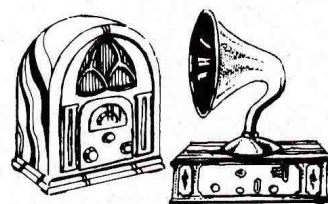


Vintage Radio

by PETER LANKSHEAR



Report on the NZVRS 'Conference 90'

Vintage radio societies are thriving, with Australia and New Zealand each having a major club. The New Zealand Vintage Radio Society, the senior of the two, is now 10 years old. During 1990, New Zealand is recognising its sesqui-centennial in many ways, with clubs and societies being encouraged to hold celebrations. Accordingly the NZVRS, with perhaps a little trepidation, arranged a convention for the holiday weekend of 2nd June.

With something like 50% of the 250 or so NZVRS members living in the greater Auckland area, there was no question as to where the convention should be held. Planning commenced at the start of the year, and to the considerable credit of all involved, the whole complex event went like clockwork.

The convention programme format was based on that evolved by America's veteran Antique Wireless Association, which has for many years conducted successful conventions. It proved to be a winner here also. After registration formalities, the Saturday morning was given over to addresses. The afternoon was taken up by an auction and the convention dinner filled in the evening. Sunday was spent by groups visiting a range of Auckland collections.

HRSA represented

An honoured guest was Ray Kelly, editor of the Historic Radio Society of Australia's *Bulletin*. First to give a formal address, Ray described the history of the eight year old Australian Society, which has a membership about 50% greater than its trans-Tasman counterpart.

Then followed a talk by fellow Australian John Mann, who related in a most entertaining manner the trials, tribulations and successes in a hobby combining two popular fields of preservation, the restoration of vintage car radios.

Final event for the Saturday morning was an outline by your scribe of the history of the superheterodyne receiver.

The auction

Auctions are always popular events at vintage radio society functions, and the NZVRS effort on June 2 was no exception. This is understandable, as auctions

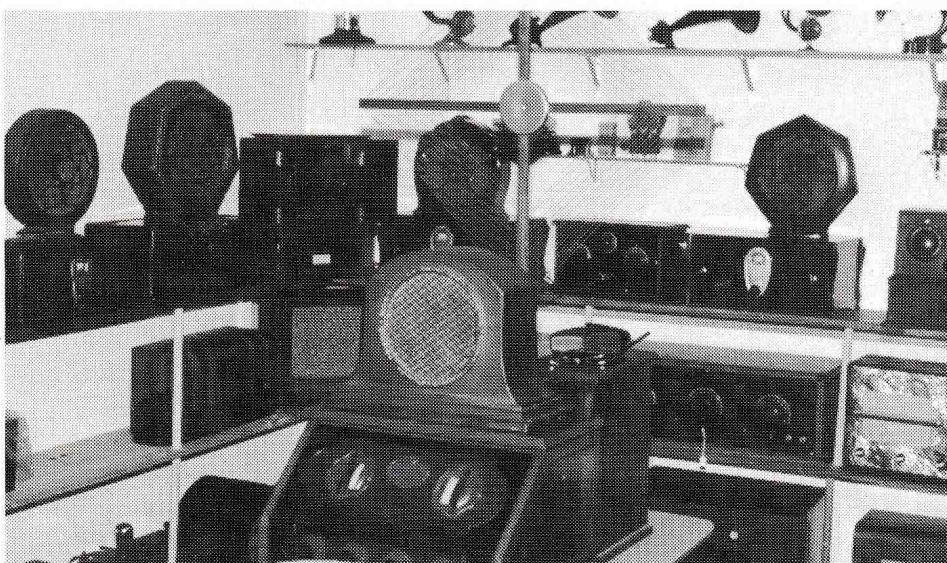


Fig.2: A corner of the pioneer New Zealand collection belonging to John Stokes.

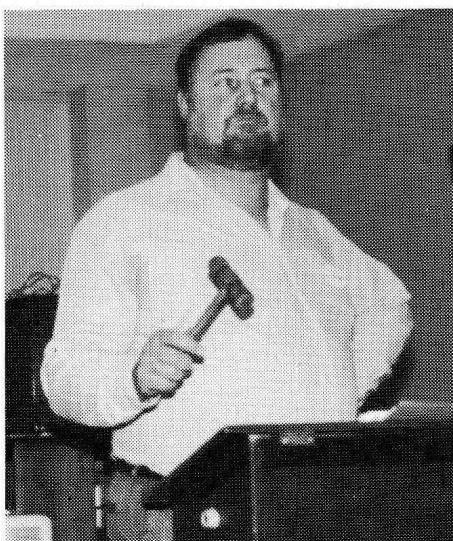


Fig.1: A small Philco curved-end mantle goes under Don Strange's hammer at the NZVRS Conference auction.

perform several functions. They provide an opportunity for some members to cull their collections, and for others to add to theirs.

Another important aspect of auctions is providing an idea of the value of radios. Unlike some hobbies, vintage radio has no recognised standard set of values. Transactions conducted in isolation tend to be 'one off' and frequently result in bartering or swapping. Collectors can gain from an auction an indication of the worth of equipment, while the club benefits considerably from the 10% commission on sales.

The group of 120 or so items of equipment to go under the NZVRS hammer was impressive. Ranging from the 1920's to the cutoff date of 1960, there were horn speakers, plastic radios, metal boxes, handsome consoles, novelty receivers, books, crystal sets, test instruments and several excellent repro-

ductions of early home built receivers. Most common were mantle radios from the 1950 period.

Prices were as varied as the lineup, and there was something for everybody. Society President Don Strange displayed his auctioneering skills in keeping the action going and the bidders on their toes. The top bid of \$410 was by a South Island enthusiast for an excellent 1928 Atwater Kent model 40 metal box receiver, without speaker. At the other end of the scale, average quality small plastic mantle receivers from the middle 1950's fetched less than \$20.

