

# MORSECODJAN'S MESSENGER

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August 1999

*Morsecodians - Keeping Morsecode Alive*

## 1869 to 1999 ...A LONG TIME BETWEEN MESSAGES

A great day was had by all on June 21st when we celebrated the 130th anniversary of the first telegram transmitted in Western Australia. The months of organising were all worthwhile when it all came together in the Perth GPO and Fremantle PO. Telegraph traffic was continuous from 8am until GB (we were still transmitting at 5.30pm when the doors closed). The interest shown by members of the public was most gratifying. Questions were answered and telegraph messages lodged. Morsecodians were the stars of the day and we received plenty of coverage by the media. The "West Australian" newspaper next day had a great photograph and article and we featured on the TV news on Ch 2 and 7. Two weeks later we were on "Postcards" a Ch 9 presentation with places of interest in Western Australia. We feel our objective of keeping morse code alive has been well and truly advanced through this exposure. We are becoming well-known and with the current interest shown by members can continue to advance our cause. We are fortunate to have a cross-section of membership with skills in various areas such as organising, presentation and technical know-how not to mention the ability to work morsecode which is the main feature of our exhibitions. The skills gained over many years are put to good use and continue to amaze people who did not experience morsecode telegraph days. Tourists, especially from foreign countries, tended to be really surprised and somewhat confused and we are sure they thought the telegraph was a new invention with great possibilities.

A feature of the day was the historical ceremony at 11am when the WA Governor Major-General Michael Jeffery and Fremantle Mayor, Mr Richard Utting exchanged telegrams. Exactly 130 years ago the then Governor Colonel Bruce sent the first telegram to the the Chairman of the Fremantle Town Trust the forerunner of the City of Fremantle congratulating the Fremantle citizens on the annihilation of distance between the Port and Capital. Reflection on this achievement comparing modern days with the Internet, telephones, email, faxes etc., shows just how used we have become to fast communication. Before Samuel Morse the fastest means of conveying a message was by horse on land and sailing ship by sea. Morsecode telegraph was a revolution in its time and its longevity (over 100 years in Australian Post/Telegraph systems) testifies to the great contribution it made to human communication. We have a great number of people to thank for ensuring that

*(Continued on page 3)*



## OUR NEXT MEETING 10 Am MONDAY 6th SEPT 1999 AT THE HYDE PARK HOTEL

Please note the change of day to give those who have other day commitments a chance to attend, and the date.

This will be a day for reminiscing and discussing what we can do to improve future commemorations to make them even better than the last two big events, Eucla and the 130th anniversary of the first telegram in WA.

Bring along a friend or relation and enjoy the social atmosphere. Stay to lunch and enjoy the culinary delights of the Hyde Park Hotel. This time with no planning work taking place we intend to have a more social day. See you there.

## We Were Busy.....

Traffic stats. for 21st June.

Lodged :  
Perth 153  
Fremantle 197

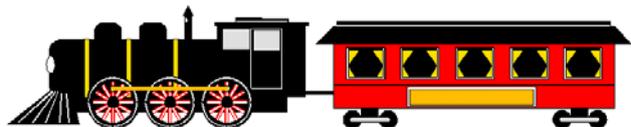
Our send and receive positions were kept going all day with overflow on the reserve circuit. There were still several messages on hand at Fremantle at 5.30pm when the office had to close and these were cleared early next morning.

All operators had a circuit during the day. While some were a little rusty, the old skills were still there and as the day wore on it became easier. Those on regular dialup and the Wireless Hill roster are right up with it.

A special mention here to Frank Fletcher is warranted. Frank organised the operating procedures, the rosters for both telegraph offices and even the collection point for our equipment which was transported by Ken Knox in his personnel carrier. The setting up before the event and cleanup was smoothly done and we thank all those who took part. A spirit of enthusiasm prevailed which augurs well for our future activities.

And last but not least to our indefatigable Secretary/Treas. Terry Keays "The Terrier" who put in countless hours in organising the event to the temporary detriment of his home life which we hope is now back on an even keel.

