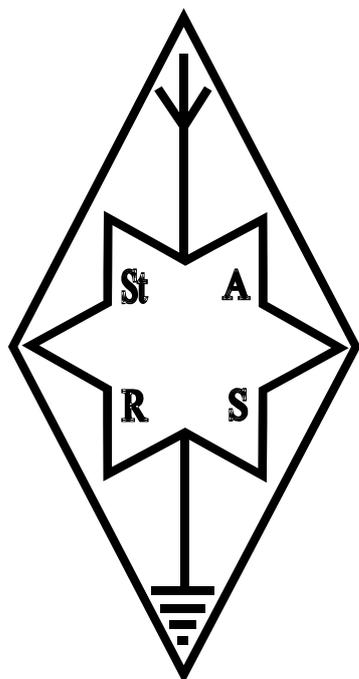# STARLITE

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The Newsletter for Members and Friends of

Stourbridge and District Amateur Radio Society

incorporating

Old Swinford Hospital School Radio Club

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ISSUE
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Old Swinford Hospital

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Visitors always welcome	The Society holds its full meetings on the
MEETINGS	1st and 3rd Monday of each Month at **Old Swinford Hospital School** **Heath Lane** **Stourbridge** **(8.00pm – 10.00pm)** Additionally the shack is open during the same times on the intermediate Monday's

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

John Clarke M1EJG

(01562) 700513

honsec@g6oi.org.uk

STARS Web Site

WAP enabled ??

STARS

C/O The Mill House

21 Mill Lane

Blakedown

Kidderminster

DY10 3ND

www.g6oi.org.uk

www.g6oi.org.uk/wap/index.wml

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

A special thank you goes to Adrian Simms for the visit he arranged to Stourbridge Fire Station. Thanks also to Bernie from Green Watch. (I think it was Green Watch). See below "Fire Station Visit" courtesy of our roving reporter – Malcolm.

This month sees a new feature where individual club members tell us how they became interested in Amateur Radio. This month Mark has kindly volunteered the first article. It is hoped that each club member will contribute their own article.

As always I would be interested to receive contributions and feedback on any of the articles. I aim to make Starlite available for the first day of each month, so please can you submit any articles in time for this deadline.

Regards

Adrian Bryan (G0NLA)

EARLY INTERNET EXPERIENCES

Background - Computer to Computer Communication

Back in the early 1970s only very large multinational companies, government departments or such organisations as the CIA or FBI were able to afford computer to computer data communication via telephone lines and most of this took place in the USA. There was limited use of data communications within universities which was often funded by grants from industry. In the latter part of the 1970's computers and computer to computer data communication was starting to become more widespread in countries outside the USA and filtered down to medium sized companies.

When I worked in computing during the 1970s attachment of a modem to an IBM mainframe computer required a unit the size of a large chest freezer. This unit could support two leased telephone lines running at 2400bps! There would often a be a lead time of 12-18 months for a leased line from the Post Office and the only type of modems that were allowed were supplied by the Post Office. I don't have access to the cost of this but it would have been very expensive in those days and one could not go elsewhere if one didn't like the price. The Post Office had the luxury of being a monopoly and IBM were making huge profits which could only come from one place – the customer. Data communication could take place over an ordinary dial-up line and speeds of 2400bps were possible, but not reliable and more often a speed of 1200bps was used. As line transmission speeds were slow, this would require longer connection times which would increase the chance of a failure in transmission.

During the 1980s the Post Office monopoly was broken up and British Telecom and the Post Office were formed with British Telecom later being privatised. This gradually resulted in a more open and competitive UK telecommunications market with reduced lead times for leased lines and reduced costs. This was further accelerated with the introduction by BT of fibre optic trunk lines. In 1981, IBM launched it's own Personal Computer as a challenge to small personal computers that were available at the time, such as the Commodore PET, Atari, TRS-80 and Apple II. The computer industry at the the time seemed to split between favouring either the more expensive synchronous and less expensive asynchronous modem.

Computer manufacturers tended to develop their own proprietary solutions for data communications. This made good business sense for the manufacturer but tended to lock the customer to a supplier and greatly hindered interconnectivity. Use of TCP/IP was not encouraged by the likes of corporate mainframe suppliers such as IBM. whereas Unix and TCP/IP were non-proprietary and favoured by academia and the home and lower budget end of the market.

During the late 1980's dial-up modems became cheaper, faster and more affordable for home computer users and I bought my first US Robotics 9600 bps dial-up modem for around £100.

