



When I Think Back...

by Neville Williams

Price's Radio: Toys' for boys of all ages — from seven years to seventy!

Running between George and Pitt Streets in Sydney there was/is a network of narrow lanes servicing buildings on the Circular Quay side of Martin Place. Comprising principally Angel Place and Ash Street, the lanes provided a lunchtime mini-Mecca, in the old days, for technically minded hobbyists who frequented that part of the city. This month, we revisit the scene as it once was.

At the Pitt Street end of Angel Place was Swain's bookshop, where with discretion, one could browse through the latest technical books and magazines. At the other end was Palings music store, displaying phono discs, sheet music and albums — along with instruments ranging all the way from 'Boomerang' harmonicas to the first generation of electronic organs.

Between the two was Price's Radio (spelt with an apostrophe) fronted by windows that were re-dressed with 'goodies' every week or so and backed up inside by other interesting bits and pieces. Price's Radio no longer exists, but it will certainly be remembered by those who patronised it in person or by way of mail order.

Back in the 1920's, the store had been founded and run by the late Aub Price, with the subsequent assistance of a young recruit by the name of Allan Falson, who joined them in 1928. For Allan it was supposed to be a 'fill in' job, but he remained there for long enough to serve two masters and become acquainted with successive generations of wireless/radio enthusiasts — from Charles MacLurcan and Don Knock to my own contemporaries.

Even EA's present Managing Editor Jim Rowe confesses to visiting Price's — 'but only as a kid', and not frequently enough to have struck up a friendship with the staff.

In correspondence to hand a few weeks back, Allan Faison tells me that, at age 83, he is currently living in retirement in Cronulla, NSW. I am indebted to him for his recollections of the shop in Angel Place. While Allan's health is not the best these days, one thing he can manage without undue stress is to

tap away at his computer — a world apart from the analog technology which once paid his bills!

Although I myself worked nearby in the early 1930's, I was not a regular customer of Price's Radio in those years — for two main reasons. Firstly, I was working for £1 (\$2.00) per week and, by the time I paid fares and board, I had nothing left to spend on radio parts.

Secondly, if I felt inclined to indulge in a spot of window shopping, I was more likely to head up-town to Levensons and Radio House in Pitt Street, to wireless shops in the nearby Royal Arcade and to Murdoch's — also spelt with an apostrophe. Here a brief word about the last-named:

It was situated on the corner of George and Park Streets, diagonally across from the Sydney Town Hall. Murdoch's was a respected menswear store, which maintained a radio department upstairs — along with a range of home handyman tools like drills, grinders and hobby lathes.

Murdoch's Advertising Manager was an archetypal Scottish gentleman called John Davis, with as rich an Edinburgh brogue as one might hear in a lifetime. A family friend, John Davis later became well known for a session called 'Church in the Wildwood', which he hosted each Sunday on Sydney radio 2CH.

When he knew that I had taken up radio as a career, he insisted that I visit him at Murdoch's, where he would introduce me to the Manager of their radio department — another Scot (presumably) by the name of Daniel McIntyre. This I did in due course, and met the somewhat portly Mr McIntyre, who was gracious enough to conduct a penniless process worker on

an inspection of the many bits and pieces on display.

Little did either of us realise that we were to meet again in entirely different circumstances, as I will explain later. But back to Price's Radio...

According to Allan Falson, Aub Price's parents had had business interests in the country, and their two children — Aubrey and a younger sister — were well educated and well adjusted socially. Aub's sister ultimately married Leslie Hooker, who founded the L.J. Hooker real estate group, but Aub's dominating passion in his own younger days had to do with fast motor bikes and fast cars.

When Price Senior retired, the family moved to Manly, a Sydney beachside suburb. Aub married circa 1923 and branching out for himself, took over a newsagency at Vaucluse. While there, he fathered a son and a daughter, bought an Essex sedan, and took up radio as a hobby — indicating to all and sundry that he had settled into family life.

