

STARLITE

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE STOURBRIDGE AND DISTRICT A.R.S.



G6OI
G6SRS



ISSUE: NOVEMBER 2019



G4CVK

STOURBRIDGE & DISTRICT AMATEUR RADIO SOCIETY
INCORPORATING
OLD SWINFORD HOSPITAL SCHOOL RADIO CLUB

MEETINGS HELD AT

OLDSWINFORD HOSPITAL SCHOOL
HEATH LANE
STOURBRIDGE
[8:00 TO 10:00 PM]

VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME

THE SOCIETY HOLDS ITS MEETINGS
EVERY MONDAY (EXCLUDING BANK HOLIDAYS)

THIS MONTH: ANNUAL SURPLUS SALE

RSGB AFFILIATED SOCIETY

STARLITE

Telephone Enquiries to:-

Hon. Secretary
John Clarke M1EJG
[01562] 700513

Or by Email to:-
honsec@g6oi.org.uk

StARS Website URLs:-
www.g6oi.org.uk
<http://g6oi.ross-lewis.co.uk/index.html>

StARS Facebook Page:-
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/stourbridge.ars/>

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

StARS
c/o The Mill House
21 Mill Lane
Blakedown
Kidderminster
DY10 3ND

Forthcoming Meetings

November 4 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
November 11 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
November 18 th	Annual Surplus Sale
November 25 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
December 2 nd	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
December 9 th	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
December 16 th	Christmas Dinner @ The Foley Arms, Pedmore
December 23 rd	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
December 30 th	Final On Air & Informal Meeting Of 2019
January 6 th 2020	First On Air & Informal Meeting Of 2020
January 13 th 2020	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
January 20 th 2020	Main Meeting – Subject t.b.a.
January 27 th 2020	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
February 3 rd 2020	On Air. Informal. Digi Modes Group.
February 10 th 2020	Main Meeting – Subject t.b.a.

Editor's Comment

The Society's Christmas Dinner is being organised, once again, by Wayne M5LLT. It is to be held on Monday, December 16th, at The Foley Arms, Pedmore, where there is a large car park for patrons. Details of the event were given at a recent meeting and if you wish to attend, please tell Wayne asap, who has the full menu.

This month's featured article is human interest and comes from Jim G4WAO. It is loosely entitled "*A Life In Amateur Radio*" and I hope you enjoy the story.

Listening on 2m a few days ago, I heard someone mention the prospect of a new beginner's amateur radio licence. I found some info on the interweb and include it in this issue. Personally, I can't see the point in having another introductory grade licence when we already have a Foundation licence.

Why are people so scared of learning Morse Code? What is it that instils fear into them? I don't know the answer to this, but I do know that when beginning, the learner is already at (around) 5wpm, so the first step to a licence upgrade is achievable without too much trouble. Within a few weeks 12wpm (the old test speed) can be reached and improvements will be made as time passes. This was prompted by someone's recent comment who is "*petrified at the thought of learning Morse code*".

Do you have any thoughts or comments about any of the above? If so, please send them to the Editor at g4xom@g6oi.org.uk

NASA considers this 80-year-old radio buff part of the astronaut family

To NASA personnel, he is VK5ZAI. To his neighbours at Pinks Beach, a small coastal town in South Australia, he goes by Tony.

In his 30-year association with the US space agency, Tony Hutchison has been called upon to help in times of crisis, moderate calls between astronauts and their families, and run a worldwide schools program.

He's shared a beer with first commanders, had barbecues with mission specialists, and watched the space shuttle launch from the bleachers at Kennedy Space Centre.

Looking back, it's a life he never expected.

From amateur radio buff to NASA's go-to guy

Mr Hutchison, 80, fell in love with radio at age 10, had his amateur radio licence by 21, and became involved with satellite communication a few years later.

In October 1992 he made his first contact in space — cosmonaut Anatoly Solovyev onboard the Mir space station.

"You could talk up to them as they passed over and they'd talk back to you."



The neighbours didn't know what to think when three large aerials went up after the Hutchisons moved in

For the next year Mr Hutchison was fielding regular conversations from his home radio shack with the low-orbiting laboratory.

