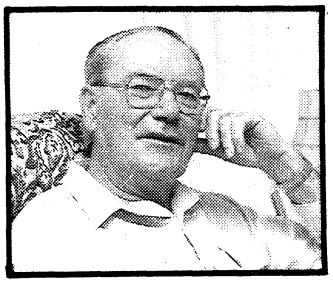


When I Think Back...

by Neville Williams

Readers have their say: Organs, Langford-Smith, Popov and FM

In response to the historical articles that have been published during the past twelve-odd months, a number of readers have contacted me direct or through the magazine, offering further information and/or suggestions for future topics. What better time than the present to acknowledge their observations in lieu of the regular article.

While feedback is valuable, anyway, as a barometer of reader reaction, I've been able already to make good use of clippings, photostats and odd booklets that readers have passed on to me from time to time – the kind of thing that's not good enough to keep, but too good to throw away!

If you do want to comment or pass on information that might otherwise be lost, I suggest that you address it to me via Jim Rowe at the *EA* office so that, as Managing Editor, he can better gauge reader interest in the various subjects.

To date, the article that seems to have generated the most response was the one in the May issue: 'Organs – electronic and otherwise'. Once an organ enthusiast, it seems, always an organ enthusiast!

In that context, one interesting item came from the family of a lady who had been in the same age group as my own grandparents, and whose pride and joy had also been an Estey reed organ. Among the things she left behind was a small reed organ catalog from W.H. Paling & Co Ltd, 'established in 1853'.

The catalog is undated but it shows their Sydney centre which I well remember on the corner of George St and Angel Place, plus premises in Newcastle, Brisbane, Toowoomba and Rockhampton. My guess is that it was issued in the early to mid 1930s.

Eleven models are listed, with pictures and specifications, 'For Churches, Lodges and the Home'. Curiously, I had forgotten about the lodges, which were very much a part of the social scene around that time.

Typical reed organs

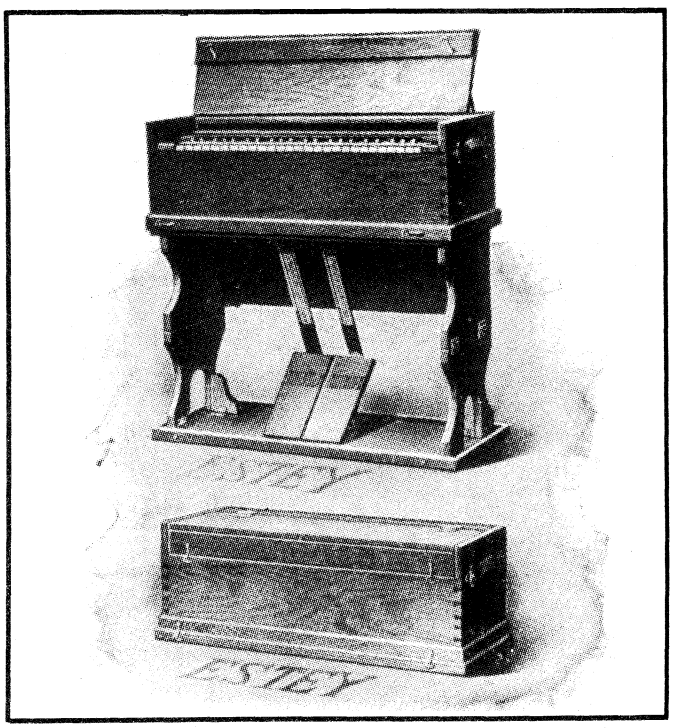
The folding portable organ mentioned in the May issue was, I discovered, the Estey model JJ, as pictured. It had four C-C octaves and no stops, the loudness depending on how many notes you played and how hard you pumped – a useful attribute of most cottage organs.

My own grandmother's organ could have been a de-luxe version of the 12-stop 1135 or the 13-stop R-38, while the 16-stop R-97 would have been the kind of reed instrument that most amateur organists of the day would have been content to own.

