Morsecodians -
Keeping Morsecode Alive

ABC Radio National broadcasts from Wireless Hill

To commemorate the centenary of Marconi's trans-Atlantic transmission trials, the ABC entourage fronted by popular radio celebrity Ted Bull descended on Wireless Hill on 12th December 2001 from 1pm-4pm. Interviewer Ken Brand spoke with Morsecodians Richie Bright and Ken Knox on the role of the Morsecodians Fraternity and culminated in the duo demonstrating the transmitting of a telegram to Ted Bull.

It was the 12th hour of the 12th day of the 12th month in 1901 that Guglielmo Marconi received the first transatlantic radio signal from England at Signal Hill, Canada in 1901. His claim was met with some scepticism; Edison thought Marconi may have heard static instead of signals and the scientists, unaware of the ionosphere, thought the earth's curvature would preclude distant transmission of radio signals.
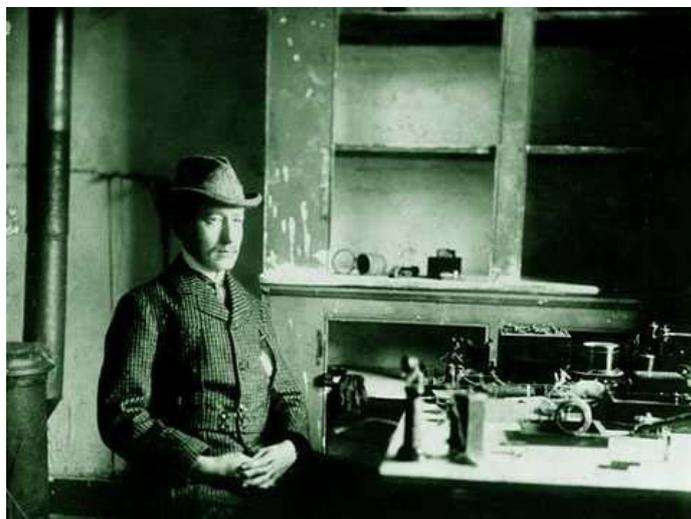
On 11th December 1901, the first attempt at transmission from Poldhu, Cornwall took place - and failed.

Marconi, who was in Newfoundland, had sent a message back to England, via the underwater telegraph cable, to tell the Poldhu transmitter to send radio signals between 12 noon and 3pm local time. A weak signal was received in Canada but the wind was so strong that the balloon holding the aerial aloft was swept away.

The following day, after losing one kite, a second was launched with the aerial attached and the signal from Cornwall was heard by both Marconi and George Stephen Kemp, his assistant.

"The chief question," Marconi said at the time, "was whether wireless waves would be stopped by the curvature of the Earth. All along, I had been convinced that this was not so. The first and final answer came at 12:30 when I heard...dot...dot...dot."

This letter "*S*" was significant. The transmitter was actually two spark rigs in series, one driving the other. The first stage spark gap would break into a continuous
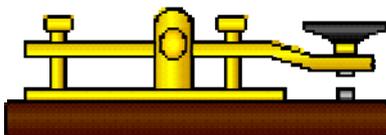

Marconi—Signal Hill 1901

arc if the key was held down for the length of a dash, hence only **dot** letters could be used in the tests. Only later did Fleming, who later invented the valve, understand the physics to correct the problem.

ARMADALE OUTPOST TELEGRAPH CENTRE

REPLICA 1898 POST-OFFICE OPENS FOR TELEGRAPH TRAFFIC

Morsecodians were present amongst 500+ folk to witness the opening on 30th November 2001 of a replica of the first Armadale Post and Telegraph Office which commenced business over 100 years ago. This period building project was overseen by honorary morsecodian Bert Tyler, ably bringing together many supportive sponsors to the enterprise. Armadale P. & T. office first opened on 1st. Sept. 1898, its postmistress was Elsie Ann May Turner born 20 years earlier in Winchester Hampshire, migrating to W.A. in the early 1890's. As telegraph lines expanded out from Perth, it was the first office on the No. 81 line to Bunbury.

19 year-old Carmel Fancote, great-niece of the first postmistress was at the opening ceremony and stole the stage at the presentation by appearing in an 1890's frock and delighted onlookers by tapping a morse key as her great aunt would have done over 100 years ago.

Armadale is staffed by morsecodians every Tuesday from 10am-1p WST on (08) 9497-4583.

Ken Knox
and
Carmel Fancote

Elsie Turner

CAN YOU HELP?

Phil Heydon loaned his original 196 page manuscript of his final (unpublished) book entitled "Journeys of a Postal Man" to the Fraternity some time ago for perusal by interested members.

Our esteemed late President, Colin Smith, was keeping track of who had this item.
Unfortunately the manuscript cannot now be found and it is Phil's only copy.
If the book has been seen by you, please check your bookshelves to ensure that you did return it.
Any helpful information to Phil or to Terry Keays, please.

Our long standing member Jarrahdale pioneer **Alex Grant** has moved to NSW.
His address is:- U101 5/9 Everton St, Pymble NSW 2073. He's on the dialup 02 9440 7030 and welcomes calls.

Retirees' Annual Fellowship Meeting at Mandurah.

The annual get-together for retirees.

Date: Wed 27th March 2002.
Venue: Halls Head Tavern.
Cost: $25.
Contact: Ricardo Crameri.

TELEGRAPHS AT MERREDIN (MZ) by Richie Bright.

Merredin in 1951 was the largest town in the eastern wheat belt and a major railway depot and junction, in addition to being home to RAAF no. 10 stores depot.

With the demands of these and about 25 sub offices it was busy enough to justify 2 postal clerk positions, one of which was mainly telegraph duties.

