

## Chapter 3

### Worst Nightmare.

As 1972 progressed, the reception from Radio Caroline, anchored off the Dutch coast, improved slightly, and we passed this information on, at the gigs. To even mention the name of Radio Caroline at the gigs wasn't easy, because there is no freedom of speech, where Offshore radio is concerned. In fact there is a complete ban on it. I refer to the vindictive M.O.A. of 1967, mentioned in earlier chapters, which states that; 'It is an offence to promote, or advertise, on all Offshore stations', including Caroline. Technically, by law, you cannot say, "I would like to promote Caroline at our next appearance". Or, "Be sure to place your advertisement with Caroline". The poor girl has been born with an illegal name, and anybody promoting her, could get a Three-month suspended sentence. Such is the gagging effect of this disgusting bill.

Everybody we have spoken to agrees the malice behind the MOA, is hard to believe. Not only is it a spiteful, undemocratic act, it is akin to laws imposed on the peoples of a nation, overrun by a dictatorship. In such a scenario, one of the primary objectives of a despot is to take control of the radio and TV stations. This is firstly, to prevent any of the opposition, from broadcasting, appeals for help, or propaganda, subversive to the new junta. Secondly, by controlling the airwaves they can then, dictate what programs, they want the people to listen to. Similarities here? I think so.

Meanwhile back at the North Sea, two Radio ships were now anchored within a mile of each other. The new Radio Caroline, and Radio Northsea International, from the good ships, *MiAmigo*, and *Mebo II*, respectively. Caroline was now broadcasting on 259 metres, (1187 khz), on the Medium Wave band, and RNI was on 220 metres.

At night, when any of the lads called to the studio, at least one of them would start twiddling with the living room radio knobs, just to be sure the radio ships were still broadcasting. Remember, Caroline had been off the air for 4 years, and we weren't going to lose it again. All this knob twiddling caused the dial cord to break more than once.

I know two of the roadshow lads, were so obsessed with this ritual, that they 'flipped', if they couldn't pick up either of the stations. Like myself, they let the whole aspect of 'radios' get to them, even when they're asleep. It's not surprising to find, that this causes the poor guy to get a 'jammed head' by the end of the evening, due to the long exposure to knob twiddling, over the years. This sometimes gives rise to irrational behaviour, caused by the worst scenario of all. Discovering, that the only station, left on the radio to listen to, was Radio 1. Ugh! The very thought.

A doctor would probably recognise that these 'headbanger' symptoms, were mainly only associated with Offshore, or 'Free Radio' fanatics, like myself. ('Free Radio' of course, meaning 'free of state interference'). The poor guy suffering from this 'condition' would probably find that the effects are more psychological, than physical.

Unless sore fingers, twiddling with radio knobs, and dials, can be counted as 'Repetitive Strain Injury'. The worst scenario would occur, during the poor fellow's nightmare. He would imagine Radio 1 was blasting out from his radio, non-stop. And as much as he tried, in his surreal state, "he was held back by some imaginary force", from reaching the switch, to turn the disgusting noise off. For some illogical reason, somebody or something, had tied him up to Caroline's mast with best quality, aerial wire, and he couldn't move a muscle. Even if he did break free, the diabolical racket still wouldn't stop, no matter what he did. This would cause the poor guy to suddenly wake up from the nightmare in a cold sweat still thinking the whole thing was real.

On getting up out of bed he would walk, with arms outstretched like a 'zombie', towards the radio in the

living room. He would have had a portable radio at the side of the bed, but in his nightmare, it had sprouted wings, and flew off. Then, still in a surreal state, he would switch on the living room radio and start twiddling with the dial, until he could hear the reassuring sounds of the 'all night' service of Radio Caroline, or RNI. Still in his 'zombified' state, he would return to bed and go fast asleep, as though nothing had happened. I'm glad this has never happened to me. Yet.

To the dedicated 'Free Radio' fan, it was worth all the 'jammed heads', just to listen to the Offshore stations. We were pleased a few of them were broadcasting again, this time hopefully, to stay. As the Caroline roadshow began to get more noticed, I thought some more advertising wouldn't go amiss, so I put a sign up on the fascia

above the shop window. It read; '*RADIO CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL*', in 4" letters. More stickers of the 'Pirate ships' were placed in the window, which was getting quite full now. This gave my bus passenger friends, something else to look at, instead of gawking at me, whenever I was doing something in the window. Several more Free Radio Societies contacted us, from the latter end of 1972 onwards, wishing to exchange information on the latest developments. Many of them sent copies of their Newsletters and magazines.

Names like; *Deejay & Radio Monthly*, from Hertfordshire; *Cheshire Free Radio Society*; *Monitor Magazine*, from Essex; *Living Free Radio Society*, including, *Birmingham Free Radio*; *Lion Productions*, from Leiden, Holland; *Bell Records & Tapes*; *North American Radio Clubs*, from Pasadena, California; *Free Radio Action Movement*, from Ashton-U-Lyne. To name but a few.