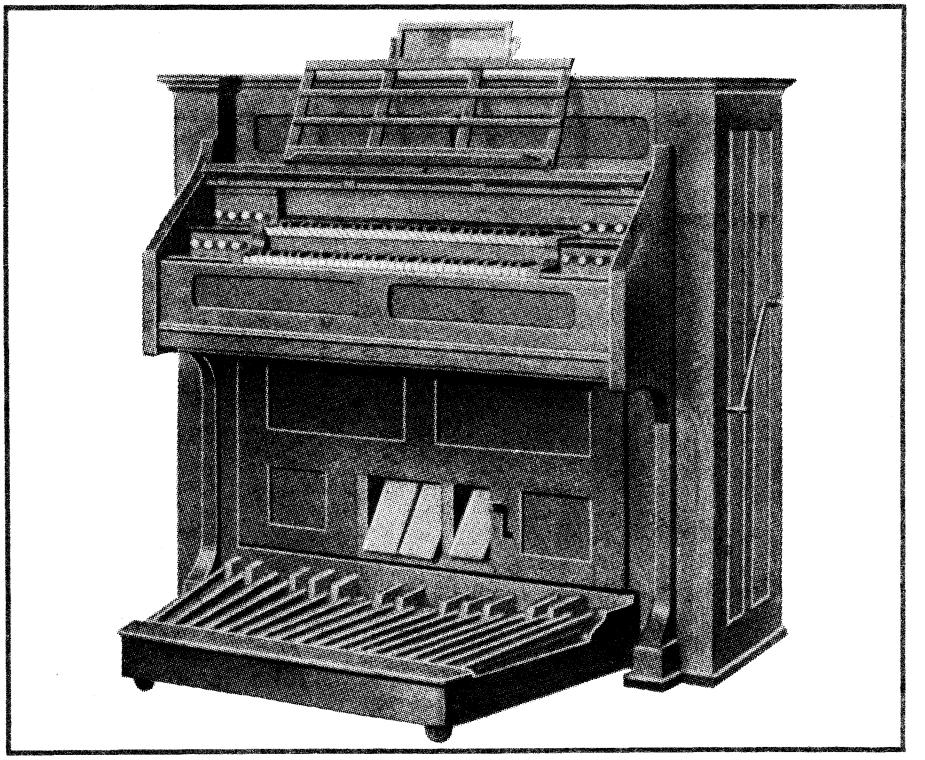
The Estey T-61, pictured, was at the top of the range, intended for churches, convents, etc., which could not afford a pipe instrument. In a 'solid American oak' console, it had two 61-note CC-C4 manuals and a 30-note CCC-F concave radiating pedal clavier. With 15 stops and 10 sets of 'Philharmonic Scale' reeds (548 total), it was normally fitted with a rotary hand blower, with an electric blower available as an option.

I doubt that I ever saw an Estey T-61, much less played one, probably because the organs and churches with which I was familiar in my younger days were on a much humbler scale.

Two other instruments, which I had never seen or even heard about, are illustrated in the catalog. The Estey 'Modernistic', with a 61-note manual F-F manual, 11 stops, 'noiseless' electric blower and piano-like expression pedals clearly anticipated electronic instru-



The Estey folding organ, mentioned in the May article. Supplied in a small oak console, it was described in the Estey catalog as 'a treasure for missionaries or for open-air services'.



Self-contained, the Estey T-61 was designed for use in situations where a pipe organ was not affordable or practicable. With two manuals, pedal board and balanced swell, it could equally serve as a useful practice instrument for professional organists.

ments in both concept and appearance. The 'Melodeon', with tabs rather than drawstops, was an apparently similar instrument but housed in an 1850-style solid walnut cabinet styled for parlours rather than parishes!

Pipe & pipeless organs

By why the focus on mechanical reed organs in a modern electronics magazine? Mainly because they created a receptive market and an army of amateur organists for electronic organs, which made their appearance around the time this catalog was issued. In fact, organs like the T-61 provided the basis for short-lived ventures into amplified reed – 'pipeless' – formal organs, of which the Everett Orgatron was probably the best known.

Still on the subject of organs, I received a letter from Aberdeen, Scotland, from a distant relative and a lover of grand organs, Will Sinclair – whom I met briefly during his recent visit to Australia. He took a copy of the May issue with him to read on the plane. Minus the personal references, his letter reads:

Dear Neville,

I found your article both excellent reading and absorbing in an historic sense. I can differentiate between degrees of musical merit, but do not share your overall knowledge of the subject.

