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E.K. Cole Ltd.

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Eric Cole was born in Rochford on 4th July 1901, and was the only son of Henry and Alice Laura Cole who lived at No.2 Beedell Avenue Westcliff (Southend-on-Sea). It is believed that 'Kirkham' was his mother's maiden name and that his father at that time was a Dairyman. Following school, he attended Southend Technical Collage and was lucky that he avoided being called up for the First World War. He joined his father who by this time had set up a small business as '*Henry Cole Electrical contractor*' probably wiring up houses since electricity was still being introduced to domestic properties at that time. In 1920, the business name was changed to '*Henry Cole and Son – Electrical Engineers*'. Trading from a shed behind No. 2 Beedell Ave, Westcliff-on-Sea.

In 1922 the business name was changed to *Eric Cole – Electrical Engineer* and in addition, he started a separate a separate business called the *E.K. Cole Receiver Company* with his then girlfriend Muriel Bradshaw, but still trading from his parents shed/workshop in Beedell Ave.

One source says that his business was repairing electrical appliance's including the rudimentary radio sets of the day (the BBC and Marconi had only started broadcasting in 1922) as well as making his own sets on a small scale (probably no more than 6 a week) and in line with many other outlets he was offering a battery charging service (they were called accumulators in those days) since most radio sets were battery powered due to the wide variance in electricity supply (the national grid at 240 volts A/C was not agreed until 1926) and DC voltage was still commonplace – Southend at that time had 230 volts DC.



One-day in 1924 Eric was approached by a William Streatfield (Billy) Verrells, who was a schoolteacher (at that time a semi-invalid recovering after having a lung removed due to tuberculosis) who came into the shop one day for a freshly charged battery. Verrells, exasperated by the accumulator letting him down in the middle of an interesting program, complained to Eric Cole that as an electrician, he (Eric) should be able to make his wireless work from the lighting mains, which at that time was on Direct Current.

Eric replied that 230 volts was too powerful to run a 6-volt set and apart from the danger of fire, the reception would be drowned by interference. Nevertheless, later that evening in his workshop Eric thinking about Verrells comments, rigged up a series of lamps between the set and the mains, which reduced the voltage to the required 6 volts and while the set worked, the hum was awful.

After reading up textbooks, he inserted a high capacity condenser to smooth out the hum and took this contraption around to Verrells, who was delighted even though he still needed his high-tension battery and the glare and heat from the electric lamps was pretty bad.

Determined to improve on this, Eric substituted a resistance for the electric lamps, which got very hot however and needed a metal case to avoid the fire risk, Eric in fact later told one of his managers that it was so hot you could have fried eggs on it!!

Persevering, Eric improved the apparatus and sold a few to his friends locally. When later, he succeeded in incorporating into his brainchild a device, which also supplied the high-tension current hitherto needing a HT battery, Verrells persuaded him to advertise his contraption in the radio journals with the result that while the device was still crude and not in accordance with the regulations of the Institute of Electrical Engineers covering mains devices, there was a rapid rise in sales with the result that Verrells, in spite of his illness, went into partnership with Eric Cole using Eric Cole's initials as a trade mark becoming the *E.K. Company* or **EKCO** for short.

Capital came from Mr. Maxwell (who owned and ran '*Peter Pan's Playground*' – the well known local amusement park on Southend seafront) who by all accounts was a canny Scot, Mr. Manners (an enterprising local builder) and Mr. Pring – who was a local milkman – all of whom became directors.

Interestingly W.S. Verrells became the Chairman and Managing Director with Eric Cole becoming the Works and Technical Director – a role that Verrells felt gave Eric the freedom to be an '*ideas man*' to develop the business – and leaving himself to run the commercial activity, which gave him a new lease of life to the point that he almost forgot about his illness and much to his surprise, he discovered he had a keen commercial sense. In fact he took charge of commercial policy, and had soon engaged a sales and publicity staff. Now that he had a viable business, Eric took the opportunity to marry his girlfriend Muriel Bradshaw, which he did in 1925.