We even corresponded with a fan from Knoxville, Tennessee. E-Mails didn't exist then, of course. A Chinese gentleman came over from Hong Kong one day, while we were in the shop, working on the 'rig'. Perhaps I should have said, Hong Kong Restaurant, which was opposite the studio in Prescott Street. We knew him quite well, because he was the son of the Chinese owners. Our shop door was open, so he called in to pass the time of day.

After the exchange of a few pleasantries, he pointed to the stickers in the window, and said he was particularly interested in the 'Free Radio' promotion stickers. And wondered if we, possibly still had some free radios left over, 'Because his own radio was broken'. He wasn't joking either, because he thought we were doing a 'freebie' radio promotion for one of the manufacturers.

On an other occasion, an interviewer from Granada TV, 'Reports' program, telephoned the roadshow studio, and asked if he could call and see us, about doing an interview on the Caroline Roadshow. We knew of him previously, as he regularly did a half hour current affairs program each weekday around 6pm. After talking on the telephone for ten minutes he told us he would talk to his boss about it. A day or two later, he rang back and told us that they couldn't do the program, in case they broke the law talking to us." It might be illegal to mention your name", I think, were the words he used. Talk about being paranoid.

A similar occurrence happened with the local, wretched, IBA station in Liverpool. They nearly 'flipped' at the thought of talking to us, for the same reason. And, this idea had been suggested to them, by one of their own staff. With typical arrogance, they told us that they were, 'Unable to mention our name, because they might be breaking the law. In any case local radio was here to stay now, which was legal'.

These local radio owners fail to understand two important things. Firstly, people in the Liverpool area only listen to local radio now, because Radio Caroline doesn't broadcast from Ramsey Bay any more.

But if 'The Lady' were still there, these local stations would go 'bust', through having no listeners.

Secondly, it is only because of Radio Caroline, and all the other Offshore stations, pioneering commercial radio in this country that these loathsome substitutes exist at all.

However, the arrogant attitude of the local IBA station, *Radio City*, really got up my nose, so I told one of our lads what I intended to do about it, and he nearly fell off the chair laughing. If you recall, in an earlier chapter, I mentioned that I often repaired radios, etc, for workmates, and other friends and relatives. Well, because of the local IBA station's sarcastic attitude, towards Caroline, I caused them to lose several listeners, because of my little idea. The local IBA station at that time, was broadcasting on 194metres Medium wave, which, if you look at a radio dial, is at the extreme end. So when a radio came in for repair, I 're-tuned' each of the radio's Medium Wave trimmers, and presets. These are miniature station alignment settings, which ensure the station playing, matches, or tallies, with the position of the dial

pointer. For example, Manx Radio is on 1368khz MW, therefore you would expect the dial cursor, (pointer), to be reasonably near the 1300khz marker. By adjusting the MW trimmer slightly, I could trim the local IBA station right off the end of the dial, and 'hey presto', the station was gone. The dial knob would have had to be turned past the 'end stop', to tune the station now, which of course is not possible. When I returned the radios to their owners, they would twiddle away with the dial knob and inevitably came the question; "Where's Radio Wotzit gone"? To which I would reply; "How the hell would I know, I only repair them. Phone up the station. Maybe their transmitter's broken down, or the station has done everybody a favour, and closed down for good". After a while, they saw the funny side. It didn't bother most of them, because they didn't listen to it anyway. In my opinion, I didn't think anybody did.

As 1972 drew to a close we decided the new roadshow should, ideally, have an 'Official Opening Night', to mark, not only the return of the roadshow, but also the return of Radio Caroline. Anyway most of the 'rig' construction was nearly finished. The only problem was we still couldn't get the 500watt power amplifier and speakers, due to a shortage of funds. So it looked like we would have to manage, for now with the 100watt amp I had salvaged from the first disco.

Radio Caroline was still doing test transmissions from the *MiAmigo*, so we decided to contact their offices in Holland, to arrange a joint operation to promote both, the station, and the proposed Caroline Roadshow Official opening night.

After a few telephone calls to the Liverpool University Students Union, they became very interested in the idea, and a 'Grand Radio Caroline Night Dance', was organised. The event was to take place on January 20th 1973, at the University's Mountford Hall, situated on the campus, near the city centre.

Posters were put up all around the campus, and in the shop window, advertising the event. We again telephoned the Radio Caroline offices in Holland, and spoke to a couple of the DJ's. They already knew about the advertising, we were doing, to promote Radio Caroline, so they told us that they, in return, would advertise the

dance during the nighttime programs, up to, and including, the day of the dance. Which is exactly what they did.

A few days before the dance, we rang the Caroline offices again, thanking them for their co-operation, and to ask them if, by any chance, they had a spare DJ, (or two), who might be available to do a 'Celebrity Spot', at the dance. Not overlooking the fact, Holland isn't exactly, 'around the corner' from Liverpool. Therefore, we were quite surprised when Steve England, one of the DJ's said he might possibly, be in Liverpool on that night,

and asked for directions etc. To save him a lot of expense, he was invited to stay overnight, at Prescott Street, provided he didn't mind sleeping on the couch. We didn't expect to get back to the studio, to drop the roadshow gear off, until the early hours of the morning, anyway.

