

When I Think Back...

by Neville Williams

John Murray Moyle — 2

Rejoining the magazine after the second World War, John Moyle soon became involved in setting up a two-way radio system for the parent company's newspapers. He also renewed his involvement with amateur radio and hifi audio, and even threw himself into the design of television receivers when broadcasting began in the 1950's.

When the PMG Department announced frequency allocations for commercial mobile radio services, John seized upon the idea of fitting two-way radio to the news gathering vehicles operated by the parent company's *Sydney Sun* newspaper. Up to that time, reporters had to rely on phone calls to the office for instructions, and to get stories back to the sub-editors. Two-way radio would provide virtually instant access.

To John, it was simply an elaboration of what he had been doing, as an amateur on the 6-metre band, around 1936. The frequency was higher — 70MHz instead of 50MHz — and the gear would ultimately need to be suitable for use by non-technical personnel. Neither requirement should present any great problem.

The *Sun* executives were interested, if not fully convinced, and John set about adapting and/or rebuilding bits of what were essentially amateur gear. One was a base station, which was ultimately set up in a disused 2UE studio in the Associated Newspapers building in Elizabeth St, Sydney. The other, a vibrator powered transportable transceiver to be lashed to the rear seat of a news car.

Radio newsgathering

Within a matter of weeks, after a series of night-time and weekend tests using *R & H* 'volunteers', the gear made its official debut in July 1948, when the first Australian news story was despatched by radio direct from a reporter's car to the news editor. (See *Radio & Hobbies* for August 1948). It came just one month after Kemsley Newspapers in Britain has boasted of a similar 'scoop'.

The two-way radio system remained John's personal 'baby' as it developed into a full-scale system, maintained by a

technician attached to the *R & H* staff for that purpose.

Not long after its inauguration, John began to look covetously at the decibels of gain that could be won from a high gain antenna. That automatically involved staff member Raymond Howe, who had specialised in antenna design in the RAAF. Many and long were the

discussions (arguments?) between the two, but the consensus design was a large vertical phased array which was assembled on the roof of the *Sun* building, using knot-free timber, carefully primed and painted.

It was erected one weekend by contract riggers, who managed the job without damaging the elements and without dropping the whole lot into the street at the rear of the building. Whether John drew breath during the operation remained a matter of speculation.

But even that episode paled before what happened when the equipment had to be moved to a new building in Wattle St, Ultimo, following a takeover by John Fairfax & Sons in the late



July 2, 1948: John Moyle transmits to a news car the first instruction that has just been received by reporter Kath O'Neill from *'Sun'* news editor Jack Toohey. The typically amateur station set-up was subsequently replaced by a remotely controlled system.

1950s. The haste with which the building was conceived, constructed and occupied is apocryphal – but somewhere in the process, the question arose as to where the antennas might be mounted, for two-way radio systems now serving both the *Sun* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, plus possible radio and television links.

Almost hesitantly, John suggested a scaled-down AWA-style tower – and to his amazement, the idea was seized upon by both management and architects as a much needed centrepiece for what was essentially a utilitarian building. And there it still stands, like a mini Eiffel Tower, referred to by the then-generation of company luminaries as 'Moyle's Monument'.

Amateur station VK2JU

Immediately after the war, John had set up his own amateur gear in the only place available to him at the time – in an unoccupied 'cosmetic' tower room on the roof of the original 14-storey Associated Newspapers building. It was a promising site for VHF experiments but cold, damp and abysmally isolated on dark winter nights. Even so, it was from there that he generated the enthusiasm and the technology that ultimately gave birth to the *Sun* 2-way system.