W.S. Verrells in 1932

Photo courtesy Chris Poole

The EKCO business name was adopted in 1926 when *E.K. Cole Limited* was formally incorporated (and floated on the stock exchange with a working capital of £2,500) and the business moved to larger premises at 505 London Road, Southend, and then shortly afterwards to 513 London Road, Southend.

As most of England was on Alternating Current, their sales were limited to those areas still on DC and it was soon evident that they would have to produce a model of 'Eliminator' that was usable on AC current. However, this involved more technical knowledge than Eric Cole possessed as an electrician, but he got in touch with people who made rectifiers and condensers and managed to produce a model usable on AC. It was crude, but sold very well. They did realise with foresight that as mains powered radio sets came onto the market (following the adoption of the National Grid), eliminator sales would fade out, so production was turned over to making mains powered radio sets, which had two and three valve sets (without speakers) using the new indirectly heated valves.

These new receivers were not very successful, being rather unreliable - not unexpectedly – since the technique was new and reliable components were unavailable, and being the first actual receivers they produced, the design was somewhat experimental but they sold well, such was the demand for sets.

Being well financed, a factory was built at 1135 London Road, Leigh-on-Sea in 1927, and they wisely engaged professional engineers to design more reliable and safer products. This recruitment program (mostly during 1928/9) was to be one of the best moves ever made by Eric Cole since the engineers he brought in were to form the core team, which took the company to commercial success in the 1930's and beyond. At the same time, he also wisely recognised that he needed 'home grown' talent, so he also began to recruit bright school leavers who showed an aptitude for electronics to work alongside these professional engineers.

By 1929, with the rapid expansion, there were about 100 people working for the company and they were earning quite good profits (believed to be in excess of £30,000 p.a.), which in those days was a venerable fortune, and with the new engineers setting the pace, new designs for the sets were coming through, which were exhibited at Radio-Olympia, and proved to be a big success.

As a result of this, a green field site (actually a cabbage patch) was acquired in Priory Crescent, Southend, and work commenced building a completely new factory, which just happened to be built by a company called *Bentall Estates* who were owned by Mr. Manners. In fact, in addition to building the factory, he went on to build a whole housing estate adjacent to the factory, which to this day is called the 'Manners Way Estate'.

In 1930, with the 100,000 square feet factory completed, EKCO moved in, and this site was to remain the main HQ and manufacturing site for the rest of the life of the company – with the exception of the war years (WW2). Here, rapid expansion took place and very soon there were around 500 people working for the company. By this time radio production by far outstripped 'eliminator' production, but a big issue was the radio cabinet, which was one of the major features in selling the sets. These had been cabinets made from wood but were very expensive, so the newly invented 'Bakelite' material was considered.

However, the choice of cabinets was limited until one day in 1930, Michael Lipman (who at the time worked for AEG in Germany), made an appointment to see the Chief Buyer (Mr. Ratcliffe), where he showed him a Bakelite cabinet AEG had made for the German *Telefunken* company, which demonstrated what could be done with this new 'wonder material'.

As Michael Lipman recalled, 'Ratcliffe was looking for a new cabinet design, grabbed it, took it upstairs and came down a few minutes later with John Wyborn, the chief engineer, who, after asking a few questions, whisked him upstairs to the Board Room where he was introduced to Cole and Verrells.'

They were wildly excited and said this was just what they needed to launch themselves into the radio-set market proper and, within an hour, he had an inquiry for 30,000 cabinets of two types, and a request for a designer to come over from Berlin at once, as it was March, and the new sets had to be ready for the Radio Exhibition in August. The order was duly placed and was the largest single order for Bakelite cabinets placed by a Radio manufacturer at that time.



