

## **Don't let the digital sharks get their teeth into your wallet!**

### ***Advice about digital TV for people in Sheffield city and some surrounding areas, but not Dronfield, the Derbyshire Dales, or Chesterfield.***

Britain is changing over to digital TV and, whilst most traders are honest, there are a lot of unscrupulous people who have spotted a way of making easy money. We have received the following quick guide from PARAS on how to avoid getting ripped off.

PARAS is an informal group of professional aerial riggers with detailed knowledge about the switch-over to digital television and how it is affecting the public. As professionals they are appalled at the way some unprincipled traders are using the switch to digital TV as a means of misleading or even cheating the public, especially the more vulnerable members of society. If you know of anyone who might be vulnerable please show them this article if appropriate.

### **Exposing a few common myths about digital TV**

The most common myth says that you need a special aerial for digital. In fact the majority of people will get digital TV perfectly on their existing aerial. You should always try your digital reception with a cheap 'set top box' (£25 from a supermarket) before you think about buying a new aerial.

Another myth says that if you can't get Channel Five now it means that you won't be able to get digital TV unless you buy an expensive new aerial. This is completely untrue. Channel Five reception and digital reception are entirely different things.

You may have been misled into thinking that, if you live in a really poor TV reception area, paying for Sky is the only solution when the analogue signal is switched off. Absolutely wrong! Read the section on satellite options below.

It is also not true that the only way to record digital TV is by using a Sky+ satellite recorder. There are lots of ways to record digital TV. See the "Recording your Programmes" section. Of course, it is a fact that to use a Sky+ recorder you have to pay a subscription to Sky. Some people have been told that the only way to get TV when analogue is switched off is to subscribe to Cable TV. This is also nonsense.

### **Your television set**

You definitely do not need to buy a new TV set because of the analogue to digital change over. Any TV set less than twenty-five years old needs nothing more than a simple digital TV receiver – a 'set top box' – which you can buy from electrical shops or supermarkets for about £25. If, however, you decide to buy a new TV set you should be certain to get a digital one and have it demonstrated. Be aware that a lot of non-digital sets are being sold off cheaply – don't buy one. If you are deaf ask the shop to demonstrate the subtitles for the hard of hearing. Are they easy to switch on?

### **Your aerial**

If you have been getting good reception from your existing aerial it is likely that it will be fine for digital (but see the more detailed advice below). You should buy a digital 'set top box' and try it on your existing aerial before you consider buying a new one. If you can

get all the channels you want and the picture is stable there's no need to buy a new aerial. Even if a few unimportant digital channels are missing they will probably come on after analogue is switched off because the digital signals will be much stronger then, up to ten times in some cases.

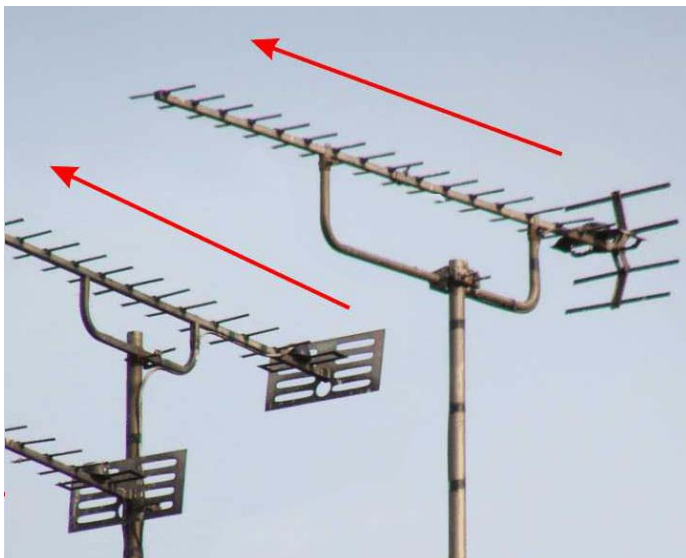
## Local transmitters

Most people in the Sheffield area use either the main Sheffield relay transmitter (known as 'Sheffield', Crosspool or Tapton Hill), or the Emley Moor transmitter. The Sheffield relay is the one up on the hill behind the Royal Hallamshire. You can see it from all over the city. Emley Moor is to the north-west, out near Huddersfield. A few Sheffields use one of the small local relays. These are at Totley Rise, Wincobank (near the big gas holders next to the M1), Blackburn (Rotherham), Oughtibridge, and Stocksbridge.

