

A Potted History of FISTS

Transcript from M0RSE video of George G3ZQS FISTS #1 and Bill G2AKK FISTS #2 in 1991.

The video can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0evhoeZF6ao>

George: Hi Bill. It's over with. M0RSE. I'll bet you're sending that in your sleep now aren't you?

Bill: Yeh, yeh very often. Birds whistle it now, anyway, outside.

George: Yeh I know, aye. I keep tending to send it myself you know when I get on the air.

Anyhow I've stuck together a potted history - I don't know if you have heard this one or not, but just a guide to the club, and apart from that it will give this queer beggar an intro. into his tape, won't it?

After several years of sending slow Morse broadcasts on 2 meters FM, I was well aware of the frustrations of those who were burning the midnight oil in an endeavour not only to learn the code, but also to put what they learn into practice.

Perhaps one of the most popular features of the broadcasts was Friday evenings, when I would push the speed up to 18, 20, 22 and 25 words a minute, for the more advanced of my listeners.

Even these however were nervous about making their first, live, QSO, and there were quite a few 2 meter skeds. arranged to introduce them to procedures.

Could it be, that it was this, which was frightening off would-be Morse operators, rather than the demands of increasing copying speeds to the standard 12 words a minute required of them?

I listened long and carefully and apart from the novice allocation on 15 and 10 meters, there was precious little happening much at below 25 words a minute.

And these people were being unintentionally dissuaded from using CW by the more experienced fellow members - I beg your pardon - the more experienced fellow amateurs.

QRS was a lone voice in a QRQ Tower of Babel.

They were surrounded by speed merchants and aspiring speed merchants, screaming at each other with speeds varying between 25 and 45 words a minute, and to make things worse they seemed to have no time for their more pedantic brethren.

I started to ask a few pertinent questions of the CW operators I knew and it did not take long to reach the conclusion that, like myself, they were concerned about this.

The only trouble is that, so far, no one had made any serious attempt to do anything about it, and from that point on the idea of FISTS, a club in which veterans would take novices under their wing, was born.

It had to wait until I was closer to retirement so that I could devote the necessary amount of attention to the club.

But September 1987 found me touting for members at the rally held at the University of Lancaster. We haunted the bands and within a month the membership was showing signs of growth.

In September the following year, we had over 300 members.

From that point on the growth curve was steady, and relentless, and now at the time of compiling this brief history, we are well on our way to a 1000 members throughout the world.

Interest in Morse by newly licensed amateurs has gladdened the heart of many of our more experienced members.

Newcomers were steered gently away from the less salubrious operating practises, which sadly enough are still common enough, and it's made plain to all, good manners and consideration for others are expected. There is no minimum speed requirement. Membership of any national society is not demanded. Indeed, apart from the above, and a love of Morse, there are no other requisites for membership

FISTS is peopled by those whose love of CW fosters the urge to preserve it in the face of those, who, not understanding the joy and satisfaction to be had from its use, seek to replace it with techniques that fall far short of the efficiency and simplicity of Morse.

Amateur radio is firmly anchored to the mode from the very beginning of its history, and with the help of yourself and others like you, it will always remain so.

Our subs. are modest. We offer you a truly superb QSL bureau, a monthly newsletter. We have a computer chapter, club QSL cards. Ah, what more need I say.

I reckon that'll pull 'em in Bill, does thee not?

Bill: Yep, should pull 'em in George. The FISTS CW Club serves a very useful purpose, as far as keeping people interested in Morse is concerned, because many people tend of course to get through their necessary 12 words a minute, and then put the key in the cupboard, and I feel this is a practice that we should look down on a little bit and encourage these people to keep the key in front of the rig, and use it.

Because, of course, the thing is of course that Morse itself is basically a living memorial to Sam Morse, and, although Sam's been away from us for a long long time...

George: 200 years in fact

Bill: Yeh, 200 years since he was born, but is, the code still survives, and will continues to survive, as long as there are radio amateurs.

