



**RAGCHEW**

**MARCH 2019**

## FROM THE EDITOR - G4CIB

The club meetings go from strength to strength with good attendances - there is always a buzz in the room so we must be doing something right!

The recent Foundation and Intermediate exams held at the School had a 100% pass rate so a huge thank-you to Les G0ULH and Cliff G8CQZ for their dedication in tutoring the candidates and all the other volunteers especially the Examination Secretary Anne 2E1GKY.

I'm afraid my radio activity has been sparse since the New Year as Leta and I have been settling into our new Bookshop premises in the Homend Shopping Mall in Ledbury, having moved some 10,000 plus books from Bishops Cleeve to Ledbury, but I made amends by activating Lundy from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> - Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March. Unfortunately the bad weather meant that activity was severely limited - see my report later.

Many thanks to regular "Ragchew" contributors Tony G4HBV and Tom G3XMM for submitting articles for this issue. Tony has been researching the subject of radios in Prisoner of War (POW) camps and once again Tom has uncovered details of an interesting Morse key.

Just to remind members that the RSGB AGM takes place at Jurys Inn Hotel, 245 Broad Street, Birmingham on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April at 12 noon.

As I was putting the finishing touches to this issue. I learnt of the death of Rev George Dobbs G3RJV, founder of the G-QRP Club in the early 1970s. Many years ago when the club met at the Drill Hall in Painswick Road we were lucky enough to book George to give a talk on QRP (low power) operating and after the talk he judged a QRP equipment display put on by the members. I cannot recall which entry he adjudged the winner. Perhaps some of our senior members may remember? George was an inspiration to many amateurs, editing the G-QRP magazine "Sprat" (**S**mall **P**owered **R**adio **A**mateur **T**ransmitters) for many years, also writing articles for Practical Wireless and RadCom. He will be much missed amongst the QRP fraternity.

**73 and good DX!**

**Brian G4CIB**

## A Flying Visit to Lundy by G4CIB

Leta G4RHK and myself have just spent a lively five days on a very windy Lundy in the Bristol Channel. We flew out to the island on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March from Hartland Point in an Agusta 109E Power helicopter operated by Castle Air. Keeping the weight down is a priority, 10kg being the maximum allowed. With my FT817ND, a 3 element 2m SOTA beam, 80m dipole, a collapsible telescopic "roach pole" and ancillary equipment along with personal items, we just crept in under 20kg for the two of us. The plan was to operate on the 2m UKAC contest on the Tuesday evening and on the Thursday evening join in the Club on the Air 80m net.

Unfortunately strong winds prevented me from putting the 2m SOTA beam up when we arrived, but I managed with a struggle to get it set up just before the start of the UKAC event. Twenty minutes after the start, however, the wind was so fierce (reportedly Force 11) that I felt it prudent to take the antenna down having completed only 2 qsos, M0MLZ/P and 2E0VCC, both in IO70 square. For the next few days the wind and rain did not let up, precluding using any outdoor antennas so I had to content myself with 2m FM QSOs via the GB3NC repeater using an indoor whip antenna.

On the Thursday evening about an hour before the GARES COTA net, the wind dropped to almost nothing and I was able to put my 80m dipole up and managed to be heard by most of the club members on the net with the best signal report from Les G0ULH. The noise level on 80m was horrendous so I was amazed that my 5 watts was heard at all. After the net had finished I had a very pleasant 2-way QRP CW QSO with F5NZY, Steph in Paris. Such was the light breeze that I left the antenna up and dismantled it just as dawn was breaking over the island. Soon we were packing our kit up and heading for the safety briefing in the Tavern before being whisked back to the mainland in the same helicopter which had deposited us some five days previously, only this time I was lucky enough to sit up front with the pilot.

Our next visit to the island is late September from 21<sup>st</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> when hopefully we will have more settled weather to do some relaxed /P QRP operating!

## POW RADIOS by Tony G4HBV

POW - Prisoner of War radios provide a fascinating insight into the skills required to build receivers under the restrictions of captivity. During World War Two, in any large body of men, there would be some who possessed the necessary skills, not all of these would be technical because sometimes bribery and blackmail had to be used to get parts.