"The Russians liked to brush up on their English language a bit. They would call and one

day I got a reply from them. That spurred me on a bit."

He became good friends with one of them, Aleksandr Serebrov.

"He would call me probably a couple times a week as he passed over. Of course they keep to Russian time, which is almost the opposite time to us, so it would be in the middle of the night and Alex would call."

NASA eventually caught on and had Mr Hutchison doing communications for Andy Thomas while he was onboard Mir.

Putting children in space

It was Serebrov who took part in Mr Hutchison's first school link-up in 1993.

A group of keen country kids from Loxton High School went to Mr Hutchison's radio shack in the Riverland, where they asked the cosmonaut questions about life and space.

"It's quite an adrenalin rush when you hear the voice come through: 'Hear you Tony loud and clear, go ahead please.' Even after as many as I've done, it gives me a great thrill to hear that voice first come through."

When Mir's days were coming to an end, NASA asked Mr Hutchison to help form a school program for a new venture, the International Space Station (ISS).

By the time of launch in 1998, Mr Hutchison had helped form Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS).

In its 20 years, ARISS has connected astronauts to 1,300 schools worldwide, 70 of which are in Australia.

"It's taken up a lot of my time. I've thoroughly enjoyed it," Mr Hutchison said.

Unlike a casual chat on the phone, he said linking students with astronauts was a different thing entirely.

"You've got several hundred at the school waiting at a remote site, and you've got the astronaut waiting on the space station — you might call once, call twice before the station comes within range."

Of the thousands of students who have taken part, some have gone on to space science.

"We have one desire, to pass on our knowledge to the next generation and encourage children, kids, university students to continue with their work in engineering, science, mathematics," Mr Hutchison said.

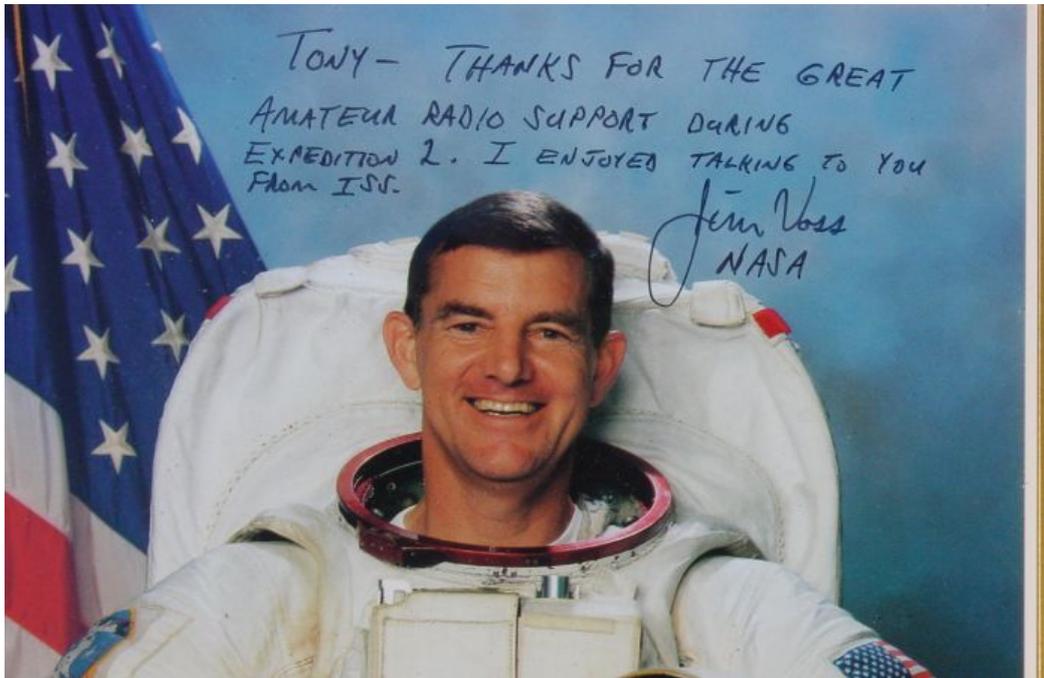
Friends and family out of this world

Mr Hutchison has spoken with close to 100 astronauts in his time, from a bit of banter to ensuring the line quality between an astronaut and their spouse during precious moments of connection.

