

KING'S STANDING TRANSMITTER STATION AT CROWBOROUGH

The Nightingale Hospital in London was put up by great speed by the Armed Services in expectation of its use during the coronavirus pandemic and it was an outstanding feat of what just can be done in an emergency.

But of course during World War II, there were also great feats of engineering and as we have celebrated VE Day 75 years ago, it seems an appropriate time to mention the King's Standing Transmitter Station based at Duddleswell (on the way to Crowborough).



Harold
Robin

Harold Robin* who died at the age of 87 was a brilliant technician, and he was responsible during the Second World War for the transmission of black propaganda broadcasts to Germany. He was the boffin who ensured that British black propaganda broadcasts to Nazi Germany sounded just like the real thing. (photo 1)

From May 1941 to October 1942, Sefton Delmar** organised the Political Warfare Executive, broadcasts purporting to be from Gustav Siegfried Eins, a branch of the German Army's Signals. In fact the broadcasts came from Wavendon in Bedfordshire, where Harold Robin had installed the necessary facilities.

The programme succeeded in catching German attention by a mixture of lascivious stories and crude anti-British propaganda; Winston Churchill for example, was described as "a flat footed bastard son of a drunken old Jew". Having thus gained the confidence of his audience, Sefton Delmar was able to deliberate on the incompetence of the Fuhrer's advisers, who were also accused of all manner of sexual perversions.

Gustav Siegfried Eins came to a dramatic end in October 1942 when the Gestapo supposedly burst in and machine-gunned the announcer to shouts of 'Schweinhund'. The real cause of the

- Harold worked as an electrical engineer for Standard Telephone and then Philco before building a radio transmitter in Lichtenstein

** Sefton was born in Germany but educated in England. As a journalist he was able with his German connections, to infiltrate the Nazi hierarchy.

programme's demise however was that Sefton Delmer had had bigger plans in view.

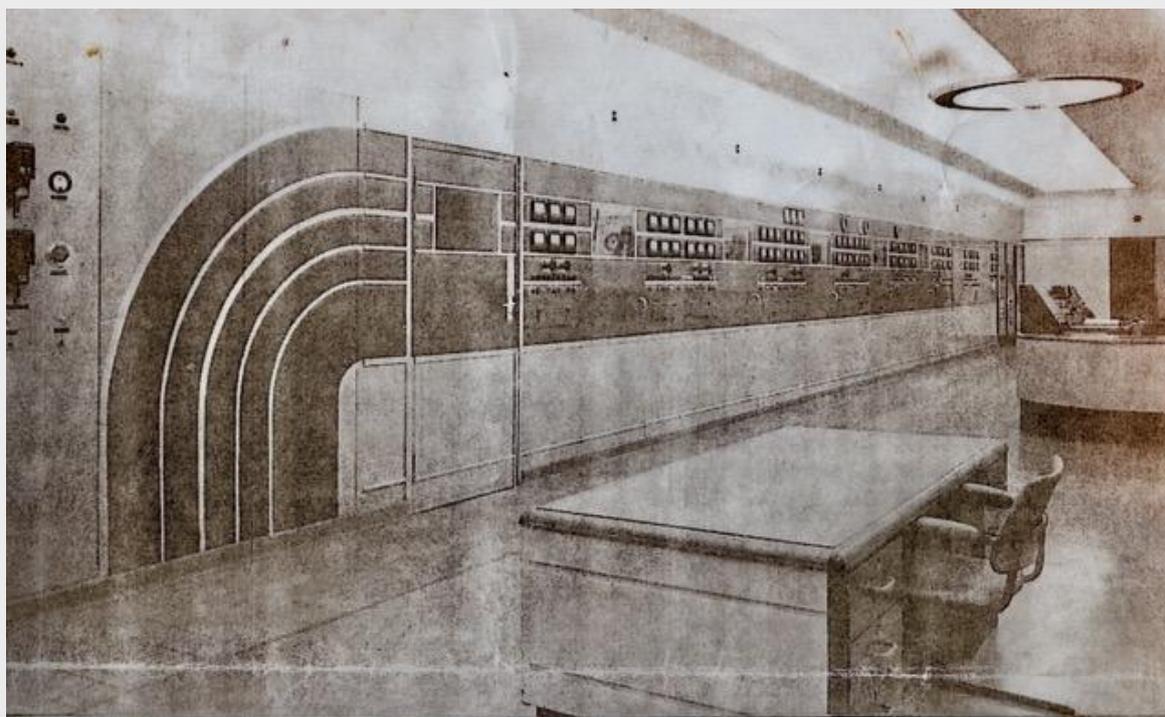
In the summer of 1941 Harold Robin had been sent to America with a blank cheque to buy the biggest transmitter capable of reaching the German people directly on medium wave frequencies. He paid £165,000 for this monster, the biggest transmitter in the world, accordingly named Aspidistra after Gracie Field's song 'The Biggest Aspidistra in the World'. It was shortened to ASPI and later code named ASPI 1 and subsequent transmitters were numbered consecutively.

