BAWDSEY RADAR
A world first

David Harrison - Working on the East Coast Chain Home Tower 1953

First the technical bit - The receiver dipoles were mounted at 120 ft. and 190 ft. up the 240 ft. wooden lattice towers. The towers were rigid and did not sway but they vibrated in a high wind. The method of detecting whether an echo was in front or behind was by separating the reflector dipole and then shorting it together by pushing the ‘sense’ button on the receiver. The shorting was achieved by a mercury relay which comprised a horizontal glass tube with a pool of mercury at each end. When the sense button was pushed, an iron strip was pushed into the mercury and made the contacts.

On windy days the vibration caused the mercury to accumulate at one end, with the result that the operator on the Tube would shout “Mech. The reflector’s gone (again)”

So on this wintry day in 1953 I had to climb 190 ft. up the receiver tower in a gale in the middle of the night, to take the lid off the relay box and flick the glass tube to move the mercury back in place.

Whilst I did this, strapped to the central feeder, Flight Sergeant Ted Lawrence stood on the ladder and held the torch. At some stage he swung the torch around and illuminated the remains of the adjacent tower which had collapsed in the January gales.

We were both relieved to get back into the receiver block!

If you spent time at Bawdsey Radar Station or have stories to tell about events in and around the station please do get in touch with us!