

Nadolig Llawn a Blwyddyn Newydd Oda



MERRY CHRISTMAS and a Happy New Year

LLAIS Y DDRAIG - THE DRAGON'S VOICE

CYLCHLYTHYR CLUB RADIO AMATUR Y DDRAIG
NEWSLETTER OF THE DRAGON AMATEUR RADIO CLUB
Gaeaf 2011 Winter Rhif 97

PWYLLGOR/COMMITTEE

Cadeirydd/Chairman: John E Parry. GW3VVC.

Is-Gadeirydd/Vice-Chairman: Danny Shurmer. GW7BZR.

Ysgrifennydd/Secretary: Stewart Rolfe. GW0ETF.

Trysorydd/Treasurer: John L Brimecombe. GW3GUX.

Aelodau/Members: John Jones MW0BER. Richard Zieba MW3RWZ. Bill Williams GW0IQZ. Tony Wright GW0LIS

Web site: <http://www.radioclubs.net/dragonarc/>

Cynhelir cyfarfodydd y clwb yn Neuadd Ebeneser Lon Foel y Graig, Llanfairpwll ar Nos Lun y cyntaf a'r trydydd yn y mis am 7.30 ar gyfer 8.00 o'r gloch. Croeso i ymwelwyr ac aelodau newydd.

Club meetings held at Ebeneser Hall, Lon Foel y Graig, Llanfairpwll on the evening of the first and third Monday in each month at 7.30 for 8.00. Visitors and new members always welcome.

Pob gohebiaeth at yr ysgrifennydd. All communications to the Secretary, Stewart Rolfe GW0ETF at:

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Patrick O'Brian – SK

I am sad to have to inform you of the death of Patrick O'Brian GW1SXN. Patrick died on 25th September after a short illness. Although not a member of this club he was well known to many amateurs in the area and was a stalwart of the Arfon Repeater Group. He was always prepared to talk to any one and will be sadly missed.

The funeral service was held at the church of St David and St Helen, Twt Hill, Caernarfon, followed by Interment at Llanbeblig cemetery.

QSLing Directly and IRC's (international reply coupons)

When requesting a QSL card directly from an overseas contact, it is polite to include some form of return postage. This is usually as International Reply Coupons or sometimes as a couple of US Dollar bills.

You can buy the coupons from most large Post Office branches for £1.60. Then whoever you send the coupon to can exchange it for international postage at a post office in their own country. They can be used to buy postage for just about anywhere in the world. Obviously, if the contact is within the UK just include an s.a.e.

If you receive a coupon from abroad, just take it to the Post Office where they will exchange it for 67p worth of stamps. Seems like the Post Office are on to a good thing there, sell for £1.60 and exchange for 67p!

Your Licence Revalidation

If your licence has an issue date of between November 2006 and August 2007 and the details have not been amended since then, your licence will be due for revalidation around the time of the London Olympic Games in 2012. Ofcom have said “that they will be busy preparing for the event, making sure that the extra demand for spectrum is met, without causing interference” [whatever that means!] and so has decided, as a one-off event, to automatically extend the validation period of these licences for a further year, thus giving six years from the issue date. After that, these licence holders will need to update their licences themselves in the normal way.

If you want full details and have Internet facilities, go to: www.ofcom.org.uk/licensing/olc then click on: ‘Ofcom extends validation period...’

When, at the end of August, I tried to re-validate my licence via the Ofcom website, I was asked to provide my ‘username’. Needless to say, I had forgotten it. After trying all the names and combinations I could think of, without success, it finally dawned on me to look in the folder where I keep all my licence paperwork and, lo and behold, there it was. It just goes to show that whatever you are doing, whether it is searching for something or trying to trace a fault, always go for the most obvious thing first – a high percentage of electrical problems are just caused by a blown fuse or poor contact.

I wonder what percentage of Amateurs will forget to revalidate their licences when the time comes, unless reminded in some way!

Crusty old git!

Harking back to John ‘VVCs article ‘Have you been on the air much lately’ in the Spring issue of this newsletter and to quote John’s words “I try not to get drawn into nets – where the same people meet regularly to say the same things – I always feel that’s a bit sad”.

