

BBC Radio Ottringham

Have you ever tuned into BBC Radio Ottringham? Possibly not as this radio station was shutdown in 1953 but played a part in transmitting information into northern Europe during the Second World War. The radio station was located on the A1033 to the east of Ottringham at a site which is now an industrial estate used for the fabrication of temporary buildings.

Following the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, the Netherlands government took exile in the UK. Shortly after, the Dutch government approached the UK government with a request to transmit information into the Netherlands to combat the radio propaganda being transmitted by the Nazis. This resulted in the production of Radio Orange, a Dutch radio programme on the BBC European Service broadcast to the German-occupied Netherlands. It was transmitted from London and broadcast programmes of approximately 15 minutes. It consisted of brief commentaries on current affairs and political speeches, as well as news on the Free Dutch forces, colonies, and merchant navy. It was distinct from the BBC's own Dutch Service which only broadcast news programmes and which, unlike Radio Orange, was not controlled by the Dutch government in exile.

The name, Radio Orange, was a tribute to the Dutch monarchy's House of Orange-Nassau and the station made its first broadcast on 28 July 1940.



Existing BBC radio transmitting stations were located north of London and not powerful enough to transmit good quality signals to the Netherlands and other parts of northern Europe (Belgium, Poland, etc). The BBC therefore decided to build a transmitting station in the north of England. Ottringham, a village 12 miles to the east of Hull, was the selected site.

The site covered an area of approximately 95 acres and included seven buildings (total 38,000 square feet) with several 500 foot transmitter masts. The facility cost £180,000 to build and was later sold to a local farmer for just £5,100 following it's closure in the late 1950's.

Construction had difficulties, including the collapse of two of the 500 feet masts, and hence did not commence broadcasting until February 1943. During operation, programs were recorded in London for transmission from Ottringham. At the time, Radio Ottringham had the most powerful radio transmitter in the world, much to the annoyance of the residents of Ottringham given the interference to the local telephone system during transmission.

Employees at the radio station lived in the nearby town of Withernsea, where a BBC Club was provided in Queen Street with games rooms, snooker tables etc.

The station transmitted to the Netherlands throughout the rest of the war and would have been listened to by many Dutch people, despite efforts by the Nazis to prevent this.

The Germans tried jamming signals and banned people from listening to foreign stations and finally ordered Dutch people to hand in radios (receipt were given to allow radios to be returned once Germany had won the war). However, the Dutch made their own secret radios – hidden in books, food boxes and match boxes, risking 6 weeks imprisonment if caught listening to radio

The station continued to be used after the war until the 15th of February 1953, when it closed due to lack of funding and available channels.

The only building remaining is part of the control centre which is unrecognisable with all that is left of the original station being a large basement of 3 separate rooms.

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References

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