Morsecodians — *Keeping Morsecode Alive*

Perth Royal Show 2003

The popular annual Royal Show once again attracted large crowds with many visiting the morsecodian display stand.

The expression of interest notice to recruit operators for positions at the show attracted 24 WA morsecodians with duties for everyone.

The 'West Australian' looked in at our stand interviewing our President and John Stephens, plus a pic of Alan Jolley zoomed in on his Automorse.

Jeff Pitts did a radio 6PR segment too. This year a scaled-down replica telegraph line with cross-arms and insulators was the backdrop to the display and was found useful in explaining how the landline telegraph worked. The intermittent backfiring of a stationary steam engine close to the operating positions added to the uniqueness of the event!

Traffic figures for 2003 were:- 1372 messages.

For comparison, 2002 figures were:- 1471 messages.

Readers who study statistics should bear in mind last year's show was for 9 days whereas this year was of 8 days duration.

Alan Greenslade receiving

Huck Fathers on the key

Thanks to **API** our sponsor

CRTB

In the last *Messenger*, we asked readers to comment on the claim that the famous poem **CRTB (coming round the bend)** was not written by Spru but by Andy Mortel published in "What hath God wrought, a history of the Queensland telegraph service from 1861" by P. J. Gribble. Bob Power of New Lambton NSW was kind enough to respond by stating that in 1981 he requested the book editor Mr. F. W. Watkinson of Telecom to recommend to Percy Gribble to issue an erratum that Frank Spruhan was the rightful author of the poem. Bob also wrote to the secretary Jim Lightfoot of the Postal Telecommunication Historical Society of Queensland on the same subject. Jim responded by stating he would talk to Percy for an addendum to the book.
An addendum was never issued.

The editor had an interesting conversation recently with WA morsecodian identity Syd Chick.

Syd was still in short trousers when Andy Mortel boarded with the Chick family for a while and was responsible for getting Syd first interested in morse-code. This happened when Andy was on evening shift and took Syd into Perth CTO. He spoke of how wonderful the job was, the camaraderie and the transfer prospects.
That first glimpse inspired Syd to become a telegraphist.
Syd said Andy was a smart fellow, good at telling stories being very lucid in description about the places he'd been posted to as a telegraphist. He never heard Andy spout poetry but he may have had the ability.

Jilliby

Jack Gibson reports:

Confirming that Telstra will be running their usual promotional centre at next year's Tamworth Country Music Festival and that members of the Sydney Morsecodians Fraternity will operate a temporary telegraph office from that centre.
The telegraph office will open daily during the hours of 10 am to 6 pm (ESDST) from 16th to 26th January 2004 inclusive and will be transmitting to the following receiving stations :- Adelaide, Beechworth, Bendigo , Brisbane, Canberra, Darwin, Melbourne, Perth (Armadale Outpost), Pymble, St. Helen's and Wagga Wagga.
Traffic will be ex Tamworth only.
Previous records show that over 1000 visitors pass through the Telstra Centre daily so it is possible that up to 200 telegrams will be lodged daily. Two morse lines will be used with a teleprinter circuit to Brisbane as a backup. Messages will be enveloped and posted to the addressee from each receiving station. Stationery, postage and circuits will be provided.
Obviously having receiving stations during the full 11 days will require planning, negotiation and rostering. We are therefore asking that you consider what participation we can expect from each centre. As a starting point could you let us know how you could be involved as follows :-
(a) preferred day/days (full or half) (b) second preference and (c) availability as standby.
It is expected that the time difference between Tamworth and Adelaide/Perth will be a useful factor in the roster.
————————————
This will be discussed at our General Meeting on Monday 20th Oct 2003.
Incidentally Jack Gibson will be undergoing major surgery during October and will be out of action for about 1 month. We hope all goes well Jack and look forwarding to working with you in January.

Richie Bright

Peter Shaw reports:

October 12th 2003 — MOAMA NSW Telegraph Station.

Built in 1864 — will be re-opened as part of a weekend of celebrations in the Echuca/Moama area on the Murray river. On 11th October, a flotilla of river boats and a pageant will recall the arrival of the first paddle steamer in the area 150 years ago. On the 12th the paddle steamer Mary Ann will move to Peppercorn Bend Moama nearby to the telegraph station and the crowd will follow the ship's captain to the telegraph station to send a message to Adelaide to say that he has arrived safely.
(Unfortunately their historical research led them to believe that the telegraph station was opened in 1850 and it was hard to convince the locals that the telegraph didn't come to Australia until late 1853 with the first line being in operation in 1854.)
Ken McLeod from Wagga Wagga and Peter Shaw from Eaglehawk (Bendigo) will set up room to room communication for the day. Peter will take his extensive collection of telegraph equipment and memorabilia and set up a one day display.