The newsagency did well enough, but Aub's new hobby interest gave him the idea of selling radio parts as a sideline. In fact, he soon sensed that it could provide a more acceptable way of making a living than by getting up before dawn to deliver newspapers!

So he sold the newsagency and registered a new business by the name of 'Price's Radio Service Station' — a name apparently inspired by a trend in the automotive industry to set up 'service stations', as distinct from the earlier 'motor garages'! The word 'station' was subsequently dropped.

The new business was established in one of the 10 small shops in Wingello House, in Angel Place, having display



Fig.1: Aub Price, as *Wireless Weekly*'s cartoonist 'Hot-point' saw him in the Trade Supplement for October 19, 1934. We could not trace any actual photos of either Aub Price or Dan McIntyre.

windows at street level. Aub was fortunate enough to secure a corner position with three such windows, and Price's Radio Service was born, with Aub as proprietor/manager (Fig.1) and Albert Wright as his first employee.

(Curiously, the August 13, 1926 issue of *Wireless Weekly* carries an advert for plug-in coils from The General Trading Co, **Wingello** House, Martin Lane, but I have no knowledge of what happened to that company.)

Again, in later years, Radio Suppliers Pty Ltd advertised **Radiokes** components from an address in **Wingello** House, but they also seem to have disappeared without trace.)

Price's Radio did well, however, and against the trend, continued to prosper during the early stages of the Great Depression. In 1928, Allan **Faison** joined the staff in the dual role of radio mechanic and lunch-time salesman. (Fig.2)

Looking back on those days, Allan says that his own first — and futile — attempt to build a crystal set had been around 1920. His second attempt, as a student of Sydney Technical High School, had been more successful, thanks to the support of the school wireless club and some practical assistance from a then young Gordon Wells, who worked in Miss F.V. **Wallace's**

shop in Sydney's Royal Arcade. (See EA for April 1992, p.47.)

While still at school, Allan had also joined the once prominent Waverley Radio Club, and spent more time than a schoolboy should doing the rounds of other clubs and club members, particularly those owning a radio station. Perhaps not surprisingly, in 1926, when he was due to matriculate, he missed out and had to find a job instead — preferably in wireless!

His first position as a serviceman with the Australian Wireless Company did not turn out as expected, most of his time being spent installing radio sets around Sydney. Based in Castlereagh Street in the city, **AWC** manufactured the once well known 'Radian' battery receivers, which I remember from my boyhood in the country as being very loud — but also very 'thick' in terms of speech clarity. (Ref. *Wireless Weekly*, August 13, 1926, p.11.)

After a few months, Allan transferred to Aladdin Industries, where he was final testing **neutrodyne** receivers. Although nominally 'technical', it proved to be a frustrating job trying to make the three tuning dials 'track'; this was with tuning components that were not sufficiently uniform in the first place.



Fig.2: Allan Faison, as Hotpoint sketched him from the Wheless Weekly Dade Supplement for June 7, 1935. Having worked at Price's Radio for over 30 years, Allan is in a unique position to recount its history.

Allan's next move was to Price's Radio where, for a change, he became 'the bloke behind the counter', called upon to assist customers with their technical problems. It was a job that he relished, especially as it obliged him to 'swot up' on the questions raised by referring to technical magazines and the *Admiralty Handbook*, and/or by discussing customers' problems at Club meetings (Fig.3).

By this time, the original corner shop had become too small. But just when it seemed that they would have to **find** other premises, an adjacent double-shop was vacated. By removing the dividing wall, Price's Radio gained adequate floor space — three times the original — and two extra display windows.

With crystal sets still popular, Allan recalls that Aub Price would periodically buy large lumps of galena — which he would pound into small bits with a hammer. Pieces of appropriate size and shape for a detector would be set aside, ready to go into a box and sold for sixpence each. However, the most eye-catching specimens would be picked out, placed in a pill box on a layer of cotton wool and offered as 'Specially Selected Crystals: 2½'.