1930 photo of factory being built

Photo courtesy Southend Museum Services

This bode well for Michael Lipman since shortly afterwards EKCO made him an offer he could not refuse, and he joined the company as a Production Engineer for the new factory, with responsibility for the installation and equipment of a tool room, machine shop and

mass production assembly facilities.

The new sets in their Bakelite cabinets were an instant success, as were the loudspeakers in cabinets to match - in those days the speakers were separate from the receivers, largely because the early valves were 'microphonic', i.e., they were affected by the speaker vibrations, which caused distorted reception.

After the new year of 1931, a fresh range of combined receivers and speakers were designed, again with Bakelite cabinets, and in a wider range of colours. The factory was extended, having proved to be too small for the projected output, and all was set for a still more successful season in 1931/32. Some ten assembly lines using the conveyor-belt technique were built, which was another innovation unique to EKCO at that time and this allowed six models to be produced alongside each other.

This was to prove to be another hugely successful year and it seemed EKCO could do no wrong and amply proved the recruitment program of 1928/29 due to the quality of both the personnel and the product they were able to engineer. A measure of the success was the fact that over a two year period since moving to Priory Crescent, production quadrupled and the number of people worked for the firm reached one thousand. However, disaster was just around the corner.

The crash of 'Credit Anhalt' in 1931 and the European economic crisis, which forced the Labour Government to resign, led the new National Government to impose swinging import duties on industrial products from around the world, with foreign goods charged at a higher rate than imperial items. This hit the cabinets from AEG in Germany and would have crippled EKCO in the marketplace. Urgent action was called for and EKCO suggested to AEG that the cabinets be made in the UK. The upshot of this was that an agreement was entered into whereby, for an annual fee and a royalty, a factory would be erected by EKCO adjacent to the main plant using presses supplied by AEG. This agreement was very onerous at the time. However, the Plastic's factory was built and the future supply of cabinets was assured.



In May 1932, EKCO produced their first 'staff magazine' called 'ECHOES', which gave a very good snapshot of the growth of the company - at that time - since the following statistics were given. In the first six years of existence, capital had risen from £2,500 to £400,000; floor space had risen from 50 Square feet to 172,200 Square feet, and output (sales) had risen from £1,000 to £1.25 million (in excess of £53 million at 2007 rates).

However, even as this was being printed, there was a disastrous fire in the design laboratories, which destroyed all the design data and models for the coming season (1932/33) and, due to this dislocation, there was not time to redesign the new range.

As a result, the two principal models for the 1932 season were built on the same basic chassis and in the same cabinets as for 1931.

This proved to be disastrous, as the trade expected something entirely new each year, and did not order as well as in earlier years, so while production went ahead at not too great a rate, it soon became apparent that there was a 50% drop in sales with large stocks of unsold sets building up, which by January 1933, brought about a financial crisis and the shares dropped on the Stock Exchange since the investor's were not very anxious to finance unsold stocks. The result of this was that the company had to make wholesale reductions in staffing levels, and manning was reduced to a level where only essential 'technical staff' were retained.

Of the financial backers, both Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Manners sold their interest in the company, and both 'Billy' Verrells and Eric Cole had to mortgage their houses to provide some much needed capital as well as cashing in Insurance policies to back a bank overdraft, which was needed to see the company through the few difficult months until the new 1933 season.

Nevertheless, like a Phoenix from the Ashes (literally) the company emerged stronger than before mainly because of the wise decision taken in 1928/29 to engage top line engineers who now (under the guidance of Eric Cole) set about designing new sets to a much higher standard and quality, which allowed the company to go up-market.



RS3 assembly line 1932

Photo courtesy Chris Poole

Eric also commissioned two outstanding designers, Serge Chermayev and Wells Coates to design cabinets for the company. Both of these designers had built themselves high reputations as architects and designers in the modern (Art Deco) movement, and now they set to work designing new radio cabinets, taking advantage of what Bakelite could offer, and breaking away from the previous convention of trying to get the Bakelite cabinets to imitate wooden ones.



