

MORSECODJAN'S MESSENGER

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September 2000

Morsecodians - Keeping Morsecode Alive

ISRAELITE BAY "IB" .. -...

NEXT MEETING
10 Am Monday
19TH OCTOBER 2000
VENUE
THE HYDE PARK HOTEL

Please note the time and date for Our next get-together. Partners and friends welcome.

Dial-up Bulletin via "BM" closed its key for the last time.

Available since Dec. 1997, the dial-up Bulletin ceased with the final nostalgic cheerio message on 27th August 2000.

It's original aims were to provide satisfactory receiving practice, user equipment test adjustments and a way to pass on news items to callers. We trust these have been adequately met.

Larry Rice wishes to thank all who supported this service and to the many contributors of stories and reminiscences.

The Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia (Inc.)

President: Colin Smith
Secretary/Treas: Terry Keays
39 Cumberland Way
BASSENDEAN WA 6054
☎ 08 9279 4696

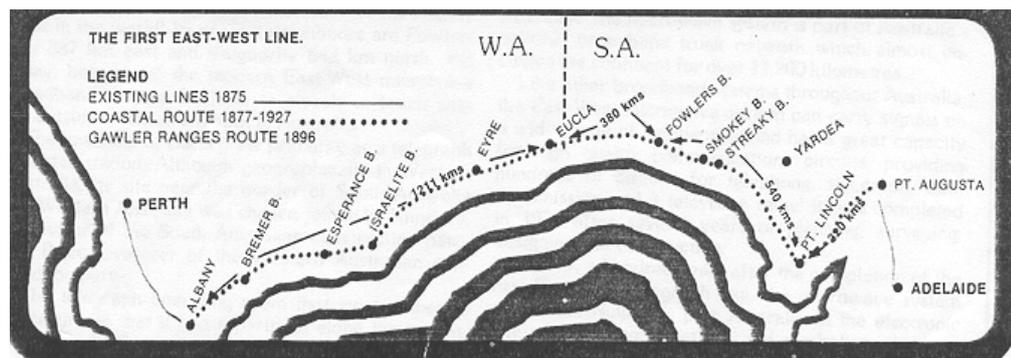
The Telegraph Station at Israelite Bay on the coastal telegraph line around the Bight has not rated much mention compared with Eucla and Eyre's Sand Patch. Eucla because of its importance at the border of SA/WA and the two telegraph staffs until 1906 and Eyre because it became the junction of the coastal line and the new lines via Coolgardie and Norseman in 1897 and 1905. Probably its relative closeness to Esperance has a bearing but Israelite Bay was just as important from its opening on 5th December 1876 until it closed in 1925. In earlier times when telegrams were repeated manually from each telegraph station until repeaters came into use when there was still a need for attention to them and to provide more battery when needed. As technology improved, duplex repeaters were installed at Albany and Israelite Bay which allowed Eucla to work direct to Perth. The staff list of officers at Israelite Bay Telegraph Station between 1877 and 1917 shows that at times there was a Telegraph Master (after Federation known as Postmaster) two operators (telegraphists) and assistant, a senior line-man and one lineman. Some of the more illustrious on the list are Fred Barwick later District Inspector, Michael Ryan, later Superintendent of Telegraphs in WA and Geo P Stevens who later became the Secretary of

the Civil Service Association and contributed much to articles on the history of the line. Israelite Bay was 130 miles east of Esperance, 210 miles west of Eyre and 370 miles west of Eucla. In those times just as isolated and dependent on ships for supplies.

Mr J Lawrence left Perth for Eucla via Albany in November 1895. He said when he got to Israelite Bay the only inhabitants were the telegraph repeater attendants, the linesmen and their families. Refers to J P Gorman the TM and wife, Messrs Creagh, Craig and Jack Kelly as staff. Also says IB was a vital power amplifier (boost) in the upkeep of inter-colonial communications. The inference here is that automatic repeaters were in IB by late 1895.

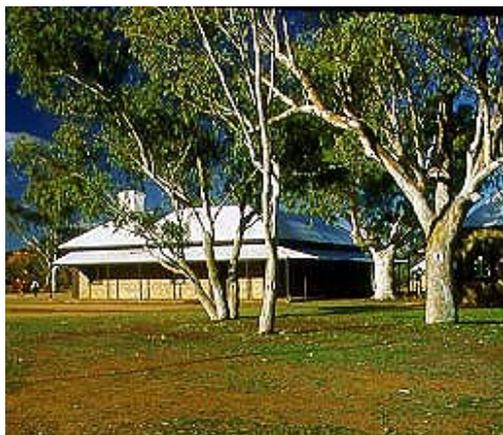
Naming of Israelite Bay.