A surprise to some was the popularity of a group of finely crafted replica receivers of the 1920's. A one-valve boy's radio in a mahogany cabinet fetched \$120 and a three-valve regenerative receiver reached \$290. Radios of this type have a special place in collections. Home building from scratch and kits was an important aspect of early radio, and it can be argued that provided genuine parts and technology are used, the actual assembly date is not important.

The auction placed a premium on receivers being in operating condition, if only to assure purchasers that essential components, in particular power transformers, were intact.



Fig.3: Some worthwhile sets saved from the scrap heap. This is a small part of a collection totalling well over 500 receivers.

Final event for the day was the Conference dinner. An excellent meal was accompanied by much animated conversation, well into the evening.

A popular feature was the display in the convention room of a wide range of choice vintage and novelty receivers, selected from members' collections. Another display item to receive much attention was a flawless replica of a 1925 QST-designed one-valve Hartley transmitter.

Tour on day 2

The second day was given over to local members escorting groups of visitors around Auckland to see a selection of displays. Obviously, only a few collections could be included, but the half



Fig.4: Eric Kirby demonstrates his replica 1925 transmitter.



Fig.7: A beautifully presented Atwater Kent model 53 on display. This early all-mains powered receiver has a steel cabinet which doubles as a table.

dozen or so chosen revealed just how wide the variation in interests can be, ranging from small to large, and from general 'run of the mill' receivers to superb landmark radios of the 1920's.

There were contrasts in ages of collectors. One young enthusiast who has been collecting for about six years, has an enviable assembly of carefully chosen classics that any collector would be proud to own. It is most encouraging to find that there are younger people committed to becoming responsible and knowledgeable custodians of the early equipment, which in time they are likely to inherit from the pioneer collectors.

Next we saw the work of a more senior citizen who in only four years has gathered together an incredible collection that at last count numbered 550 radios. Whilst most of his models are not particularly rare, nevertheless he has some classics, and his receivers form an invaluable collection that gathers in one place numerous examples of the everyday radios from the pre-TV period, when there was a valve receiver in practically every household.

Each collection selected had a different theme. One caught the eye with its attractive presentation. Sets varying from a classic Canadian Rogers mantle, with beautiful veneers, to groups of coloured plastic midgets were all tastefully arranged to create maximum visual impact.

Another popular venue was one of New Zealand's pioneer collections, which includes historic pre-1920 receivers and many fine early classics from New Zealand manufacturers.

VINTAGE RADIO



Fig.5: An international part of Fred Pond's carefully staged collection of immaculate receivers, this section featuring American, Australian and English models.

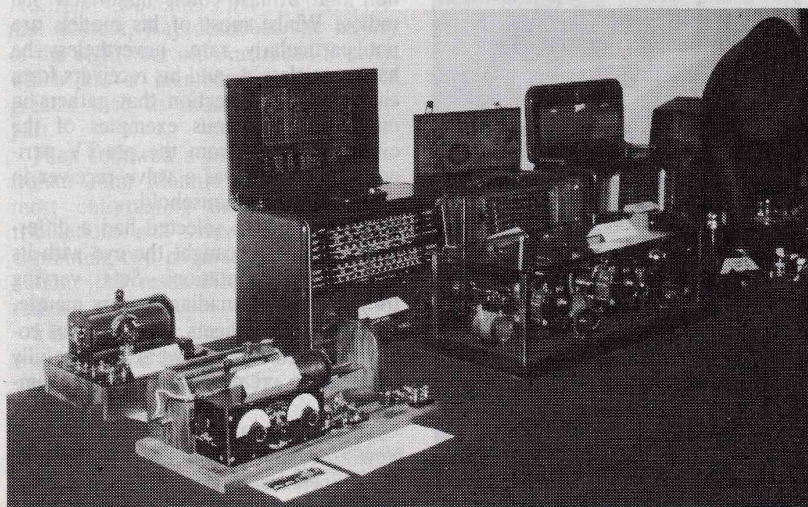


Fig.6: Some of the unusual receivers on show.

Valuable lessons

There could have been few who were not impressed and inspired by the convention and the displays. Most visitors would have returned home with plenty of ideas on how to improve their own displays. Some important aspects of serious collecting became apparent, and are worth passing on.

What appeals to one collector may be of little interest to another. This is predictable in a hobby as diverse and wide ranging as ours, and an active club with a large membership means that no aspect of vintage radio is neglected.

Both the auction and the members' displays reinforced the importance of caution in refinishing valuable equipment. It is very easy to degrade the historic and monetary value of a radio by thoughtless, inept or over-enthusiastic 'restoration'. There was agreement in discussion that rare and valuable cabinets needing attention should be professionally refinished with original stains, shading and lacquers, but it cannot be over emphasised that unless a classic radio is in really bad condition, careful cleaning only is the best policy.

Club membership

The convention confirmed the value of club membership. Although many members live in isolation, they are kept in touch with the vintage radio scene by the club newsletters and out of town visitors. A surprising number belong to both the HRSA and the NZVRS, and membership of one or both is strongly urged for collectors regardless of whether they have only one radio or a large collection.

The Historic Radio Society of Australia contact person is:

The Secretary, HRSA,
Rex Whales,
PO Box 283,
Mt Waverly, Vic 3149.

And his New Zealand counterpart can be contacted as follows:

The Secretary, NZVRS,
Bryan Marsh,
20 Rimu Road,
Mangere Bridge, Auckland.

Both organisations welcome new members and publish well edited bulletins quarterly.

The 1990 Vintage Radio convention is now over. But if many enthusiasts have their way, it will not be the last, with several expressing the hope that the HRSA could host the next in two year's time. 21