1934 AD65 Radio

The result of this was the launch in 1933 of the AD64 radio designed by Serge Chermayev, and in 1934 of the AD65 Round Radio, which, with its *Wells Coates* designed cabinet, truly became a piece of 'Art Deco' furniture to grace any contemporary room. This latter set was produced in both cream and black, against the advice of the trade who shuddered at the idea of trying to sell a black object. In fact, this round set was to outsell the rest of the market, and is today invariably featured in design exhibitions and in TV programmes on the thirties period as typical of the era. It was these architect-designed sets that put Eric Cole back on the map and led to a further expansion of manufacturing facilities. Now that the company was solvent again, phase two of the building plan went ahead and building work began on a new office block and research laboratories (designed by Wells Coates) facing onto Priory Crescent, in front of the existing factory (these buildings still existed in April 2008).

1934 also saw EKCO being at the forefront of the design and installation of Car Radio's, which were at that time were new phenomenon and very technically challenging. These were launched at Radiolympia that year and caused a sensation as well as quite a few headaches, not the least of which was that the normal radio shops had no garage facilities and garages had no radio expertise, so EKCO had to set up a chain of installer/dealers.

These sets, while not popular with some car manufacturers (who saw them as an unnecessary technical nuisance), soon became an optional standard fit for Rolls Royce, which gave the company not only access to the R/R dealers and clients but the recognition from the worlds best car manufacturer, which was to be influential in more manufacturers slowly offering EKCO car radio's.

In 1935, to overcome import restrictions on the continent, EKCO set up a manufacturing

and distribution site in Belgium. This was only a small-scale operation but was to provide much experience of running an 'overseas' operation and working with foreign nationals. Belgium manufacture initially used components shipped over from Southend but gradually began to use locally sourced components, which materially assisted sales. This manufacturing unit, however, was short lived due to an economic downturn in Belgium following the German occupation of the Rhineland in 1936, so in 1937 it was shut down with the exception of a sales and service department in Brussels, which continued up to the start of WW2.

In 1936, EKCO began experimenting with Television through a joint venture with a company called *Schophony Limited*, where they attempted to negotiate a non-exclusive license for the manufacture, sale and distribution of Scophony television sets. The first set to go on sale was the Ekco-Schophony model ES104. These mechanical large screen models would have been aimed more at clubs and other public premises rather than the home.

In 1937, Ekco introduced their own conventional C.R.T.-based home model TC101, which had a built in radio and sold for the pricely sum of £84 or without the radio (model TC102) which sold for £47. 5 shillings.

Sales of these sets were not not large since Television (as we know it today) only began broadcasting in late 1936 (in 405 line) and only in the London area. 1937 also saw the formation of the 'Domestic Appliance Division', following the adoption of a patent taken out by a Scottish engineer, George Burnside, who had designed for the builders of the *Queen Mary* a new type of electric heater for use in cabins, which met the stringent requirements of both the Board of Trade and the ship's architects. This system was called 'Thermovent', which was soon widely adopted by ship builders especially Cunard. Following this success, Thermovent was launched into the UK housing market and was destined to remain in production for about 30 years.

1937 also saw EKCO set up production of their own radio valves, much to the annoyance of the established valve manufacturers, but it gave them the freedom and leverage to negotiate much better prices. While short lived (being sold the Mullards in 1939), it did give EKCO a further leg-up in the league of radio manufacturers.

1938 saw the introduction of a low cost simple, efficient add-on television unit for use with existing radio receivers for the reception of television programs, this unit being priced under 25 Guineas.

In 1939, the factory space vacated by the cessation of valve-manufacture was turned over to the manufacture of electric lamps since the equipment and machinery was very similar and the skilled labour which had been accumulated for valve-making was ideal for lamps - albeit a much less demanding technology. 1939 also saw the beginning of development work on 'Airborne Radar' in two forms, where EKCO, because of their outstanding reputation for quality and innovation, were asked by the Air Ministry to participate in the research and development of AI (Air Interception) and ASV (anti surface vessel) radars so as to bring the equipment up to a production standard - and then to manufacture it. Needless to say, this work was done in absolute 'top secret' conditions - on a strictly 'need to know basis'.