The only POW receiver I have seen was many years ago in the Imperial War Museum. It had been constructed by an RAF officer, who, if I remember correctly was named Shackleton\*. It was built on a scrap piece of wood and was hidden under floorboards, being tuned by a knitting needle through a hole in the boards.

In the 1980s our club was privileged to have a talk by the late Tom Douglas G3BA, who was a prisoner of the Japanese for most of the War. It was very dangerous for POWs of the Japanese to build receivers as discovery could have meant torture and execution. There is a published account of this happening which I shall describe briefly later. In his talk Tom mentioned his experience of serving under pre-war regular British officers. He was threatened with court-martial after he modified the antenna input of an army radio set to accept a dipole in order to increase its range. His POW camp operated a radio whose batteries had been obtained by bribery and he had a very narrow escape when his tent was subjected to snap search. He managed to distract the guard with some photos whilst he pushed the receiver under the tent wall with his foot. At the Japanese surrender he informed the Japanese Camp Commandant that they had operated a receiver for most of their captivity - part revenge for the treatment they had to endure.

In his book "The Railwayman", Eric Lomax describes his experience of being a POW of the Japanese - parts of it are not comfortable reading. He was a Signals Officer captured in the fall of Singapore. He was involved in the construction of a receiver - they had managed to exchange items for some valves with a trader outside the camp. The antenna was hidden in their hut rafters. The POWs were transferred to another camp at Kanchanaburi where the secret radio was found on a random search. The POW suspects were severely beaten, two dying as a result. After further torture, Lomax was given a prison sentence - he had expected to be executed. During his imprisonment Lomax found out that another POW radio had been discovered at a camp in Borneo and an officer had been shot.

Lomax was transferred to a hospital ward in Changi prison where a secret radio was operating. News of the atomic bomb being dropped signalled the imminent ending of the War. At the surrender, this radio was used to operate a loudspeaker in front of the astonished Japanese. Lomax found out that many of the POW camps had operated radios, and another POW had been shot as a result of discovery.

Not many POWs escaped from the Japanese, but in his book "You'll Die in Singapore", RAF Sergeant Charles McCormac, a radio specialist, came under suspicion of being a spy, the evidence being a radio set when actually it was an Army field telephone. Knowing that he was almost certainly going to be killed, McCormac organised a breakout from his POW camp and eventually reached Australia.

In "One Man's War", Frank Stroobent, a Channel Islander, was sent as a civilian deportee to an internment camp in Germany. In this camp they were fed propaganda from German radio and newspapers so they decided to build a receiver to find out exactly how the war was going. Incredibly the Germans allowed one of the internees to work in a local radio shop. Parts were acquired and stored in various hiding places. Stroobent was given the task of winding a transformer, but when the laminations were installed the windings were damaged and the whole task had to be done again. Eventually "The Forbidden Whisper" as it was called was complete and Stroobent was nominated as operator, though he admitted to not being at all technical. Much thought and effort had been put into finding a hiding place where the set could be stored and operated. The antenna was a short wire thrown out of a window when the set was used at night. After initial failure, Stroobent managed to receive the BBC Overseas Service and after this regular news was passed around the camp, so much so that the Germans realised, via letters sent out, that the internees must have had a radio. There was the threat of a Gestapo camp inspection so the German Commandant volunteered to store the radio until the threat had passed!

I believe that most POW camps would have managed to produce a receiver - an amazing feat in terms of the conditions prevailing.

## Is This a Stream Key?



This rather scruffy little key was acquired at a junk sale some years ago, put away in a cupboard and forgotten. It resurfaced recently while I was looking for something else (of course!) so I thought I would try to establish its provenance. It has a cast-iron "tear-drop" base, a one-piece steel lever and trunnion assembly and a distinctly transatlantic look about it. These clues and a search on the Web were enough to suggest that it was probably a version of the McElroy Stream Key produced in the early 1940s - and thereby hangs a tale.