One version is that Israelite Bay is believed to have been named after the Aborigines according to William Dempster of Esperance. Eyre mentions the practice of circumcision for natives. A group of visiting surveyors learnt of this and presumed these Aborigines were the remains of the people who left Jerusalem in biblical Times. Hence the name "Israelite".



CANBERRA/ALICE SPRINGS TELEGRAPH CIRCUIT

APRIL 22nd to 30th 2000



Alice Springs Telegraph Station

Ken Knox reports that the annual hookup between Canberra and Alice Springs produced 2922 telegrams during the week of operations. One of the busiest ever. A new venue in Canberra at Questacon (Science and Technology Centre) gave more access to the public. The exercise also coincided with school holidays, Easter and Anzac Day. At Alice Springs, there was heavy rain causing flooding which cut the Ayers Rock road so the tourist buses all arrived at the Old Telegraph station with many more lodgments. Fred Ryan unfortunately broke his arm leaving only 3 operators and a wife on the counter. Operating was carried out on a Duplex setup. The first few days were very busy with only 4 operators in Canberra to do Morse and talk to the public. Perth Morsecodians were well represented in Canberra by Richie Bright, Ken Knox and Frank Mike (a Newcastle area resident ex Perth telegraphist). Harry Tazewell was the other operator. Much time was spent explaining the mystery and magic of Morse Code. It was amazing to see how many people were fascinated by it. With the children we did the old trick of getting them to whisper their name to one operator, who then transmitted it by morse to the second operator who then told them their names. The "Canberra Times" gave us a very good write-up in the local paper.

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CLARRIE HUTTON REMEMBERS

During his interesting career Clarrie was a Telegraphist, Postal Clerk and Postmaster at locations ranging from the far north to south of WA. He recalls:-

"Whilst still a T.I.T (1941/42) I remember as a group being sent out to troop convoys off Rottneest to accept telegrams from troops - (heavily censored of course)- quite a few Telmos to home with winnings from two up games! It was all go go for a day/night - my two visits were to the "Ile de France" and "Queen Elizabeth".

Working overtime in Telegraphs became so heavy due to the lack of Telegraphists during the war years, that it was often necessary to double your shift - 6 hours became 12 hours etc. The Administration decided to pay overtime on the off- week to normal pay day. In other words pay day became weekly instead of fortnightly This was gradually eased with the re-employment of retired Telegraphists and the introduction of women into training. Another experience as a Telegraphist was to be seconded to Melville Military Camp which, if my memory serves me right, held about 7000 to 8000 troops waiting to be sent overseas. The PO was a Nissan Hut with a small room at

to be sent overseas. The PO was a Nissan Hut with a small room at back with two beds and we had meals in the Sergeants' Mess.

The late Leo Wall ran the counter and myself the telegraph. Don R's from the Company picked up and delivered batches of messages hourly. It was a busy time. A bonus was being able to line up at the canteen and purchase items such as cigarettes, chocolates, razor blades etc., which were scarce in civvy life - I was popular at my boarding house on my day off.

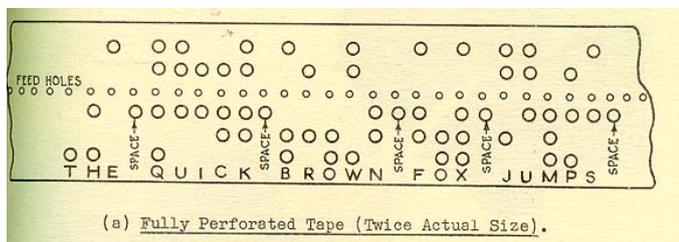
Seconded to Albany as Teleg/PC in the old PO for some months I decided to take a demotion to PC and after a stint in Katanning was appointed as PC Mullewa, a repeater office for lines 19, 6 and 65.

My seven years in the Kimberleys as PM Broome and Wyndham brings back many memories (and experiences - too many to mention) - and you will know that the line to Wyndham was the last to close in WA.

My tutor when passing the 20 WPM morse test in Bunbury in 1937 was Postal Clerk W J Cramer who in those days received a payment of about 5 or 10 pounds as I was still a Telegraph Messenger. Jack was later my PM in Mullewa."

Murray Multiplex Tape

The sample below shows alphabetical letters which were not recorded on normal tape. Experienced telegraphists could read this tape like a book or as fast as you could draw it from side to side through your fingers. If you knew you had made a mistake when transmitting you could reverse the tape through the transmitter before it was sent, delete the errors and resume correctly. Quite often tape was prepared and run through the transmitter later if there were faults or other needs. This was an advantage at times compared with a teletype or teleprinter when a letter or figure pressed activated both sending and receiving machines.





