



When I Think Back...

by Neville Williams

Readers have their say - 2: What are 'Collectables'? — Archie Caswell & Singapore

I'm still working through a stack of unanswered mail, a by-product of being laid up for several weeks in hospital. The next letter to hand raises the question of what constitutes 'collectable' items, for readers interested in relics — either electrical or electronic. The short answer, I guess, is 'Whatever takes your fancy'; but there are other, more practical considerations!

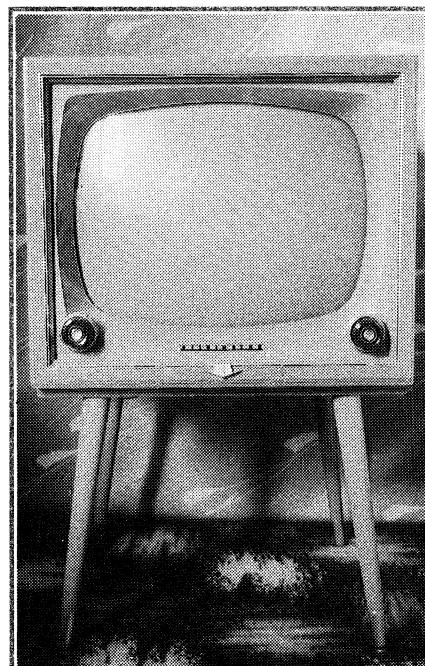
Alan Barrow of Aspendale, Vic, says that he has been a regular reader of *EA* for about 15 years, and finds the various vintage radio articles 'fascinating'. Unlike many of his peers, however, Alan is not an old-timer; he has certainly dabbled in repairs and restoration but confesses that 'valves have largely remained a mystery to me!'

My impression of the average reader/collector is that they face the reverse problem: being older, they can cope with valve technology and traditional wiring, but solid-state devices on PC boards turn them off — even if mainly because of failing eyesight!

I gather that, as a technically interested friend, Alan Barrow had been invited to help 'clean out the shed' of an older acquaintance who had recently died. In it, he says, was stored left-overs from just about every whatnot that the deceased had ever owned: 'washing machines, cars, boats, trucks, radios, furniture, etc'. In a quandary, his relatives had decided that what could not be distributed usefully would be have to be consigned to the tip!

The item that most interested Alan was an elderly black and white TV set, supposedly purchased in 1956 to take advantage of the Olympic Games. Clearly branded 'Kelvinator', Serial No. K00430, it obliged with normal sound and a somewhat unstable picture — a horizontal hold problem — when dusted off and switched on.

Suitably encouraged, Alan rang the Kelvinator number, to be told: "You've got the wrong place, mate. We've never made televisions 'ere... Nar, mate; fridges and air conditioners only... we don't service televisions 'ere!"



Prompted by the recent articles on Admiral B&W TV receivers, and offered this obsolete Kelvinator model gratis, Alan Barrow asks whether B&W TV sets would qualify as 'collectable' electronics memorabilia.

Despite the put-off, and as evidenced by the photographs, the disowned receiver certainly exists, in remarkably good shape, and is clearly branded, complete with serial number. Major components like the picture tube and loudspeakers are clearly Australian-made. So why would a spokesman for Kelvinator deny all knowledge of it, and

would this affect its worth as a 'collectable' from the first generation of Australian-made TV sets?

Forty years ago...

In other circumstances, I would probably have attempted to ferret out the background to the current Kelvinator logo. But it may be sufficient at the moment to refer back to the Fred Thom story in the October '92 issue (p.31). There, Fred tells of the stresses which faced the Australian radio industry in the postwar/pre-TV era, and the instability that followed the intervention of big-name American white goods manufacturers.

As Fred explains, Tasma lost its corporate identity in the schmooze but kept right on producing TV receivers, as also did Thom Electronics, but never under their own name. As indicated elsewhere, Stromberg Carlson also ran into marketing problems doing the same thing.

At this remote point in time, present-day staff in what I gather is now a 'whitegoods' outlet for Email could well be totally unaware that their employer dabbled in 17" and/or 21" B&W TV sets 40 years ago. I imagine that management would long since have discarded redundant paperwork, circuit diagrams and spare parts. Even an old-time B&W TV serviceman could be hard put to it to recall that the Kelvinator, as pictured, used a chassis from 'Strommies' or whoever — identifiable from a dog-eared service manual.

Does that discount the worth of Alan Barrow's ancient B&W receiver? Not if he can recount its background and

demonstrate that it still works — 40-odd years after it was christened 'Kelvinator'.

But would it be worth considering as a 'collectable' relic? That would depend on those 'other practical considerations' — notably Alan's living quarters, and whether they're one room, a flat, an apartment or a spacious cottage...

If Alan or any other electronics history buff chooses to major on historic clippings, documents and pictures, he/she might conceivably store them in a filing cabinet or two.

