

THE VOICE OF 10,000 SHIPS

Prefab nerve centre

By J. H. HORROCKS, Daily Graphic Reporter

IN an enlarged "prefab" hut down Somerset way, on a site used during the war for spotting enemy aircraft, some of Britain's best boffins are perfecting a scheme for maintaining hourly contact with any British ship sailing the world's oceans.

All types of messages at this ship-to-shore radio station are recorded: a fire at sea, a changed position owing to bad weather, the birth of a son to a member of a crew. Time lag from sending the message from the station to receiving an all-clear from the ship is—TWO MINUTES.

The Wall Map

I have watched these experts at their desks at the G.P.O. long-range station at Burnham-on-Sea. I saw ships ranging between 3,000 and 20,000 tons being "recorded" on a wall map. One was nearing New Zealand, another off the West African coast, another entering the Panama Canal, yet another was midway between Aden and Bombay.

From Burnham it is possible to "talk" to more than 10,000 ships, of which 5,000 are known British merchant vessels, each equipped with two-way radio-telephone sets.

Opened in 1926, the station handled in its first year a mere few thousand words. Twenty years later traffic had topped the 45-million-word mark, and

this year the station expects to handle at least 10-million-word messages.

Equipment is vast and entirely British. Ninety Post Office engineers and a number of Royal Naval operators cope with the huge volume of traffic, which pours through the 50 aerials and the 40 transmitter-receiving sets.

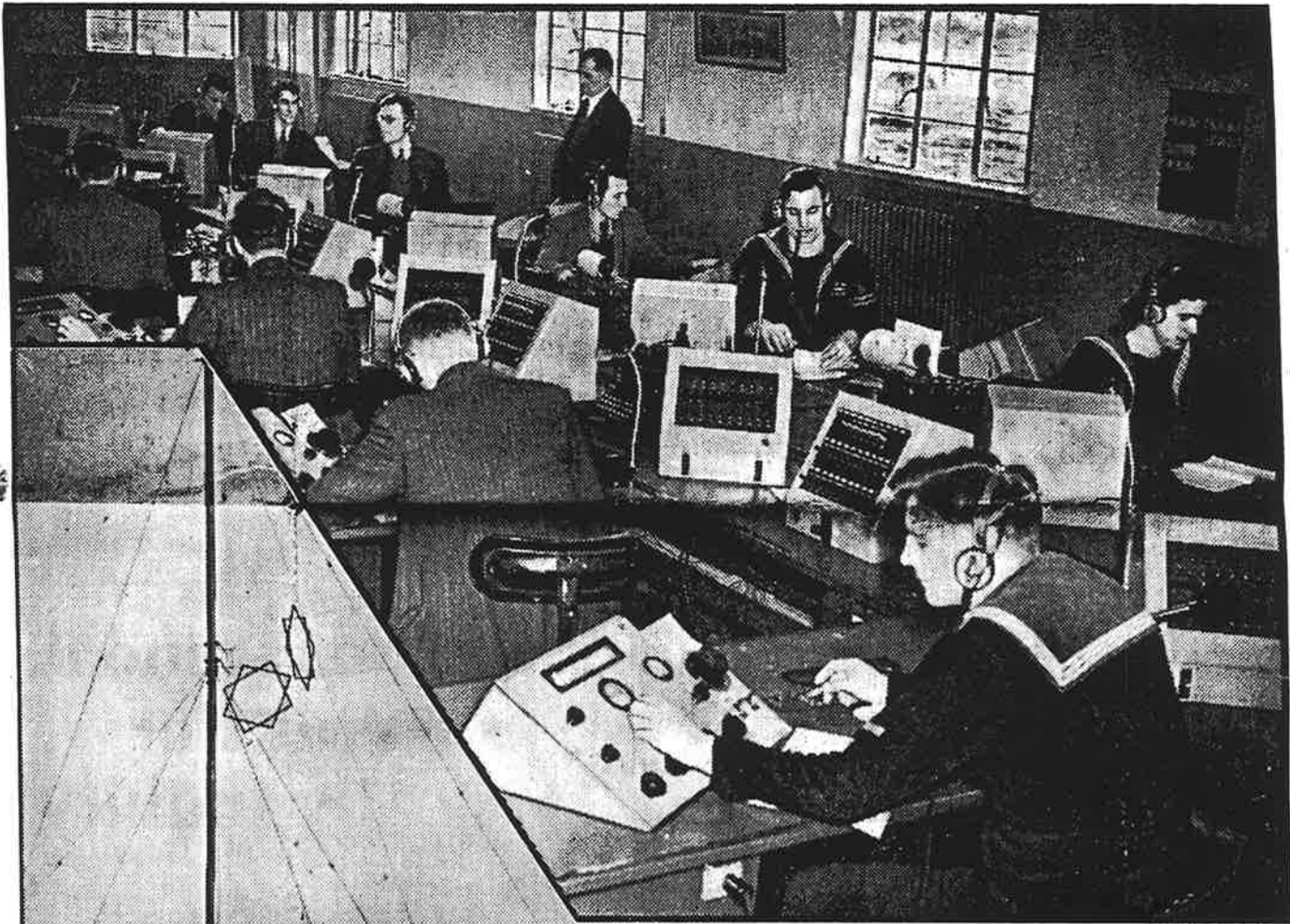
High-speed traffic to any point in the British Isles goes by radio-telephone and teleprinter.

