

MORSECODJAN'S MESSENGER

Volume 1 Issue No 9

MAY 2000

☎ 08 9279 4696

Morsecodians - Keeping Morsecode Alive

NEXT MEETING
10 Am Monday
19th June 2000

**AT THE HYDE
PARK HOTEL**

Please note the
time and date for
our next get to-
gether.

**PARTNERS,
FRIENDS
WELCOME.**



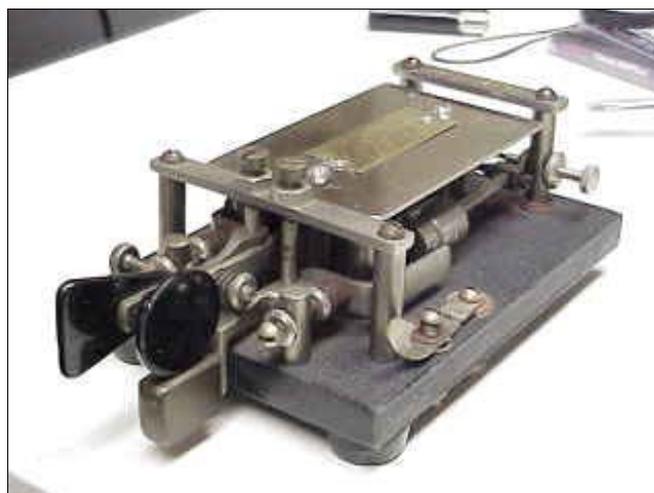
CTO Perth T-I-T Class of 1935

(Photo from Syd Chick)

L to R Standing: Instr. Les 'Foster' Clarke.
Front: Jim Hancock Jnr, Bob Schnaars, Syd Chick,
Ted Rodgers, Jack Edwards.
Rear: Ron Alexander, Cec Rowlands, Bill White.

LEO G COHEN MELBOURNE:

Some thousands of jiggers with automatic dots and manual dashes were made by Leo Cohen, but this model (below) with both automatic dots and dashes was relatively rare.



The Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia (Inc.)

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

Telegraph at Broome in the 1950's

The main telegraph line was No 65 Perth to Broome (via Marble Bar) and was worked by duplex. The single wire was 400lb GI Meekatharra to Broome. No 8 north was a cailho 200lb HD copper 120 miles between Broome and Derby. Derby to Wyndham 400 lb GI. Poles were mostly Buller poles, in 2 parts, base and top, designed to be handled by one (strong?) man. No 8 was duplex to Derby and simplex beyond through a half-toye repeater. The load on No 65 was considerably eased by a 260 watt radio transmitter at Broome. This link No 170 was duplex Broome to CTO Perth

by radio via Wanneroo and thus enabled Broome to work direct to Perth. Stations north of Broome could be switched to the radio link to work through to Perth in the event of line troubles south of Broome. Senior Technician Jack Jorgensen at Broome had worked out the technical circuit to connect from land line to radio from the North but could not work the same in reverse. Given time he no doubt would have but he was promoted to Mullewa. Apparently the system as it then was handled the traffic satisfactorily.

Exmouth in War Time

Col Hopkins recalls:
"During the war (1939/45) there was a submarine base at Exmouth and all traffic was repeated by Carnarvon. There was plenty of traffic all coded and addressed to Mr Allison. There were also weather reports and forecasts

and military traffic. Because of the double handling the powers that be got the military to put in a spur line from No. 6 to Exmouth. It was a simplex station (XP) and manned by two trained military operators who could only work about 10 wpm. Being a simplex line they could not decipher what was going on because of the duplex workings north to Port Hedland. It caused some havoc but was relieved by the Army finding Vic Busch up in the islands and flying him to Exmouth. Vic stayed there for the duration, much to his disgust. (Vic was a Postal Clerk at Leederville for some years after

DUPLEX, TRIPLEX AND QUADRUPLEX

Memories were stirred for our esteemed member Norm Doig when he saw the photograph of the Telegraph Training Room as it was in 1947 in the last issue of the "Messenger", especially the photographs on the wall of past classes. These were later passed on to the WA PO Museum but with the closing of the museum their whereabouts are not known.