At a personal level, Allan says that Aub Price was of a quiet disposition, although

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sometimes impulsive. He was also generous to a fault, and found it difficult to bypass city ‘*wineoes*’ with their hard luck stories. In a work situation, it would have been difficult to find a more considerate boss — and he was also mindful of his customers, as evidenced by the following episode.

By the late 1920s, Allan says, Australian radio marketing had gravitated into a rigid structure of suppliers, wholesalers and retailers. Suppliers — manufacturers and/or importers — would consign components in bulk to 'wholesale' distributors, at a negotiated base price. On receipt of formal orders, the wholesalers, in turn, would distribute the components to equipment manufacturers, government departments, instrumentalities, service organisations and retailers. This would be at a so-called 'wholesale' or 'trade' price, plus sales tax where applicable.

In turn, the public was supposed to purchase their requirements only from retailers, paying a pre-determined 'retail' or 'list' price.

Valve companies, in particular, supported the regime as a structured way of processing a multitude of assorted types from their bond stores to the public via suburban radio shops. Everybody, including the Federal Government, got their precise cut!

As a one-time wirer/tester cum spare-time radio repairer, I well remember our collective objection to paying full retail price — and the efforts we all made to find someone behind a wholesaler's counter who would concede that we were 'in the trade'.

Price's Radio was of course a



Fig.3: Allan Faison as some customers may remember him, from the mid 1930's. This studio portrait was taken In 1934.

'specialist' retailer, whose customers included a high proportion of experimenters, amateur operators and spare-time servicemen. As a result Aub Price felt that, in his case, the full retail mark-up was inappropriate; accordingly he began to discount retail prices, on a unilateral basis. Other retailers complained, on principle, and a number of wholesalers duly black-listed him in an effort to force him to toe the official line.

One wholesaler, however, broke ranks by agreeing to fill his orders — providing they carried some name other than Price's Radio! So, when parts were ordered by

'Messrs G. Tunney', they were delivered to a specified city address and paid for by a cheque drawn on a special Tunney account, which Aub had set up!

Philips finally took Aub to court in 1927, with respect to valve prices, and won the case — with one reservation. According to Allan Faison, after delivering his verdict (see panel) the trial judge observed that he could find nothing in law to prevent Price's Radio from offering some other inducement with each valve sale — free of charge, if they so chose!

Perhaps prompted by his early involvement with fast cars, and/or by the widespread interest in aircraft, Aub Price decided, in 1929, that he simply *must* learn to fly. Accordingly he signed up for theory lessons, to be followed by practical training. But at this point his plans came unstuck: every time he left the ground on a training flight, he became violently airsick. Finally he had to abandon the whole idea.

Perhaps by way of compensation, he became involved with fast boats — and ended up as Social Secretary of the Royal Motor Yacht Club, with speedboat racing tying up his weekends and arrangements for dinners and theatre parties occupying a good deal of his time during the week. Allan says that he too was often co-opted to help out — which had its good side, in the form of complimentary tickets to the various functions.

Aub's own practical commitment centred around a small, high-speed out-racer, in which he personally set an open ocean Newcastle-Sydney record.

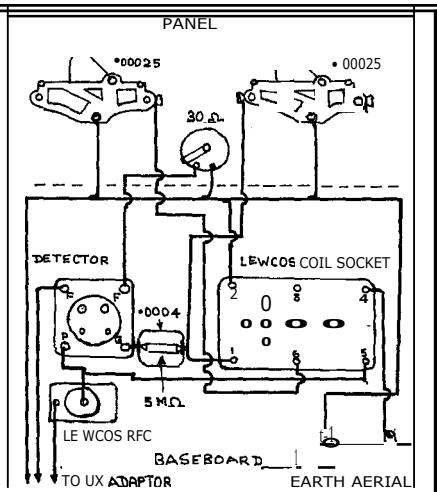
At one stage he even installed a bracket in the shop, on which he could hang the outboard motor. Sometimes he would spend hours during the week fiddling with it, in the hope of gaining a few more

Get Them All!!

