

Wharfedale

The Anniversary Book





foreword



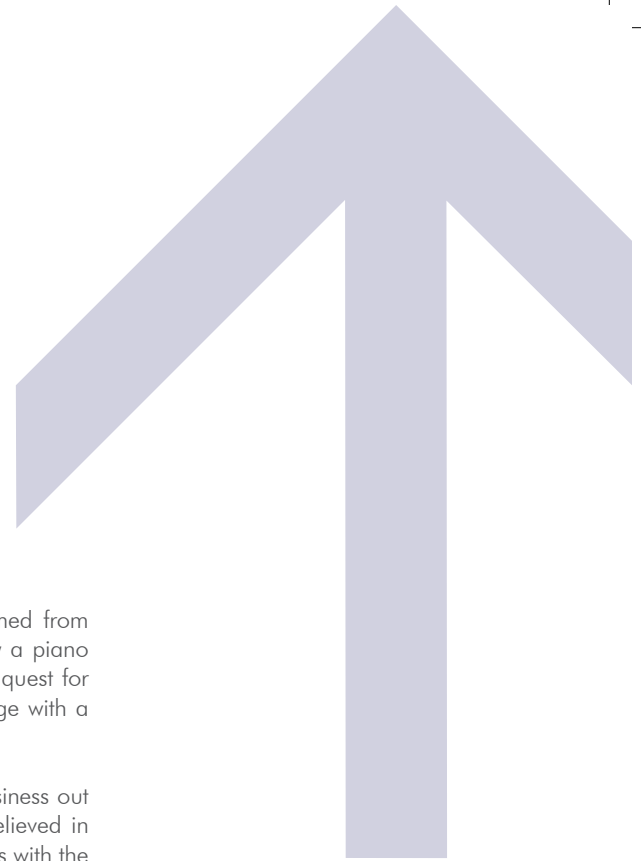
Gilbert's dedication to the hi-fi industry stemmed from his love of music. He saved for 3 years to buy a piano and at 18 owned the first of 40 pianos in his quest for ever better performance. He settled into old age with a 'Steinway Grand'.

He was very lucky in being able to make a business out of his hobby, he worked every evening and believed in treating his workforce well. His early experiments with the making of sound reproductive systems were successful enough upon which to build a world class company.

He was proud to be a Yorkshireman and travelled the world promoting what he truly believed in. He spoke in front of thousands and was informative in speech and in print.

To know that the name Wharfedale is still at the forefront of hi-fi design and that Wharfedale speakers are still winning prizes for excellence would be a great pleasure to him.

Ruth Theobald – Granddaughter of Gilbert Briggs





Britain has long been recognised throughout the world as being the home of loudspeaker technology in terms of innovation and quality.

This reputation has been built up over many years by some of the World's most famous loudspeaker manufacturers. Wharfedale, established over seventy years ago has always been at the forefront of developing this reputation.

It was in 1932 that Gilbert Briggs built his first ever loudspeaker in the cellar of his home in Ilkley, Yorkshire. This sleepy little market town was located in the valley of the river 'Wharfe' – an area known to this day as 'Wharfedale'. This unlikely location would see the birth of a brand that was to become recognised all over the world, synonymous with quality in high-fidelity reproduction.

Gilbert Briggs is still much admired and respected throughout the world for his pioneering work in hi-fi reproduction and his endless pursuit of better sound quality – driven by his love of live music.



foreword

It was in 1933 that Gilbert set up a small factory near Bradford to build his new loudspeaker drive units. Radio was an exciting new technology and word of the new transducers had spread quickly around the area. Demand was growing quickly. Initially, and in the true spirit of the cottage industry, his wife, Doris Edna Briggs was the production department, spending many late nights soldering wires and winding coils.

In the same year, he entered the Bradford Radio Society's annual competition and won both first and second place, earning the company their first major order. From this point, the Wharfedale

Wireless Works never looked back, going from strength to strength, producing up to 9000 units per year until the outbreak of World War II.

