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RAL SPACE: HALF A CENTURY OF STELLAR SUCCESS

**Abstract**

The Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (RAL) is the result of the merger of both the Rutherford and Appleton laboratories in 1979. Based at the Harwell Campus in Oxfordshire (UK), RAL has played a significant role in the history of space science since its origins in 1957.

The space department at RAL, currently known as RAL Space, has its roots at the Radio Research Station (later Radio and Space Research Station and then Appleton Laboratory) in Ditton Park, a major centre for UK space research sparked by the launch of Sputnik-1. However, the heritage of the station goes back to the early 1930s with a leading role in ionospheric research. At the same time as the merger of both Rutherford and Appleton laboratories, the Culham Astrophysics Research Unit also joined the Harwell site, bringing their heritage in plasma diagnostic instrumentation launched aboard Skylark rockets.

In 1962, researchers at what is now RAL supported a space mission to launch Canada's first satellite, Alouette 1, marking the beginning of RAL Space's involvement with the space industry. For more than 50 years, RAL Space has supported over 210 space missions positioning RAL as a centre for the UK space sector. This paper describes the history of RAL Space and highlights the laboratory's major space missions and contributions to the UK and worldwide space community.