



Marconi at Signal Hill, Newfoundland, in 1901 with instruments used to receive the first trans-Atlantic wireless signal.

THE Science Museum, London, is commemorating the centenary of Marconi's birth with an exhibition which opened on April 25. This is more likely to appeal to someone with a keen interest in wireless or in the history of science than to the casual visitor; the most interesting exhibits are letters and other literary material which are clearly presented and easy to read, but require time to digest.

Other exhibits emphasise the social rather than the scientific significance of wireless, with pieces of original equipment (including the kite used to fly the aerial from which the historic transatlantic broadcast of December 12, 1901, was made) and personalia including Marconi's swordstick.

One of the curiosities on show is a copper earthing tube dug up in the 1960s from the garden of the bungalow where Marconi lodged in 1896-97; the tube was in the ground outside Marconi's old room and was probably used by him in his earliest experiments in Britain.

But the written and printed matter is by far the most interesting. A cutting from the *New York Times* of February 13, 1927, reports Marconi's views about the prospects for wireless transmission of power, "radio movies" and television. He was rather optimistic about the latter, and the reporter looks forward to the day when "Secretary Kellogg (sits) in his office in the State Department and converses face to face

with Premier Baldwin in Downing Street". In other ways, Marconi was equally visionary, foreseeing the replacement of oil as a fuel source by solar energy, but dismissing the idea of tapping geothermal power because heat from the Sun is both a simpler and cheaper source.

By 1932 (according to the *Daily Mail* of December 6) Marconi's vision had expanded still further. Musing that messages could be sent on further than around the Earth, and prompted by the interviewer, he said: "Interplanetary communication—who can tell? There is a great deal more to be found out and made perfect."

John Gribbin

mid-April to discuss possible new arrangements for financing the firms.

Although the foundation has made it clear that the firms should be thinking seriously about how they should live without Ford money, it is equally clear that if it came to the crunch, Ford would be unlikely to pull the rug from underneath public interest law firms and allow them to expire or cut back their operations drastically. Thus the emphasis will be on finding new sources and methods of finance.

Two possible arrangements were suggested in the San Diego meeting and, although no concrete decisions were taken, at least two possibilities were given careful consideration and hold

great promise. One idea is to set up a permanent fund, financed by private donations, philanthropic organisations and perhaps even by professional legal organisations. Such a fund would probably operate much like a foundation, but the way in which the money would be distributed has not yet been worked out.

Another possibility is that courts will award legal fees to public interest law groups which successfully sue the government and industry. But the problem there is that the acceptance of such fees could well endanger the firms' legal status as tax-exempt organisations, and until the Internal Revenue Service issues some guidelines on the

matter the firms are precluded from taking such fees. Ironically, some major pieces of environmental legislation, such as the Clean Air Act, and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act contain specific provisions which direct courts to award attorneys' fees to organisations which successfully bring court cases against the government, but until the IRS gets round to issuing its guidelines, those fees cannot be awarded to public interest groups.

Thus the next couple of years could be critical for the future of an extremely important element in governmental decision making in areas which have a profound effect on scientific matters.