I could not help smiling and thinking how apt when I recently came across a small quotation from the G & S Comic Operetta, Princess Ida.

**Oh, don’t the days seem lank and long
When all goes right and nothing goes wrong
And isn’t your life extremely flat
With nothing whatever to grumble at!**

But hold on, yes, some nets can be a bit like that, but they can, no matter how trite the conversation may seem, be almost a lifeline to some amateurs who may, for whatever reason, be housebound. Or am I now playing devil’s advocate?

Reverse Beacon Network

This system was first brought to my attention by Stewart ‘ETF after the International Lighthouse/Lightship weekend in August when the club operated GB2TD from Penmon.

To quote Stewart:

“... weird conditions. Struggled on 20, 40 and 30m to get a run going; 30m probably 'best' but not good. Winkling Eu stations out of the noise and then a JA would call so antenna must have been working and the Reverse Beacon Network shows I was radiating all over the place last night.”

(The underlining is mine – Ed.)

So what is this Reverse Beacon Network all about? It is based on a network of Radio Amateurs who, using CW Skimmers, (a topic in its own right, perhaps for a later article) monitor a section of a given band and automatically feed the results to the RBN web site. This means that you can check for openings on the bands by seeing 'who can hear what and from where' without listening for any of the fixed worldwide beacon transmissions. Even more usefully, you can check to see where your signal is getting to, even though you may just be calling 'cq' and not be in a qso with anyone. (See Stewart's comment above).

The Reverse Beacon Network depends on volunteer stations. Currently, there are a few dozen, some active almost 24/7 (I hate that abbreviation!), others coming up only occasionally, which gives a decent coverage in North America and Europe, but they can always use more volunteers. It needn't cost a lot, or tie up your station equipment.

To find out more about this system, go to: <http://www.reversebeacon.net/>

Early History of Radio

On 3rd October, David Roberts GW8NZN gave a very interesting talk on the early history of radio. One of the points which came out of his talk was how each nation has its own pioneering 'heroes' both in this field and of course many others.

It is not the purpose of this very short article to look into the rights and wrongs of who 'invented' radio (or wireless communication, if you want to call it that!) nor in which country it was 'invented' as I think that is a rather futile discussion, as most 'inventions' are built up from a series of other experiments and investigations, usually by others. As Sir Isaac Newton wrote in a letter to Robert Hooke as early as 1676, "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

However, sometimes inventions and ideas can be given away, either deliberately or accidentally, to other people/organisations or countries. Many ideas and inventions, which originated in the UK, are somehow now regarded as having come from the USA, etc. One such example, allied to our hobby, was the development of the first electronic programmable digital computer. This was carried out, not in America as many claim, but by the engineer Tommy Flowers and others, working at the Post Office Research Station at Dollis Hill, London, in order to assist the codebreakers working at Bletchley Park during W.W.2. to read the encrypted German messages. The result, as many of you will know was Colossus, which some claim was instrumental in shortening the war. Due to a number of factors (mainly Governmental), Tommy Flowers never received true recognition (nor even decent financial reward) for his pioneering work and the majority of future development work went across the 'pond'.

History, they say, is written by the victors and so is not always what it seems!

NB. During my working life, I spent quite some time at Bletchley Park (long after W.W.2. I should add) where at that time the wartime huts were in quite a dilapidated state. As you will know, the whole site is now being developed as a National Museum, etc. including the RSGB National Amateur Radio Centre, and according to my daughter who went there recently, is well worth a visit. Go to: <http://www.bletchleypark.org/> for further details.



A view of the RSGB National Amateur Radio Centre at Bletchley Park.

The CQWW SSB Contest and Club Ladder

The idea for this came to me after taking part in the 2011 SSB Field Day in the newly refurbished club caravan at Holyhead Harbour. Due to the sorry state of the caravan the club had missed out on all the regular contests so far this year and SSB Field Day was our last chance to get together and 'do' a club contest. It attracted the customary enthusiasm from a large number of members including several new to contesting, and it was comments heard while packing up that got me thinking....

