



# The Internet is a Wonderful Thing!

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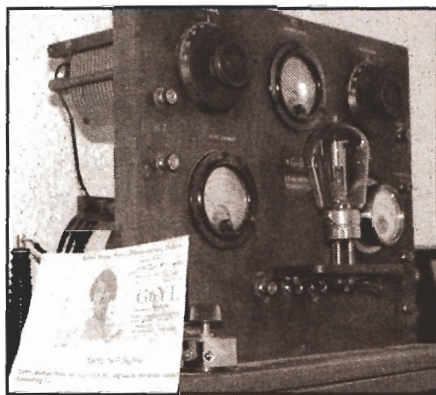
**I**t all started with a visit to the Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB). In April, 2007, I was fortunate to be assigned by my employer to conduct some training in our London office; and even more fortunately, my schedule included a couple of free days. Being interested (to put it mildly) in the history of radio, I made arrangements to visit the National Amateur Radio Museum<sup>1</sup> at the RSGB headquarters in Potters Bar.

Thanks to the Internet I was able to correspond with Vicky Keep, RSGB Receptionist, to learn that the museum was open only two days per week, Monday and Thursday. Monday matched my day off. So I made an appointment to visit.

On the appointed day, I took the tube (subway) to Kings Cross Station (made famous by the Harry Potter movies) where I caught the train out to Potters Bar. RSGB HQ is about a mile from the rail station. So I dodged English showers for the short walk. Upon arrival I was greeted by John Crabbe, G3WFM, curator of the museum. John was incredibly patient and gave me a wonderful briefing on many of the sets.<sup>2</sup> The whole visit was a thrill and I had the chance to hear a World War II era National HRO receiver and feel the incredibly smooth tuning of the legendary precision worm drive.

One special highlight of the visit was seeing a transmitter owned by Barbara Dunn, G6YL. Back in 1927, Ms. Dunn became the first licensed woman operator in the United Kingdom. The museum owns her single triode tuned-plate-tuned-grid (TPTG) transmitter and has it on display along with a QSL card (Figure 1). The transmitter is a beautiful specimen of the times with its tube mounted front-and-center amongst the controls and meters. It didn't take too much imagination to see the triode glowing softly and pulsating in time with a CW signal.

A few weeks after making lots of notes and photographs at the museum, I started researching many of the rigs that caught my fancy, and that's where the



**Figure 1: The Tuned-Plate-Tuned-Grid transmitter owned by Barbara Dunn, G6YL, in the National Amateur Radio Museum of the Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB).**

story gets interesting. I did an Internet search on G6YL and came across several terrific websites.<sup>3</sup> One site reproduced her autobiographical note from the *Spark Gap Times*.<sup>4</sup> The Internet is a wonderful thing. After standing before Ms. Dunn's historic transmitter I was able to pull up her autobiography with just a few keystrokes.

Barbara Dunn got her start in Amateur Radio after becoming curious about the "rasping" interference from spark stations on her family's broadcast receiver. So she taught herself Morse code. The whole story is worth reading, but I'll highlight just one further excerpt: her code examination in 1927.

"At my Morse test, the examiner

gave me a column from "The Times" newspaper and asked me to send it in Morse. This I proceeded to do, but very soon he stopped me because I was putting in all the brackets, colons and semi-colons, etc., etc., which he told me amateurs never used. He only wanted full stops and commas, and notes of interrogation and exclamation! So I started off again. Then he sent to me at 12 words per minute, which I wrote down correctly with no trouble. He said I had come through with "flying colors," and far better than most of the men. Then he said he would like to send faster and see how I got on. He sent at 25 words per minute and I copied correctly, so he was quite satisfied."

In addition to the autobiographical note, my Internet search turned up another hit that proved quite fruitful. It seems that a G6YL QSL card had recently been offered for sale on the eBay auction web site. The sale had closed with no buyer. So I sifted out the seller's contact information and asked him to re-post the G6YL card. This he did and I came away with an original 1937 Barbara Dunn QSL card (Figure 2).

