MORSECODIANS MESSENGER

The official newsletter of the Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia (Inc.) *Editor:* **Larry Rice**

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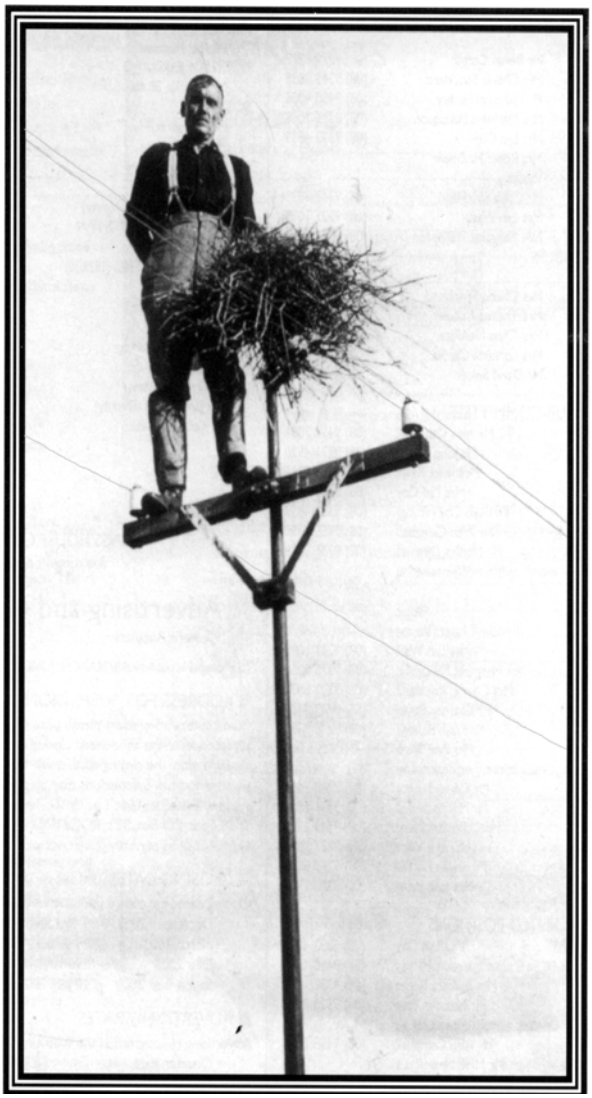
Morsecodians *Keeping Morsecode Alive*



Mr H.E. Tonkin clearing a crows nest on the #6 line 55 miles north of Carnarvon July 1933.

Thanks to API, our sponsor.

API leisure lifestyle

Royal Show 2nd—9th October 2004

This year's exhibition of morse telegraphy at the Royal show will have special significance as 2004 is the 100th anniversary of the show, the 150th anniversary of morse telegraphy in Australia and the 175th anniversary of the founding of Western Australia.

This interim roster has attempted to fit all members in on their preferred day. However if this is not suitable, please advise Ken Knox on 08 94505069. Entry passes will be posted when they are available.

Saturday	2nd Oct 04	Field Knox Keays Tyler Campbell Chick
Sunday	3rd Oct 04	Greenslade Sargent Fathers Bright Stephens Rice
Monday	4th Oct 04	Allender Edmunds Spalding Bowen Knox
Tuesday	5th Oct 04	Sargent Pitts Ravenscroft Spear Gregan
Wednesday	6th Oct 04	Meadowcroft McKenna Jolley Willis Macdonald
Thursday	7th Oct 04	Brinkworth Hopkins Field Keays Chick Rogers
Friday	8th Oct 04	Jolley Spear Pitts Tyler Gregan
Saturday	9th Oct 04	Meadowcroft Spalding Allender Edmunds Greenslade Sinclair

A new morse symbol for the @ sign has been agreed worldwide. This sign is used in all e-mail addresses. Sent as one word:-

•– –•–• for At.Com

Stop Press....

