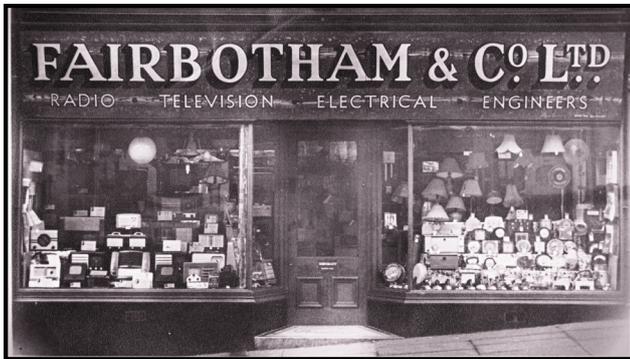


Flightdeck - The AirBand Shop

Part one - Lower Hillgate, Stockport.

July 1965, Dialstone Lane, Secondary Modern School, Stockport. Called to headmaster's office to discuss my further education options. This was a very short meeting, as I told him the "system" can't teach me what I want to learn, i.e. the family business and that my "apprenticeship" was already waiting. So it was, my working career started soon there after.



My father Frank, had started Fairbotham & Co Ltd and opened a shop at 47 Lower Hillgate in Stockport, after being demobbed from the R.A.F in the late 40's, where he'd served as a Radio Operator / Service Engineer and was involved in Radar development at Bomber Command. So I guess that's where my interest in radio and aviation has it's foundation.

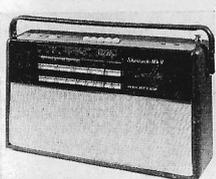
By the time I started work, my father had moved the business across the road to the much larger premises of 58-62 Lower Hillgate and it was there, some 20 plus years later that Flightdeck would eventually be "born". We'd always stocked a wide and varied range of portable radios, including such popular brands as Grundig, Roberts, Sony etc and also the "exotic"



American Zenith Trans Oceanic shortwave receiver, which I recall was a huge set with a very long telescopic aerial housed in the carry handle. Whilst this didn't have AirBand, it was certainly influential in generating my interest in "specialist" sets.

Looking back today, a model which caught my eye, or should I say "ear" from which I suspect caught the AirBand "bug", was the Shorrock MkV. This was a modified Decca TP85 radio, that was converted to VHF Air reception by the Shorrock Radio Development company of Blackburn and I have vague recollections of collecting stock, with my father, from Shorrock's workshop.

THE SHORROCK V.H.F. AIRCRAFT BAND RECEIVER (MK V).



- ★ 108-117.9 Mc/s. Aeronautical Navigation Band
- ★ 117.9-136 Mc/s. Aeronautical fixed and mobile including:
 - ★ International Aeronautical Distress—121.5 Mc/s.
 - ★ Flight Information
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 - ★ 136-137 Mc/s. Fixed/Mobile—Earth to Space/Space to Earth
 - ★ 137-144 Mc/s. Aeronautical Fixed and Mobile—Location by means of radio
- ★ INCLUDING FULL INTERNATIONAL V.H.F. AIRCRAFT BAND 108-144 Mc/s.

LW and MW Broadcast Band cover: Luxembourg, Light, Home, Third, Paris, Brussels, Rome, Hilversum, Lyons, American Forces' Network, Radio Eireann, Stuttgart, Madrid and hundreds more.

18 NEW FEATURES

<input type="checkbox"/> 108-144 Mc/s graduated dial	<input type="checkbox"/> High sensitivity	<input type="checkbox"/> Transformerless output stage for top quality reproduction
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<input type="checkbox"/> Twin Long-Life batteries (up to 400 hours)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 ext. aerial sockets	<input type="checkbox"/> Detachable handle
<input type="checkbox"/> Super high output from 14 semi-conductors	<input type="checkbox"/> Tape socket	
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PRICE: £36 (Plus 7/6 p. & p.)

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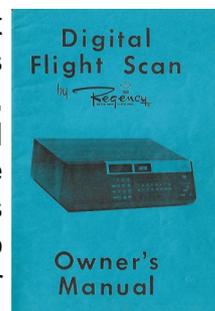




As the years passed and of later models released by various manufacturers (the memories of which I recall here, are not given in any chronological order) perhaps the most conspicuous and popular with spotters' (because of it's budget price and pocket size), were the FX-184 and 213 from the Sharp Corporation. These were probably the first truly hand-held sets to hit the market and sold in vast numbers, thanks to their dedicated VHF Air Band which made their performance live up to the "Super Sensitive" logo on the FX-213 model. I'm sure Manchester Airport Spotters of a certain age group, who maybe reading this, will recall local spotter "Radio Roy", who could be seen regularly on the top of the multi-storey car park with a Sharp radio taped to his head, binoculars and note book in hand !

Around the late 70's early 80's, specialist brands of dedicated VHF Airband only and the first scanners started to emerge. Being able to monitor several frequencies within seconds, by scanning pre-set memory channels, provided the listener with much more ATC activity, thereby negating the temptation to go "tune about" in search of transmissions and something to listen to. This feature, was singularly I feel, the catalyst that sparked the huge growth in Airband monitoring that was to come.

