

Letters from Guglielmo Marconi to his Father, 1896–1898

Translations of letters, with introductions and comments on each

Guglielmo Marconi was born in 1874 to Giuseppe and Annie (née Jameson) Marconi and, for the most part, lived at Villa Griffone near Bologna. From the age of five he had spent two years at school in Bedford and, during boyhood, was brought on frequent visits to relatives in England and Ireland. He thus spoke both Italian and English like a native.

Following his early experiments at home in Italy, he came to England with his mother in 1896 in order to demonstrate his achievements with wireless communication and to pursue a commercial career in this field. His contributions are well documented elsewhere (see references (1–4) and their associated bibliographies) and are currently being celebrated the world over, some one hundred years later.

GEC Review is fortunate in having access to a series of letters written by Marconi to his father during his early days in England when he was striving to establish himself. Unfortunately, we do not have

the replies he received and can only infer their contents. These letters, which are presented here, are now part of the Henry Willard Lende Collection and held in San Antonio, Texas; they have been translated from the original Italian and commented upon by Ing. Dr. Paolo Ghiggino of Marconi SpA.

As will be seen, much of the content of these letters is concerned with the filing of patents protecting Marconi's invention, and with the various financial opportunities that were available to him. Not all of these were necessarily in his best interests, however, and it is clear that he relied heavily on the advice and backing of his father in the very early days. The rate of correspondence between England and Italy was quite prodigious, sometimes taking only a few days in each direction. Replies were sent almost by return and it would appear that letters occasionally crossed en route.



Guglielmo Marconi 1874–1937

Letter 1, dated 11th March 1896

Guglielmo Marconi (GM) writes about having obtained the provisional UK patent for his invention, about the offer of Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart, and about his discussions with his cousin, Enrico, over the advantages and disadvantages of this offer.

London, 11th March 1896

Dearest Father,

I have finally obtained the provisional patent-rights through the efforts of Enrico Davis's agent. This cost in total 5.5 pounds sterling and will last for 6 months.

Recently I received a proposal from two engineers[†] namely Mr Wynne, who is related to my cousins the Robertsons, and Mr Urquhart, who is the partner of Mr Wynne. They propose to establish a small company with capital assets of 2,400 pounds sterling with the purpose of carrying out experiments and advertising my discovery. They would meet all the costs for obtaining patents in all the major countries in the world.

This company would give me, free of charge, more than half of the shares (with details to be sorted out) as a reward for the rights that I should transfer to it.

They are thinking of re-selling to companies and governments the patent-rights that they would have obtained and I would get a part of the profit proportional to the number of shares that I would own.

The company would meet all expenses required for demonstrating the usefulness of my discovery and I should give personal aid and support for a period of three months. Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart would also work as engineers to perform experiments.

They say that I should note that I would not have to invest a penny, that there is no risk for me personally, and that in case of failure they would meet the losses.

What do you think of all this?

I showed their letters to my cousin Enrico who says that half of the shares is too little and no good for me and that in any case I should seek a proper contract, compiled in my interest, by a lawyer. He also says that English law states that if I had more than half of the shares of the company, then I would be practically the owner, having in this case the right to force the company to follow my own

decision regarding anything. Enrico adds that if I were to take my share of risks and expenses, then I could fairly ask for a share of profit much higher than has been offered.

It should also be noted that these engineers did not ask for any proof or warranty concerning the effectiveness and usefulness of my discovery.

I also talked about this to my other cousin Ernesto Burn, who is a lieutenant in the Royal Engineers. He told me that a friend of his has obtained £10,000 from the British Government and a life subsidy of £2,000 per annum for a discovery useful to the army.

My cousin went to visit his friend asking him about the paperwork required. He said that it is sufficient to write a letter to the Secretary to the Minister of War who normally asks for demonstrations with the expenses paid for by the Government.

Major Carr, who teaches electrotechnics to the officers of the Engineer Corps in the British Army, says that it would be sufficient for my system to allow telegraphing up to a distance of only one and a half miles in order to prove extremely useful in military practice. He, together with other officer friends of my cousin, is a member of the commission responsible for reporting on the merits of discoveries offered to the Government.

Please note that, having obtained the provisional patent-rights, I do not risk anything if I demonstrate the system that allows wireless telegraphy, since it is now protected by the law. Therefore nobody here or elsewhere can operate or reproduce my discovery without my permission.

I hope you will answer me soon giving your opinion on these matters so that I will know what it is best to do.

I hope everything is fine at the 'Griffone'. Please send my regards to Alfonso and Gigino from whom I have had no news for a long time.

Your very affectionate son

Guglielmo Marconi

PS: As I have to process many others, I hope you will forgive me for writing this letter in haste.

Comments on Letter 1

The historic importance of this letter is self-evident. This letter is also very valuable because it portrays several sides of GM's character extremely well; he is very young at the time, but amazingly level-headed, cool, methodical, and determined. The great tension and excitement which GM is likely to have been experiencing at the time can be sensed in this letter.

[†] In Italian the word 'ingegnere' identifies a person who obtained a university degree in a technical discipline.

Letter 2, dated 21st March 1896

Continuation of the evaluation of the Wynne and Urquhart offer

London, the 21st March 1896

Dearest Father,

I have received your letter dated 15th March where I read with pleasure that everything is fine there.