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The War Years

At the outbreak of war on 3rd September 1939, all work on domestic Radios and TV's



1939 TS701

stopped and following a plan laid out by the government, production was switched over to 'war work', which for EKCO meant manufacturing the WS.19 (Wireless set) for the Army, with the 'bakelite' presses turned over the munitions work (plastic practice bombs being one such item), and the lamp division returned to valve manufacture.

In 1940, at the time of Dunkirk and with invasion (seemingly) imminent, the order was given to disperse manufacture away from Southend, which was seen as being in the front line. Radar work went to a secret factory hidden inside a country house (Cowbridge House) just outside Malmesbury, the head office/administration went to Aston Clinton, where they occupied the Green Park Hotel, and radio production went to Aylesbury and Woking. In all cases, key workers were also relocated. A site was also opened in Rutherglen in Scotland for component manufacture especially transformers.



Photo courtesy Chris Poole

1941 saw AI mark IV and ASV Mark II radars being made at Malmesbury, while at Aylesbury work started on the TR-1154/1155 transmitter/ receiver set, which was to become the standard set for bomber command for the duration of the war.

1942 saw 'centrimetric' AI Mark VII and Mark VIII radars being manufactured at Malmesbury.

1943 saw production return to Southend with the vast assembly hall manufacturing 'wiring looms' for bombers – principally the Lancaster. This year also saw EKCO develop the WS-46 man pack portable 'walkie-talkie set especially for the commandos – this set being made at Woking.

In 1944, it is estimated that over 8,000 people were working for the company across the various sites.

In 1945, WS (Billy) Verrells the co-founder and chairman of the company decided that on both health and age grounds he could not carry the company through the post-war years and so he resigned at the end of the war.

As a stopgap measure, Sir George Allen (an eminent solicitor of the day - he had been the king's solicitor at the time of the abdication) became chairman. Peacetime production re-commenced at Southend with Aylesbury, Woking and Rutherglen shutting down, but Malmesbury was retained for military work. Domestic production initially concentrated on 'pre-war' designed radio sets until new designs could be developed.



Priory Crescent: A siren called the shift workers

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Post War

In 1946, a subsidiary company, Egen Electric Ltd., was formed to manufacture radio components and premises were acquired on Canvey Island in Essex. TV production re-commenced (TV broadcasting re-started June 1946). Malmesbury started work on Nucleonic equipment as well as CCWR (Cloud and Collision Warning Radar), and Eric Cole became Chairman and Managing Director by the end of the year.

In 1947, an associate company, Kelly & Shiel (EKCO Products) Ltd., was formed in the Republic of Ireland for the assembly and marketing of EKCO products. The Plastics Department was enlarged in the same year to incorporate injection-moulding plant. Weather radar made at Malmesbury flew with B.O.A.C. in the Hythe Flying Boats.

At the beginning of 1948, the production and marketing of EKCO lamps was taken over by a newly formed subsidiary company EKCO-Ensign Electric Ltd. At Malmesbury 'Thermotube' production begins.

In 1949, the Hadleigh - Essex plant started radio production. Also in 1949, an association with the National Radio & Engineering Company of India (subsidiary of the vast TATA organisation) was announced, resulting in the formation of National EKCO Radio & Engineering Co. Ltd. for the development and production in India of radio receivers, components and electronic devices. At Malmesbury the Army WS88 set went into production.

In 1950, Development work started on successor to WS 88 numbered WS A40 at Malmesbury and at Southend work commenced on a VHF radio system for Southend Waterworks Company. In 1951, an associate company was formed in South Africa, Kruger-Wilson (Africa) Ltd., for the assembly and marketing of EKCO radio receivers and a new factory was built on Canvey Island for the production of Egen components.

