

**Far right,
an aeronautical
R/T console in
operation**

The Portishead transmitting site was closed in 1978, leaving the sites at Leafield and Ongar, operating alongside the main transmitting site at Rugby. However, the famous name of 'Portishead Radio' was maintained to provide the maritime community with a familiar and well-known service. The advent of satellite communications in the early 1980s had little initial impact, and in 1983 the new control centre was opened, providing new radiotelephone and radiotelegraphy consoles, with automatic radiotelex being installed later that year. Remotely-controlled receivers and receiving aerials, located at Somerton, were utilised for all services, resulting in the dismantling of the receiving aerials at Highbridge. The old operating rooms were demolished, creating space for administration offices and stores.

**The purpose built
BT Portishead Radio
Station at Highbridge,
Somerset**



1985 saw the opening of a new aircraft service, providing world-wide 'phone patch' and flight information services. This service proved so popular that many land-based industries based in remote locations in Africa used the 'aero' frequencies, culminating in the opening of the *Gateway* service, which continues to flourish to this day. Relief agencies, military units, embassies, and industries still use the service, which acts as a lifeline to those located in countries where normal landline links are poor or non-existent.

**Far right,
Portishead Radio's
microwave aerial**

**BT's Gateway service
provides important
communications links for
workers in countries
where landline links are
poor or non-existent**



By the end of the 1980s, satellite communications were making significant inroads into Portishead's traffic figures. It became clear that a severe rationalisation programme was necessary in order for the station to remain viable, which resulted in the closure of the transmitter sites at Leafield and Ongar. The number of operating consoles was reduced in line with the decline in radio traffic, and the number of staff employed fell proportionally.

Portishead Radio currently provides employment for 50 radio officers, and around 100 ships a day use the morse code service. This figure is expected to decline during the next few years, and by 1999 morse code communication is expected to be phased out, although there may still be some older vessels still trading who may need to use the facility. The radiotelex and radiotelephone services still, however, maintain a reasonable level of traffic, and the 'bureau' messaging services to our maritime customers remain popular.

Portishead Radio remains the most famous maritime radio station in the world, and the mere mention of its name

is likely to provoke fond memories by those radio officers who used the service in its heyday. Whilst the days of receiving weak radio signals from a passenger liner from the South African coast are long since gone, Portishead Radio continues to provide a valuable service to the world's maritime community.



*Offices in Europe, North America,
Japan and Asia Pacific.*

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