On the night of the gig we still had the problem of obtaining a more powerful amplifier. We started panicking, in case the 100watt home made one wouldn't be loud enough. However, we were assured by the Students Union staff, that we could in fact, use the hall's own P.A system. Problem solved, or so we thought.

The big night arrived, and John Shannon started up the Radio Caroline Opening Night Dance at 7-30pm, with the Radio Caroline theme tune, 'Caroline' by the Fortunes. Recorded by them in 1964, and adopted by the station in that year, much to the delight of the band.

The theme has been played so many times over the years, at gigs, and on the station, that the record number is etched in my memory. Decca label F11809. Caroline by the Fortunes. 1964.

After a few announcements about the return of the station, and other promotions, John Shannon got started with his show. So far so good. That is, until he tried to play his personalised jingles, in between records. They sounded awful. Tinny and piercing like a dentist's drill.

This was due to the poor acoustics of the hall. I had to quickly re-route the jingle machines through a different sound channel. Then, soon after we had solved that problem, the hall's own P.A. system, we had hooked up to, failed, leaving only our own 100watt amp still operating at full volume.

The building maintenance men began looking for the fault, which they eventually, only partly repaired. We managed to continue on reduced power, for the rest of the night, without it affecting the show.

As the night progressed more people arrived, and the dance floor started to fill up. Eric Day, (the name he used at the time), called in to do a half hour 'Guest appearance' at 9pm. Eric informed the crowd about a 'Dial A Disc' telephone we had set up in the hall foyer for making requests and dedications.

This was an older type, dial phone, mounted on a heavy metal stand. People could pick up the phone and dial '0'. A long telephone wire was installed, back to another telephone set up on stage, which I was manning. I was busy writing down requests, and passing them to Eric, who sat behind the microphone. It got chaotic, Eric couldn't understand my scribble, as I passed them to him by the dozens. I had an awful job trying to hear what

the punters were saying, because of the din from the loudspeakers, on the stage. The phone was too popular. was up to my eyes in requests, and Eric was doing his best to decipher my hieroglyphics. Soon there was a great mound of paper on the floor around his seat, which then stuck to our shoes, when it got sodden with spilt beer.

Following the Eric Day program, John Shannon returned to the microphone for his second half. He was about half way through the program, when a message came from the stage entrance that the DJ from Radio Caroline had arrived. We all breathed a sigh of relief, because we had been telling the crowd all night, about the guest appearance of a, 'DJ from the Radio Caroline ship'. John Shannon then asked the crowd to, "Give a big welcome to Steve England from Radio Caroline

The crowd went wild cheering and clapping, as our 'guest' walked up to the microphone to say hello.

He began to talk about the continued success of the station, which had recently resumed test transmissions from the ship off the Dutch coast. Also the relationship between the station and the Roadshow.

With all his charm and charisma he was pretty convincing. No doubt about it, he certainly was good.

The impostor. Yes, the guy was an impostor. Because none of the roadshow crew had ever met Steve England personally, we had no reason to doubt that this smartass wasn't for real. Thinking back, I seem to recall John Shannon being the only one of us, to introduce Steve England by name. The phoney one was careful not to mention his own name.

He even stayed till the end of the show, and was very talkative to the roadshow crew. Obviously, the lads were very patronising, thinking he was genuine. We found out, a day or so later, who he was Alias John Dwyer, and alias other names as well. A guy who turned up now and again, like a bad penny, wherever there was an Offshore radio event.

How he thought he would get away with it, I don't know. Supposing the real one had arrived while he was impersonating him. In that event, it wouldn't have been proverbly wise, to stand near any fans that were switched on.

Luckily, the crowd was unaware of the subterfuge. We only found out the truth ourselves, later that night, when we got back to the studio to unload the rig. We rang the Radio Caroline offices in Holland, to tell them about the success of the dance, and to thank them for advertising the event. Also to ask them to say thanks to Steve England for appearing, although it was a pity he had to leave in a hurry, before all the lads had, had the chance to speak to him. "But he is still here with us", came the bombshell reply. Steve then came to the telephone to apologise for not being able to make it, due to circumstances beyond his control, but hoped that the show went on alright without him.

After talking to Steve for several minutes, we thought it better not to mention he had an impersonator.

It was bad enough for us, trying to scrape the egg off our faces, without our Dutch office falling off their chairs laughing. Instead we arranged for further advertising, ahead of the forthcoming gigs.

Later, after the telephone call to Steve, the lads discussed the night's fiasco well into the early hours.

One good suggestion was to, 'put a contract out on our guest'. Afterwards however, we all saw the funny side of it, but would make sure in future, that it couldn't happen again.

Strangely enough, John Dwyer later became a friend of the roadshow crew, but he always remained a shady character. Still, after all he did save us from considerable embarrassment that night, by taking Steve's place. We may well have got 'booed' off the stage, for plugging a non-event all night, if he hadn't.