Robert Arthur “Bob” Pitcher

Bob Pitcher may never have had a reputation as a “gun” telegraphist but he is indeed one of the ‘Characters of the Craft’ when looking at his career which spanned 6 months short of 50 years from telegraph messenger to Director PMG’s Department Western Australia. Possibly every telegraph messenger on joining the Department with stars in his eyes aspired to be Director one day, but few achieved it. Bob did. For the many hundreds of telegraphists and support staff in several States their careers depended on him. He was variously liked or disliked depending on whether he caught you out or not trying to beat the system or making mistakes with telegrams, but I don’t think anyone can say that he wasn’t fair and proud of his skilled telegraph staff. His role as Supervisor and later Superintendent was to see that telegraph traffic was cleared within the permissible time lag period every day and it is a remarkable achievement that this was done on all but unusual occasions.

To juggle staff of varied abilities on morse lines, Mux, teleprinters, phonograms 24 hours a day was an achievement taken for granted. The ability to manage some hundreds of people most of whom had their own ideas of how the place should be run, their various methods of beating the system (some were indeed brilliant) and still maintain a sense of humour is given to few. Bob did. His sense of humour may not have been evident to those being carpeted, but he was always one of the first at the Telegraphists’ ‘Smokos’ and laughed as loudly as the rest when the irreverent Charlie Norman and his ventriloquist act with Oigle the doll featured Bob in his skits. Only Charlie Norman could have got away with it.

Bob was more than a character of the



Mr R A Pitcher August 1963

craft, he was a master of the craft. Not only was he a good telegraphist, he was as competent as any technician and an able administrator. He knew telegraph theory backwards and how to apply it practically. He lived for telegraph.

Bob was born in Albany on 19th February 1901 and was appointed telegraph messenger Albany on 1st August 1916. He later trained in Perth as a morse telegraphist and worked in that capacity at various towns throughout the State, particularly Kalgoorlie, Boulder, Rawlinna, Broome and Perth. Bob was back in Kalgoorlie by 1924 and in 1927 he married telephonist Dorothy Trevaskis, and they had a daughter Verna and sons Don and Trevor. He qualified as Supervisor in 1929 and was promoted to OIC Telegraphs Kalgoorlie in September 1931. His next promotion was to SPC Gr 2 Geraldton in March 1933 and in June 1934 he was back in Perth CTO as Supervisor Grade 3. Almost immediately he acted as Assistant Superintendent and was promoted to the position early in 1936. In 1946 he became Superintendent. In 1951 he was promoted to Superintendent Melbourne and three years later to a similar position in Sydney. He returned to WA in 1955 as Assistant Director in charge of Telecommunications.

Appointed Director, Posts and Telegraphs for WA in September 1963, he held the position until his retirement in February 1966. Bob passed away on 11th July 1983.

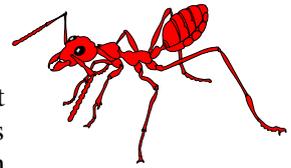
Recollections

By Col Smith

Mt Magnet/Singapore Ants

Cliff Ryan was the postmaster and I was the postal clerk at Mt Magnet from 1947 to 1949.

An unusual telegraph line fault occurred. Lines 65, 21 and 22 went through Mt Magnet and we got the message that there was a fault on all lines and it was traced to the post office. We first looked at the switchboard where line changes were made to patch etc. and everything looked to be in order. Cords were in the right places. When we opened the board to check it out, we stood back. It was a teeming mass of little ginger Singapore ants which had caused the havoc. (Probably they were known as Mt Magnet ants in Singapore).



M t Magnet
w a s cursed
w i t h t h e s e
small ants. They were hard to see but you knew they were there when bitten. It was necessary to keep your tables and even your bed legs at times in tins with oil or water. Woe betide it if any food was left in clothing. The ants found it. They not only ate the food but the cloth around it also. Anyway we disinfected the switchboard and things returned to normal but it was necessary to be wary and any ant trails were quickly followed up after that. In later years when I returned to Mt Magnet there was no mention of them, so I presume modern in-

• U • C • L • A

By 1909 Eucla still had a large staff. Auto repeaters were installed at Eucla in November 1909. After that staff was reduced to OIC, 3 telegraphists and 2 linemen.

(From Bob Pitcher’s papers).

