DOVER and SWINGATE
VHF and UHF in the DOVER AREA

With the postwar expansion of VHF FM radio and 405 line tv, Swingate was leased from the MOD and equipped to provide Band I and Band II for the areas along the South East coast not covered by Crystal Palace and Wrotham. The site is that of of a wartime "Chain Home" radar station on the cliffs overlooking Dover Harbour.

Band I opened in April 1958 using two CG1 transmitters in a "cold reserve" system but with an automatic changeover facility. The Band II system used Marconi equipment; For each service, an A or B translator fed two 1kW amplifiers. A split combiner and aerial arrangement made for easy and shutdown-free maintenance of the whole system.

With the introduction of the UHF 625 line service, and the decision to co-site ITA and BBC, it was decided that the Swingate site was too small to accommodate all of the services. A new site was obtained at West Hougham, half way between Folkestone and Dover, where the UHF transmitter was built in 1966. At first, only BBC2 transmitters -PYE 6.25kW parallel- were installed. Test transmissions started on Jan. 28th 1967 with regular BBC2 (monochrome) transmissions on Saturday Feb. 11th. The BBC2 Colour service started on Oct. 9th 1967.

For the BBC1 UHF service, a Marconi UHF77 system was installed and started service on 3rd Jan. 1970. In Jan.1979, the original PYE carrier mod. drives on UT2 were replaced by PYE IF Mk2 IF mod. drives, increasing reliability and reducing the transmitter hall temperature. As more similar drives became available "second-hand" from other sites, Dover’s UT1 drives were also replaced.

Major re-engineering at Swingate took place in 1984 with the replacement of the Marconi valved translators and amplifiers by the TM4 and AM14 systems now standard. At the same time the station was virtually rewired and a new MV switchboard and diesel alternator control panel fitted.

Radio Kent (nee Medway) arrived at Swingate in July 1984 but only line fed and in mono as a stereo feed was hard to find. The RBL from Wrotham on 95.7MHz was unusable as the ILR programme broadcast from the Dover UHF site on 97.0MHz was on the same bearing. Various methods of getting a stereo feed were tried, including an RBL receiver at Littlebourne, feeding BT lines. (The receive yagis were to be mounted on the MF mast radiator). Eventually it was decided to have the RBL receiver at Dunkirk near Canterbury and use a NICAM coded SHF link to Swingate. However, the problems were not over as the French objected to the SHF frequency used crossing the Channel! This being resolved, Radio Kent went Stereo in July 1986 a little earlier than planned courtesy of Reg. Cornish.
Tv programme feeds to the Swingate and Dover area started with direct reception of Crystal Palace. This continued until, in 1968, a link was set up from Wrotham to Dover with BBC1 and BBC2 at 625 line standard. To take advantage of the higher quality available, Swingate B1 was fed via a 625/405 standards convertor and 7GHz link from Dover. This feed system continued until 1980 when a new link was installed from Bluebell Hill to Dover (and Heathfield). About this time, the 405 service ceased, simplifying the feed arrangements considerably.

Despite Dover’s UHF aerial system having no panels on the South face, programmes are received well (and well received) across the Channel. This fact was used during “Children in Need” to solicit money from European viewers by reprogramming the remotely controlled caption generator. In place of instructions not to adjust your set due to atmospheric conditions, telephone numbers in France, Belgium and Holland were broadcast, to where pledges could be made.

Two extensions have been made to the Dover building; the first to add offices to the front of the building to cater for the move of staff from Swingate and the formation of the TMT. We like to think that the second extension was as a result of a memo in Oct. 1980..... We received a memo, allocating us a sum of money for "...prints etc. for your Rest Room." The TM replied, thanking them for the offer and asking for a Rest Room in which to hang the "prints etc". Whatever the reason, the second extension, providing a Rest Room and a much larger test room, was built in the Autumn of 1982.

Dover continued as the South East's Team Base until the move to Wrotham in 1988. A regular "Throughput" of staff made up the Team, including John (Jack) Howe (who retired in 1983), Reg. Cornish (Retd.), Bob Harrison (WRT), Mike Maskell (WRT), Stuart Abbott, Bill Vince, Graham Drinkwater, Dave Betts (WTP), Nigel Williams (NHT), Peter Chamberlain (WRT), Bob Baxter, Lee Dyer, plus numerous attachés and trainees.