By 1936, Gilbert's company had outgrown their small premises and moved to a larger factory, again in Bradford. When war came, the factory continued. During the second half of the war, the Wharfedale Wireless Works were commissioned to make transformers for Marconi. Some 40,000 units were completed by an expert team of just 20 staff before the war finally came to an end.





The Wharfedale 'Bronze' won first prize in the Bradford Radio Society's 1933 competition



The premises where it first began (apart from Gilbert Briggs' cellar!)



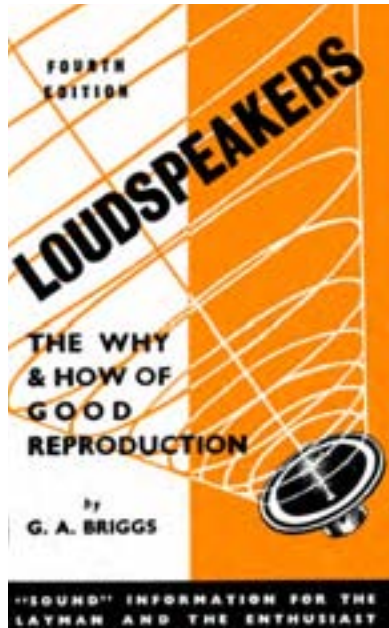
Winding coils for Marconi transformers kept the 20 staff busy throughout the war.

Technological advances in electronics made during the war impacted heavily on the emerging audio market during the 1940s. The widely travelled troops had experienced new types of music during their service and a swell of interest in home reproduction was the result.

In America, a trend developed for seeking better and better music reproduction. Wharfedale were well positioned to meet the growing demand for quality loudspeakers and by 1945, had developed the first two-way loudspeaker – the prototype of the modern loudspeaker. The device would look strange by modern standards with a 10" tweeter and a crossover that took two grown men to lift, but it set the standard for an entire industry.

In 1948 Gilbert Briggs embarked upon a new venture with the publication of his first book. 'Loudspeakers The Why & How of Good Reproduction'. It was little more than a pamphlet, but struck a chord on both sides of the Atlantic. The first edition was so well received, it sold out within 5 months and has subsequently been reprinted on numerous occasions.

He went on to write many other books, including the follow up to 'Loudspeakers', called 'Sound Reproduction'. Mr. Briggs derived much pleasure from the correspondence his books generated. He himself estimated something like 10,000 letters resulted over the thirteen years he was writing.