# Land Line Morsecode Telegraph in the Western Australian Government Railways (Westrail)



In the last "Messenger" Page 1, we said that Morsecode telegraphy ceased in Australia in 1959. It did cease in the Post Office generally but not strictly because several areas and offices were continued for a while by morse until they could be converted to Tress or other working. Furthermore, at least in Western Australia, land line Morsecode was continued by Westrail until 1976 with 4 telegraphists on roster. Our most senior member Chas Hatswell (92 on 13th June) worked for Westrail as a telegraph operator for most of his working life and he has provided information on the extensive Westrail telegraph and telephone network. Westrail had its own telephone and telegraph lines along most of its rail network. Telegraph connections were provided at major railway stations to handle official business.

For many years, the Westrail operating room was in Perth station (off Forrest

Place) but it was shifted to Nash Street East Perth in 1957. Westrail also had its own trunk telephone exchange with switchboards and telephonists to handle internal traffic. Nash Street was closed together with morse telegraph when the new East Perth terminal was officially opened on November 12, 1976.

Main lines went out from Perth to Parkeston with operators at Northam, Merredin Southern Cross, Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. Other lines were to Bunbury and Collie, Geraldton via Northam, Goomalling, and Mullewa, to Albany via Spencers Brook, Northam, York., Narrogin, Wagin, Katanning, and Albany. In later years, some of these stations were removed from telegraph connection.

It is not known precisely when the first telegraph for the Railway Department was provided but it is thought it coincided with the building of the railway lines.

## Telegraph Equipment- Power Surges

Upon examining the dialup equipment at Wireless Hill recently our technical officer Barrie Field found both modems were in very bad shape; in fact 5 silicon devices were found damaged by an over voltage surge which had occurred either through the phone lines or the power line. Barrie has managed to find replacements for these chips and the modems are once again in working order.



But there are no more components available to effect repairs and if any dialup modem in the future suffers from any over voltage surge, there is a likelihood it cannot be repaired.

If any electrical equipment is left connected to either the telephone lines or the power supply during electrical storms, there is a risk of damage.

When buying a new modem these days there

is always a disclaimer in the warranty which says under no circumstances should you allow your modem to remain connected to the telephone line when not in use as damage caused to the modem by lightning strikes or overvoltage surge will not be covered under the terms and conditions of your warranty.

So when your equipment is not in use and specifically for those staffing Wireless Hill, on leaving at the close of business please disconnect the telephone plugs from the telstra sockets and disconnect the power plugs to the dialup equipment from the power sockets.

If an electrical storm is imminent whilst you are on a circuit, close it down immediately after telling the distant station why and disconnect phone and power plugs from their sockets.

Our dialup modems commonly use the modem 7910 chip. Please ask your friends, relatives, acquaintances who have access to electronic gear to search for these now obsolete modem chips as your future link to the dialup network may depend on supplies of these electronic devices.

The following telegram was received at the GPO at 5.25pm on 21/6/99:- No.192 Fremantle to TOIC Perth "Keep GPO 64 PM". If they thought they were going to panic us at Perth they were mistaken. For a start we didn't understand the message and when we did wake up, it was too late. GB had been given. 64 on hand, in-



Commander Susan E Jones, was recently appointed as CO of Naval Communications Station Harold E Holt at Exmouth. Sharp-eyed Ric Cramer spotted this in the Press and as with anything "Exmouth" immediately leapt into action and contacted Cmdr. Jones who has a background in morse code through her early telegraphist days in the Navy. Cmdr. Jones has accepted our invitation to become a Morsecodian in our Club and we are delighted to say the least. Because of her duties at the base it is unlikely that we will see much of her down south, but the Commander has extended an invitation to any Morsecodians should they be holidaying in Exmouth, to make this fact known and she will be pleased to access a tour of the Communications Station for them. This is well worth seeing and we thank Cmdr. Jones for her kind invitation.

**TELEPHONES**  
A.C.A. License No. W 222

**Antique to Modern**

*Raymond J. Buckley*  
Communications Consultant

**Repair • Restore • Install**

188 Sequoia Rd  
Duncraig WA 6023

Ph / Fax: (08) 9447 4147  
0407  
Mob: 045 381 316

## Old Telegraph and Telephone Equipment.

See above card. Ray has a great collection of old telegraph and telephone equipment much of which is in working order and is well worth a visit to his private museum to see. He is quite happy for Morsecodians to look over it. Call him first to ensure he's home. (☎ 9447 4147)

## FINANCIAL.....



Due to generous public donations a t our 130th anniversary day which more than covered postage costs and from others towards the event, our bank account is still healthy. On 30th June 1999 we had a bank balance of Cr. \$1023.49.

