

So you are interested in amateur radio are you?

This short article will tell you how to go about getting involved in this magical technical hobby.

Whether you have used no radio at all, operated CB, been a professional radio operator in the services, or just read about it, amateur radio can be for you. The hobby has many facets, technical design, construction, operation or just for a social it can be what you want. Students on the courses run by The Mid Sussex Amateur Radio Society cover the age range from 10 to 80 and with a wide range of abilities (and disabilities as well), all have passed!

Many of the finest operators do not have full licences (more later) or, have they been on the air man and boy for 50 years, some have only just started. It all depends on what you want to do and how much time you want to spend doing it.

Getting started.

Many people start as Short Wave Listeners, "SWL"s for short. Listening to the airwaves for interesting conversations, watching weather satellite maps appearing on the computer screen or listening to strange noises or Morse code (more later) Anyone can do this, all you need is a radio with the world shortwave bands on it and a book or magazine with the frequencies, or channels, listed to help you on your way.

When you think you are ready to join in and start transmitting there are two ways to do it.

First is to buy a CB radio and just join in. Amateurs consider this to be a little restricting as you have only one band, limited channels, and can suffer considerable levels of interference. Or second, work for an amateur radio transmitting licence. This entails taking in the first instance a short multi choice examination. Many radio clubs like ours run courses and help you get this first licence. It is called "The Foundation Licence" and allows you to transmit on the amateur bands with some restrictions. You will be issued with a "callsign" unique to you in the world, currently in the series M6AAA to M6ZZZ.

Most courses consist of a two day weekend and culminate with the examination where you will be given the result within a few minutes. After applying for a licence you can be on the air within a week or so.

The course covers many subjects that are of interest to the newcomer and the old hands alike. A short session of using Morse code, the famous code of dots and dashes that most know of including S-O-S for emergency and the more recent mobile phone code S-M-S a text message has arrived for you. "Dot Dot Dot, Dash Dash, Dot Dot Dot"

You also get to operate a VHF short range radio and a long range HF short wave radio. Don't worry we will explain what VHF and HF means!

Progressing on.

Having passed the first exam most people apply for a licence and start using the airwaves while they study for the second level exam. Having a licence allows you to talk to like minded people all over the world but especially those local to you who can, and usually will, help you learn your way about the hobby. It is not unusual to hear a "school class" being taken on some bands. One of the best ways to enjoy the hobby is to join your local club, like ours. There you can attend technical lectures, join in with social activities, and use the club's radio equipment.

The next level up is the Intermediate level, and is primarily designed to help you learn some of the technical “stuff” and let you actually construct a working circuit. If you pass this intermediate exam you are allowed more on- air privileges and are permitted to build and modify all sorts of radio equipment for use on the air.

Finally you can, if you wish, progress to the “Full”, or Advance licence. This teaches you much of the theory of radio and allows you to teach others, run club stations and operate at sea and from most other countries of the world using maximum power!

Conclusion.

So what to do first?

Come along to the club on a club evening, or contact one of the officers in the contact us section. Buy and read one or more of the radio magazines on sale in newsagents or invest in a small radio and start listening to see what it is all about, then when you are ready, contact us to make a start.

You will really enjoy this hobby for a lifetime.

My name is Chris and my call sign is G4ZCS, listen out for me sometime.