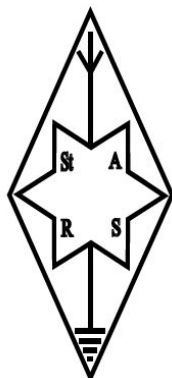


STARLITE

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE STOURBRIDGE AND DISTRICT A.R.S.



**G6OI
G6SRS**



ISSUE: JULY 2019



G4CVH

**STOURBRIDGE & DISTRICT AMATEUR RADIO SOCIETY
INCORPORATING
OLD SWINFORD HOSPITAL SCHOOL RADIO CLUB**

MEETINGS HELD AT

**OLDSWINFORD HOSPITAL SCHOOL
HEATH LANE
STOURBRIDGE
[8:00 TO 10:00 PM]**

VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME

**THE SOCIETY HOLDS ITS FULL MEETINGS
ON THE 1ST AND 3RD MONDAYS EACH MONTH**

RSGB AFFILIATED SOCIETY

STARLITE

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<http://g6oi.ross-lewis.co.uk/index.html>

StARS Facebook Page:-
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/stourbridge.ars/>

All correspondence/enquiries should
be addressed to the Hon Secretary at:-

StARS
c/o The Mill House
21 Mill Lane
Blakedown
Kidderminster
DY10 3ND

Forthcoming Meetings

July 1 st	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
July 8 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
July 15 th	Main Meeting – Subject t.b.a.
July 22 nd	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
August 5 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
August 12 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
August 19 th	Main Meeting – Subject t.b.a.
August 26 th	Bank Holiday – No Meeting.
September 2 nd	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
September 9 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
October 7 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
October 21 st	Main Meeting – Subject t.b.a.
November 4 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
November 18 th	Main Meeting – Subject t.b.a.

Editor's Comment

Another month has passed and, once again, I have not received any news or other correspondence from the majority of members or Committee of the Society. This includes the question I asked about FT8/FT4. I'm wondering if I would be more successful by using a crystal ball to find out what's going on!

I did receive one item, though, from regular contributor, Jim G4WAO, about 175 years of Morse code. I found some more articles in a similar vein. I hope you find them interesting.

I understand the annual BBQ was a success, enjoyed by the attendees and that the weather was favourable. It's a shame I couldn't be there, but I was expecting delivery of a motor car and had no insurance on my old vehicle.

Keith MØHPY has, recently, been taking names for SSB Field Day. He is working out a provisional operating schedule for those interested in taking part, whether as operators or loggers. There is, also, talk of using a different type of aerial for this year's event, with fan dipoles and Cobweb being mentioned. This is an ongoing consideration and I believe more news will be known in the near future.

For some considerable time I have been listening on 2m & 70cms and I am constantly surprised at the lack of activity on these two bands. Of course, 70cms has always been a "quiet" band, most activity being on weekends for contests or other /P operation, but 2m used to be full of activity, on both FM and SSB, at most times of the day or evening. Is this due to the advent of digital modes, where operators appear to stay on one frequency only to make their contacts? Or is it for some other reason? I, and others, haven't gone to the digital side and have no intention of doing so, when we have perfectly good "traditional" modes to use. Most days I hear the same few stations talking to their, presumably, only friend. And when did I last hear a Club member on analogue? I honestly can't remember, but it must be at least three or four years ago! So what is the remedy? In the past we had a thriving Club net on 2m. Would it be conceivable to *attempt* to revive this, or would it be a non-starter? I really don't know the answer – do you? I would be interested to hear your views on this topic.

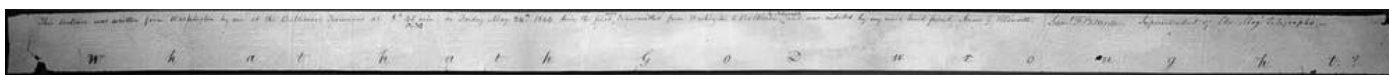
Please remember that you have the right to reply (in writing only, please) about these, or any other topic. It would be most gratefully received and may be published in these pages. Please send them to the Editor at g4xom@g6oi.org.uk

Morse code marks 175 years and counting

The first message sent by Morse code's dots and dashes across a long distance traveled from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore on Friday, May 24, 1844 – 175 years ago. It signaled the first time in human history that complex thoughts could be communicated at long distances almost instantaneously. Until then, people had to have face-to-face conversations; send coded messages through drums, smoke signals and semaphore systems; or read printed words.

Thanks to Samuel F.B. Morse, communication changed rapidly, and has been changing ever faster since. He invented the electric telegraph in 1832. It took six more years for him to standardize a code for communicating over telegraph wires. In 1843, Congress gave him US\$30,000 to string wires between the nation's capital and nearby Baltimore. When the line was completed, he conducted a public demonstration of long-distance communication.

