

# Brookman's Park – A Brief History



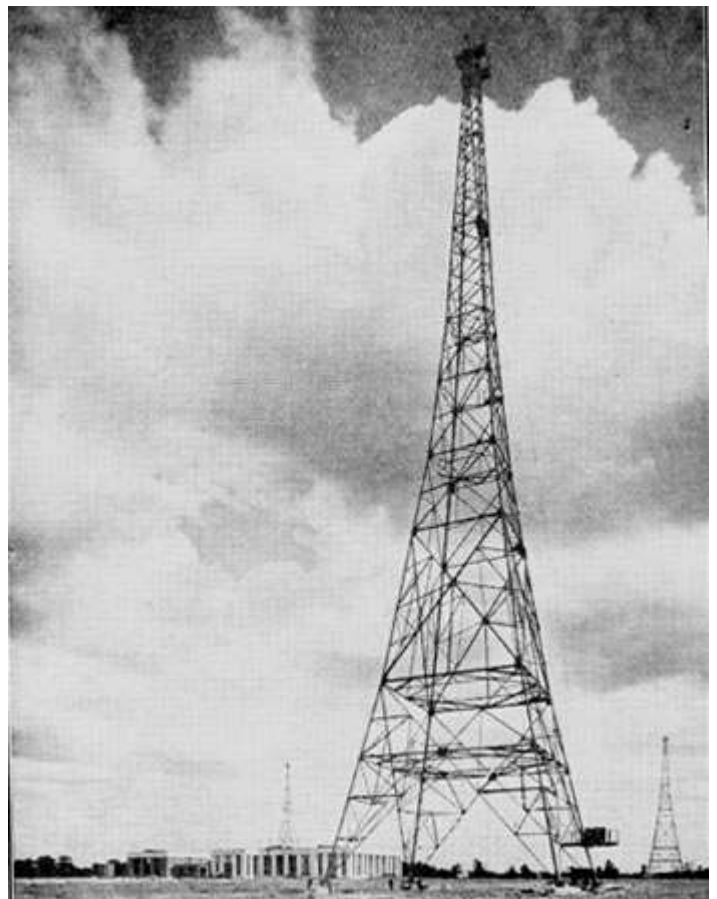
In January, fellow BDXC member Mark Palmer saw a handpump for a beer being served in a local pub with a pump-clip picturing a wireless set and the Brookman's Park aerial mast. As a Real Ale as well as radio fan, I did some further "Googling" and found the beer, named Brookman's, was brewed by the Tring Brewery in Hertfordshire, the county that is home to the Brookman's Park transmitter site.

Situated north of London, between Hatfield and Potters Bar, Brookman's Park was the first purpose-built "twin-wave" transmitter station in the world capable of broadcasting two radio programmes simultaneously when it was completed in October 1929. The station was the first in a series constructed as part of the BBC's new Regional Scheme,

conceived by BBC Chief Engineer P. P. Eckersley, to improve and extend radio coverage throughout the UK. Prior to this, coverage had been restricted, using a number of town centre 1 or 2 kilowatt transmitters and relay stations broadcasting just one programme. The new Regional Scheme planned to use transmitters of 50 kW giving much wider coverage, but needed open sites outside of town centres to avoid swamping nearby receivers. Brookman's Park was to serve London and the Home Counties and the land was bought by the BBC for £10,000 from the Brookman's Park Estate and faced few planning or building restrictions (soon to be introduced in the 1932 Town & Country Planning Act). It was to replace the 2LO transmitter sited on the roof of Selfridge's department store in Oxford Street, central London. According to the 1930 BBC Year Book, the first three stations in the Regional Scheme - Daventry, Brookman's Park and Moorside Edge - would extend coverage to 75% of the British population. The station building with huge transmitter hall was larger and grander than strictly necessary to reflect the new status of radio in the public life.