Supplement these with a wall cupboard, and they could accommodate a collection of smallish technical whatnots: Morse keys, a brace of microphones, crystal detectors, valves, primitive receivers, horn loudspeakers and so on. Given a bit more room for a shelf, and there'd be a place to stow two or three restored pre-war mantel receivers, still able to fill the room with acceptable music.

Who owns this house?

But introduce a floor model radio or two, and the living space could become visibly cluttered, particularly for someone who does not share the interest: "Your hobby has become an obsession... a so-and-so eyesore!"

Alan Barrow might reasonably argue that his modest Kelvinator TV is no more bulky than a floor model radio — or a Stromberg-Carlson TV or an Admiral equivalent that featured so prominently in a recent issue. In short, Alan, it's over to you; it's a matter of what takes your fancy — and what you can accommodate!

Perhaps, at this point, I should add that extra care would also be necessary when involved with B&W TV receivers, to minimise the risk of an accident. As with a mains powered radio receiver, there will be an internal connection to the mains and a DC high tension supply of around 250 - 300V.

As well, there will be an EHT supply to the picture tube of 15kV or more. Because of its limited current rating, this is not directly dangerous — but a 'bite' could promote an impulsive body movement that could itself cause injury or wreck something.

The picture tube can be distinctly vulnerable, particularly types in early models requiring the provision of a front safety glass — as in the case of the Kelvinator in question.

Kingsley stereogram?

In a letter to hand from Jim Davis, he says that he has recently gained possession of a stereogram branded 'Kingsley', which is equipped with twin loudspeakers and fold-out 'Garrard' 3-speed auto record player. It would appear to be a 1955/6 model, using valves, but too recent to have been produced by the original Kingsley organisation.

It raises the question whether another manufacturer gained legal rights to the name, or decided to use it without formal permission...

A blow to the glass envelope could cause it to 'implode', creating a shower of glass particles. Care is needed, when handling an exposed tube, to protect one's eyes with industrial goggles or, at the very least, spectacles with generous plastic lenses.

Last but not least, you would need to study the how and why of TV circuitry. Fortunately, valve-based B&W receivers have a lot more in common with old-time radios than modern colour sets, but take time out to read before you fiddle!

Right now, B&W TV receivers have little or no commercial value, but if you consider them as logical candidates for restoration and display, drop me a line and we'll spread the word to other interested readers.

Unrestricted passion

Mind you, not everyone has to curb their passion for historical whatnots to match their living quarters — which takes me back to a letter from Jim Davis of Latrobe, Tasmania, referred to in the last article. While Jim provided useful information therein about Howard Love

and Kingsley Radio, it was merely incidental to details about an extensive personal collection of electronic memorabilia that has certainly not been limited by either personal means or living space. Let me explain:

At age 81, Jim has reaped the rewards of a successful business career in the motor trade — aside from wartime industrial commitments — centred in the Latrobe area of Tasmania. Then, in amateur radio lingo (VK7OW) he 'went QRT' from business (retired) in 1973, to concentrate on the collection and restoration of antique radios, phonographs and such like.

While his interest has been spread widely across evolving technology, his first love would appear to have been cinema equipment, evidenced by the fact that his family home was neither a flat nor a cottage but 'a large Spanish type hacienda' incorporating a complete purpose-built theatrette.

In-home 'flicks'

Measuring 11 squares, the theatrette had an acoustically designed ceiling, sound drapes, several rows of antique theatre seats, motorised curtains and screen capable of displaying a CinemaScope image 25ft wide! The acoustics were said, by Jim, to have been 'superb'.

Jim adds he had ended up with six fully restored 35mm projection machines in the projection room — a 1918 Hahn-Goertz hand cranked, and a huge 1927 Western Electric 'sync sound' system. Adaptable for sound on disc, it had been the equipment which had showed the first ever 'talkie' in

VK7 (ham double-talk for Tasmania)!

It was reputedly complete with a rack and panel amplifier and accompanying WE loudspeakers — a multi-cellular HF unit, 17A mid-range pressure loaded exponential horn (12ft sound column with 5ft mouth); and below all this, two 15" LF units.

Also on hand was a USA 'Bogan' cinema amplifier with five-stage equaliser. ("I used to spend hours just listening to this system playing good quality 78rpm discs...")

Keeping this system company, Jim had two Raycophone J3 optical sound projectors of around 1939/40 vintage. He had replaced the original PE cells with



From a Kingsley Radio brochure for 1938. The central white line is the division between the front leaves, which open outwards to reveal the contents. (From Jim Davis' papers).

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photodiodes, and says the frequency response was excellent.

The remaining machine was a 1926 silent projector, a Kalee No.7. Jim Davis said that he had taken out — and still holds — a current cinema projectionist's licence... "For the hell of it!"

