

## PREECE, Sir WILLIAM HENRY (1834 - 1913), electrical engineer

**Name:** William Henry Preece  
**Date of birth:** 1834  
**Date of death:** 1913  
**Parent:** Richard Matthias Preece  
**Parent:** Jane Preece  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** electrical engineer  
**Area of activity:** Engineering, Construction, Naval Architecture and Surveying  
**Author:** Edwin Augustine Owen

Born at Bryn Helen, Caernarfon, 15 February 1834, eldest son of Richard Matthias Preece, who went to Caernarfon (1815), as a schoolmaster; he then went to work with Lloyd's Bank, and subsequently on the Stock Exchange; his mother Jane was from Caernarvon. His grandfather was headmaster of Cowbridge school.

All his professional life was connected with telegraphic engineering and the development of electrical engineering. He was educated at King's College, London. He made rapid strides in the engineering world being, in 1877, appointed electrician to the General Post Office, and, in 1892, engineer-in-chief. He was noted for his public lectures, at which he excelled, having a good delivery and a power of presenting his subject matter in a simple and practical way. He took great interest in the early development of the telephone, publishing two volumes on the instrument, and delivering many papers before the scientific societies. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1881.

Preece will probably be best remembered for the pioneering work he did for a number of years on wireless telegraphy. He conducted many experiments on this subject across arms of the sea such as the Bristol channel, Menai straits, the Solent, or from land to lighthouse (the Skerries), or between coal mines. In 1892 he managed to send, through the air, messages across the Bristol channel between Penarth and the Flat Holm, a distance of more than three miles. Strange to say he entirely missed the significance of the wireless signals, which were correctly explained later by Hertz. He was a genial personality, thorough in his undertakings and industrious to the last degree. He held the distinction of Officer of the Légion d'Honneur, and was an honorary doctor of science of the University of Wales (1911). At the end of his life he resided in Caernarvon, where he died 6 November 1913.

### Author

Edwin Augustine Owen, (1887 - 1973)

### Sources

*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (1912-21)

*The Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1932-3 (with a list of his papers)

### Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [William Henry Preece](#)

### Works

William Henry Preece, James Sivewright, *Telegraphy* (London 1914)

### Additional Links

VIAF: [24098140](#)

Wikidata: [Q2140313](#)

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