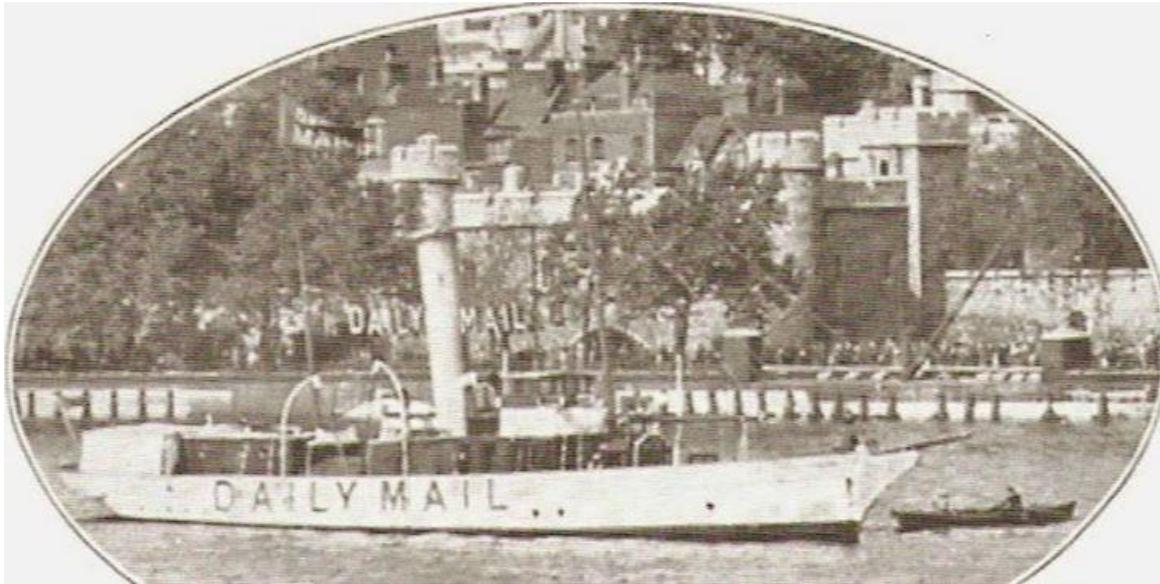


Claimed to be offshore, Radio Daily Mail in 1928.



It's about a quarter of a century ago that I wrote a book about the little radio projects. That included those projects which never came alive as well as those stories from thumb suckers and dreamers. One of the very early ones mentioned in that book was 'Radio Daily Mail'. In 1928, a small luxury steamboat, once owned by Lord Iveagh - the then owner of the Guinness brewery - left the port of Dundee heading to the high seas.

Broadcasting Yacht, as baptized as the ship was, was to anchor just outside the then observed three-mile zone and broadcast commercial broadcasts to mainland Britain. Only sponsors as announced were the Daily Mail, for the newspaper of the same name, as well as the Evening News and the Sunday Dispatch. The programmes should promote these newspapers.

The project was led by Valentine Smith, to whom the idea could also be attributed. For the Daily Mail newspaper he was responsible as publishing company's director for dissemination and publicity. Not much more could be told at that stage as research on this subject brought me in those days not further.

By searching the archive many years later it's possible to bring many more facts. In the newspaper from June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1928 the readers were informed that the twin screw yacht, 185 tons, would on the next

Monday begin the most remarkable voyage in her history. She had been chartered by the Daily Mail to cruise from resort to resort and entertain readers with music while they're on their holidays.

That day it was also mentioned that the ship was still in Dundee harbour while completed with the most wonderful loudspeakers in existence. Let's see what the Daily Mail announced that day. 'During its voyage around the coast this loudspeaker will be released at its full volume if necessary, but, at those who were at Olympia know, it has the peculiar property of not being overwhelming even those quite near the installation. It carries without being penetrating and will multiply many times an orchestra or giant organ without 'blast' or distortion.' Reading this now, almost 90 years later, we know it was not a radio station but must have been very exciting for those along the shores and in the visited harbours.

The owners wanted the project to be as glamorous as possible as they promised that during dark hours the yacht was to be illuminated and outlined in electric lights. The name of the newspaper, so they promised, would be displayed in red lights between the masts. Also a floating special broadcasting studio had been built on the deck and 'concerts' would be held on deck of the 'Ceto', as the real name of the vessel was.

Before leaving the ship the harbour it was inspected by the Lord Provost of Dundee, Mr. William High, his daughter Minnie High, and his lady Provost. Owing the necessary technical adjustment to complete its intricate equipment the ship did not leave on the Monday. They also mentioned that the Lord Provost was also interested in the specially installed plant, which would generate the electricity for the huge 1500 volt valves there were. These valves were similar to those in use in broadcasting stations in those days.