Your reference to Marcel Dupre brought back pleasant memories of this fine organist, whom I heard twice in St Macher (?), one of three cathedrals with a Willis organ. M'lle Demessieux, his pupil, also played there and caused a stir by doing so in high-heeled shoes!

My late, great friend Dr John Dalby (Dr Mus) gave many broadcasts while he was organist at the same cathedral. I was privileged to have been a friend for 50 years and guested for him many times at recitals.

Your other reference to the old reed organ at Scatlands (Shetland Islands) awakened further nostalgia. I played a few hymn tunes on the very same organ, when we visited there some time ago, little knowing that you had made it possible.

Will Sinclair (Aberdeen)

One might well remark 'what a small world', but the indigenous families on the Shetlands, out there in the North Sea off Aberdeen, form a small, tightly knit community (no pun intended).

Playmasters & GEMs

From much closer to home came a letter from Doug Browne, formerly electronics buyer and departmental manager for Grace Bros, who was primarily responsible for introducing to Australia the Italian GEM organ pictured in the May issue.

I first got to know Doug about the time *EA* became involved in the Playmaster electronic organ (also pictured in the May issue), using components which became surplus when Stromberg Carlson Australia went into liquidation.

I finished up with a single manual Stromberg/Playmaster, but Doug upstaged me by buying the laboratory prototytpe of a new 2-manual transistor organ which Stromberg-Carlson engineer Neville Oates had been developing for Australian release. Doug persisted with it for a while, but finally sold it and consoled himself with a Hammond M-100.

In a phone conversation, I asked Doug why Grace Bros had not persisted with the GEM organ, which seemed so well suited to churches/chapels, and excellent value for money. I knew that there had been some difficulty in arranging showroom demonstrations and finding TV servicemen able to cope with organs.

Those were considerations, he said, but organs proved not to be a good showroom mix with TV and hifi. Organ enthusiasts were never in a hurry to make up their mind and sales staff tended to adopt the attitude that, in the time it took to sell one organ, they could write orders for several TV sets!

The truth of the matter probably is that the retail mark-up on organs has to be high enough to cover all of the above. But that's no longer Doug's worry. Now retired, he divides his spare time between his CB transceiver, fiddling with vintage radio equipment (valve, of course) and playing his M100 Hammond.

Australian organ

From Kotara, NSW, comes a letter (abbreviated) which reads as follows:

Dear Mr Williams,

I enjoyed your story in the May issue concerning the evolution of electronic organs. In a brief survey, it is obviously not possible to cover everything.

I wondered if you were aware of quite an impressive and innovative theatre organ developed and manufactured by Alan Bourne, in Newcastle, during the immediate post-war years. He made 23 altogether.

Quite significant was its acceptance by top musicians. Wilbur Kentwell chose a Bourne organ to put down three of his albums, including 'Strolling down Broadway'. It's a pity that these and other elements of our music are not permanently preserved.

I'm enclosing a copy of a newspaper story on Alan Bourne. As you will see,

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he has kept abreast of state-of-the-art electronics for more than 50 years.

With every good wish,
Vic Moore.

Clipped from *The Newcastle Star*, the article recounts how, returning to Newcastle after wartime service in the RAAF, Alan Bourne set up in business as a radio mechanic. He later became involved in theatre sound systems and in the provision of sound amplification for major musical events in the Newcastle area.

For good measure, he established Newcastle's first sound recording studio (1948) and, from it, set up an all-day, every-day background music service for supermarkets, factories and telephone circuits in the Newcastle area.

An accomplished pianist and organist, his interest in music led him into the design and construction of electronic organs.

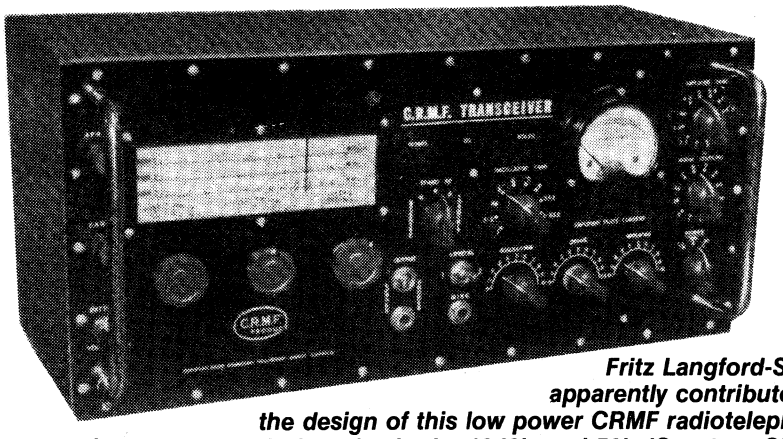
The first of these went into the New Lambton (Newcastle) Methodist Church. Another was installed in the Newcastle Baptist Tabernacle, where it remained for 30 years. Still another was installed in a Melbourne TV station.