Those two gentlemen wrote a letter to me saying that, after having thoroughly considered the whole matter, they do not believe it is possible to give me more than 1,000 of the 2,400 company shares, in which case, and following English law, I would benefit from $\frac{5}{12}$ of the net profit corresponding to 41.55%. They also add, however, that if I were to acquire a greater number of shares, paying for them of course, then my share of the profit would be proportionately greater.

I asked several of my relatives to examine their proposal. They say that as far as the reputation of the proposers is concerned there is nothing to doubt, nevertheless the share of profit they have offered is too small. Furthermore my relatives say that if I were a youth totally lacking in any means then they would not hesitate suggesting that I should accept the proposal. However, since you are a person of wealth then they believe it would be such a shame for me to accept an offer that reduces the profit which I could realise from my work to less than half, for fear of risking three hundred pounds.

They also say that if these engineers offered to venture more than one thousand pounds sterling, this proves that they certainly know what they are doing and are expecting to realise much more.

Having considered my position well and listened to my relatives, I believe that only four options are left open.

1. To continue on my own performing experimental demonstrations, setting up trials and advertising as well as applying for the full patent rights in England and abroad. All this would require approximately £500, but in this case I would not have to share the profits with anybody.
2. To accept the proposal of Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart, acquiring however a certain number of shares in addition to those offered. This would increase my share of profit and in case I had more than half of the issued shares then I would also be effectively the owner of the company in relation to its decisions, deeds, etc.

3. To accept the plain proposal of the two engineers, being satisfied with the $\frac{5}{12}$ offered but in this case I would not have power in the company since I would own a number of shares equal to less than half of the total.
4. To try to find other parties offering more advantageous conditions, although everyone agrees that this would be very difficult to achieve.

I believe that the best conditions for me would be those I drafted in point No. 2 above. In such case I would benefit from the practical and scientific aid of the two engineers which is something not to be overlooked, since they are experts in this country, the business and the way to carry it out.

I hope to write also to Mr Carpi the lawyer, translating for him the proposed contract and asking him for his opinion on my affairs.

These engineers let me know that they cannot wait too long for my decision, having other businesses they could undertake, therefore I hope that you will wish to answer me as soon as you can, giving me your counsel in whichever way you will consider most appropriate for both my future and our interest.

Please send my greetings to all.

Your affectionate son

G.

Comments on Letter 2

This letter shows well the coolness and method typical of GM. This is difficult to fault. GM has decided already that he wants to be in control and therefore needs his father's financial support. However, he's not yet asking for money but, rather, is analysing the logical reasons and facts. The beauty of this letter is the insight into the relationship between father and son.

Letter 3, dated 1st April 1896

The proposal of a contribution from GM's father, and the first meeting with Mr Preece.

London, the 1st April 1896

Dearest Father,

I have received your welcome letter dated 21st March and I am pleased to hear how you are all well.

I also hear that you would be happy to subsidise me to buy the 300 shares of the company in order to take charge of it; and in case I decide that I would

be better off acting on my own, then you would also be prepared to grant me 300 pounds sterling or even more if needed. For this I thank you very much.

As far as the share of profits that you wish for Alfonso is concerned, I will say that I will not have any difficulties in ascribing in his name half of the shares that I will be able to subscribe with the monies that you will send me. Should it turn out to be more useful for me to proceed on my own (that is, without bonds to any society) I would then transfer to Alfonso the 15% of the net profits that I will be able to raise, under the condition that you will provide me with enough financial aid in order to allow for patenting and demonstrating the discovery.

I do not believe that there is any need for the presence of Alfonso here, since at least for the time being there would be nothing for him to do. In fact, for the little accounting that I may have to undertake with the company, I can rely on the help of the accountants from Mr Wynne and my cousin Enrico. These would work under my supervision.

The other day I went to the Command of the English Royal Engineering Corps in Chatham, to gather information on whether it would be convenient to offer my findings to the British Government. I had an interesting conversation with Major Carr. He said he believes that my system would be too difficult to keep secret, for military purposes, in which case the War Ministry could not undertake the expenses for trials; he also told me that if instead the Government accepted, he then would forbid me to patent my findings in any country other than England. This would not be in my interest.

This Major suggested to me that I visit the directorate of telegraphs to see what opinion they may have on this matter.

Yesterday with a letter of introduction written by a friend of my relatives, I went to talk to ing* Price†, who is the Director General of the British Telegraphs. He seemed to show extreme interest in my case and told me how he had tried to do what I have achieved using an arrangement different from mine but without obtaining any good results.

He promised me that, if I wanted to perform experiments, then he would allow me the use of any necessary building belonging to the telegraphic administration in any city or town in the whole of the United Kingdom, as well as ensuring the help (at no cost, of course) of any personnel employed by the administration mentioned above that I might need. He added that he has ships on which I could install and try my equipment in case I wanted to perform an experiment between vessels at sea.

He would also like me to perform a small demonstration across one of the rooms of the telegraph house, before the members of the Royal Society of Science.

He also said that it would be enough for my system to work at a distance of half a mile in order to be extremely useful in navigation for preventing collisions between vessels during thick fog.

