

The Story of *Radio Constructor*

Feature

Editor's introduction: I have no doubt that some readers might ask the question, 'Why feature *The Radio Constructor* magazine during the 75th birthday celebration year of *PW*?' To this question I would unequivocally state that *The Radio Constructor* (*RC*) itself played an extremely important part in the development of hobby radio and electronics in the United Kingdom. During the planning stages for the 2007 magazines in September 2006, I intentionally scheduled Mike G3TEV'S article as a tribute to *RC* in our celebration year. This is because many of our readers (and I include *PW*'s **Tex Swann G1TEX** and myself in this category) also appreciated *RC* and the projects and features that appeared within its pages over the years. When *The Radio Constructor* finally closed there was no fanfare or tribute that I can remember. However, I hope that Mike's article goes a long way towards honouring a worthy magazine that we all miss. **Rob G3XFD**

To tell the story of *The Radio Constructor* magazine we have to go back to the end of 1945, where it starts with one **Bill Overland G2ATV** who had the idea to publish a magazine for the Radio Amateur and short wave listener. The company he formed first appeared with the title **The Amalgamated Short Wave Press**. He lived at Debden House in Maida Vale, London and the offices of the company were at 57 Maida Vale.

The new magazine, *Short Wave News*, appeared on January 1st, 1946, priced at 1/3d (7.5p) and was edited by Bill Overland G2ATV who was assisted by **Arthur Gee G2UK** and **Joe Peerless G3JPJ** (both of whom were still in the Army).

The main content of the magazine was the logs received from short wave listeners of stations both Amateur and broadcast that they had heard. It was at this time that the **International Short Wave League** was founded and it became associated with *Short Wave News*.

Severe Paper Shortage

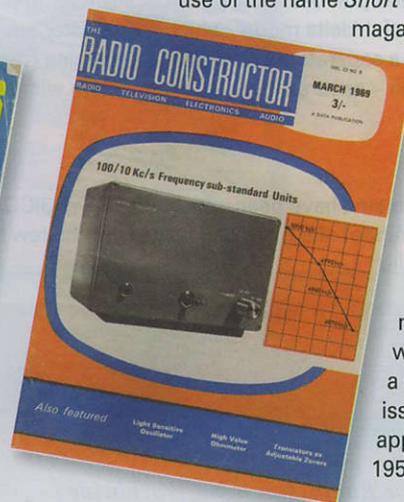
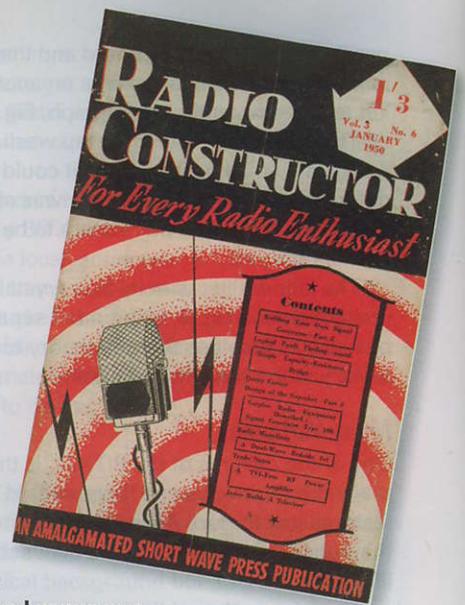
After the Second World War (even up to the late 1940s), there was a severe restriction on the amount of paper available for printing. *Short Wave News* found it increasingly difficult to print all the constructional articles submitted for publication. A decision was then taken to launch another magazine that would be devoted entirely to constructional topics when paper became available - *The Radio Constructor* was on its way!

In August 1947, the first edition of *The Radio Constructor* (*RC*) appeared on the shelves priced at 1/3d (7.5p). The editors were **Arthur Gee G2UK** and **W Norman Stevens G3AKA**, the Technical Editor was **Lionel. E. Howes G3AYA** and the Advertisement & Business Manager was G2ATV. It would appear that early editions of *RC* had a very limited print run due to paper restrictions, early editions are very hard to find.

Both the *Short Wave News* and *RC* magazines were pocket-sized and continued as separate magazines until December 1953. In the early 1950s **Austin Forsythe G6FO**, the proprietor and editor of *The Short Wave Magazine*, objected to the use of the name *Short Wave News* and the magazine was re-named

Radio Amateur. This title first appeared in January 1952 and at the same time the company name appears to have been changed to **Data Publications Ltd.**

Unfortunately, the newly named magazine was, apparently, not a success and the last issue of *Radio Amateur* appeared in December 1953. However, it was



Mike Mills G3TEV delves into the history of *The Radio Constructor*, a magazine that many *PW* readers enjoyed. Mike has already featured **J. R. Davies** – the man behind the very popular *Radio Constructor* series entitled *In your Workshop*. Now, Mike tells the fascinating story of a publication that shared many authors with *PW* but still maintained its own unique style and content.

incorporated into *The Radio Constructor* and the name was still there in the title page – right until that magazine ceased publication in 1981.

