

When I Think Back...

by Neville Williams

John Murray Moyle – engineer, editor, music and art lover

A great many people knew 'Johnny' Moyle, having met him personally, or on-air as a radio amateur, or as an editor/writer for many years in technical magazines. Few realised, however, that over and above his preoccupation with electronics, John was a man with a natural flair for poetry, painting and music. He was also an informed debater on a wide range of subjects.

Having worked alongside John, or been in close contact with him for twenty-odd years, I got to know him better than most. Many long hours were spent over innumerable cups of coffee discussing all manner of subjects, from equipment design to the hereafter. I sat in on dozens of arguments with Julian Russell about musical interpretation, and caught the backwash of many others he had with Jim Corbin over Wireless Institute politics.

Sadly, I also witnessed his final confrontation – with terminal cancer.

John Murray Moyle was born in Malvern, Victoria in February 1908 and, from an early age, displayed an unusual blend of literary, musical and 'mechanical' talents, which were evident throughout his entire working life.

He attended Scotch College, Melbourne, from 1923 to 1926, and emerged with an impressive student record. He won prizes for poems which he contributed to the school magazine *The Scotch Collegian* and – shades of things to come – was appointed editor of that magazine during his final year. In that same year he wrote the Colcough Prize song and, as a member of the debating team, won the school debating award.

His school testimonial was both perceptive and prophetic: 'John Moyle has a marked literary facility and, if he finds scope for his powers in the field, may be relied upon to do his utmost to bring distinction to himself and his employer'.

After leaving Scotch, John continued to find outlets for his literary talents, some of his poems and short stories

being published in the daily press and magazines, including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Sun Pictorial*, the *New Triad* and *The Argosy* – a literary publication no longer in existence.

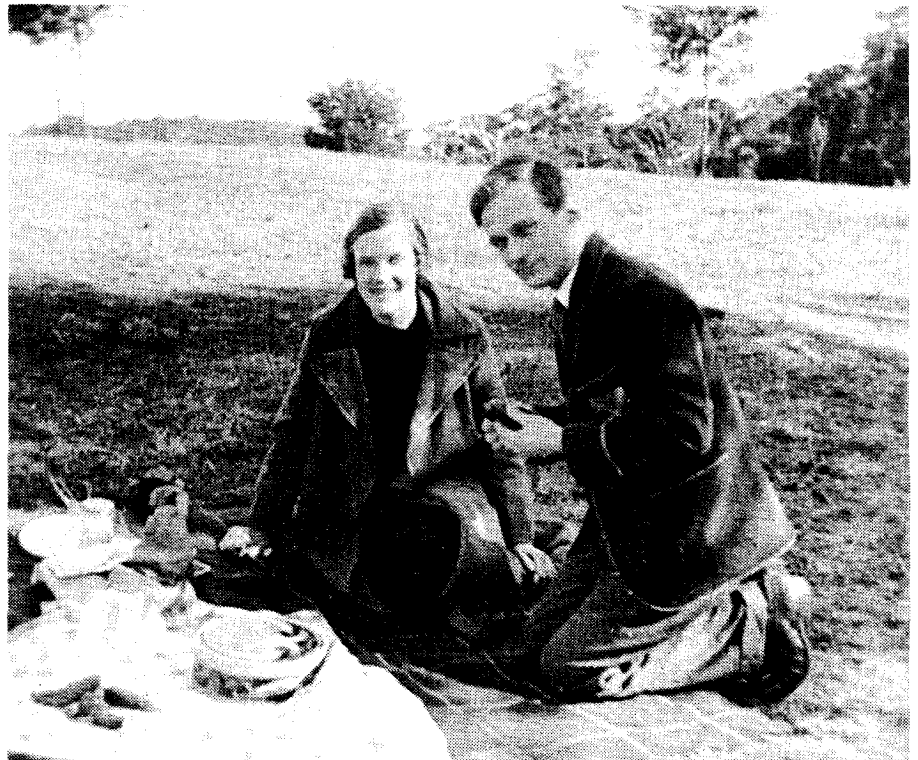
These facets of John Moyle's personality may come as a surprise to some of his industry contacts in later life, who may well have seen him as a single-minded man, completely committed to

the theory and practice of electronics.

I, for one, knew nothing of his penchant for poetry until in late 1941, on the eve of his joining the the RAAF, John sought the urgent assistance of Frank Cull, *Radio & Hobbies* foreman printer, in the production of a small book: *Forty Poems*. I still have the copy that he gave me at the time – almost diffidently, it seemed.

The poems and sonnets are not dated or otherwise identified, but they provide intimate glimpses of a man sensitive to many things beyond the realm of multimeters, soldering irons and typewriters. I quote just one, written decades before environmental awareness became fashionable (see box).

In Melbourne, during the late 1920s, John's first job was in the commercial advertising section of radio station 3DB. Later, during the depression years, he took on the editorship of a farming weekly: *The Gippsland and Northern*. It



John Moyle and his wife Alice on a picnic in the Blue Mountains, in the mid 1930's. John was also testing some amateur radio gear, while they were there. (Courtesy Mrs Olga Bell)



A portrait of John Moyle taken before the second World War.



