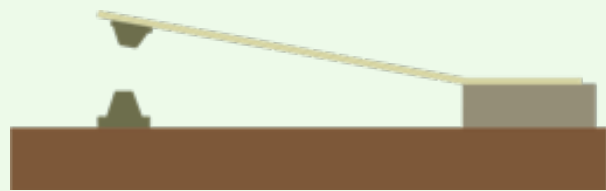


180 Years of Morse Keys

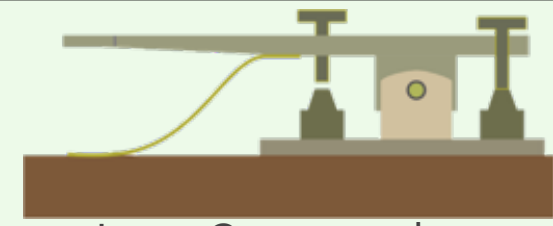
Since the first Morse keys were made, they have undergone a huge amount of development



Morse 'Correspondent' key

The first Morse key was most likely developed by Alfred Vail, one of Morse's associates. Although crude by today's standards it was used to send the first Morse telegraph message in 1844.

Seeing the shortcomings of the original key, a lever arrangement was used to improve the way Morse code could be sent.



Lever Correspondent

Camelback key



Many keys were launched over the following years, but the Camelback design became very popular. It had a 'hump' in the middle to provide the correct weight distribution. Not also the integral sounder as telegraphers liked their own key and sounder. This key dates from around 1863-5.

The steel lever key was a later development. Light and easy to transport, this design was pioneered by James Bunnell who launched his 'Triumph' key in 1881.



Steel lever key

British Post Office, Walters Electrical Patt 1056



In Europe the preference was for larger heavier keys that would remain in the telegraph office. This British Post Office Morse key (Walters Electrical Patt 1056) dating from around 1900 was a typical example.

With the importance of radio communications in warfare, many Morse keys were developed like this British Army WT-8AMP key. They were produced in large quantities and this one produced in WW2 is quite acceptable to use.



British Army WT-8AMP

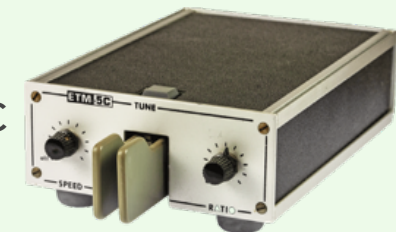
Vibroplex



One of the major issues faced by telegraphists was that of repetitive strain injury or 'Glass Arm' as it was often called. Horace Martin introduced his Vibroplex in 1904. The key mechanically generated dots using a vibrating arm, but dashes were still produced manually.

As electronics technology developed, it became possible to create both dots and dashes easily. The first designs and products became available in the 1940s using tubes / valves, but later transistors and ICs were used.

Samson ETM-5C el-bug



Kent paddle key



As modern amateur radio transceivers typically incorporate the key electronics, all that is needed is a paddle to make the dots and dashes.



Hi-Mound

Even though paddles enable fast accurately spaced Morse to be sent people still like to use straight keys and a good selection is available.



Bencher