

The Reading and District Amateur Radio Club

The Reading and District Amateur Radio Club, RADARC, recently won the National Club of the Year Award for the second time. Club chairman Vin Robinson G4JTR and publicity officer Pete Milton G8FRC give some history and explain what it is that they believe sets RADARC apart as a rather special club.

2014 sees RADARC in its 80th year. The first record of the club appears in the December 1934 *T&R Bulletin*, where **Gerald Marcuse G2NM**, the County Representative for Berkshire, announced that he was holding monthly meetings with other members in the Reading District. Apart from a brief period of inactivity during WWII, the club has remained continuously active since then. A members' list for 1935 shows 27 members with visitors such as **Leslie McMichael G2FG** attending. The club also has a logbook from club

member **Bill Wright G8KJ** with all his contacts from 1937 until close down in September 1939. This includes all the active callsigns in the greater Reading area, many of whom were members. The club also has all his received QSL cards from that time, a great resource for research.

Soon after September 3rd 1939, Gerald Marcuse and **Lord Sandhurst** of the MI5 Radio Security Service (RSS) spoke to a gathering of amateurs in Reading to ask if any were prepared to become Volunteer Interceptors (VIs).

Many volunteered and worked for many months before most were called up. Two members became part of the official RSS intercept station SCU3 at Hanslope Park, Buckinghamshire.

Fig. 1 is a very rare view of one of the general search banks at Hanslope Park where RADARC member **Ted Handcocks G5HN** spent several years until 1946. The banks of three HROs and coil packs will bring back memories to many. There is more about the work of VIs on the secret listeners website. www.secretlisteners.org

RADARC became active again during 1944 and up to 20, many in uniform, attended meetings. With the end of hostilities and the return of some amateur bands in 1946, RADARC held the first post war hamfest, **Fig. 2**, in a large hall in the town. Well over 50 people attended. RADARC has always been a large club and similar activities throughout the 1950s and 1960s were well supported. The DF hunt shown in **Fig. 3** is typical of a well-supported event in the early 1950s.

More Recently

The 1970s and 80s saw the development of VHF and UHF repeaters. The Berkshire Downs Repeater Group (BDRG), which later became the Thames Valley Repeater group (TVRG), was formed and included club chairman **Chris Young G4CCC**, members **Andrew Barrett G8DOR**, **Ian Livesey G8NXJ** and others. The first local repeater was GB3BK on UHF channel RB6 (later RB11) and started in October 1977 at Upper Basildon. Currently, TVRG runs 70cm repeaters GB3BN near Bracknell and GB3AW at Ashmansworth, south of Newbury. 2m repeaters include GB3RD near Aldworth on the Berkshire Downs and the MB7JU APRS node at Bracknell. RADARC has supported these through donations and frequent usage by members.

RADARC has been meeting at the Woodley Pavilion Community and Sports centre, Woodford Park, Haddon Road, Woodley, Berkshire on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month for the last 24 years. This has been a stable base from which to grow the club and its activities. In 1990 RADARC decided to try to win HF National Field Day (NFD) and did. From 1991 to 1994 RADARC won the Open section of HF NFD for four consecutive years. This was a remarkable achievement, driven by a very dynamic chairman, **John Linford G3WGV**.

To mark this achievement, RADARC sponsored the RSGB's QRP Shield for

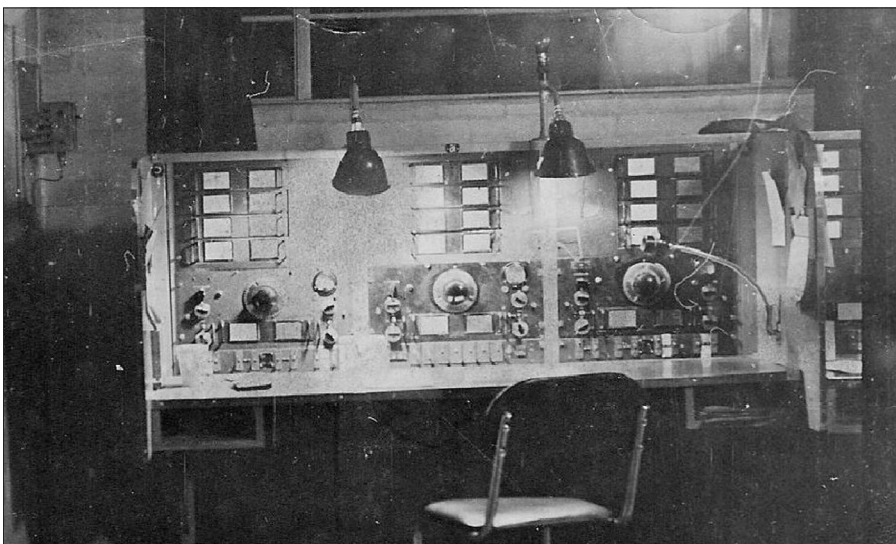


Fig. 1: Search bank of HRO receivers at Hanslope Park in 1944.

the low power section of HF NFD and has won this shield many times since, including in 2012 and 2013. RADARC also enters the RSGB SSB Field Day, the 80m Club Championships and, occasionally, other contests. In the 1970s and 1980s a big effort was made in the VHF Field Day contest from a site on Watership Down in north-west Hampshire.

MX0AAA

In 1994, having heard that the G series of calls was to cease, being replaced by the new M series, the club scooped the first M series call **M0AAA** and put **MX0AAA** (M0AAA with its special club prefix) on the air at 0000UTC on April 1st 1994, having spent most of the previous day on the air promoting the new call. The operators were able to use a high specification HF station with beam and linear amplifier and the result was a huge and never-ending pile-up. Club members operated for 48 hours without a break on both HF and 2m and had a great time. The club also holds the callsigns G3ULT and G3AKF and the contest call M4T.

