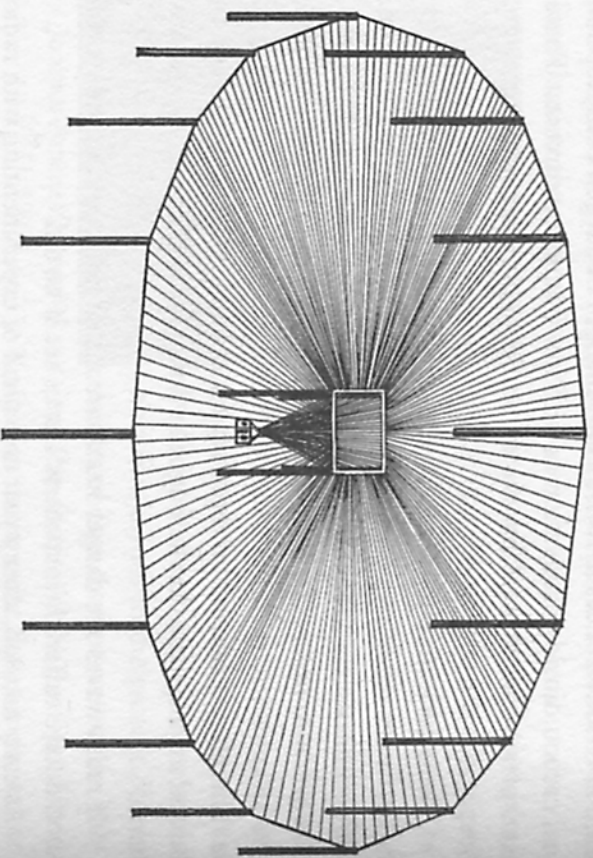


aerials, occupying acres of land, from multiple towers hundreds of feet tall on both sides of the ocean.

On March 16, 1905, Marconi married Beatrice O'Brien. In May, after their honeymoon, he took her to live in the station house at Port Morien on Cape Breton, surrounded by twenty-eight huge radio towers in three concentric circles. Looming over the house, two hundred antenna wires stretched out from a center pole like the spokes of a great umbrella more than one mile in circumference. As soon as Beatrice settled in, her ears began to ring.



From: W. J. Baker, *A History of the Marconi Company*,
St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1971

After three months there she was ill with severe jaundice. When Marconi took her back to England it was to live underneath the other monster aerial, at Poldhu Bay in Cornwall. She was pregnant all this time, and although she moved to London before giving birth, her child had spent most of its nine months of fetal life bombarded with powerful radio waves and lived only a few weeks, dying of "unknown causes."

At about the same time Marconi himself collapsed completely, spending much of February through May of 1906 feverish and delirious.

Between 1918 and 1921, while engaged in designing short wave equipment, Marconi suffered from bouts of suicidal depression.

In 1927, during the honeymoon he took with his second wife Maria Cristina, he collapsed with chest pains and was diagnosed with a severe heart condition. Between 1934 and 1937, while helping to develop microwave technology, he suffered as many as nine heart attacks, the final one fatal at age 63.

Bystanders sometimes tried to warn him. Even at his first public demonstration on Salisbury Plain in 1896, there were spectators who later sent him letters describing various nerve sensations they had experienced. His daughter Degna, reading them much later while doing research for the biography of her father, was particular taken by one letter, from a woman "who wrote that his waves made her feet tickle." Degna wrote that her father received letters of this sort frequently. When, in 1899, he built the first French station in the coastal town of Wimereux, one man who lived close by "burst in with a revolver," claiming that the waves were causing him sharp internal pains. Marconi dismissed all such reports as fantasy.

In what may have been an even more ominous warning, Queen Victoria of England, in residence at Osborne House, her estate at the north end of the Isle of Wight, suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died on the evening of January 22, 1901, just as Marconi was firing up a new, more powerful transmitter twelve miles away. He was hoping to communicate with Poldhu the next day, 300 kilometers distant, twice as far as any previously recorded radio broadcast, and he did. On January 23 he sent a telegram to his cousin Henry Jameson Davis, saying "Completely successful. Keep information private. Signed William."

And then there were the bees.

In 1901, there were already two Marconi stations on the Isle of Wight—Marconi's original station, which had been moved to Niton at the south end of the island next to St. Catherine's Lighthouse, and the Culver Signal Station run by the Coast Guard at the east end on