The mentioned visitors also inspected the broadcasting studios and the Lord Provost stated that the undertaking was both unique and interesting. He added: "I am told that the Daily Mail will remind seaside visitors of the benefits of their vast insurance scheme. I'm

told that the Daily Mail will remind seaside visitors of the benefits of their vast insurance scheme."

It was hardly necessarily to tell the readers of the newspaper that this talk was only to gain more people for a proper insurance. On July 6<sup>th</sup> in the column 'by wire, air and wireless' people could read that in the afternoon of the 5<sup>th</sup> big crowds were entertained at Scarborough with music from the super loud speakers on deck of the yacht *Ceto*. A day later a big crowd in the harbour of Hull was attracted to the dockside by the music broadcast.

On July the 9<sup>th</sup> a larger report was in the Daily Mail again and first there was the announcement that on that day people in Felixstowe, Frinton, Walton and Clacton-on-Sea would hear a concert broadcasted from *de Ceto*, anchored off the shore. It was added that the concert could be heard at a distance between half a mile and a mile that was if the wind was not blowing from the land.

The article promised also special attention for the inhabitants in Margate: 'Tomorrow when the *Ceto* goes to Margate, the *Golden Eagle* is running a special excursion trip, leaving 2.30 p.m. to meet the *Ceto* and escort her to Margate. When the vessels meet the Mayor of Margate will go aboard the Daily Mail yacht and broadcast an address. Afterwards a concert will be broadcast.'

Further in the article it was mentioned what happened more on July 8<sup>th</sup>: 'The *Ceto* entered Lowestoft harbour last night shortly before 10 o'clock. She was followed along the coast by a large number of people as it was announced that by arriving in the harbour gramophone records would be played. Crowds listened to the concert which could be heard three-quarters of a mile away.'

July 11<sup>th</sup> brought the news that Margate was visited on the 10<sup>th</sup>, so a day later than promised. 'A delighted thousands of residents and visitors were there, with broadcast concerts in the afternoon and the evening.' Near the Tongue lightship, about seven miles out, the promised pleasure steamer, with 500 people aboard, the *Ceto* was met. The mayor, Tofts Fasham, inspected the yacht and did his

message. Afterwards he sent out a wireless message to thousands of people who had assembled to greet the yacht.

In the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> the yacht cruised between Margate and Broadstairs and the next day one could read in the newspaper: 'She was brilliantly illuminated with nearly 2000 lights, and created enormous interest, while the concerts she broadcast through her super loud speakers were thoroughly enjoyed.' At the end of the article it was mentioned that permitting the weather next Ramsgate, Deal and Dover would be visited.

Next there were a few days without finding back any announcement in the archives. The first small piece was in the newspaper from July 17<sup>th</sup> when one could read that on the evening before people in Southsea listened to the concert broadcast. Also a schedule for the following days was published: 'Thursday (so the next day) leaving for Bournemouth and arrive at 9 a.m. Friday; leave Bournemouth 3 a.m. and arrive at Torquay at 11 a.m.' On the Saturday a concert in Plymouth was on the list.

It was also in the archives mentioned that near Southsea the Ceto had steamed in to a berth near the shore when she noticed Morse signals addressed to her by H.M.S. Furious, an aircraft-carrier. These proved to be an inquiry asking at what time the Ceto's entertainment began and on what wavelength.

The newsflash went on with: 'An engineer in the Ceto trained the yacht's search-light on the Furious and morsed the explanation that the music would be a direct by super-loud-speaker, and not by wireless. A message was added asking for a report on how the Furious received the concert, which was about to begin.' After a few items were broadcast the Furious came back with the message that it was good received. This ship was at the time anchored two miles away from the shore.

A day later the readers of the Daily Mail learned that on July 20<sup>th</sup> residents and visitors at Torquay, Paignton and Brixham listened entranced to music 'that floated softly but with wonderful clarity

over the sea.' Bathers especially enjoyed the sometimes merry dance music from the yacht.'

There were also readers who were not happy that they hadn't the chance to listen to these special broadcasts. On July 23<sup>th</sup> there was a letter from a reader published. It was J. Line from Grove Cottage, Ore, near Hastings, who wrote: 'Sir, How is it that the Daily Mail musical yacht *Ceto* has not been in Hastings and St. Leonards? Surely there are many here who would enjoy hearing the program.' No answer was given on the letter-content.

The same day it was mentioned in the Daily Mail that during the following days Dawlish, Teignmouth, Paignton, Falmouth, Ilfracombe and Penzance would be visited. Early August visits to Ramsey, Douglas, Peel, Blackpool and St. Annes - amongst others - were in the planning.

Another readers letter was published on July 24<sup>th</sup>. It was from Harry J. Snelson, General Manager Brighton Celebrity Concerts. It became clear that the concert in this town could not become successful as he wrote: 'Thousands did enjoy the free concerts of the Daily Mail yacht *Ceto*. But, speaking from my own selfish (perhaps) point of view, I hope the *Ceto* does not come to Brighton again for ever so long (at least not on a Sunday). We played to almost empty seats on Sunday with one of the foremost London attractions'.

