

In Memoriam

With the recent death of **John Gilbert** on October 6 our Society has lost one of its most colorful and devoted long-term members. Like so many British audio engineers, he joined the BSRA (British Sound Recording Association) after the end of World War II and when that society eventually faced financial difficulties, he teamed up with John Maunder and Raymond Cooke to find a new base for the membership. At first, this was the BKSTS, but after a short time of set and change, the British Section of the AES came into being. Thereafter, John devoted the rest of his life as honorary secretary to the British Section with two years as its chairman. He attended section meetings regularly and appeared at most conventions.

Born in London in 1908, John initially set out to find a career in music. He became a capable pianist and organist. He broadcast from 2 LO at Savoy Hill before the BBC was formed and became church organist at a Lutheran chapel in London's East End. However, it was the wireless bug which eventually claimed his attentions and despite his salaried career in assurance, he eventually moved sideways to become a design engineer for disk recorders, amplifiers and transformers with Partridge & Mee.

John Gilbert's energies were such that throughout his life he generally maintained two or three other jobs. During the summers he loved to install and operate sound reinforcement equipment at the open air theater in Regents Park. It was there in 1934 that he contrived an audition for the then completely unknown Greer Garson with the eminent director Robert Atkins. Garson had hitchhiked from Nottingham—after the local Reperto-



John Charles George Gilbert

Born London, 1908 January 24. Audio engineer extraordinary, industrial consultant, head of telecommunications department, Northern Polytechnic 1951–1974, racing motorist and scrutineer, television presenter of over 200 programs, founding member of AES British Section. Married Marion Miles (two daughters and one son). Died Dorking, 1993 October 6.

ry Theatre closed down—and was almost penniless. She presented herself for an unscheduled audition with Robert Atkins, but he refused to see her. Later that morning John persuaded the crestfallen Garson to walk across the greensward close to some microphones which he had rigged for testing. She spoke some lines of Shakespeare's as she passed slowly across, and the director offered her a job on the spot. She spent the rest of that summer playing small parts; she was heard by West End directors and soon moving up-market. Five years later she appeared on our screens with Robert Donat in "Goodbye Mr. Chips," and a star was born.

In the late 30s John was appointed to the staff of Northern Polytechnic, London, in a new small department teaching radio servicing and telecom-

munications principles. At the outbreak of World War II he was seconded to the Ministry of Aircraft Production under Sir Robert Renwick, working on a research program for centimetric radar. After the war he became Head of Department at Northern Polytechnic, which by that time had grown to a significant size. The department became a significant part of audio and radio education in north London. John held this post until his retirement.

Throughout this time, John Gilbert followed an entirely different career as a scientific journalist. He was appointed technical editor of *Music Trades Review* in 1935, and after the war he became a contributor to *Gramophone* and eventually technical consultant to that journal, a position he held until his death.

In yet another phase of his career, he became a sound broadcaster and regular television presenter, first with the BBC in a program called "Inventors' Club" and later on a Saturday morning program for Independent Television. As if all of this were not enough, he maintained a great interest in sport, particularly motor racing. John was not only a good racing motorist, he was a capable mechanic and for many years acted as scrutineer at Silverstone and Goodwood. He often traveled to Berne and Le Mans during the racing season to give commentaries and make recordings.

Here was a man who packed three lifetimes into one and thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. He made countless friends all over the world and was always ready to help young people and struggling new companies. Those of us who worked with him and received his friendship have been well blessed.

Raymond E. Cooke, OBE ➤