Letter from Mick Clough



The last issue of the "Morsecodians Messenger" stirred some memories for Mick who came from the Sydney CTO to WA in 1948 on exchange and stayed here for about a year before returning to Sydney. By 1951 he was in Perth again for a six months exchange. Several years later he came back to WA as Postmaster at Leonora. He eventually returned to New South Wales where he entered State Parliament. He was the Member for the Blue Mountains and later Bathurst. He and his wife Doreen retired to Nambucca Heads in recent times and bought a motel. Mick became well known in WA not only through the job but also his sporting ability. Many friends remain.

The photo in Messenger No 9 is a Cohen model Simplex Auto with automatic dashes as well as dots. Auto Morse jiggers were made by Thomas & Co. of Adelaide.

George Thomas retired on 2nd September 1948.

Mick writes: "Thanks for sending me the "Messenger". It reminded me of a good number of things I can assure you.

I arrived in the Perth CTO in September 1948, and I remember George Thomas who either retired just before I got there, or just after. 65 was a permanently occupied shift, and I eventually convinced good old Bert Esberey I could work it and he put me on it. I used my Simplex Auto and it carried well.

The 1935 TIT class was before my time but I remember Foster Clarke and Monty Taylor as the Grade 3's in the room, Bill White (Joan Bardens' brother. Joan was the wife of the mine Manager at Gwalia during our time at Leonora in the late fifties). I also knew Cec Rowlands, Jack Edwards and Jim Hancock.

The photo of the Automorse was interesting. There were a lot of them in Sydney CTO but if my memory serves me right they were not made by Cohen, who manufactured the Simplex Auto. I have still got my own and my dads. (Simplex autos).

I remember one night working a six to midnight and Wynham had been out for about a week. I was just getting ready to ride the bike home when all of a sudden he called Perth at about 11.30pm. The Supr said "Well, Mick, you won't be going home tonight", and I worked him till he got clear about 6am. Someone else sent his traffic to him.

I remember the radio link from Broome. I was hopeless with the buzzer and my mate Ken Knox rescued me one morning when I was rostered on there. Broome kicked off with a Department of Civil Aviation requisition which left me for dead. Knoxie was really good on the radio, as well as the sounder. I had some great times in the Perth room and Leonora. About ten years in all and I keep in touch with the Colonel." With best wishesMick Clough.

BOB PITCHER'S PAPERS

Recently, Bob Pitcher's daughter Verna Levett kindly let us look through his personal papers. Some very interesting telegraph items were noted and are worth passing on.

While Superintendent Telegraphs in Sydney (around 1954) he gave a radio interview with a Miss Cartwright. In response to questions he said:-

"Approximately 356 telegraphists are required each day to work the Sydney CTO. In addition, there are always telegraphists absent on annual leave, furlough, sick leave etc. The total telegraphist staff attached to Sydney is 450. The staff is arranged to coincide as closely as possible with the traffic offering. The day commences at 12midnight, when 7 telegraphists come on duty. They work until 6am when 13 telegraphists come on. A further 23 report at 8.30am and at 9am 187 telegraphists are on. The staff increases progressively at intervals until 11am, when 300 are on duty. The staff decreases slightly during the lunch hours 12noon to 2pm and from 2pm until the post offices close at 5pm remains at about 270 telegraphists. It then decreases at intervals until between 10.30pm and 12midnight only 11 telegraphists are at work."

"The present phonogram system was introduced in 1927 and enables any telephone subscriber to ring the Telegraph Office and dictate a telegram, and have the charges included in the next telephone account After acceptance, phonograms are treated exactly the same as as message lodged at the counter. It is a very popular and convenient means of sending a telegram as indicated by the fact that between 7000 and 8000 phonograms are accepted daily from telephone subscribers in the (Sydney) Metropolitan Area. Normally we have about 45 girls answering callers."

ON HIS EXPERIENCES IN BROOME WA.



Lugger and diving helmets of pearling's past...

I was transferred to Broome at the end of 1920. This was prior to the introduction of air mail to the North West and provision of good roads. The only communication between Broome and the rest of the world was by coastal steamer. But vessels could only berth at the old Broome jetty for about three days at each top spring tide, which occurred fortnightly. Therefore mails, provisions etc. only arrived at approximately fortnightly intervals. So correspondence, both official and private, was carried by the telegraph service in the North West. Broome was a busy telegraph station and employed a senior telegraphist, two telegraphists and the postmaster and postal clerk, who spent much of their time in actual operating duties. Between visits of steamers, practically the only activity at the post office was telegraphs and the telephone exchange. Broome also manually repeated all telegraph traffic for post offices between Broome and Wyndham. One shift I worked was 1pm to 5.30pm and 6.30pm to clear. If there were only about 200 telegrams each in the 30 to 50 words category on hand at 8.30pm it was a good night and traffic would be cleared by midnight or soon after. "