At Malmesbury, work was ongoing for Radar Ranging (for Hawker Hunters) and ASV Mark 19 for the Fleet Air Arm. At Southend work started on CE39 police radio destined for the London 'Met' Police.

In 1952, building work started on a further Southend factory, known as Kenway. Radiation meters started production at Malmesbury.

In 1953, EKCO Electronics was formed to handle the marketing of EKCO ground and airborne radar, VHF radio, nucleonic equipment and other electronic devices. CE39 sets used during Canvey Island flood disaster.



1947 Aerial photo of works
Photo courtesy Southend Museum Services

1953 also saw the Airport radar (ARAA) developed and installed at Southend. East Anglian Flying Services at Southend airport modified four of their ex-R.A.F Rapides to fly as illuminated billboards to advertise *EKCOVISION*. They were regularly seen over the skies of Southend during the Southend Illuminations, but unfortunately they upset most local television sets as the aircraft passed over head, so the venture was scrapped. The Rapides that flew in this set up were G-AKRN, AKRO, AKOV & AKJZ.

On 6th July 1954, EKCO purchased an Avro Anson (G-ALIH) from BKS, and became a veritable workhorse for EKCO being used extensively for moving senior staff between the EKCO sites, visiting Bristol Aviation at Filton aerodrome on a regular basis in the mid-1950's, when the first civil weather radar contract was underway for the Bristol Britannia and taking directors etc. to important meetings. She had a long life with EKCO and was finally retired from service on the 21st September 1967.

G-ALIH was replaced by another Anson, a Mk.



19 Series II (G-AGPG), to be used as a flying radar laboratory at Southend.
 'Papa-Golf' continued in the service of Ekco and was used for the development of the Concorde weather radar systems, after which she was presented to the Southend Aircraft Museum in Aviation Way.

In 1954, the American Tradair Corporation of New York became a subsidiary company, for the marketing of EKCO products in the United States. Flight trials commenced on project 'Blue Sky' (fire control radar for Fireflash Missile), developed at Malmesbury.

In 1955, the main Southend factory was extended to provide an additional 30,000 sq. ft. of floor space to cope with the increasing demand for EKCO television and radio receivers. At the same time, the Plastics Division, by then one of the largest organisations producing industrial mouldings and plastics domestic ware, installed vacuum sheet forming presses. E120 weather radar system went into production at Malmesbury (designed for the Bristol Britannia), and Transistors (Germanium) were tested for the first time (cost £2.10s each)

In 1955 also, a controlling interest was acquired in *Dynatron Radio Ltd.*, manufacturers of high-grade radio, radiograms, television and electronic equipment. The assembly and marketing of EKCO radio in New Zealand was, in the same year, put into the hands of an associate company, Ultimate EKCO (N.Z.) Co. Ltd. of Auckland.

1956 saw *EKCO Plastics Ltd* formed as a new, wholly owned subsidiary company. This company was responsible for the extensive range of industrial mouldings and 'Gold Seal' domestic ware formerly handled by the Plastics Division. Also in 1956, an Australian Company, jointly owned with Associated Electrical Industries Ltd., was formed to manufacture radio and television receivers. This Company, Ediswan-EKCO (Aust.) Pty. Ltd., had its factory at Yennora, near Sydney, although this was to be a troubled and short-lived venture. At the same time an associate company was formed in Colombia, E.K. Cole (Colombia) Ltd. of Bogotá. This same year EKCO introduced the world's first mains/battery portable television receiver and at Malmesbury possibly the world's first automatic machine control system was developed for the precision engineering market.