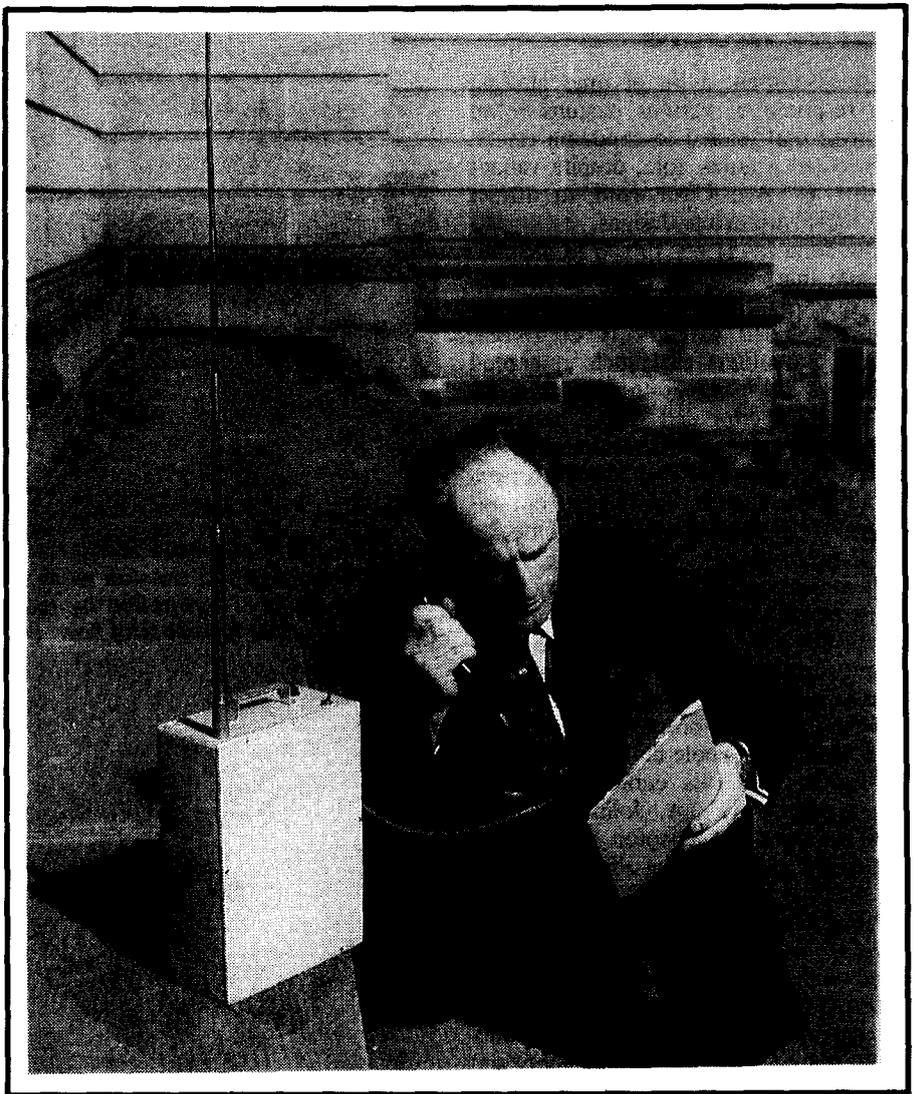
Perhaps I shouldn't talk. My own 'shack' at the time was indeed a shack, stuck out in the backyard and likewise damp, cold and isolated. But according to my old log book, it was from there that I first talked to John in his lonely tower room on 51.15MHz, at 9.25pm on April 2, 1947.

When he later set up the family home at Ryde, on the north-western fringe of Sydney, he took over a 'spare' bedroom as a 'shack'. This subsequently became the birthplace of any number of amateur and other projects subsequently described in *Radio (TV) and Hobbies*.

Most of his amateur gear, by the way, tended to be of relatively straightforward design, intended to do one job well. He was not a lover of complex switched-band equipment, especially for home construction.

His next most urgent need was for reasonably efficient antennas to cover both HF and VHF bands. For VHF he set up a modest beam but, for HF coverage, he settled for conventional resonant wire antennas of one kind and another. To support them, he needed two, preferably three, tall masts in the side lawn.

Not one to accept compromise without an argument, John chose the largest pieces of sawn timber that he felt it



A little further down the track, John tests a portable transceiver, one of several which he designed and produced in collaboration with the R & H staff. They could be used by reporters on foot, or in collaboration with news cars in remote areas. (Courtesy Dr Alice Moyle)

would be possible to erect without a crane. They were duly bolted together on the ground, painted, pivoted to a base and fitted with guys and pulleys.