The RAAF station personnel (concession rates) generated quite a bit of traffic in addition to the official RAAF telegrams, registered code address "Cackle" which consisted mainly of lengthy messages of catalogued part numbers of letters and figures. A typical telegram would have a word count of say 150 bar 100, but occasionally messages with 300 or 400 words would be received.

In all there were about 9 lines which either passed through or terminated at Merredin and of these, number 102 was our main working line which we shared with Trayning, Kununoppin and Nungarin. This line travelled via Toodyay, Northam, Goomalling, Wyalkatchem, Trayning, Kununoppin and Nungarin, terminating at Merredin.

Our other working line was number 9 which we would share with Southern Cross. This was via York, Kellerberrin, Merredin, Westonia, Southern Cross and Coolgardie terminating at Kalgoorlie.

Because of their age and iron wire construction neither of these lines were always perfect particularly number 9 and I would occasionally hear either Steve Clegg or Jack Joss having difficulty from Southern Cross.

In fact Jack Joss sold me his Simplex Auto for 2 Pounds as he said it was "*NBG*" from Southern Cross.

The situation greatly improved in 1952 when a 9 channel VFT carrier/simplex repeater system was installed at Merredin. This system was similar to those in Mullewa, Bunbury and Kalgoorlie and later on, one was installed in Katanning.

The installation at Merredin consisted of a rack about 7 feet high, the upper section of which contained the 5 VF panels arranged one above another. Below these was an instrument panel containing the bias current and line current meters.
The throwing of a switch on any of the VF panels would display that circuit's amp. readings (line and bias) on the meters and allow us to "break-in" on that particular circuit.

The controls for balancing the circuit were located on each panel. Below this was the switch board. The upper section of the switch board contained jacks for the various physical lines and the lower section contained the jacks for the 9 VF channels. This enabled the use of any 5 of the available channels at one time.

On the front of the rack was a desk to which two morse keys were fitted and behind these, set into the rack, were two sounders. By moving keys similar to those on a telephone switchboard it was possible to "speak" to either the Perth teleg., or the distant station on whichever circuit we had "broken-into".
Five of the VF channels were connected through the carrier/simplex repeaters to the various physical lines which radiated from Merredin, 3 VF channels were spare and the other VF channel was connected to a second morse set on the operating table and was used as a dedicated "order wire". This was direct to the test desk at the CTO, although I can recall the "order wire" being worked with traffic in conjunction with our normal circuit during busy times at Christmas.

To balance the circuits, it was normal to set the bias current at one third of the line current (ie 10 mA and 30 mA) on each circuit but during the day it often became necessary to alter these settings as leakage occurred or conditions altered.

Occasionally we could detect trouble by monitoring on each panel at intervals during the day but more often the Supr would contact us on the "order wire" and ask us to attend on the particular circuit which was having trouble. We would then go across the circuit and ask the distant station *to write.* By adjusting the bias and/or line current we were then able to *bring the station in.*

Sometimes it would be necessary to increase the bias to up to half the line current to obtain a good signal however line current was not to exceed 50 mA., and in most cases if we could read the distant station it would be correctly adjusted for the CTO teleg.

The order wire was also used by the Supr. to call us when physical or VF switchings were needed. With single and double plugged cords, it was possible to substitute a faulty VF with one of the spares or patch any of the physical lines from one VF to another.

I believe this system was introduced because it was more efficient and economical than upgrading the total length of all the physical circuits.

It continued in morse operation until one sad day in May 1960 when the whole lot was cleared away and replaced by a large black box with a typewriter keyboard.

RBX 11 Oct. 2001.

(An article on this "large black box" will be a feature of a forthcoming Messenger article ... Ed.)

EAST-WEST MORSE EXHIBITION

The East Perth rail terminal was crowded on Thursday 25th October 2001 when the specially commissioned train commemorating the first East-West crossing by rail rolled into the platform.

Waiting to welcome the official party which included the Governor of Western Australia His Excellency Lieut-Gen. John Sanderson AC, was the Premier of Western Australia The Hon. Dr. Geoff Gallop, who then escorted them along the red carpet and through the entrance to the terminal building where they were introduced to Morsecodian President Terry Keays.

After speaking briefly, the Premier handed Terry a message which was passed to Vice-President John Meadowcroft who "flashed" the message by morse code to Adelaide for delivery to the Premier of South Australia notifying him of the safe arrival of the train and its passengers.

After the official party had retired to a civic reception, the eager and interested crowd descended upon the Morsecodian display and kept those members present busy with questions and requests to have messages transmitted over the local circuit.
In all, 85 messages were handled.

The exhibition proved to be very successful and we are indebted to Westrail and the organisers (Devahasdin PR Promotions) for their assistance in setting up the event.

We also thank our colleagues in Adelaide, Laurie Wallace and Ross Hintz for their ready and willing assistance in making the interstate circuit a success and for arranging for delivery of the message.

Our Pres. hard at work!

The *telegram* comes to life again via the Centenary of Federation 2001 website!   **TRY IT!**
Send a telegram to be delivered via the internet on an Electric Telegraph South Australian form:
http://www.connectingthecontinent.com/ctcwebsite/alicesprings/alicespringstelegram.htm
=============
Hook up a sounder to an electronic circuit, touch a metal piece of sounder and it starts clicking a message!
Look at: http://web1.greatbasin.net/~muellerpage/main.htm

NEW MEMBERS

We are pleased to welcome the newest members of the Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia Inc.

Jack Gibson 64 Birchgrove Rd, Balmain NSW 2041.
Peter Foreman 346 Marine Pde, Busselton WA 6280.

We reluctantly record the passing of the following members:
Ron Corey
Chas Hatswell
Alf Willoughby