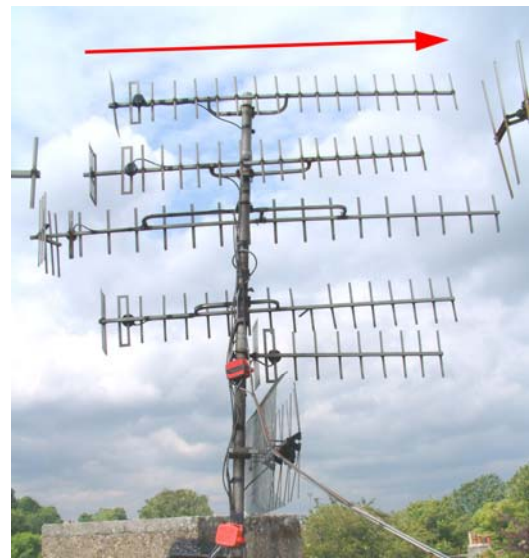
You need to figure out which transmitter you are using, because it makes a difference to your digital change-over situation. If you would like to get a grid reference or location for the likely transmitters (as named above), you can go to <http://tx.mb21.co.uk/gallery/> The alphabetical index of sites has all the transmitters mentioned here. Find yours and click on 'go', then just double click on the grid reference.

## Emley Moor and Belmont

It's easy to tell if you are using Emley Moor. The aerial will have horizontal rods (flat so the birds can sit in them!) and will be pointing north-west (roughly where the sun sets in mid summer). A few people in Sheffield use the Belmont transmitter. This also needs aerials with horizontal rods, but the aerial will point to the east, roughly towards sunrise.



Emley Moor and Belmont aerials have horizontal rods. The red arrow points towards the transmitter.



Crosspool and the small relays need vertical rods. The red arrow points towards the transmitter.

## Emley Moor or Belmont?

Emley Moor viewers get *Look North* from Leeds with Harry Gratton. They also get Channel Five. If you are an Emley Moor viewer then your existing aerial will definitely be OK for digital, as long as you get good analogue reception. So if you can see Harry you don't need a new aerial for digital! It's that simple!

Belmont viewers get *Look North* from Hull with Peter Levy, and don't get Channel Five very well, if at all. In the period leading up to analogue switch-off your old Belmont aerial will not receive all the digital channels. But after analogue ends in 2011 all your familiar channels plus many more should work from the aerial you have now. (This is because the frequencies will be re-arranged.) Bear in mind though that Belmont reception in Sheffield can be quite weak, so until analogue switch-off digital reception could be poor. You will only get the BBC channels and these might not be reliable. If your analogue reception is poor now, and everyone in the street seems to have a big aerial, it could be that you are in a really poor reception area, so you might be better using Freesat or Sky.

So, Belmont viewers with good analogue reception, who are in no hurry to 'go digital' and who want to keep costs to a minimum, should forget all about it until 2011, then buy a 'set top box' or a digital TV set during the last few months before analogue switch off, and use it with the old aerial. After analogue finishes all your familiar channels will be available from the old aerial. You might or might not need a new aerial if you want the full range of digital channels. But in essence, if you can see Peter you won't need to get a new aerial for digital after 2011 unless you want to! It's that simple!

### **Crosspool and the small relay stations**

If you are using Crosspool or one of the small relays your aerial will have vertical rods. Frankly it isn't easy for you to tell whether you are on Crosspool or one of the small relays. You can only go by the direction the aerial is pointing. However:

