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The Rev. George Dobbs G3RJV



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The Practical Wireless 144MHz Contest

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Amateur

radio personality

The Rev. George Dobbs G3RJV

Rob Mannion G3XFD chats to G3RJV and helps explore the the fascinating life story of a very special *PW* author! !

Rob G3XFD: Thank you for accepting the invitation to feature as a *PW* Amateur Radio Personality George! However, although you worked in Rochdale, Greater Manchester for many years, I think you originated from the other side of the Penine Mountains?

George G3RJV: It's my pleasure Rob! Yes, you're correct – I was actually born in 1943 in Cleethorpes – actually Grimsby – where the local maternity hospital was located. I'm married to **Jo-Anna**, a teacher who now works part-time at a local resource centre and holds the callsign **G00WH**. We have two sons, **Stephen** and **Ben**. The son of a Baker, I was raised at the back of a Baker's shop – Father working in the bak-house, mother serving in the shop. I woke every morning to the smell of fresh bread!

Rob G3XFD: Was your family from Lincolnshire?

George G3RJV: Yes, my family, up to my father, were all from Lincolnshire farming stock. Farm labourers, not farmer owners. In my childhood I spent many weekends with my maternal grandparents in the village of North Thoresby and these weekends were the time when my interest

in radio began. I usually shared those weekends with my cousin, **Peter**, and together we developed an interest in radio building and short wave listening. In the 1950s a lot of war-time surplus equipment and components were available and we were able to buy radio surplus items at a local shop and on a local market stall.

Rob G3XFD: When did you really get into the hobby?

George G3RJV: Naturally the first radio projects were crystal sets, followed by one and two valve receivers. I also began to read the *Practical Wireless* and seek out library books on radio, usually by F J Camm who was then the *PW* Editor. The learning process was helped by reading technical books that – then – I couldn't quite understand and building things that sometimes worked and sometimes didn't work! One early project that I still recall well was an 0-V-1 shortwave receiver build into a discarded small desk drawer. The radio was fastened by the drawer handle to the cross bar of my bicycle and became my first portable receiver. A surplus tank whip antenna was mounted behind the saddle and the batteries were in my saddle bag! The *Eagle* comic printed a letter I sent to them about the radio and that was first writing on radio!

Rob G3XFD: When did Amateur Radio attract your interest George?

George G3RJV: My interest in the



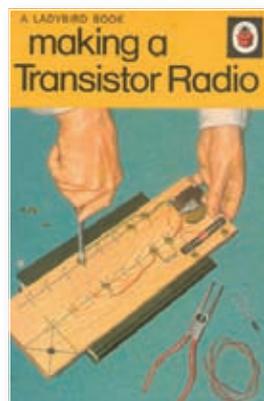
Amateur Radio bands really began when I met **Peter Linsley G3PDL**, shortly after I left school. He'd just received his licence and was an active member of the local radio club. I joined the club and decide to seek a licence. Peter assisted me in preparing for the old style Radio Amateur's Examination and practiced Morse code with me.

I received the callsign G3RJV in 1962. My first station was a three valve transmitter for Top Band. The line up was an EF51 oscillator, followed by an EF51 buffer amplifier, feeding a 6V6 as a power amplifier. The transmitter was used in conjunction with a BC348Q surplus Canadian war-time receiver. My first radio contact was achieved using a light bulb as an antenna! On the day I received the licence, I was testing the transmitter output using the bulb and Peter G3PJD, about a mile from me, heard it and called me!

Rob G3XFD: How did you end up as a Priest in the Anglican Church George?

George G3RJV: I had left school a week before my 16th birthday and got a job as a laboratory assistant with a local chemical company – our family had no history of further education. I wanted to be a physics teacher, so I worked myself back into higher education. But before I achieved that goal my direction changed and through a whole series of events and people (too long to relate) I decided to offer myself for ordination in the Church of England. I was then tied up in student life for the next five years. During this time, living in cramped accommodation and having little free time curtailed my Amateur Radio activity. However, I managed to spend a little time on the air thanks to a kindly local Radio Amateur.

I was ordained in 1968 and became the



Making A Transistor Radio by G3RJV was published in 1972.



George speaking in Texas in the early 1980s.

