

## Special leaflets and magazines about offshore radio

During the high days of offshore radio, the sixties and early seventies, there were several organisations and even individuals active in the fight for free radio. Some regular got a mention on the radio stations, others tried to gain readers by placing small advertisements in newspapers or music magazines. Let me see how many you do remember from those, who came in my mind today. First the National Commercial Radio Movement from London followed by the Free Radio Campaign and the Free Radio Association. There was the Commercial Radio News Agency in Gloucester; the Caroline Club in Cambridge, Free Radio Movement, Offshore Radio Association, Monitor Magazine, Script Magazine, Caroline Action in Rotterdam, Caroline Club in Holland, Baffle Magazine - later renamed into RadioVisie, Action Central in Liverpool, Offshore Echos and not forgetting the Pirate Radio News.

Pirate Radio News was started in 1968 in Amsterdam by Wim Herrebrugh and Dick van Schenk Brill and I wrote sometimes small newsflashes for the PRN. In 1971 Jacob van Kokje and I took over the editorial work and we went on with the magazine till late 1976. Soon there was a follow up with the Freewave Media Magazine, which is still published 6 times a year by us and yes already more than 13 years the International Hans Knot report is published. I mentioned the Free Radio Campaign, which had branches in several countries including the Netherlands and Germany. The later one published a high profile magazine Radio News, including photographs from Theo Dencker, which made the Radio News top class. Also the Free Radio Association had branches in several countries, mostly one or two persons running them. In England they also had local branches, like the Brighton Branche, run by Eric Ruell.

It was Eric who published a small, special leaflet in 1969 telling the story of Radio 390 in which David Lye, former Director with Radio 390, wrote a special postscript. Now, many decades later, you can find this leaflet back on the internet by downloading it from

[www.hansknot.com](http://www.hansknot.com)

## RADIO 390

Radio 390 was operated from a war-time fort in the Thames Estuary, some  $8\frac{1}{2}$  miles off the Whitstable, Kent, coast. The seven fort complex was built on Red Sands during World War II as part of the coastal defence system for Britain.

The forts were first used for broadcasting in the middle of 1964, soon after the start of offshore radio in this country. A well-known Kent character named Tom Pepper used Red Sands Towers as the broadcasting base for Radio Invicta. On the 17th of July, 1964, Invicta started transmissions on 306.1 metres in the Medium wave band. By using a  $\frac{1}{2}$ kw transmitter it was claimed to have an excellent signal strength for a radius of about 100 miles. The unusual thing about this station was that its programmes were transmitted between midnight and 6pm and consisted mainly of 'pop' music. Radio Invicta was the first British radio station to use the 24-hour clock system in its programme schedule.

The life of Radio Invicta came to an end after a tragic accident in the Thames Estuary. Tom Pepper and an Invicta dj were drowned when their boat, the David, sprang a leak and sank whilst they were travelling between the forts and the mainland.

The forts were then acquired by a syndicate of Kent businessmen, and continued to broadcast a similar format, but also provided a small volume of 'sweet' music. The station call-sign was changed to K.I.N.G. Radio. It was in April 1965 that the new station started, and at this stage started to