Well the next day Falmouth was taken and then the *Ceto* went indeed to Penzance where even three concerts were given and in the newspaper could be read: 'A good deal of dance music was given by special request, and it appeared that people would have been willing to dance all night if the selections had continued.'

On July 28<sup>th</sup> it was mentioned that in Ilfracombe the Capstone hill was thronged with residents and holidaymakers who, despite the rain, awaited the broadcast program from the yacht. 'The skies soon cleared however and many people put off in boats to see the *Ceto*. '

On July 31<sup>st</sup> the captain decided to bring in the ship into Milford Haven as a result of a too heavy sea. But a concert was given to the crowd in Milford who greatly enjoyed it. When in Milford Haven the ship was visited by a deputation consisting of the chairman of the Milford Haven Urban District Council, Mr. A.H. Codd, and representatives of the trade of the town and the port. Mr. Codd expressed his admiration of the enterprise of the Daily Mail in sending their musical yacht to the town. He also asked, following the report in the newspaper, if it would be possible to a return visit on August 11<sup>th</sup>, during Milford's annual regatta. In the evening the *Ceto* was taken into dock and a full musical program was broadcast, to the delight of a huge crowd which surrounded the dock and filled the promenade. At the end of the concert it was announced that the next day they would give concerts at Tenby and the Mumbles, near Swansea, and on the Friday to Blackpool.

More visits followed including August 10<sup>th</sup> Colwyn Bay Llandudno, where more than thousands of holidaymakers were enjoying the music. At Llandudno councilor Cheetham, in those days chairman of the local Urban District Council, and Councilor John Roberts, chairman of the Town Improvement Committee, visited the yacht. Robert spoke of the wonderful advertising pull of the Daily Mail, about which he said there could be no doubt: "We have advertised and we know no other paper can touch the Daily Mail. We get nothing like the results from any other source." Passengers in Wallasey, Ferry steamers, the crews of tug-boats and liners were also delighted with the music of the *Ceto* as she lay in the river Mersey.

It was silence in the archives till August 20<sup>th</sup> when information about the music was brought to the people on Weymouth esplanade and pier. Those were very surprised to hear the chimes of St. Margaret's, West Minster. Following the sound of the bells people were listening to Ave Maria, the lost Chord sung by Caruso, Händel's Largo, the Hallelujah Chorus and 'Softly Awakes my heart', a Kreisler violin solo.

The next day the *Ceto* was still in Weymouth: 'The lively dance music floated up the two main streets within a radius of half a mile, and added charm and novelty to shopping in the very heart of the town. In some of the big shops hundreds of girls were jazzing in spirit, if not in actual physical motion. When preparing this article I thought of the several places I visited so much during my many visits to England and thought: 'when was it that for instant Greenwich was visited?'

The answer came in the Daily Mail from August 30<sup>th</sup> 1928 when it was mentioned that the evening before the broadcast concert was so much enjoyed at Southend that the carnival officials asked for a special extra concert should be given the next morning. And it happened on the 30<sup>th</sup> and after finishing around 11.45 hrs. local time; the *Ceto* left the harbour just after noon heading for Gravesend where it arrived at 2.30 in the afternoon. And what was published in the Daily Mail: 'Soon after leaving Woolwich near Gravesend we commenced a concert. From factories and warehouses crowds flocked to the riverbanks and listened.' They had arrived in another area of the river Thames. Next they arrived at Greenwich where also hundreds of people listened to the concerts.

Also was announced in the Daily Mail what would happen next: 'Tomorrow morning we are cruising in the river from 7 o'clock onwards broadcasting selections. We expect to arrive off Tower Bridge Gardens about noon and will broadcast a concert from there. In the evening we shall return to Greenwich for another concert.'

It would be one of the last given in a long series. On September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1928 the last message regarding the *MV Ceto* was found in the archives and one may think that's the ending article as it was mentioned that after 10 long weeks the whole personnel of the Daily Mail yacht *Ceto* were entertained to dinner at the Holborn Restaurant after concluding a remarkably successful cruise round England.

Also was mentioned that Mr. Valentine Smith, of the Daily Mail, who presided, complimented the crew on the energy and enthusiasm which they had shown. Excellent cooperation had enabled them to visit 87 of the most important seaside resorts and coastal towns. They had kept to time wherever they went and had covered in the ten weeks of the cruise no fewer than 4000 miles. About 300 concerts were given.

Of course when reading this nowadays you can think what a lot of non- information as we have an un-countless amount of radio stations to listen to. In 1928 it was all an experiment and although we cannot speak about a real radio station we can think about the fact what a sensation it must have been for those listening to the special broadcasts from the MV Ceto.

Hans Knot @2017