"When's the next contest?" was a question I remember being asked. "Maybe next weekend" could well be the answer as any avid anti-contester will tell you, but what they really meant was when is *the club* doing the next contest? There was clearly a lack of confidence or willingness to have a go from home for many so I thought an idea like an informal intra-club ladder linked to a specific contest might help get some members started. CQWW is the biggest contest of the year so would give everyone plenty of opportunity to make contacts during the 48 hours even though the weekend of October 29/30th clashed with the Llandudno Rally.

Rules were simple, make at least 50 contacts, log with N1MM (the logging program adopted by the club for special events as well as contests) and submit the log to myself in the contest standard format of a Cabrillo file; naturally the general rules set by CQWW would have to be followed as well.

I was never sure how many would take this up so I was pleasantly surprised to get 6 logs, making a total of 7 including my own. None were record busting attempts but that wasn't the point, rather it was to familiarize those taking part with the contesting technique, setting up and using the software, and subsequent handling and submission of logs. In addition several participants submitted their own logs to CQWW for inclusion in the final official tables. The 'scores on the doors' are on the club website and are listed here, in no particular order:

MW0AQZ	52	4018
MW0BER	111	16940
MW1CFA	70	7656
GW0ETF	223	24790
GW0GEI	106	19082
GW3GUX	100	8040
GW4HMR	182	22989

Thanks to those who took part for making it worthwhile, and see you in the next contest!
Stewart, GW0ETF

Annual General Meeting

This was held on 21st November with a record 30 members being present, including Liz Cabban, who gave a brief update on some more recent RSGB activities.

John Parry GW3VVC wished to stand down as Chairman, his place being taken by Danny Shurmer GW7BZR. Chris Tanner 2W0GLV was elected as Vice-Chairman. All the other positions on the Committee remained the same. The Club finances remain in a healthy state and so the annual subscription will remain at £10.00. Any club member who was not able to be at the AGM and would like a copy of the accounts, please let me know and I will send one, either by post or email.

Weekend courses

For some time there had been a slight hiatus with Foundation and Intermediate licence training courses. The main problem being able to fit everything in with work schedules, trainer's commitments, hall availability, etc. Stewart 'ETF and I talked this over between ourselves, and thought that if the RSGB can run weekend courses, then why can't we. We then spoke to our prospective candidates, (Stewart had two, later increased to three, Foundation candidates, while I had three for the Intermediate licence), to see how they felt about undertaking such an intensive course. It is to their great credit that all agreed to be guinea pigs and to have a go at jumping into uncharted waters.

Make no mistake about it, there is a lot to get through in just one weekend, not only must all the candidates have to study hard at home prior to the course, but in addition, the Intermediates also have to have completed various practical tasks at home, including building a radio related project. To run two separate courses together in the same hall is not ideal, however we have done this before and decided that it could be done with minimal interference between the two groups.

9.30 am on Saturday 5th November saw eight of us start the first Dragon ARC weekend course(s) in the Ebeneser Hall, and all went well, with frequent 'panad' breaks, etc. finishing for the day at just after 5.00 pm. I don't know what the pupils or Stewart did, but I went home and poured myself a large glass of whisky!

Due to the 'Chapel' needing the hall on Sunday morning, the start was delayed until 11.00 am, when it was noses to the grindstone again! The remainder of the day followed, more or less, the same concentrated pattern as Saturday, except that the examinations followed at 6.30 pm.

I am pleased to say that all passed their respective examinations, so congratulations to everyone, particularly to our own club members:

Stephen Paulger.	Foundation.	Now. MW6SPX.
Barry Vile.	Intermediate.	Now. 2W0LYD.
Chris Tanner.	Intermediate.	Now. 2W0GLV.

The other person involved and without whom the examination could not take place, is of course the chief Invigilator. Most times John 'VVC takes on the task of overseeing the candidates and making sure that all details of the examination are followed to the letter. Unfortunately, at this time, John was indisposed and so Les 'SEC kindly stepped into the breach. Thank you Les for giving up your Sunday evening to be our chief Invigilator. We have had snap visits from an RSGB representative before now, to check that all the rules are being followed and we are always 100% correct.

