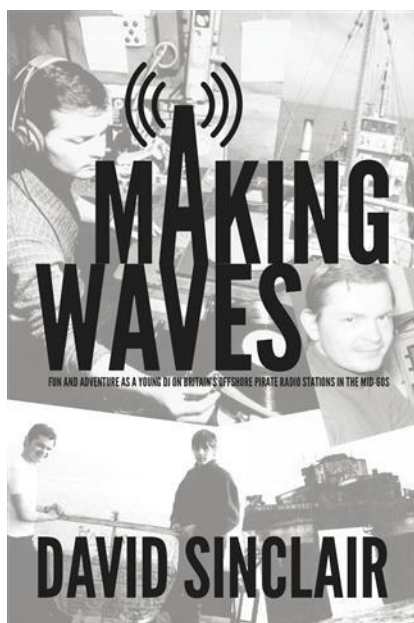


Paul de Haan reviews in this story not only an excellent new book in the history on offshore radio but also has some personal reflections and memories to the days when radio was real radio.

Making Waves by David Sinclair.

David Sinclair was in the 1960's a presenter on three offshore radiostations off the UK coast, Radio Essex-BBMS, Radio 270 and Radio 390.



A book review written by Paul de Haan.

You can of course read this review and on the other hand you don't, the result is that I strongly advise you to order this book as soon as possible because it tells this great inside story of a station that always intrigued me, Radio EssexBBMS, the smallest UK offshore radio station on the air from autumn 1965 till Xmas 1966. On top of that author David also explains the goings on on Radio 270 and if that's not enough a great inside look in what is one of my favorite stations the legendary sweet music station Radio 390.

But before we get to David his account of events on the Knock John Tower, the Ocean7 and the Red Sands Fort a note on the foreword written by Jon Myer from the Pirateradio Hall of Fame. Jon writes he got hooked onto offshore radio in May 1964 and as a result he mentions the fact that his schoolteacher wished he wouldn't listen so much to the 'pirate stations', it might ruin his education and career in adult life. Well, it didn't ruin Jon's life in fact it got him a 40 year long career in broadcasting.

I also got 'hooked' but almost in a different way. In June 1964 I stayed with my Uncle and Aunt in Hilversum and one day this uncle asked me if I had ever done some fishing, well in fact up until June 64 no fishing, we went to the famous Loosdrechtse Plassen near Hilversum and I got some lessons in fishing, but after about 15 minutes I noticed that the car radio, parked near us, played good music: Stones-Beatles-Ray Charles-Georgie Fame and a voice of a man telling us we were tuned to Radio Caroline ding ding. From that day in June 1964 at the age of 12 I was hooked on offshore and onshore radio. It didn't only introduced to me the UK offshore stations but also the BeebBeebZee Light on 1500 longwave, Luxembourg on 208 and AFN on several mediumwave frequencies. At age 12 I got my very first transistorradio, long and medium wave and I am proud of the fact that I heard every UK offshore station between 64 and March 68, also Essex on 2double2 mediumwave but to tune in and get hooked onto the Knock John Radio I had to set my alarm clock at 2 am, the French station had closed down. That was the only time for me to listen on 222. At the age of 12 I was expected to only listen to the ones playing the top 40 tunes but there was something rather strange, I also started to enjoy the sounds of Britain Radio but most of the entire great format on 390.

Somehow I managed to find photos from the ships and army towers in UK newspapers and Disc and Music Echo, but it took me a long while to find out the Knock John was something very special

compared to Red Sands and through the decades and the blessing of tape swapping and later internet I found out that the smallest of them all, Radio Essex, was in fact a very very mature radio station with a great format and presenters who somehow at very young age<16-18> had very specific knowledge of music. There aren't that many hours of recording from Essex/BBMS, perhaps 5 'good quality' mediumwave recordings from a time of day at around 18.00-20.00 hours, easy listening and Big Band music. So, that's my introduction to this phenomenon called offshore radio, by the way, I never ever fished again.

I started reading the book and was amazed that at an early stage in his working life Sinclair was horrified by the chance that his working life was going to be down and dull and somehow he decided that joining one of the offshore radio stations would be a guarantee for an exciting career till his pension would come along.

It takes me back to December 1970, both Hans Knot and yours truly could be heard on an fm pirate in Groningen called RNI Groningen, remember the real thing was off air. We were also looking for less down and dull and more thrills and much more music. After 3 weeks we were raided by the Dutch GPO. Here's a funny story: one of those GPO guys insisted we handed over an Elvis record that we played on air, we couldn't because we didn't have any Elvis record, the guy did not believe us. After the raid we laughed our head off, we had played one of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band songs, imitating Elvis. Great fun and we had our cheap thrills for three whole RNI Groningen weeks.

So, somehow I can understand why David Sinclair was keen on getting onboard of one of those floating radio stations off the English southeast coast.