A new studio complex was built at Milton Bryan in Bedfordshire, and it had been intended to install Aspidistra there too. But Harold Robin insisted that the transmitter should be as close to Europe as possible. A 70-acre site was eventually found close to Duddleswell on the Ashdown Forest 620ft above sea level.

It took six weeks for 600 members of the Canadian Army's roadbuilding unit working under Robin's directions to dig a hole big enough for Aspidistra and her operators at Kings Standing near Crowborough, Sussex.

But it was not until nine months later that the transmitter was operational. (photo 2)

On November 8 1942 Aspidistra broadcast a speech delivered in French by President Roosevelt's nephew in support of the Torch



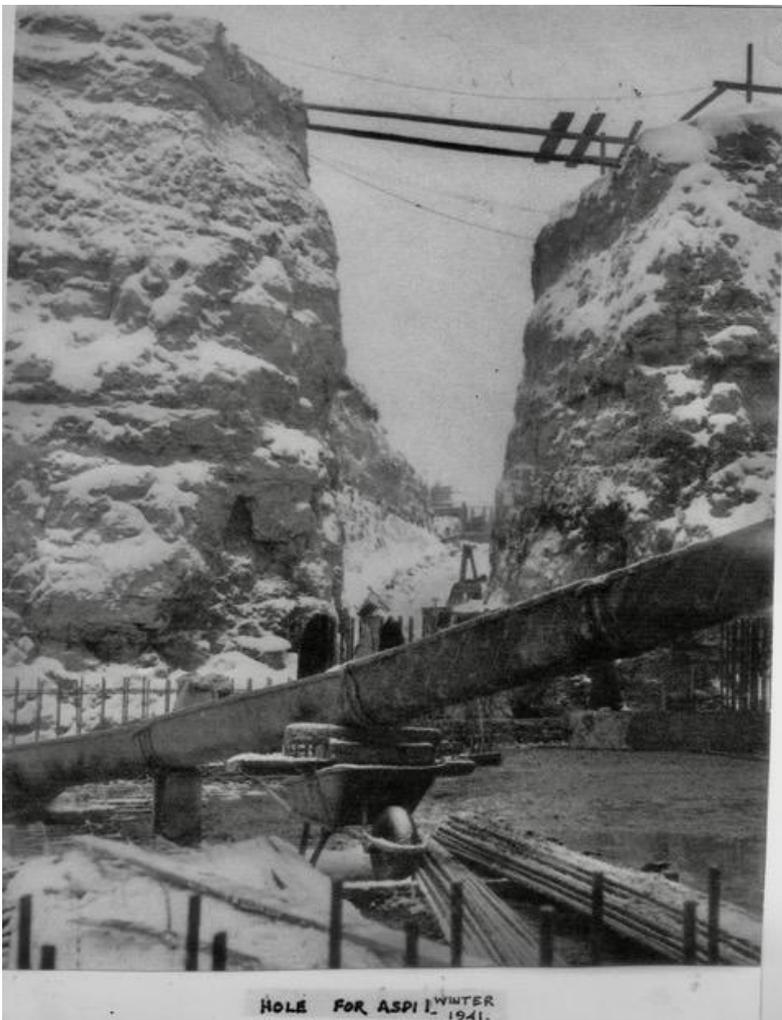
Aspidistra, the biggest medium-wave transmitter in the world when it began to beam fake radio programmes to the enemy in 1942