I have not yet decided what I will do, that is, whether it is better to join the society or to proceed on my own. Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart would not have any problem to give my name to the company as well as to obtain all foreign patents in my name.

After a careful analysis of everything involved, I hope that I will soon come to a decision on which way forward to take; however, I believe that in any case that sum which I have mentioned earlier will be needed, therefore I beg you to take all necessary steps in order to send me the money soon.

Mother is well and sends her greetings. She hopes that you will have received her letter of last Saturday. Please send my greetings to Alfonso and Gigino who I hope will be getting better and believe me

your affectionate son

Guglielmo.

Comments on Letter 3

This is an extremely important letter from a historical point of view as GM meets, for the first time, the remarkable figure of Mr Preece (later Sir William), who was certainly the most helpful counsellor to GM. The importance is twofold: first because it shows that the relationship between GM and his father at that time was better than had been portrayed. Clearly GM's father offered his help very promptly, whilst also defending the rights of the brother, Alfonso. Second, because it

* Marconi uses here the Italian title 'ing' for 'ingegnere', rather than an English degree.

† Very uncommonly, both here and in the next letter, Marconi misspells the name and role of the important contact he has just met. The correct name was 'Mr Preece' who was not 'Director General of the British Telegraphs' but the 'Chief of Engineering Department of the General Post Office' (see 'Guglielmo Marconi', compiled by Pam Reynolds, Copyright of The Marconi Company Ltd (1984)). Given the fact that he had never met Mr Preece before, coupled with Marconi's usual precision especially concerning important subjects, a doubt may arise as to whether the spelling mistake was contained in the letter of introduction itself. However, this is not the case, as can be noted from the original manuscript of that letter, dated 30th March 1896, written by A.A. Campbell Swinton.

describes the crucial meeting with Mr Preece who was to be so important for the progress of the events. Also this was a rare occasion when someone may have convinced GM to change his mind.

GM had probably decided (possibly already at the time of letter no. 1) to accept the Wynne and Urquhart offer but with the added target of securing the majority of the shares. But Mr Preece probably suggested a new dimension to the importance of the invention, which must have pleased, but at the same time puzzled, GM about what to do.

Letter 4, dated 8th April 1896

Misunderstandings between father and son

London, the 8th April 1896

Dearest Father,

I received yesterday your welcome letter dated 5th April. I am sorry to learn that Dott. Gardini injured his shoulder. I hope that it is nothing serious and that he will get well soon. Please offer him my best regards when you see him again.

From what you wrote to me, I believe that perhaps you may not have fully understood my letter dated 1st April. The Director of the telegraph did not offer to meet the expenses of the experiments that I may wish to perform, but only the use of the premises as well as some kind of help from the personnel employed by the telegraph organization. Therefore, the largest part of the costs, i.e. those associated with the required equipment and the acquisition of the patent rights, would still have to be borne by myself.

I mentioned to my relatives this proposal, so that they could express their opinion. They say that, even though ing Price was very kind offering his help, nevertheless his offer must be treated very cautiously, since:

1. The experiment that he wished me to perform in front of the Royal Society of Science could not take place until a month's time, during the next colloquium which will take place around the 15th May. This would waste over one month just waiting and it is extremely likely that, meanwhile, those two gentlemen that offered to set up a company in my name, as you are aware, will eventually decide that they would not wait any longer. Furthermore, if I were to perform an experiment in front of the Royal Society, I would then have to explain my discovery in every detail. At present this would not be in my best interests as such findings are currently only protected by provisional

patent rights. Moreover, I have not had so far a proper chance of improving it the way it would be desirable to do. After the demonstration such improvements might well be carried out instead by some of those scientists who would then derive most of the benefits and eventual profits.

2. I could not have the help of Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart, who in addition to their personal aid, would be prepared to spend 500 pounds in costs for experiments as well as 500 pounds for obtaining the foreign patent rights.

3. The directorate of the English telegraphs does not have any interest in limiting the use of my discovery only for their purposes. Therefore it is necessary that I obtain the patent rights in every other individual country.

I do not fully understand the meaning of a passage from your last letter, where you say "that I should transfer the rights of my discovery to other countries, after having obtained the patent rights for them, so that I would not have to risk any capital and I would obtain a full profit". After what I have learnt, I can now say that in order to obtain foreign patent rights more than 300 pounds sterling are needed; therefore even in the case you mentioned, I would still have to risk some money.

Also, I do not understand exactly what you mean by saying you will lend me 300 pounds sterling. You will surely understand that in the hypothetical case of a failure, I could not take responsibility for the money spent, as I do not offer any guarantee to Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart who also are willing to put 1000 pounds at my disposal.

I repeat again today that I have not decided anything yet. I am waiting for the counsel of Lord Fredric Bramble who is one of the most famous lawyers here. He is a friend of my relatives and is extremely competent in these matters.

I will not come to any final decision before a full examination of what is most convenient for me to do. Mr Wynne and Mr Urquhart say that they can wait approximately another week for my decision, so I do not consider it wise to refuse their proposals now.

Here we are enjoying a splendid season; perhaps even too warm. We have also learnt of the death of Count Mattei from reports in the English newspapers.

Please send my regards to Alfonso and Gigino and believe me always

your affectionate son
Guglielmo Marconi.