Norm Doig in 1946

For many years Norm was a supervisor in the CTO and he was also the Instructor for the Telegraphist-in-Training classes. He is a mine of information on telegraph matters in the 30's and 40's.

In researching details in regard to duplex working, repeaters etc., Norm can recall the setups in WA, most notably telegraph lines No 6 to Marble Bar via coastal towns Carnarvon, Roebourne, Pt Hedland etc, and No 65 to Derby via Marble Bar and No 8 onwards to Wyndham. In later years No 65 was duplex to Derby (previously Broome was the duplex terminal) and simplex to Wyndham by a half-toye repeater. One then asks the question, "What was a full-toye repeater?" Norm says it was simply joining two lines together (in this case in the CTO) for one man to work e.g., the Lake Grace Line and the Wyalkatchem line. The repeater provided battery to both lines. He also recalls the quadruplex, (two circuits each way). At the start of WWII only 2 quads remained, Kalgoorlie and Mullewa. The introduction of the carrier system from Perth to Adelaide via Kalgoorlie provided many additional circuits. (In a paper by Mr R A Pitcher he states that an 18 channel VF telegraph system was installed towards the end of the war.) As a result the Kalgoorlie quad was superfluous and the instruments were removed. The Mullewa quad was used spasmodically until 1942 when it too was scrapped. Norm recalls the technical diagram for a triplex (three circuits) which to his knowledge was only used in the eastern States in such circumstances as from a racecourse. For those times it must have been amazing to the uninitiated to see how these circuits were worked out by the use of artificial lines, polarisation of relays etc., to emulate the main circuit, all this over one wire and an earth return.

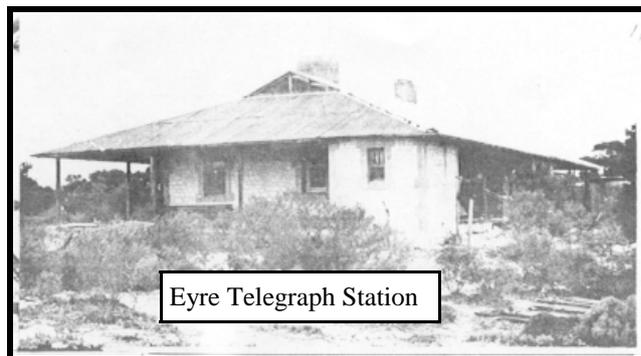
PROUDLY SPONSORED BY



William Graham SM Eyre Telegraph Office

(From Lawrence paper)

"Reached Eyre's Sandpatch on way to Eucla from Israelite Bay Dec 1895. A wonderful gentleman, Mr W Graham of Adelaide was the Station Master at Eyre, and with him were his wife and two young members of his family, who were the only inhabitants, five daughters having already been married to prominent WA citizens in the PMG's service. Grit and determination must have been the outstanding virtues of this couple of courageous people, to whom a small mail service was sent from Eucla by a native runner once a month. Provisions had to be rigidly watched in order that their supplies should not run short, ere the arrival of the quarterly steamer, yet a grand family of nine was reared at this lonely spot which held no fascinations. This gentleman was a full-time optimist and was highly esteemed. The old couple spent their days of retirement with one of the sons who was a successful agriculturalist in the prosperous Narrogin (WA) district."



Eyre Telegraph Station

From "The East-West Telegraph 1875-77" by Mr G P Stevens. Read before the WA Historical Society October 27 1933.

"William Graham of Kadina, South Australia, officially opened Eyre's Sand Patch on 17 July, 1877.