- ◆ Your present Receiver's wave-band can be doubled if you add a short-wave tuner; all you have to do is to remove the Detector Valve in your present set, and plug in the adaptor, the receiver is then ready for short-wave reception from 20 to 90 metres

PARTS REQUIRED:—

2	Pilot .00025 Log. Cond.	.....	24	d
1	Bakelite Panel, 12 x	.....	0	
1	Base			
2	Pilot Vernier Dials	.....	LR	6
	Centralab Rheostat	.....	
	Shock Proof Socket	.....	2	
	W. and M. Grid Cond. and Clip--	.....	2	
	Aerovox 5 Mag. Leak	.....	1	
	Lewco Special S.W. Choke	.....	6	
	Lewco 6-pin Base for Con	.....	3	
	Lewco Coils, 20-90 Metres--	.....	30	
	U.-C. ector Valve	.....	S	
1	U.X. Adaptor			
2	Terminals and Strip	.....	
TOTAL PRICE				
£1/15/0				



PRICE'S RADIO SERVICE

THE CORNER STORE

Fig. 4: Portion of an early advertisement from the 'Wireless Weekly Call Sign Supplement' for July 18, 1930 — published in the Aub Price era.

'hubs'. He would even start it up on occasions — filling the shop with smoke and fumes, to the intrigue of some customers and the dismay of others!

Unfortunately, Allan says, with the above distractions and the cumulative effects of the depression, the business began to suffer a down-turn. At first Aub preferred to ignore this, but finally, to save rent the dividing wall was re-erected and Price's Radio vacated the corner section of the store. But Aub's heart was no longer in it, and he sold the business in January 1935, presumably for much less than it had once been worth.

Aub continued his association with the Royal Motor Yacht Club, accepting a modest retainer for his once voluntary activities. Further to supplement his income he also became Manager of the once-popular 'Palais Royal Ballroom' at the Sydney Showground.

Unfortunately, Aub was to live only a couple of years after that, being killed in a traffic accident in 1937 when his car skidded in gravel and came into collision with an on-coming Sydney tram.

New owner

So, while Price's Radio continued under its original name, it acquired a new owner/manager from July 1935. The new proprietor was none other than the one-time manager of Murdoch's radio department, Daniel McIntyre, mentioned earlier — who soon came to be known as 'Mac' by the customers!

I gather that Mac had been born in Australia, but had spent much of his

THE PRICE IS NOT RIGHT!

We are advised that by consent of the parties in the Equity suit of Philips Lamps (A Asia) Ltd against A.F. Price, trading as Price's Radio Stores, Angel Place, Sydney, a decree was made by Mr Justice Harvey restraining the defendant during the continuance of letters patent, covering Philips and Mullard wireless receiving valves, from selling or offering these goods for sale, at other than the retail price imposed and fixed by the plaintiff company.

Defendant is to pay costs of the suit.

It was alleged that the defendant had infringed the plaintiff's letters patent by selling the valves below the fixed price.

(From *Wireless Weekly*, November 18, 1927, page 21)

young life with a well-to-do Uncle who owned a sheep station on the Canterbury Plains, west of Christchurch in New Zealand. He had been educated at Christ College, had become interested in radio, gained an amateur licence and operated his own station for a time. Back in Australia, he took up radio as a career, but appears not to have remained active as a 'ham'.

Allan Faison recalls that Mac was keen to try out ideas that could not be implemented while he had been at Murdoch's. One was to have graduated scales and templates manufactured commercially, to give home-made projects a more professional appearance. They were

an immediate success, and were still being sold in 1960.

Mac also dreamed up the 'Radiomac' label, to identify proprietary lines. Added to this, he was able to import items of special interest to amateur operators through personal contacts in London and San Francisco.