Telstra has recently awarded a grant of $50,000 to be shared between the Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne Telstra museums.

NEXT MEETING

Hyde Park Hotel
10 am 21st June 2004

Please note the time and date for our next get-together. Members and non-members welcome.

ALICE SPRINGS 2004 By Richie Bright

The old Alice Springs Telegraph Repeater Station (1872 – 1932) was once more reactivated as part of the annual Northern Territory heritage week, which this year was held from 17th to 25th April. I was very happy to be invited to join Fred Ryan, Peter Shaw and Rex Rutherford and be part of the team that would exchange messages from the public by morse telegraphy with fraternity operators at the Sydney Power House Museum. Among those who attended at Sydney during the week were Gordon Hill, Brian Mullins, Jack Gibson, Bob Power, Ray Carter, John Houlder, Tom Collins, Harry Gifford, Bob Moore, Mary-Anne (Bankstown museum), sandgroper Ken Knox and ex-sandgropers Alex Grant and Frank Mike

The whole of the station complex, comprising the barracks, the station master's residence & kitchen, the battery room, the blacksmith's shop, the buggy shed and store, and the post & telegraph office has been restored to its pristine condition and is the best preserved of any telegraph repeater station in Australia. Each building is furnished with items from that bygone era.

The Post & Telegraph office building consists of two rooms, of which the walls and floors are built with local stone. Only an iron roof, which was fitted during renovations, is not original. Complete with counter, sorting frames and mailbags with reversible metal labels, the first room is the post office and public section. From there a doorway leads into the operating room and on entering one soon senses an aura of mystique. The telegraph table with its duplex operating positions. The instruments, some of which are over 100 years old, the rough wooden bed-frame slung with cowhide on which the night shift operator may have snatched a few moments rest. The oil lamp, and the photograph of Alice Todd who gave Alice Springs its name. The thick iron wires affixed to the wall, and insulated only by wooden blocks. One could almost imagine ghostly images of former operators at their positions and bringing news from the outside world with reports of the Boer war, the death of Queen Victoria, the sinking of the Titanic and the world war. With the silence only broken by the staccato rattle of the sounders and the cries of the wild life.

During heritage week, the rattle of the sounders was still there as was the squawks of galahs that came to have a drink at the nearby atmometer. Visitors could be seen wandering through the various buildings that make up the station complex or watching the blacksmith at work. Later they would inevitably visit the telegraph office. From time to time the roar of a bus would precede the arrival of dozens of Australian or foreign tourists who would swarm into the telegraph office anxious to make good use of the short time available and lodge their telegrams. Their incessant chatter almost drowning the sounders.

The highlight of the week was 'open night' Friday the 23rd, a balmy evening, when over 1000 people, many in period dress, took advantage of the free entry to visit the station and witness it operating as it would have 100 years ago. There was horse shoeing, sheep shearing with blades, a damper cooking competition, wool spinning, lace making, quilting, tatting and jam making. There were various types of races for the children and people were dancing to the music of a bush band. As usual, the telegraph office proved a big attraction and most of the visitors would have crowded in at some time during the evening. With two outward lines operating, the jiggers ran hot trying to clear the deluge of messages. However, with 269 transmitted 'GN' was declared at 8.30 pm still leaving 50 plus messages carried over for the next day. The Sydney operators had performed admirably with scarcely a 'break' during the marathon session..

Overall 1881 messages (992 outward – 889 inward) were handled and despite experiencing a few gremlins in the equipment (quickly fixed by Fred) the whole operation went extremely well. For this, thanks must go to Brian Mullins and Jack Gibson (Sydney) and to the Alice Springs parks & wildlife rangers. Special thanks to Rick Hope (ranger-in-charge) for his co-operation and help. Also to James, who, despite having only been in Australia for 18 months and just recently appointed to the Alice Springs ranger station, was thrown in at the deep end, and was responsible for the organisation and smooth running of the event. Well done James! As for the Alice Springs team, we finished tired but satisfied that we had done our best to promote heritage week and the objects of the fraternity (keeping morse code alive) by demonstration and explanation. We look forward to the future when maybe our number will come up again

.Unfortunately the event was marred when the station shop was attacked by arsonists on Wednesday night and resulted in damage estimated at $15,000. We sympathise with shop owners Brenton and Edwina, and also thank them for their willing assistance when needed. Luckily no heritage buildings were damaged.