The original telegraph station was a weatherboard building with an office, kitchen, dining room and bedrooms. When William Graham arrived to take charge, a similar building was erected for him, his wife Emily, and their six children (four girls and two boys). Twenty years later, in 1897, a limestone building was erected. The following year, there were 17 people living at Eyre.

Of all the people who worked on the Inter-Colonial Telegraph Line, William Graham or Ironman Graham, as he was known to his contemporaries, was the most outstanding personality. He came from Kadina in South Australia and was a builder, an amateur anthropologist, a magnificent horseman, a long-distance swimmer, a successful horse breeder and a capable cross-country cyclist.

He learnt the language of the local Aborigines and studied their culture. As a hobby, he bred thoroughbred horses at Eyre and several of them were very successful racers. His own horse, a fine stallion appropriately named Wire, stood 17 1/2 hands high - almost as big as a Clydesdale.

Legend has it that he rode Wire 100 miles in one day to repair a break in the telegraph line. He is reputed to have regularly stayed on board the supply vessels which serviced Eyre until sailing time, and then swam a mile back to shore through the shark-infested waters of the Southern Ocean. He is believed to have also ridden his bicycle 210 miles from Eyre to Israelite Bay in the days when there was nothing except scrub and mallee, and certainly no roads.

The Grahams brought up ten children on the Station. William Graham held the position of Station Master until his retirement in 1901 to a farm near Narrogin. Some of his daughters married telegraph staff who later became Station Masters at Eucla and Israelite Bay."

(Note: The Eyre Telegraph Station was restored some years ago and is now a bird and wildlife observatory.)

“Memoirs of George Thomas – Telegraphy in 1896”.

“The Coolgardie gold boom was at its height in 1896. The biggest boom of its kind in the world. West Australia had a small population, and it wasn't till the rush of people from the eastern states, and elsewhere, that the PMG's Dept found they were severely taxed for staff. The West Aust Govt advertised worldwide for telegraphists and other postal officers. Six months later telegraphists arrived from England America, Ireland, South Africa, New Zealand and the eastern states– very few from South Australia, and they proved to be some of the worlds best telegraphists. The Englishmen were also Wheatstone tape readers and machine and hand punchers. I had the pleasure of listening to their signals and taught them the Western Australian code. The lads who were fortunate to have fathers and brothers in the department were taught telegraphy at home, at least two hours receiving nightly, six days per week – the hard way prior to 1896. The youths studying telegraphy in the dept had to complete six months as an unpaid cadet. At the end of that time, he was examined at sending and receiving at the rate of 25 words per minute. If successful he was retained in the Telegraph Branch, otherwise he was transferred to a postal position mostly in the country. Lads commencing as messengers from 13 to 14 years of age without telegraph ability delivered telegrams for 8 to 10 hours per day. Those who could work at 25 wds per minute were utilised on the Perth-Fremantle circuits when necessary. All deliveries were on foot, no bicycles available for this work. When a messenger was late with his round, all extra time was doubled and had to be worked off the following Saturday. Some worked from 8am to 10pm. The messengers room had a sending and receiving set installed, the receiving came from the Perth-Fremantle duplex or a spare simplex circuit worked daily. Most lads were able to pass after 3 months tuition.



On July 12th 1899, an operating messenger was sent to Rockingham to transmit press for our two local morning papers The West Australian and Morning Herald. An English Barque “Carlisle Castle” foundered at 2 o'clock that morning off Coventry Reef Safety Bay – all hands lost.

After a trying journey of 5 hours, wind at gale force, the party arrived at the post office. The Postmistress lit a big fire and clothing was dried off. Owing to the hurried departure from Fremantle, there wasn't time to collect a change of clothing or night attire. The OIC Fremantle informed the messenger that a night shirt was unnecessary, it will be mostly night work and you will have to sleep when you can. This proved correct. The reporters handed in 32000 words for despatch by telegraph. The Postmistress did not have a local sounder, all signals were sent on a “dead relay”. During the same morning the “City of York” another British ship was wrecked 2 miles west of Rottneest lighthouse – eleven lives lost. Owing to the heavy weather and clouded

sky, we did not receive news of the wreck for several days. The only communication between the mainland and island was per Heliograph. The OIC Fremantle and an operating messenger received 5000 words. Heliograph is usually worked by two persons, one reader and a writer. A cable telephone has been installed, and Rottneest during the summer months – especially Xmas and Easter– is a thriving popular summer resort.