On the appointed (fine, non-windy) day, with (as I recall) staff member Maurice Findlay standing by, the masts were duly 'walked up' by the most physical friend John could locate: fellow amateur and Qantas pilot Alan Furze.

How Alan managed it, I shall never know. Nor can I imagine how the masts remained there, without apparently attracting the ire of neighbours, the attention of the local council or the destructive wrath of the westerly winds. Here, perhaps, I can quote directly from personal notes which his wife Alice Moyle sent me for reference when preparing this biography:

"The enormous aerials, which dwarfed the surrounding neighbourhood at Ryde,

were put there primarily for his contacts with experimental stations overseas."

"John won awards for his outstanding performance in Remembrance Day and in National Field Day contests. In 1961, the year after his death, the National Field Day was renamed the John Moyle National Field Day contest."

Hifi amplifiers

But I must get back to audio and hifi. Following the war, the urgent need for hifi buffs was to win better sound from existing 78rpm discs or, better still, gain access to a superior medium.

Like his counterparts in the UK and USA, John spent a great deal of time and effort sorting out the frequency compensation curves for 78rpm discs, as used by the various manufacturers. This done, he devised preamplifiers with switchable compensation to suit them.

John Moyle

He also spent a lot of time plotting the response of various pickups – an exercise that tended to condemn crystal pickups to a utility role, despite valiant efforts by Acos/Cosmocord to attract hifi buffs with exotic designs.

But John (as I) was forced to the conclusion that, in terms of quality, traditional 78rpm discs were a lost cause. We applauded the efforts of Decca, AWA and others to launch up-graded pressings but it was John who, from his position as editor and record reviewer, championed the new 33rpm long playing microgroove format that appeared circa 1950. This, against the dogged opposition of EMI headed up, at the time, by Sir Ernest Fisk.

It is now a matter of history that, once on the market, microgroove discs swept the old 78s aside, with their outdated technology and standards and the masses of ancient equipment that had hitherto clogged progress. With LPs, 'hifi' took on a whole new meaning.

Flowing from his earlier preference for magnetic pickups, John became a firm supporter of Ortofon moving coil cartridges and, while he admitted to the existence of other makes, Ortofon remained his first choice.

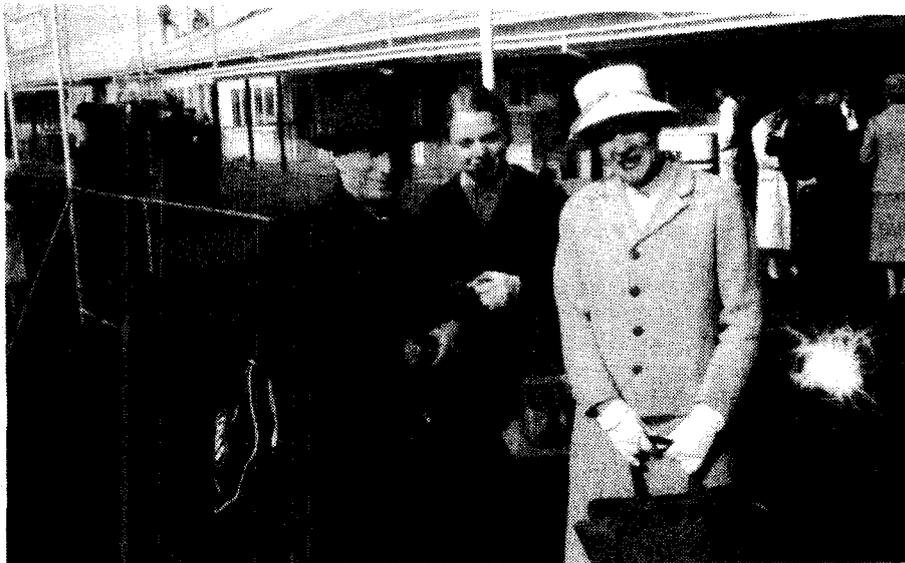
In 1956, John went on a fact-finding tour of the UK, Europe and the USA, meeting many people who shared his interests in sound recording and reproduction. A man who particularly impressed him was the Swiss orchestra conductor Hermann Scherchen, who invited him to Gravesano, Switzerland, to look over his own experimental studio.