Not only did the in-house cinema offer an appropriate setting for reclaimed movie memorabilia, but it provided space to display other equipment such as historic radio receivers around the walls. These ranged from antique wireless receivers dating from 1914 to a half-dozen or so more modern general coverage receivers, including a pristine Kingsley AR7 with coil boxes. Also on display were 15-odd transceivers related to Jim's amateur activities — plus, in contrast, mechanical phonographs dating back to 1897!

Prominent among the smaller items was a collection of broadcast quality microphones, ranging from a 1926 Philips PCJ carbon, double button and transverse current carbon types to a classical RCA ribbon 'velocity' model.

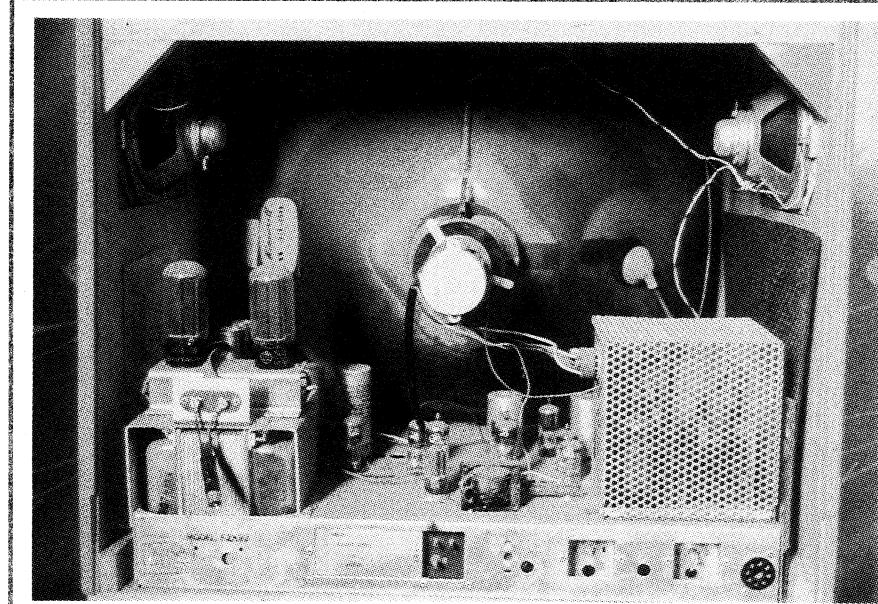
History on tape

Jim Davis says that, over the years, as an amateur and a collector of 'wireless' memorabilia, he had made the acquaintance of interesting pioneers from overseas. One such was the late Roy C. Corderman (W7ZW), who was the original engineer for the memorable US broadcaster KDKA on 1020kHz. He had helped Dr Frank Conrad of Westinghouse build KDKA's first modest transmitter.

Years ago, they had supplied Jim with a tape recording detailing the early KDKA. He was able to return the compliment when a flood in the station's basement destroyed all their records, and the contents of Jim's tape became a surviving remnant of the station's history.

Another interesting contact was 'Spenny' (H.C.) Spencer of Warwickshire, UK, made on the 14MHz amateur band. In his late '80s, and operating under the callsign G6NA, Spenny said he had been a junior tech during the initial experimental transmissions from 2MT Writtle, later 2LO London.

They had recorded some of the tests on a WW1 Edison cylinder Dictaphone. Again, Jim Davis was the recipient of a taped copy. It carries the voices of a technical discussion between a couple of engineers, followed by a test transmission featuring Dame Nellie Melba singing 'Home, Sweet Home'. This dates back to late 1921 and 1922.



Conventional, accessible and still functioning, this 'orphan' Kelvinator TV should be a practical starting point for a novice collector. Alan Barrow would need to identify the make and model number of the chassis to obtain a circuit. Can anyone help?

Elsewhere on the tape 'Spenny' tells how he was a design engineer for Pye TV (UK) and involved in the production of their first TV transmitter — as ultimately installed in Alexandra Palace. Thereafter, with the help of two others, he went on to design the first production TV receiver.

Only 12 receivers were built but, by sheer good fortune, one of them ended up in Jim Davis' collection. It was apparently brought out from London by a doctor in the late 1930's and finished up in Hobart. It came to the attention of a technician at the Royal Hobart Hospital, who managed to secure it on Jim's behalf. As far as 'Spenny' Spencer could ascertain, the only other example in existence is in the London Technological Museum.

In fact, says Jim, he has collected quite lot of radio history recorded on Edison cylinders through to 33-1/3 rpm discs — with the necessary gear on which to play them. One such cylinder carries the actual voice of Florence Nightingale, with a message to 'My Dear Old Friends of Balaclava'.

Important activity, but...