Murchison Goldfields 1900.

Some of our Goldfields towns produced wonderful revenue - towns which have since faded out. Cue population of 5000, Day Dawn 5000, Mt Magnet – noted for Afghans and goats – Lennonville, Nannine, Abbots, Peak Hill, Star of the East (now Meekatharra). Cue, the centre, boasted of a solid revenue, 8 telegraphists and a large postal staff. Day Dawn one of the busiest stations in the Commonwealth. The Great Fingall Mine, then the biggest gold mine in the world employed 2200 men. The PO staff worked long hours mostly 12 hours daily – no overtime paid for weekdays or Sundays – Geraldton another busy centre – similar hours were worked. Telegraph circuits were few and traffic heavy which meant late GB's. The north west line always showed a heavy lag. We only had the old coastal line which carried a fair amount of cable traffic. Repeaters were at Geraldton, Hamelin Pool, Carnarvon, Onslow, Roebourne, Pt Hedland and Broome. Broome had repeated for stations northwards. Today we have an inland circuit via Mullewa, Cue, Meekatharra, Marble Bar to Broome. Perth also works direct with Derby, Halls Creek and Wyndham. There is still a fair lag. The same can be said of the coastal circuit terminating at Pt Hedland. The day is not far distant when both the north-west circuits will be improved and lag lessened.

Interstate Circuits.

The days of Eucla have passed. It is worth recalling the wonderful work performed by the South Australian and WA staffs during the Coolgardie rush. They only had a coastal line each side of the WA border. It worked well during daylight but faded badly during the night 9 months of the year caused by sea mists and damp atmospheres. Both lines were built along the coast. On the WA section between Eyre and Israelite Bay for 9 miles the line was just above high water mark. Whilst relieving at Eyre, I often removed beach sand from the insulators. I believe they followed the route travelled by explorer Eyre from Adelaide to Albany. The first pole from the Albany end was erected in 1876. I remember an overlander travelling east from Esperance to Adelaide along the telegraph line. This man, suffering badly from thirst, climbed a pole and broke the wire by hitting it with two stones causing an open circuit fault west and earth east. Eucla rang Eyre to start the lineman on a fault close to Eyre, and that Israelite Bay was getting open circuit. Eyre lineman left immediately and found an Italian lying near the pole nine miles west. He was greatly distressed on arrival at the station but after a few days rest he departed for Eucla 160 odd miles east. The lineman brought a piece of wire from the span as a curio. It was heavily crusted with a
(Cont P4)



EUCLA POST OFFICE 1898-1927

Eucla 1920's.

WA Morsecodian John Roberts showed us a visitor's book which was maintained by Mr R Counsel telegraphist- in-charge at Eucla from 1918 to 1927. The book is now held by John's son-in-law Mike Counsel, a grandson of Bob Counsel. Eucla was closed on 26th March 1927 when all telegraph traffic was sent over new lines erected along the Trans-Australia railway line. The record consists mainly of signatures and comments from people passing through Eucla on the dirt road. Bob and his wife obviously welcomed visitors and most of the comments are words of appreciation of their stay with the Counsels. One entry:-

“E P Ramsay Deputy Director Posts and Telegraphs for Western Australia. Much enjoyed trip across from Perth. Roads excellent, hospitality better than excellent! Eucla's climate is delightful and must be a component part in the fine reception given me on my first visit here. 24/10/26.”