Getting onboard one of those floating dreams wasn't easy not having the necessary contacts in the radiobusiness and just about 18, London and Caroline employed professional presenters/deejays and

somehow Sinclair needed to be on an easylistening station, not playing the pops of the day. Getting onboard proved to be possible on the one hand because one of the Essex people lived in the same village as David, on the other hand getting onboard the Knock John was a different story. London and Caroline had spent a lot of money on buying a ship to broadcast from, the good news is that getting Radio Essex on air was a matter of climbing onboard the fort, there you are its yours. No money involved, good news! That's what they had in mind, the reality was different, a rival group was already out there so it took some gentle persuasion to make them leave the Knock John to Bates and his Radio Essex happy bunch.

Becoming a deejay on a fort based radio station off the Essex coast was what could be considered as a training school for the rest of your life, it proofed that spinning the Mantovani and Big Band sounds was just about 10 % percent of the job, the other 90%? Buy the book, read the book, its revealing! It took David 4 pages to write down the horror of getting 'onboard' the Knock John. 99.9% of all radiopresenters just walk into a radiostudio blindfolded only using their nose for the smell of vinyl records.....4 whole pages for the 0.1 % lucky ones starting their careers on the Knock John. Thanks to the Major Roy Bates.

Many pages in this superb book are devoted to explaining the format and musicpolicy of Radio Essex/BBMS, the food and diesel situation onboard and the 222 Powerhouse, a 50 watt mediumwave transmitter that was expected to produce 50kw of Rf. Well of course it didn't. In those days it was all valves and old army TX stuff, no handbooks etc etc and the TX engineers on the Knock John were specialists on electric toasters, mediumwave toasters?

For many years we were educated to believe that mediumwave broadcasting is something from out of space, well I can assure you it's not. In 2012 I wanted to know what it was all about and bought a 100 watt mediumwave transistor transmitter and together with my

son we started building a proper long wire aerial in the back garden, which was the easy bit of the project. Backbreaking was digging in the garden many many yards of copper wire as an effective earth to the TX aerial, in the end we got it on air on 1539 khz mediumwave using a laptop as playout system connected to a 70s Tandy equalizer and a homebuilt lim/compressor. It sounded great and the signal that originated from Groningen was heard loud and clear in towns like Dokkum county of Fryslan. It's a matter of arithmetic and some educated thinking on how to get very good modulation. All this without the help of an Optimod, it can be done without it you know.

The TX and aerial have now been sold to another one of those mediumwave fans < It wasn't the cheapest but certainly it's the best>, there is still a lot of copper in the ground by the way.

Now over to page 56..... Is there a ghost or not on the Knock John? We now know that not only the Mi Amigo had a friendly goast, also one has been 'seen' on the Ross Revenge?

As of page 58 a fascinating story about the other navy fort off the Kent coast, I remember the Tongue from passing it whilst being on the Olau ferry from Vlissingen to Sheerness and it could also be seen when on the beach of Margate. What was the reason for those Essex men to visit this crippled fort?

During the fall of 1966 however things started to fall apart for Radio Essex/BBMS resulting in the closedown during X Mas 1966, Sinclair in his book gives the sad details and the reason why he moved on to bigger and better thinks. Bigger and better, indeed Radio 270 was the next stations, moving on continued whilst being onboard the former Dutch fishing vessel ocean 7, going forward-backwards-forward-backwards and even from side to side-side to side-forward-backwards and of course the ever present smell of fish caught during her fish hunting days. "Would you like a salty raw herring with a nice touch of whipped cream on top, come on give it a

try, you'll love it"backward-forewords-backward-forwards and ahhhh, there's that nice smell of diesel oil too. And on top of that the format was Top 40, not everyone's cuppa tea.

Radio 270 had a very clear signal with its 10 kW on 1115 kHz across the North Sea into the northern parts of Holland, in fact a better signal than Big L on 1132 kHz, Big L was off channel and pushed into AFN Bremerhaven's 1142 from northern Germany, and so in Groningen there was always this 'whistle' on the London signal.

About 20 years ago via satellite I listened to ASDA Radio, one of those in-store radio stations advertising just about every product they had in store, that is what 270 did in 1966, the deejays were salesmen too. Sinclair also explains about the background of the Yorkshire investors in the station and the unique very cramped living conditions on the radioship that should have been used as the tender.

The next station Sinclair worked on from February 1967 was without doubt his favorite and in fact if it still would be on air from Red Sands towers he might still be going out there every other week and I would still be listening. Radio 390 the classiest of them all!

The remainder of his excellent book is all about Radio 390 right till the sad end in July 1967, this superb station was forced off air even before the introduction of the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act August 1967 leaving the very loyal listeners out in the cold and wasting very good on air people who were never heard on UK radio again.

A thank you goes out to David Sinclair for the many hours of listening to 390 and for writing this great book about three significant offshore radiostations.

Making Waves can be ordered here:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00T3G2HNA/the-pira-radio-21>

Paul de Haan.

www.marinebroadcasters.com