Comments on Letter 4

This letter adds the flavour of a historical novel to the saga! GM complains to his father who may have slightly changed the terms of the matter in lending – rather than giving – the money to GM and misinterpreted other points of the previous letter. The letter suggests much about the character of the two.

Letter 5, dated 6th May 1896

GM's decision and conclusion of the Wynne and Urquhart dilemma

6/5/96

71 Hereford Road
Bayswater
W London

Dearest Father,

I took some time to write because I did not have anything new to tell you and therefore I resolved to wait until I had decided something.

Following the suggestion of several of my friends and relatives, I decided to conduct an experiment in order to show the utility and practicality of my discovery to whom it may be of interest. In this way I could take better advantage than doing otherwise.

Ing Preece, the Chief Director of the telegraphs, advised me against accepting the proposal to join venture with those two gentlemen [Wynne and Urquhart], saying that their capital is too small. He also said that it would be far better for me to perform an experiment in front of a certain Government Commission that is looking for ways of setting up a telegraphic link between the shore, light-houses and lightships.

As I have already said to you in another letter, he promised the assistance of the personnel under his control and to lend me the use of the buildings for the experiments. However, I would still have to meet the cost of the equipment, the experimental set-up and the demonstrations that I may carry out.

An impressive experiment, as it would be desirable to set up, would require some of the 300 pounds you promised. I reckon that approximately one hundred pounds will be necessary if these tests are to be carried out properly.

They also say that it is not in my interest to sell the provisional patent rights now because in that case I would lose the right to obtain patents in the principal states of Europe.

I still have approximately three months left in order to apply for these patents. They will cost in total 190 pounds, which added to the 100 pounds necessary for the experiments, carries forward a total for all the expenses of approximately 300 pounds, which I already quoted to you in another of my letters and that you said you would make available to me.

I am also certain to fulfil your wishes while doing this demonstration in front of competent people, as you suggested in your welcome letter dated the 14th April.

The day before yesterday we received notice that the two barrels of wine and the case had arrived in Harwich. Unfortunately the customs refused to ship the box over to London without inspecting its content first. Harwich is a sea port some seventy miles away from London and since I could not travel there just for that purpose, I sent the key of the case so that they could carry out the inspection for themselves.

I don't have any more news to tell you. Here the season is now truly beautiful. I hope that everything is fine at the Griffone and the Bonconvento, and that you are all in good health.

I beg you to send me the 100 pounds as soon as you can, because I have already ordered several pieces of equipment that I will have to pay for when they have been completed, that is in approximately 12 days.

I believe that using a bank order to London is the best way to send the money over here, as I did experience great difficulty in cashing the cheques that you sent last time.

Please send my regards to Alfonso and Gigino, from whom I received news today, and with many greetings from me and Mother.

Always your affectionate son

Guglielmo Marconi

Comments on Letter 5

This is an important letter where GM decides to perform the experiment suggested by Mr Preece and to use some of the money promised by his father for setting it up. He considers using the other money for extending his patent rights in the most important countries in the world. GM also mentions that Mr Preece discouraged the formation of an association with Wynne and Urquhart because they had far too little capital. This probably cleared the matter and GM does not mention Wynne and Urquhart any more.

Letter 6, dated 12th May 1896

The money for the experiments has arrived!

12/5/1896

71 Hereford Road
Bayswater
W London

Dearest Father,

I thank you for your welcome letter dated 9th May with enclosed bank order for £100. I hope to cash it tomorrow at the 'Credito Lionesse'. I will try to use the money in the best possible way and take great care not to spend it unnecessarily.

I am aware of the invention of Mr Verardini and if he owns the patent rights in England he may be able to achieve greater profits here than somewhere else. This is because in London all telegraphic wires as well as those employed for the electric light are buried underground. If he sends me some details to clarify the advantages of his special wire, then I will try my best to make sure that proper note is taken of his findings.

The other day I saw Mr Merton who offered to lend us the bottles needed for our wine, and also to send his man to bottle it. I think that it will be fair to send him a few bottles of wine for his troubles.

Here it is exceptionally warm for London (approx. 20 deg R) and it has now been over a month since we had any rain, with great damage for the agriculture in the countryside.

I hope everything is fine at the Griffone and Bonconvento and that all the signs there are for a favourable year ahead.

The quotation of 190 pounds that I received covers the expenses necessary to obtain all major foreign patent rights and does include the United States of America, as that nation is extremely rich and also very enterprising.

I will try to keep you informed about the progress of my affairs.

Please send my greetings to Alfonso and Gigino whose health I hope will be getting better somehow.

Please receive my greetings and those from Mother who will write to you tomorrow, and believe me always

Your affectionate son

Guglielmo Marconi

PS: Please send my best regards to Dott. Gardini when you see him.

Comments on Letter 6

GM informs his father that the first sum of £100 was received and thanks him for it. He will use it to

set up a demonstration with the help of Mr Preece. He plans to use the remaining sum promised (about £200) to extend the patent rights to most of the countries in the world. Important from historical point of view as it marks a milestone.

Letter 7, dated 9th January 1897

The success of the demonstration. More on the patent rights.