In the UK, he met Gilbert Briggs of Wharfedale loudspeakers, as well as other identities in the British hifi scene who were at their often eccentric best in the mid 1950s. He was also able to spend time at the then-new Royal Festival Hall, where experiments were in progress to test out its acoustical design.

With Gilbert Briggs, by the way, he found a great deal in common. G.B. was a pianist of some ability, a music lover and a manufacturer of quality loudspeakers who thought a lot and wrote a lot but listened even more. Ten years later, I met G.B. myself and found a similar affinity.

Hifi-stereo from disc

John arrived back from overseas convinced that stereo LPs were well and truly on the way. He was able to publish facts and figures which, at the time, were news to the very leaders of the local audio/radio industry. Some, in



1956: Photographed outside what then passed for Sydney Airport's overseas terminal, John is farewelled by his wife Alice and daughter Carolyn, on his round-the-world fact finding tour. (Courtesy W.N. Williams)



Boarding arrangements in 1956 were nothing if not basic, even for overseas departures. John Moyle climbs the steps into a Qantas Super Constellation. (Courtesy W.N. Williams)

fact, seemed to be living in hope that the new development would go away.

The arrival of stereo in Australia was announced in John's 'Off the Record' column in the January 1959 issue, in the tangible form of a lone commercial stereo radiogram and a half-dozen records, including Decca's outstanding 'A Journey into Stereo Sound'. That disc, by the way, is still an attention-grabbing recording, even by present-day standards.

In that very same column, he could not resist a lusty swipe at his industry critics. I quote:

'One or two companies haven't been all that happy about information published on stereo, even in our own magazine.'

'They consider much of it has been ill-informed, premature and 'little more than gossip', to quote one unofficial spokesman.'

'Here is a development likely to become one of the most important in the history of sound reproduction. It has been approaching us with agonising slowness for about 18 months. It is of the greatest importance to all audio enthusiasts.'

'Could anyone imagine that a magazine would fail to gather as much information and report as it could, and from as many sources as possible?'

'I can't regret a single word of what I've written or reported, or anything I have done with stereo in the last twelve months. For most of our readers, it was

the only information about stereo they were able to gather in.'

In this same period, John presented two public lecture/demonstrations to eager audiences at Sydney's Conservatorium of Music and Anzac House.

As I recall, they involved two large Wharfedale-style 3-way systems, brought in from his own home and driven by a pair of 20-30W mono Playmasters using EL34 valves in ultralinear mode. On standby, however, was a twin 10-watt stereo Playmaster using EL84s in a similar configuration.

While the demonstrations were highly successful, any number of hifi fans remained to be convinced that stereo was even a legitimate form of hifi. How right he was is evidenced by the fact that, in today's hifi world, stereo is routine; mono is virtually the exception.

Perhaps I should mention, here, that John enjoyed a brief dalliance with home recording, both on acetate discs and open-reel tape. He sampled the potentially excellent quality of tape, but did not see the technological explosion around the cassette format.

To him, tape was useful, interesting, even promising but 'messy' in open-reel form. Who can forget his impatient outbursts of "falls off the reel!" At heart, he was a disc man.