Luckily Mr Ramsay was not at Eucla in March 1905 because he may not have found the climate so delightful. Eucla recorded a temperature record one day in that month of 51.1C (123.9 Fahrenheit).

Surprisingly, the “Roads Excellent” comment was echoed by many other visitors.

Remarks usually included the make of vehicle used by the travellers and some of these will bring back memories to the older brigade:-

Armstrong Siddeley, Austin 12, Baby Citroen, Buick, Chalmers 6, Chevrolet 1925, Crossley, Chrysler 6, Douglas m/c, Dodge, Essex 6, Fiat 501, Ford Tourer, Harley-Davidson m/c, Hudson, Hupmobile straight 8, Indian m/c & sidecar, Jewett Big 6, Marmon 1925 sports, Maxwell, Pontiac 6, Rugby, Studebaker special 6, Willys Knight.



Characters of the Craft

by Col Smith



George Thomas

George Thomas would have been one of the most famous telegraphists ever to work in Western Australia because for many years he worked the long lines to the north west mainly No 65 exclusively. His intimate knowledge of these lines kept the circuits going when lesser mortals would have failed. In addition, he was a friend and Perth agent for all the postal people working in the isolated NW. If anything was wanted urgently, George would get it for them, a great boon in those days with limited communication. The vagaries of the north west lines because of the long distances, weather conditions such as cyclones and sea mists were a constant challenge. Operators were specially selected to work numbers 6 and 65. No 6 to Marble Bar along the coast via Pt Hedland to Marble Bar and No 65 inland via Mullewa and Marble Bar to Broome (later Derby) and on to Wyndham as No 8. A firm hand with good signals was generally needed to cover the 2000 miles to Wyndham.

George was born in 1883 and joined the service as a telegraph messenger at Fremantle when he was thirteen years old. As a telegraphist he worked at Eucla, Albany (where he married his wife Phyllis), Kalgoorlie and the CTO Perth. He retired on September 2, 1948 after 52 years service and passed away in 1956 aged 73. A "List of Officers at Eucla for the Period 1877 to 1917" shows Geo G Thomas, Operator, from 1907 but no date of cessation.

(See the article "Memoirs of George Thomas –



Mrs Jessie White.

This lady was well known to PMG people in WA in the 1960's being the wife of the then WA Director Mr Jack White. In her book "A Vital Link - Eucla and the Eyre Highway." by Jessie White 1979 printed by West-offset, Perth (available in the State Library system) Mrs White recalls her years as a young girl at Eucla with her parents, her father being a telegraphist there. It was thought that her father may have been George Thomas, but a paragraph in correspondence (1968) from Pom Cornell ex Telegraphist and later Public Relations Officer in WA reads: "George worked at telegraphy right through his career, was a Eucla man and was uncle to Mrs White, wife of our present Director. Mrs White's father, the late Mr Doug Thomas, also was a Eucla man having worked there as a telegraphist for 5½ years from 1916, which Mrs White as a child remembers well."

Memoirs of George Thomas (contd from P3)

black rust. A sample of wire was finally brought to Perth for examination. Our Engineer could not believe it came from our coastal line and remarked that it looked more like a piece of wire from a fence. Whilst relieving at Eyre I came across a Line Journal dated 1883. One entry read "10.10 pm. Just received two messages from Mr Barwick and passed them on to Mr Williams at Eucla." The OIC's in those days were called SM's.