It was around this time, I bought (with my own money) a Regency Digital Flight Scan from Amateur Radio dealers, Lowe Electronics of Matlock. The D.F.S was a desk-top, 16 channel synthesised AirBand scanning receiver from America, the first of its' type on the U.K. Market, real state of the art stuff. This I had running in the shop, connected to a special transducer wedged between the display window and the support for the security shutters. This vibrated the glass (like a loudspeaker cone), allowing people outside looking in, to hear ATC radio traffic. I remember I put a sign up saying something like "you are listening to Air Traffic Controllers talking to aircraft". As a result of my ingenuity, we got orders and Fairbotham & Co Ltd became stockists of numerous sets and accessories from Lowes, without realising I was laying the foundation for what was to come.



The Signal Corporation of Japan was a name that soon became synonymous with high quality and very sensitive (generally) dedicated Airband Receivers. Their first scanner, the R512, was a crystal controlled model. This was a mains / 12volt set along the lines of car radio designs of the day and was supplied with a mounting bracket for "in-vehicle" use. It featured 8 memory channels, each accepting a plug-in crystal to control a receiving frequency, e.g. 119.40mHz, which at the time was allocated to Manchester Approach. Over time, Signal released several dedicated Airband receivers, R517, R528, R537, R550, but two models in particular were to become "The bench mark" for sensitivity, by which others were judged - the R532 and R535. The R535 covered both civil and military airbands, although somewhat bizarrely, coverage stopped 20mHz short, ending at 380mHz.



Both models were digitally synthesised, allowing the user to input the exact frequency of their choice and store in a memory. Common practice nowadays, but back then, this was ground breaking technology.



LOWE ELECTRONICS LTD.

TRIO R820 The ultimate receiver for the professional or advanced listener. **£790** inc. VAT. Carriage **£4.50**.

TRIO R1000 200MHz-30MHz. Digital all mode receiver. The latest from the TRIO Company and the best. **£298** inc. VAT. Carriage **£4.50**.

LOWE SRX30 Receiver, modest price and mighty performance 500kHz-30MHz. AM, CW, SSB. **£178** inc. VAT. Carriage **£4.50**.

REGENCY FLIGHT SCAN The top digital synthesised Air Band receiver. Full band coverage, 16 channel scanning. **£230** inc. VAT. Carriage **£4.50**.

REGENCY K100 F.M. Digital Scanner, 30-50, 144-174, 440-512MHz, programmable, 10 channel scanning. **£180** inc. VAT. Carriage **£4.50**.

SIGNAL R512 Air band Scanner, crystal controlled, 8 channel capability, fitted 5 channels. **£138** inc. VAT. Carriage **£1.50**.

SIGNAL R517 Air band portable, tuneable and 3 fixed channel capability. **£49.45**. Carriage **£1.50**.

BELCOM AMR217B F.M. Scanner. Marine or 2 metres, mains/battery operation. Fitted 8 channels. **£120.75**. Carriage **£1.50**.

DAIWA SR9 F.M. Receiver. Marine or 2 metres, tuneable or crystal controlled. **£46** inc. VAT. Carriage **£1.50**.

LOWE FS-10 10 channel F.M. Pocket Scanning receiver, crystal controlled, marine or 2 metres. Fitted 10 channels. **£109.25**. Carriage **£1.50**.

LOWE AP12 12 channel aircraft band pocket receiver. Fitted 12 channels. **£118.45**. Carriage **£1.50**.

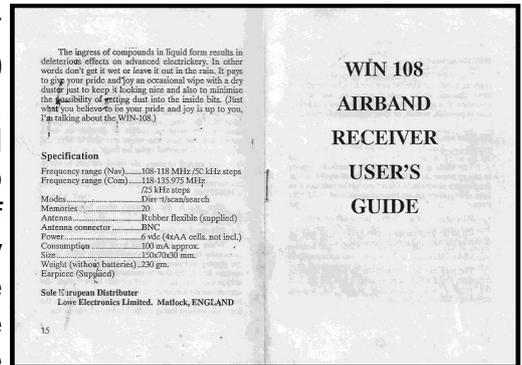
For all other goods in Amateur Radio, contact:

LOWE ELECTRONICS LTD.,
Bentley Bridge, Chesterfield Road, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 5LE.
Tel: 0529 5430 or 5817

For full catalogue simply send 50p in stamps and request catalogue CPW.



The Win108 was the first dedicated VHF AirBand digital hand-held scanner, with 20 memory channels in two banks of 10, selling for £179. I must have sold hundreds of them over the years. Prior to its' U.K. release by Lowe Electronics of Matlock, I'd felt quite honoured (my reputation seemingly having spread to the Far East !) to be approached by the factory in Japan, who offered me the sole



importation rights and sent me a pre-production sample to evaluate. I opted not to, as my company was financially structured for retail, not distribution. I kept hold of my unique example (identifiable outwardly by the aluminium control knobs, which were not used on production models) until a few years ago, when home move down sizing, meant the radio collection had to go.

