

# DI-DI-DI-DAH-DI-DAH?

## MORSE CODE IS DEAD, OR IS IT?

"Why on earth are people coming to club nights *early*?" I overheard one member say a few months back. Well that's a good question! The answer though is simple; a resurgence of interest in Morse Code.

"Morse Code?" I hear you say. "But that's of no interest these days and we don't have to take that drafted test to get on HF anymore." That is very true when it comes to the old 12 wpm test, but when it comes to interest in the Code, worldwide, as well as in Wythall Radio Club, there seems to be a real movement of amateurs wanting to get on the mode.

Now this could just be down to computer technology advancing to the point where Morse can be read and sent by computer (though the reading of it, even by computer, is very often poor). I suspect though that it is more down to the kind of places we live in.

### HOUSING PROBLEMS

Let me explain. Most of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century live in fairly small houses on fairly small plots of land. The modern trend has been to cram as many houses as possible on as small a piece of land as possible. The net effect of this is that it is more and more difficult to erect efficient antennas.

It is easier on VHF and UHF of course and a small rotatable 2m beam can often be erected and mistaken locally for a TV antenna. But what about HF? You may only have 50-100 feet of length of wire to play with. That makes for tough going on SSB. The dream of a tower with 3 element HF beams such as we have at the club is, for most of us, a pipe-dream at home.

### THE ADVANTAGES OF MORSE

Enter CW! The signal-to-noise ratio advantage of CW over SSB is estimated (depending on who you listen to!) to be anything from 12-20dB. (Remember 10dB is what takes you from 10 Watts output power to 100 Watts output power).

What this means in effect, is that just using CW is like having your own high power linear amplifier (at no cost!). In addition, antennas do not have to be as

efficient in order to receive and transmit the on/off signals that comprise the code. Most CW enthusiasts in this country use simple wire antennas (often with low power) and many have DXCC scores that look like they had 400 Watts and a beam! Isn't that enough reason to give you a push to learn the code? Well, that is just one reason why 12-15 or so members now come down to the club classroom at 1945 each Tuesday.

### HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The classes began in response to myself and Barry M0DGQ using some CW to make contacts during the Christmas Contest of 2010. Interest was piqued and the first class began in January 2011 with quite a few members "having a go". The class settled down to a handful numbers-wise and by the summer, at least two members were making contacts on air.

Because people learn at different paces, the class had to learn to allow people the freedom to learn at a speed which suited them. As time has gone by, we have tried new techniques, different speeds and so on.

However, one thing has always been insisted upon; that is that Morse characters are sent at a fast speed (around 15-20wpm) but with long gaps of silence in between. That way, students hear the sounds at the speeds that are likely to hear on the bands, but have, in the early stages, plenty of time to think.

### A LESSON FROM DRIVING

What we aim for is instant recognition of the characters upon hearing them. Of course that takes time. When you learned to drive, I will wager you had real trouble co-ordinating hands and feet with clutch and gearstick! Now though, you drive places and don't even give that a thought! That's the kind of instant recognition we aim for in the Morse Class.

Students range from teens to senior citizens and we have both genders too. We do strange things like playing individual and team games as well as the usual learning stuff, but basically anything goes and learning is made as much fun as it can be.

### HOME HELP

While we have a basic structure to the course, it does naturally rely on students

practising at home in the week. There's no better way than listening on air of course but there is plethora of learning materials around these days, probably the best of which are the website at [lcwo.net](http://lcwo.net) and Ray Goff, G4FON's free Windows program. Have a look at them for yourself.

### THE FUTURE?

This year we hope to see more members on the air trying CW in the Christmas Contest and by next summer hopefully yet more members sending CQs in Morse and making contacts.

On that note, we also encourage students to join the FISTS club as they have members willing to meet up with you on the bands and go as slow as you need. The excitement of making your first CW QSOs though is palpable and there truly is no feeling like a CW QSO. It is just *different* from any other kind of QSO you have.

### REAL RADIO?

This article isn't an advert for the CW class – to a large extent it advertises itself. What I would say though, is do not underestimate the power of this great mode.

In many ways it takes you back to the earliest days of experimental spark transmitters, back to the days of Marconi, back to the days when each contact was cherished. In other words, back to *real* Amateur Radio!

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