Looking at a fascinating life serving others and Amateur Radio



Journal of the G QRP Club.

curate of North Hykeham – just south of Lincoln.

I married to Jo-Anna, who is a teacher and we had two sons, Stephen and Ben.

Rob G3XFD: What brought you back into the hobby?

George G3RJV: My interest in radio was revived almost by accident through the local grammar school. Following a hint from one of the teachers, I formed an after-school radio club. There were several complete beginners so I devised a progressive radio project as a teaching aid. The project began as a crystal set and ended as a regenerative receiver capable of driving a loudspeaker. Soldering was not a good idea with a group of younger boys so, after trying several methods, I used a wooden board with the component leads trapped under brass screws and screw cups. Several of the radios were completed including one built by a boy whose father worked for Ladybird Books in Loughborough. I was approached with the idea of turning the project into a Ladybird Book. As a result, the Ladybird book *Making a Transistor Radio* was published in 1972. I was amazed at its success!

Some exposure in a children's television programme resulted in large sales and for a short time it actually entered the top ten sales list for children's books! People still write to me about it, some saying it started them off in Amateur Radio and some even saying it led to their career. This year the book re-appeared in the *Vintage Ladybird Box for Boys*.



George and Jo-Anna G00WH.



Leaning on the Hollywood labyrinth stone at Glendalough.

Rob G3XFD: We've got a copy of the original Ladybird book in the *PW* offices George!

George G3RJV: The book also rekindled my interest in Amateur Radio construction. I had given away or sold most of my equipment; much of it rather dated and using valves. At that time the Heathkit company in the USA released their first little QRP transceiver kit; the HW7. With some of the money from Ladybird I bought an HW7 kit. As with all Heathkits, it went together easily and as soon as I had soldered the last joint I wanted to test it on the air. The HW7 is a direct conversion transceiver that covers the 40, 20 and 15 metre bands with a transmitter output of 2 watts (on a good day!). I had serious doubts about it. The receiver looked too simple and 2 watts did not seem enough power.

For my first test, I did not have an



The "radio wall" at St. Aidan's Vicarage.



Sharing a speaking platform with Doug DeMaw, W1FB, at the Dayton Hamvention in 1992.

antenna but I had some wire, so I cut a dipole for 20 metres and mounted it around the picture frame in a large room in the old house where I then lived. There was no available coaxial cable so the two legs of the dipole were connected to the antenna input and the chassis of the HW7. I was also without a Morse key so I attached a short wire to the key jack socket and tapped the free end on the back of the case. Tuning along the 20 metre band I heard a Swedish station calling "CQ". So using the makeshift key I called him. To my amazement he came back to me, and much to my astonishment he give me a signal report of 569. That was how my interest in QRP began.

The simplicity of the HW7 encouraged me to venture into solid state construction and at about the same time **Doug DeMaw W1FB**, has become the technical editor of the American *QST* magazine and began a long series of articles describing solid state QRP equipment.

Rob G3XFD: How did you get to know Doug DeMaw George?

George G3RJV: I first got to know Doug through his writing in the early 1970s. At that time I was attempting to update from valves to solid state. My local library was generous enough to keep copies of the *QST* and in their pages I found a fellow traveller – Doug, who was then **W1CER**, had just become the Technical Editor of

the ARRL. He was shifting the emphasis of their magazine from valve to solid state design. My early introduction to transistor circuit design and the first solid state projects I built came directly from his writing. It was lucid, it was interesting and I understood it! In later years I was to come to know Doug DeMaw personally.

It's not difficult to work out that W1FB was my hero – I've been inspired by his work for many years and he has kept the hobby alive for so many people. It's a lucky man who can come to know a hero as friend and I'm glad to say that happened with Doug! When I began my writing for Amateur Radio magazines, Doug was my model. The ARRL staff used to say of Doug, "he wrote it once and it was done!" In the 1980s I was more than pleased when he subscribed to *Sprat* the G QRP Club journal and absolutely delighted when he began to write to me about *Sprat* and even about the articles I wrote for UK radio magazines.

Rob G3XFD: When did you get to meet Doug face-to-face?