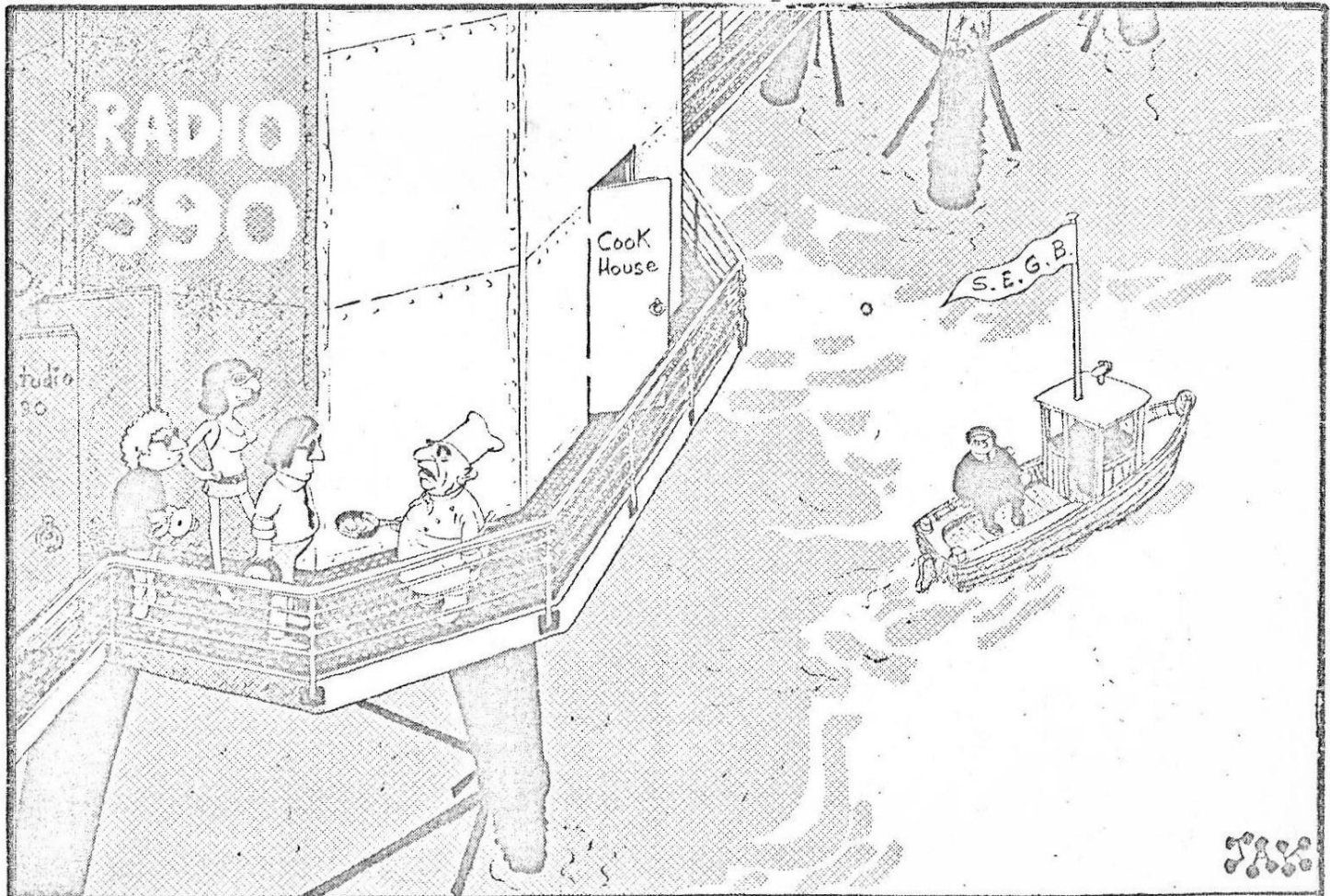
become more of a business venture, rather than "just another offshore radio station". At the instigation of Mr. David Lye, who had been asked to advise on the whole station, a firm of London Press and Public Relations Consultants were contacted for their suggestions on obtaining advertising revenue and the running of the station. As at that time all other stations were using the brash, pseudo-American format, it was suggested that the new format of programmes be aimed mainly at housewives. During the planning stage the name Radio Eve was put forward, but it was rejected. This was partly because it was thought that although daytime audience would be mainly feminine, the evenings and early mornings should have more of a family atmosphere. Another reason for the rejection was that the wavelengths of commercial stations would not be published in the National Press. Considering these points, it was suggested that the name should indicate the wavelength and so the name "390" was chosen.

