

# FISTS DOWN UNDER



Newsletter of the Australian / New Zealand chapter of the International Morse Preservation Society

May 2014

Email: [fists-down-under@ihug.co.nz](mailto:fists-down-under@ihug.co.nz) | Website: [www.fistsdownunder.org](http://www.fistsdownunder.org)

## Editor / QSL Manager for VK

Chris Thompson VK2CTN  
PO Box 65  
Dickson ACT 2602, Australia

## Membership / Awards Liaison

Ralph Sutton ZL2AOH  
12c / 186 The Terrace  
Wellington 6011, New Zealand  
Tel: 0-4-473-0847

## QSL Manager for ZL

Nigel Hardy ZL2TX  
PO Box 15078  
Otaki 5542, New Zealand  
Tel: 0-6-364-6339

## Web Administration

Garry Cottle VK2GAZ  
96 Luttrell Street  
Richmond NSW 2753, Australia  
Tel: 0-2-4588-5429

### This month:

- New member profile: Michael VK3CMV
- Key survey
- Coax plugs
- Modifying a Czech key
- Straight keys and paddles

## From the editor's shack

I hope everyone had a pleasant Easter with family and friends. I have to admit that I spent most of the long weekend working in my shed, installing new shelving and a solar power setup. I now have more storage space and light to work by. But more about that in a future newsletter...

This month we have a new feature - an online survey. The question is: 'What is your favourite Morse key?' Members without internet access can also participate. The results will be published in the June newsletter. See page 2 for details.

Occasionally we receive enquiries about the use of the internet for making CW contacts. We may have a number of members who are not able to get on the bands due to antenna restrictions, health problems etc. But perhaps they are able to use a keyboard to send CW via the internet. If you have experience in this area, we want to hear from you so that we know who to ask for assistance.

The colours of autumn are very evident here in the Canberra region. If repairing your antenna system or painting the shack is on your to-do-list, now is the time to get those things done before the colder weather of winter arrives.

## Chris VK2CTN #9057



## Members' news

**Mavis VK3KS #14110** has recently moved into an aged care facility and has reluctantly resigned her membership. Mavis joined us in July 2009 and was our only honorary member.

**Derek VK3KX #14125** writes: Mavis lived only 5km from me. Her callsign is so close to mine and her FISTS number also. Although I don't think I have met her, she and her late husband Ivor were already keystone members of the hobby in Victoria, when I was a teenager in the 1970s.

It is sad to hear that Mavis has moved into care, as many would know she has been licensed for 75 years. Here is a link to the 2009 AR article about her:

[www.wia.org.au/newsevents/news/2009/20090607-1/index.php](http://www.wia.org.au/newsevents/news/2009/20090607-1/index.php)

**Ralph ZL2AOH #1073** will be in hospital later this month for a total hip replacement. We wish Ralph all the best and hope that he has a quick recovery.

**Chris VK3CGB #9087** has acquired a buddipole portable antenna and hopes to use this to be QRV /P in the near future. The antenna covers 7 MHz up to 144 MHz so don't be surprised if you hear him using CW on the HF bands. Chris would welcome a chance to have a CW QSO.



Mavis VK3KS



Chris VK3CGB

**Anagram** - a word or phrase formed by transposing the letters of another.

The Morse Code

*Here Come Dots*



Karl KB1DSB

As advised last month, **Karl KB1DSB #6938** is the new President of the FISTS North American chapter.

Karl has sent us this photo of himself, recently working on the tower at his home in Alabama.

**Coax plugs** are often best with the braid soldered, especially when used outdoors.

It's not always easy to get enough heat without melting the insulation. Always use a very big iron for quick and effective heat transfer.

The best plugs are silver plated and needless to say costly. Cheaper products are often adequate but common sense should be applied.

The plating on most brass plugs is not solder friendly and filing the aperture with a chainsaw file has three important benefits:

1. Removes the plating, enabling solder to flow easier;
2. Thins out the amount of brass which helps the heating process; and
3. Makes the hole bigger to aid getting the braid through.

These photos tell the story:



1. New plug, difficult to solder.



2. Apply file.



3. Ready to solder.

David VK3DBD #3756

## New member

We warmly welcome **Michael VK3CMV #14175** from Belgrave, Victoria. His QTH is in the Dandenong Ranges about 45km SE of Melbourne.

Michael writes: I live in a very tall timber area, close to Sherbrooke Forest, home of the Australian Superb Lyrebird and also home of the Australian Mountain Ash, which is the world's tallest flowering tree.

My immediate house area is surrounded by Mountain Ash and Mountain gums and all in excess of 90 feet / 27metres tall. My main wire antenna support tree is 110 feet / 34 metres high. In the nearby national park forest, located about 1km from my home, the older trees in the gullies are up to 220 feet / 67 metres tall and about 8-10 feet / 3 metres thick through at the base.