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1957 saw EKCO Electronics Ltd. make history by providing a complete nucleonic instrumentation system for the Australian nuclear reactor HIFAR, which was the first experimental reactor to be exported from the U.K.. At the same time a new four-storey development and engineering department building providing a further 30,000 sq. ft. of floor space was opened at Southend. In this building, nuclear instrumentation was developed for atomic reactors at Harwell, at Dounreay and at RisÆ in Denmark. In the meantime, the increasing application of radioisotopes in medical and industrial fields resulted in a continual output of new instrument designs appropriate to such uses of atomic energy.

Another important development in the domestic radio and television field took place in April 1957, when the Company launched *Ferranti Radio and Television Ltd* as a wholly-owned subsidiary to market receivers under the Ferranti trademark. This new firm had its head office at Old Street, London. In December of this same year, *the millionth television receiver left the EKCO factory*. Note: at that time TV production was running at in excess of 5,000 sets per week.

In 1958, the range of EKCO heating equipment, which had steadily expanded over the years, was further extended by the addition of a complete range of domestic reflector fires. This enabled the Heating Division to offer a complete, balanced heating system for almost every conceivable situation. These were built at Malmesbury. The heating range was

further supplemented by the addition of EKCO 'Warmglow' electric blankets as the result of the acquisition of the old established Warmglow Company Ltd in Leigh on Sea.

During the same year, a completely new factory was built at Maidenhead to house the expanding Dynatron organisation. The Egen factory on Canvey Island was extended and modernised to provide a 50% increase in floor space, and the Kenway factory was extended to cover twice the previous floor area.



'Frigidaire' refrigerators

The major exhibitions of 1958 saw EKCO products surge ahead in every field. EKCO car radio was offered in most leading makes of cars and the 'Superbath' was selected from the range of EKCO 'Gold Seal' domestic ware for the 'Design of the Year' Award by the Council of Industrial Design. At Malmesbury, a new weather radar system known as E160 was produced for the Comet IV (although also sold successfully as an upgrade to the previous E120 system). Flight trials were also underway with 'tail warning radar' for the V bomber fleet. In November 1958, Eric Cole received the C.B.E. from Her Majesty the Queen at an investiture at Buckingham Palace.

In 1959, the extension of EKCO Plastics injection moulding shop was completed to include the largest injection press in Gt. Britain, and history was made with the production for *Frigidaire* of the first moulded refrigerator liners.

The 1959 Radio Show saw the introduction of the slimmest ever television - an Ekcovision Portable Model. At Malmesbury development work started on a 'ground-breaking' transistorised Airborne Weather Radar system (E190), which was the first such system and only half the weight of previous systems. Red Steer (the code name for the tail warning radar for the V bombers) went into front line service with the RAF.



The Rochford factory in 1960
Photo courtesy Chris Poole

In late 1959, plans were made to re-locate and consolidate the Electronics business sector (radar, telecommunications and Nuclear) in a new factory to be built at Rochford, Essex, leaving Malmesbury to concentrate in heating products.

By 1960, domestic manufacture encompassed mains and portable TV's, Mains and portable radios, radiograms, tape recorders, car radios, electric heaters, thermotube and thermovent heaters, electric blankets, plastic toilet seats, various plastic utensils, plastic bathroom fittings and 'Superbath' baby-baths.

In November/December 1960, Radar manufacture re-located from Malmesbury to Southend and Rochford (the Electronics production site) leaving Malmesbury as the site doing the 'heating products'.

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The EKCO Sports and Social Club

One of the founding principles of EKCO was that from the very early days, there needed to be a Sports and Social Club where employee's could meet after work or at weekends and enjoy a social atmosphere and for those so inclined, participate in sports both indoors and outdoors. Each employee, when starting work for the company, was given the option to join the ESSC (Ekco Sports & Social Club).



Those who joined (and the vast majority did), had a small deduction made through their pay packet, which formed their membership fee and a membership card issued. The clubhouse had two full size snooker tables, and as well the regular social activities there were the firms' Christmas parties which were a real treat. Every year it would cater for hundreds of children with party food and entertainment, and one year there was an outing to a circus.

For a complete history of EKCO Radar development click [here](#)

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