

## GEOFF WATTS, FOUNDER OF IOTA

The world-wide DX community was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Geoff Watts on 9 May 1994 at the age of 75. He died quite suddenly from a heart attack in Norwich where he had lived all his life. As the news spread, there was shock at the loss of a friend who for so many years had given so much to amateur radio. Many remembered him as the founder of the DX News Sheet which he ran single handed between 1962 and 1982, editing, printing and mailing the bulletin weekly to thousands of readers worldwide. Others knew him as the editor and publisher, over three decades, of the authoritative DXNS DXCC Countries Guide and Radio Amateur Prefix-Country-Zone List. But, for readers of this booklet, his crowning achievement was his creation of the IOTA Award Programme in December 1964 and his management of it for more than 20 years until March 1985.

IOTA is the result of Geoff's vision which was to catch the imagination of amateurs worldwide. During the 60s most DXers were concentrating on DXCC following an influx of new countries as a result of political change. IOTA took a few years to catch on but catch on it did. Geoff had introduced it by saying "Now that propagation conditions are poor, DX getting scarce, the possibility of brand new DXCC countries eventually becoming extremely remote, top DXers retiring because there is nothing new left to work, it is proposed that an entirely new DX achievement be created, the **ISLANDS ON THE AIR AWARD**, to promote more activity and interest among all DXers, many of whom could then go on a brand new island DXpedition themselves". This is as true today as when it was written in July 1964!

Geoff was well qualified to found a new award programme. Not only had he been at that time the editor of the DX News Sheet for two years but he also had a distinguished SWL record. As BRS-3129, he had, already in 1958, become the first British SWL to get all 40 CQ zones confirmed. He went on to become the first British SWL to have 300 countries heard and confirmed and for many years he had all countries on the current DXCC list heard and confirmed.

Those who had contact with Geoff knew him to be quiet and unassuming, always a gentleman.



He was one of "the old school." He always strove for high standards in himself. The strict routines adopted for the weekly issue of DXNS, the care and accuracy devoted to the maintenance of IOTA records, the conscientiousness in handling correspondence and queries all bear this out. It was perhaps natural that he expected high standards in return, particularly from those who participated in his IOTA award programme.

Geoff passed IOTA to the RSGB in 1985. This must have been as great a wrench for him as the transfer three years earlier of the DX News Sheet. His wife was in poor health and he himself was having problems with his sight. But his support for IOTA never wavered. In the two years before his death Geoff under his SWL call BRS-3129 started to collect islands himself! He received IOTA-100 certificate No. 639 on 10 March 1993 - and by January 1994 his score had increased to 390 islands confirmed, not bad going! Quite often he would give me a land-line to ask about a particular operation coming through there and then on the band. He was indeed a real short wave listener right up to the end.

Geoff was inducted in 1977 into the CQ Magazine's DX HALL OF FAME, one of the highest honours possible, for his services to DXing through DX News Sheet. He was the first, and remains the only, SWL to have been so honoured.

IOTA will always be linked to the name of Geoff Watts. Its growth into a major international award programme is fitting tribute.

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