



Mike Meadows: Very fortunate to be able to keep in daily contact with the amateur radio community from home

Amateur radio – the first social media

Mike Meadows, of Cirencester U3A in Gloucestershire, shares his lifelong love of taking to the airwaves

I was just 13 when, like most radio enthusiasts of my generation, I started out as a shortwave listener.

I would repair old World War II radios and this inspired my natural curiosity in all things scientific, electronic, electrical and mechanical.

I continued reading about electronic and radio techniques, and finally got a licence in 1974, upgrading to a full licence in 1978. This gave me access to worldwide communication.

I have always had a quality world atlas to hand to enrich my contacts, opening up conversations about geography and topography.

Amateur radio is a fun way to learn about radio technology and make friends. It's both a technical communications hobby and a recreational activity that gives a true sense of personal achievement.

Amateur radio was the world's first

social media – before Facebook or WhatsApp – and it continues in that role today.

There are 65,000 radio amateurs in the UK and some three million worldwide. It has led many into technical careers, including leaders in their fields who have won Nobel Prizes and credit their early interest in amateur radio as a contributing factor to their success.

The amateur radio community includes people experimenting with the latest advanced technologies such as wireless digital communications, software-defined radios and long-distance digital and image transmissions. Others just enjoy keeping

“Some bounce signals off the moon”

Morse code – the original communications system – on the airwaves and they are as skilled as the earliest wireless telegraphers who began it all in the late 1890s.

Some are attracted by the ability not only to generate radio signals and communicate around the world, but also with astronauts on the International Space Station; others bounce signals off the moon or meteor trails, or communicate via satellite.

There are those who like to build their own equipment or experiment with leading-edge technical developments, while others connect a computer to a radio to communicate via a keyboard, or send and receive images and amateur television signals.

For more than a century, people engaged in amateur radio have had to obtain an internationally recognised licence and their own personal radio call sign to operate.

In the UK, there is a three-tier licence, with increasing privileges, power limits, modes and frequency allocations. Examinations to qualify as a licensed radio amateur – from entry-level to the internationally recognised advanced qualification – are conducted by the Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB).

The RSGB was founded in 1913 as the London Wireless Club and today has more than 20,000 members.

I would encourage U3A members who have lapsed or inactive radio licences to consider giving a lecture on this hobby to their local group.

At Cirencester U3A, we have just had our first successful science and technology Zoom presentation, with 26 members online.

In lockdown conditions, I feel very fortunate to be able to keep in daily contact with the amateur radio community from home.

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