If Aub Price had been a fast cycle/car/boat addict, Dan McIntyre was still a boy at heart — according to Allan Faison — and interested both in models of all description and in the technology of radio control. There had been a hint of this even at Murdoch's — so why not promote technical toys at Price's, to supplement the radio business?

It began with a few Lionel train sets from the USA and Marklin sets from Germany, which went on sale in December, 1936. Technical toys soon became an entrenched part of the business, with sales peaking in the Christmas season.

A full-page advert in *Radio & Hobbies* for December 1939 was typically devoted to model trains, model plane kits, stationary steam engines, Meccano sets, Dinky toys and chemistry sets. The diversion did not seem to deter traditional customers, most of whom were also boys at heart, or fathers, or both! (See also Fig.5.)

Growth overall was steady, giving rise to speculation about new and larger premises. But the war brought an abrupt end to expansion plans. Trade restrictions were imposed by the Federal Government; two of the staff who had been on RAAF Reserve were called up, and the show windows were boarded up as a safety measure.

By 1942, Mac was left to run the business alone or, at best, with part-time assistance from his sister Mrs Mary Belfield — whom I remember myself as an obliging lady, anxious to assist in an unfamiliar situation. They managed, between them, to keep the business solvent until the war ended.

After the War

At that point, businessmen and customers alike were anticipating a freeing-up of component supplies and a return to 'business as usual' but such was not to be the case. True, restrictions on the distribution of new parts were lifted, but the Defence Department also embarked on a massive clearance of surplus war equipment, much of which was auctioned off at 'scrap' prices.

Dealers bought it up by the truckload and stowed it in warehouses, basements, at their own homes, in sheds, on verandahs and under tarpaulins! It was flogged off to hobbyists, who bought it with the idea of adapting it for civilian use or strip-

MECCANO
WORLD-FAMOUS TOYS

FOR THE BEST TOYS
FOR BOYS VISIT PRICE'S RADIO

Away from the crowds, yet in the heart of the city.

OUR RANGE IS COMPREHENSIVE & INCLUDES:—

- Meccano Sets
- Meccano Accessory Sets
- Meccano Parts
- Meccano Motors
- Dinky Toys

HORNBY Tank Goods Train

No. 201 CLOCKWORK SET.—
Tank Locomotive (reversing), etc. No. I
SN. 4in. by 4ft. 6in.
82/- PLUS POSTAGE

WRITE FOR PRE-BUDGET PRICE LIST —
WHICH APPLIES TO PRESENT STOCKS

PRICE'S RADIO

5-6 Angel Place, Sydney Through Colonial Mutual Arcade from Martin Place

Fig.5: Even though Dan McIntyre was still doing well from radio bits and pieces in 1951, the December issue was the signal to advertise technical toys.

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ping it for components. In practice, many private homes also became cluttered with surplus radio equipment, which the purchasers never quite got around either to using or stripping!

Allan Faison explained how, at a typical auction, hundreds of electronic gadgets would go under the hammer, with potential buyers including a few private individuals, plus a half-dozen or more executives from the major electronic surplus dealers — Ace Radio, National Radio Supplies, Walthams, etc. Having looked over what was on offer on the day, the dealers would decide among themselves what was marketable, the numbers they could cope with and what they would be prepared to offer.

The auctioneer would commonly call first for bids on a 'per unit' basis, and one-off buyers would be supplied accordingly. The remaining units would be offered as a single lot, with (usually) only one collective bidder from among the company buyers.

Other lots would be processed in the same way and, at the end of the day, the dealers would settle their mutual liabilities and arrange to collect their agreed share of the equipment.

I gather that Mac attended many of the auctions, although he did not outlay as much as the major specialist dealers. But this still prompted a question in my discussions with Allan Faison: If Price's Radio bought war surplus in bulk, how come that all I ever saw displayed in the shop were separate components? Who stripped the equipment down?