*right: The new London Station at Brookman's Park (B.B.C. Year-Book 1930)*

The first programme transmitted from Brookman's Park was the London Regional programme on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1929 on 356 metres (842 kHz) A few months later, on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1930, the National service launched from another Marconi transmitter housed in the same building on 261 metres (1148kHz). The new twin transmitters at Brookman's Park were also used for simultaneous sound and vision 30-line television tests in 1930, after the radio had closed for the night.



These transmitters continued in use until the Second World War. On 7<sup>th</sup> January 1940 the BBC Forces Programme commenced on 877 kHz from four 50 kW transmitters, including one at Brookman's Park. Also, to increase the power and overcome jamming of the BBC European Service, a 140 kW Standard Telephone & Cables (STC) transmitter was installed in an extension to the original Brookman's Park building - this came into service on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1941 on 804 kHz (373 metres). (A comprehensive list of wartime frequencies can be found at this excellent site: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160618190433/http://mds975.co.uk/Content/AMFREQS.zip> ).

After the Second World War, the new BBC Light programme was broadcast from Brookman's Park initially on 1149 kHz, then on 1214 kHz (247 metres). Also the Home Service for the South East on 877 kHz then moving to 908 kHz. From September 1967 the new BBC Radio 1 shared 1214 kHz with Radio 2 (the old Light programme) and the Home Service became Radio 4. In 1972 new BBC local Radio London added a mediumwave transmitter on 1457 kHz (206 metres) at Brookman's Park. Launched in October 1970, Radio London had originally been on VHF (95.3) only, but medium wave was added ahead of the launch of commercial stations.

Unlike other famous transmitter sites such as Droitwich or even Stagshaw, I've never seen Brookman's Park printed on the dial of any radio set though. From the start it seemed to appear just as 'National' or 'London Reg.', then 'Light' etc. Maybe some members know differently?

Overnight on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1978 the BBC reorganised its mediumwave frequencies, at the same time bringing them in line with the new frequency plan for Europe with 9 kHz channel spacing. At Brookman's Park this meant Radio 1 moved to 1089 kHz, Radio 2 to 909 kHz, Radio 3 to 1215 kHz and Radio London to 1458 kHz.



In the 1990s, BBC stations started leaving mediumwave and the Brookman's Park frequencies were gradually replaced by commercial stations. R2 left MW in August 1990 to be replaced by new BBC Radio Five (to become Radio Five Live in 1994). R3 vacated mediumwave in February 1992, Radio London in October 1993 and R1 in July 1994. Radio 5 Live, on 909 kHz from Brookman's Park, is now the only BBC analogue station still using the site. In July 1992 tests started for commercial "INR2" on 1215 kHz which launched as Virgin Radio in April 1993 (now Absolute Radio). On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1994 Sunrise Radio, an Asian station, launched on Radio London's old 1458 kHz. And in February 1995 Talk Radio (now TalkSport) launched on 1089 kHz.

BBC Transmission who operated Brookman's Park was privatised in 1997 and the domestic network was bought by Crown Castle. In 1994 they were bought by National Grid who were in turn bought by Arqiva in 2007. Brookman's Park is now home to two DAB multiplexes – D1 National and London 3.

Reference: "A History of Brookman's Park Transmitting Station" (Lilian Caras 1982)  
<https://www.northmymshistory.uk/2018/01/a-history-of-brookmans-park.html>

"The London Twin-Wave Broadcasting Station Brookman's Park" (BBC Souvenir Booklet 1930)  
<https://www.northmymshistory.uk/2018/01/the-london-twin-wave-broadcasting.html>

"UK Radio – A Brief History" (Parts 1,2,3) Martin Watkin's AMFREQS spreadsheet are archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160430042022/http://www.mds975.co.uk/Content/radmemb.html>

"On Air – A History of BBC Transmission" – Norman Shacklady and Martin Ellen (2003)

Thanks to Lynne at Tring Brewery for kindly sending me two Brookman's pump-clips: as well as the one pictured above, there's also a "Winter Ale" version of the same picture with snow falling outside the window and around the mast with radio listener (DXer?) sporting a warm bobble-hat!

Alan Pennington (c) British DX Club March 2013 (links revised January 2023)