Bourne organs with special sound effects were also built for hypnotist and entertainer Franquin. In fact, Alan toured with him for several years during the 1950s and '60s, throughout Australia and New Zealand, as organist in the three-man team.

While I had heard occasional reports of Alan's activities, I can't recall ever having had direct contact with him. I do remember having played a lone hymn in a small meeting in the Newcastle Tabernacle many years ago – without knowing anything about the organ. And I would almost certainly have reviewed the particular Wilbur Kentwell albums – again without being aware of how and where they were recorded.

As it turned out, Alan rang me following publication of the May article, and we managed to make up for some of the lost time – to the delight of Telecom! Still a very busy man, he looks after an assortment of electronic organs in the Newcastle area. But his main involvement is with Yamaha organs, including the big new computerised models.

They're about as far removed as is possible from the analog instruments that most of us are accustomed to. Listening to his account of obscure problems with microprocessor chips caused me mentally to 'dip me lid', to a pioneer who has indeed kept abreast of electronic organ technology.



Fritz Langford-Smith apparently contributed to the design of this low power CRMF radiotelephone transceiver, used by missionaries in the 1940's and 50's.(Courtesy CRMF)

Yet another letter comes from Victorian organ enthusiast R.B. Morrow, husband and manager of professional organist Nell Morrow. I simply can't do it justice here and will respond to it at the first available opportunity.

F. Langford-Smith

On a completely different subject, several readers contacted me following publication, in the August issue, of the article on Fritz Langford-Smith. One such was Dr Ernest Benson, a long-time mutual friend, and one of the enthusiastic group who pooled their resources to build their own Hammond style organs (May issue).

Sadly, Ern Benson himself died suddenly on August 2 at age 78, leaving a very large gap in the Sydney electronic engineering fraternity.

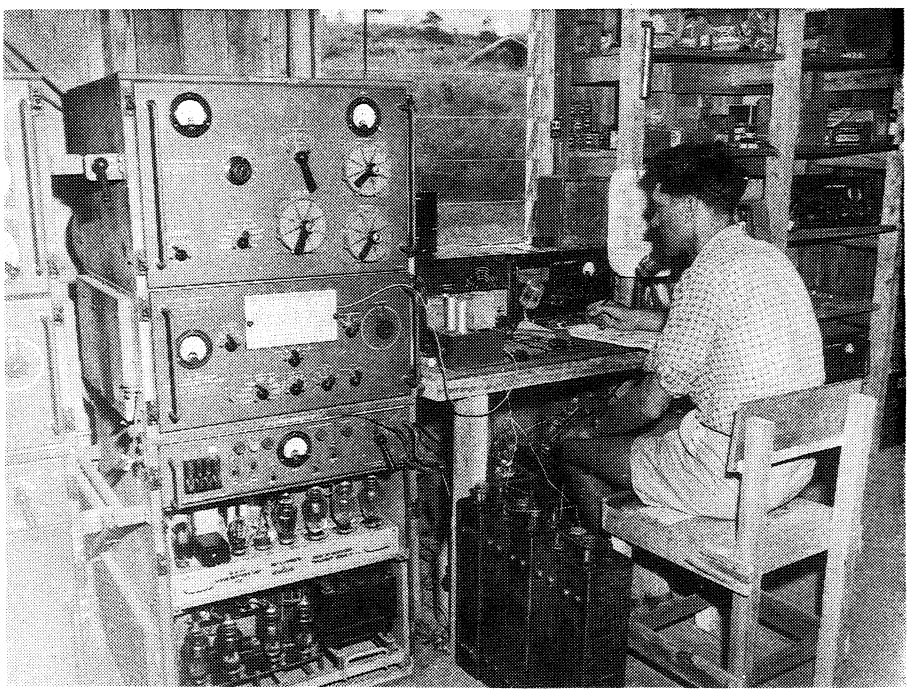
Among the other letters to hand was one from Robin Cole, Executive Director of CRMF (Christian Radio Missionary Fellowship Inc) now centred in Blackburn Sth, Vic. He adds a further dimension to the Langford-Smith story. I quote (with abbreviations):

Dear Mr Williams,

I write to express my appreciation for your article in the August issue.