George G3RJV: We exchanged mail for several years and I first visited Doug at the end of a trip to the Dayton Hamvention in 1992. **Dick Pascoe G0BPS** and I did the day's drive from central Ohio to northern Michigan to visit Doug's Oak Hills Farm. It was a visit to a deity! The farmhouse lies just outside the tiny village of Luther among the lakes and forests of north Michigan. The house is beautifully restored and much of the surrounding land has been left to return to the wild. Here Doug followed his other great loves, black powder shooting, hunting and cooking with natural ingredients. We were served wild deer and onions gathered from the local forest. **Jean DeMaw** was a lovely hostess as well as being a keen shooter with a muzzle loaded rifle!

Rob G3XFD: You have a most unusual trophy at home George – what's the story behind it?

George G3RJV: On my next visit to the Oak Hills Farm, I was presented with a wooden plaque which had my callsign burned on a deer jawbone. It had the inscription, "Primitive Man Endorsement. In recognition of the accomplishments of Rev. George Dobbs, G3RJV, who has demonstrated at Luther, Michigan, his skill and deadly marksmanship with primitive muzzle-loading weapons, for having eaten wild deer meat and for quaffing native

grog at the Luther tavern. Rev. Dobbs has earned the title of Mountain Man and Buckskinner. By the hand of Doug DeMaw, W1FB, 1994" I also cherish a small cup fashioned from deer horn by Doug and presented to me on condition that it would only ever contain spirits!

Rob G3XFD: You shared a special award with Doug – how did that come to be?

George G3RJV: In 1992, the American QRP ARCI, revived the **QRP Hall of Fame Award** and Doug was the first named recipient. I was also chosen to receive the award at the same time as Doug. My own Amateur Radio writing is modelled on Doug's style and I've always tried to make it as interesting and worthwhile as his work. Doug was presented with his plaque first and after I received mine I joined him, I looked up to him and said, "I don't know why they gave me one of these?" He looked down from his height and in the deep voice, that always reminded me of James Stewart, said, "I reckon for about the same reason they gave me one." Without doubt, that was the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me!

Rob G3XFD: How did the G QRP Club come into existence George?

George G3RJV: Encouraged by the

W1FB articles in *QST*, I began building my own QRP equipment and using it on the air. On 80 metres, I met several other people using home built equipment. This inspired me to write a letter to the *Short Wave Magazine* asking QRP enthusiasts to contact me with a view to forming a QRP Club. Just over 30 people wrote to express their interest and the G QRP Club was formed. The first ten members were, in order, **G3RJV, G2NJ, G3DNF, G8PG, G2BS, G4AL, G8KB, G2CAS, G2FWA** and **G2HKU**. The steady response showed that there was a great latent interest in QRP, that the Club was filling a much wanted need and that it was beginning to attract members from all over the UK as well as overseas countries.

Soon it became obvious that a Club publication was essential to hold together the scattered membership. When the question of the title of such a publication was raised **Gordon Bennett G3DNF**, came up with the name *Sprat* (Small Power Radio Amateur Transmitters). The first issue consisted of eight pages run off on an ancient spirit duplicator, and contained three technical articles plus operating and contest information. *Sprat* is still thriving over 30 years later. The club grew slowly at first but then membership expanded quickly and it currently stands at about 3,500 members.



Left to right – Rick Campbell KK7B, Roy Lewallen W7EL, G3RJV and Bill Kelsey N8ETO.



A group at the G QRP Club booth at Dayton. Roy Lewallen W7EL on the left and behind G3RJV on the right are Tony Fishpool G4WIF and Dick Pascoe, G0BPS.



Left to right – Graham Firth G3MFJ, Glen Reid K5FX, G3RJV and Wes Hayward W7ZOI.



The Abbey of Gethsemani.

Rob G3XFD: Your writing really took off then didn't it George?

George G3RJV: Yes, Rob it really did! In the late 1970s I began sharing my QRP construction work with the readers of the *Short Wave Magazine*. There followed a series of articles, some in conjunction with **Ian Keyser G3ROO**. In early 1980s I was approached by **Geoff Arnold G3GSR**, the then editor of *PW* to do some writing for the magazine. My first *PW* article was the *PW Severn*; a QRP transceiver for the 7MHz band. The first part appeared in *PW* in May 1983. The *PW Dart*, a 160 metre a.m. transmitter, written in conjunction with **Colin Turner G3VTT**, appeared later that year. These were followed by the *PW Terme*, a modulator transceiver described over three monthly parts beginning in November 1984.

