

**HISTORY  
OF SCIENCE  
MUSEUM**



**MARCONI COLLECTION  
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 - 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. You might be interested in the human connections that radio still offers today. Or you might be 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 to commission images of these objects that tell their story in a way that we can't achieve in our physical space – for example, stylistically adding graphic annotation, illustration, or applying other artistic approaches or photography treatments to capturing the images.

We do have some existing photography of these objects but it is at varying resolution and not suitable for audience engagement online. 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. Once you've identified an approach that interests you, we'll then work collaboratively with an interpretation writer to produce text in a style agreed as appropriate to support your work. The images are central to the online material - they might link through to deeper textual information on a separate page, and/or have very minimal text accompanying them - we would aim to work this out together, led by your visual work and your suggested narrative approach.

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 only 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 a long term digital exhibition on our website, as 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.



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



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



Marconi's first tuned transmitter, completed at the Haven Hotel, Poole 1899 - giving the ability to transmit waves at a specific frequency that a receiver can 'tune' in to, avoiding broadcasts interfering with each other.



Portable Lifeboat Transmitter Receiver, by Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co. Ltd, Early 20th Century. This is a unique early example of a fully self-contained portable transmitter and receiver. The robust design was intended for use on lifeboats.



The microphone used on 15 June 1920 by Dame Nellie Melba for her famous broadcast from Chelmsford, the first live public entertainment broadcast. She has signed it 'Nellie Melba 1920'.

## AIMS FOR THE PROJECT

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

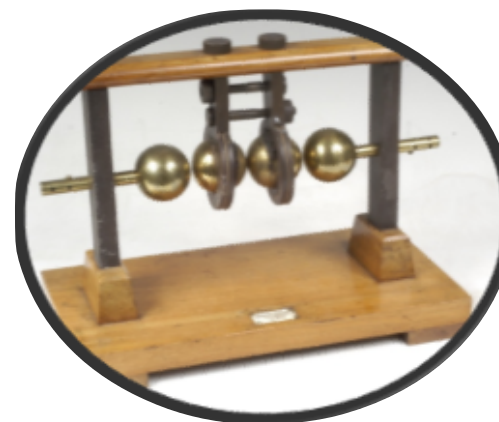
**Engage:** employ visual and/or audio layers to the photography to engage audiences with the story beyond or within the images - to bring the story of this important collection to life. The creative approach must unlock these objects as ingenious inventions that led a communications revolution, gave 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 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.



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



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

## BUDGET

**Total budget £6,000** - to cover your fee, and all equipment, travel and expenses and collaborator fees for anyone that you would like to work with eg: sound designer, illustrator. (If you are proposing a collaboration with another artist please include their details and link to portfolio in your proposal.)

## Process and Timeline

We would like for the work to begin at the start of March, for delivery by 11th April, so we have time to produce the images on our website ready for launching to celebrate International Marconi Day on 23rd April 2022.

A small commissioning group from our collections, public engagement and learning teams will review applications against the stated aims of the project. Once commissioned, the process will be in three stages:

- 1) **Research phase** - to inform your ideas, visiting the objects at the museum, and talking to 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
- 2) **Articulation of your refined idea** for capturing and presenting the images - to be agreed with the museum team.
- 3) **Photographing of the objects and creative process** for producing and delivering the images and any accompanying audio, graphic layers, other digital elements.

## HOW TO APPLY:

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

Deadline Mon 14th February 2022.

- ***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 for delivery of the project by 11th April 2022, and please let us know if you have any access requirements. Do email us on the address below if you have any questions.



***Send us your proposal:***

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

[publicengagement@hsm.ox.ac.uk](mailto:publicengagement@hsm.ox.ac.uk)

by **Mon 14th Feb 2022**

If you have any questions about the project or would like this document in a different format, please get in touch!

