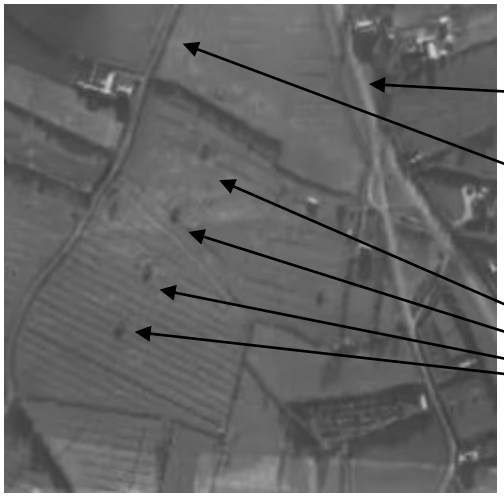
Meacon Countermeasures Site , Steven's Lane, Lympsham

The 'Meacon' system was one of many that RAF 80 Wing used to counter the German Bombing offensive, by altering the radio beams and other technology used to direct bombers to their targets in the UK. Code names were rife and typically RAF; they had systems called 'Asparin' to counter the German 'Headache', 'Bromide' to counter 'Ruffians' and 'Benjamin' (play on Ben-Jamming) to counter the German 'Benito' (Mussollini). All these systems were used to try and alter the direction of the bombers so they missed the target.

'Meacon' (derived from Mask/Beacon) was slightly different in that it targeted the planes homing beacons. This signal (Broadcast from France) marked a safe entry and exit point into the UK. It was picked up by a receiving station (in this case the radio establishment in Highbridge) and sent along a high quality phone line to Lympsham where it was re-transmitted to confuse the returning planes.

An early documented success caused a German Junkers Ju88 (left image IWM) to be the first plane to land at Bristol Airport, then RAF Lulsgate Bottom, which was still under construction at the time. The plane was prevented from taking off again, after it realised it's mistake, by construction workers. Junkers Ju 88, confused by the Meacon Beacon transmitted from Lympsham and landed at the now Bristol Airport (RAF Lulsgate Bottom) thinking it was 'home'! The captured aircraft provided vital information about the equipment being used by the Luftwaffe. It became part of 1426 (Enemy Aircraft Flight) that had many captured planes that the RAF flew for training and publicity purposes during the war.

The line of rectangles in the aerial photo (taken in 1946) are the position of the transmitter huts and look like they are the remaining brick built blast walls. The 4 transmitters would beam their signal out across the Bristol Channel to catch any returning aircraft from raids on Bristol, Swansea, Cardiff and further afield. There were many similar sites (3 in Somerset)

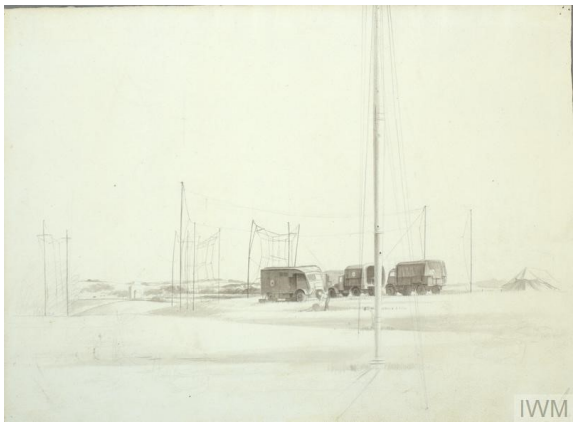


Lympsham Transmitter Site

Route of current A370

Steven's Lane

Transmitters within blast walls



Sketch of a mobile Meacon site, showing what the aerials would have looked like. (IWM)