Since that time, I have had the pleasure of sharing my QRP construction experiences. My current regular feature *Carrying on the Practical Way* began in August 1996 although the origins of this series goes back to 1991. Incidentally Rob, I'm always wary of making any claims for my *PW* submissions. I'm not a technical author – I don't know enough for that – instead I'm just a Vicar who enjoys building radio projects and happy to share them with other people!

Rob G3XFD: You really seemed to have enjoyed travelling and making new friends over the years George!

George G3RJV: Yes indeed, a great source of pleasure for me has been making links with QRP enthusiasts overseas. In 1982, I was invited to speak at a radio convention in Houston, Texas and that began a long standing link I have made with QRPers in the USA. In 1984 I first visited the Dayton Hamvention, in Dayton, Ohio, to speak and to run, with other club members, a small stand to promote the G QRP Club. Since that time I have been at the Dayton



The Dobbs' wooden Welsh lodge.

Hamvention every year, with the exception of two years when I visited HamCom in Texas instead.

For the last 14 years, the American QRP ARCI have hosted the Four Days in May Seminar and I have had the honour of being a guest speaker every year it has run. This has brought me into personal contact with many fine American Radio Amateurs including outstanding amateur radio writers like Doug W1FB, **Rick Campbell KK7B**, **Roy Lewallen W7EL**, and **Wes Hayward W7ZOI**. I have also been a guest speaker at QRP events several times in Texas, twice in California and once in Arkansas. Since 1999 I have linked my visits to the Dayton Hamvention with a week of retreat at the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani (they do spell it that way) in Kentucky. This was the home of **Thomas Merton**, the great monk, writer, poet and peace campaigner who was a hero of mine in my student days.

It has also been a great honour to have been invited further afield as a QRP speaker. In November 1994, I was invited, with **Rick Campbell KK7B**, to be a speaker at the first Asia-Pacific QRP Convention in Kuching, Sarawak. In 1999, the JA QRP Club invited me as a speaker, to the annual Ham Fair in Tokyo. This was an interesting experience with a real-time live simultaneous translation. My host in Japan was **Tadashi Okubo JH1FCZ**, who for many years ran a *Sprat*-like QRP magazine called *Fancy Crazy Zippy*. Tadashi is the co-designer of the 'Super XV0', which I have used several times for projects in *PW*.

Rob G3XFD: George, just how did the famous Rochdale QRP rallies start?

George G3RJV: In 1984 I was appointed as the Vicar of *St. Aidan's Church* in Sudden, Rochdale and it was an appointment I held until my retirement in 2008. From 1989, the G QRP Club ran a "QRP Mini-Convention" in the church hall at Sudden. The convention still continues



At the Pacificon QRP Convention, California 2003.

in an alternative location. Over the years, this humble event has attracted QRP fans from all over the world. Visitors come from the USA every year as well as Europe and further DX locations. During my time at *St. Aidan's church* I had the advantage of a large Edwardian vicarage and my wife Jo-Anna and I have entertained many QRPers from around the world. The large house also resulted in a large radio shack and workbench. It formed one wall of my study and was once called "the G3RJV Wall of Radio". My retirement house is very modest by comparison and I've been challenged to fit in as much radio space as possible!

Rob G3XFD: I know you've also got many other interests to keep you busy George!

George G3RJV: My other interests include Celtic Studies, derived from *St. Aidan* being a Celtic saint. For several years I have led pilgrimages to Celtic Christian sites in Ireland and Wales and have written for the (now defunct) magazine *Celtic Connections*. We have a family owned wooden lodge in Wales from which Jo-Anna, who now works part-time at a local resource centre and I seek out local Celtic sites, especially holy wells. In more recent times I have taken up water colour sketching, more in terms of recording places in a journal than painting pictures.

Rob G3XFD: Thank you for sharing a few highlights from your wonderful achievements George!

George G3RJV: My pleasure Rob! Amateur Radio has provided me with countless hours of pleasure, friendships all over the world and that unique satisfaction of using things that I've built with my own hands. I also enjoy sharing it through my writing and hope to continue to do so for many more years!