

# TUNED IN

**Ken Taylor**, Museum volunteer and member of Oxford and District Amateur Radio Society (ODARS), explores how objects in the Marconi Collection worked.

## Morse Key



**Maker:** Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company, Ltd.

**Origin:** England

**Date Created:** c. 1900

**Provenance:** Presented by the Marconi Corporation

**Materials:** Brass, ebonite, mahogany

**Inv:** 86892



*Morse Key (Inv: 86892)  
Photograph by Hermeet Gill*

A Morse Key is nothing more than a spring-loaded switch which completes an electrical circuit when activated.

Originally developed by Samuel Morse around 1837 for transmitting information along telegraph wires, the Morse code underwent refinements in the 1850s and finally became International Morse Code in 1865.

Keys used for radio communication differ slightly from telegraph types as they need to pass heavier currents. This results in slightly larger contacts and an operating knob that is better insulated to protect the operator from electric shock.

Some types of key have an additional pair of lighter contacts which connect slightly before the main set. These lighter contacts short circuit the headphones on the receiver, preventing the operator's hearing becoming damaged from the crash of the spark when transmitting.



*Morse Key (Inv: 86892)  
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## Experiments at Haven Hotel, Dorset

Marconi used this key in all his experiments at the Haven Hotel station (Sandbanks, near Poole, Dorset), leading to the 7777 tuning patent of 1900.

It was the first type of key designed specifically for wireless work.



*The Haven Hotel, showing Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Station.  
Courtesy of Poole Museums*



*Morse Key (Inv: 86892)  
Photograph by Hermeet Gill*