Meanwhile, whilst these imported sets seemingly dominated the market, the Birmingham based Swinburne Aviation was flying the flag for U.K. manufacturing a niche range of models. Details of these can be found elsewhere on this site. I count myself privileged to have been one of (if not the only) Swinburne retailer, other than themselves. Ron Swinburne was a regular visitor to Hillgate delivering stock to me.



Sony were the only “big brand name” to get involved with AirBand receivers, initially with their TR8640. This was a dedicated receiver of traditional radio technology design, albeit with an unusual sliding cursor for tuning, rather than the more common place rotary knob. It featured a series of movable pre-set markers, which allowed the listener to move the cursor to an exact frequency (in theory), fine tuning was still required however when a transmission was heard. The model though that Sony really “hit the target” with was the Air 7, I’m sure many reading this will be familiar with, about which I have the following anecdote.

As had been the case with the Win 108, whereby the factory got in touch with me, a similar situation arose with the Air 7. At the time Fairbotham & Co Ltd, was an existing Sony dealer and my retailing of AirBand sets was well known to their area representative. He arranged a meeting between the U.K. New Products Manager and myself to discuss the viability of Sony launching the Air 8 (U.S. model) as the Air 7 in the U.K. The Japanese gentleman in question flew to MAN (from LHR) and I went to collect him, the date - 22nd August 1985, British Airtours B737-236 G-BGJL incident had occurred that morning and I was caught up in the ensuing mayhem trying to locate him. The Air 7 went on to be an extremely popular model, due to performance, audio quality, doubled as a “normal” FM radio, ease of use and simple programming. The last point particularly, was to become a thing of the past, as more complex receivers were to be released by specialist manufacturers.



Although the Uniden Bearcat UBC-100 springs to my mind as being the first multiband digital synthesised hand-held, there were others. The Black Jaguar (first with military coverage) and AOR’s AR-900 and AR-1000 etc. However, of the early “next generation” receivers, one model really stood out from the rest, the MVT5000. This was first model from a new, then unknown Japanese manufacturer Yupiteru, a brand which for some reason was originally launched in the U.K. as Jupiter II. Yupiteru went on to become synonymous with quality hand held multi-band and AirBand receivers, those particularly notable included VT125, VT225, MVT7000 and the legendary MVT7100. They released others over the years, but these four models were particularly noteworthy for having above market average AirBand sensitivity.

In October 1985 F & Co held an open evening to celebrate refitting of the 58-62 Lower Hillgate premises some 20 years (approx) after moving from 47 Lower Hillgate.. As part of the refit, I had made by the shop fitters a dedicated Airband Monitors display cabinet, topped with an illuminated sign inspired by B.A.'s Concorde then livery. Unfortunately, of all the pictures I took at the time, only one shows part of the cabinet and what was to be Flightdeck's "origins".



Over the ensuing years, the turnover level being generated by my "Aviation corner" continued to grow steadily, reaching a point where it needed more space. So I moved all things "aviation" upstairs and took over what was then our audio visual demonstration lounge. The upward trend continued and after nearly two years of trading from the 1st floor, I took the decision to form a separate company, as by that time sales of aviation related items



had become nearly 25% of Fairbotham & Co's annual business. So Flightdeck Ltd was "born", but continued trading from Hillgate, thus allowing me to assess the viability of the venture as a stand alone company, with a view to an eventual move to somewhere near the airport.

My Concorde trip story: 24th July 1988

My then Shop Manager was amongst the group of winners in a sales promotion competition run by one of our suppliers, the prize being a Concorde Supersonic LHR "round robin" trip. This was an opportunity not to be missed and with help from the suppliers' area rep, I managed to "blag" an extra ticket for myself. There was however one small problem, I would be on holiday in Devon on the day of the flight !

Determined not to pass up this "once in a lifetime" experience, I worked out a plan. As luck would have it, on the day there was an early Plymouth – Gatwick flight, then the Gatwick - Heathrow rail shuttle, but timing was very tight. So after an early start, drove from Torquay to Plymouth Airport, caught the flight, used the inter-terminal Gatwick shuttle and made it time for the LHR rail shuttle, so far so good, but this was not to last. The LHR shuttle got delayed and I remember watching "precious" minutes tick away as the train remained stationary for what felt like an "eternity". Legged it across Heathrow to the B.A. Terminal and made it to Goodwood Travel's "Flights of Fantasy" check in desk, as the last boarding passenger.

Of all the memories I took from the day, two really stood out - the "shove in the back" on the take off roll, heightened by the lack of luggage in the hold and Sunday lunch of roast beef at Mach 2 over The Bay of Biscay !



Passenger Name Fairbotham, M. A.		Not transferable Not refundable		Passenger name	
Date and place of issue 27th FEB 1988 CHARTER SALES GATWICK		Contract number 207 19097 172		Seat number	
Check in & Report Instructions GATWICK: BRITISH AIRWAYS TERMINAL 3 DESK 32 ISLAND 2 (only for delays)		Baggage allowance (only for delays)		Flight VOID	
From: LONDON		Carrier: BA	Flight: 908DC	Date: 24 JUL 88	1155
To: LONDON		To:			
By: VOID		Date:			