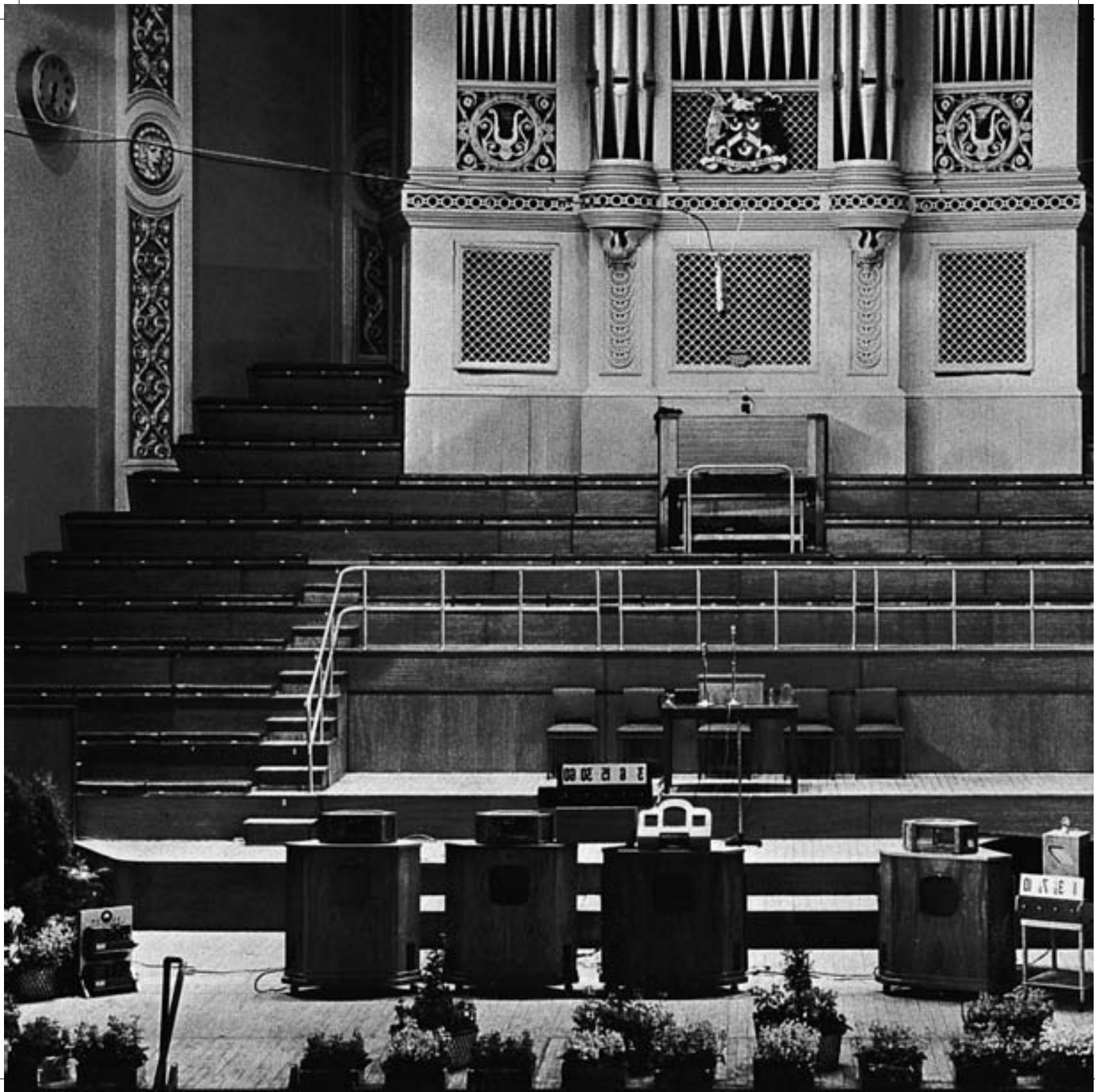
Gilbert's first book,
published in May, 1948



An early two-way loudspeaker design



A 1947 crossover unit





Gilbert was already building quite a reputation for pioneering within what was now firmly established as the 'hi-fi' industry. His books were immensely popular and in the 1950s, he decided to take things a step forward by staging an audacious series of concerts comparing live with recorded music.

These concert demonstrations became very famous, using Wharfedale loudspeakers and either Quad or Leak amplification. In his book, *Audio Biographies*, Gilbert recalls the first time he worked closely with Peter Walker, founder of Quad, at their first demonstration in the Royal Festival Hall, London. They worked well together, a relationship between the companies that is stronger today than ever before under the umbrella of the 'International Audio Group'.

The demonstrations continued into the late 1950s, visiting the Royal Festival Hall and Carnegie Hall, New York on several occasions as well as such exotic locations as Portugal, Canada and Hong Kong. A live band, or group of instruments would play first, being recorded as it happened. The acetate would then be played back to the assembled audience to impress upon them the similarity of the recorded music.

◀ The stage is set for one of Gilbert Briggs' 'Live vs. Recorded' concerts at the Royal Festival Hall

In 1958 The Wharfedale Wireless Works were sold to the Rank organisation. A controversial move at the time, but one which led to rapid development of the company and expansion of the brand into areas such as electronics. Gilbert Briggs, then 68 years old, continued to manage the day-to-day running of the company until his well-earned retirement in 1965.

The first four years of the Rank era saw two major breakthroughs. Wharfedale pioneered the use of the now famous 'roll surround' on cones and in 1962 launched the first ever loudspeakers using ceramic magnets.

Through the 1960s, the company moved into electronics manufacturing with a number of tuners, amplifiers and even turntables being introduced to the market. Growth was rapid as the quality and styling of these units strongly appealed to the newly liberated youth market.

Throughout the late 1960s and 70s, fashion played an important part in hi-fi design. Teak vinyls and ultra-modern plastics were introduced to an eager and enthusiastic audience.