Theodore ("Ted") Roosevelt McElroy was born near Boston Massachusetts in 1901 and by the age of fifteen was working as a telegrapher for Western Union. This is the sort of work he did for the next twenty years or so apart from a brief spell on RCA's inter-continental radio circuits. At various times he operated using International, American and Japanese Kanji code with equal facility and, as a result of various competitions, was acknowledged as "World Champion" in all three. He could copy at over 70 words per minute and type considerably faster. In the mid-1930s he started a successful business producing telegraphy equipment for the commercial, military and amateur markets.

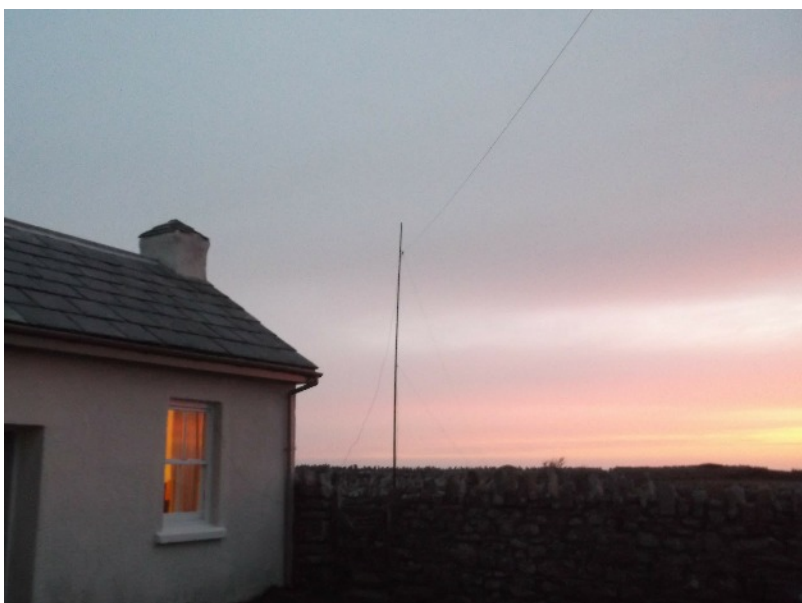
Stream Keys were produced in the late 1930s and early 1940s as far as I can ascertain. Most were straight keys but a rather nice semi-automatic Super-Stream Speed Key was also produced. The distinguishing feature of them all was the characteristic "tear-drop" or "flat-iron" base. This was usually cast-iron but plastic-based versions are known. The associated Telegraph Apparatus Company produced keys with a zinc alloy base and it is suggested that various "bootleg" versions exist. The standard finish for metal-based keys was black crackle but chrome-plated de-luxe versions were available. A rather confusing picture to be sure but these keys seem to be rare on this side of the Atlantic and are most definitely worth acquiring if you can find one