Mr John Graham SM at Eyre was well known along the coast. It was said by Capt Douglas, skipper of the quarterly boat from Albany, that Johnny often came aboard in the surf boat. The Captain warned him several times that he could not take him ashore again. Johnny replied "That's OK, I can swim ashore." The boat anchors about a mile offshore. On several occasions he would be at least two miles east of Eyre when he said goodbye to the crew and dived overboard and swam ashore. Sharks are fairly numerous near the anchorage. He owned a fine horse by the name of "Wire". It is recorded in a Line Journal that "Wire" travelled 100 miles in one day, returning from a fault. Down further west of Eyre near Point Culver you can see the bleached bones of a camel commonly known as "Breen's Camel". The story goes as follows:- "Tim was returning from a fault fully 50 miles west. He wished to reach the station before nightfall. About 10 miles from Eyre rain began to set in. The camel squatted and all the language in the world could not shift him. Finally Tim collected some dry wood and lit a fire round him. Whether the camel died from sickness or burns can only be gathered from Tim Breen the "bush poet." Recalling the congestion of interstate traffic during the Coolgardie rush days. It is said that traffic from the eastern states at times was 2 to 3 weeks in arrears. I remember whilst stationed at Fremantle in 1896 boats from Sydney and Melbourne often arrived before telegrams lodged by passengers before departure from the eastern ports. It took a fortnight to catch up with the traffic when the new copper wire was erected via Balladonia, Norseman and Coolgardie. Casting my eye back to 1896, the struggle we had with circuits and staff and comparing it with today. We have the Carrier system Interstate, with ample channels for any emergency. This system has also been installed Northway to Geraldton, Eastward to Meekatharra. Machine telegraphy to most of the suburban and centres on the Great Southern and South West and in the near future Perth will have one of the most up to date Telegraph rooms in the Commonwealth. Last but not least our respective Unions have done wonderful work during the last 50 years. In 1897 we called a meeting to form a Post and Telegraph Association. Next morning Mr Sholl, Deputy Postmaster General, issued notices of transfer to all officers on the committee. Transfers were to Broome, Cue, Menzies, Coolgardie and Eucla. This almost led to a strike. Mr Sholl wouldn't listen to a deputation and Mr Randall, Minister of Post and Telegraphs, would not interfere with Mr Sholl's decision. Finally the late Lord Forrest, then Premier, cancelled the transfers two minutes before noon, the appointed time to "down pens." Our old P & T Association did wonderful work and paved the way for years to come. Today we have our Arbitrator and have gained our points in a constitutional way... Amen... G. Thomas.

Retired from Telegraph Dept Sep 2nd 1948. 52 years service."

William (John?) Graham SM Eyre.

In his memoirs George Thomas recalls that John Graham was SM at Eyre. John does not agree with Mr G P Stevens' writings or the staff list. Mr Stevens refers to William Graham and the staff list for Eyre Telegraph Station 1876 to 1917 shows GRAHAM, William, Dec 1876 to Jan 1903 Telegraph Master. See separate article page 2 on William Graham.

EARLY LINES NORTH WEST

The original telegraph circuit from Perth to Broome ran round the coast and was worked on the open circuit simplex system. Old maps of the Pilbara area, which were in the Marble Bar post office in 1925, showed a telegraph circuit from Roebourne to Nulagine via Tambourah and Pilbarra, apparently a town in the old days. Later a circuit was erected south from Condon to Marble Bar, date unknown, and this circuit remained in use until after the second world war.

In 1912 a copper line was built from Perth to Peak Hill, and then with iron wire through to Marble Bar and this became the new line to Broome, working north from Marble Bar to Condon and along the old coast route to Broome. In 1925 the construction of an iron wire between Marble Bar and Waroopbah (18 miles south of Lagrange) was commenced and brought into use in 1926, and the Perth-Broome circuit was derived over this route. This enabled Marble Bar to become the terminal station of the coastal circuit No 6, utilising the Condon-Marble Bar section of No 65 hooked on to either 6 or 37 into Roebourne.



Some Recollections from AJL

Re suburban offices, the Claremont Showgrounds PO catered well for the military camp there during WW2. The Midland Saleyards (open only on sale days) when a Telegraphist would go up from the CTO (usually Ernie Goggin). Subiaco had 2 Morse circuits when traffic demanded (174 and 14). The No 111 to Applecross was in fact a simplex channel to VIP (Perth Radio).