During the war, John Moyle served in the RAAF and rose to the rank of Squadron Leader.



A whimsical John Moyle, snapped at the stereo hifi demonstration at Sydney's Conservatorium in 1959.

was scarcely in accord with his predominantly technical aspirations, but it provided valuable journalistic experience and helped pay the bills.

One aspect of the job that did appeal to him was road testing late model cars. Deputising for his rural readers, he drove them personally along selected routes to and through the Dandenongs, and commented on their performance.

Already a lover of classical music, John taught himself to paint, about this time, using both water colours and oils. Later, when he came to work in Sydney, he was to take every opportunity to broaden his knowledge and appreciation in these areas.

Joins 'Wireless Weekly'

But while John's roots were in Melbourne, it was Sydney that, in 1932 gave him the break he wanted when he gained a position on the staff of *Wireless Weekly*. Ross Hull had returned to the USA a few months previously (See our February 1989 issue, p.24) and while Ross's brother 'Braith' had taken over as editor, the magazine was clearly in need of another enthusiast in the Ross Hull mould.

John Moyle, at 24, was just such a person - sharing Ross Hull's wide-ranging interests and writing skills, plus a useful background in radio.

Bitten by the 'bug' at school, John had maintained a hobby interest in wireless/radio, along with his other activities. By the late 1920s, he had become an enthusiastic experimenter and radio amateur, writing occasional technical articles for the Victorian journal *Listener In*.

When he moved to Sydney, he changed his callsign to VK2JU, which was too close to VK3JU - Ross Hull's callsign - to be a coincidence. '2JU' was later to be associated with a string of amateur radio projects featured in *Radio & Hobbies*, but more of that later.

By coincidence, John's first job on *Wireless Weekly* paralleled that of Ross Hull when he had joined *QST* in 1926 - that of answering technical queries addressed to the magazine. Both became assistants to the technical editor and both were later promoted to technical editor in their own right.

In 1933, John married a Melbourne lass, Alice Brown, whom he had known since his schooldays. An accomplished cellist, Alice shared his interest in classical music and this, along with John's involvement with hifi receivers and amplifiers, ensured that the family home in Chatswood, Sydney, would re-echo to the sound of new record releases - 78rpm style. It was into this environment that their two daughters were subsequently born: Josephine and Carolyn.

John prepared regular record reviews for *Wireless Weekly*, while Alice also provided articles on the music scene, writing under her maiden name. In those days, *Wireless Weekly* appeared to have a 'thing' about too many by-lined articles by any one writer, let alone too many articles by a married couple!

It was perhaps not surprising that John should also turn up on Sydney radio 2UE which, like *Wireless Weekly*, was a subsidiary of Associated Newspapers Ltd. In off-the-cuff talk sessions,

he would answer technical questions on behalf of the magazine but, on Sunday evenings, he would turn his attention to the classics in 'Serenade to Music' - a session which became associated with the Sydney Recorded Music Society, of which John was a foundation member

Landmark years

1933 was a landmark year for *Wireless Weekly*, highlighted by a receiver design competition that produced the famous '1933 Standard' - an ambitious project that signalled a new era in home receiver construction. It was followed in 1934 by the 'Champion', another receiver that clearly outclassed contemporary commercial models.

What input John had to the series is difficult to define at this remote date, but the style is very much his. Certainly, in the years that followed, John's diligence at both workbench and typewriter is evidenced by the number of projects that carry his byline.

Those listed in our recent 50th Anniversary issue were a mere sampling of

The Leaves

The leaves are falling on my garden path,
One by wistful one, they flutter down,
Born on the wings of every little breeze,
Red, gold and brown.

Each day I needs must tread them underfoot;
Softly I take each single step, lest they
Should think that I, in passing, could forget
Their sun-sweet day.

One of John Moyle's poems. He was a man of diverse talents.

John Moyle

designs published in the latter part of 1938: 'Little Jim' for bedside listening, May 27; 'Stereoscopic Six' receiver, Sept 2; 'Stereoscopic Amplifier', Oct 7; 'Stereoscopic Eight', Nov 18; 'Stereoscopic Nine', Dec 16; and so on.

The Stereoscopic Nine would have been a major undertaking for any do-it-yourself publication. The separate tuner featured dual-wave coverage, with an RF stage, combined dial and push-button (lever) tuning and a 2-position selectivity switch. The amplifier used push-pull 2A3 output triodes, driven by an Australian made full-range transformer and feeding multiple Australian Rola loudspeakers.

The job of conceiving, building, testing and writing about a succession of such projects for years on end could never have been fitted into a regulation 40-hour week. But John Moyle didn't live by the clock; his day began when he got up and finished long after everyone else had gone to bed. Like Ross Hull before him, once possessed by an idea he had to pursue it to a conclusion, grudging the time lost to meals and sleep.

For sure, he did manage to grab the odd weekend away from workbench and typewriter – often to pursue another obsession: tearing around the countryside with mobile 6-metre (50MHz) amateur radio gear, talking back to fellow 'hams' from remote mountain bluffs around Sydney – some the best part of 200km away. This interest had a sequel in the immediate postwar years.

