

# Step by Step

By Felicity Smith M0MBW

*[An abridged version appeared in the October 2006 RadCom [1]. Here is Felicity's story in full – Ed]*

My thanks to all those who have helped along the way, from those behind the scenes completing paperwork and arranging venues, through the invigilators at the exams to those who explained the theory, bought the construction kits, patiently explained where I was going wrong and all those who said you can do it.



Well, now that I have managed a pass in all three of the Licence exams, I thought that it was about time that I fulfilled an agreement that I had made fairly light heartedly some months ago.

Yes, I was silly enough to agree to write an article for the newsletter about my experiences as a newcomer to the hobby working my way through the Licence stages.

A newcomer? Well, that's debatable for a start: my husband passed the old RAE some twenty plus years ago – long before we met. I didn't just marry him; he came with lots of baggage (Yaesu, Icom etc). Over the years, I became fed up with hearing this language I couldn't understand (no, Alex, not CW – I mean SWR, S59 etc.)

So, what to do about it? Well, like everyone else, once I heard the dreaded words exam, test and assessments, I ducked for cover. Attend a course? Where on earth would I find the time? Get real!

Aha! Says husband – I've heard that you can do a weekend Foundation course and sit the test the following week.

Hmmm. Two days? You know, I might just manage that. Next thing I know, he's signed me up for it!

So, in the middle of August last year, I turned up at the Cadet Centre in Epping with a copy of "Foundation Licence Now!", paper and pen, full of trepidation.

Along with five others, the basics and essentials needed to pass were explained over the next day and a half. Suddenly, things started to make sense – I now understood terms such as coax, feeder, PL259 and dummy load. And some twenty years after doing Higher Physics and

Chemistry (the Scottish equivalent of AS Levels when they were real exams), I finally understood the difference between a cell and a battery!

And the practical assessments? Well, if I can do them anyone can with the patient input from Marc, John, John, John and Alex (it's the only time I've seen Alex use a straight key!) The great bit about this is that you have to make a QSO (but beware a certain lead instructor who started getting ahead of his own script and QSY'd too soon leading to a trainee at first panicking and then laughing so much that she couldn't continue the QSO) so you don't end up with a Licence but no idea of what to do with it.

Much hilarity and many mugs of tea later, with our assessments duly signed off and completed, we left with the cries of "it's all in the book, see you on Friday" ringing in our ears.

Friday arrives, and we meet at All Saints. Papers handed out and time to begin. So the first question – I know this one, and the next one, and the next one. Hey, this isn't so bad after all. Now I start to believe everyone who has been saying that I will pass. OK, questions answered, check them through. Great, I can leave now.

Soon, most of us have left the room but are waiting for the papers to be marked. We're soon put out of our misery with the news that all six of us have passed. Group smiley photo duly taken, off we go to post off the forms to the Radio Licensing Centre.

A few days later, my licence arrives and I have my own callsign, M3OAX. Great, I can use the station myself using my privileges, or, under Malcolm's supervision, I can use more than "my" 10W. I can stop here – but others have different ideas "why stop now, go on, at least do the Intermediate".

So, in February, I find myself back in Epping on a Sunday morning demonstrating my ability to build a simple circuit, make neat solder joints and to construct a kit. Believe me, if I can pass this anyone can – I had never even used a soldering iron until that day.

No classes this time, it's all in the book is the familiar cry. A date for the exam is set and a couple of weeks before it, I get around to reading the book, and again, and again. Oh cripes – too late now, it's exam night.

Back to All Saints, but it's only four of us this time. Some of the questions take a bit more reading, but otherwise it's not any harder than the Foundation – there are just a few more topics to be covered. Having gone through the questions, and checked my answers, it's still too soon to leave the room. Hmm, time to check a bit more carefully. Oops, that answer's not right – better change it (pity – as I found out afterwards, I had changed it from the correct answer to a wrong one.) Phew, I can escape now. Soon, there are three of us outside undertaking the traditional dissection of the exam. Oh dear, got that wrong and that one (well, at least by the general consensus of opinion). The papers are marked, and Marc calls us back in to say that we've all passed. Another smiley photo for the club archives!

More decisions to be made now – send off a cheque for a 2E0 callsign, or wait and go for the Advanced. Having thought about what is coming up at work in the next year or so, I come to the conclusion that if I don't go for it now, I probably never will.

This time, I'm on my own – no course, no assessments – just an exam, which it looks as though I will be sitting on my own (well at least I can't be accused of copying!)

Go on, they say – just ask a question on the group if you need help. But in the time honoured tradition of being stubborn, I read the book, and read it again (and again). I desperately search for practice papers, but as the Advanced doesn't have a set pass mark yet, it's hard to find such resources.



On the appointed day, 11<sup>th</sup> May, I'm at All Saints (yet again) along with a candidate from Kent who was just grateful for an exam centre.

You may begin – the waiting is over, it's the moment of truth. The questions on Licence conditions are no problem – after all, you have a full BR68 there with the answers! Hang on, what's this – it wasn't in the book – or this – or this. Oh dear, stop – take a deep breath. Right lets go through and answer the questions I am sure of (a depressingly small number!) Now, go back and take my time and get an answer to everything. Some were answered by a process of elimination (it needs a calculation, I know values for A and B and the formula sheet has only one formula with both A and B, so the answer must be this). For others, it's a case of this is the only one that sounds plausible.

This time around, I'm still working at the time that you can first leave the exam room. When I do eventually finish and check what I can, it's time to go. The papers will be marked in Potters Bar, so there's no point in hanging around when I think it's a fail. Oh well, I'll find out in due course but I hope the results arrive in time for me to enter for the July exam.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> June, a very slim envelope arrives from the RSGB. The letter doesn't say: a quick look at the result sheet – YES!! I've passed. Where's the chequebook? I want to send that form off in tonight's post.

I've no idea what the pass mark was, or what my mark was, but does it matter? Of course not! By the time you are reading this, I will know what my callsign is, but for now...

73

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[1] RadCom October 2006, p.14 – “Newcomer's News”