Whereas in the 1950s, hi-fi was usually built into other furniture to hide it from the enquiring eyes of neighbours and friends, by the mid 60s, enthusiasts were beginning to flaunt their newly acquired systems. Design was playing an ever increasing role.



Demand for Wharfedale products continued to grow at an ever increasing speed and the existing factory in Bradford Road was limiting growth. In 1967, a decision was made to develop a new, more efficient factory on a green field site in Highfield Road, Bradford, just over a mile away. The factory took some seven years to complete. When finished, it comprised over 170,000 sq ft of production with additional office space and large scale research and development facilities.

After the frivolity of 1960s psychedelia, the 70s saw a return to the more sober, traditional crafted form of loudspeaker. The loudspeaker kits which were once best-sellers for Wharfedale were re-introduced in the late 1970s under the 'Speakercraft' name. This opened the market once again to hobbyists with ranges like the Glendale proving highly popular amongst those for which hi-fi was a deep and serious passion.

Production growth continued unabated throughout the 1970s with classic loudspeaker models such as the Lintons and the smaller Dentons. Such was the popularity of hi-fi and the efficiency of the new factory, production in 1977 reached 800,000 drive units.

Production in the new factory increased rapidly. ▶
By 1977, the factory was producing over 800,000
drive units per year, for both hi-fi and PA speakers







Rank continued to invest heavily in research and development, and the early 1980s were the age of technology and analysis. Investment in cutting-edge equipment led to Wharfedales development of Laser holography processes and the more scientific analysis of components. Our advanced 'SCALP' (scanned laser probe) and the 'FRESP' (frequency slice plot) techniques led to a better understanding of the physics of loudspeaker technology and to the further advancement of the industry.

These tools were a means to an end. They introduced hi-fi to the study of materials science. As the movement of diaphragms could be analysed more closely, we were able to develop materials that could meet the requirements of a loudspeaker more accurately. For the first time, we could actually tell us what was happening to diaphragms under extremes of stress. These would prove to be the tools that defined loudspeakers in the 1980s.

Speakers such as the 'Laser series' relied heavily on this. Scientific analysis was seen as the ultimate loudspeaker technology and the complex crossovers and new diaphragm materials were introduced as a result of our research. We began to understand the limitations of existing materials and work towards finding the ideal diaphragm. That quest continues today.

More recently it has been accepted by the majority of acousticians that while measurement and analysis are undoubtedly important in producing accurate and efficient loudspeakers, this was far from the holy grail it purported to be. Loudspeaker design is a black art. It requires immense skill and experience as well as all the latest test equipment to get well integrated, tonally matched drivers. Let us not underestimate the part that 'physcoacoustics' plays in our enjoyment of music.

In 1981, work began on a product which was to change the face of the loudspeaker industry forever. Derived from research undertaken for the high-end TSR102, the Wharfedale Diamond was born.

Into a rear-ported cabinet of just 5.2 litres, went a small 19mm plastic dome tweeter and a 120mm long throw polypropylene (quite revolutionary at the time) bass / mid driver. The cabinet was 12mm chipboard with a vinyl wrap and the crossover was simply two components plus a resistor to balance tweeter levels.