His answer was surprising, to say the least "Mac looked after that himself. He stacked the equipment in his house, then in a marquee in the backyard and finally in a rented warehouse. He'd attack it at weekends and most mornings. Every Monday morning, a truck would turn up in Angel Place with boxes of valves, panel meters, variable capacitors and inductors, oddment transformers, knobs and dials, and tagstrips loaded with wiring components."

"They'd be unloaded, tagged and put on the bargain counter or into take-your-pick bins for a few bob! Mac seemed to enjoy it. It was his way of relaxing!"

Mac certainly wasn't the only one! In those days, this magazine (as *Radio & Hobbies*) was produced in the Sun building, adjacent to Martin Place. With other members of the staff, I'd make frequent lunch-hour pilgrimages to Angel Place, standing shoulder to shoulder with other 'hams' to rake through the 'goodies'.

SPECIAL BARGAIN LIST for SEPTEMBER

We have hundreds of bargains in Radio Components, etc., which we had in stock in the shop before we became a mail order business exclusively.

We have drawn up a special Bargain List of these parts which we do not require to keep in stock for Mail Order business. As quantities are limited we cannot advertise them here so please write for list which will be kept up to date from day to day. It will be sent post free.

Thanks! and on apology

To all those old and new customers who are supporting me in this mail order business I want to express my thanks. I had expected up to about twenty orders a day but some days I am receiving a hundred or more ! !

I am sorry that in a few instances I have not been able to get goods away as promptly as I would have liked to.

D. McIntyre,
Prop., Price's Radio.

For Radio Components by mail
only send to

PRICE'S RADIO

LATE OF ANGEL PLACE
Est. 1922

BOX 1212, G.P.O., SYDNEY,
N.S.W.

Fig.6: From our September 1963 issue, Dan McIntyre was thanking readers for their support, little realising that he was facing imminent death from a brain tumour.

It was a painless way of collecting valves, meters and oddments for transmitters and test equipment. These would cost only 'pocket money', and you avoided the hassle of half-stripped units that seemed too good to discard but not good enough to keep!

Behind the counter, Mac, Allan Faison and another amateur Norton McNaughton ('Young Mac') would exchange a cheery "G'day" for our spare cash.

Redevelopment looms

While the supply and demand for new components progressively increased during the postwar period, the trade in surplus components continued throughout the 1950's as an important source of income for Price's Radio. But then trouble loomed ahead: the word was out that Wingello House was to be redeveloped, with Price's having to find new premises.

It came at a time when Allan Faison could see an end to the surplus bonanza, with Price's needing to change its image from an oddments store to a place where an emerging breed of higher-tech enthusiasts would turn for up-to-the-minute advice and supply.

Uncertain as to what lay ahead, Allan Faison resigned in 1959 and rejoined the CSIRO Radiophysics organisation with which he had been associated during the war. In this new role, he spent several years at the Parkes Telescope centre, followed by another period at RP's Epping Laboratory.

Mac, meantime, was served with a notice to quit — but won a reprieve, to extend his occupation of the Angel Place premises until 1961. At that point he had to choose whether to find another shop and, if so, whether to rebuild the business in its existing — and possibly limiting — mould, or to invest capital in a forward looking hifi, hi-tech enterprise.

In the event, Mac chose neither option. He vacated the old store, retained the existing box number, continued his familiar advertisements but endorsed them 'Mail Order Only'. Working alone, from the basement of his family home, he would pick up his mail, collect the required components, then package and mail them to their destinations (see Fig.6).

No longer a young man, he had unknowingly made the right decision. Two years later, in 1963, he took ill and died from a brain tumour.

Such then is the story of Price's Radio — as I said earlier, a Mecca for radio hobbyists who worked in the Sydney's city centre. And, speaking as a former editor of this magazine — Price's was an advertiser about whom we rarely, if ever, received complaints.