The Start of Mass Internet Access

So the scene was almost set for mass internet access to start to take off, but not quite, as the only way to access the internet was possibly from one's workplace or an educational establishment. In 1992 Cliff Stanford saw a business opportunity in the UK and Demon Internet was founded. This offered dial-up users access to the Internet for £10 per month. So what did you get for your £10? A floppy disk which held a zipped program that talked to your modem via your pc's serial port and then to your home telephone which connected via a POP (point of presence – more on this later) to

the internet.

The software on offer to access the Internet was the KA9Q NOS (network operating system?) which was developed originally by the radio amateur Phil Kam. The software was altered and modified for different computer makes and gave a command line access to the Internet. Starting KA9Q would start up a dialler program and this would supply your ISP with your user-name and password and with luck connect you up to the Internet. The best way to visualise this is to imagine a cut down copy of Unix available on your home pc

So what could you do with command line access to the Internet?

One thing you could not do was start up Internet Explorer or any other browser for that matter as they had not been invented yet!

The first step after getting access to the internet was to obtain basic software. Often a first download would be a program to read usenet news. To download a news reader a good start point would be the Demon's own Internet Web site. One would FTP to the demon internet site. See below for a typical interaction:-

```
ka9q> ftp demon.co.uk
Connected to ftp.demon.co.uk
220 Demon FTP Service
user> anonymous
password> often you would put your e-mail address here
Welcome to the Demon Internet FTP Server
> cd public
> cd NNTP
cd> Windows
> binary
200> Type set to I
> hash
> get nntp_install.exe
####################
226 Transfer complete
185587 bytes sent in 35 seconds
ftp>  bye
ka9q>
```

Incidentally, the FTP client program still exists as a DOS Command Line program (run cmd.exe). Start it up and type in ftp and then help to understand what is happening in the the above extract, if you are interested.

You would the run nntp_install.exe and "hey presto" a directory would be created for you on your PC. In the directory there would be numerous files. The first one you would read would be README. There might be an FAQ file, and you would be expected to read the files with care. Forget about viruses, they had not been invented yet and as a matter of principle you would not pay for software or be expected to pay for it! At the time there was no thought of commercial exploitation of the Internet although debates were starting and opinions being aired on various newsgroups. After having read the README and FAQ you would install your NNTP News Reader Program. The next step would be to decide what News Groups you were interested in. When I first

gained access to the Internet there were around 3,200 newsgroups available. Today the number of groups is over 50,000. Linux was being developed at the time and there were large numbers of newsgroups devoted to Linux and aspects of its development. Your internet service provider provided an NNTP (newsgroup server program).

The news facility would allow you to access "news" items that were of interest and were grouped by topic and the usenet facility enabled discussion between groups with similar and often narrow interests. The reason for the subject matter being specific was to avoid having to wade through subjects that did not interest you. You would be expected to read the FAQ for a news group to avoid asking questions that had already been asked and answered. If you did commit the sin of asking questions that were in the FAQ the new and inexperienced user would not be treated lightly! Likewise you would be told to RTFM if you had failed to read and act on the README file. A similar facility is available today with Yahoo groups. To receive a newsgroup you would subscribe to that newsgroup. No money changed hands. Subscribing merely indicated your interest in the newsgroup. Similarly when you were no longer interested in the group you would unsubscribe.

Newsgroups fell into two categories – moderated and unmoderated. If a newsgroup dealt with a controversial subject, a slanging match could develop and, whilst it may be mildly interesting short term, it would soon become tiresome or expensive in terms of telephone costs to download. Consequently contentious material was edited out of some newsgroups to avoid unpleasantness and in some cases libellous accusations. Abuse of a busy moderated newsgroup may end up with a user being banned from a newsgroup.

The next program you would be likely to download would be an improved e-mail program. An e-mail would probably not be your first download as you would be unlikely to know anyone else with an e-mail address. However, after seeing various posts in the newsgroups you might build up a list of people you contacted by e-mail. It was easy to use the internet for protracted periods but if you did it was quite likely your dial-up connection would fail within an hour as dial up connections were not particularly robust. At the initial introduction of the Demon ISP dial up costs could be significant as one could only connect via a London or Glasgow telephone number called a Point of Presence. POPs later became more numerous and the cost of phone calls was reduced for me when a Birmingham POP was introduced. The number of telephone lines provided by a POP caused problems as all the lines in the POP were often in use and you would have to wait for a telephone line to become available. Dialling and getting a hung line was also a frequent annoyance.