## A Selection of Photos - G4CIB/P and G4RHK/P on Lundy



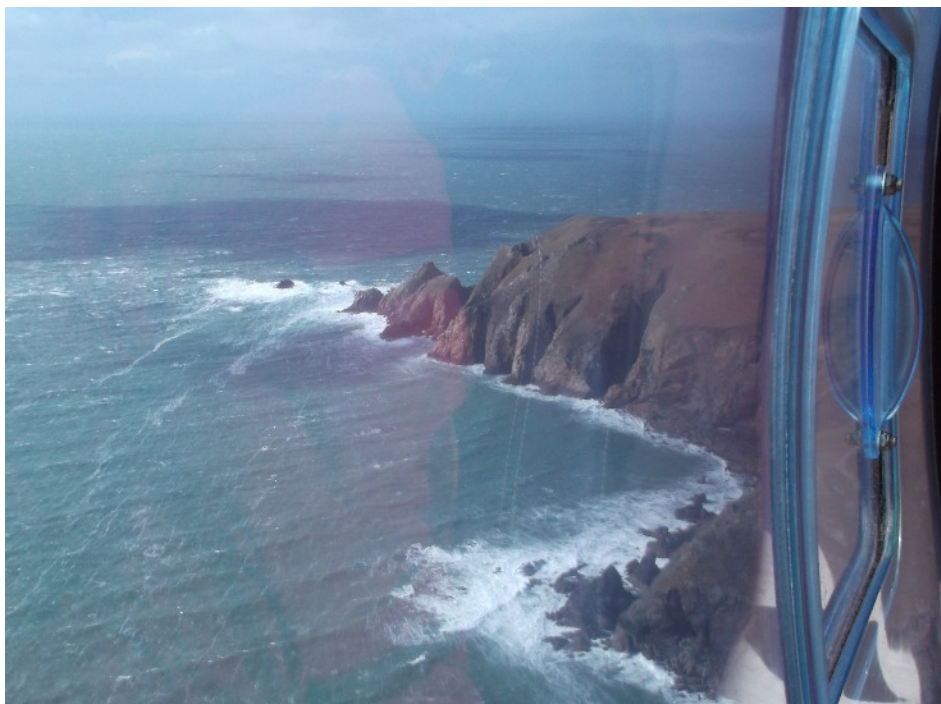
Just arrived on Lundy - Leta G4RHK alongside the Agusta 109E Power helicopter G-DVIP

80m dipole used for the GARES COTA net - the morning after the night before. And for once there was little or no wind.



Operating in "Stoneycroft" using my FT817ND and mini iPad for logging. Calls signs logged on 2m UKAC - M0MLZ/P in IO70UM and 2E0VCC in IO70TP. Along with club members heard (M6NZC, G1NVS, G3XMM, G4LEN, 2E0MFH, M0HNNH, G4MGW and G0ULH) I also worked F5NZY on 80m CW, and on the North Cornwall repeater GB3NC: 2E0TGK in St Denis, G4OCO/M near Liskeard and G4WKW in Falmouth.

As always, despite making a list, I managed to forget something and this time it was my little Heath Antenna Tuner. Luckily the 80m dipole is pretty well "spot on" so did not require any matching.



Approaching Lundy from the south with the Shutter Rock in the distance where in 1906 HMS Montagu, a relatively new Duncan-class battleship came to grief in fog. It took some twenty years to salvage the wreck.

Just above the Shutter Rock can be seen a shadow - this is the Devils Limekiln and is described in the UK Caves database as follows " A sea cave with a deep fossil blowhole. The blowhole has enlarged due to collapse. This is the only sea cave that is long or deep enough to earn a place in this database, and is the deepest (or tallest) sea cave in the World"



The wind has dropped sufficiently for me to put the telescopic mast and 80m dipole up, although it's still fresh!

It was great to hear all the GARES COTA members, unfortunately the only call sign not heard was Anne, 2E1GKY who had antenna problems. Also the noise level on 80m was S8 so copying everyone was a bit of a struggle. Many thank to Les G0ULH for running the net.

Our next visit to Lundy is in September and we will be in Castle Cottage on the south east tip of the island. Although this property does not have as much available land to put an 80m dipole up, I have managed to work out a way of fitting it in. Because of its cliff-top location, Castle Cottage is a superb VHF location looking straight up the Bristol Channel.

## Homeward Bound from Lundy



Arriving passengers disembarking on the left while I'm waiting for the nod from the dispatcher to join the pilot in the "front seat"

Chatting to the pilot a few days before, it transpired that most of his 25 year-plus flying career had been on helicopters.

The operator Castle Air is based in Trebrown near Liskeard and fly to Lundy on Mondays and Fridays from the end of October to the end of March



The "Office"



And the view from the "Office"



Approaching Hartland Point. The lighthouse is just visible in the centre of the picture and was threatened with closure by Trinity House a few years ago but was reprieved after a protest by local residents. However gone are the days when the beam of Hartland would sweep across Lundy and light up ones property at night. Now its no more than virtually a car headlamp bulb, indeed the lights of the nearby Hartland Quay Hotel are brighter on Lundy than that of the lighthouse!