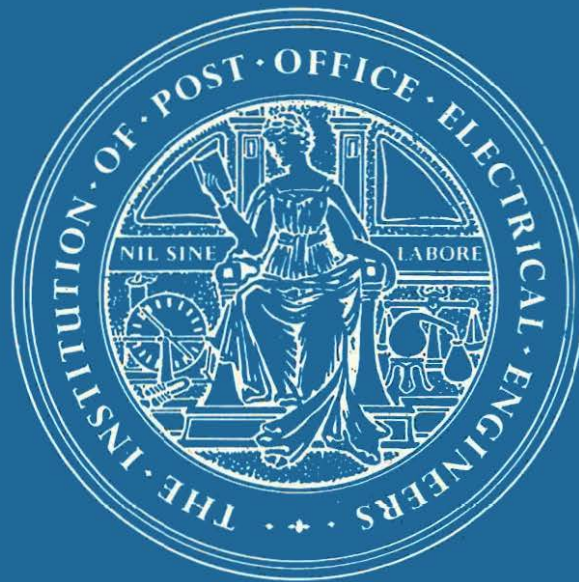


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The Opening of the Post Office Tower, London

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ON Friday, 8 October 1965, the Post Office Tower in London was officially opened for service by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Harold Wilson, M.P., before an invited audience including three former Postmasters-General (Lord Attlee, the Right Honourable Ness Edwards, M.P., and Lord Hill of Luton), the Minister of Public Building and Works, the Postmaster-General, members of Parliament, and representatives of industry and the press. The ceremony was relayed by a closed-circuit television link between the Tower and Birmingham, where the Lord Mayor, Alderman G. Corbyn Barrow, joined the ceremony.

The Postmaster-General, the Right Honourable Anthony Wedgwood Benn, M.P., after thanking all those concerned with the project, said "the Tower symbolizes the 20th century, and it is appropriate that the first Prime Minister to have made science and technology his special interest, should be invited to open the Tower."

The Prime Minister emphasized that work in the Public Service, of which the Tower was a typical example, could be exciting and demanding, and dubbed the tower "Big Bedford," the 20th-century equivalent of Big Ben, after its architect, Mr. Eric Bedford, Chief Architect of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. He then made the opening call, via a microwave radio-relay link, to the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, who welcomed the valuable addition to the communications to the Midlands and assured the Prime Minister that Birmingham, in its turn, would be proud of its Post Office Tower now nearing completion but, alas, without a restaurant. In repartee, the Prime Minister invited the Lord Mayor to the Tower restaurant in London, an invitation which was confirmed by Sir Billy Butlin, the restaurateur concerned.

The Tower, and its complex facilities, was then accepted into the Post Office service by the Director of the London Telecommunications Region, Mr. A. B. Harnden, who promised that it would be maintained and employed in the public service in accordance with the high standards set by his telecommunications staff.

At the conclusion of the opening ceremony the Prime Minister and Postmaster-General, accompanied by their wives, toured the building, visiting the Tower and Mercury trunk-switching units and the new television network switching centre, and then unveiled a plaque at the base of the Tower. The tour concluded with an ascent to the restaurant floor at the top of the Tower.

Parties of the guests were then conducted on tours of the installations.

Previous articles^{1,2} have given full descriptions of the Tower and its radio services, and a further article³ in this issue of the Journal describes the high-speed lifts. When fully equipped the Tower will provide up to 150,000 trunk telephone circuits and up to 40 television distribution channels, carried over microwave radio-relay systems. The television network switching centre can accommodate up to 400 incoming and outgoing video circuits, of which nearly half are in the course of being provided. All the new radio broadbands operating from the Tower are suitable for either colour television or telephony, and the two types of service share common protection



THE PRIME MINISTER SPEAKING AT THE OPENING CEREMONY

channels. At the present time B.B.C. 2 television services are provided to Birmingham, Manchester (serving also Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north-east of England), Norwich, and, by temporary radio circuits, to Bristol and Cardiff, and to the Isle of Wight. A broadband radio circuit of 1,800 telephone channels to Birmingham and Manchester is in service, and a second is in the course of being commissioned. During 1966 a third telephony broadband, plus a television channel (transferred from the existing steel tower), will be put into service to Birmingham, followed, at the end of the year, by three television channels to the Isle of Wight and four to Bristol. In 1967 additional telephony broadbands will open to Folkestone, Southampton and the Goonhilly Downs satellite earth station, together with a Eurovision channel to the Continent via a cross-channel radio link. The build-up of telephony broadbands will continue in 1968 with two more to Birmingham and two, on a new route, to Peterborough and Leeds. Orders are already being negotiated for four more broadbands on the London-

Birmingham-Manchester route, and for an additional broadband to Leeds.

The television and telephony services will then be evenly balanced, each having a dozen or so broadbands. Despite the upsurge in telephony requirements, it seems likely that television development will keep this balance between the two services for some years to come. In the words of the Prime Minister "the Tower will be the nerve centre of a system which will help to ensure that both national and international telecommunications will be adequate during the next decade and beyond. It is a magnificent example of British engineering skill, and Post Office enterprise."

S.G.Y.

References

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²JONES, D. G., and EDWARDS, P. J. Post Office Tower, London, and the United Kingdom Network of Microwave Links. *P.O.E.E.J.*, Vol. 58, p. 149, Oct. 1965.

³MARRIOTT, P. E. Passenger Lifts in the Post Office Tower, London. (In this issue of the *P.O.E.E.J.*)



THE PRIME MINISTER AND MRS. WILSON AND THE POSTMASTER-GENERAL AND MRS. WEDGWOOD BENN TOURING THE BUILDING AFTER THE OPENING CEREMONY