67 Talbot Road
Westbourne Park
9th January 1897

Dearest Father,

I have gratefully received your letters dated the 2nd and the 5th of this month. I have been to the Comptoir National d'Escompte, who paid the 50 pounds sterling. However, I did have to sign a receipt and a declaration in order to exempt the Bank Minotto R^a. I^a. from any responsibility.

The other day I received a letter from General Ferrero, the Italian Ambassador, who congratulated me on the results obtained with my experiments and invited me for dinner at the Italian Embassy on the following day. Yesterday I did in fact visit the Italian Embassy and I shared the company of Gen Ferrero for dinner together with the secretaries of the Embassy. He talked a lot about my discovery and after dinner we went in one of his coaches, to the Ministry of Telegraphs[◇], where I showed him my equipment. He seemed to be very interested and he said that he hopes to meet me again soon. He even apologized a little for not having dedicated his attention to the matter sooner.

He is an extremely clever person but he always disparages the Italian government, saying that Italy is leading itself to ruin by sustaining too many soldiers.

The military delegates of the Austrian-Hungarian Embassy asked me to show them a small experiment with my system. Needless to say, I have performed a demonstration for them in the palace of the telegraphs and they seemed to be very satisfied with it.

The countries where I have applied for patent rights are: England (or Great Britain and Ireland), Russia, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Spain, the United States of America and India. It will take three months for the patents to be granted, with the exception of Russia where almost a year is necessary.

[◇] Perhaps there is again some confusion here. The equipment was probably located either at St Martin's-le-Grand, or in a building on the Embankment – both premises of the General Post Office.

It is fair to tell you that some competent people, while not being interested parties, nevertheless point out that in the process of obtaining the grant for a patent, there is always some risk of litigation. This is because in case, by mistake or inadvertently, my applications were to contain some small elements that are not novel or original and should this not be properly declared in the patent, then the whole of it could be made invalid.

I met two American gentlemen who are seemingly willing to acquire my patent rights for the United States of America. They have not yet formally declared what they wish to give me in return, but I understand that they would give me ten thousand pounds divided as follows: four thousand immediately and six thousand when the patent is granted by the American Government. They would meet all costs for litigation etc that the patent may incur and all risks etc. etc.

I will try to learn more about exactly who these two people are.

I believe that it may be better for me to accept one of these early offers since I could benefit from a tangible sum of money and thereafter, obtain the patent rights in other nations such as Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal, Denmark, Brazil, etc. etc., where for the time being I have not yet applied for any patent which could well prove to be considerably worthwhile.

Furthermore, even in case something goes wrong with the other applications, I would still have made a considerable profit.

Please let me know what you think about it and also what is the opinion of Mr Carpi the lawyer.

I read the article in the *Gazzetta dell'Emilia*[○] but I could not find any relevant remarks that had anything to do with me.

Please send my greetings to Alfonso, poor Gigino and all his family, as well as all the other friends down there including Mr Carpi the lawyer, Dott Gardini and Dott Secchi.

Believe me

your very affectionate son

Guglielmo Marconi.

Comments on Letter 7

GM has performed his historic demonstrations and has become famous; Mr Preece was right! The Italian ambassador invited him for dinner. Again

○ The local newspaper of his Italian home town. The 'Emilia' is the region of Italy of which Bologna is the principal town.

GM shows no sign of excitement but, instead, he is extremely composed. He likes the Italian ambassador.

Back to business matters, GM explains to his father about the various foreign patents rights and laws.

Letter 8, dated 20th January 1897

More experiments, capital, and insight into the laws on patent rights

67 Talbot Road
Westbourne Park
London W
20/1/1897

Dearest Father,

I have gladly received your letters.

Regarding the patents, I went to see one of the best local lawyers, who was recommended to me by Mr Preece.

He says that there is always some danger dealing with patents, especially in America. He also suggested some small modifications to my patent for England.

It will take approximately another three months before the English patent may be granted. However, this is in some respect an advantage, since I will have the time to include improvements or make modifications etc.

The experiments at sea will take place as soon as the season improves.

I also discovered that in Austria if my invention is not put in place and used within a year from the date of filing, then this patent could there be made invalid.

I am waiting for your answer in relation to that proposal, of which I told you in my last letter. I believe I could earn 20 thousand pounds by conceding half of the future profit to that company which, as I told you, would make available 25 thousand pounds to develop the discovery, while meeting all the risks etc.

Everybody agrees that the expenses for supporting the patents in case they are challenged in court, would require such capital funds that I do not have. They also say that the law concerning patent rights is very unclear, especially in England.

Just think that some ninety per cent of the patents that are granted over here are made invalid within ten years from the date of their licence.

I believe that, if these people are honest, I could come to terms with them, assisted by a good lawyer, and I could obtain 18 thousand pounds, 4 or 5 thousand immediately, and the rest when the

patents are effectively granted. All this in addition to 50 per cent of the company shares.

As far as the Government is concerned, I do not believe that they will decide very soon whether to acquire my rights or not. I also believe that they will not pay a great deal for them.

In effect, it is also fair to remember that for the time being I do not have anything to sell (as I have not been granted the patents yet), and also that such patents could be opposed before or after the date they are granted (in approximately one month's time) by anybody who may have any interest against me.

The laws regulating the patent rights are different from country to country.

Please, think carefully about all this and let me know your opinion.

