

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS KEEPS IN TOUCH

THE sewing circle is not what it seems. For one thing, there isn't a needle or reel of thread in sight.

But there are Morse keys, valves and aerials aplenty.

The sewing circle is the longstanding nickname for a group of about 50, mostly retired men, dedicated amateur radio enthusiasts who get together each evening for a chat over the air waves.

Their call signs come from all over Tasmania and their conversation between 5 and 6 pm covers almost every subject imaginable.

It all began in 1962 when the late Jack Batchler (call sign VK7JB) and his friend Snowy Harris (VK7CH) on his boat, Marina, had daily conversations on the 80-metre band.

They were soon joined by Owen from Bellerive on VK7OM and other "ham" radio enthusiasts around the State.

They earned their nickname one evening when the session delayed the Batchlers' meal. Jack's wife, Joy, said the men reminded her of a sewing circle at school, a select group of students who were allowed to talk as they sewed.

Jack protested, saying jokingly that it was a strange comparison for a bank manager, a marine engineer and an Army officer.

But despite his protests, the name stuck and became very important to the group as it grew during the next 20-odd years.

In fact, a photograph of a sewing machine adorns the



● Bill Donald on the Morse key in his radio shack at Forcett, broadcasting to the world.

group's annual award to one of its members, for his or her contributions during the year.

Current holder is Owen Langham (VK7OL) of Devonport, who was presented with the plaque last week at the sewing circle's annual barbecue. It was handed over by last year's winner, Allen Sherriff (VK7NWS) of Midway Point, who chose Owen as his successor.

The barbecue was held at the home of Rosemary and Bill Donald, who live at Rosy Vanyan, Forcett.

It was another result of the nightly "rag chew", after Bill boasted about some delicious lamb he had just eaten and another member of the group said if it was

that good, they should have a barbecue at Bill's place to sample the lamb.

Bill said why not. That was three years ago and the barbecue has quickly established itself as a sewing circle tradition.

Bill Donald has been a member of the group for 2½ years, since getting his novice licence. A couple of days ago, he sat for a full licence.

A novice has passed a test on the regulations for amateur radio operators, an examination on the theory of radio transmissions and has proved he or she can send and receive Morse code at the rate of five words a minute.

To get a full licence the

amateur radio operator must be able to send and receive Morse code at the rate of 10 words a minute and pass a more difficult theory examination.

Bill's interest in amateur radio prompted him to host the recent Jamboree of the Air at Rosy Vanyan when 200 scouts, parents and troop leaders pitched their tents in his front garden and spent a weekend contacting other scouts throughout the world.

He and his fellow "hams" enjoy the companionship the sewing circle provides. For many, it is an interest in retirement and no matter how remote the home base, a friendly chat is only a flick of a switch away.

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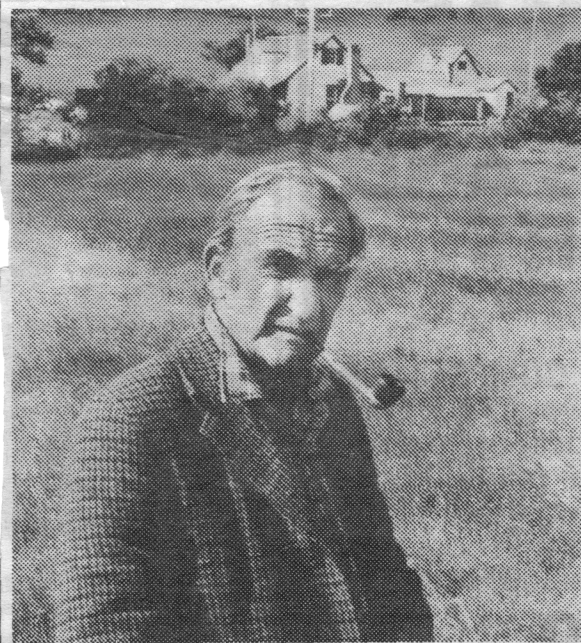
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● Bill Donald and his picturesque property where radio amateurs of all ages gather.