Was this weekend course a success? The answer has to be yes, but because of the commitment, concentration and the time constraints involved, this type of course is not suitable for everyone. All prospective candidates **must** be able to put in a lot of work at home before even considering taking such a course.

Will we hold another weekend course? The answer is probably yes, but not for some time.

G6NA, the SAS and the Feathermen

I first met Harold Cyril Spencer (G6NA), when he was working for the Plessey Company in the sixties. Despite the fact that he was shortly to retire, he seemed to appreciate the company of younger chaps and became a member of our local radio club. Later, we were to become firm friends over the period, which eventually ended in his death at the age of 95, a few years back.

Some of the lads in the club, regarded him as a bit of a "line-shooter" as he had described to us a very interesting career, which started when he was an apprentice with Logie-Baird of television fame and took many interesting turns during the war, when he was greatly involved with radar and also some work at Bletchley Park. There was also a hint or two of clandestine work which had been carried out during the cold war.

The trouble with Spenny (as his friends knew him, was that he was always a bit careful about giving away too much detail. He had a well-practiced method of quickly but politely changing the subject if questioning became too direct.

Later in the 70's I was running a small business in Swanage as a one-man band. Not, it has to be said, with any great success, but Spenny would always help out where he could and a business opportunity seemed to arise on the advent of local radio broadcasting, which we were keen to get involved with.

Spenny & I took the train one morning to visit a company called Local Radio Consultants. They were located in South Audley Street, London – not far from the American Embassy. After we had concluded business (we were hoping to sell mixing desks through them), Spenny said “Before we go, I would like you to meet Colonel Stirling, whose office is just downstairs.” I was shown in to a panelled office and introduced to a very nice old chap who shook my hand. It was not until some years later, that I realised that I had met David Stirling, founder of the S.A.S.

Fast-forward to the eighties, and I acquire a book by Ranulph Fiennes, entitled “The Feather Men”. This is a truly remarkable story about a group of ex S.A.S. men who amongst other things take some direct action against nasty people where the normal channels have proved wanting. The book is ostensibly fiction, but like all the best fiction is based on a good deal of verifiable fact. My attention was sharply awakened when the address of South Audley St. was named as the meeting place of the Feather Men – could this be why Stirling had his office there? Knowing I would never get a direct answer from Spenny, I wrote to Ran. Fiennes and pointed out the coincidences. Ran. took the trouble to write back in short order and whilst his letter was a jolly good read, he cunningly offered no further clues regarding his book and the parts which were fact or fiction.

A few years before his death, Spenny was resident in a care home in Swanage, where I used to visit him. Despite the effects of a stroke, which made conversation difficult, I pointed out to him that I had now put two & two together. I listed the co-incidences from the S.A.S., the Feather men and pointed out that what I now knew about David Stirling, would not lead me to believe that he had any interest in local radio broadcasting. His office in the LRS building in South Audley St., was I concluded a sham of some sort. Spenny just smiled and said “Yes – it worked very well”.

Spenny was certainly no line shooter. He had worked with Bletchley Park as I discovered when the story really broke in the 80's. I was at his home when various staff members were ringing him up for advice as to what they could say to the press. Also one day in the care home an old girl came in to see him. “I worked under him during the war” she explained. “I had to salute and call him sir then”. Spenny did admit to me that he had ground the crystals for a radio mentioned in the book “Spycatcher” and also that he had worked on a decorative gift for the Russian Embassy which included a diaphragm in the design. By beaming microwaves through the window, it was possible to hear conversation, due to the Doppler shift.

Shortly before he died, Spenny apologised to me for not being more forthright in the past, explaining that a great deal of the work he was involved in was unauthorised in the eyes of the law, and secrecy was required to preserve those still engaged in it.

Sadly, I suspect that I will never know the full story of Ran. Fiennes, the Feather Men, David Stirling and G6NA.

Les. Hayward (MW0SEC).

This ends the winter edition of the DARC Newsletter, many thanks to those who contributed to making it a bumper issue. Please send anything you would like to have in future newsletters, articles or ideas, to me at the address on the first page.

Wishing you all a very merry Christmas and a safe and peaceful New Year. - John GW3GUX.