

At the end of the 1939-45 War many members of the British Commonwealth of Nations desired independence for their own people. This implied control over their own communication system and where possible control over all telegraph and telephone cables entering or leaving their territories. The main world wide communications system was owned by Cable and Wireless Ltd., and at a conference in London in July 1945 the "Canberra Proposals" (formulated as a result of Lord Reith's mission to each of the Dominions, etc.) were examined in detail. The result agreed by each of the Dominions was to Nationalise those parts of Cable and Wireless which existed within each of their territories.

On the 6-Nov-1946 Parliament passed the Cable and Wireless Act which laid down, inter alia, that "On the appointed day" all shares of Cable and Wireless would be transferred to the Treasury. On the 19-Dec-1946, Mr. Dalton (Chancellor of the Exchequer) named the "Appointed Day" as 1-July-1947 and a new board of Directors was nominated to take office from that day. In each Dominion, that section of Cable and Wireless in their territory was acquired by their Post and Telegraph Department or by a specially created organisation.

In the U.K. the Wireless Section and operating section of the Cable and Wireless in London (3,500 staff) became part of the London Telecommunication Region. The problems of disparity in wages and salaries, and conditions of work between the Post Office and Cable & Wireless staffs are outside the scope of this book as we must follow the problems of submarine cables and cablesips. Cable and Wireless was in fact the name given to two related companies:- Cable and Wireless Ltd., was split up by the 1946 Act, whilst the Cable and Wireless (Holdings) Ltd. remained intact. The Postmaster General assumed Ministerial responsibility for the Company and the Company was subject to his directions on major matters, though it was allowed to control its day to day management. The Treasury held all the shares of the Company.

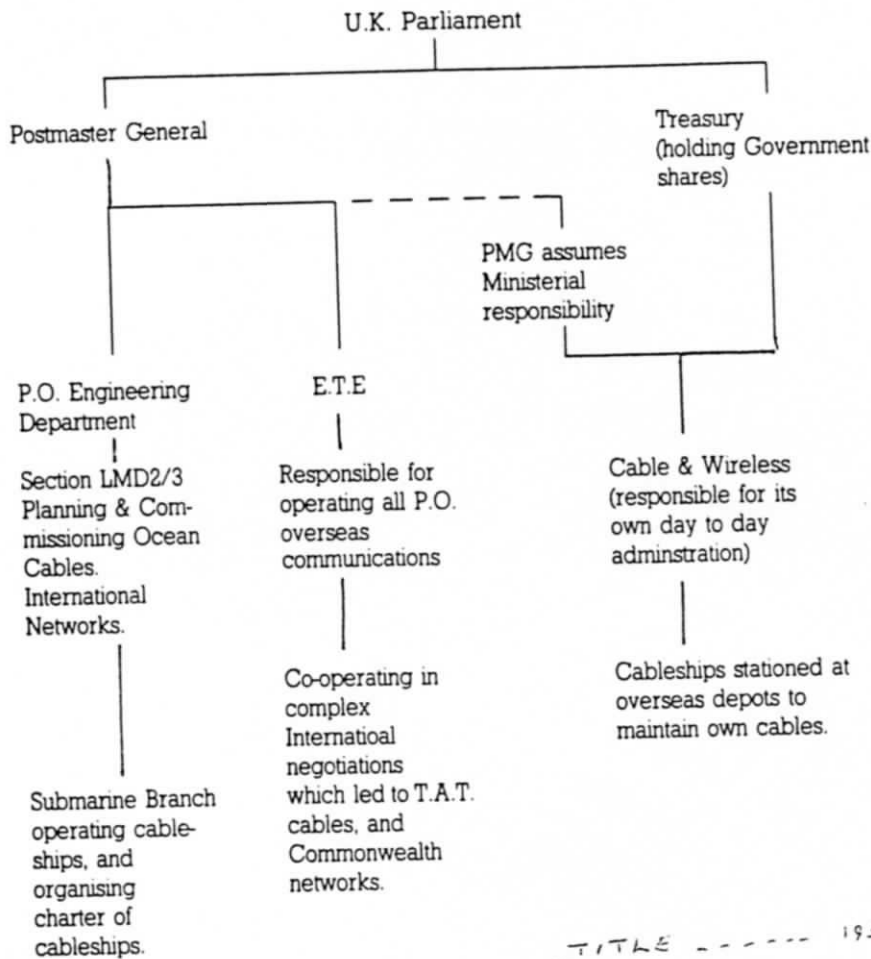
The reasons for this "Holding Company" remaining intact is explained in the report of the Working Party on Cable and Wireless (Oct. 1946), it pointed out that:

1. If we nationalised those parts of C & W in the overseas territories, the members of the staff concerned would become British Civil Servants as were their counterparts in the U.K. and this might not be acceptable to the various governments concerned.
2. Cable landings were subject to non-transferable agreements between the country concerned and the particular cable company owning the submarine cable. The C & W (Holdings) Ltd. were the trustees for those various cable companies. If this Holding Company had been nationalised all the cable landings would have to be re-negotiated, and it was realised that in the majority of cases no re-negotiation would have succeeded.

In spite of the Cable and Wireless Act 1946 much remained of the original Company, it remained in control of the largest part of the British Commonwealth overseas telegraph system. Indeed, it was the largest single undertaking in the World with the only integrated radio and cable system outside Europe. In Britain it owned nothing operational except the shore ends of the submarine cables at Porthcurno, the half mile from the beach to the terminal cable station remained in the company's hands, and this station once more became a training centre. It also retained ownership of the five cablesips. Later we shall look at a serious attempt to amalgamate the cablesip fleets of the Post Office and the Cable and Wireless.

