Marconi's Radio

It is very cold in St John's, Newfoundland in the winter. But on 12th December 1901 someone was out on a hill flying a kite. It was a very large kite. A long wire was attached to it. High, high in the sky went the kite. The wire trailed down, down, down to a radio receiver where Percy Wright Page was waiting. Why were these men flying a kite in the bitter cold Canadian winter?

The men were helping Marconi do an experiment. They were waiting to pick up a radio signal. It was coming from Poldhu, Cornwall, 2,200 miles away. Marconi was proving that radio waves can go a very long way. They can even cross oceans. Would it work? If it did it would be the first radio signal to cross the Atlantic. Look in your atlas. Can you find Newfoundland? Can you find Cornwall? They are far, far away from each other.
In the picture you can see Marconi himself. He is on the left watching the kite being raised.

Marconi had been experimenting with radio since he was young. Like you he was home educated. He did not go to school. He was able to experiment with things that interested him.

On 12th December 1896, Marconi had given a demonstration of his radio equipment. In those days the Post Office was interested in radio. The Post Office ran the telegraph service. This sent messages by wire. The messages were in Morse Code. How good it would be if no wires were needed! William Preece was chief electrician of the Post Office. He had arranged Marconi's demonstration. He arranged for a hall and put out adverts in newspapers. A large crowd turned up. Newspapers sent their reporters.

Everyone would hear about what happened at the demonstration. Marconi tapped the key on the transmitter. Preece carried the receiver box around the room. Everyone could see Marconi tap the key. Everyone could hear the bell ring in the receiver. Everyone could see that Preece was carrying the receiver box about. This proved there were no wires between the transmitter and the receiver. The signal between the transmitter and receiver was travelling across the air!

Marconi did more experiments. He transmitted a message across the English Channel. Then Marconi went to the USA and showed people his equipment there. On his way home he fitted up his radio on board the ship. Before the ship reached port, Marconi's radio station on land had a message that she was nearly there. Such a thing had never happened before.

Then came the famous 1901 test. Did it work? Marconi thought so. He had told the operator in Newfoundland to listen for the Morse letter "S". This is three clicks: click, click, click. Had he really heard them? Was it just the crackling of the atmosphere? It was broad daylight all across the Atlantic. Radio signal travel better in the dark. We know that now. Marconi did not know that in 1901. He was right about radio. But perhaps he was mistaken about the test!

Marconi organised another test. It would prove that his idea worked. In 1903 he sent a greeting from United States President to King Edward VII. Now everyone knew that the radio waves could cross the Atlantic.

Marconi's radio began to be used by ships. In the *Titanic* disaster,[1] Marconi's radio helped to tell nearby ships that the *Titanic was* sinking. Marconi's work became better known. "Marconi's invention has helped to save people's lives," said the Postmaster General.

Missionaries still use Marconi's wonderful discovery. The first Christian radio station in the world began broadcasting in 1931. Gospel messages can be broadcast to places were missionaries are not allowed to go. The Bible can be read out very slowly. Then a listener can copy down the words. This often helped Christians in places where Bibles are hard to find and not allowed by the government. We can pray for those who can only hear the Gospel by listening to the radio.

1 See the lesson for April 14th.