



COLLECTORS' CORNER

with Alan Pennington at
Ye Olde Hurdy-Gurdy Museum
of Vintage Radio in Howth, near Dublin
© BRITISH DX CLUB



Museum curator, Pat Herbert, whose collection is displayed at Ye Old Hurdy-Gurdy Museum

During the European DX Council (EDXC) conference held in Dublin at the end of August 2009, conference delegates were taken by coach to the coastal village of Howth, where Ye Olde Hurdy-Gurdy Vintage Radio Museum is housed on two floors of an old Martello Tower overlooking the harbour. The coach dropped our party outside the Abbey Tavern in Abbey Street - almost opposite the pub, a steep pathway rises upto the tower housing the museum on Tower Hill.

The museum opened in 2003 following the restoration of the 200 year old tower, which was one of many constructed around the English and Irish coasts as a defence against possible invasion by Napoleon's forces. Pat Herbert was looking for somewhere to house his collection of vintage radios, gramophones, TVs, telephones and related ephemera he had built up over forty years of collecting, and was offered the tower to house part of the collection by Fingal County Council.

The tower already had an interesting radio-related history before being taken over by the museum. In 1852, one of the first submarine telegraph cables connecting Ireland to Britain was laid between Howth and Holyhead, coming ashore on the beach below the Martello Tower which became an important telecommunications centre as a result. In 1903, American radio-pioneer, Lee de Forest demonstrated his wireless telegraphy system at the tower to British Post Office engineers. Communication with another de Forest station at Holyhead was successfully established. But despite de Forest having a more efficient wireless system, the Post Office contract went to the rival Marconi company. In 1905 further British Post Office experiments were made with a Marconi station in the Howth tower receiving signals from the HM Telegraph ship Monarch sailing in the Irish Sea between Scotland, Howth and Holyhead.

The museum gets its name from a comment by former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Seán Lemass who referred to Radio Eireann as “the old hurdy-gurdy” when visiting their studios in Dublin. Today, each visitor to the museum is given a personal tour by Pat (or Tony Breathnach EI5EM who runs an amateur radio station, EI0MAR, from the tower most Sundays mainly using Morse).

The entrance into the museum is up some steps into the first floor of the tower. Ducking through the door is like entering an Aladdin’s cave of colour, sounds and light – in contrast to the grey exterior of the tower. The limited space in the round room is crowded with radios, gramophones, TVs, display cases etc, and the walls covered with posters and advertising signs. Pat greets us as we enter and plays an early recording commemorating Marconi’s transatlantic transmission. The collection covers all ages of radio from early crystal sets through bakelite classics to sixties transistors and novelty radios. We could not really do it justice in the time available!

Pat is particularly proud of a Marconiphone Type 41 Four-Valve set (see behind Pat in photo above) which cost £37-19s-00d including a Marconi Royalty fee of £2-10s - 12s 6d per valve holder - according to the 1925 catalogue (right). The new long wave station 5XX Daventry on 1600 metres had launched in July 1925 and Ireland’s first station in Dublin, 2RN opened in 1926.



R E C E I V E R S

The
Marconiphone
Type 41—FOUR-VALVE MODEL

THIS new four-valve model incorporates the features of the types 21 and 31 models, with the introduction of a high-frequency valve to provide extra range and selectivity, whilst retaining simplicity of operation.

A new type of rejector is also incorporated in this model, which operates on wave-lengths up to 1,800 metres.

Very special attention has been paid to the cabinet finish of this instrument. The high tension battery is enclosed in the cabinet.

A single switch is provided for breaking the High and Low Tension circuits when the instrument is not in use, and for allowing either three or four valves to be employed at will.