I believe that asking for 20000 pounds sterling for the Spanish patent is too much, because the invention is not yet perfect for the time being.

Please send my regards to poor Gigino and his family, and with my best greetings to you and Alfonso,

believe me

your very affectionate son

G. Marconi

Comments on Letter 8

An interesting letter where GM explains more details about patents rights and their weaknesses. GM comes to the conclusions that he needs to consolidate his capital since he could not sustain the costs of a legal dispute to defend his patents. He plans to sell some of the acquired patents. Mr Preece acts more and more as GM's counsellor and plans more experiments at sea with him.

Letter 9, dated 8th August 1897

Foundation of the first Company shares. The first commercial contract.

67 Talbot Road
Westbourne Park
London W
8th August 1897

Dearest Father,

Annexed to this letter, I am sending to you a copy of the contract with the company, which has been signed by my lawyers and that you can have translated by Alfonso.

The company is now looking for an electrical laboratory where my equipment can be built.

I could not see Mr Preece yet as he is currently out of London, however from what his friends are saying, it seems likely that he will remain friends with me, even though I have sold the patent rights.

In fact the English Government wishes me to go to Dover to install the first wireless telegraphy station.

Captain Malfatti has committed himself to write a few articles in the Italian press in order to confute or correct the statements of Righi and his friends.

The 15000 pounds sterling are credited in my name at the London and Westminster Bank. Three thousand of these are deposited in a current account and I can withdraw them at any time. The remaining 12000 are in a savings account and I can withdraw them giving seven days' notice.

I have also learnt that it is only those who buy the shares of the bank that will receive 2.50% interest, while having my money deposited there, I can get only a half per cent. This means that I will have only 60 pounds sterling per year from my 12000. This is very little indeed, and I will need to try investing elsewhere.

The 50000 shares of the Company will be transferred or given to me as soon as we have finished printing them.

I hope you are all well. Please send my regards to anyone who has shown kindness to me.

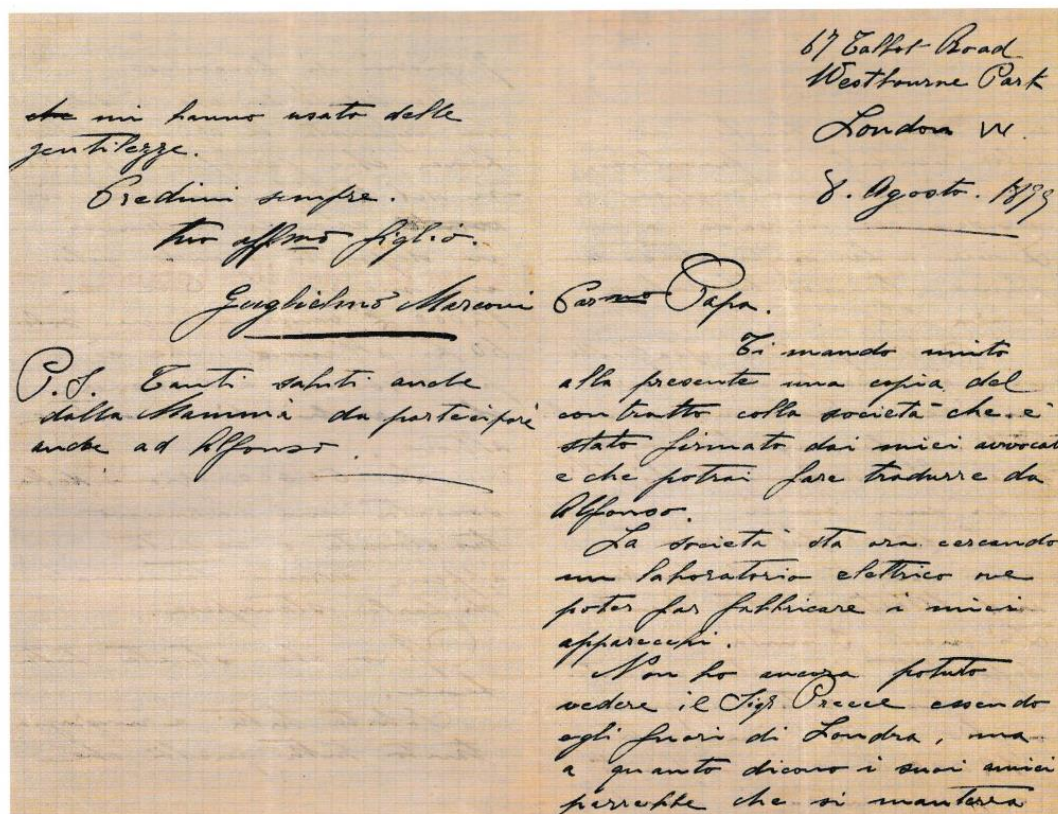
Believe me always, your very affectionate son.

Guglielmo Marconi

PS: Mother also sends her best regards to be extended to Alfonso as well.

Comments on Letter 9

A very important historical document where GM informs and sends a copy of the contract for the foundation of his first company and the plan to sell the shares. GM's finances are now improving significantly and he has had a contract for the first telegraphic station in Dover. There is also an important note about a dispute with Prof. Righi in Italy about which Captain Malfatti would write in his favour to confute some of Righi's alleged assertions.