On 1-April-1950 the Company's assets in the U.K. including the London Station at Electra House with its staff of 3,500 was placed under the control of the Post Office to be administered by the London Telecommunications Region. During the next two years the immense additional work put such a strain on the L.T.R. that a separate organisation had to be set up to take over control of the Post Office's external services, and on 1-Oct-1952 the External Telecommunications Executive was formed. The relationship between the Post Office, and the Cable and Wireless submarine cables and cablesips at this time.

THE EFFICIENCY OF OUR CABLE SHIP FLEET



The relationship between the Post Office Cableships and those of the Cable and Wireless.

TITLE - - - - - 1952.
Iris Based at Woolwich, used for repairs Around the British Isles.

At times any one of the above cableships could be used on charter work.

The Cable and Wireless cableship fleet consisted of:

One of the problems investigated by an ad hoc committee (C.W.P. Committee) was to see if a more efficient cable fleet could be obtained by the amalgamation of the two cable fleets by either:

- The Post Office taking over the Cable and Wireless cableships, or
- Cable and Wireless taking over the Post Office cableships.

Edward Wilshaw Based on Rio de Janeiro, for maintenance of company cables in the South Atlantic.

Stanley Angwin Based on St. Lucia, for maintenance of company cables in the West Indies.

The Post Office cableship fleet consisted of:

Monarch Used for cable laying for the P.O. or on charter.

Alert Based on Glasgow, used mainly for repair work around the British Isles or in the North Atlantic.

Ariel Based at Dover, used for repairs around the British Isles.

Recorder Based on Gibraltar (at times on Vigo), for maintenance of company cables in the Mediterranean, and Eastern Atlantic.

Retriever Based on Suva, for the maintenance of the company cables in the Southern Pacific.

Cable Enterprise Based on Singapore, for the maintenance of company cables in the East Indies, and Western Pacific.

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Mercury is utilised as a relief ship for those of the C. & W. fleet (which normally takes ninety weeks out of a cycle of four years). This relief being in the main to cover the refit of each cableship coinciding with the Lloyds "Special Survey". This is in addition to its own cable laying programme.

The Post Office cableship HMTS Alert had the capability for laying short ocean telephone systems, and from her commissioning in 1961 she was engaged on patrol duties and repair work on the trawler fishing grounds off Newfoundland as discussed in an earlier chapter.

The C.W.P. Committee found that the P.O. cableship fleet was in the main based on the U.K. and employed crews of British Nationality who came under trade unions registered in the U.K. and recognised by the Post Office. On the other hand the crews of the C & W fleet were mostly from the country on which the cableship was based and whose pay was related to employment conditions in that country. Whilst it would have presented real difficulties for the P.O. to have taken over the C. & W. fleet on these conditions, it would have been relatively easy for the C. & W. to have taken over the P.O. fleet.

The maintenance of the cableships provided another problem. The P.O. fleet had a refit each year and as a Crown Vessel the survey of each ship was undertaken by the Admiralty. There was no insurance taken out to cover these vessels but any costs of an insurable nature were guaranteed by the P.O. The cableships in the C. & W. fleet had a refit every four years, the refit coinciding with the Lloyds Special Survey, and an insurance taken out by the company to cover the ship. The important point here is that the Merchant Shipping Acts do not normally apply to Government owned (Crown) vessels; because of this, these vessels are not bound by the various orders made by the Board of Trade under these Merchant Shipping Acts. For the C. & W. to have taken over the P.O. cableship fleet, the two smaller vessels would have cost the C. & W. in the region of £30,000 each to have them modified to meet the Board of Trade requirements. The only alternative would have been to have the C. & W. cableships made Crown vessels but this

was fraught with difficulties as we would then have had some of the Crown cableships operated to British wage conditions negotiated by British Trade Unions, and some of the fleet operated to overseas wage conditions to meet the local conditions. The Committee felt that difficulties would exist whoever had control of the combined fleet — especially if in the interests of efficiency it was decided to do away with one cableship!

When this committee examined the administration staff position, it was found that if the P.O. took over the administration staff for the cableships of the C. & W. the extra annual charges would be £36,000. The C. & W. would not have needed all the P.O. administration staff for they worked under a different system due to their overseas bases so that if they took over the P.O. cableship fleet their increased annual charges would be well below £30,000. In fact it was not quite so simple as that for the salaries of these two organisations did not match, neither did the job titles and duties. The salaries of the C. & W. staff were 15 to 18% higher than comparable jobs in the P.O. structure. To get equal pay for equal status and duties meant that the P.O. staff would have had large increases in their salaries.

When the Committee attempted to assess the work which might be available with in the next ten years they stated "...Such a forecast is particularly difficult at the present time when the full effect of telecommunication satellites and degree of coexistence with submarine cables cannot as yet be determined..." However the forecast which they did provide included repairs and renewals of the existing submarine cables, and that meant that the existing cableship fleets would certainly be kept employed for at least ten years.

So the problems were carefully examined, one by one, till the final report recommended that the position be kept as it was with the cableship fleets kept separate.

From 1951 till 1976 there were a few of the Cable and Wireless staff engaged on research in the P.O. Research Laboratories.

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There were two other occasions when partial amalgamation of these two cables fleet were considered but these were dropped as being either too costly or that the legislation would be too difficult and time wasting to compose.

The Post Office Bill of 1967

(Clause 127) pointed out that the Cable and Wireless Ltd. was a company that operated telecommunications in many parts of the World and whose shares are owned by the Treasury. This clause will enable the Treasury to sell these shares to the existing or new Post Office, if it so chooses. In fact, the Treasury sold the bulk of its Cable and Wireless shares on the stock market in November 1981 retaining an interest in only 20% of the shares, so eliminating this problem of cables fleet amalgamation.
