

# **BYGONE DAYS**

## **BRISTOL GRID CONTROL CENTRE**

### *A Brief History*

#### **Oakfield Road**

In the mid-1920s the government of the day decided that the way forward for an efficient electricity supply was to create a 'grid system' to connect up the numerous but isolated power stations dotted around the country. To this effect the CEB (Central Electricity Board) was formed in 1926 and plans for a 132kv Grid System proposed. To control this system seven Grid Control Centres were set up for designated regions, one of which was The Bristol Grid Control Centre to cover the South West of England and South Wales.

The original Bristol Grid Control Centre was established in 1934 at 26 Oakfield Road in the Clifton area of Bristol in a building known as Grid House. A Standby Control Centre was established in St Steven's Place in the centre of Bristol. During the second world war Bristol suffered significant bombing damage but fortunately Grid House and St Steven's remained unscathed. Following nationalisation in 1948 the CEB became the BEA (British Electricity Authority) and in 1957 the BEA became the CEGB (Central Electricity Generating Board).

In 1957 the Control Centre transferred to Durley Park but Oakfield Road remained the HQ of the South West until that transferred to a modern purpose built building in the Bristol suburb of Bedminster Down in the 1970s. This building in its turn was granted listed status by Historic England as an example of modern low-rise office architecture and energy efficiency and is known as 'The Pavilions'. Following privatisation, the Pavilions were sold and became offices for the IT firm Computershare.

26 Oakfield Road is a Grade II listed building and was built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to a design by architect Charles Dyer and was previously owned by the Maggs family, Bristol store owners, it is now known as the White House because of the Stucco and limestone dressing exterior. The White House is now an office complex and is the headquarters of several Bristol based companies.

## **Durley Park House**

In 1951 the BEA purchased Durley Park House for about £5500 to create a new Standby Control Room. The house is located between Bristol and Bath, 5 miles from Bristol and just west of the town of Keynsham, which was perhaps better known for its Fry's Chocolate Factory and Horace Batchelor's Football Pools Syndicate. The Standby Control Room was built into the basement of this grand old house and the system diagram was painted on board and was 'dressed' using crayons.

During and following the war years the grid system expanded and a government decision was made to establish the Control Centres away from the city centres but close to communication links. Durley Park House fitted these criteria plus it was close to Keynsham for ease of staff accommodation and in 1957 became the main Bristol Area Grid Control Centre replacing the original at Oakfield Road. A purpose built Control Room was constructed adjoining the house and the house became office accommodation to support the control function. A Standby Control Room was established a few miles away on farm land at Warmley (Wraxall Rd), which is now a housing estate.

As the grid system evolved over the next decades and the 400kv and 275kv Supergrid systems, were constructed the Grid Control Centres expanded. At Durley Park a new Area Control Room was built along with a satellite Control Room. The Area Control managed the Supergrid system and the satellite, known as Severn Control, managed the 132kv system of South Wales and South West England. The original control room was retained to manage the 132kv system of part of Southern England and was known as Wessex Control. This new control complex was mainly completed in 1967 and was known as the 'Three Tier' system namely National, Area and District Control.

In the 1980s the 132kv system control was gradually transferred to the supply boards and this coupled with advances in control technology prompted the decision to reduce the number of control centres to five, four Area Controls and National, known as Five Centre Control. Bristol GCC remained as one of the four Areas. Severn and Wessex rooms were closed, Wessex became a conference facility and Severn became part of the conversion to the 5 Centre Control Room which was opened in 1993.

In the 1990s the CEGB was privatised and the National Grid Company came into being. The NGC decided to phase out the four Area Controls to centralise control of the supergrid system and associated generation at a new purpose built control centre at Wokingham (Vision 2000). Hence Bristol GCC (Durley Park) ceased operations in 1996 and closed as a NGC location in 1997. At its peak about 160 people were employed at Durley Park.

Durley Park House was built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to a design by a church architect and prior owners were the Tucker family who were Corn Merchants with premises in both Bristol and Bath. A son of the family was a Flight Lieutenant in the RFC and was killed in the First World War.

After closure the Control Centre was decommissioned and sold to Burdens, a local builders merchant, for use as offices. Later it was sold on to the Babcock International Group and the complex is now a centre for work associated with the MoD and naval technology. Babcock changed the name from Durley Park House to Davenport House.

*Brian Johnson*

*Poole Power Station 1956-61 Technical Staff Trainee*

*Kingston on Thames Power Station 1962-64 General Assistant*

*Bristol Grid Control Centre 1964-97 Control and Control Support*

*Chairman – Durley Park Association 1996-Present*

*I acknowledge the contributions made by numerous ex BGCC colleagues to this brief history, both through conversations and articles printed in our DPA Newsletters over the past years.*



26 Oakfield Road Grid House *now The White House*



The Original Bristol GCC at Oakfield Road



Durley Park House *now Davenport House*



Bristol GCC Area Control Room