

RADIO WAVES WE ALL SWIM TO



My grandfather Louis Breeze, sang principle baritone with the world famous D'Oyle Carte Opera Company. He also, believe it or not, waxed records in the early 1900's. He sang these with piano accompaniment directly to disc, some of which I still have. With the phenomenal advancement of all forms of media since those days, it was interesting to me to research when and how it all began. The modern generation usually take for granted the fact that the latest gadgets and gizmos just appeared overnight, but in reality, they are merely the latest offerings based upon the foundations of the first pioneering steps, taken in an age of very little technology.

As far back as the mid 1880's, people like Michael Faraday were experimenting with all kinds of theories surrounding electro magnetics and its possible uses. In 1864 another pioneer was certain that radio waves actually existed.



His name was **James Maxwell**. These experiments and beliefs paved the way for



Heinrich Hertz (Hz) to actually make the very first radio waves using a device called a "Spark Gap" transmitter in the late 1800's. Zoom and the whole fundamental birth of sound waves was off to a positive start. In 1880, David Hughes invented what is now regarded as a standard, yet vital piece of equipment we all know and love as a 'microphone'. In fact it was termed a 'carbon' microphone. In 1901, Guglielmo Marconi was actually the first to transmit a radio signal from Cornwall, across the Atlantic to Newfoundland in Canada. This was an amazing step forward in this field and catapulted Marconi into the fore front of the public eye. Progress abounded and in 1904, the



Thermionic Valve was invented by Flemming and De Forest which enabled Marconi to conjure up a reliable 'Carrier Wave'. This in essence, was an instrument that would transmit voice and music across the airwaves. Thus, in 1920, the first UK Broadcasting Station 2MT was born in Chelmsford, Essex. As with all experimental ventures, 2MT's location was not sited in the lap of luxury that stations like the BBC are today, it was in fact, located in an ex - army hut. I remember my father, **Alan Breeze**, who was himself, part of Broadcasting History



as the main singer with The Bill Cotton Band show, talking about people using crystal radio sets. He said it was a very basic radio receiver that didn't need any electricity or batteries to work. He even said that people would make them up out of the cardboard inners of a toilet roll and then wire them up with an ariel to receive transmissions. I wasn't sure if he was pulling my leg as he was a great practical joker. The fact is, that these **crystal sets** were indeed the very first means the man in the street had for picking up broadcasts from 2MT. No Digital or DAB's around in those days! These must have been extremely exciting times for all involved and I can visualise many people dreaming up ways of utilising this new technology. Did those early pioneers envisage the advances of today however? 2MT continued broadcasting it's half - hour dosage of entertainment and news programmes for about three years. There were obvious





behind the scene goes on as is usual when predators smell a killing and money is to be made. So, in 1920, with Marconi's company encouraging more people to set up stations around the country, an overall "big brother" organisation came into being to administer such networks on an overall basis. This beast was known as The British Broadcasting Company or BBC as we know it today. To be precise, the



Government of the day did not want Marconi to set this conglomeration up and had in fact opposed his efforts as they perceived a threat from broadcasting information to the masses. It would be true to say that today's politicians would probably also have opposed this as they too, prefer to deal in under handed practises. It is only the media who expose this to the masses and therefore, contribute in a small way to catching some out from time to time, when they have been less than honest in their remits. Eventually, Marconi was granted his broadcasting licence. He signed a deal which would guarantee the broadcast of plays, music and variety shows. This would be paid for by the issuance

with Germany also in 1939 and 2LO became the BBC Home Service during the second World War. It broadcast many legendary shows including "Music while you work" - "Worker's Playtime" - "Desert Island Discs" which is still with us today. It made stars like Forces Sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn, Arthur Askey, and J.B.Priestly, who made many new fans by reading his novel, "Let the people sing". There was even controversy when Wilfred Pickles was allowed to read the news in a Yorkshire accent. Only the Queen's English was heard on the BBC prior to that! Famous names emerged from the evening War Report including Wynford - Vaughan Thomas and the legendary Richard Dimbleby, whose sons are very much at the forefront of broadcasting today. After the war, the BBC launched the Light Programme in July 1945, which was to run nationally and re-introduced six pre-war regional services. For the next 27 years, the Light Programme entertained the nation which such shows as 'Housewives Choice', 'Much binding in the Marsh' starring the hilarious Kenneth Home and Richard Murdoch, 'Mrs. Dale's Diary', a popular children's show 'Listen with Mother' which, if it were on these days would probably be called 'Yo Mo!' and of course 'The Billy Cotton Band Show' which my father sang on for nearly 40 years. He would travel every Saturday to the BBC to film the Saturday evening 'Billy Cotton Band show', then travel back to Flixton in Suffolk afterwards, only to return for the Sunday Radio Broadcast early the next morning. I remember clearly going down with him many times and meeting all the stars of the day including, Tommy Cooper, Bob Hope, Russ Conway, Mrs. Mills and the emerging ones such as Cliff Richard, Joe Brown, Frankie Vaughan and many others. From those innovative and heady days of birth, infancy, teens and beyond years, BBC Radio was given an almighty wake up call in the 1960's to play the brand of music that the youth of the day wanted. When it failed to do so, a number of enterprising people set up off shore Radio Stations, broadcasting from boats, out-

side British Territorial waters. These stations were branded as Pirates by the Labour Government then in power. As they did not have official broadcast licences from the government and as they were actually far more successful in attracting younger listeners than Aunty Beeb, they promptly passed the Marine Broadcasting law in August 1967, stating that these offshore stations would be committing a criminal act if they continued broadcasting. All of them immediately shut down with the exception of Radio Caroline. Following this act of dictatorial might, Radios 1 and 2 were created by the BBC to broadcast Pop Music in its various guises. Radio 1 would be aimed at younger listeners whilst Radio 2 would cover middle of the road music. This did in fact spell the end of what is considered by many to be the most innovative and creative period British Pop and Rock music has ever known. As much as Marconi had difficulty with Politicians in starting Radio at it's inception, so did the Pirates, who tried and succeeded, in offering an alternative to the control freaks in the national broadcasting media and government. These days, it doesn't really matter much because the Internet is a weapon of mass reduction in so far state control over freedom of expression is concerned and it's been a long time coming.

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Michele Breeze



Couple listening to an early crystal set

In the 1920s, the new medium of radio reached millions of people for the first time. Some radio programs provided entertainment, while others presented current news. Advertisers used radio to introduce audiences to their products. Some people realized the educational opportunities that radio offered as well. Radio helped to end the more isolated lifestyle of people living in rural areas. It provided listeners with news reports and often connected them to events around the world as they were happening. Church attendance also declined with the arrival of radio. Many people chose to stay home on Sundays and listen to sermons broadcast on the radio rather than to walk or drive to church. As radio became more popular in the 1920s and 1930s, many companies sponsored radio programs to entertain listeners and to advertise their products. Proctor & Gamble was famous for its Ivory soap. Because of Proctor & Gamble's sponsorship, some radio programs became known as "soap operas."