Although I personally can lay no claim to knowing Mr Langford-Smith, I read the article with great interest because his name was recently brought to my attention. This, in the context of a history of CRMF which we are currently putting together.

Between the years 1946-56 CRMF designed and produced, amongst other items of equipment, an HF transceiver mainly for use by Missionary Societies



A shot taken inside a mission station at Rugli in New Guinea, around 1950. A CRMF transceiver is visible behind the operator's right hand; the large transmitter on the left is an ex-RAAF AT-13C. (Courtesy CRMF)

and Churches in Papua New Guinea, Borneo and other overseas countries. I understand that Mr Langford-Smith assisted the late Claude D'Evelynes (our then technician) in the basic design.

I joined the staff of CRMF in 1971 and, even at that time, we were still servicing a few of those same transceivers.

The receiver was notable for its stability, even though it was not crystal locked. It could be set on precisely the correct frequency without fear of drifting and you could confidently return to that frequency, even in the event of no signal being present.

Robin Cole (Executive Director)

In the 1940s and '50s, CRMF was centred in Sydney and, while I often talked to Claude D'Evelynes by phone and, of course, knew Fritz Langford-Smith personally, I was unaware of the latter's involvement in the design of the particular transceiver. As I indicated in the biography, FLS was a very private person and the chances are that many of his contributions to Australian-designed equipment will never be recorded. Thank you, Robin Cole.

By the same token, few would ever have known of Fritz Langford-Smith's influence on a very successful British technical writer – by coincidence, another Sinclair – whose letter appears in the accompanying panel, minus a couple of essentially private references.

I can certainly endorse the writer's observation about FLS's meticulous attitude to phrasing, and his insistence that the meaning of an explanation should be clear to any reader, not just to the technically qualified.

My own pet dislike, often stimulated by computer literature, is the kind of procedural instruction book which starts to make sense only after you've worked things out for yourself! Thanks also to Ian Sinclair.

More on Popov

When this was written, my article in the November issue on Aleksandr Popov was still in the printery and readers will not have had the opportunity to react to it. However I came across the letter reproduced in the accompanying panel, which indicates Marconi's personal reaction to apparently persistent argument in the early 1920s as to who really invented wireless telegraphy.

Popov was clearly just one of a number of names being thrown into the proverbial ring. I suggest you read it.

The Professor Braun mentioned in the letter was Professor Karl Ferdinand Braun (1850-1918), who shared the Nobel award with Marconi in 1909 –

F. Langford-Smith: 'Meticulous attitude'

Dear Sir,

My wife and I have just paid one of our regular visits to Dulcie Langford-Smith, who showed us your article in 'Electronics Australia'. It was the best biography of Fritz that we have seen, both in appreciation of his technical achievements and as a colleague.

I joined the English Electric Co in August 1956, and was overwhelmed to find that Fritz, the editor of the book that had been a continual source of information for me, was working as Technical Information Manager.

When we settled into a flat in Great Baddow, we found that Fritz and Dulcie were neighbours, and subsequently we moved to houses whose gardens were adjacent. Invariably we saw a lot of each other and my latent ambition was undoubtedly galvanised into action in those days.

Now, some 118 books later, I still remember his meticulous attitude to phrasing and his insistence that the meaning of an explanation should be clear to anyone who had read it, not only to the technically qualified.

Not all memories are pleasant, however, because we all witnessed the tragic disintegration in his later years. Dulcie returned to England in 1975 and has lived there ever since, though she is no longer able to keep house for herself.

Your article brought back many memories, not only of Fritz but of valve problems that we have all experienced. I am glad to find that a magazine of the status of 'Electronics Australia' can devote space to eminent names from the past and to technological problems that, at the time, seemed so formidable, but which are now only memories.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Sinclair (Felixstowe, Suffolk, England)

A letter to the editor from G. Marconi...