Resurrection of an Australian Simplex Auto Bug Key
by Peter Holtham   p.holtham@uq.edu.au

 The Simplex Auto is an Australian made right-angled bug key made by Leo. G. Cohen. He was a telegraphist at the Central Telegraph Office in Melbourne, Victoria and sold various models of bug key from sometime in the 1920s onwards.

The Australian GPO used them, and after the days of landline Morse code, quite a few fell into the hands of Australian radio amateurs.

I have been looking out for one for several years, and finally came across a very sad example in a Brisbane antique shop. The label tied to it simply said "PMG Gadget, $25" so the shop owner clearly had no idea what it was. He knew it was ex Post Office, but that was only because it had a government arrow and "PMG 311" stamped on the top.

Although the black and white photo in Figure 1 does not really show it, the key was in a terrible state. The nickel plating was badly tarnished and worn, the screws were rusty, and the pendulum jammed under one of the adjusting screws. What was left of the manipulating arm was rusted solid.

The rest of the arm, the thumb piece and knob were missing. Strangely, the arm attachment screw was still in place. Perhaps someone had unscrewed the arm to pack the key away and somehow the two pieces had got separated. The missing piece wasn't in any of the nearby junk; I would have to replace it.

A bit of haggling, with an emphasis on its condition got me $10 off the price, and I was finally the proud owner of a Simplex Auto. Rubbing the filth of ages off the label revealed that it was number 6232.

Now the question was how to restore it. Step one would have be a complete strip down, which turned out to be a major effort. The screws in the base plate holding all the pillars needed an impact driver to shift them. The brass lower bearing screw sheared off and had to be removed with a screw extractor. Most of the other screws were rusted solid and need copious amounts of penetrating oil before they could be undone. The rivets holding the nameplate on the top of the bridge had to be drilled out.

Finally I had a heap of bits, and a sketch of where they all came from. A thread gauge showed me that all the fastening screws were 5/32" Whitworth, so at least I could buy replacements.

Meanwhile a search for "Simplex Auto" on Google turned up quite a few useful websites. I found a scanned copy of an original instruction leaflet plus some original adverts (Figure 3). Photos from key collectors around the world showed various models, some slightly different from mine.

The adverts told me that the key was originally heavily nickel-plated on a black painted base and cost £3/7/6. The plating on mine was pitted and tarnished. No amount of cleaning and polishing by me made any great difference. The paint on the base plate flaked off at the slightest touch.

Given all these problems I decided I would try to restore the key to as-new condition by replating and repainting. Some people may argue this destroys any historical value. I decided there are sufficient original Simplex Auto keys around in much better condition not to worry.

I measured photos downloaded from the Internet to work out the size of the missing arm and cut a new one out of a piece of brass. Then all the bits went off to a local electroplater who specialised in restoration of antiques.
While they were away I resprayed the base in matt black and cut a new thumb piece from a piece of Perspex. I also gave the rubber feet a wash in warm soapy water. I don't have a lathe so a fellow member of the Brisbane Amateur Radio Club turned a new knob for me.   When I picked the bits up from the plater a few weeks later, the transformation was amazing. The new nickel plating sparkled and shone. The downside was that all the

adjusting screws and nuts were over plated. What was worse, the nameplate was so thickly plated that the serial number had almost disappeared.

The thread problem was soon solved; all that was needed was to clean them up with a 5/32" tap or die. The nameplate was a bit more serious, and for a while I didn't know what to do.

Referring to my dismantling sketch it was quite easy to get everything back together. The only slight problem was again excess plating which had narrowed the slots in the support pillars for the pendulum and dot contact springs. A thin blade helped to prise them apart.

At this point the original adjustment instructions proved handy. Hooking the key up to the side tone of my transceiver it was easy to follow the instructions and set the dot contact gap.

Some test transmissions showed me that the key worked really well. But without the nameplate on top it lacked that final finishing touch.

Then I had an idea. I looked up engravers in the Yellow Pages, and found a local badge making company. I showed them the problem, and yes they could help. They would scan my original and make me a copy, with all the engraving properly filled in black. A week later I had the new nameplate, as promised it was an exact copy.

I screwed it back into position and the restoration was complete. Figure 4 shows the final result, Simplex Auto number 6232 was back from the dead and ready for some amateur band action.

My thanks to Bob Marshall and Mick Kilmartin for help with the dismantling and Renato Langersek, VK4TNT, for making the knob. You can download the original instructions and see some other Simplex photos at Tim Patton's website http://www.tim-patton.net/Telegraph.html. The adverts come from Larry's website http://home.iprimus.com.au/oseagram/jigger.html. My thanks to them both for their help.