Morse wasn't the only one working to develop a means of communicating over the telegraph, but his is the one that has survived. The wires, magnets and keys used in the initial demonstration have given way to smartphones' on-screen keyboards, but Morse code has remained fundamentally the same, and is still – perhaps surprisingly – relevant in the 21st century. Although I have learned, and relearned, it many times as a Boy Scout, an amateur radio operator and a pilot, I continue to admire it and strive to master it.



Samuel F.B. Morse's own handwritten record of the first Morse code message ever sent, on May 24, 1844

Easy sending

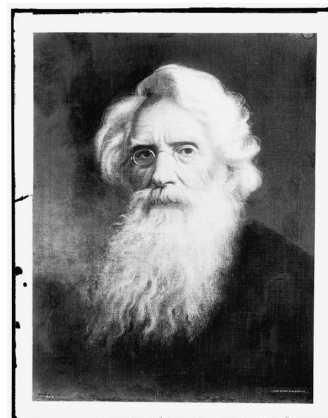
Morse's key insight in constructing the code was considering how frequently each letter is used in English. The most commonly used letters have shorter symbols: "E," which appears most often, is signified by a single "dot." By contrast, "Z," the least used letter in English, was signified by the much longer and more complex "dot-dot-dot (pause) dot."

In 1865, the International Telecommunications Union changed the code to account for different character frequencies in other languages. There have been other tweaks since, but "E" is still "dot," though "Z" is now "dash-dash-dot-dot."

The reference to letter frequency makes for extremely efficient communications: Simple words with common letters can be transmitted very quickly. Longer words can still be sent, but they take more time.

Going wireless

The communications system that Morse code was designed for – analogue connections over metal wires that carried a lot of interference and needed a clear on-off type signal to be heard – has evolved significantly.



The first big change came just a few decades after Morse's demonstration. In the late 19th century, Guglielmo Marconi invented [radio-telegraph equipment](#), which could send Morse code over radio waves, rather than wires.

The shipping industry loved this new way to communicate with ships at sea, either from ship to ship or to shore-based stations. By 1910, U.S. law [required many passenger ships in U.S. waters](#) to carry wireless sets for sending and receiving messages.

After the Titanic sank in 1912, an international agreement required some ships to assign a person to [listen for radio distress signals](#) at all times. That same agreement designated "SOS" – "[dot-dot-dot dash-dash-dash dot-dot-dot](#)" – as the international distress signal, not as an abbreviation for anything but because it was a [simple pattern](#) that was easy to remember and transmit. The [Coast Guard discontinued monitoring](#) in 1995. The requirement that ships monitor for distress signals was [removed in 1999](#), though the U.S. Navy still teaches at least some [sailors to read, send and receive Morse code](#).



The arrow points at the chart label indicating the Morse code equivalent to the 'BAL' signal for a radio beacon near Baltimore

Aviators also use Morse code to identify automated navigational aids. These are radio beacons that help pilots follow routes, traveling from one transmitter to the next on aeronautical charts. They [transmit their identifiers](#) – such as "BAL" for Baltimore – in Morse code. Pilots often learn to recognize familiar-sounding patterns of beacons in areas they fly frequently.

There is a [thriving community](#) of amateur radio operators who treasure Morse code, too. Among amateur radio operators, Morse code is a cherished tradition tracing back to the earliest days of radio. Some of them may have begun in the Boy Scouts, which has made learning Morse variably [optional or required](#) over the years. The Federal Communications Commission used to require all licensed amateur radio operators to demonstrate proficiency in Morse code, but that [ended in 2007](#). The FCC does still issue [commercial licenses that require Morse](#) proficiency, but no jobs require it anymore.

Blinking Morse

Because its signals are so simple – on or off, long or short – Morse code can also be used by flashing lights. Many navies around the world use blinker lights to communicate from ship to ship when they don't want to use radios or when radio equipment breaks down. The U.S. Navy is actually testing a system that would let a user [type words and convert it to blinker light](#). A receiver would read the flashes and convert it back to text.

Skills learned in the military [helped an injured man communicate](#) with his wife across a rocky beach using only his flashlight in 2017.

Other Morse messages

Perhaps the most notable modern use of Morse code was by [Navy pilot Jeremiah Denton](#), while he was a prisoner of war in Vietnam. In 1966, about one year into a nearly eight-year imprisonment, Denton was forced by his North Vietnamese captors to participate in a video interview about his treatment. While the camera focused on his face, he blinked the Morse code symbols for "torture," [confirming for the first time](#) U.S. fears about the treatment of service members held captive in North Vietnam.