The card confirms a contact from her residence in Felton, on the east coast of England, just south of the border with Scotland (thank you Google Earth). The other station was W8KYY, Leo Yob, in Massillon, Ohio. They communicated on 10 Meters, with G6YL running 6 to 10 watts of input power. She had moved on from the TPTG and was then using an Ultraudion.

The sunspots were obviously cooperating in 1937 (a fact confirmed with yet another Internet search!). On the reverse side of the card, Ms. Dunn records some of her recent activity. Not every word is legible, but enough is readable to be envious:

"DX QSOs are on 28 mc. with 6 to 10 watts input: Worked 41 countries. W. A. C. [and] W. B. E. [Worked British Empire] 4 times. Twice in 10 days in 1936.

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To Radio W8KYY  
 Ur Sigs had wrkd at 1440-1505 G.M.T.  
 Date Dec. 3rd 1937 O.S.A. 5  
 O.R.K. 9  
 Note Mod. c.c. Band 10

**G6YL**

1st G.Y.L. Station (1927)  
 Transmitters—Split Hurley  
T.P.T.G.  
 Receiver—Loose Coupled Circuit, O-V-I  
A.C. Aerial—Herts. Please Q.S.L.  
50 W. High W-5  
**BARBARA DUNN—YL.**  
**OWNER-OPERATOR—G6YL.**  
 R.S.G.B. A.R.R.L. S.S.A. R.E.F.  
 (U.K.) W.B.E. } 16mc. v 28mc  
 H.B.E. W.A.C. } 6 to 10 watt

Figure 2: This QSL card confirms a 1937 contact between G6YL on the east coast of Great Britain with W8KYY in Massillon, Ohio. The contact took place on 10 Meters with G6YL running 9 watts of input power. The sunspots were certainly cooperating in 1937.



Figure 3: W8KYY, Leo Yob, appears in this 1950s newspaper clipping. W8KYY was on one end of the 1937 QSO with G6YL. In the photo, W8KYY appears standing on the far right. Photograph courtesy of The Massillon Evening Independent.

Worked all districts U. S. A. (8 W5s, 15 W6s, 18 W9s) VE 2, 3, 4, 5 (4 VE3s), 5 LUs [Argentina], 9 PYs [Brazil], 2 VUs [India], 4 U[?], 3 VS6s [Hong Kong], 4 ZEs [Rhodesia], 5 ZTs [South Africa], PK3, CN, FA, FB, 4Zs, SU [Egypt], ST [Sudan] (1st G/ST 10 Meters contact) (1st G/PY 10 Meter contact) ZB etc. etc.  
 Never enough eh, OM. You can always QRQ...."

And what about W8KYY? Did I mention that the Internet is a wonderful thing? Searching on W8KYY turned up a newspaper clipping on the Massillon Amateur Radio Club website<sup>5</sup> that included a photograph of W8KYY. The photograph dates from the 1950s when the Ohio club sought meeting space in the town firehouse (Figure 3).

So a spark of curiosity ignited by a historic transmitter in a far-off museum made it possible to learn about an extraordinary woman, her TPTG transmitter, and discover something about both parties to a QSO that happened 70 years ago. The Internet is a wonderful thing!

<sup>1</sup><http://www.rsgb.org/rsgbinfo/narm.php>, 22 October 2007.  
<sup>2</sup>Additional photographs and details about my visit to the RSGB museum may be viewed on my website: <http://www.gladlylearn.com/AmateurRadio/RSGB/RSGB.htm>  
<sup>3</sup>For instance: <http://hamgallery.com/Tribute/G6YL/>, 22 October 2007.  
<sup>4</sup><http://hamgallery.com/Tribute/G6YL/sparkgaptimes.pdf>, 22 October 2007.  
<sup>5</sup><http://www.marcradio.org/history.htm>, 22 October 2007.

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