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A Light Shandy

part 1

Syd Chick is one of our oldest and most treasured members and all because of his liking for a light shandy on a hot day.

Syd was born on the 4/3/12, and at an early age his only wish was to be a Telegraphist after his mother took in a boarder by the name of Andy Mortell a Telegraphist from the Perth CTO. Most of us now know this gentleman as Winja Mortell of CRTB fame. It was Winja who could take the fast cut-up race results without so much as a moan. Syd was very impressed with Winja's many telegraph stories especially after he was given permission for a tour of the CTO.

At the age of 13 Syd became a Christmas relief telegram messenger by saying his age was 14 but the job was only short term. Syd did not return to school but got a job with a chemist washing bottles and delivering prescriptions. As soon as he was able Syd sat for a PMG entrance exam and was permanently appointed in 1927 at the age of 15. He soon became skilled in the art of telegraphy but because appointments were scarce in those days he was unable to become qualified as a Telegraphist. In the meantime he was still classed as a telegram messenger but often did relief work in circulation, the accounts branch, the taxation branch and in the 'snake room'.

At the age of 20 Syd was promoted to Postal Assistant Geraldton and told to catch a train to Geraldton. However he was unexpectedly taken off the train at Mingenew in the middle of the night on the instructions of the District Inspector as due to the sudden illness of a staff member at Mingenew he was required to relieve there. After that Syd relieved at Carnamah and several other places in the district as acting Postal Clerk before selection in the Telegraphist-In-Training Class of 1935. He was then appointed Telegraphist CTO Perth but when war broke out on September 3rd 1939 he was one of the first young men to join the Royal Australian Navy. That early enlistment as a leading Wireless Telegraphist was to give him over six years of war service at sea and at land-based-stations.

Syd's first posting was to HMAS Leeuwin East Fremantle for training and from there he went to Albany with a small group to establish a signal station. It was PWSS Stoney Hill, Frenchmans Bay Albany. This was a land based Radio & Signal Lookout and its function was to monitor any ships entering King George Sound. They also kept watch for any ships coming via the Bight and rounding Cape Leeuwin. On one occasion a ship travelling at full speed was observed off the south coast but it did not answer when challenged by WT and soon disappeared. The matter was mreported to Naval Authorities who were unaware of any Allied merchant or naval ships in the area. It was later found to have been a German Raider believed responsible for the sinking of a merchant ship west of Fremantle.

After 7 months at Stoney Hill, Syd went to Melbourne to train midshipmen in the use of radio, a project that lasted about six months. Part of this training entailed sea trips on the converted sugar boat HMAS Bingera but this was stopped when the increased presence of enemy submarines in the area made the operation too dangerous. Syd then went to the Tasman sea but when war with Japan broke out he was transferred back to Leeuwin and then to Flinders Naval Depot to learn an Allied signal system which was an enmeshment of the American, Dutch and Australian systems.

In late 1941 Syd was drafted for a course at Flinders Naval Depot for advancement to Petty Officer before travelling to Perth to join the crew of the cruiser HMAS Sydney. The main draft of 350 men had already left and he was due to leave 4 days later. Whilst waiting for the train at Spencer St Station Melbourne Syd and 12 ratings decided to have a drink at a Pub across the road. One drink led to another and they arrived back at the station just in time to see the train disappearing down the track. Big trouble awaited them at Flinders when they reported back. They were given a stern talking and booked on the next available train. Because their papers had already been forwarded on, punishment was deferred and left for the Captain of the Sydney to administer.

