



# Francis Thomson

(1914-1998)

## About Francis

Francis Paul Thomson OBE (1914–1998) was a British historian who spent over three decades claiming to write the definitive biography of Alan Dower Blumlein, but never wrote a single word. He even claimed to have been an engineer at EMI and worked with Blumlein, though nobody could ever remember him working there, and EMI have no record of his employment.

Earlier in his life, during his travels in Scandinavia, Thomson became fascinated by the postal giro networks that had flourished across Europe since the late nineteenth century. Unlike traditional banking, these state-run systems offered ordinary citizens and small businesses a cheap, accessible way to transfer money without relying on cash or clearing banks. Determined to see Britain adopt a similar service, he published *Giro Credit Transfer Systems* in 1964—the first comprehensive English-language study of giro models worldwide—which outlined how the Post Office could introduce such a scheme. His work quickly influenced debate in Parliament. In 1965, MPs cited his book as a crucial resource, and Postmaster General Anthony Wedgwood Benn later acknowledged its role in shaping government policy. The Post Office Giro launched in 1968, marking a major step in modernising British financial life. For his contributions, Thomson was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 1975.

From the early 1970s, Thomson had assured Blumlein's family, colleagues, and the wider engineering community that he alone was preparing a comprehensive account of Blumlein's life and achievements. As years passed without any published book, Thomson's behaviour became increasingly belligerent toward anyone who dared enter "his" Blumlein territory. He fired off vicious letters to researchers, journalists, and academics—sometimes threatening legal action—accusing them of infringing on his self-appointed role as Blumlein's "official biographer." Notoriously protective of his claimed exclusivity, Thomson aggressively discouraged others from pursuing related research, effectively stifling scholarly work on Blumlein for decades.

Despite repeated promises of a vast and unparalleled archive of rare documents, interviews, and unpublished material, Thomson continually postponed publication, citing shifting personal and research-related reasons. Supporters who had trusted him to safeguard and chronicle Blumlein's legacy grew frustrated as the promised biography never materialized.

After Thomson's death in 1998, his legal representatives, rather than destroying the collection as he had instructed, contacted Robert Charles Alexander and Simon Blumlein to review what remained. The supposed treasure trove turned out to be just a few cardboard boxes and carrier bags of unsorted papers, previously published periodical articles and letters—far from the monumental archive Thomson claimed.

Once seen as the custodian of Blumlein's untold story, Thomson ultimately left behind a legacy of lies, hostility, obstruction, and unfulfilled promises, a vacuum that later historians have worked diligently to fill with genuine scholarship and transparency.