In 2012 RADARC hosted one of the many national Olympic Torch Relay stations, **GX4WAB**, in WAB square SU67 and in 2013 hosted **G100RSGB** for three days in July, making 758 contacts, mainly on CW.

Website

The RADARC website, **Fig. 5**, managed by **Marnoch (Min) Standen G0JMS** is a valuable resource and is one of the club's greatest assets. Many pages cover club history with scores of photographs, events, club news, technical articles, items for sale and so on. A large archive of information on wartime VIs associated with RADARC, based on a club talk by the current chairman, **Vin Robinson G4JTR** and **Peter Smith G4JNU**, using the memoirs of the late Ted Handcocks G5HN, a founder member of RADARC in 1934, is on the club website and has also been copied to the secret listeners website referred to earlier.

www.radarc.org



Fig. 2: RADARC hamfest, 1946.



Fig. 3: RADARC DF Hunt in the early 1950s.

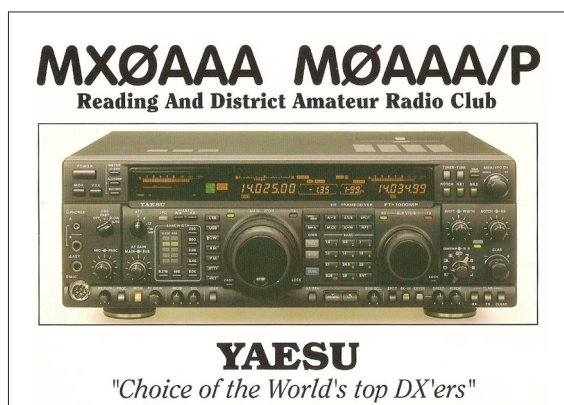


Fig. 4: The RADARC QSL Card.

RADARC and Berkshire RAYNET
RADARC has strong ties with the local RAYNET group, Berkshire RAYNET. Club member **Denis**



Fig. 5: The RADARC website home page.

Pibworth G4KWT is the Berkshire RAYNET Controller. Of its registered membership, approximately 15 are RADARC members and, along with other club volunteers, help with many community events each year. Additionally, RADARC provides communications for two major walking events each year. The first of these is the Three Towers Scout hike, held each April. This is a large and complex event with over 300 hikers in around 80 teams walking several routes, the longest being 72km. The event requires a base station to be operated for 24 hours, 18 checkpoints equipped with VHF or UHF communications and several minibuses fitted with radio. RADARC, with help from the Newbury club, manage all the communications under the guidance of **Ian Alderton G6IZA**.

The South Oxfordshire Christian Aid walk is held on the third Saturday of May each year. RADARC members provide communications support on 2m and 4m while enjoying a day out in the South Oxfordshire countryside. Members assist with communications at checkpoints and run the control station at Bix village hall.

McMichael Rally at Sonning

The annual McMichael rally is the major RADARC event each year. It is organised jointly by RADARC and the Burnham Beeches ARC. The rally committee chairman, **G0JMS**, is also on the RADARC Committee. **Martin Lynch & Sons** attend and, with **Yaesu UK**, have for the past four years supported the rally by donating a new Yaesu FT-450D as a raffle prize, **Fig. 6**. Proceeds provide significant financial support not only to RADARC but also allow donations to be made to local repeater groups, air cadets and local charities.

Training

Probably the most important contribution RADARC makes to the future of amateur radio is through running the Foundation and Intermediate RCE courses and examinations.

Two members, **Eric Curling M0LUV** and **Harry Hogg G3NGX**, run these courses and the club sponsors a member, **Alison Johnson G8ROG**, who runs the Advanced course, providing administration and accredited trainers on all three courses. Up to the Spring 2014 Foundation course, RADARC had achieved over 140 passes from entries to 22 courses run since November 2004. The Intermediate passes are currently nearly 60 from 9 courses since 2007.



Fig. 6: The winner (centre) of the McMichael Rally 2013 main raffle prize is presented with his prize at ML&S in Chertsey.



Fig. 7: GB2MBA in operation.

The RCE Advanced course is run each autumn with the course examination in December. **David Honey M0DHO** organises the Intermediate course construction project and also runs CW training once a week on Tuesday evenings on 80m.

2010 to 2014

One of the most significant recent RADARC events was the special club meeting held at the Palmer Building lecture theatre at Reading University in the autumn of 2012. This was a public lecture entitled *The Sun* and given by astronomer and television presenter **Dr Lucie Green** from the Mullard Space Science Research Laboratory in Surrey. This was widely publicised and 103 attended. A brilliant set of images and animations were described. For several years RADARC has run the GB2MBA special event station for the Museums on the Air weekend at the Museum of Berkshire Aviation. RADARC's current membership is

just over 100 with a wide spread of membership age and, thanks to the RCE courses, RADARC retains a small number of young radio amateurs who subsequently join the club. Being in the high technology environment of the M4/Thames Valley corridor, RADARC has many members who work in communications and electronics and this is reflected in a wide range of member interests and capabilities and an excellent programme of meetings on technical subjects. Two meetings a year are surplus equipment sales and these raise a very significant amount of money for the club. This and the McMichael rally help to keep subscription fees very low, just £15 a year and £7.50 for those not in employment. In June this year, RADARC was due to hold an 80th anniversary barbecue to celebrate the club's success of which the members are rightly proud. New members and visitors are always most welcome.