Another train was not available until 3 days later and Syd's group arrived at Fremantle to find that the HMAS Sydney had hastily sailed from Fremantle the previous night to intercept a German Raider named the Kormoran. Shortly after when the HMAS Sydney went missing, Syd and 2 others were sent to the Wireless Hill Coastal Radio Station to scan the airwaves for signals from the Sydney. However after 10 days of continuous 24 hours monitoring, no signals were heard and they were recalled to HMAS Leeuwin when it was learnt that survivors from the Kormoran had landed at Carnarvon and that the Sydney had been lost with all hands. This loss is one of Syd's saddest memories of his war service.

continues part 2 next issue.

Correction – Post & Telecom Museum

It was stated in the last issue of the ***Morsecodian Messenger*** that telecommunication artifacts were damaged in a fire at the Post & Telecom museum at 78 Murray Street Perth. Although this seems to be a common belief, it is incorrect. The fire occurred in the museum at the so-called GPO annex on the corner of Wellington Street and Forrest Place on the 7th September 1978, and destroyed some items while others suffered damage either from the fire or from smoke. Amongst those items entirely destroyed were original drawings of the inter-colonial telegraph line and the Perth underground cabling system (circa 1914). Several sounders complete with resonators and stands, together with several keys were damaged beyond repair. The collection was then moved to the West Perth post office where it was stored for the next 6 months. During this time restoration of items was diligently carried out by museum personnel. Also the postal workshop was able to produce replicas of the damaged sounders and keys. The museum was then relocated at 78 Murray Street and opened on 12th February 1979. Australia Post withdrew from this Murray Street museum in 1982.

In 1988 a decision was made to replace the displays with a more modern exhibition so the artifacts were removed, packed in boxes and put into storage. At the same time the façade of the building was undergoing an upgrade. It was whilst this upgrade was in progress that vandals, climbed scaffolding, entered the building and turned on the fire hoses on the third floor. These were left on overnight and caused extensive flooding, particularly to the ground floor where the museum had been situated.

It was then (to cut the story short) that Telecom, following examinations, reports and recommendations, concluded that it should not be involved in the museum 'business' and having the same things displayed in various states was wasteful and unnecessary. Subsequently the Perth museum's artifact collection was to be either sent to a central collection in Melbourne (not a museum) or given to responsible organizations in WA. These actions were taken without any discussion with people who had donated items for display. Thus there is ill feeling amongst those who had handed over such items.

We are reliably informed that no morse telegraphy artifacts were given away in WA and that before being sent to Melbourne, a selection of the best and most representative of these artifacts were withdrawn and kept in Perth. Whether they have since been dispatched to Melbourne is unknown.

Morsemen on the Internet.

Amendment. Max Bowen

maxbowen@optusnet.com.au

Barrie Field writes:-

Frank Macrae in Parkes NSW has been sent the late Frank Fletcher's dial-up set on a "on-loan" agreement.
He's an enthusiastic morsecodian.

A Snippet from the 50's

The testing officer at the CTO Perth was going on leave and a relief was necessary. The job was not appealing to many as it was boring with few penalty payments.
The supervisors were having a hard job finding a suitable person. One supervisor hopefully approached the 'Colonel'.

Supervisor : " Ken, we are trying to find a suitable person to take over as testing officer for a few weeks. What do you know about the test desk?"

'Colonel': " Is that, that thing over in the corner?"

Supervisor: " Err, yes Ken, look, err, don't worry, I've just thought of someone else who may be suitable ".

The 'Colonel' didn't get the job.

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Meetings are held on the 3rd Monday in February, June and October each year in the Hyde Park Hotel North Perth.
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Vale Frank Silva. It is with regret that we record the passing of Frank Silva. Frank was one of our more recent members and was a radio operator with the United States Navy. We extend sincere sympathy to his family.
We also record the death of Trevor Hopkins of Cunderdin, the son of morsecodian Colin and Dallas Hopkins.
We extend our sincere sympathy.