The first and last pages of the letter from Guglielmo Marconi to his father, dated 8th August 1897

Letter 10, dated 1st December 1897

Various transactions. The Bevilacqua foundation.

67 Talbot Road
Westbourne Park
London W
1.12.1897

Dearest Father,

Today I received your letters on my return from a long tour of the Isle of Wight.

I attach to this letter a note of credit in your name for the sum of one thousand and eight hundred pounds to be paid at the 'Banca Popolare di Credito' in Bologna, for supporting the Bevilacqua foundation.

My bankers suggested forwarding the sum in this way as they reckon it to be the simplest and most secure.

At your convenience, please send me the copy of the transaction.

I believe that you will not have any trouble collecting this amount as you are known at the bank. I hope that the exchange rate will not be very low.

Our things are going reasonably well here. It does however take a long time to install the various equipments.

Since several trials must be done on board ships at sea, such tests are progressing very slowly because of the bad season.

Please let me know as soon as you have received this letter, and when you have concluded the affair with the Marquise Bevilacqua.

Send my regards to all.

In a great hurry, believe me your aff. son.

Guglielmo Marconi.

Comments on Letter 10

GM can now afford to send £1800 to his father as payment for some business with the Marquise Bevilacqua in support of a foundation. His tests in the open sea are progressing slowly because of bad weather and GM wants to get on with them.

Letter 11, dated 24th December 1897

Buying a villa in Italy? Exceptional results of the sea tests.

67 Talbot Road
Westbourne Park
London W
24th December 1897

Dearest Father,

I am confirming my latest letter that I posted from the Isle of Wight on the 20th of this month and which I hope you will have received.

Concerning villa Banzi I believe, as I told you, that if it can produce a net 5% profit then it is well worth doing the deal.

However it would be good to know whether the property could be rented or alternatively an active and honest agent could be found to look after it as for the time being, I cannot live there.

If Mr Carpi the lawyer believes that this is such a good opportunity, then I would not hesitate to complete. I can withdraw the money required with seven days' notice.

I have been busy for the last two weeks carrying out experiments offshore between a ship and the ports of the Isle of Wight. The results have been excellent, or I could even say beyond expectations, as I could transmit messages during storms and fog to a distance of about 28 kilometres.

I have been nearly two weeks on board a steam boat during a horrible season, but thanks to God everything went very well. Monday I will go back to continue these experiments.

Please let me know how the paperwork for villa Banzi is proceeding.

I have received so many letters from every part of the world, that I do not know how I will possibly ever be able to answer them all.

Mr Preece, the head of the English telegraphs, is currently in Rome where he went for reasons concerning his health.

I hope that you all will have a very happy Christmas. Please send my greetings to our friends and wish them all a very happy New Year from me. Special wishes to Alfonso, poor Gigino, Letizia and the Luinzis as well as the Franceschinis, the Monti Carpis and the Secchis. With my most affectionate wishes for you, and hoping that the New Year will bring you every good and happiness,

believe me always

Your very affectionate son

Guglielmo Marconi

Comments on Letter 11

Another short letter where GM politely replies to his father, who probably proposed ways to invest his son's new fortune by buying a villa in Italy. GM is interested but not too excited and simply delegates matters to his father. His tests in the open sea went very well and this was clearly much more important for him.

Letter 12, dated 15th February 1898

Shares, honour and fame all growing

67 Talbot Road
Westbourne Park
London W
15th February 1898

Dearest Father,

I was very pleased to learn from your last letter to Mother that you are all well, however I am very sad to hear of the death of poor Dr Gardini. I really did not expect it.

I am certain that I will never forget his great kindness and the love that he always showed for me, either when treating me with so much care when I was ill, or as he encouraged me in my studies with his great faith in my success.

Here we are working as usual. It seems that the Lloyds company is about to buy some of our patents.

The company shares carry on increasing their value as our trials succeed over ever greater distances. Two months ago the shares were worth one and a half sterling each. About a month ago they cost £2.

In fact at about that time one of our shareholders sold all his shares, which were more than 5,000, at £2 each, making a profit of £5,000; that is 160% in six months.

Following the demand of several bankers, I see today that our shares are quoted in the stock exchange at over £3 each, from their initial value of the £1.

This is a somewhat peculiar result since we are not yet floating for the time being. I also received from Minister Bruni the '*Croce da Ufficiale*'* which is very nice. I also received the '*Regio Decreto*'†.

At the embassy I am told that such a title is a grade more than that of '*cavaliere*'‡ and that perhaps I will soon be promoted to '*Commendatore*'◊.

* Officer Cross

† Literally: 'Royal Decree'

‡ Knight

◊ No direct translation. It may be equivalent to 'Commander'

This is all the news for the time being. I also heard that the Emperor of Germany wishes to give me another honorific title if the trials that are to be carried out in Germany end up well.

Today I had dinner with General Ferrero. He is very kind to me and will come to the Isle of Wight in a week's time to see my system in action. He was also very saddened by the news of the death of poor Dr Gardini, which he had not yet received.

I am pleased to hear that the season is good and the work in the farms is progressing.

We will leave London this Saturday because all my tests are on the coast now.