The owners of K.I.N.G. Radio decided to accept the proposals of Allbeury, Coombs & Partners. To implement them a Partner of that firm, Mr. Ted Allbeury, was appointed a Director of Estuary Radio Ltd., which was formed to operate Radio 390 and he subsequently became Managing Director. Before the change-over came about, the dj's (later to be known as Station Announcers) were given initial training and were instructed to minimise the amount of talk between the music, and present the announcements in a gentle and personal fashion.

On the 26th September, Radio 390 went on the air for the first time, after quite a considerable amount of capital had been spent to improve the

running of the station. 390 used the latest type RCA transmitter with a 35kw output. On top of the 90ft Tower was the broadcasting aerial. This being some 200ft high in itself gave 390 the tallest of all the aerials used by any of the offshore commercial stations. It was therefore no idle boast when the station chose their identification signal saying "This is Radio 390 broadcasting on 388.1 metres in the Medium wave band. Britain's most powerful commercial radio station". This meant that the evening reception was remarkably free from interference. Programmes were broadcast between 6.30 am and midnight. From 9 am until 6 pm, 390 presented "Eve, the Woman's Magazine of the Air". Programmes, which were aimed mainly at the housewife, included such items as "Music From The Shows"; "Keyboard Cavalcade"; "Masters Of The Organ"; and the station's request programme "From Me To You".

Things went fairly smoothly for 390 until on 21st September, 1966, summonses were served on Mr. Ted Allbeury (Managing Director) and Mr. David Lye (Financial Director and Company Secretary). These alleged that Red Sands were inside Territorial Waters, and the Company was therefore contravening the Wireless Telegraphy Act of 1949 by transmitting without a licence. A former Conservative Solicitor-General and former Shadow Postmaster General, Sir Peter Rawlinson, QC, MP, defended the Company during the hearing at Canterbury. The two-day hearing ended in disappointment for the millions of 390 listeners. Estuary Radio Ltd. were convicted and fined £100. A pre-recorded tape was taken to Red Sands and played twice by Station Announcer Steven West. On the tape Mr. Allbeury said that the station would close down until an appeal could be arranged. So, on 25th November, 1966, the sound of Radio 390 was silenced.



"And they've just cut the gas off!"

London Express Service.

An appeal was arranged for the 13th December, but more disappointment was to come. The station lost its appeal against the decision of the Canterbury Magistrates, and it was decided by the Directors to disband the station completely.

This, however, was not the end of the 390 story. At the suggestion of Mr. Gething, another of the Company's Directors, it was decided to carry out a marine survey; and an eminent Hydrographer was called in. The outcome of his survey proved that Middle Sands was never uncovered and therefore Red Sands was at least 1.9 miles outside Territorial Waters. So, on 31st December, 1966, Radio 390 returned to the airwaves. The GPO were not satisfied with this independent survey, and so summonses were again served on the station and its Directors. Despite the earlier GPO contention that the forts lay within the jurisdiction of the Canterbury Magistrates, this time the case was heard at Southend. Sir Peter Rawlinson again represented the Company, but again they lost their case. Despite the conviction the Company continued broadcasting, and lodged an Appeal. Had the GPO not applied to the High Court for an Injunction this would have eventually been heard at the Chelmsford Quarter Sessions. The case in the High Court, from which Leave to Appeal was granted, lasted many weeks.

Between June 1966 and January 1967, negotiations were held with a view to operate Radio 390 North off the Liverpool coastline. The plan was to use the Cheetah II, which had been used by Radio Caroline South when the Mi Amigo went aground off Frinton-on-Sea, Essex.

In August 1966 Radio 390 became the first British offshore radio station to operate on VHF frequencies.

These test transmissions were carried out on Red Sands.

