

EYE ON BRITAIN: The giant radar that has become a landmark for thousands in South East Essex.

Secrets of the eye on an Essex hilltop

THE whirling antennae on Bushy Hill dominates the skyline for most Crouch valley towns and villages.

For years the giant radar scanners have sat above them constantly sweeping the skies.

Under the shadow of the giant dishes a small country village has been transformed into the new riverside town of South Woodham Ferrers.

But, despite the acres of prize houses and their courtyard-style shopping precinct, the hilltop radar testing station is still the best known landmark.

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Over the years the purpose of the electronic wizardry up on the hump — known by locals as Radar Hill — has been a talking point.

Wags claim it is a big detector to trap TV licence dodgers while the more serious may have considered that perhaps South Woodham is in the front line of Britain's aerial defences.

Bushy Hill is, in fact, the testing and development station for Marconi Radar Systems and the company opened its security gates to me to explain how the site is helping to bring millions of pounds in export orders to Britain.

Marconi Radar Systems is part of the giant GEC-Marconi combine which last year had a turnover of £1,000 million.

Much came from defence and civil aviation radars sold across the world in a market in which Marconi's main competitors are giant American companies.

At Bushy Hill the latest Marconi systems are worked on while the 60 technicians and electronics experts

By GRAHAM LOWING

employed there go through long and elaborate checks.

The company's reputation as a world-beater in radar depends on the testing there.

Station manager Ron Moule said: "Radar is constantly developing. It started with valves and with the bulky equipment that was needed and then transistors came in to make everything smaller."

"Now we are using microprocessors which have increased the equipment's potency and makes everything more compact."

"At Bushy Hill we test the equipment and demonstrate it to foreign visitors and potential buyers."

"It is used throughout the world for military purposes in the form of radar defence systems and for civil aviation air traffic control."

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"We are not part of any early warning system at Bushy Hill. It is purely testing and demonstrating."

The scanners which are so familiar in the area have been turning constantly for years. The biggest one which weighs seven tons, has been in use for eight years and replaced a heavier one which had been on the site since it opened in 1953.

A mobile scanner has been in operation for fourteen years and is still going strong. The equipment under test puts out a radar beam and the dishes pick up aircraft images over a 100-mile range and blips on the display consoles at Bushy Hill show massive aircraft activity over South East England.

It picks up aircraft as far away as Heathrow airport and the Midlands and military planes around the heavy concentration of RAF and United States air force bases close to the Wash.

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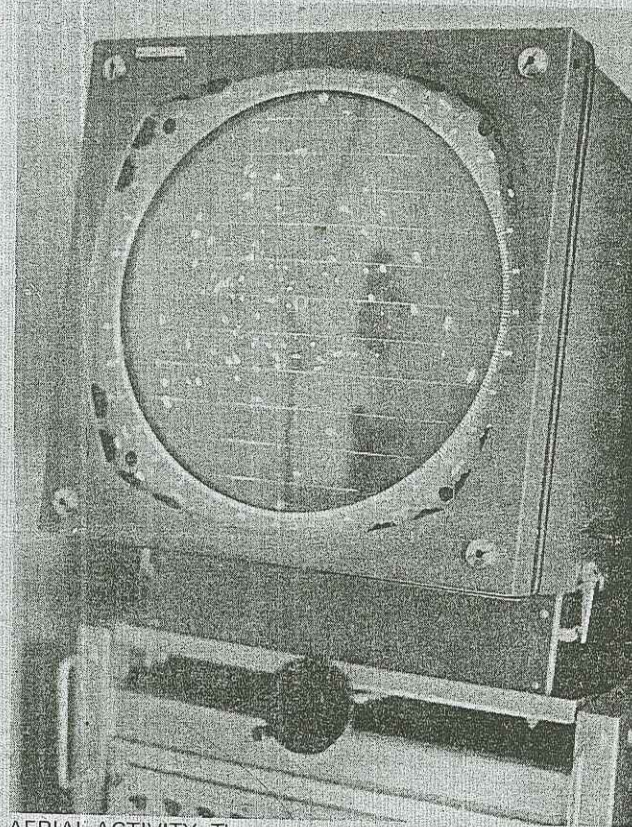
Marconi has just developed the latest generation of radar which is not yet on test at South Woodham Ferrers.

It is called a Martello and is a three dimensional system which gives height, direction and the distance of the plane under scan.

The company also markets a system of civil air traffic control in which the radar beam returns with the plane's identification.

A spokesman said: "Our radar is used for military defence purposes particularly by the RAF and the Navy but the Army also uses it because they are into rocketry."

