

When Alf Met Louis. Roger Spear G4BXM

The "Elizabethan" Saga. (Concluding the find of the original G5RV transmitter at the recent Luton Boot Sale)

Time: circa early 1950's, **place:** Newbury Berkshire. GPO engineer Alf Grimsdale G3CJU was putting the finishing touches to his 20m crystal controlled 150w rack and panel rig prior to offering it to the Newbury club stand at the local "Festival of Britain" celebrations.

Meanwhile over at Chelmsford, Louis Varney was well under way with his experiments into "TVI proof transmitters" and completing his prototype for the Elizabethan series of transmitters for the bulletin to celebrate the appropriate coronation.

At about the same time, a spotty schoolboy was hurrying back to Notting Hill Gate in London from his Saturday morning spent trying to ignore the "ladies who lurked in the doorways" outside Smith and Co in Lisle Street, to visit the shack of a school chum's father who was a 2 letter G2. In the darkened room, it was the glow of the 866's as they throbbed in time to his CQ that clinched the deal and from then on he (I) was hooked.

Fifty years later these three separate events collided as that spotty schoolboy, now old enough to know better, attempted to re-create the ambience of the basement in Portobello road (and I don't mean with the ladies who lurked in the doorways). The idea was to have some equipment where the mercury vapour devices were visible. I already had some in use in the Minimitter De-Luxe - but I needed them exposed, and a standard home brew 6ft rack and panel rig from 1947 etc. would be the ideal candidate.

Flicking through the pages of some 1950s copies of the "Bulletin" I saw several photographs of the sort of rig I was looking for. particularly one relating to the Festival of Britain exhibitions. But I couldn't see any of these things surviving, assuming that they must have been consigned to the skips long ago in the march to modernise. And so the search was put on the back burner and almost forgotten. That was until the Newbury boot sale a couple of years ago.

Arriving early, and looking under the tables I found on the local club stall a promising pile of black crackle chassis and panels containing 807s etc. and somewhere in there a Woden UM3 along with a coil of ancient interconnecting cable, this looked as though it would assemble into something resembling a rack built rig of suitable vintage. A deal was struck and the bits and pieces (very heavy) were bundled into the back of the groaning car and removed before they could be separated and stripped down by keen punters. (I believe Dave G3UUR had his eye on the very same pile).

Safely back in the shack and many staggering journeys down the stairs I put the various chassis in some form of order, they were all there - power supplies (with mercury vapour rectifiers), modulator, exciter and power amplifier (813). Things started to look familiar and I pondered. Sure enough, looking back at the Bulletins that had inspired my search, there was a photo of the Newbury club's Festival of Britain exhibition with a very familiar rig lurking in the right hand corner.

I had managed unwittingly to acquire the very rig that had inspired my search in the first place. The vendor, the redoubtable Alf Grimsdale (Post Office Engineer, as witnessed by his immaculate wire lacing throughout) was getting on in years and was relocating to a home, (in Surrey as it happens) and this rig had resided in his garage since its construction in the early fifties, but was complete except for the 813 heater transformer which had been removed to provide power for the fan on his central heating boiler! Alf had left instructions that if anyone who purchased the rig wanted to restore it

and not merely strip it down, then he would donate the 813 itself which was also missing. I managed to speak to Alf on the phone but he was by the time of his move, very confused and I thought it best not to tax him further, (although I did receive the missing heater transformer).

So the Rig restoration began. I was starting with the power supplies and modulator (2 x 807) when the Louis Varney prototype for the "Elizabethan" came along (featured in a previous newsletter) and work ceased on the Newbury rig.

Modulation was not a big feature of the Elizabethan, although there was an article describing a NBFM adaptor in a later copy of the Bulletin, but essentially for me (not a CW operator by any means) a modulator was needed to bring this rig back to life. This is where Alf stepped in as I can now use what I have restored of his transmitter to modulate the Louis Varney "inheritance". I often ponder on what Alf would have made of the fact that his rig (featured in the Festival of Britain celebrations) would - fifty years later - be brought back to life and modulating Louis Varney's rig that was built about the same time to celebrate the coronation of Elizabeth 2nd in 1953.

Alf, for his event, would have signed as G3CJU whereas the special event station run a few years later by Louis Varney was able to use the prefix GB. These days of course any old village fete or dog show can affix a GB to their call but back then up until G5RV pioneered and browbeat the authorities the RSGB were the only body to have the privilege and his coronation station was the first station I believe to break the monopoly.

I have now completed the driver and exciter stages of the rack and panel rig to augment its duties as modulator to the Elizabethan and have extended the range (through plug in Eddystone coils) to cover Top Band and Eighty and even 5megs where I can join in any AM when it's going .

On the subject, I do hope we continue to support the efforts made to introduce an element of AM on the military frequencies. The procedure is a bit restricting but at least it is a start and deserves our support and enthusiasm as who knows - if there is enough demand perhaps a regular (every other Sunday?) vintage AM military frequency might be something that someone might consider as a viable proposition if they had eaten a good lunch that day?