- In Stockbridge you will either be using the Stocksbridge relay, Belmont, or Emley Moor. So a vertical aerial means you are on the Stocksbridge relay.
- In Oughtibridge you will either be using the Oughtibridge relay, or Emley Moor. So a vertical aerial means you are on the Oughtibridge relay.
- In Blackburn (Rotherham) you will either be using the Blackburn relay or Emley Moor. So a vertical aerial means you are on the Blackburn relay. The relay is on Droppingwell Road and you can see it from all over the estate.
- In Totley you will either be using the Totley Rise relay, Emley Moor, or Crosspool. The relay is up on the brow above Abbeydale Road South, and you can see it amongst the trees. It's just off Rosamund Avenue. It is only used by those in the valley along Abbeydale Road South, Baslow Road as far up the hill as The Cross Scythes, and on adjoining roads. There are special problems in this area: see the section 'Crosspool Problems'.
- In Wincobank you will either be using the Wincobank relay (off Barrow Road near the gasometers), Belmont, or (unlikely) Emley Moor or Crosspool. A horizontal aerial pointing across the motorway means that you are using Belmont, so see the info in the section above. Bear in mind though that your Belmont reception will be quite weak, so until analogue switch-off digital reception could be poor.

### **If you are using Crosspool**

First, see the section below called 'Crosspool Problems'. If you aren't in the affected areas to the west of the city centre (mostly Dore and Totley) come back here and read on.

Until analogue switch-off your old aerial will be no good for Crosspool digital reception. You could buy a set-top box or digital TV set and try it, but it's unlikely that you will get any worthwhile reception. If you want digital before 2011 you will need a new wideband aerial. **After analogue switch-off though, the situation will be very different.**

After analogue switch-off, even if you have an old aerial, as long as your analogue reception was all right the old aerial will work fine for all the important channels – the five main ones and some others. It might or might not work for the other channels – the shopping channels and suchlike. So, if you aren't bothered about getting more channels now you can just sit tight. Buy a set top box if you like, any time between now and analogue switch-off in 2011, and try it. If it works – fine. If it doesn't, wait until analogue finishes. Then your set-top box will work. There's no need for you to buy a new aerial unless the one you have isn't working properly for analogue. If that's the case, the new aerial needs to be a wideband one (ask the installer). There's no need for you to do anything until just before switch-off in 2011, when you should buy a set top box (or a new digital TV if you like).

### If you are using one of the small relay stations

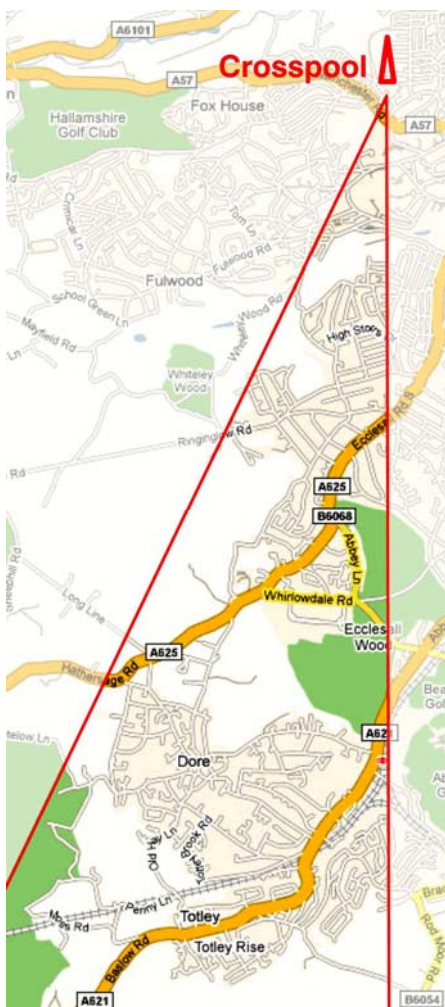
In essence, the relays won't transmit digital until 2011. So you should do nothing until then, unless you want digital TV now. For the full story click on

<http://www.paras.org.uk/05-relays.shtml>

Read that page and then, if you want digital now, follow the link there to the Freesat page.

Do not buy a big expensive aerial for digital now. That's unless you know you can get good reception from a main transmitter (unlikely) and you really want digital from an aerial now. Although Freesat will almost certainly be better for you.

### Crosspool problems



There is an unusual problem with TV reception in Sheffield. In the UK nationally there is not enough space in the radio spectrum for every analogue and digital TV service. Compromises have had to be made otherwise one transmission would interfere with another.

Transmissions from Crosspool have had to be severely restricted. There is no transmission of any of the digital signals towards Totley. This is in order to protect the Totley Rise relay transmitter, which uses channels that coincide with the Crosspool digital signals. If Crosspool sent out digital signals in that direction people in Totley would have no TV at all. Unfortunately the area left unserved by this transmission null is quite large. This situation will not change until analogue switch-off in 2011.