Oh yes — television

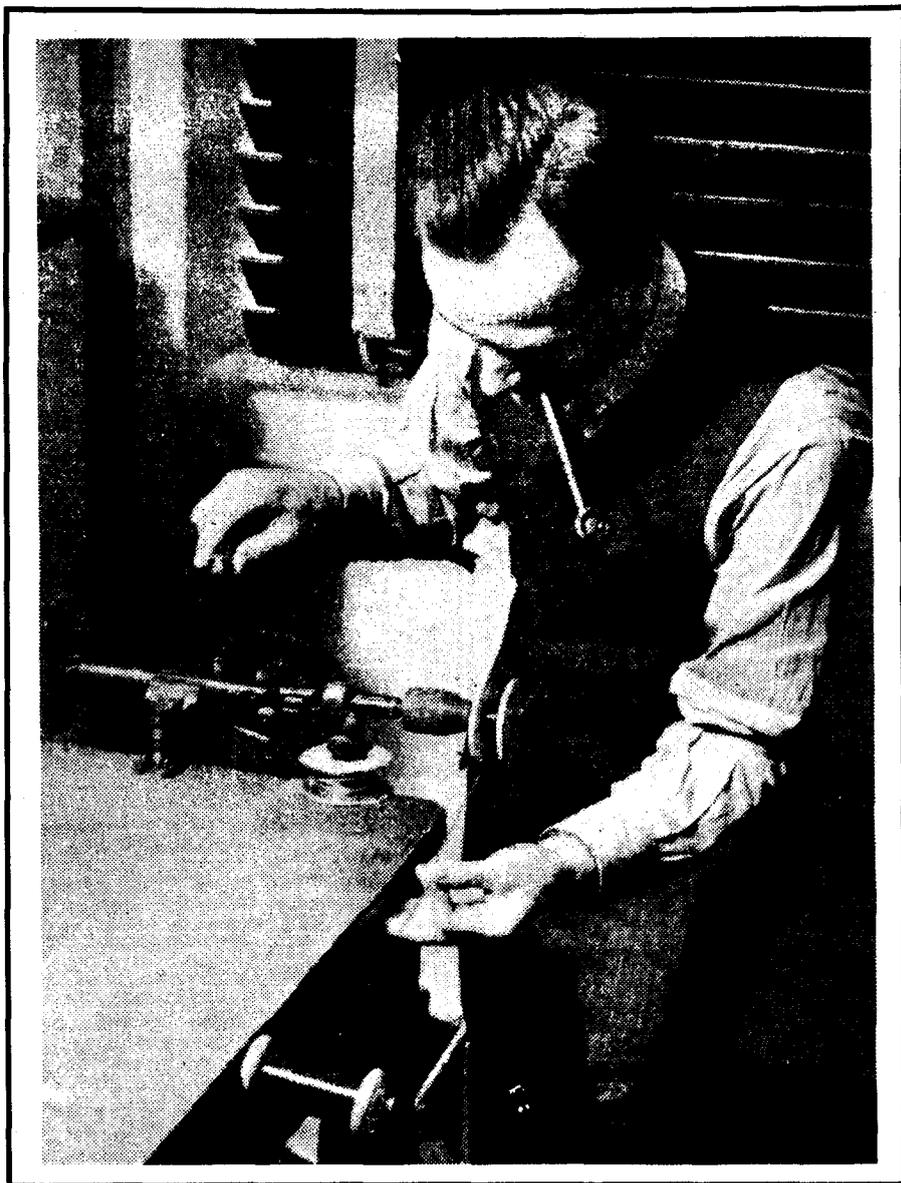
If stereo arrived in the late 1950s, so also did television, as far as Australia was concerned. Taken up by hifi-stereo, amateur radio and the affairs of the WIA (Wireless Institute of Australia) it was a wonder that John could find any time at all for television. But he did — somehow!

It was not at all clear at the time whether the home construction of TV sets would ever be a viable proposition, because of the lack of key major components in the shops: tuners, IF strips, picture tubes and the wherewithal to cope with deflection circuitry and EHT.

What hobbyists did have access to were stacks of oddment cathode-ray tubes, 6AC7s and other high frequency valves, 6H6s, and boxes-full of small bits.

I don't know who started it, but both John and I decided we *had* to build a poor man's TV set from disposals oddments — green pictures notwithstanding.

We contrived tuners and IF strips that shouldn't have worked, but did. We built EHT supplies using 6H6 diode detectors and paper capacitors operating way outside their ratings. We picked over 5BP1 and VCR97 cathode-ray



John Moyle in a characteristic pose, pipe in mouth and concentrating on the job in hand — here the winding of an inductor for a loudspeaker crossover network.

tubes, to find ones with good emission that were reasonably free of gas and screen surface charge effects.

It was a fun challenge, and the satisfaction of receiving 'little green pictures that moved and talked' was reminiscent of that first crystal set thirty-plus years before. The sets were described in the magazine, of course, and quite a few readers apparently shared our experience.

