

STOKESLEY PROBUS CLUB

Speaker Notes – Jack Brunton Room at Stokesley Town Hall Tuesday 17th June 2025 at 10.00am

The Chairman was very pleased to introduce Colin Hatton to present his talk, “Those Were the Days – Recalling the Golden Age of the Wireless. Part 1: History, Memories and Anecdotes”.

Colin is no stranger to the Club this being his fourth visit to present talks. A retired mechanical engineer, Colin worked extensively on petro-chemical and iron & steel plant designs.

Having a keen interest in history, Colin has written a book and had many articles on local history published in “Now and Then” magazine.

Colin started by giving a run down on the birth of radio, which had its origins in 1887 when radio waves were discovered, and the possibility of communication was realised. In Italy, Guglielmo Marconi (1874 - 1937) was experimenting with transmission of radio waves, and moved to the UK to develop his ideas. He linked up with the Post Office and the Royal Mail who shared his vision and funded the research. After two years of development, in 1922 the first radio broadcast was transmitted around Europe from Marconi House in The Strand. The BBC was established in the same year, and under John Reith, the first general manager, a radio service was launched. The first programme broadcast was Women's Hour.

Further development was swift, and radio rapidly took off:

1923 - The first transatlantic wireless broadcast was transmitted.

September 1923 – The Radio Times first published.

December 2023 – Big Ben striking first broadcast to mark the hours.

December 2023 – the “Pips” introduced as accurate time signal

1923 – Wireless Licence introduced, cost 7s and 6p (Television licence followed in 1946).

1924 – First radio communication between UK and Australia.

1925 – After only three years radio listeners had grown to ten million.

John Logie Baird proved in 1926 that moving pictures could be transmitted, and the principle of television was established. After much development the first television broadcast was transmitted by the BBC from Crystal Palace in 1936.

During WW2 television broadcasting was suspended, and radio became an essential source of news, propaganda to aid the war effort, and morale boosting messaging together with popular entertainment programmes that helped keep spirits from dipping.

Undoubtedly, the most historic of all announcements made on UK radio was on 3rd September 1939 when Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared that the nation was in a state of war with Germany. A following statement from King George VI was also broadcast on the radio.

The principle of using radio waves to detect objects was realised, and UK scientists developed a war changing technology, radar. This was very quickly introduced and used to intercept enemy planes and limit the effects of bombing by the superior air power of Germany's Luftwaffe.

Early radio programmes included Children's Hour, Weather Forecast, the News, and Children's Hour from which it is understood that the epithet "Auntie" was derived. New programmes covering a wide range of subject were first introduced in the 1920's. The FA Cup Final, the Boat Race, rugby matches, and test match cricket all proved very popular. Also, music programmes had a wide following such as The Proms, the BBC Dance Orchestra with Jack Paine, later Henry Wood and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, considered one of the best in its day.

Rapidly expanding, the BBC opened the purpose-built Broadcasting House in Langham Place in 1932. This is where the golden age of BBC radio was born. Originally just the Home Service, other channels were introduced to cater for the growing demand for a broad range of programmes and the Light Programme and the Third Programme were subsequently added.

Some of the most popular programmes of the era were ITMA (It's That Man Again) with Tony Hanley and Dorothy Summers, Band Waggon with Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch, Life with the Lyons, Have a Go with Wilfred Pickles, The Good Old Days, Music While You Work, Much Binding in the Marsh with Richard Murdoch and Kenneth Horne, Charlie Chan, and many more. Desert Island Discs with Roy Plumley was first broadcast in 1941, and the format has proved so popular through the decades that the programme continues today.

Interestingly, and in contrast to the celebrities of today, during radio's golden age all the radio stars were household names, well known on the radio but little recognised in public.

Following several questions and thanks from the Chairman for a fascinating and very unique presentation, Members expressed their thanks and appreciation to Colin in the customary manner with a hearty round of applause.

JE 17.6.25