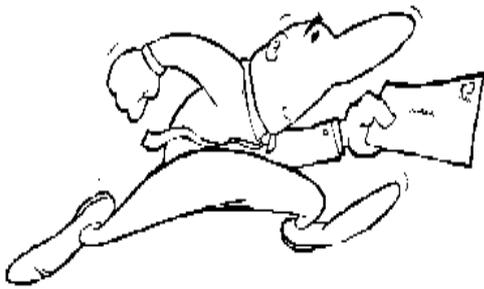
The financial statement and auditor's report will be presented at our meeting on 6th September.

(Continued from page 1)

# 1869 to 1999 A Long Time between Messages.....



our commemorative day was a success not the least being AUSTRALIA POST. When Gen. Manager Mr Geoff Cook agreed to our request to make the GPO and Fremantle PO available for the day, he also asked his staff to provide any necessary assistance. This was forthcoming with quiet efficiency, willing cooperation and thoughtfulness. It was enough to make us regret that we were not still at work together with these people many of whom were youngsters in our working days. At least we had the privilege of their presence and help on the 21st of June and they did indeed look after us with hospitality and concern. The celebration of such an historic event would not have been possible without Australia Post and we do sincerely thank all those people in the enterprise.



## The Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia (Inc.)

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



### MORSE INKER

#### FRIENDS OF THE FRATERNITY



We also wish to express our appreciation to others who assisted us towards providing a most successful day of Telegraph.

- The Australian Post-Tel Institute for stationery and their continued support of our activities.
- The CEP Union for printing and the use of their office equipment.
- The ladies of Tranby House for historical research and photographs.
- Mr Nev Kent of Allstamps for our datestamps,
- and to all those individuals who do not want to be named but gave us



Prior to and on the 21st June of June we received invaluable assistance from TELSTRA, part of history as the last provider of telegrams and together with Australia Post combined from 1901 until 1975 as the Postmaster General's Department. The technical part of the operation was provided by Telstra who ensured that our connections were provided on time and maintained at their usual high standards throughout the exhibition of Telegraphy. Our previous major exhibition was at Albany in November 1997 on the occasion of the 120th Anniversary of the telegraph connection of WA to the Eastern States and the world via Eucla in 1877 and Telstra provided similar facilities. We wish to acknowledge this and again thank Telstra for their much appreciated co-operation and expertise.



### PONY RELAY

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY .....



(Special Contacts Contd.)

We also enjoyed a special contact with the SA/NT Morsecodians with whom we exchanged telegraph messages. The SA/NT Morsecodians were celebrating an "End of the Millenium Week" by re-activating the historic Overland Telegraph Route coincidentally. It was 127 years ago when Sir Charles Todd and his team completed the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Port Darwin; a long thin wire stretched over 3000 km and strung on 36000 poles to link with an undersea cable to Java and onward to London to provide Australia's first electric communication link with the world.

Our exchange of telegrams was transmitted over this route from Port Darwin to Adelaide and then sent on to Fremantle and Perth by dialup telegraph. A very pleasant and welcome contact and we thank Laurie Wallace the SA/NT co-ordinator and all our SA/NT colleagues for a great historic connection.

## SPECIAL CONTACTS 130TH ANNIVERSARY

A feature of our day was an exchange of telegraph messages between Captain Chris Blake of HM Bark Endeavour in Sacramento California. Captain Blake exchanged telegraph messages with us and the Mayor and the Endeavour Foundation in Fremantle. A very fitting connection we thought. We must thank Mr Phil McGrath of the Eden Killer Whale Museum in NSW who provided duplex connections for both Fremantle and Perth GPO so we were both on line together and who organised the telephone contact from Eden to Endeavour in the USA. A great deal of time and organisation was necessary to do this. Phil has

been a great friend of this club and typifies the willing and helpful attitude of all Morsecodians towards each other irrespective of origin.

In addition to many private messages, telegraph messages of good will for our 130th Anniversary were also received from :-

- Ship's Company HM Bark Endeavour
- Canberra Morsecodians
- Mr Jack Dickenson President Eden Killer Whale Museum.
- Bendigo Tourism Information Centre Operators.