Landings in North Africa. But, as the Admiralty had not been informed that the broadcast was being made on the wavelength used by the Vichy-controlled radio in Rabat, it was mistakenly deduced that Rabat was already in American hands.

Though Aspidistra had originally been purchased for Sefton Delmer's purposes, a dispute with the BBC had been settled by an agreement that the transmitter would be used for the BBC's European Service. So when Delmer launched a new series of black propaganda on February 4 1943, it had to be broadcast from a short-wave transmitter which Robin had installed.

The name chosen for the new station was Deutsche Kurzwellensender Atlantik, or German Short-wave Radio Atlantic. The station abbreviated to Atlantiksender, was aimed chiefly at U-Boats.

To aid the deception, German military music was specially recorded by the band of the Royal Marines in the Albert Hall, and the embassy in Stockholm sent copies of the latest hit records in the Fatherland. There was even a "Sailors' Sweetheart" called Vicky. The studio at Milton Bryan would burst into laughter as Robin switched from Vicky's birthday greeting to a recording of one of Hitler's latest speeches. The temptation to poke fun at the Fuhrer on air, however, was sternly resisted.



Though the Nazis immediately rumbled Atlantiksender, they could not prevent German soldiers and sailors listening. The station put it about that German prisoners of war were working for large salaries in America.

The photo left and on the next page show the vast hole which had to be dug in the winter of 1941 to house Aspidistra.



The next photos show aerial views of the site and probably there will be DPHS members who might remember the masts which were at the Old Radio Station.



Top left: aerial view
Above: view of transmitter masts
Left: man scaling a mast

After the War the site became important during the Cold War and it was reinforced with concrete etc so that it could withstand a nuclear attack. One of the entrances was large enough to accommodate a double-decker bus to take the British Government underground to its secret bunker.

After three months, when it was thought to be safe "someone" was chosen to poke their head out and test what was going on.

Jill Rolfe, who was then Secretary of the DPHS arranged 5 visits for members to visit the Nuclear Bunker which was then used by the Police as a Police Training Centre. On entering the Bunker a vast and extremely heavy metal door clanged behind you and there was no escape. It was a bit creepy. The first place we came to was the boiler room housing vast machines to operate all systems to sustain life for three months and you had to virtually bend double and creep along between the machines and afterwards we came to metal landings and stairs which had to be negotiated. This took us on to all sorts of rooms. Outside we saw where the police train for riots etc and use petrol bombs, and we had to make sure we were very careful.

One of the Society's visits had to be cancelled as the day before there had been a summer cloudburst and storm and the boiler room was flooded. It appears the bunker could withstand a nuclear attack, but not the British weather.

These visits took place in the summer during the evenings, and you had to be fit, agile and active to be able to take part, as the visits lasted about two hours. There were two members, the Rev. Bruce Hayler and his wife Diana who were most anxious to attend but it was not safe for them to do so. Jill mentioned this to one of the Police Officers who immediately said they would make special arrangements for Bruce and Diana and the visit was arranged for an afternoon so that if they got stuck there were plenty of police around to help them out. Both Bruce and Diana remembered the site being constructed as they used to ride their horses over the Forest but absolutely no-one at all ever made any comment, it was known to be top-secret and everyone kept to that unwritten code.

If there are any members around who went on one of these visits and has photos, we would be very interested to see them.

Jill Rolfe