"You can hear everything, but you don't disclose the private conversation. It's a great honour."

In 2001 NASA invited Mr Hutchison and his wife Jill to attend a shuttle launch. They were also able to meet some of the many astronauts VK5ZAI had heard but not seen, including Bill Shepherd, the first commander of the ISS.

"I had no idea that I'd ever get involved with astronauts the way we have."



A signed photo from astronaut Jim Voss thanking Mr Hutchison for his service and friendship.

"I've been fortunate and had the privilege to meet a lot of these guys, just average guys with a brilliant mind, and you can sit down and have a good conversation about their life."

The Hutchisons were treated as friends and family of the astronauts, dining with the crew before the launch and watching take-off from a little stand three kilometres from the site.

"The noise is incredible, you feel your whole body shake ... all of a sudden you'd hear this enormous roar, you could feel it right down your spine."

Saying no to NASA

During the trip, NASA offered Mr Hutchison the chance of a lifetime — a two-year contract with master control in Houston.

After discussing it most of the night at their motel, the couple opted to turn it down.

With children and grandchildren back home in Australia, they decided the timing was not right.

At the end of 2019, Mr Hutchison will step back from ARISS indefinitely.

"It's been a wonderful life ... I just feel as if I'm getting a bit stale and it's a little bit hard on Jill," he said.

"She certainly knew what she was getting into, I think, when we got married, and she's backed me all the way. I've been very fortunate.

"We've got a little motorhome and want to do a bit more travelling around Australia."

With talk of NASA building a new base on the Moon in a few years' time, Mr Hutchison is not ruling out a return.

"I'm getting a bit old but I hope I'm around to see it. I'm looking forward to that."



Mr Hutchinson has accumulated a lot of equipment over the years



Mr Hutchinson has devoted his life to amateur radio

A Proposal for a Beginner Amateur Licence

In October 2019, an interesting thread, "[Red Rag](#)", appeared online in the RSGB Workshop group about a possible future change of direction for the hobby.

Central to the debate was "**A Proposal for a Beginner Amateur Licence**" – to encourage a new generation get a taste of the hobby, removing some of the barriers that we've established that may keep people out. This proposal generated so much debate (and support), that the RSGB Workshop groups moderator locked the thread within 24 hours, preventing further discussion.

We feel that debate on such an important matter is important, and so we caught up with the proposal's author, John Regnault G4SWX, to explore the idea:

A Beginner's Licence – John Regnault G4SWX Interview (Oct 2019)

See the interview here: <https://youtu.be/EYGAmfClfzc>

What is being proposed?

In summary, the proposal is for a low-power (5 watt) VHF/UHF (144/430 MHz) entry class 'Beginner Amateur' licence for use with unmodified equipment. A call-sign and licence would be awarded after passing an online exam.

Why would we need a new licence-level?

There's currently some concern with the amateur radio community about the hobby's future, and this was a key topic at the recent [RSGB Convention](#). With the tougher Foundation and Intermediate exams now in place, the ongoing drop in newcomers taking up the hobby, and fewer clubs now offering training, are we get to see numbers dropping?