Michael VK3CMV

I'm active on 40m CW and can be occasionally found on the Australian SSB dx net on 7.150 at around 1200 GMT. My main interest is now in actively restoring my CW skills and the vast majority of my HF contacts over the last 6 months have been on CW on the 40 metre band, with my favourite frequency being 7.016 or very close by.

My key is a CW Touchkeyer, model P1PADK paddles, into my HF radio, which is a current model Icom IC-7410. I originally learnt to send right handed on a brass pounder in 1980, when I gained my Australian Novice Licence. 1981 saw me gaining my Australian Advanced Licence (full call) and starting to actually enjoy CW a little.

In 2000, I let my licence lapse for 10 years, (big mistake) due to a very young family and the pressures of caring for young children, building a home, work, etc. Two years ago, I reactivated my Advanced Licence, and am now gradually building a new radio shack.

Since taking up CW again in late 2013, I have taught myself to key left handed on the electronic Touch Paddles, so that I am able to continue to copy right handed with a pencil. On the rare occasions that I revert to a brass pounder, it's back to keying right handed.



VK3CMV shack desk.

Hopefully, the next 12 months will see a major increase in my CW speed and many more contacts via the keyer. This is without doubt, now my favourite method of HF communication.

My sincere thank you to those several existing FISTS members, particularly Mike ZL1BVB with whom I have had repeated CW contacts already. All have been very patient with my basic CW skills. Your patience and warm welcome, has ensured my long term return. Long live CW.

## Key survey

**What is your favourite Morse key?** Let us know!

Simply click on the link and enter the *make* and *model* of your favourite key.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1phT5IH-F2q3L5t09RGVTSxC9TEMP3UhhnGnh5vhB3EY>

When you've finished, click on 'Submit'. You can edit the response if you've made a mistake.

The closing date for responses is 20 May 2014. Results will be published in the June newsletter.

For members that receive postal copies of the newsletter and do not have internet access, please send your response via mail to Chris VK2CTN or Ralph ZL2AOH (addresses in masthead).



## Modifying a Czech key David VK3DBD / G3SCD #3756



The well known Czech key, of which a large quantity appeared on the surplus market only a few years ago, has become a big favourite in Europe and UK. It is arguably one of the best value keys money can buy - even in Australia, where mailing cost is a large proportion of the price.

This key is now over 50 years old and offers the operator a nice looking key with the usual adjustments and most important it is good to use. It is unlikely to ever be a serious collectors item, but still many owners like to keep it as supplied; the original wire with braided fabric covering, and a two pin plug which, surprisingly, has a pin spacing which will fit quite snugly into a mains power socket of the type used in much of Europe. The mind boggles, and it is to be hoped that no one would be foolish enough to plug one in!

*This key is*

*now over 50*

*years old.*

The original metal base plate screwed onto the bottom of this mainly Bakelite key, was intended to slide into some kind of holder, possibly in a vehicle. As supplied, it is not particularly ideal for normal desk use. A few of these keys suffered light rust on the edges of the metal, due to years of storage. A very convenient solution to this is a new base which can be made in various materials of choice: marble, slate, or the traditional heavy polished wood base. There are many Australian hardwoods that are ideal for this purpose.



New timber base.

The transformation is an easy one and of course gives the key a personal touch. The metal plate is secured by four 3mm metric thread screws. Once the new base has been suitably cut to size and finished to satisfaction, the removed metal base should be used as a template for drilling holes (note that the four holes are not symmetrical). The removed screws are not very long and normally longer ones to suit your new base, can replace them. Four 3mm metric ones will be required (they can be deeply countersunk). Not usually hard to find, but you may have to shop around a little, as larger diameters are more common.

While you have the base off the key, it is a good idea to lift off the rubber gasket to expose the terminals. If you wish to change the cable to a thinner and easier (two conductor) one, which will connect to a 3.5mm jack plug, it is a simple task to substitute and the original can be stored for posterity. It is not an easy task to simply cut off the original large two pin plug and join a modern 3.5mm jack or even a 1/4" one, as the cable is quite thick and the four core wire type needs crimping rather than soldering. Two wires are all we need for our amateur requirements. Some models of the Czech key had a four pin connector.

The adjustment of the key gap and tension is easily made by lifting up the top cover during normal use. But lifting the cover also disables the key's ability to operate. It is highly convenient at this point to make a small modification by joining two terminals inside with a short length of hook-up wire, offering the means of adjusting the gap and tension, and testing while the lid is raised. A small point, but a worthwhile one, in my opinion. I constructed the base in the picture from an off-cut of oak flooring about 19mm thick, finishing the edge with a router and after careful sanding with fine sandpaper, applying two coats of good varnish.

On the underside of the new base was glued a piece of 'non-slip' rubberised material, commonly sold in yacht chandlers, caravan/ camping suppliers and many supermarkets.