At the beginning of February 1967, Mr. Ted Allbeury resigned from the Board of Directors to join Britain Radio. In an interview for Radio News Mr. Allbeury said "I am resigning because I honestly believe that a ship has greater potential than the forts. The forts are continually being harassed by the Government. I have been unable to persuade my shareholders to take a ship and am therefore hamstrung to continue". Radio News also stated that there was little doubt that "Unless the 390 Directors did find a replacement - and quickly - the station would have to close down". Mr. David Lye was appointed as Managing Director; and a new lease of life started for Radio 390.

Advertisers continued to support the station. Rates varied from £10 for 7 seconds to £50 for a half-minute spot. Also during 1967 a survey was conducted in 112 towns by K.W. Electronics Ltd. In 99 of the towns Radio 390 was found to have a better signal strength than any other offshore station. In some cases the signal was stronger than that of the B.B.C.'s Light Programme.

In July 1967 Mr. E. Short - then Postmaster General - announced that the bill to outlaw "pirate" radio stations would come into effect at midnight on Monday 14th August, 1967. The life of Radio 390 was to end just 18 days previously; after losing its High Court battle with the GPO. Even with the expenses of the Courts, 390 was not a financial flop. On the other hand, it could not be called a great success story. The Court fees amounted to about £10,000 and so the station could only "break even".

## Postscript from the Director

I am very pleased to be able to write this postscript to the history of Radio 390 which has been prepared by the Brighton Branch - Free Radio Association. It gives me an opportunity, firstly, to express my appreciation to our Announcers, Engineers and Administrative Staff, without whose enthusiasm Radio 390 would not have been such a success. Secondly, I perhaps could use some of the space kindly allotted to me by the Publishers to express some fairly general views on Commercial Radio, which may not have come to light either in these booklets or in the Press Publicity during 1965 to 1967.

I think I am correct in saying that the form which Pirate Radio adopted would, of necessity, been fairly short lived. The existing legislation in the United Kingdom, at the time, was the Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1949, and this virtually gave the B.B.C. freedom of the air. Although this Act did indicate that licences could be obtained, to our knowledge these were never forthcoming to anybody wishing to provide a service to the Public. The Wireless Telegraphy Act applied not only to the United Kingdom but to the Territorial Waters of this, and also to British ships. Any commercial station had, therefore, to broadcast outside these restrictions and it was because of this that most of the Pirate Radios chose to transmit from ships of differing nationalities.

If one considers the life of a ship and the continuity of transmissions, one will realise that from time to time these vessels would have to put into Port, either for replacements or long periods of maintenance. These periods of non-



transmission are not only costly but give great scope for a competitor in the same thing.

The history of Radio 390 is set out in this booklet and I hope that readers will not be bored by the space which is regretably allocated to litigation. It must not be forgotten that Estuary Radio was the only real British station and although our career in keeping with the others was somewhat chequered, we did try and establish a broadcasting policy which proved acceptable to many millions of listeners.

I think that the Government had little alternative but to pursue their planned policy against the existing commercial radio stations. It might seem strange for me to say this, but if one considers how many stations there were when the Marine Offences (Broadcasting) Act became Law and how many of these were British, one will realise that if any Government had accepted the stations which existed, they would be giving away what is in fact a large slice of British business to foreign enterprise. I feel that we, Radio 390, cannot easily be distinguished from the rest and in common with other pirates, we likewise had to suffer the same fate.

Now, as I rather foresaw, the Pirate Stations are almost forgotten but they have left a mark which I hope will remain for a long time. They set a pattern for subsequent B.B.C. programmes and I am sure that the policy and programming of further commercial stations will be based on the success which they achieved. One thing will be missing - the glamour of being a Pirate.

Dawley

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and  
the Evening Standard for allowing us to use the cartoon on page four  
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## Recommendations

For further reading on this subject, we recommend:

"When Pirates Ruled The Waves"  
by Paul Harris - Impulse Books

"Who's Who In Pop Radio"  
by Peter Alex - New English Library

"Competition In Radio"  
by Denis Thomas - Institute of  
Economic Affairs.

Also in this series:

"Radio London"



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