## CHARACTERS of the CRAFT

(by Col Smith)



Billy Balaam (pron. Bayl'm). There would be few morse operators in Western Australia in the 1930's to 50's who did not know Billy Balaam, if not personally, at least by working with him on a telegraph line. My remembrance of him is as a small scruffy looking man, thin to the point of emaciation and his standard of dress, to be kind, borderline. He did not fit the description of sartorial splendor enjoyed by many of the old-time telegraphists. I recall being told that in Billy's earlier times as a postal assistant at Subiaco before going into the CTO he was known as a dapper dresser. All that aside, it was his operating style, particularly his hand sending ability that he was renowned for. He was known as a 'roller'. For the uninitiated, this meant that he ran morsecode signals together in a rhythmic manner with little space between letters in words, not the minute nanosecond pause between letters of the classical school. It took concentration to stay with Billy; some could read him easily (it takes one to know one?) but many stumbled and had to "break" (break the circuit and ask for a repeat) especially the recently qualified and others with lesser morse ability.

Talk about "Lord help the man who "broke" him once or questioned his "creations", ( a line from Frank Spruhan's classic poem of morse days when one Charlie Teede was known to become rather irate with anyone who "broke" him) it was nothing compared to Billy's reactions. He might have allowed one or two interruptions but after that it was too late. To infer that his copperplate signals could not be read would suffice him with indignation. Such people had to be removed from the line and sent back to re-sit the morse test, invitations to "meet" on the GPO steps after his shift were issued and supervisors called in to pacify him. There must have been many a budding postal clerk whose confidence was completely destroyed for a while after an episode with Billy, but it was accepted that once you could get through a circuit with him without breaking, you'd made it. Out in the street, no one would have noticed Billy; if you saw him you would say he was a jockey out on his luck, a nondescript character. But in WA telegraph circles he was well known allright.

## EUCLA RUINS

This photograph which has been reproduced many times is popularly thought to be the ruins of the Eucla Post Office but it seems they are all that remain of the Western Australian Station Master's residence. A similar residence was provided for the South Australian SM. The doorways and windows do not match authentic photographs of the post office. An excerpt quoted from a letter dated 28th April 1958 from James Lawrence 15 Liscard St Elsternwick Vic to James Hancock 45 Wasley St Mt Lawley, both one time telegraphists at Eucla and old friends, reads:-

"The SA/SM's residence has been demolished, 105 tons of stone and transferred to a



position between Moopena and the pass or as we called it the road up the cliffs, where it and some of the stone from the office will be used for the motel at Hampton Ridge. One wall of the office cannot be recovered, hundreds of tons of sand prevent its dismantling". The tree is a euc. Gomphecephala. In her book, "A Vital Link - Eucla and the Eyre Highway" printed by Westoffset, Perth 1979, Mrs Jessie White said she climbed the tree as a child when at Eucla with her parents Mr and Mrs George Thomas. It was probably planted by early telegraphists in the days before the rabbits arrived, ate every plant within reach and turned a verdant area into sandhills.

You couldn't say that Billy was a widely travelled officer, in fact he never moved far from the sight of the Perth Town Hall.

History details:-

- Born 12th September 1899.
- Appointed telegraph messenger Brisbane Street 9th Feb 1914.
- Postal assistant Subiaco 31st Aug 1916.
- Postal assistant Telegraph Branch 5th Dec 1919.
- Telegraphist 4th div Telegraph Branch 1st Oct 1925.

He is listed in every seniority list as telegraphist (until designations were omitted) from then until 1963 but is not named in the 1964 list.

WE REMEMBER.....



We regret to record the passing of two of our esteemed members since the last newsletter:-

Jim Kirkby on May 23 last. Jim was postmaster at West Perth before retirement. In earlier years, he spent some time in the northwest at Derby and Marble Bar, and

Cliff Humphreys who passed away on 5 May 1999. Cliff was a postal man throughout his working life. He saw service in the northwest as a postal clerk and postmaster including Wittenoorn. After some years as postmaster on Christmas Island (Indian Ocean) he returned to Perth at St George's Tce. Prior to retirement he was the postal manager at Mirabooka.