SPECIFICATION

Cat. No.	£	s.	d.
B.127. Instrument bare, with Coils to cover B.B.C. range	25	10	0
Royalty	2	10	0
	£28	0	0
<i>Accessories :</i>			
B.428. 2 D.E.5b Valves at 22/6 ..	2	5	0
B.424. 1 D.E.5 Valve ..	1	2	6
B.430. 1 D.E.5a Valve ..	1	6	0
B.528. 1 6-volt 40 amp. L.T. Accumulator ..	2	16	6
B.501. 3 42-volt H.T. Batteries ..	2	2	0
B.251. 1 16-volt Grid Battery ..	0	3	6
B.768. 1 L.T. Lead ..	0	3	6
	£9	19	0
B.147. Instrument complete, with Accessories as listed above and including Royalty ..	£37	19	0

ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENT
Instrument as specified above, but with 2 D.E.S (H.F.), 1 D.E.5 and 1 D.E.5a Valves, and 6-v. L.T. Accumulator.

For extra Coils—See page 22.

On display in a glass case was a pair of rare 1927 Andia speakers, disguised in the form of earthenware parrot ornaments so as not to be as intrusive in the late-1920s sitting-room!

The sign outside the museum pictures a 1945 Ekco A22 – Pat said he had five of the famous bakelite “round Ekcos” in total. These sets were produced in various models between 1934 and 1945 at E. K. Coles’ Southend factory, and are now highly

collectable design icons. Also very collectable was a black and chrome Ekco AC 74 dating from 1933. Other classics included a late 1920s Pye Model 275 with its distinctive rising sun speaker grille and a Pilot Radio (1936 U650?) whose round aeroplane style dial was filled with station names. On mediumwave R. Normandie and Tour Eiffel caught my eye whereas the shortwave band had some stations I had not heard of etched on it e.g. on 49 metres Skamlebak (Denmark) and Bowmanville (Canada) and on 41 metres Drummondville (also Canada I think).



The collection includes a Heathkit Apache transmitter used by the Irish Army UN peace-keeping force in the Congo in 1960. An Irish radio amateur, Terry Tierney, who was working as an engineer across the border in Ginga, Uganda had heard a CQ call with an Irish accent on 7 MHz coming from the Irish Army base in Goma, Congo. He learnt the Army could not operate above 10 MHz with the equipment they had, so contact with their HQ in Dublin

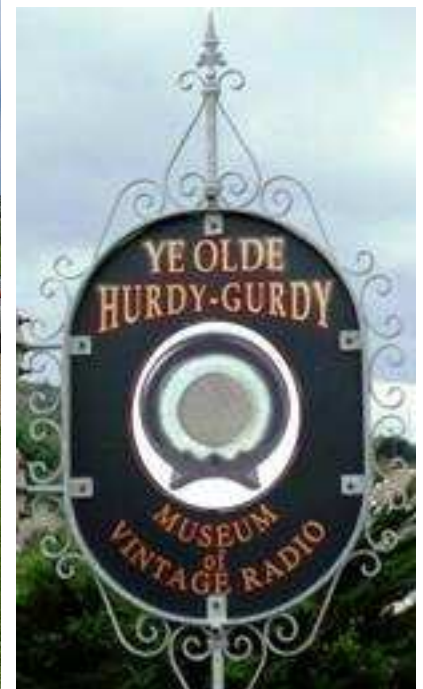
was almost impossible. So he built and transported the 28 MHz transmitter the 500 km to the Uganda-Congo border where he handed it over to the UN Irish Army, and received Irish biscuits, tea and some petrol to get him back to Ginga. Full story at: <http://ei5em.110mb.com/niemba.html>

Downstairs in the basement of the tower was a further room of radio and local history exhibits but after a brief viewing we left to make room for others to enter the museum and after signing Pat's guest book and leaving a donation for the museum, made our way down to the Abbey Tavern and coach, vowing to return to the museum if in the Dublin area again.

The museum has a website, <http://ei5em.110mb.com/museum.html> where you can view a slide show of the museum and also download a booklet about the museum and its history.



The museum is open daily May to October and on Saturday & Sunday only November to April from 11am to 4pm. Admission: €5. Howth can be reached by DART trains from Dublin City centre.



Above: 1805 Martello tower at Howth, home of Ye Olde Hurdy-Gurdy Vintage Radio Museum with (left to right) Jonathan Murphy (Cork), Toshi Ohtake (Japan), Alan Pennington and Mike & Christine Terry (UK).