An alternative idea is to screw three rubber feet on the base. Three, because it will not have an annoying rock should you use it on an uneven surface, and you can still use a piece of 'non-slip' loose under the key.



Non-slip material on base.

### FISTS club calling frequencies

The following are suggested calling frequencies. If they are busy, it is recommended that you QSY to a clear spot (within your licence limitations and the band plans).

Band	Freq.
160	1.808
80	3.528
40	7.028
30	10.118
20	14.058
17	18.085
15	21.058
12	24.908
10	28.058

## Key dates

### FISTS Activity Day

Every Tuesday!

### Harry Angel Sprint

Saturday 3 May

1000 - 1146 UTC, 80m

Established in 1999, the sprint is an annual contest event to commemorate the life of Harry Angel VK4HA who at the time of his becoming a silent key, was the oldest licensed amateur in Australia.

The duration of the contest is 106 minutes; one minute for each year of Harry's life.

More details: [www.wia.org.au](http://www.wia.org.au)

### NZART Sangster Shield

Sat 17 and Sun 18 May

2000 - 2300 NZST

80m CW only.

Maximum power output: 5 watts.

More details: [www.nzart.org.nz](http://www.nzart.org.nz)

**Note:** The correct link is embedded in the abbreviated website address. Simply click on the link to go directly to the website, or point your mouse at the link to get the full address.

## Postage increase

Please note that Australian postage rates increased on 31 March 2014. The cost of sending a standard domestic letter is now 70 cents.

Please remember this when sending your membership renewal via post to Chris VK2CTN.



More details:

[www.auspost.com.au](http://www.auspost.com.au)

## Trawling the web

Ian ZL2AIM #9683

### Straight keys and paddles

I wonder how many of our FDU members actively use a straight key, as well as a paddle? Ever since I entered my first Straight Key Night (SKN) as ZS5IAN, I realised that the paddle does spoil us a lot. When I entered the last SKN that was held in November last year, I decided two weeks before the SKN that I would need to brush up on my straight key operation.



The SKN lasts two hours, but generally speaking the longest that I would have been using a straight key in one time period in the previous 12 months, would have been about 10 minutes. So I decided to see if I was ok on the straight key for longer periods than that. What a discovery! My hand and wrist got tired after 20 minutes of practice calling CQ de ZL2AIM SKN.

*a UA station* So I had to practice a bit more. For two weeks before the SKN, I spent most evenings practising until I could do a full 2 hours of straight key. It paid off for me.

*came back to* My setup with my TS570 allows me to have both a straight key and a paddle plugged in at the same time. Ditto for my Elecraft K2/100. Hence it is easy for me to jump from a paddle set at 26 wpm and use a straight key at whatever slower speed that my contact has answered my CQ call. This is how I operate most evenings.

*me at about* Incidentally last night I was calling with the auto keyer at 26 wpm when a UA station came back to me at about 45 wpm. My brain could not decipher it even after he repeated his callsign a few times. So I just changed to my straight key and asked him to QRS. I did this with my straight key at about 15 wpm! He complied.....

*45 wpm* I tried to teach myself CW without having a tutor. The rule of thumb is that one starts learning to receive before touching a Morse key for transmitting. I only learnt that a few months later! I had a practice oscillator and an el-cheapo key. I also had a 1972 book 'Ham Radio A Beginner's Guide' by RH Warring. This shows that you rest your elbow on the table and the key held lightly with the thumb on the left of the knob and the first and second fingers on the top and other side of the knob respectively. This I painstakingly did and I got quite good at transmitting. Once I eventually passed my 12 wpm exam I heard from another straight key operator that I should under no circumstances allow my elbow to rest on the table! So to this day I hold the key as above, but with my elbow well clear of the table!

Recently I was looking at some sites and came across this one:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2x1qlcskYQ> I would ask that you have a look at it, as he manages to send beautiful CW using what I perceive to be the first joint of his first finger on top of the key. Then he changes to his Bencher paddle and sends perfect CW from that too. I suppose that we eventually find a system that is suitable for ourselves. To each his own. Just don't allow that straight key to stand idle for too long. Get it out, clean the contacts (with paper) and start making a few contacts with it. Enjoy!

## Membership renewals

Ralph ZL2AOH #1073

The following memberships are due for renewal (up until 31 May 2014), some are well overdue:



9066 - 9072 - 9099 - 9566 - 9622 - 9623 - 9689 - 14116 - 14118 - 14119 - 14121 - 14134 - 14135 - 14138 - 14141 - 14142 - 14144 - 14157 - 14158 - 14160 - 14161 - 14162

If you are listed in error, wish to receive a replacement reminder notice or would like to discuss your membership, please email us at [fists-down-under@ihug.co.nz](mailto:fists-down-under@ihug.co.nz)

Many thanks to Pat VK3OZ #9070 and Drew VK3XU #9629 for including a donation when renewing their membership.

*Until next month, 73*