



SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE – GUGLIELMO MARCONI (1874 – 1937)

Guglielmo Marconi was born in Bologna, Italy in 1874, the second son of Giuseppe Marconi, an Italian land owner, and his Irish/Scots wife, Annie Jameson of the Scottish whiskey distillers family Jameson & Sons. He was educated privately and then went to the Livorno Technical Institute. While there, he read an article which suggested the possibility of using radio waves to communicate without wires. The year was 1894, and the most modern way to send a message at that time was over telegraph wires.

Marconi jumped right on the idea. He began experimenting at his family's home near Bologna. Within a year he had sent and received signals beyond the range of vision (including over a hill) and then over increasingly great distances -- up to two miles! He took out a patent in 1896. The Italian government was not interested in Marconi's work, but the British Admiralty was, and it installed Marconi's radio equipment in some of its ships.

Chelmsford, Marconi Hall Street Works

Marconi continued to refine and expand upon his inventions in the next few years, and then turned toward the business aspects of his work.

In 1898 the first wireless factory was established in Hall Street, Chelmsford employing around 50 people. The factory was built in what was initially a silk factory. This building still stands today and is owned by the Essex and Suffolk. Water Co.

For this reason Chelmsford is credited as the "birthplace of radio".



Radio transmission was pushed to greater and greater lengths, and by 1899, Marconi had sent a signal nine miles across the Bristol Channel and 31 miles across the English Channel to France.

Most people believed that the curvature of the earth would prevent sending a signal much farther than 200 miles, so when Marconi was able to transmit across the Atlantic ocean in 1901 people were stunned. It opened the door to a rapidly developing wireless industry.



Men at work in the Marconi factory

In 1922, the world's first *regular* wireless broadcasts for entertainment began from the Marconi laboratories at Writtle near Chelmsford – Call sign '2MT' in what was little more than a wooden hut.