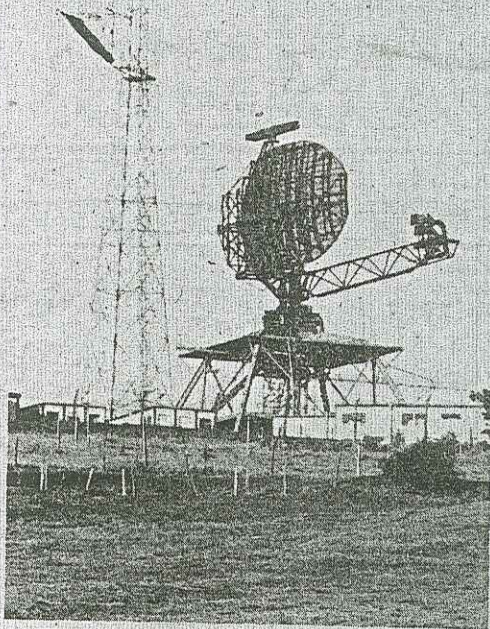
Security at Bushy Hill is a 24-hour affair with guards on duty and high fences to keep out the industrial spies from rival firms in the fiercely competitive high technology electronics market.



AERIAL ACTIVITY: The screen plots the course of scores of planes up to 100 miles away.

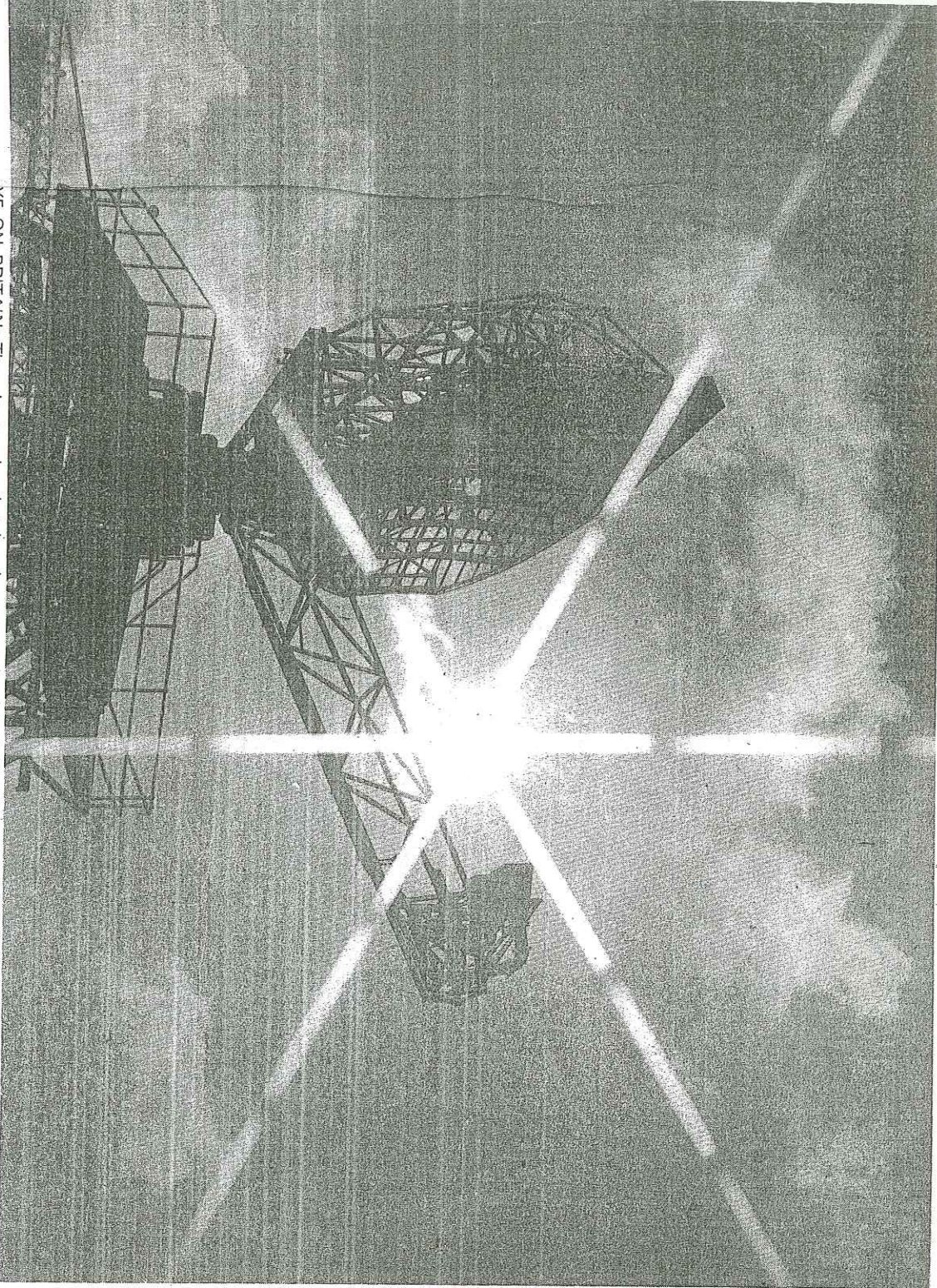


NERVE CENTRE: Radar control inside Marconi.



ON TRIAL: A new piece of radar at Bushy Hill for testing.





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