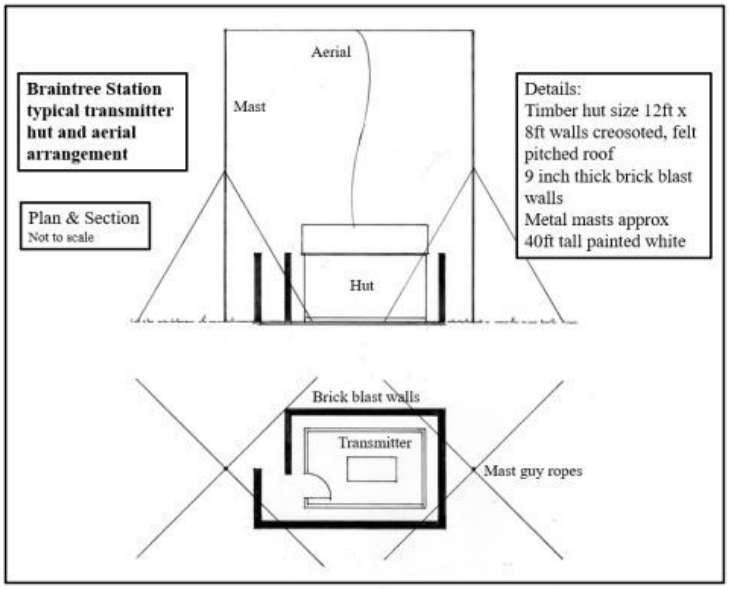
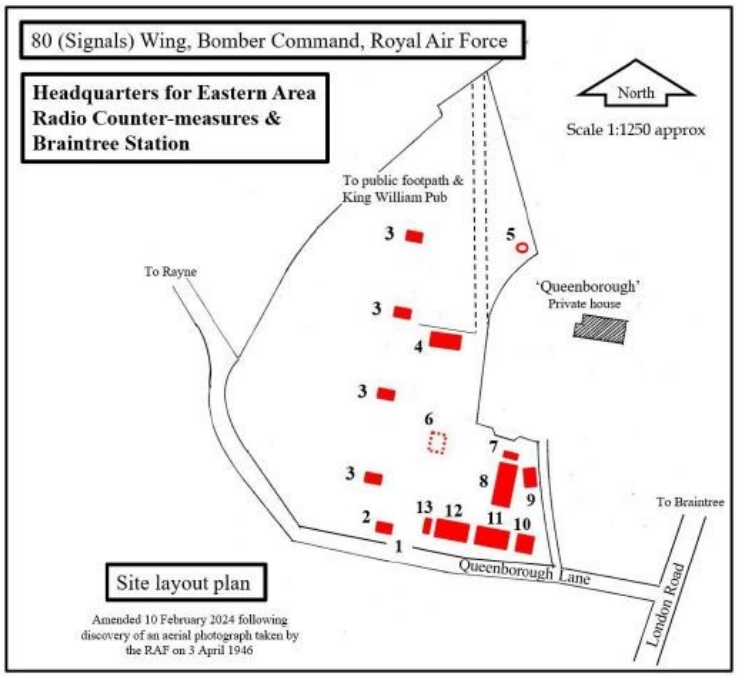


Diagram of typical Transmitter hut, showing blast wall and aerial. There would have been 4 such huts/aerials. (Michael Bardell)

Below is a site map of the Braintree Meacon site and Eastern HQ drawn from the memories of Harry Cullum who served there during the War. It was drawn by local historian Mike Bardell in 2019 and is used with his permission. Sadly Harry died shortly afterwards, this paper is dedicated to his memory and all those who served. We will remember them.



No	Accommodation use	Notes
1	Main gate	Permanent armed sentry
2	Guardroom	Storage for weapons
3	Main transmitter huts	Each operated by one airman
4	Stores	Included clothing
5	Hand grenade pit	Covered with turf for secrecy
6	Standby generator	Lorry mounted
7	Toilet Block	3 Elsan chemical toilets
8	Recreation Hut	Tea making and table tennis
9	Trailer mounted transmitter	In brick enclosure (see group photo)
10	Control Room	Shift Cpl and one airman
11	Eastern Area Command Office	Sqn Ldr Pears, WO and several staff
12	Workshop, Stores & site OC's Office	Plt Off Godfrey
13	Lean-to bicycle store	With vertical racks

All huts were timber framed with creosoted boarding under felt pitched roofs; they had electric heating. The site was a meadow but no roadways or paths were constructed. However beaten tracks between buildings soon emerged

Remains of a blast wall which would have surrounded the transmitter hut—this one survives at Templecombe.

A 1946 aerial photo of Highbridge radio site, located near Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, was a remote receiving station for Portishead Radio that opened in 1925. The station was a key part of Highbridge's history for many years, and was the world's largest maritime communications station at the time. It provided vital links between ships and other stations using Morse code, radiotelephone, and radiotelex during World War 2, the Falklands War, the two Gulf Wars, and the war in the Balkans.

This is a fascinating subject and if you are new to it I would recommend the excellent and very readable book, Battle of the Beams by Tom Whipple. For a more localised view Somerset and the Defence of the Bristol Channel (free download) is an excellent reference document. Finally the man behind all of this was an incredible character called Reginald Victor Jones, who took on the challenge pretty much single handed. His book, Most Secret War, tells his version of events. For the more technically minded Royal Air Force Beam Benders: 80 (Signals) Wing 1940-1945 by Laurie Bettingham is a must read. Finally there is a lot of research online if you take the time to look. My thanks to the Charley Heritage Group, The North Yorkshire and Cleveland 20th Century Defence Group and especially Michael Bardell for sharing their research with me.

Jim Bishop
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