



# The Last Monument to Britain's Subsea Cables' Industry

*Allan Green*

Since presenting my paper at a London Meeting three years ago (*150 years of Industry & Enterprise at Enderby's Wharf*, NewcomenLinks 220 Dec. 2011 p10) much Thames water has flowed past that site at Greenwich. It had been rumoured over several years that communications giant Alcatel-Lucent, who own the site, would be selling most of it for redevelopment. We now know that this had already taken place in 2008. However, it was only in the summer of 2013, after a number of false starts, that development of the major part of the riverside site, including Enderby House, had been taken up by Barratt, a property development company. This is in a joint venture with Morgan Stanley principally to build 616 apartments in several large blocks. Alcatel-Lucent continues manufacturing on the remaining part of the site.

Because of its listed status, Enderby House must be maintained within conservation guidelines, but Barratt has not yet defined its future use. That is why interested individuals, including some from the submarine cable industry, have set up the Enderby Group, to find a secure, relevant and long-term use for the property that recognises and honours its role in the telecommunications revolution which started at this location over 150 years ago.

In the past few years the building has been vandalised but is currently being conserved and protected by Barratt.

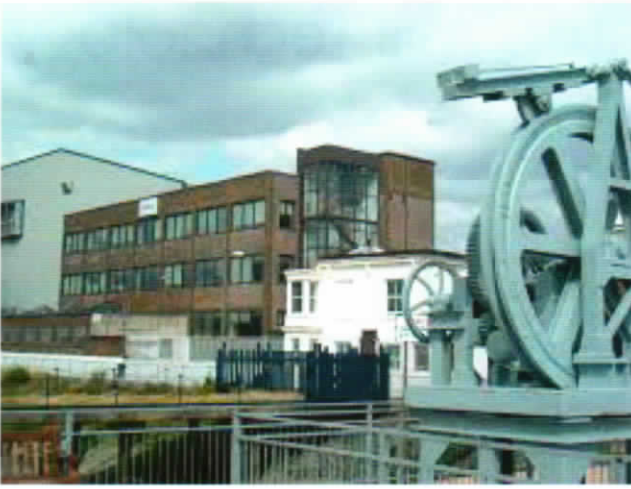


Their architect's site model shows a pristine and extended Enderby House alongside the proposed Greenwich Cruise Liner Terminal and jetty. To the rear and overshadowing all are the proposed multi-storey apartment blocks which are already being marketed.

The Enderby Wharf site was the Greenwich home of the Telegraph Construction & Maintenance Co (Telcon), who built most of the world's submarine cables and is the oldest continuously operating telecommunications factory in the world. In 1864 that factory manufactured the first successful Atlantic telegraph cables. From then until the 1975 the factory continued to make subsea telecoms cable, which were loaded

*On the left Enderby House before it was vanadised, on the right. It is the only building on the riverfront site that has survived the re-development.*





onto cable-laying ships via cable-handling gear that still survives on the riverside jetty. In its first hundred years the factory made over 400,000 miles (no less than 82%) of the world's subsea cables. When cable making was transferred to other factories Enderby Wharf turned to the manufacture of subsea repeaters and other systems components under new owners ST&C who took over the site in 1970. In 1994 they in turn were taken over by Alcatel.

The Enderby Group seeks to preserve Enderby House and the riverside cable-handling gear as the birthplace of the international communications revolution. Named after the shipping family that originally owned the site, the house was built on the riverside in the early 1840s. Though it is not an architectural masterpiece, it is of significant historical importance, it became Grade II listed in June 1973 and is the only building on the riverfront site that has survived the re-development.



*Far left: the factory continued to make subsea telecoms cable, which were loaded onto cable-laying ships via cable-handling gear.*

*Left: the Barratt architect's site model shows a pristine and extended Enderby House alongside the proposed Greenwich Cruise Liner Terminal and jetty.*

The Alcatel-Lucent site behind the new development remains the oldest subsea telecommunications manufacturing site in the world and the last in the UK. This industry has been British dominated for over 130 years. Today, the economies of many countries around the world quite literally depend upon access to the internet and its highways of fibre optic subsea cable.

This history and heritage is worthy of recognition and preservation. With this in mind, the Enderby Group has been formed to save Enderby House and its environs for posterity and provide it with a sustainable future. A business plan is currently being developed for presentation to Barratt and Morgan Stanley and to attract investors and other potential sources of funding. Historic archive material and artefacts relating to the site were transferred to the Porthcurno Telegraph Museum almost 10 years ago and an already promising collaboration with them has been sought by the Enderby Group.

**Porthcurno Telegraph Museum:** [www.porthcurno.org.uk](http://www.porthcurno.org.uk)

**The Enderby Group:** [www.enderby.org.uk](http://www.enderby.org.uk)

[facebook.com/groups/enderby](https://www.facebook.com/groups/enderby)

[twitter.com/EnderbyWharf](https://twitter.com/EnderbyWharf)



### THE SOCIETY'S AGM

WILL BE HELD ON  
11 FEBRUARY 2015  
AT 5.45

IN THE DIRECTOR'S SUITE,  
THE SCIENCE MUSEUM,  
EXHIBITION ROAD,  
LONDON SW7 2DD

IT WILL BE FOLLOWED BY THE

### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

TO BE GIVEN BY  
GEOFF WALLIS

ON  
CONSERVATION ETHICS IN PRACTICE

*Copy date for the next issue of*

*Newcomen Links*

*1 February 2015*

*[editor.links@newcomen.com](mailto:editor.links@newcomen.com)*

*[www.newcomen.com](http://www.newcomen.com)*

Do you know someone who would like  
to join the Newcomen Society?

Or would you like to give  
a year's membership as a gift?

There is a membership application form  
on p30

or join on-line at

[www.newcomen.com/membership/signup](http://www.newcomen.com/membership/signup)