

From a Tourist to a Visitor

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During spring break I had the opportunity to spend a week in Cambridge, England. Cambridge is home to the University of Cambridge, one of the oldest universities in the world, and has many famous sites such as King's College Chapel along with some fine museums.

For a techno-geek like me, the Cavendish Laboratory was a major attraction. The Cavendish Lab opened in 1874 with James Clerk Maxwell as the first director. Maxwell, of course, gave us Maxwell's equations that led to the recognition of light as an electromagnetic wave and the work of Heinrich Hertz that's the foundation of our hobby! And where would we be without the electron – discovered in the Cavendish by JJ Thomson.

Seeing the sights is pretty cool but in preparing for the trip I wondered how much cooler it could be to connect with some British hams. A little sleuthing turned up the Cambridge University Wireless Society (CUWS). To make a long story short, Martin Atherton, G3ZAY (Figure 1), became my host and I got quite a peek at the activities of the radio club. CUWS has been around a bit longer than GARS. It was founded in 1920 and counts several Nobel Prize winners amongst its past members.

Martin, although now retired from British Telecom, is a graduate of Emmanuel College, one of the 31 colleges that make up the University. So before getting down to any radio business he first gave my wife & me a private guided tour of his college. But after that it was off to the CUWS "shack." The club has occupied a number of sites since its founding including a location on the grounds of the Cavendish Laboratory. However, they were just recently evicted from the lab (something about radio frequency interference...). In any event, CUWS has a new location, a new building (a work in progress), that's just outside of the town on a university-operated farm (Figure 2).



Martin Atherton, G3ZAY, seated at the HF position in the Cambridge University Wireless Association station. The club membership consists of students, alumni, and other hams from Cambridge and the surrounding areas. The club station is relatively new and the interior is still under construction.



A farm tractor passes by one of the two towers adjacent to the CUWS radio building. The club was relocated to this new site after running into interference issues at the world renowned Cavendish Laboratory.

As a club they're pretty much into all-bands, all-modes, and their antenna farm includes two towers, one a 65-foot crank-up tower along with HF, VHF, & UHF beams, and wires for the low bands. Rather uniquely, the club doesn't offer regularly scheduled meetings. Since many of the members are students, and extraordinarily busy, they instead meet informally at the local Maypole Pub each Thursday evening at 8:00 PM. This isn't to say that they never hold meetings! Occasionally the club hosts special presentations which take place at an alternative venue.

After the college and the shack, Martin drove us out to the Mullard Radio Telescope Observatory. This is the antenna site where Antony Hewish's graduate student Jocelyn Bell first detected pulsars; and Martin Ryle worked out long-baseline interferometry for high-resolution imaging of radio sources. Both Hewish and Ryle (G3CY) received Nobel prizes for their efforts. Following the afternoon with Mar-

tin – Atherton, not Ryle -- the next day I switched back into tourist mode for another round of sight-seeing; but that day was also a Thursday which, of course, meant the gathering at the Maypole Pub.



N4TRB (wearing hat) with a handful of CUWS members at the Maypole Pub. The university was between sessions so quite a few students were away from school.

So on Thursday evening my wife & I indulged in the quintessential British tradition and met the CUWS crew at the Maypole for dinner and conversation. The chief topic was their upcoming Islands on the Air (IOTA) expedition to the Isle of Aaran. The club discussed their plans to operate as G3PYE/P from this little island off the west coast of Scotland in the Firth of Clyde. Unfortunately that evening was to be our last in Cambridge and after a few hours of talk we walked back to our bed & breakfast accommodations. Although reluctant to leave I was grateful for the ham radio connection through which we were transformed from mere tourists into visitors.