

HISTORY OF SCIENCE MUSEUM



MARCONI

PHOTO/DIGITAL ART COMMISSION



BACKGROUND

The History of Science Museum in Oxford holds a significant part of the Marconi Collection – a collection of objects related to the early development of radio transmission.

Driven by pioneering Italian inventor and electrical engineer, Guglielmo Marconi, this communications technology exploded from wire-less individual exchange of Morse code to a globally adopted form of broadcast, and changed the way we connect with each other, forever.

We would like to bring these objects to life for our digital, online audiences, and to re-examine this collection through the lens of our new museum mission — to become a meeting point for people, science, art, and belief.

THE COMMISSION - this is an open call for a photographer or digital artist to creatively respond to the Marconi collection.

We invite you to bring an imaginative visual approach to capturing images of these objects, to tell their human and scientific story online, as a key part of our digital offer.

These are not objects that were designed to be looked at, they were designed to be used. So they are some of our most challenging 'black box' objects – we need a creative approach to reveal their beauty and ingenuity, with the visual treatment of the objects unlocking a deeper exploration of their human stories.

It might be about finding contemporary resonance from this pioneering time of invention, in our world of instant communication technology. Or you might be interested in unlocking these objects through the story of the Titanic radio operators, or the opera singer making the first wireless entertainment broadcast.

We would like to tell a visual story with these objects that helps people go beyond their appearance and engage with their world changing impact.

There is a limit to what we can do in our gallery space with static displays and limited layers of interpretation. Online, we would like for you to animate these objects in a way that we can't achieve in our usual space – for example, stylistically adding graphic annotation/layers, and other artistic approaches or treatments of the photographic images you capture.



Figure 1: Dame Nellie Melba made the world's first live entertainment broadcast through this microphone in June 1920

We do have some existing photography of these objects but it is at a low resolution and not suitable for audience engagement. We would love for you to consider the way in which you might capture photos of these objects that inspire curiosity in the viewer to find out more about them. You might also choose to include sound design, or weave in the perspectives of historical and contemporary voices.

There are 15 objects currently on display and a much larger archive of objects, and of printed material held at the Bodleian libraries. This project will necessarily need to focus on the set of displayed objects, to introduce the collection to general audiences, and bring the stories to life.

The images you create will become an evergreen digital exhibition on our website, that will create a compelling introduction to the Marconi Collection. The objects have international importance and so lend themselves well to digital display and interpretation, for access by global audiences.



Figure 2 In 1896, Marconi used this Coherer Receiver to wow Victorian audiences with never-seen-before wireless technology – ringing a bell from anywhere in the room with no visible connection between the two. Marconi caused a sensation – and became a celebrity



Figure 3 This was held in the hand of the first human being to hear a radio signal sent across the Atlantic - the three Morse-code dots for 'S' - from Cornwall to Newfoundland in 1901

NOTE - this commission is primarily about a photographic and creative visual approach.

Our in-house team will be able to support with text writing to accompany your images. Once you've identified an approach that interests you, we'll then provide text in an agreed style as appropriate for your work. The images are central - they might link through to deeper textual information, and/or have minimal text accompanying them - we would aim to work this out together, led by your work and your suggested narrative approach to link the images together.

AIMS FOR THE PROJECT

Attract: offer a compelling visual approach to make technical objects accessible – and interesting – to the non-specialist

Engage: employ visual and/or audio layers to the photography to engage audiences with the story beyond or within the images - to bring the story of this important collection to life for the general visitor. The creative approach must unlock these objects as ingenious inventions that led a communications revolution, gave birth to the broadcasting industry, saved lives – and changed the world.

Connect: to present a connected visual narrative context for the objects - we are not looking for isolated object-by-object 'capsule' histories, but a visual storytelling that creatively links the objects.

Deepen: to add a new dimension for technical specialists familiar with how the objects work, but not necessarily with the broader creative or human story behind the technical details

BUDGET AND TIMELINE

Total budget £5,500

- to cover all equipment, travel and expenses and collaborator fees for anyone that you would like to work with eg: audio artist, sound designer, animator. (If you are proposing a collaboration with another artist please include their details and link to portfolio in your proposal.)

Timeline - due to funding rules, this project must begin contractually by end Dec 2021, with payment upfront for a mutually agreed research and delivery schedule over the first few months of 2022.

FURTHER NOTES

The commissioned artist will have the opportunity to meet and speak with Marconi experts:

- **Ken Taylor**, Chairman of the Oxford and District Amateur Radio Society (ODARS), History of Science Museum volunteer and Marconi enthusiast.
- **Stephen Johnston**, Head of Research, Teaching, and Collections

and to visit the Marconi Collection objects in the Museum to inform your research phase.

You can also take a look at the [Marconi: Wireless World exhibition](#) which includes [catalogue](#) and our old [Marconi Story gallery](#) ([also available as a pdf](#)).

If you take the [Virtual Museum Tour](#), the Marconi Collection is just in front of you to the left as it loads in the tour start in the Basement Gallery.

Note that the text accompanying these web resources is not indicative of text or narrative approach for this project, but for information purposes.

HOW TO APPLY: deadline Friday 10th December 2021

Tell us why you're interested in this project and how you would approach it.

- *Please send us a word document or short video (no more than 1 side of A4 or 2 min video max) including:*
 - an outline of your photographic or artistic practice
 - your interest in this project and proposed approach
 - a simple breakdown of how you plan to allocate the budget
- *Show us your work*
 - Include in your document or email any links to portfolios or examples of work which demonstrate why your creative approach is a good match for the challenges and opportunities in this project.
 - If you plan to work with a collaborator, please include links to their work too.
- *Tell us what you need and when*

Let us know your availability - ideally to make a start by end of December 2021 and please let us know if you have any access requirements.

Send us your proposal:

Email your Word document or link to a video with a short covering email to :

publicengagement@hsm.ox.ac.uk

by 10 December 2021.



Figure 4 This is the first Morse code key specially designed for wireless work. Marconi used it to prepare for his first transatlantic broadcast in 1901

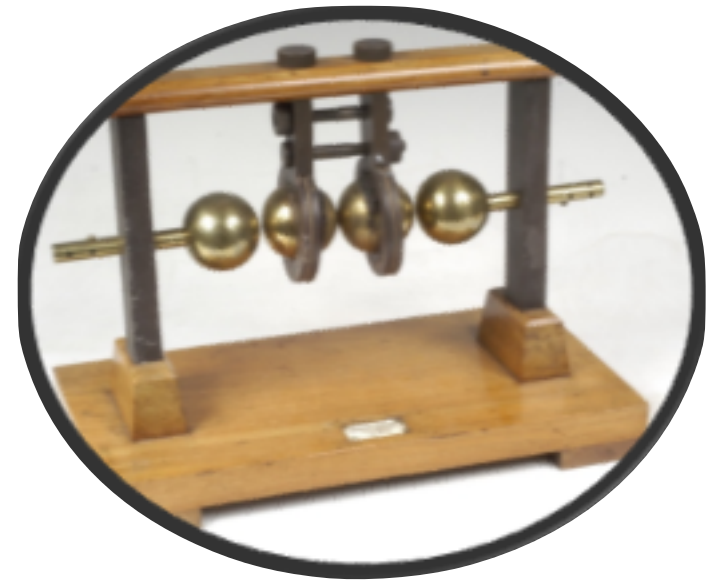


Figure 5 Also known as a Spark-Gap, this Righi Oscillator generates radio waves. Marconi used it in demos to the Post Office