A common use for the internet today is to search for information. This was possible in the early days by using a program called Gopher (i.e. go for this, or a general dogsbody). You could pass Gopher a subject and it would provide you with a list of possible sources to look into, but it was a poor substitute compared with Yahoo or Google and Gopher was soon superseded by better things.

Enter the Internet Browser

Gradually internet browsers became available, but initially these were character based such as Lynx. However character based browsers soon became dated and graphical browsers such as NCA Mosaic, Samba and Viola became available. Too much graphical web content was counter productive as the speed of a modem was a major limiting factor. Waiting for several minutes for a screen to paint was often not worth the effort. Modem speeds increased in time and US Robotics sold modems with speeds of 9600, 14.4k 32k, 48k, 56k gradually became available. Pictures could be sent by sending text files which were assembled and run through a program which gave you a picture – the name of the program/protocol escapes me. The then infrastructure of the Internet with e-mail, ftp and usenet

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was ideal for cooperative and distributed working and the sharing of ideas. Usenet use and FTP use declined and the user World Wide Web now assisted by Microsoft Internet Explorer version one took off. Remember though that Microsoft was initially very slow to see the possibilities that the Internet could offer. Modem speeds improved and faster internet access, more Internet Service Providers saw the commercial potential of the Internet.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

As usual, all errors and inaccuracies are mine.

Adrian Bryan – G0NLA

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HOW I STARTED IN AMATEUR RADIO

Before I even got into my teens, I noticed books at Dudley Library on the subject of Amateur Radio. It all looked very impressive. Being able to talk to people not just in the immediate locality, but anywhere in the world and on the radio! How wonderful I thought, but not knowing quite how to start and how much it would cost anyway, it gradually got put on the back burner for a few years.

Some years later, when I was working in West Bromwich as a young Apprentice Audio Engineer, I became friendly with a colleague who was a Radio Amateur. He advised me to take the RAE at my local college in Dudley, so in 1986 I signed up and later on in May, I sat the exam.

It was while I was at the Black Country Talking Magazine, that one of our reporters had heard about there being a Lady President at the Stourbridge & District Amateur Radio Society, which of course was our very own Eileen Tracey!

After the studio interview, which I was Recording Engineer for, Eileen and I got chatting and it was then that she invited me to come over and see the club, and that is how my Amateur Radio got fully under way. Apart from absence due to personal circumstances of 15 years, I otherwise never looked back and enjoyed every minute of it, and met some amazing people and have an ever increasing circle of friends.

This is why I would have no hesitation in recommending Amateur Radio as a great hobby to anyone!

Mark Hedges - G7EDZ

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FIRE STATION VISIT

Thanks this month go to Adrian Simms for arranging the visit to Stourbridge and very interesting talk from Berne.

It was interesting to see the varied amount of cutting equipment that is packed into a fire tender and to have it explained in detail. The cab is pictured above with its large amount of communications and computer equipment.

Photos courtesy of Malcolm Palmer.

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YOUR COMMITTEE

Hon. President	JAMES	G7HEZ	
Vice President	ADRIAN SIMMS	M3HBA	
Hon. Secretary	JOHN	M1EJG	(01562) 700513
Hon. Treasurer	JOHN	G8UAE	
Committee Members	NICK	G6DQN	
	MALCOLM	G8BOP	
	ANDREW	M6APJ	
	RICHARD	M1DBC	
	ADRIAN BRYAN	G0NLA	

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

It should be noted that the Shack will be open every Monday evening unless shown otherwise in the Calendar

September	Sat 3rd	SSB Field Day
	Sun 4th	SSB Field Day
	Mon 5th	Informal - On air or natter
	Mon 19th	Echolink and Internet Gateways (Richard Newton)
	Mon 26th	Open Shack Night - On air or natter
October	Mon 1st	Informal - On air or natter
	Mon 8th	Open Shack Night - On air or natter
	Mon 15th	Talk on the Sinking of the Titanic (to be confirmed)
	Mon 22nd	Open Shack Night - On air or natter
	Mon 29th	Open Shack Night - On air or natter
November	Mon 5th	Informal - On air or natter
	Mon 12th	Open Shack Night - On air or natter
	Mon 19th	Club Surplus Sale
	Mon 21st	Open Shack Night - On air or natter