After that, TV set building became technically respectable, with an orderly supply of parts and kits and, at that point, John opted out. In fact, after developing and publishing about four full-scale B&W TV receiver projects, we all opted out. Built-up receiver prices had become so competitive that kit suppliers simply could not compete.

John Moyle — the man

What sort of a man was John Murray Moyle?

As I have indicated, he was very capable — able to do well most things that he turned his mind to.

No less to the point, he was a thinker — tireless, free-ranging, logical, honest, but not without an emotional side.

As such, it is no wonder that he won a debating prize at Scotch. And, equally, it is little wonder that he could never resist an argument, sometimes serious, at others by way of diversion.

In my own case, John and I had countless discussions about technical topics — but also not a few on philosophical matters. From (I gather) a traditional methodist background, John adopted a viewpoint somewhere be-

John Moyle

John Moyle could be whimsical, too. Here's an 'ode' to his typewriter.

MY TYPEWRITER

You ugly eternal monstrosity.
You deadly clarifier of thoughts.
Killer of romance – no sense of humour.
You indispensable, mute mirror of ideas.
Three months before I could speak your language
And I hope you don't mean all you say.
(Remember that letter addressed 'Dead Sir'?
You couldn't even laugh.)
Or when I wept over a sonnet – yes you remember,
There's still a stain on the letter F.
I'd like to smash your grinning teeth –
Just like that –
If I could afford to replace you.
So JJ*&7/8!! to you.

tween an agnostic and a rationalist.

In a reflective moment after one such discussion, he confided that our different stances concerned him. "I worry", he said, "that you set so much store by what I so positively reject". On another occasion, when his daughters had linked up with St Stephen's church in Macquarie St, City, he bought them each a Bible to acknowledge their right to their own opinion.

But not everyone saw that warmer side of his nature, with differences of opinion tending rather to turn into confrontation.

Perhaps that's the way it often is with people of strong convictions and the capacity to express them.

His ability as a writer was never in doubt, but again there was that combination of strictly practical prose with touches of whimsy. In her notes, Alice Moyle draws my attention to a snippet about stereo on page 105 of the September 1959 issue – one which I either never saw or have long since forgotten:

"Until a better suggestion comes up, that's the way I feel like viewing the subject, except when I feel like having a gentle argument over a cup of tea with Neville Williams."

"And he is an expert at arguments."

But if you want to sample the whimsical side of the man who wrote such practical prose or advanced such provocative arguments, read his observations on his typewriter in the accompanying panel.

One other thing I should add: in 20 years of close association, I found him totally honest – a man of his word.

A sad finale

John had a long-standing interest in WIA affairs, serving with the NSW Division as councillor and president. He subsequently held federal office and played a major role in drafting a uni-

form constitution for all states. In 1959, he attended the ITU (International Telecommunications Union) conference in Geneva, representing Australian radio amateurs.

John proved an effective advocate at Geneva, reporting back to the WIA and through the pages of *Radio, TV & Hobbies*. From Geneva, he planned to re-visit the UK and USA as a follow-up to his earlier tour.

What few knew, however, was that John was a sick man before he left and, on a number of occasions expressed to me the hope that his physical discomfort was not a symptom of a serious problem. But it was and, when John visited a doctor before leaving Geneva, he was advised to fly home immediately for urgent treatment.

On the way across to England, he had a chance meeting with A.C. Haddy, the well known British recording engineer and designer of the then popular Decca pickup. The meeting was reported in the February 1960 issue, in what proved to be his last contribution to 'Off the Record'. It is recounted with all the enthusiasm and flair of other days, with never a hint of his then desperate illness.

John died on March 10, 1960, survived by his two daughters and his wife, now Dr. Alice Moyle, attached to the Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra and an authority on aboriginal music.

It is fitting that the final tribute should come from his peers and many friends at the Institution of Radio Engineers (Aust), of which John was a senior member. In their *Proceedings* for April 1960 the valediction reads:

He was one of the best technical journalists this country has known; his lucid thinking and enquiring mind led him along paths which few of us have travelled. His journalistic talents are forever engraved upon the technical pedestal of Australian literature.