marconi Scientist mystery

Peter Wyss, an ex-Electro-Optical Advanced Systems Division (Basildon) Veteran, was involved in the Stingray Torpedo project since its inception in the early 70s. Some months ago he was sent by Ted Haydon, also ex-EOASD Veteran, the cutting from the Letters page of the Costa Brava News shown on the right. Peter entered into an exchange of correspondence with Pamela Handford, the writer of the letter, and then emailed a number of former colleagues with the results of this exchange, including your editor because he thought it might be of interest to other Veterans who had worked on Stingray, or with a taste for intrigue, conspiracy theories etc.

Pamela Handford has a number of apparently well-placed contacts all resulting from her group's involvement with UFO research. The group's activities have brought them to the attention of US Air Force and Spanish Military Intelligence. Their investigations revealed links to the deaths in suspicious circumstances of 25 Marconi engineers working on the Stingray Torpedo project in the mid/late 80s. An article appeared in Computer News at the time, and a book on the subject was published in 1990, Open Verdict: an account of 25 mysterious deaths in the defence industry, Tony Collins (1990), Sphere Books. Any Veteran with a taste for intrigue, conspiracy theories, 'spooks' etc wanting to learn more about this story can contact Peter Wyss through me or Barry Powell.



Fort Perch Rock Museum

Arising from a conversation with Jimmy Leadbitter, Stan McNally sent Barry Powell the web address for a museum on Merseyside with which he is associated. Fort Perch Rock (near New Brighton) on the Mersey is a former fort from the Napoleonic era. The museum houses many interesting exhibits, an important theme running through them being Merseyside's maritime past. A recent addition, formally opened last October, is the Merchant Navy Wireless Room which contains Marconi equipment and so may be of interest to Marconi Marine Veterans.

The web address is: <http://sco493.co.uk/album34.html>