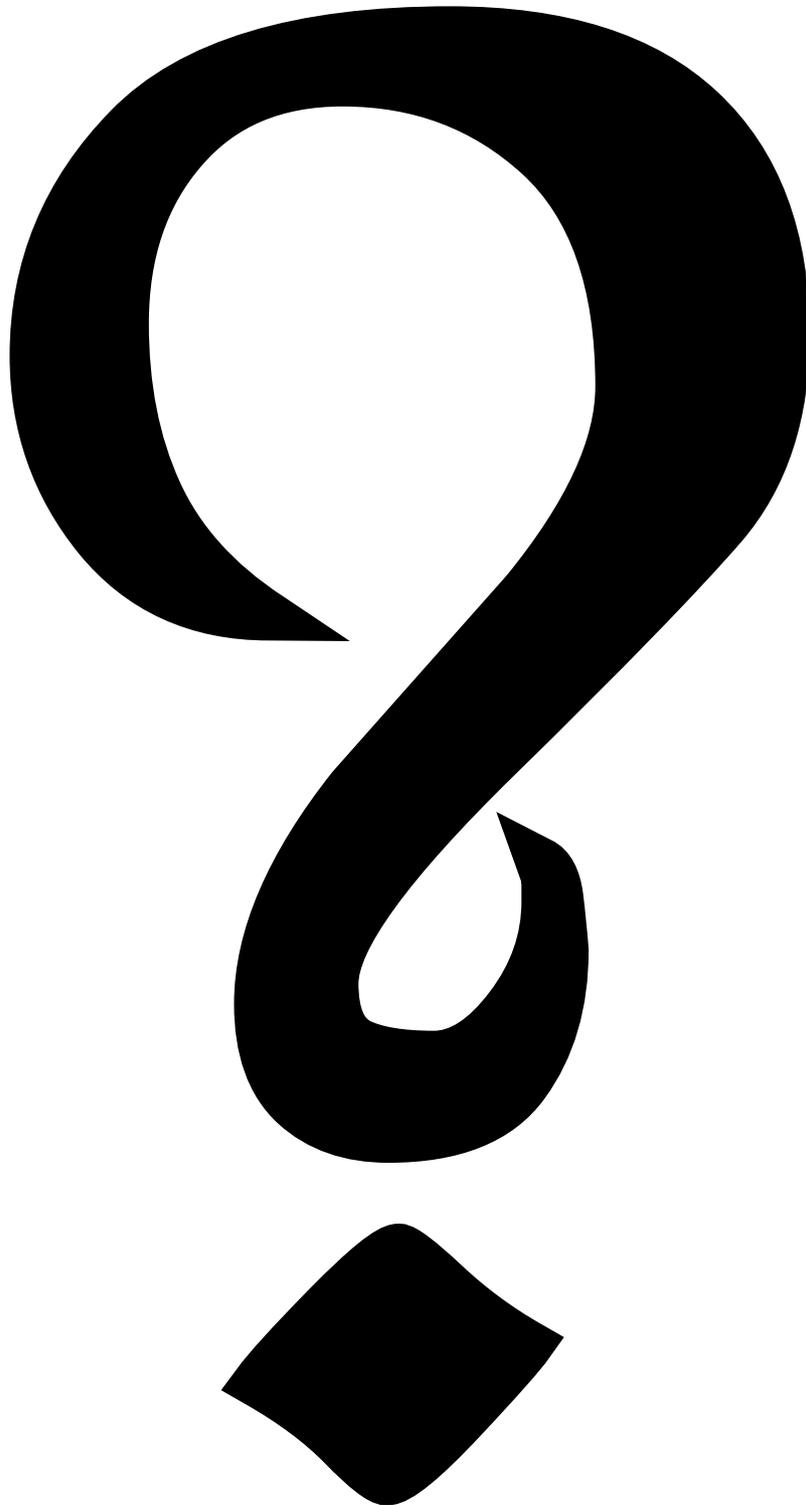
The RSGB's 2022 Strategy lists "Growth" as the top priority, and at the 2019 Convention, the target of acquiring 2,000 new RSGB members each year was set out. But where is this growth going to come from, and how do we halt the decline?

The idea of bringing in a fourth-tier licence has been proposed – this could open up the hobby to new potential markets, be more suited to the evolving maker/hacker communities, and remove the existing barriers to entry. It also potentially offers easier access to the hobby for youngsters and groups not previously served, and allows people to see if the hobby is for them before committing to Foundation-Intermediate-Full.

The idea of a new entry-level licence has been discussed before, and there were some references to the idea at the [RSGB Convention](#), including a question from the audience during the RSGB's Exam Update session.

Your thoughts?

Due to the moderation in effect on the RSGB's Workshop group, there's nowhere to discuss this (and other) ideas – and so to fill the gap, there is a new Groups.io group – if there's interest, this will allow discussion of this idea, and other ideas that might help shape the future direction of the hobby. Want to chat? Go to [HamChat on Groups.io](#)



Do YOU have anything to fill this page?

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