Our sympathy is extended to the families.

Western Australia

To  
Edmund Stirling Esquire, Perth  
One of the Projectors of the first  
Telegraph Company

The first Telegram transmitted in Western Australia  
To the Chairman of the Fremantle Town Trust  
His Excellency Colonel Bruce  
heartily congratulates the inhabitants  
of Fremantle on this annihilation of dis-  
tance between the Port and the Capital, and  
he requests that this, the first message  
may be made publicly known.

Government House  
Perth, 21 June 1869.

Transmitted 11am JCF



MR. J. C. FLEMMING, FIRST SUPER-  
INTENDENT OF TELEGRAPHS IN  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Perth May 7. 1875.

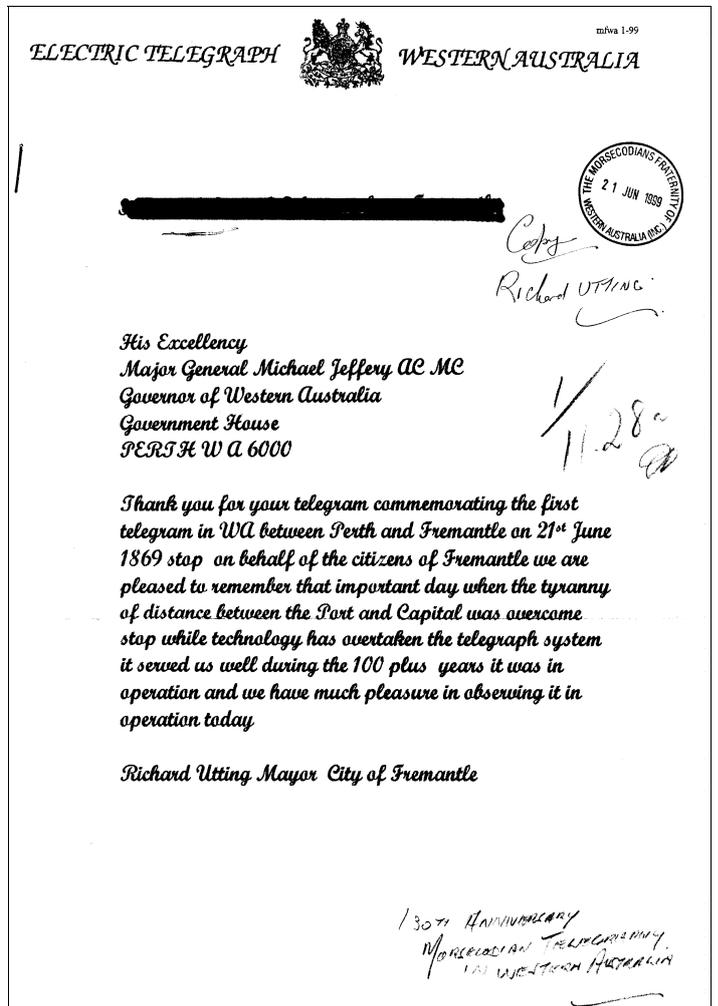
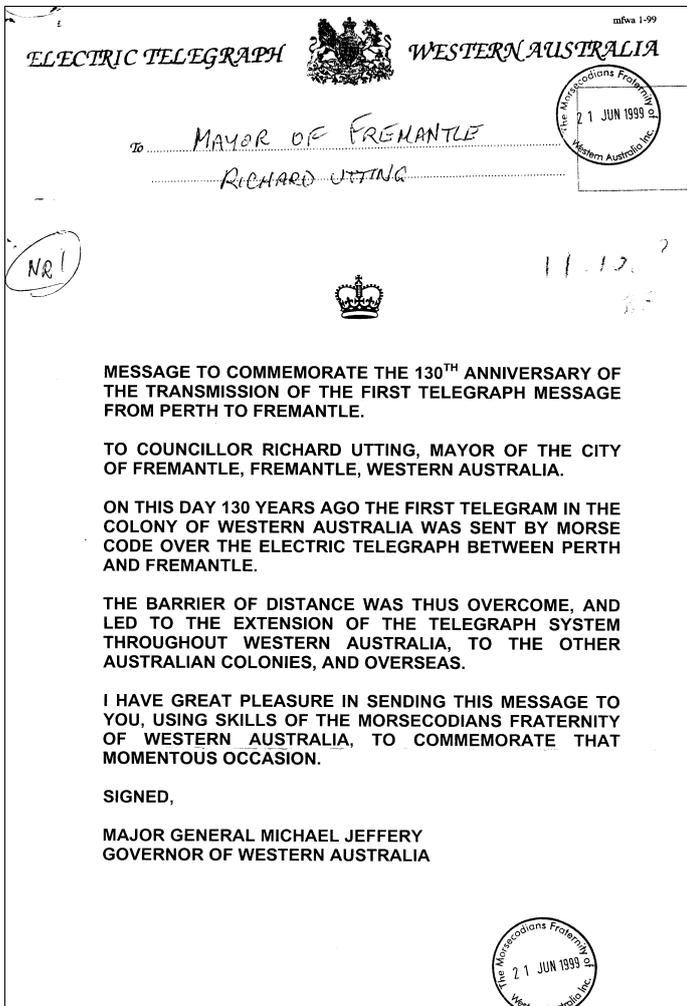
Dear Sir