See the associated video here: https://youtu.be/ioC_F8FvviM

[Blinking Morse code is slow](#), but has also [helped people with medical conditions](#) that prevent them from [speaking or communicating](#) in other ways. A number of devices – including [iPhones and Android smartphones](#) – can be set up to accept Morse code input from people with limited motor skills.

There are still many ways people can [learn Morse code](#), and [practice](#) using it, even online. In emergency situations, it can be the only mode of communications that will get through. Beyond that, there is an art to Morse code, a rhythmic, musical fluidity to the sound. Sending and receiving it can have a soothing or meditative feeling, too, as the person focuses on the flow of individual characters, words and sentences. Overall, sometimes the simplest tool is all that's needed to accomplish the task.

Like 'human hair in the ocean': Why ham radio still has an enduring appeal

It's not just a hobby. In a crisis, amateur operators provide a lifeline

Larry Horlick still marvels when he thinks about what happens when he turns on his ham radio.

"I'm taking my voice and that radio is converting it into an electrical signal and the amount of electrical energy that he is receiving is so minuscule," said Horlick, a Coley's Point resident who is one of a group of radio enthusiasts in Conception Bay North.

"It is like a human hair in an ocean and that fascinates me to this day."

Amateur radio was around for nearly a century before the internet, and to this day is the only form of communication that does not depend on a network.

Even in a world of smartphones, Facebook and texting, ham radio still holds a mystique for many people. More than two million people around the world still use the technology. Of the estimated 40,000 users in Canada, as many as 1,500 live in Newfoundland and Labrador.

An amateur radio user can connect with anyone practically around the world. The only countries that do not allow amateur radio operators are North Korea and Yemen.

The legacy, and appeal, of Marconi

If amateur radio has a prophet, it surely would be Guglielmo Marconi, the communications pioneer who in proved — in St. John's — that radio waves follow the curvature of the Earth by bouncing off the ionosphere.

No longer did telegraph wires or "ground waves" bind communication. Now it was possible to talk to anyone in the world who also had a transmitter and receiver.

"When other hams discover you are from Newfoundland, they want to know about Signal Hill," said Horlick, referring to the place where Marconi received a wireless transmission in December 1901.

Carbonear ham radio operator David Parsons agreed the allure is strong with colleagues.

"A friend of mine visited me last year and that is one of the things he had to do — go to Signal Hill and see where it all started," Parsons said.



Right in the middle of the action

Geographically, Newfoundland is in the centre of a lot of amateur radio activity, because it happens to be between Europe and the rest of North America.

"We're centrally located — you've got everything all around us here," Parsons said, pointing to a screen to see which parts of the world are likely to be reachable. "It's a really good spot for radio."

For many enthusiasts, amateur radio is a hobby. They log their daily "QSOs," or contacts. While talking to other people around the world, they exchange weather, call signs or other information.

There are contests on who can make the most contacts over a certain amount of time. Some even talk to astronauts on the International Space Station.

However, this hobby has a serious side as well. In the event of natural disasters or other emergencies — when more conventional forms of communication go down — amateur radio operators are called on to help.

In the summer of 2017, for example, damage to fibre optic cables meant that internet and

phone services failed in much of Atlantic Canada.

Parsons and other amateur operators helped keep communications open. They were on alert to help ambulances and other emergency personnel locate people in distress or to just relay information from one station to another.

The incident proved that a communications system that gets taken for granted can be vulnerable.

"The internet, the world wide web, is just that. It's a web of interconnected signals that are transmitted by satellite," said Parsons, adding that the chance of failure becomes greater as the world becomes more interconnected with Wi-Fi, satellites and cellular towers.

A simple form of communications

The beauty of amateur radio is its simplicity: one radio talking to another.

"All you need is a power source, a transceiver and an antenna," said Parsons. "Power can be in the form of a car battery, a gas power generator or solar panels."

Parsons has also helped out with other cases farther from home.

During the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, Parsons helped relay radio traffic from Israel and sent it to stations in the United States.

Parsons and Horlick both belong to BARK — the Baccalieu Amateur Radio Klub — which operates in the Conception Bay north area. The club holds an annual field day every year where about a dozen local operators use only generated power to make contact with hundreds of other operators worldwide.

The Society of Newfoundland Amateur Radio — or SORNA — is another organization that is trying to recruit new members through education and community outreach.

Becoming an amateur radio operator, though, it is not as simple as buying the equipment. After all, a ham radio is capable of operating in the commercial radio spectrum, where ships and air traffic controls operate.

Operators require a licence, and the licensing process is a verification of your skill.

"You really got to know what you are doing, so you do not interfere with their operations," said Horlick. "That could be very dangerous."

LOL in the age of the telegraph

From “lol” to “brb,” the internet and text messaging gave rise to a unique form of short form language – “textspeak” – in which almost all of us are well-versed.

