

# Marconi and Fort Burgoyne

Barry O'Brien – Dover Tales



*Guglielmo Marconi Inventor and Engineer who developed, demonstrated and marketed the first successful long-distance wireless telegraph.*

Many of us are aware that East Kent and the “pioneer of wireless,” Marconi, are inextricably linked.

With the Italian government unconvinced by Marconi's inventions and propositions, he brought them instead to England where his family had significant established contacts; his mother, Annie, was from Wexford in Ireland and was a member of the Jameson's Whiskey family.

Signor Guglielmo Marconi went on to successfully demonstrate the first ‘over-the-sea’ communication, which he achieved between the South Foreland lighthouse and the East Goodwin lightship on December 24th, 1898; this was also the first occasion on which wireless was used within a British lighthouse.

Three months later, on March 27th 1899, Marconi achieved the first international wireless message between Britain and Europe, linking across the English Channel

from Wimereux, in France, to the South Foreland lighthouse.

By 11th April, three stations, at East Goodwin, South Foreland and Wimereux, were involved in successful trials to establish multi station communication. With sufficient progress having been achieved South Foreland was able to communicate with East Goodwin without a single dot being received by Wimereux.

The Marconi Company used the South Foreland lighthouse again in September, 1925, for an experimental transmission of a radio guidance system and the story continues.

But what has all this to do with Fort Burgoyne? Only 16 months prior to Marconi's success at South Foreland his relationship with the British General Post Office, GPO, his main benefactors until that point, had significantly soured, primarily as a consequence of his having formed a private company The Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company, founded by Marconi in July 1897.

As a consequence of these actions, which, effectively, reclaimed Marconi's patent on wireless telegraphy, the Engineer-in-Chief at the GPO, William Preece, established a series of tests designed to build on those discoveries but with neither the knowledge of nor the benefit of advice from Marconi.

Writing to the Admiralty on Sept 7th 1897, Preece invited their representative to witness these tests, advising them, in the process, that in the light of Marconi's recent commercial actions “the results of

these further experiments should not be made public". Clearly the GPO and, in turn, the British Government, were aggrieved.



*William Henry Preece  
Engineer-in-Chief at the GPO*

The tests began with the transmitting equipment, modelled on Marconi's own, located within a casemate at Fort Burgoyne and despite Preece's request for secrecy, the press was soon reporting that

secret tests were being undertaken from Fort Burgoyne toward South Foreland, all of which soon made Marconi fully aware of the GPO's actions/intentions.

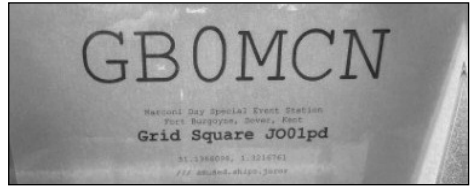
Within weeks it had become apparent to both Preece and his opposite number at The Admiralty, that they were unable to repeat the earlier successes of Marconi's experiments and an invitation was duly issued for Giuliermo himself to visit Dover and assist in any way he felt able to offer.

Marconi arrived at Fort Burgoyne on Wednesday October 6th 1897 and was soon able not only to improve on the results of the GPO's experiments but also those of his own earlier explorations.

The relationship between Marconi and the British Government, however, never truly recovered which did little to prevent Marconi's continued progress and success, so much so that International Marconi Day, a 24-hour amateur radio event, is now held annually to celebrate the career of communications pioneer, Guglielmo Marconi. The event taking place on the

Saturday closest to the inventor's birthday, April 25th.

This year's celebration was held on April 22nd 2023 and a licensed station was established for the day at Fort Burgoyne using the call sign GB0MCN thereby re-establishing the Fort's connections with Marconi.



*Marconi Day Transmitter Licence 2023*

Our OFCOM licence ran from 12:00-17:00 and, having arrived on site at 09:45, the aerial and transmitter were all in place by 10:45 ready for a prompt start.

As the event coincided with Earth Day this year, an annual event held to demonstrate support for environmental protection, our station was powered entirely by a battery which had been charged by a combination of solar panels and wind turbine. The only mains electricity used on the day was to boil a kettle!



*Marconi Day 2023*



*Marconi Day Fort Burgoyne 2023*

It was also noticeable that Fort Burgoyne's relative remoteness gave rise to a lack of electrical interference such as would have been anticipated in a modern town centre.

Our first contact came at 12:28 BST, ironically from Finland, the furthest point we had contact from all day, a distance of some 1400 miles.

In all, over a period of 4 hours we achieved 78 contacts from Eire to Germany, Finland to Spain, Folkestone to Co. Durham and Braintree to Malmesbury including someone who once worked for the Marconi Company and another who delighted in telling us how much, whenever he came through Dover, he enjoyed sitting on top of the cliffs a while watching the port traffic come and go before boarding a ferry himself.

There were also several contacts from Belgium and France as well as from Souter Lighthouse Tyne & Wear; we also had a good long chat with Amberley Museum in Sussex.

After a much-needed cup of tea followed by a prolonged silence from the receiver, it was decided to cease transmissions for this year a little after 16:00 and we had cleared the site by 17:00.

Fort Burgoyne's association with Marconi had, though, been fully restored and people from all over Europe made aware of that association.

Plans are already afoot to celebrate Marconi Day 2024 at Fort Burgoyne as well as further afield.

Marconi was the shared winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for Physics in 1909 for his contributions to wireless telegraphy; he was also credited as sending the first radio transmission across the Atlantic Ocean, in 1901.



*Signor Guglielmo and Mrs Beatrice Marconi  
1910 Portrait*