I beg to present you  
privately with the accompanying  
Record of the first Telegram  
Transmitted in Western Australia  
which I hope may awaken pleasing  
recollections of your efforts in the  
introduction of the Electric Telegraph  
now that it has accomplished  
so much and attained grand

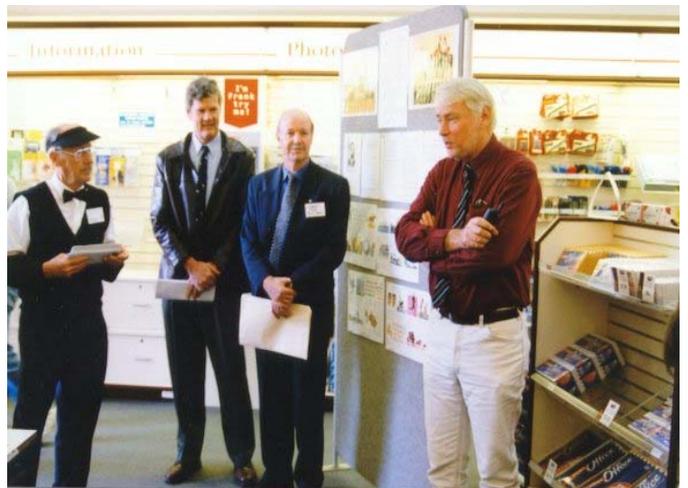
proportions amongst the public  
affairs of this colony

I am Dear Sir  
Yours faithfully  
J. C. Flemming

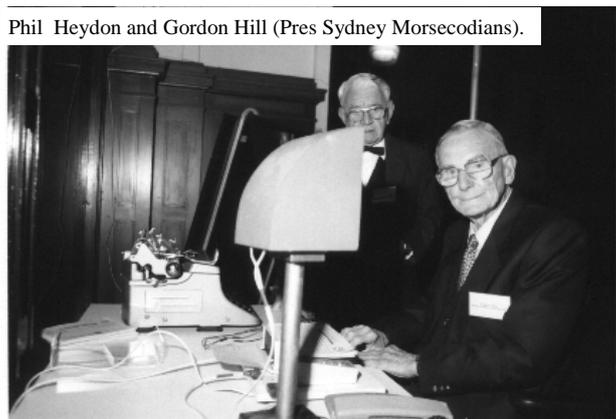
Edmund Stirling Esquire,  
Perth.



At Perth GPO. His Excellency Maj-Gen Michael Jeffery (right) and Geoff Cook Gen Mgr (WA) Australia Post watching telegraphist Ken Knox receive the telegram from Fremantle Mayor Richard Ut-



At Fremantle. The Mayor speaks. Pictured (L to R) Terry Keays Secty/Treas WA Morsecodians Frat., John Longley Endeavour Foundation, Chris Cole State Manager Australia Post Retail & Sales and Richard Utting Mayor of Fremantle.



Phil Heydon and Gordon Hill (Pres Sydney Morsecodians).

Picture on right:  
Mr Edmund Stirling, the proprietor of "The Inquirer and Commercial News" paper who was the driving force behind the introduction of the telegraph system in Western Australia in 1869.