But long before the internet revolutionized communication, humans experienced a different sort of technological innovation: the telegraph.

In 1837, the first commercial telegraphs were released by Samuel Morse, William Fothergill Cooke and Charles Wheatstone, and this machine – as journalist Tom Standage argues in his book [The Victorian Internet](#) – mirrored the impact that the internet has had in modern times.

The result was an entirely new way to wield language – one that, in a number of ways, resembles today’s textspeak.

Communicating at speeds unheard of

Using electricity, the telegraph could communicate quickly over long distances – at speeds unheard of. Soon it was developed for both government and commercial use. And because we were suddenly able to transmit interactions over large distances, new types of language were created to fit the medium.

There were several ways to communicate over these distances, including moving bars up and down or connecting one wire to each letter of the alphabet.



An 1809 drawing of the electric telegraph.

One of the forms of communication developed for the telegraph that’s still familiar today is Morse code, which used sequences of dots and dashes (or dits and dahs) to represent letters and numbers. More than just a cipher, Morse code had its own short forms and abbreviations to make messages as concise as possible; in this way, it’s an early predecessor to today’s textspeak.

Message and data rates may apply

Telegrams were written communications in Morse code sent over a wire (or, later, radio waves) across great distances, which were then translated into written English for the recipients.

But if you wanted to send a telegram, companies like the [Electric Telegraph Company](#) and Western Union charged by the word, with messages of 10 words costing as much as 10 cents (or US\$2 in today’s money) – significantly more than current standard texting rates!

So as you can imagine – just like with modern character-constrained mediums like Twitter – people developed short forms to get their message across in as little space (and, consequently, for as little money) as possible. [Numerous guides](#) to the telegraphic codes were published.

THE TELEGRAPHIC CODEX.

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The index of a Morse code guide from 1879.

Many of these shortenings look familiar even to us today. Take [one account](#) from an 1890 New York Times article, which was uncovered by the blog [Sunday Magazine](#).

The article details telegrams sent between two telegraph operators who had never met each other, but had developed their own lingo for their personal messages.

You can see a short form “Hw r u ts mng?” which can be parsed as “How are you this morning?” It looks a little bit like a long text message today, or a heavily truncated tweet from one person to another.

Some codes from this era remain with us today, including the distress call SOS, which was first introduced in 1905 as part of German government radio regulations.

Throughout its history, Morse code has undergone its own evolution as different people started to use it for different purposes. In a [2008 talk](#), historian Jason Scott describes this evolution from the telegraph to amateur radio, a modern hobby that involves using radios to communicate with people around the world. As Morse code was adapted to be used in these new formats, there were considerable innovations in communication.

Referring to it as the “first social network,” Scott describes how amateur radio (sometimes called ham radio) operators sent each other messages and updates using codes. They also used this technology to send each other images over the radio using sequences of characters and codes that were intended to be decoded and printed out.

These images, sent by slow-scan television methods (which stemmed from similar technology used [to send images from space exploration](#), often included the call signs of their sender and other jargon, and might be an early analog to online avatars or user profile images.

Thus, as people immersed themselves in technological innovations, they adapted their language to new forms and uses.

HI HI: LOL of the 19th century?

Indeed, many of these patterns developed by amateur radio users are familiar to those who use textspeak or online lingo. Shortly after writing my article on [the history of LOL](#), I received an email from [Ralph Wallio](#), an amateur radio enthusiast.

He shared with me the existence of abbreviations in Morse code, specifically one for laughter. The sequence HI HI,, is a short form for laughter and is a favorite among amateur radio communicators. It could even be seen as [an early predecessor to LOL](#).

[Some sources](#) speculate that this particular sequence originated as an attempt to imitate the sound of a person chuckling. HI HI is quite similar to traditional text representations of laughter hehe and haha, which have been in use [since the time of Chaucer and Shakespeare](#). Wallio suggested that using HA HA in Morse code would be read as - -, which would be more time-consuming to transmit, hence the use of HI HI instead.

It turns out that Morse code today has [quite a few of these short forms](#), and some of them will be familiar to those who chat online or send text messages today – not the forms, necessarily, but the things that are being abbreviated.

“Thank you,” which is often reduced to “ty” in text messaging and other online communication, appears as “TU” in Morse code. “Please” appears as “PLS” in Morse Code, and “plz” in many forms of communication online. The phonetic reductions of “you” to “u” and “are” to “r” are represented in Morse Code as well.

Short forms have existed throughout human history of using different mediums to communicate, and the short forms themselves are representative of the possibilities that the medium affords.

Some of these have withstood the test of time, and some haven’t; nonetheless, it goes to show how adaptable language is, and how communication technology almost always breeds new forms of writing.

A Brain Teaser

You have 5 cows, 2 dogs and 1 cat. How many legs do you have??

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