

Review

Behind the Scenes at Radio Caroline (in the 1970's)

Author: Lyn Gilbert

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267 pages, illustrated

The first proper book on the history of the legendary Radio Caroline was published in 1967 under the slogan: 'It's all in the magic book'. Australian-born Lyn Gilbert wrote in the introduction to her book that countless books have since been written on the subject, noting that the total story will never be written. Nevertheless, she has decided to do her own bit by sharing with readers her experiences with Ronan O'Rahilly and Radio Caroline. And this will be a revelation to many followers of the legendary station.

She met Ronan in 1973 at a party at the home of Ronan's right-hand in the 1960s, Oonagh, from whom she rented a flat. During that party, Ronan appeared to be impressed by Lyn Gilbert and made several attempts to win her over. He wanted her to work for him but she saw more in a career as a 'a teacher of dance and history'. And so it became a college application to make the dream come true. But Ronan kept calling her and, when moving house, managed to find her again and again. And eventually Ronan was successful and, as was often done by others, she went to work for him in late 1974 for a meagre wage. Initially, she was hired as the final financial officer for the film company 'Research Educational Systems Ltd', which had been set up. Lyn also visited record companies to pick up new releases for Radio Caroline before and was given the responsible task of smuggling money by plane to and from places like Liechtenstein and Amsterdam. Money that arrived in London was mainly for payment to deejays and technicians, with it becoming clear that a small number were given access to Ronan and others were not.

Entertaining and also sad is the story of how Lyn was sent to Sheffield with young James Ross by Ronan with the aim of fulfilling a promise to a close friend. Mission to buy or order copies of the latest Elton John LP from all the record shops established there. Goal to influence sales figures. The same would be done by other teams in various cities. The overnight stay in Sheffield had more unpleasant consequences.

She was also involved in the project of the band that did not yet have a name but later became known as Loving Awareness, and in which Ronan had a thick hand. He even went so far as to attempt to dissolve a budding relationship between band member Charlie Charles and Lyn at one point because it was not good for the group's developments. Lyn narrates extensively about this project about which not too much has been revealed in the past.

Very entertaining is the chapter about Ronan using, or abusing, phone lines, changed numbers, seldom paid bills and used other people's phone lines to call for hours. Also, the story about a mysterious 'Bob' who claimed to be from the Home Office and reported as a mole that investigations into Ronan and his were going to happen is totally new to me.

Lyn, who briefly had a more than friendly relationship with James Ross, also recounts from his letters to her showing that there was plenty of discontent aboard the *Mi Amigo* and a lack of everything. Living conditions on board during part of 1977 were so bad that Samantha and cook Anne decided to go ashore via a fishing boat. It became a three-week trip before they were finally brought ashore in a port.

But there are more stories in the book about failed attempts to reach the broadcast ship. For example, Lyn recounts that a second consecutive attempt with a tender failed and large quantities of meat had to be buried in her garden. This led to a visit by the police, who had been informed of the burial.

Besides the Caroline event, she also delves into other O'Rahilly projects in which she was involved. Among others, the film project around John F. Kennedy, the connection with George Harrison as well as the 'Caroline Homes' project are discussed in detail. The stories reveal that Ronan could be quite manipulative financially and often failed to honour agreements made. Many claimed that Ronan was only to be glorified. Some years ago, it was even suggested that he should be nominated for a high British award but if the average listener has read this book, the other side of Ronan O'Rahilly will already become clear. And to think that in the period up to 1991, the British government spent a huge amount of time and money tracking all movements within the Caroline organisation. Millions of pounds was poured into it of which Lyn Gilbert rightly reports that if this amount had been freed up for Radio Caroline there would have been a well-organised station where it could have run well on a commercial basis and the staff could also have enjoyed a good salary.

The above information alone makes it clear to us that we are dealing with filling a gap in Radio Caroline's history. This book certainly belongs on the bookshelf where all those other books about the legendary radio station are.

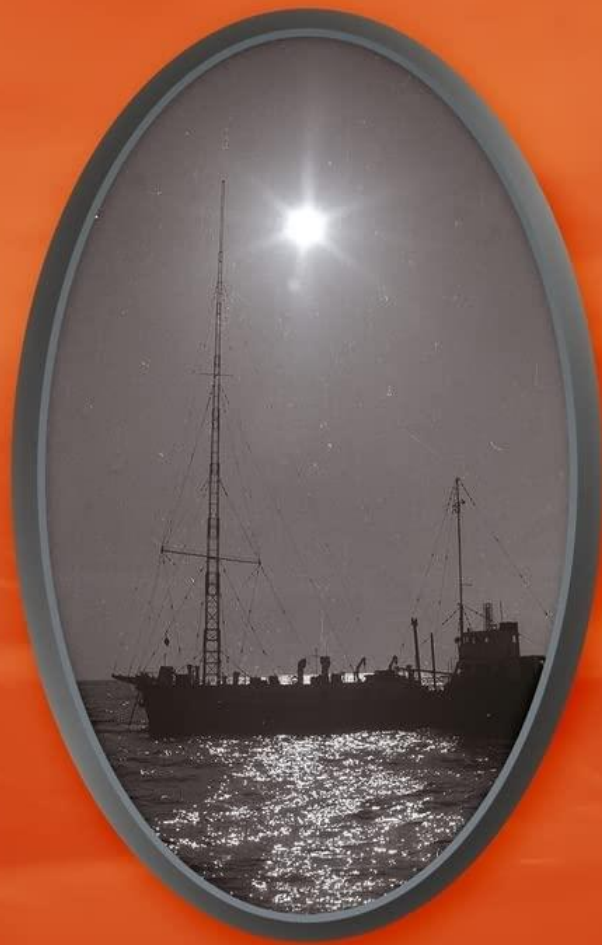
Here is more information:

<https://rcsocietysales.co.uk/read.html>

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Behind-Scenes-Radio-Caroline-1970s/dp/1999933486>

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