The situation is of course that, with radio amateurs, it's one of the things that most radio amateurs are interested in, and will last for a very long time.

There are many people of course who could be asked if they knew who Sam Morse was, a lot of them

would scratch their heads and find it a little difficult to find an answer. But ask any member of the armed services, or radio amateur, who is involved in radio communications, and they will probably tell you, he was the man who invented the Morse code, a string of dots and dashes that can convey intelligence over various distances by radio or light, semaphore flags. George tells me semaphore flags are no longer being used...

George: Not for Morse.

Bill: Not for Morse. So, anyway, they were all right from ship-to-ship where they could see each other.

In spite of technological advancing systems of signalling, the Morse code has stood the test of time, and is used in many of the service establishment, as a back-up to the more sophisticated systems, as intelligence can be conveyed using simple equipment, and a Morse telegraph key.

But what of the man himself? Sam Morse was born on April 27, 1791, in Charlestown, Massachusetts. Not a good scholar, but an excellent artist, having learned to paint during his spell at Yale University.

Graduated from Yale in 1810, and came to England to further his study of painting. It's quite true to say that a lot of people both in radio, particularly in radio, and the evolution of radio, well, wireless as it was at that time, appear to be not particularly good scholars, but to be people who had an idea and went after it.

George: Like thee and me Bill, a bit thick.

Bill: Yeh. During this time, Morse became interested in the new invention of electricity and the telegraph system. Devised the idea of using a switch and an electromagnet to send signals over long distances.

His first application of this of course was to put something right across America, and this was used, was very quickly picked up by the railway systems.

He and a friend devised the system of dots and dashes, which with some slight alterations is in use today, the modifications being made when the code was accepted internationally as a method of communication in 1851, with most of the original code being retained.

Originally the code was a little bit different in some letters, and looking at it against today's code, it probably was a little bit clumsy to handle and wasn't fast enough for what the railways and people like that desired.

27th April 1991 is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Samuel Morse. Radio amateurs worldwide are celebrating the event by putting amateur stations on the air using special call signs which have some relationships with the Morse code.

Because to obtain a Class A license the radio amateur has to be able to read and send Morse at 12 words a

minute, quite a few being dedicated brass-pounders, who use no other system, and contact amateurs worldwide by use of Sam Morse's invention.

Radio Society of Great Britain by request from the Darwen Amateur Radio Club, and FISTS CW Club, applied for a special callsign for the event.

Department of Trade and Industry had agreed that there was no major reason why the callsign of M0RSE could not be used, as the letter M was allocated to Great Britain in the international listings, and after continuous contact, the M0RSE callsign was allocated to the Darwen clubs.

It was very interested that we went after this one particularly, because, even to the uninitiated when they look at it, it spells Morse - it was as simple as that.

Although Darwen could be called a small club by comparison with some of the other clubs in the South, it has a fairly long history, being constituted in 1946, merged with Blackburn, which finally became the East Lancs Amateur Radio Club.

1984, a perusal of the current call book produced 30 plus amateurs in the Darwen area. A meeting was called and the Darwen Amateur Radio Club was reformed with around 28 members.

It's in quite a healthy position, runs 6 or 7 events each year, and is strong enough to hold most of the other entrants up from its position near the bottom of the list of contesters, working on the theory that if there was no club at the bottom, there would be no club at the top.

But M0RSE is the second prestigious callsign that Darwen has held, as GV2VED was used by the club for the 40th anniversary of VE Day, and the club is at present looking at future possibilities.

As Darwen were the first applicants for the special callsign, the 26th, 27th and 28th of April were allocated to them, the 27th being the actual date of the anniversary.

It is expected there will be no shortage of contacts, as amateurs worldwide will be keen to collect one of the special QSL cards, which will be issued to mark the event, which is one of the highlights in the history of amateur radio.