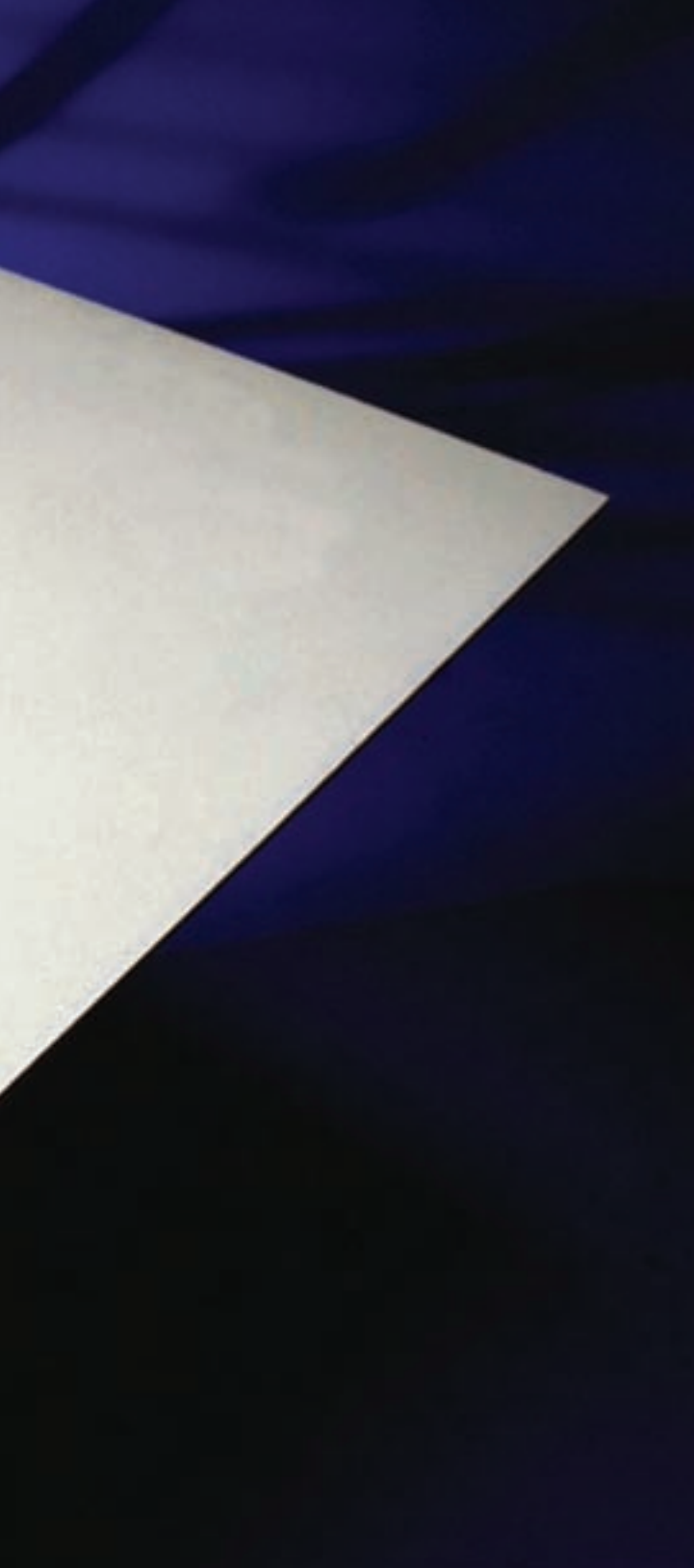
This rather unassuming small box took the industry by storm. Small cabinets and the stiff, yet light polypropylene meant a very fast, tight sound and the compact, accurate two-way drivers produced a fantastic stereo image. They very quickly became best-sellers and the Diamond range became a permanent fixture on our product list. Never a company to rest on its laurels, though work quickly began to develop successive models and within a year, the Diamond II was launched.

The development of the Diamond has continued unabated ever since. Each successive generation of Diamond speakers has introduced a new technology or material into this competitive sector. As an introduction to serious hi-fi, the Diamond series has never been beaten.



▲ The first generation of the Diamond series

www.loudpanel.com
[Loudpanel]
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By the Early 1990s, Wharfedale had become reunited with some of its hi-fi brethren. After Rank decided to focus on the film and leisure activities, Wharfedale was sold to a large group of companies called the 'Verity Group PLC'.

The Verity Group also owned Quad and Leak. The famous three were back together again. Who would have thought that the relationship between the biggest hi-fi companies of the day that began with the 'live vs. recorded' concerts in 1955 would end up under common ownership.

In around 1994, however, a discovery was made that would change the hi-fi industry forever. A document from a UK government agency caught the eye of a couple of senior executives. It was regarding sound cancellation technology in UK military helicopters.

