

In Britain the original 2, 5, 6 or 11 plus two letter calls were abandoned, and a new series starting G2, G3, G4, G5, G6 and G8 plus two letters were issued down to 1939. There was no correlation between old and new calls, thus 2AA did not become G2AA etc.. The G7 plus two series was used for special purposes: G7AE was an early Arctic expedition and G7FA to G7FH were used for clandestine contacts with Germany during the war.* Before the war an additional type of licence was issued, known as the 'artificial aerial' licence. Known nowadays as suppressed radiation, it is still beloved by the Home Office for test and development work, and the idea is that all transmitter development can be done with a dummy load and without radiating. The callsigns for 'AA' amateurs comprised G2 plus three letters, and when amateur licences were issued once more after the war in 1946 the G2 plus three calls were re-issued to their original holders, this time with permission to radiate. Other calls held previously were also re-issued, and all new applications for licences received callsigns in a new series starting at G3AAA which continued until it was exhausted in 1971. The year 1954 saw two innovations, a mobile transmitting permit and a special television licence. This ATV-only licence carried standard G3 calls, suffixed /T. From 1964 these were transferred to the G6 plus three/T series to remove the confusion between class A licences and television licences (which permitted transmission on 70 cm and higher only). Existing licence holders kept their letters, thus G3NOX/T became G6NOX/T, but any new ATV licences started at G6AAA/T.

In 1964 the first class B (VHF/UHF only) licences were issued, with callsigns starting at G8AAA. Two years later, in 1966, the G5 plus three series was inaugurated as reciprocal calls for foreign amateurs operating in the UK. G5AAA to G5LZZ were set aside for class A licencees and G5MAA onwards for class Bs. In 1971 G3ZZZ was issued (so they're not all geriatrics!) and new class A calls were issued starting G4AAA, still going strong. The separate licences for mobile and television operation were abolished in 1977: mobile operators had previously used their normal call suf-

fixed /M and this did not change. TV amateurs, however, lost their G6 plus three/T callsigns; if they already held a sound licence then this was the call they were to use, otherwise they were allocated a new G8. If they later graduated to class A they regained their original G3 callsign, minus the /T suffix of course, if they had held one, and this is what Jeremy G3NOX did (just for sake of example!). Complicated, isn't it?

Since then, the only major change has been the exhaustion of G8 plus three calls in 1981 and the consequent start of the G6 plus three series for new class B licences. These are still being issued apace and look like running out in the not too distant future. There is some speculation as to which series will be used next: G1 and G0 are unlikely and G9 is definitely 'out'. The G9 plus three series is in fact allocated to non-amateur test and development licences, mainly for industrial purposes. A notable example was G9AED, issued to the mobile TV transmitter built by Belling and Lee Ltd for service area tests before the start of band III broadcasting in the mid 1950s. Many TV dealers used the G9AED testcard for demonstrating television sets just before ITV started. Quite a few amateur radio dealers use G9 calls for testing rigs on the air, and several G9s have been issued in connection with the new UHF CB radio service, including my own G9BUP. The fact that this was issued on 31st March 1981 shows that the G9 series is likely to last for many months to come.

So far I have mentioned only G as the national prefix: there are in fact several. GD (Isle of Man), GI (Northern Ireland), GJ (Jersey), GM

(Scotland), GU (Guernsey) and GW (Wales) are all in use, and until recently GC was used to signify the Channel Islands. The GB prefix is used for beacons, repeaters and special event stations. Suffixes in use include /A (alternative address), /M (mobile) and /P (portable). More exotic are /MM (maritime mobile), /MA (maritime anchored) and /AM (aeronautical mobile). In some countries (for example Belgium) /T (television station) and /F (special event station) are also in use. Within the actual callsigns three letter combinations commencing Q are not used for fear of confusion with international Q-code messages, and British callsigns incorporating the figure 1 are rare (GB1RS news bulletin during the early 1950s and GB11ARU special event station in 1981).

By international agreement British calls can start with not only G but also M or various combinations commencing V and Z, also 2AA-2ZZ, so there is little risk of running out of callsigns. Finally, not all callsigns, heard on the bands are amateur stations of course. Three letter stations include standard frequency transmissions (e.g. GBR and MSF at Rugby), coast stations (e.g. GNF North Foreland) and government departments (e.g. GMP). Calls with four letters are ships and five letters are aircraft. Further details are given in the official Handbook for Radio Operators, published by HMSO. This is a fascinating book and is well worth adding to the shack bookshelf: it contains the full list of Q-codes for instance.

*Bitte QRX, Krieg by Michael Ockendon, G3MHF (Short Wave Magazine, June 1981).