When writing please send to

Madeira House

South Cliff

Bournemouth

With all my best greetings,

I am your affectionate son

Guglielmo Marconi

Comments on Letter 12

GM is becoming a very important person. The value of the Company shares rises; several countries grant him honours and merits. The campaign of tests at sea continues. GM relocates to Bournemouth and sends his new address to his father.

Letter 13, dated 7th December 1898

More fame – The Royal Yacht experience – the expansion of the Company

THE WIRELESS TELEGRAPH

AND

SIGNAL COMPANY, LTD

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS.

EXPANSE, LONDON.

TELEPHONE No 2748, AVENUE.

28, Mark Lane

London 7. September 1898

E.C.

Dearest Father,

I am sorry that I could not write to you earlier, but something always interrupts to stop me. My luggage is permanently packed as I am going up and down the whole of England two or three times a week if not more often.

I was ever so pleased to receive the good news about you all.

You may have learned from the newspapers or from what I wrote to Mother that the Queen and the Prince of Wales wanted to see my equipment and used it for more than two weeks.

I had the pleasure of staying on board the Royal Yacht during the excursions. The Prince of Wales was continually able to telegraph and keep in touch with his Mother the Queen (who was in her Palace in Osborne) even when the ship was off-shore, something that would have been impossible without my invention. You may be already aware that the Prince of Wales gave me a very nice and valuable tie-pin as a present. After thanking me very much, he told me that he would be very happy to see me any time I wished to visit him.

After these experiences, I went to the north of Ireland to supervise the equipment for the two telegraphic stations made for the Lloyds company. Such stations are nearly always in very remote locations and very difficult to reach, as for example there is no railway nearby. They are also so very far up in the North that it is very cold even in August and we had to light fires in the evenings. It was on Rathlin island before I arrived that Mr Glanville, one of my assistants, had a terrible accident costing him his life.

It seems that he ventured on a cliff while being out for a walk and fell more than 100 metres, either because he slipped or misplaced his foot. It was a great loss for us. He was a good young man who was getting very knowledgeable about my equipment.

I also had to stay in Dublin to attend two conferences held by Prof. Rev. Molloy. These conferences went very well. I saw many of our relatives in Ireland. Among them Mrs Hone who asked me to send her greetings to you. I also met Richard Millar and Edy Millar and their families, as well as William John Jameson and Nellie and Mimmi Robertson. They all say they have met you and send love and greetings to you and Mother. They were all very nice to me and asked me to stay with them any time I go to Ireland.

Answering your questions about the Company shares, these have dropped in value a little. Perhaps this is due to the season as it is now time for bathing and resting in the countryside so that nobody has time for financial speculations. However it is certain that the value of the shares will rise again soon. They stand now at roughly 4 pounds sterling each.

The Company shares are not titles to the bearer but personal certificates as is common here. I do not believe that it is now a good time to sell lots of

them as this would cause their value to drop sharply.

We are today asking external companies to build various parts of the equipment, but these companies produce large bills for their services, which greatly limit our profits. It seems decided now that we will set up a small factory, but to do this we will need to issue more shares in order to build up the required capital. Such shares will cost 3 pounds each and in case you wish to purchase some of them, that would probably be a good deal since it is nearly certain that the share value will rise to 4 or 5 pounds in a very short time. Let me know what you think about it.

Regarding those investments you told me about, I believe that, until I have accumulated a sensible sum, it would be preferable that my capital remains here, especially since I now earn 2% in interest.

It is very likely that we will soon sell our rights in America. This would produce a very large profit.

I am happy to know that Tania and her daughters are now at the Griffone, and I am very sorry that I cannot be there myself.

I wrote to Com. Villa telling him how sorry I am not to be able to participate or attend the exhibition in Turin.

In relation to the bill of the Journal 'Elettricità' of Milan, I will look into the matter as soon as I return to Bournemouth (tomorrow).

I am pleased to know that the farms are doing well but I am sorry that the vineyard suffered.

Mother wrote to me that you may also come over to England next time she returns here. This would be a great pleasure for me as it has been over a year since I last saw you.



The Villa Griffone. Marconi is buried in the mausoleum shown in the foreground.

I hope you will arrive soon and that you will remain here all winter.

Please send my greetings to Mother, Mrs Tanzi and the girls, as well as Gigino, Letizia and the children, and believe me always

your very affectionate son

G. Marconi

P.S. Many greetings to Mr Franceschini, the Monti family and all of our friends.

Comments on Letter 13

GM describes the historic link set up between the Royal Yacht and Osborne Palace, allowing Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales to communicate. He lived on board the Royal Yacht; everything went well and The Prince of Wales showed his approval with a prestigious present and the invitation to visit him any time he wished! GM is obviously proud, yet still well-balanced and does not forget family matters. GM mentions travel frequently. Whilst in Ireland on business, he reports the death, in an accident, of one of his assistants, as well as the greetings of his Irish relatives.

Finally mentioned here is the important decision regarding the expansion of the Company to produce the costly electrical parts needed for the equipment being assembled. Such part were, until then, sub-contracted to external firms. This is a very important document from both a historical and human point of view.

Acknowledgement

We wish to thank Mr. Henry Willard Lende Jr. for his kind permission to publish these letters. The contribution of Ing. Dr. Paolo Ghiggino in translating these letters and providing a commentary on them is gratefully acknowledged.

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