Fig.1   Before restoration

The SIMPLEX AUTO Telegraph Sender.
THE FAMOUS P.M.G. STANDARD MODEL.
Price - - £3/7/6 Plus Postage (5 lbs.)
Also
THE DE LUXE MODEL. Incorporating Automatic Dashes.
is again available.
Price - - £5/5/- Plus Postage (6 lbs.)
Complete with Cord and Plug or Clips as Ordered.
**Both Machines Strongly Constructed and Extremely Easy
to Operate.**
ALL PARTS, EXCEPT BASE, HEAVILY NICKEL PLATED.
Terms : Cash with Order or C.O.D.
Obtainable from
J. W. LAYTHER, P.O., Mooroopna, Vic.
(Australian Representative for Leo. 'G. Cohen).

Fig.4   After restoration

News *Cut-up*

Available. Loan dial-up set ex late Frank Fletcher. Interested parties must show they have a genuine enthusiasm to use the set on the dial-up. Enquiries to Barrie Field (08) 9304 5135.

"**Send** a telegram event " during the Celtic Festival Beechworth Vic 15-17th Nov 2003.

Terry, Richie and Barrie gave a "Sandwich Seminar" telegraph talk/demo recently at the State Records Office in the Alexander Library Perth CBD.

Congratulations to Alan and Lyn Jolley who celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary a few weeks ago.

Midland Railways Heritage workshops open day 14th Sept 2003 with the Armadale [AD] boys. Traffic: 114 messages.

Dates coming up for possible involvement AD. Kelmscott Show 18th Oct 2003.

Sydney Morsecodians Fraternity 29th reunion. Merrylands R.S.L. club 18th Oct 2003 1030 am**.**

Welcome to Walter Reeve our newest member.

He reminisces:

"While working at Cue, I was encouraged by the Postmaster Jerry Skehan to learn the morse. I would go back to the office at 7 pm and send the days telegrams to myself. Jerry would come in about 7.30 pm and send them to me on the practice equipment in the office. As a result I was selected for the P.C. I.T. course of 1952."

Morsemen on E-mail.
Amendment
Trevor Thatcher thatcher@fasternet.com.au

VALE   Don Willesee

Our sincere sympathy is extended to the wife and family of one of our most esteemed members, ex-Senator Don Willesee. Don's early working life was spent in the PMG's dept serving as a postal clerk in Carnarvon and later transferring to the CTO as a telegraphist. He rose through the ranks of the Australian Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists to become state secretary. He resigned to join the ALP, entered federal politics at the age of 33 and became the youngest senator to be elected since Federation. He served as foreign minister in the Whitlam government. He retired in 1975 and spent his latter years in Quinns Rocks. Although not actively involved, he was supportive of our Fraternity.

VALE   Ernie Goggin

Although not a member of our Fraternity, he will be remembered by our telegraphist members. Early in his career he worked on the staff of the Roebourne post-office. He was later appointed as telegraphist Perth CTO and was in that position in 1948. However, he must have been promoted to supervisor shortly after-wards as Alan Jolley can still remember receiving his first "Please explain" from Ernie in 1950. After Tress was introduced, Ernie worked as a traffic officer in Telecom until his retirement. Our sincere sympathy is extended to his wife and family.

Peter Shaw reports:

February 6th/7th/8th 2004 Jerilderie NSW.

Jerilderie NSW telegraph station will be 'fired up' with two dial-up lines during the festival to commemorate the holding up of the town in 1879 by Ned Kelly and his gang. During their stay in the town, the gang locked up the local police, stole their uniforms and strutted about the town dressed as 'coppers'. They had their horses shod, held up a church service and robbed the bank. During their stay Ned Kelly dictated his famous 'Jerilderie letter'. Brother Dan was delegated to cut the telegraph line prior to their antics and was unable to reach the line. He subsequently cut down one pole to lower the line.

Norm Campigli from Albury/Wodonga and Peter Shaw will operate the station and expect to transmit a good number of souvenir messages. Ken McLeod from Wagga will assist during the busier days.

The telegraph station still has an operating table Intact complete with BPO style key and about three quarters of a Pendograph sitting nearby.

A Bed and Breakfast facility next door has as part of its landscaped garden, a telegraph pole with insulators etc . . . and an axe firmly embedded in it.

It goes without saying that the organisers of Jerilderie [and Moama page-2 .ed], having gone from static displays to fully staffed displays are enthusiastic about the events and are putting their shoulders behind the wheels!