If you are in the area shown between the red lines on this map [left] you will get no digital reception from an aerial until 2011. (Those on high ground might be able to receive from Emley Moor though.) The comments and advice given in our section for smaller relay stations applies to Crosspool viewers in the area marked on the map, except that after analogue switch-off Crosspool will carry all the digital channels. In essence, if you want digital before 2011 you will have to use Freesat or Sky.

If you are in the area shown on this map and you don't want extra channels you should do nothing until 2011. Just before analogue switch-off buy a set top box. After analogue switch-off the box will start to work. There's no need for you to buy a new aerial unless the one you have isn't working properly for analogue. If that's the case, the new aerial needs to be a wideband one (ask the installer). Do not buy a big expensive aerial for digital now. It is unlikely to work properly and it will be completely unnecessary after 2011.

The situation in the areas where Crosspool can't be used for digital is similar to that at the smaller relay stations, so take a look at <http://www.paras.org.uk/05-relays.shtml> Read that page and then follow the link there to the Freesat page.

### **Beware of the shark!**

If you do replace your aerial beware of the aerial installer who points to a nearby roof to show you a large aerial with a lot of funny shaped prongs, or shows you such an aerial in a catalogue and says, "That's what you need. That's a digital aerial!" If most of the other aerials on the street are small ones then it's very unlikely that you will need a bigger one. The installer could be trying to sell you an expensive aerial that you don't need. There have already been countless examples of people being sold massive aerials for digital TV (costing perhaps £350) when a normal one is all that's needed.

At the moment digital is transmitted on low power, so until analogue is switched off in 2011 digital reception might be tricky in some areas. This is no reason for you to be rushed into spending money on a large aerial now. When analogue ends, the digital power will be greatly increased. So it could be better to wait until then before buying an expensive aerial. If you buy one now you might not need it after 2011. Only buy a new aerial for digital if you've tried reception on your existing aerial and found it lacking, and if you don't mind spending money on something you might not need after 2011. In any case, there's a limit to what you should spend on an aerial, because there's always the alternative of using satellite, as explained below.

### **The satellite option**

There are very few places in the areas listed above where reception from an aerial is so poor that you will have serious problems with digital reception. If you are sure you are in such a bad reception area you should not spend large sums on a massive aerial. The answer is to use satellite. The broadcasters have made sure that you can get all your normal TV channels from a satellite dish, *without subscribing to Sky*. Of course if you *do* want Sky all you need do is take up a Sky subscription in the normal way.

But if you don't want to pay any subscriptions you can use a Freesat service. There are two Freesat services. One is 'Freesat from Sky' and the other is the Freesat scheme operated by ITV and the BBC. If you have no intention of ever subscribing to Sky then the BBC/ITV Freesat scheme is the one for you. Ask a TV dealer for a 'BBC and ITV Freesat' set-top box, which will cost about £55. You will also have to pay for a dish installation. You don't need to buy a new TV set of course.

### **Recording your programmes**

When analogue broadcasting is switched off your video recorder won't be able to receive digital programmes by itself. However, if you still want to use it you could buy a second

set-top box and use it to supply programmes to the video recorder. So you would have two set-top boxes, one to feed the video recorder and one to feed the (analogue) TV set. In any case, as long as your video is in working order you will always be able to play your precious old tapes back through any TV set even after analogue broadcasts are switched off.

If your video recorder is getting a bit old though, it might be as well to buy a new digital recorder. This will need to be the type that works from either an aerial or from satellite, depending on which you have. The modern digital recorders are very easy to use, and if you have always found the old video a bit confusing you'll get a nice surprise if you get a new digital one. If your reception is from an aerial you can use any of the non-satellite digital TV recorders on the market, such as the Freeview+ one. If you have Sky you can use a Sky+ box to record programmes, and if you have BBC/ITV Freesat you can use a Freesat recorder (available from Dec 2008).

### **Choosing an installer**

The best bet is to get a good recommendation from someone who has had an aerial or satellite dish fitted recently. The biggest adverts in the yellow pages are often franchise operations that take a fee for passing your details to local installers — who might be good or bad.