Marconi House,
Strand, London, WC2.
July 22, 1921

To the Editor of the 'Financial News':

Sir,

I fear that the recollections of 'Midas' in your issue of the 20th instant, regarding the invention of wireless telegraphy, would not be accepted by everyone as strictly accurate.

Few matters of fact seem to have excited so much diversity of opinion. In France, the majority of people are firmly convinced that wireless telegraphy is a production of French genius, as exemplified by Dr Branly.

In England, Midas thinks that the invention should be credited to Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Preece.

In Russia, I daresay, partisans of M. Popoff could be found.

In Italy, I believe that almost unanimously the decision would be in favour of my being the inventor, and I have reason to believe that in the United States there is what Midas may consider a regrettable tendency to follow Italian opinion.

In Sweden, however, which may be considered a neutral country, since no Swede has yet laid claim to be the inventor of wireless telegraphy, the Nobel Prize Committee, which gives its decisions on the strength of an international vote, unfortunately ignored the claims of Sir Oliver Lodge and many others and made their award in 1909 to me and Professor Braun of Strasbourg. Perhaps Midas has never heard of the latter gentleman.

Midas was also rather at sea when he states that the first instrument for despatching messages was exhibited by me at Dover Town Hall. This took place in August, 1899, and over a year before, in July 1898, I reported the Kingston regattas by wireless from Dublin Bay in the 'Dublin Express'.

And before that wireless messages were passed between Osborne and the Royal Yacht, and before that again between warships of the Italian Navy.

Yours, etc.,

(Signed) G. Marconi.

When I Think Back

not Professor Werner von Braun of rocket fame, who lived much later. Mr (later Sir) William Preece, also mentioned, was chief of engineering of the British PMG's Dept and a man who warmly supported Marconi's early experiments.

FM broadcasting

Last but not least, I have to hand a long letter from Mr B.E. Cabena, of Mount Eliza, Vic. Commenting on the 'Special Anniversary Features' in the April 1989 issue, he notes that the articles are necessarily very brief. This, he says, often 'leads to a lack of accuracy and essential detail that is required to ensure justice to all the pioneers concerned'. He continues:

My impression is that the articles were written by a parochial Sydneysider, in that nothing ever happens in Australia unless it first happens in Sydney. I do appreciate the degree of reseach, effort and time put into compiling historical documents, but completeness is vital.

What he apparently has foremost in mind is the introduction of public broadcasting in Australia, particularly in the form of publicly supported music stations on the FM band. I am accused of 'glossing over' it.

Mr Cabena appears to have overlooked the fact, expressly stated on page 13 of the particular issue, that the articles in question were adapted from an invited Bicentennial paper I wrote for the *Journal of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Australia* (Vol.8, No.2, June 1988).

With the permission of the author and the Institution, *EA* Managing Editor Jim Rowe simply broke the original paper into three sections, added separate headings and extra pictures for better display, and reprinted it in that form.

In presenting a personal overview of Australian consumer entertainment electronics in a single paper (as requested), it is simply not possible to include the kind of completeness that Mr Cabena appears to expect. If that was to be a pre-condition, there would be no 'overview' papers or articles in widely read magazines; just methodical, tightly-packed publications, containing lots of facts but rarely read.

No, I didn't refer specifically to the evolution of public broadcasting, as such, nor to the personalities in either Sydney or Melbourne whose efforts were finally rewarded by the inauguration of 2MBS and 3MBS and ultimately by the opening up of regular FM broadcasting in Australia. That's a story in itself.

In the space available, I simply outlined – accurately I hope – the commercial and political pressures which first denied FM broadcasting to Australia, only to see the position reversed, to produce what is now becoming a prosperous full-scale broadcast service.

But I'll tell you what: perhaps I could combine the content of Mr Cabena's letter with material from other sources and come up with a 'Think Back' article devoted specifically to the emergence of FM broadcasting in Australia.

I remember the frustration of Ray Allsop; the opposition, even scorn, of industry identities no longer with us; the intransigence of the PMG's Dept; the persistence of music lovers in Melbourne and Sydney (alphabetical order) and the efforts of still others whose dream was a network of broadcasting stations disseminating their particular ideology.

And, right now, the determination of broadcasters to be rid of TV stations in the FM band, so that they can grab a slice of the action!