



Marconi on the Isle of Wight

By *Tim Wander*

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In November 1897, a twenty-three year old Italian inventor visited the Royal Needles Hotel that overlooked Alum Bay on the west coast of the Isle of Wight. The young Guglielmo Marconi's proposal to rent rooms to perform his 'experiments' over the deserted winter months was warmly welcomed by the hotels proprietors. Marconi used some of the working capital of his newly formed Wireless Telegraph & Signal Company to convert the hotel's billiard room and install his equipment and spark transmitter. Several small ships were hired and fitted with wireless aerials and receivers while moored at the pier below. A huge mast, 168 feet high, had to be hauled up the cliff face of Alum Bay and raised in the hotel grounds, a feat that required the help of most of the able bodied men in Totland. On Monday 6th December 1897 Marconi started his wireless experiments from the Royal Needles Hotel, including a month of private demonstrations for Queen Victoria and the Royal family using wireless stations he installed at Osborne House and on board the Royal Yacht. For the next two and a half years the world's first permanent wireless station would be operated from the Isle of Wight. By 1900 Marconi realised he need more space, greater privacy and longer ranges to his new stations being built in Cornwall. He moved his equipment and aerial mast from Alum Bay across the Island to a new station built in Knowles farm in Niton. While there Marconi developed the vital science of tuning, enabling multiple wireless signals to be separated without interference. In January 1901 transmissions from Niton reached Marconi's new station at Lizard Point in Cornwall. This was 196 miles away, a world record for 'radio' waves, convincing Marconi that his system was now ready to attempt to transmit across the Atlantic ocean, over 2,100 miles. The science and art of wireless communication was born on the Isle of Wight. This is the story of a young Italian engineer, whose small experiments on a small Island grew to produce our modern world of instant global communication, radio broadcasting, mobile phones, television, satellite communication and even the internet. Marconi on the Isle of Wight changed the world forever.

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