Chapter 42: New-fangled tech

Although regular television broadcasting started in the UK in 1936, coverage was initially limited to the London area and, at the outbreak of war, in 1939, there were only an estimated 20,000 TV sets in Britain. Opportunities grew after the war, particularly after December 1949, when the BBC's Midlands transmitter opened. Grandad's first note of watching television was New Year's Eve 1949 when he noted going to Eva's to watch a film. While he does not note what the film was, from the Radio Times of the period, it appears to have been "*Storm in a Teacup*".

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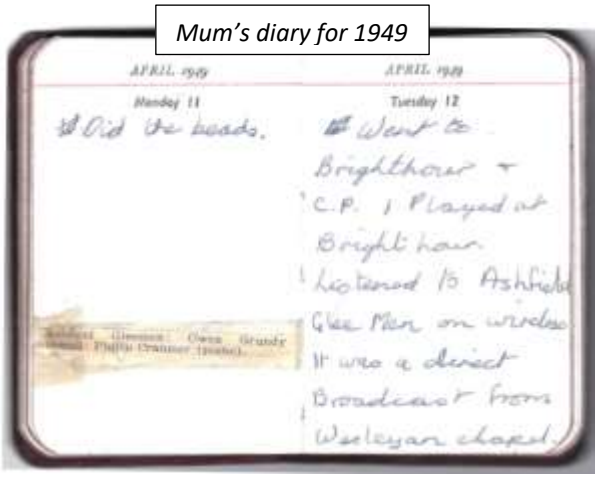
Sutton Coldfield TV transmitter

Nevertheless, mum's main entertainment medium during this period remained the "*wireless*". She listened to programmes on "*Children's Hour*"[1] including "*Bunkle*"[2] and "*PC 49*".[3] Mum also listened to some sporting events on the radio, including the boat race and the Grand National in 1949.[4] In April 1949, mum noted that she heard the Ashfield Glee Men[5] on the "*wireless*" and she included a very brief newspaper cutting in her diary. On New Year's Eve 1949, grandad noted that he listened to the BBC to bring in the New Year.

Mum's diary for 1949



APRIL 1949 — Monday 11: Did the beads.

APRIL 1949 — Tuesday 12: Went to Brighthouse + C.P. I Played at Bright hour. Listened to Ashfield Glee Men on wireless. It was a direct Broadcast from Wesleyan chapel.

While it was not a particularly new technology[6], mum noted, in January 1948, that she sent Dorothy Lofthouse a telegram for her birthday. During most of this period, the Parkins did not have a telephone at home. However, in March 1949, grandad noted that he wrote to the GPO[7] requesting a telephone. He received a reply about a week later advising him that they could not fix the phone yet but would write to him when they could. In July 1949, they had the telephone installed and, that month, mum noted they had a long-distance call from Hastings and she was also able to ring Dorothy up.

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1940s telephone

[1] This was a daily BBC radio broadcast from 5-6pm aimed at children. It started in 1922 and ran until 1964.
[2] Bunkle refers to a character created by Margot Pardoe who was featured on some of the Children's Hour broadcasts. His real name was Billy de Salis and he was the youngest of three children of a British Secret Service Agent. His siblings nicknamed him Bunkle because he talked a lot of "*bunk*".
[3] Presumably mum was referring to the radio series which inspired the film.
[4] See Chapter 45,
[5] They also appeared on the Home Service's regional radio programme for the Midlands in 1950.
[6] Used from the 1840s.
[7] General Post Office – it was established in 1660 and abolished in 1969.