HAROLD ROBIN

Harold Kilner Robin was born at Streatham on May 7 1911. His father owned a large gas mantle factory. The boy was sent to Oundle and then studied electrical engineering and radio communications at the City and Guilds College in London.

His first job in 1933 was at the Standard Telephone Company’s laboratories, where he adapted American radios for use in Britain. After three years he moved to Philco, another American firm. The company’s sales manager, Richard Gambier-Parry, introduced him to Richard Hope, a young man who had acquired a concession to operate a radio station in Liechtenstein.

Robin installed the transmitter at Yaduz and set up a direct radio link with Hope in London. On August 29 1939, when the telephone system, was in chaos, Hope was able to send a radio message warning Robin to return instantly to London.

Gambier-Parry, who was now in charge of the Secret Intelligence Service’s wireless operations, soon summoned Robin to Whaddon Hall near Bletchley in Buckinghamshire. From there he was drawn into Sefton Delmer’s schemes.

The Atlantiksender and Soldatensender stations were closed down on April 30 1945. Robin recorded the last two days’ broadcasts, which are now kept at the Imperial War Museum.

Aspidistra and the short wave Atlantiksender however , continued to be used for the BBC external services and later the BBC World Service, and was not closed until September 1982 . Robin himself pressing the “Off” button for the last time.

After the war, in 1946, Robin became chief engineer to the Diplomatic Wireless Service (DWS) again under Gambier-Parry. When Harold Wilson wanted a radio station in Botswana to broadcast to Rhodesia after Ian Smith’s Declaration of Independence, he was t first told the project would take six months. Robins had a transmitter running within three weeks.

In the 1950’s he invented an efficient means of transmitting text through keyed tones on a device called Piccolo, from its characteristic sound. But his plans to build a mobile relay station on antiaircraft carrier never came to fruition.

Robins retired from DWS in 1971, but remained as energetic as ever. He set up a new company Alegawatt Engineering to build high-powered transmitters in Dubai and Jordon. But the Jordan transmitter never operated on full power and the company was closed.

Robin discovered a new hobby in astronomy and built an 18 in telescope and observatory at the bottom his garden in Tunbridge Wells, ingeniously using bits of salvaged machinery. He eventually donated his telescope to Sussex university, making it available for public use.

He was appointed CBE in 1971.

His wife, Tilly, whom he married in 1946 predeceased him by 10 months.