'Radio & Hobbies'

Having recently celebrated what is effectively this journal's golden anniversary as a monthly (see our April 1989 issue), the story of *Radio & Hobbies* (et seq.) is sufficiently well known not to warrant recounting in detail. It warrants mention, however, primarily for the sake of continuity.

Sufficient to say that projects like the Stereoscopic Nine really clamoured for presentation in a monthly technical magazine, rather than being jammed into a threepenny weekly, along with throwaway programmes and gossip about radio station personalities.

The result was just such a monthly, entitled *Radio & Hobbies in Australia* – the last two words in small type. It was an immediate success, such that Associated Newspapers had to load the first issue (April 1939) back on to their presses for a second run – which also sold out.



July 1949: Back in mufti after the war, and surrounded by the newly reconstituted staff, editor John Moyle presents Maurice Findlay with a 21st birthday present. (Courtesy Dr Alice Moyle)

But the much heralded team of editor A.G. ('Braith) Hull and technical editor John Moyle proved less enduring. Within 12 months, John Moyle had taken over as editor and 'Braith Hull

had disappeared, to re-surface almost immediately as editor and publisher of the existing and rival monthly *Australian Radio World*.

Feelings ran high between the two



Complete with pipe and micrometer, John is pictured here with his crystal-grinding paraphenalia spread out on the table: frequency meter (top right), a slab of rigid very flat glass and (foreground) his test oscillator. In those days, crystals were large enough to handle – gingerly! (Courtesy Dr Alice Moyle)

magazines, or rather the people running them. Busier than the proverbial one-armed paper-hanger, John Moyle set about assembling a group of regular contributors. This is where I first became involved with *R&H*, subsequently accepting the position of technical editor towards the end of 1941.

It was about then that John joined the RAAF with a view to becoming a radar instructor. Involved in the group were a number of other well known radio engineers, amateurs and industry executives – all likely candidates for a crash course in the new and highly secret technology.

John served in the RAAF from 1941 to 1946, based mainly in Melbourne. He rose to the rank of squadron-leader and, fittingly, was made responsible for the production of all radar manuals at the Melbourne headquarters.

Back at the office

During this period, John used to call in to the *R&H* office during his periodic visits to Sydney but, while obviously interested in the well being of the magazine, he never sought to interfere in its affairs.

I must confess, however, to some personal misgivings as to how it would work out when he moved back into the editor's chair. While I also devoted many extra hours to the job in hand, I preferred to work by the clock: 9.00am start, 5.30pm finish, and a structured day in between. John's routine, I knew, would be to turn up when he had recovered from the exhaustion of the previous day, cope with tasks and diversions on a needs-must basis, then work through the evening until once again exhausted!

In fact – and fortunately – our different approaches turned out to be complementary rather than a source of conflict, when he did return. My own routine fitted in with the everyday requirements of staff and office administration. It left John free to work the way he wanted to with never any doubt, on the part of other staff, as to his flair, his enthusiasm or the fact that he was 'pulling his weight'.

He took over the record review section that had been maintained by popular science contributor Calvin Walters, building it into one that had a unique reputation for combining keen musical appreciation with informed technical appraisal.

It was in this period that morning tea sessions were frequently dominated by arguments with Julian Russell, himself a

former professional pianist and conductor and, at the time, adjudicator and music critic for the *Sydney Sun*.

One such argument took the three of us into an inner sanctum at Associated Newspapers, where there happened to be a piano. No stranger to the instrument himself, John had maintained that it was essentially a mechanical device in which the percussive qualities could be expressed ultimately as a function of the velocity imparted to the hammer by the player, irrespective of their technique.

Julian was unimpressed by this 'mechanical' analysis. He was determined to demonstrate the subtleties of wrist and finger action and the tonal differences resulting from variously striking, stroking or merely pressing the keys. Arguments like that were always so entertaining and/or informative that, if they didn't commence spontaneously, they were well worth starting!

It wasn't that there was lack of discussion, debate or argument between John and myself – or other members of the staff – on other subjects. Seldom, if ever, was it acrimonious and it usually served a very useful purpose. With somebody always ready to act as the 'devil's advocate', strongly held views were challenged and tested before ever they appeared in print.

Back on the air

For obvious reasons amateur radio had been silenced during the war, but was given the okay again following the cessation of hostilities. Amateurs were keen to get back on the air, keen to apply techniques picked up from war-time communications, and keen to get their hands on war surplus equipment and oddments which began to turn up in disposals stores.

Squadron leader John Moyle may only just have relinquished his commission and resumed his role as editor of *Radio & Hobbies*, but he had as much boyish fun as any of us jostling for 'two bob' bargains at Prices' Radio in Angel Place (Sydney), or searching through piles of equipment at Ace Radio and elsewhere for sought after items that others may have overlooked.

One such unit that he found, a battery powered frequency meter, complete with calibration book, enabled him to re-grind ex-disposals quartz crystals at a time when new made-to-order crystals were dauntingly expensive. Other amateurs on the staff inherited free crystals as John refined his touch with paste, talcum powder and hydrofluoric acid. But that was only half the story, which I'll continue next time. ☺