It seems that quite by accident somebody had tried using the equipment they were testing (which comprised a large soundboard and a couple of 'exciters') to see if they could play back music - in this case, a hit from the popular singer, Madonna, through the soundboard. The sound quality that emerged took everybody aback. It seems they had stumbled upon what was later to become NXT technology.

By 1996 the processes that led to the superb sound production had been studied, reverse engineered and we were beginning to understand the principles behind it. The discovery of two years previous was announced to the public. The Verity group were quick to capitalise on this new found opportunity and formed a company, 'New Transducers Ltd' or NXT as it quickly became known to research the technology further and to license the process to other manufacturers.

NXT grew exponentially from the day it was formed. A huge opportunity loomed to develop this new technology, but investment was needed. A decision was made to divest the Verity group of some of its brands to help fund further research. A deal was struck and Wharfedale, Quad and Leak were the subject of a management buy-out. The deal was completed on 19th September 1997 - we were independent again!

◀ The Wharfedale 'LoudPanel' NXT ceiling tile. Although just 4mm thick, they produce excellent clarity and a wide dispersion

In the early 1980s Wharfedale took the opportunity to enter a new market. The rapidly developing professional loudspeaker market had for many years been an attractive proposition. In the early 1960s Wharfedale had experienced much success with 'Public Address' or P.A. systems, so this was hardly a new venture. The market had, however, become much better defined. Bars and Public Houses were installing better sound systems. Nightclubs were a booming business. People had more leisure time than ever before and every teenager wanted to be in a band.

The popularity of Wharfedales domestic loudspeakers was a catalyst for meteoric growth and by the late 1980s over 40% of all the public houses in England used Wharfedale loudspeakers.

We developed larger and better professional loudspeakers and became involved in developing loudspeakers for huge touring rigs. This was a steep learning curve and, in turn, taught us to make better and more powerful home loudspeakers.

By 1998 the momentum of development within the Professional industry prompted the decision to establish a separate division within Wharfedale to concentrate purely on the Professional market. Wharfedale Pro was born.

Today, Wharfedale Pro is a leading force in the highly competitive professional market. Amplifiers, mixing desks, effects modules, equalisers and lighting are all included within the portfolio as well as loudspeaker ranges to suit every application and installation, all with a common design philosophy - Value, Integrity and performance.

The Force 9 was the speaker that helped Wharfedale establish a competitive presence in the Professional Loudspeaker market ▶







In 2001, four years after their refund independence, Wharfedale launched the Diamond 8 series. The result of many years research into materials science and enormous investment in new production facilities, this was the product that was to catapult Wharfedale, and the International Audio Group to the forefront of domestic hi-fi once more. The Diamond marquee has always been immensely popular, but this clearly announced the intentions and ambitions that I.A.G. had for Wharfedale in the new millennium.

Diamond 9 series, launched in 2003 has taken the performance of these remarkable loudspeakers to even greater heights. Three years after introduction they are still winning awards and accolades. Quite simply the most important loudspeaker of their time, today they are a worthy product with which to celebrate 75 years of outstanding achievements in audio.


◀ Diamond 9 series represents the very finest traditions of Wharfedale quality engineering

Today, Wharfedale is still one of the fastest growing hi-fi companies in the world. By staying true to the pursuit of product excellence whilst adapting products to our customers' needs and providing unparalleled value for money, we have survived both evolution and revolution.

Wharfedale Pro has grown rapidly to the extent it has further subdivided into Wharfedale Systems and Professional - each with a strong and dedicated team focused on providing the best products for each market. We have moved into electronics and lighting with one of the strongest product line-ups ever seen in the market.

Wharfedale hi-fi products are still amongst the best in the world, winning top awards for acoustic excellence, just as Gilbert Briggs did in 1932 with his 'Bronze' transducer. His legacy and philosophy still permeate the company. Whilst designing the best products he could, he firmly believed that 'a fair price to all is the best way of doing business'.

World recessions and market fluctuations have had their influence but we have adapted to meet new challenges and tough market conditions, continuously re-vitalising the brand with product excellence. We are here now to celebrate our seventieth anniversary and look to the future with more optimism and confidence than ever.

We look to the future with more confidence 
and enthusiasm than ever.



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