

## A Eulogy for PRX/A by Hugo Bruynooghe

On 20 December 1972 the first PRX/A became operational in Utrecht-Overvecht. The official commissioning was on 8 February 1973. The exchange of Utrecht-Overvecht was a pilot plant with connections to 1000 subscribers and was linked to a UR exchange via a failover switch in case of failure of the experimental switch. In the event the switch provided robust service and the UR switch remained redundant.

On 19 June 1974 the first production exchange went into service at Wormerveer . This was the first of a series of 302 exchanges in the Netherlands. During the same year 3 other PRX/A exchanges were brought into service. The last exchange to be commissioned in the Netherlands was Amsterdam-Slotermeer in 1991.

In 1974 Philips attempted to enter the UK telecommunications market and began negotiations with the British Post Office Telecommunications Department (later to be BT). It is believed that these negotiations floundered because of the reluctance of Philips to licence its MiniReed reed relay technology to UK manufacturers. However, the same year the first PRX/A export deal was signed with the States of Jersey Telecommunications Board for the supply of two switches. These were to be built to British Post Office standards and the software and hardware adaptations necessary were carried out by the Philips subsidiary PyeTMC of St Mary Cray. This laboratory was later transferred to Malmesbury in 1976.

The planning at the end of 2009 provided that the last 54 PRX/A exchanges in the Netherlands would be decommissioned by the end of 2010. The last exchange in the Netherlands was taken out of service on 7 December 2010; this was the exchange at Volendam near Amsterdam. This event was attended by Eelco Blok Executive Director of KPN and also Wholesale and Operations Director, Joost Farwerck, the Mayor of Volendam and Jeanine van der Vlist Country Managing Director of Alcatel-Lucent.

In 2007, the last PRX/A in Colombia (Barranquilla) was taken out of service and in May 2009 the last PRX/A in Peru (the triple processor unit at Arequipa).

Volendam was probably the last operating PRX/A in the world. PRX/A exchanges were installed in 14 countries. Outside the Netherlands, the last PRX/A exchanges to be installed were in Armenia (a containerized unit in December 1988 after the earthquake) and Poland (provisional international exchange 1990 in Warsaw).

The PRX/A design started end of the nineteen sixties and was designed for a lifespan of 30 years. Then it was not foreseeable that technologies would evolve as quickly as they did during the two next decades. Nevertheless the PRX/A provided a service almost without any problem over more than 36 years.

To illustrate how people in 1973 thought about the evolution of telecommunications, here a "prediction" at the end of the speech of the then Director-General of the PTT, Drs. Ph. Leenman during the official commissioning of the PRX/A in Utrecht-Overvecht:

*"... On this basis, it must be assumed that in the year 2000 still one and a half million telephone subscribers are connected to electro-mechanical systems. But besides that the Netherlands will count in the year 2000 probably 7 million telephone subscribers, who can use semi-electronic exchanges and the associated pushbutton phones instead of the dial phones. ..."*

There was no thought of mobile telephony and the great renewal would be the pushbutton phones !

Tuesday 7 December 2010 is the end of an era in the history of telecommunications.