Editor Until 1960

The Editor of the combined magazines was Bill Overland G2ATV and he continued for many years in this post until his untimely death in March 1960. After his death no one person was named as editor but it's fairly obvious that Arthur Gee (G2AK) and J R Davies had a considerable input to the content of the magazine.

The offices remained at 57 Maida Vale for the whole of the magazine's existence. There appears to never have been more than about six people involved in the production of the magazine and the office was described as being in a "chaotic state" by one visitor!

Design & Contributors

In August 1961 the magazine appeared in the larger format of 9.75 x 7.25 inches. Incidentally, the cover design changed at least six times during the magazine's existence and some of these are shown in the photographs shown here.

There were several long-time writers for *RC*. Suggested Circuits for the experimenter written by **G A French** appeared from the December 1950 edition right up to the end of publication and I believe that that he was employed by **Henry's Radio Shop** in the London's Harrow Road. The articles consisted of a circuit diagram and relevant data in a very basic form but there was enough to enable one to produce the featured item.

Another author who appeared from about 1949, was **J R Davies** who wrote the In Your Workshop series that lasted so long and was avidly read by all. He also wrote many articles under many aliases so it is almost impossible to ascertain all of them! Incidentally, he also wrote for *Practical Wireless* and I recently obtained some copies from the 1950s and in them he was writing a series on the use of relay control.

Probably, the most famous series by J R Davies was about a fictional repair shop and concerned 'Smithy' the repairman and his assistant Dick who undertook and solved equipment repairs and also discussed technical details in a very easily understood and well-written manner. As he had been engineer in charge of the television and sub-assembly department of Ferguson Radio Corporation this probably gave Davies many ideas for his fault-finding articles.

Davies also wrote a book titled *Understanding Television*, which was published by Data Publications and ran to over 500 pages. At the time of his death in 1981, he was the technical editor of what had been re-named *Radio and Electronics Constructor*, which was still published by Data Publications Ltd, no doubt renamed to keep in touch with changes in the hobby.

The magazine, as published by Data Publications, only appeared until the August/September 1981 issue. The magazine still appeared but was then published by a company based in Brentwood, Essex. It later appears to have been incorporated into *Radio and Electronics World* published by a company called Ambit, who as many *PW* readers will remember, were well known component suppliers.

Note: In your Workshop still appeared for some time after the death of Davies but whether these were written by him is open to conjecture.

Other well known authors were **R A Penfold** and **F G Rayer G3OGR**. There was a page of comment by 'Centre Tap' entitled Radio Miscellany, who appeared to be a Radio Amateur but his real name is still a mystery, although my guess it was Bill Overland because at about the time of his demise the article was re-titled *Radio Topics* written by **Recorder** and from some of the comments it would appear that J R Davies wrote quite a few of them.

Also we must also not forget **Sir Douglas Hall** with his ingenious (and famous) reflex circuits!

Data Publication Booklets

Besides the magazine, Data Publications also produced a series of booklets on various subjects. Perhaps the most famous was *Inexpensive Television*, which dealt with the conversion of ex-Government surplus equipment into television sets.

Many thousands of copies of this booklet must have been sold, judging by the number of television receivers using such items as the 62 Indicator Unit fitted with a VCR97 6-inch cathode ray tube and its associated TR1355 receiver (part of the Gee navigation system) that were in use up to the mid-1950s.

Another best seller was the *Radio Amateurs Operator's Handbook*, which listed country pre-fixes, UK counties and a host of other information useful to the short wave listener and Radio Amateur. They also published a booklet entitled *Television Picture Faults* (it was also a best seller), which was often supplied with new TV sets to help new owners solve various common problems that often occurred in the early days of mass TV ownership.

Other books were *Radio Control for Ships, Boats & Aircraft* by **F C Judd** (Fred Judd G2BCX), *TV Fault Finding*, which ran to several editions as TV standards changed. They also published a series of re-prints of published articles such as – *Tape and Wire Recording*, *Receivers, Pre-selectors & Converters*, and *Inexpensive Car Radio Radio Control Mechanisms* Altogether a very comprehensive list to suit all tastes!

The Panel Signs

Another item was a series of transfer labels for many types of electronic projects sold under the name of Panel Signs. These became very popular with hobbyists and there were as least four series with different type of label such as black on white or vice versa.

The demise of *The Radio Constructor* meant that the magazine was very much missed by its army of readers but I doubt if a publication with such a wide range of subjects would be viable today. Especially with the great dearth of firms supplying components and the lack of home construction.

My thanks and acknowledgements are particularly given to the many people who have given me the information about the early days of *The Radio Constructor*, without whose help this article could not have been written. Any other information to add to this story would be most welcome!