Burnham also maintains daily contact with seven other major transmitter stations dotted throughout the Empire, and the master control station is linked with the chief wireless section at the Admiralty.

For a Shilling

Apart from long range radio there is also in the same building the short range Burnham—one of 12 Post Office short range stations around British coasts for communication with ships up to 300 miles out and for answering their distress calls.

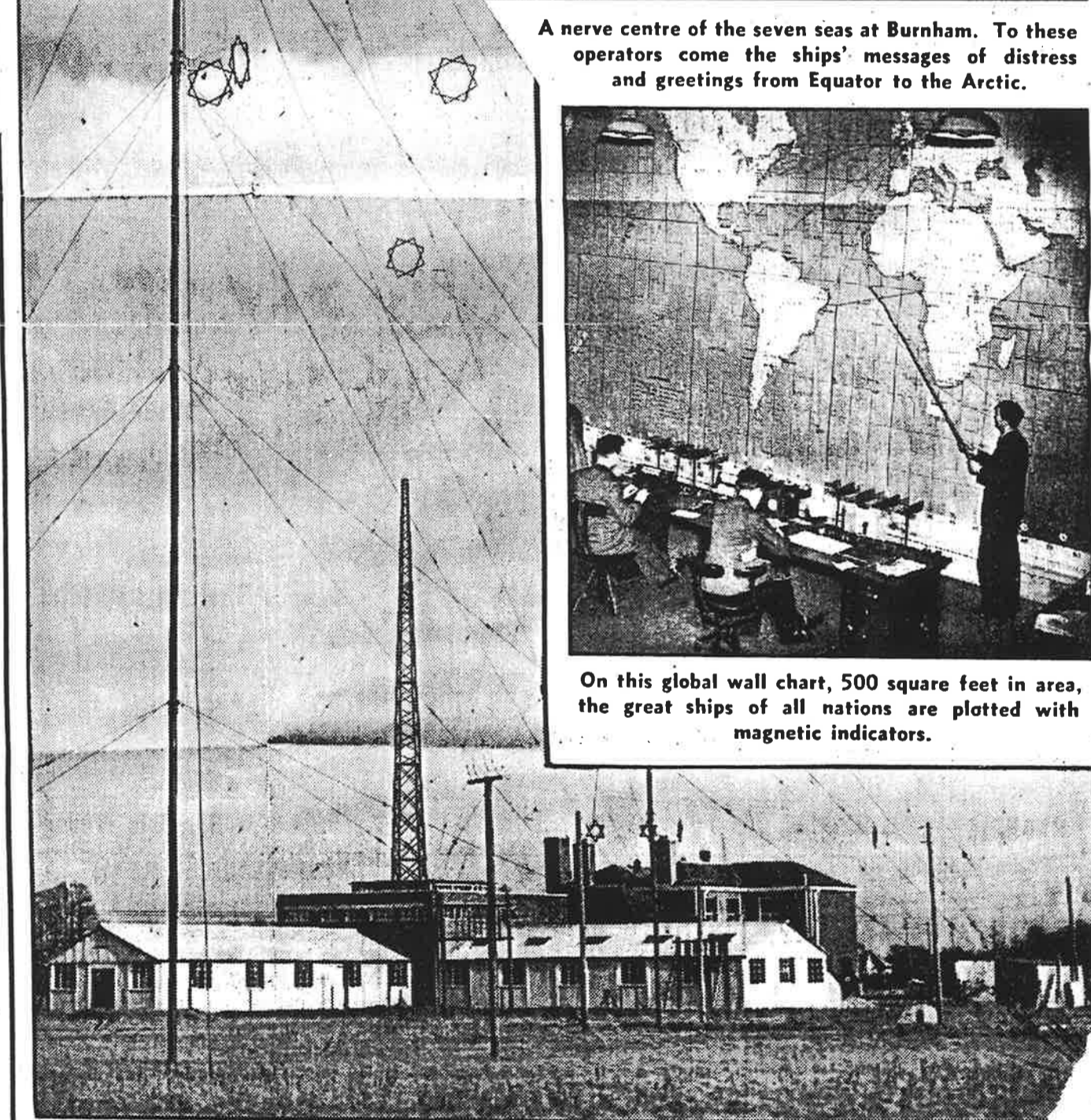
FOOTNOTE: Few British families are aware that for one shilling plus the cost of a phone call or telegram it is possible to get from Burnham information about a merchant ship anywhere in the world.



A nerve centre of the seven seas at Burnham. To these operators come the ships' messages of distress and greetings from Equator to the Arctic.



On this global wall chart, 500 square feet in area, the great ships of all nations are plotted with magnetic indicators.



Forty transmitters are linked to this web of aerials strung a hundred feet above Burnham radio station. Through them ships sailing the world's oceans can "talk" to home.



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