

Marconi Portland Bill, 23rd April 2005.

Portland Bill – 1900/1905.

Overlooking the sea close to the Bill, small gangs of quarrymen knelt in a line, with their backs bent over flaw lines in the stone layer surmounting the cliffs. Their hammers rang in perfect time to their chants and tunes as slowly bit-by-bit they drove steel wedges deep into the ageless rock, waiting for the stone to split in perfect line and size. Close by, the fishermen returned with their catch and the farmer tended his land and flocks; these were the men of Portland, their lives unchanged for generations. How far away and remote the rest of the British Empire must have seemed to them, but the world was soon to appear much closer.

It was a time of change; there were already other men at the Bill, Lighthouse Men and Lloyds and Coastguard Officers but now the Royal Navy had arrived to introduce a new technology to it's sea-going needs - Wireless Telegraphy!

During the late 1890's Marconi conducted many experiments using Wireless Techniques to send Morse code messages between Mainland England and the Isle of Wight and also ships off shore. Marconi's most recognised feat came to the fore during 1901 when against all believed odds he successfully demonstrated the first Transatlantic Transmission of wireless signals from the Lizard in Cornwall to Newfoundland.

Marconi was a businessman and he quickly embarked on producing wireless equipment and supplying it to such agencies as the Admiralty for Ship to Ship and Ship to Shore communications. In late 1900 a Marconi spark transmitter and receiver was installed in one of the Cottages at Portland Bill and in 1907 it was recorded that the station successfully communicated with a similar system installed in the Naval facilities at Gibraltar.

The South Dorset Radio Society (SDRS) has for many years supported an annual event associated with celebrating these early Marconi achievements and on St Georges Day 23rd April 2005 the South Dorset Radio Society, together with the assistance of other Groups in the area are planning to mark the historic events on Portland with an exhibition of Marconi Wireless related equipment at the Bill, together with a modern operational Amateur Radio Station. The Station will be in communication with many other similar Participating Marconi Stations throughout the world, including Gibraltar if conditions are favourable.

If there is anyone interested in any historic issue relating to Portland Bill then please come along and talk to us. It need not necessarily be about wireless as many of us would love to hear of the times of the quarries, of the families who lived there and their customs.

Robert Hodges, G0RYL

South Dorset Radio Society