As a record of one collector's activities, Jim Davis' letters emphasise how absorbing and fulfilling the collection of electronics memorabilia can be, particularly for someone who has passed the halfway mark in their anticipated life span. At a time when evolving technology discounts their training and background, it is reassuring to keep alive the associations of the past. Also to

be able to share the lifestyle, the methods and the skills of other days with those who have a sense of history...

To tune a radio station, select a colour TV program or listen to a hi-fi presentation, the rising generation needs only to read a label and press a button — a barren exercise indeed. It is all too easy. The most effective way to appreciate where we are at, technically, is to contemplate whence we have come!

To emphasise the latter point, I could do no better than quote from another letter, to hand from Michael J. Wellen-Charteris of Bombaderry in NSW. Michael expresses appreciation of historical articles and says that, for convenience he has produced a separate photostat file of 'When I Think Back' and Peter Lankshear's 'Vintage Radio'. He continues:

I must be caught in a time warp, as most of the modern gear holds no joy for me and I love restoring radios from a time way before my birth in 1963.

Articles on the early boys in the game should be compulsory reading for modern students, as the advances we take for granted did not just happen overnight. It was through people we glimpse in your columns that we are where we are today!

Pardon me if I seem to have strayed from the original theme, but not really. Sufficient to say that if you have a hankering to collect B&W TV receivers or any other technical memorabilia or information, Jim Davis' letters emphasise

the scope open to anyone with the time, means and opportunity. But Jim's letters end on a quite different — and 'practical' note.

Five years ago, Jim and his 'XYL' (wife, in amateur parlance) contemplated their Spanish Hacienda, their domestic cinema/display and its social involvements, and agreed that it had outgrown the capabilities of an 80-plus years old couple. So they built a more compact home, with a small 'museum' to house the smaller items and shared the bulky projection equipment between the local Senior Citizens Club and the Devonport City Council — the latter for a projected working museum. I gather that Jim & Co are still involved in presenting film shows to the Senior Citizens, using the trusty old Raycophones, but somebody else now provides the auditorium and the seating, and cleans up when the show is over.

To the Alan Barrows of this world, the message is clear: Collecting memorabilia can be a rewarding and long-term hobby, but it is important to:

- Plan ahead so that the scope of your activity will not over-tax your likely resources; and
- Envisage to whom your potentially valuable collection may pass when you can no longer cope with it, lest it simply ends up 'on the tip'!

RAFF Radio

For a complete change of subject, I am indebted to Jack Griffiths (VK2BJH) of Kempsey NSW. Jack says that he dates back to the *Wireless Weekly* days and apologises for his typing: "I'm getting a bit old and fuddy in the head these days!"

You put yourself down, Jack. Non-professional 'hunt and peck' typists commonly make a few keying errors, but there is nothing fuddy or duddy about the way you express yourself.

Jack says that the '50 and 25 years ago' page in the April 1994 issue stirred some memories of RAAF radio - pronounced RAFF RADIO — which was established during WW2 at the RAAF Northern Command Headquarters, Norcom, at Milne Bay, PNG:

Somewhere in the past, I read that your late Editor, John Moyle, was among those who established this station on the broadcast band, for the entertainment of local troops and others on ships in the vicinity.

The station was moved to Madang —

with NORCOM — in 1945 and that's where my involvement began. So little has been written about the station that the following may be of interest.

I joined it in 1945, just after the cessation of hostilities, as the only technician on the staff of about seven or eight. All the others nevertheless had had previous experience with some aspect of broadcasting.

When I arrived, I found a room at the front of a thatched roofed building, lined with caneite. A door led to the studio which was reasonably large, with an announcer's desk. Real 16-inch broadcast

Mumps proved lucky!

Writing from Arawatta in Victoria, L.C. (Lester) Wyatt says he was most interested in the recent articles mentioning Arch Caswell and Brian Breillat. He had enlisted for the RAAF radar training course about the same time as they had done, with Arch Caswell taking a supplementary course at Radiophysics (Sydney University) and with Brian and himself attending the PMG Research Labs in Melbourne.

They had all headed off for Singapore about the same time, but he (Lester Wyatt) was lucky — he caught the mumps en route! On arrival at Singapore, he was separated from his unit and sent off to a military hospital for isolation and treatment.

It was about that time that the Japanese intensified their aerial attacks, and Lester found himself shunted from one hospital to the next and still further isolated from his unit. There was much speculation about surrender, followed by the actual event a few days later — around February 15, 1942.

In the circumstances, Lester linked up with a group of other convalescent patients and decided that, rather than be POW's, it would be better to look for a boat and a way off the Island — before the occupying force could close off possible escape routes.

Lester's daily diary (I have a copy, WNW) indicates that what followed was no picnic but, one way and another, he finally made it to Colombo and thence back to Australia. He duly reported to RAAF Richmond, NSW, was transferred to Rathmines, and finally repositioned to RAAF Radio Station 29 at Port Moresby, PNG.

To be struck down by mumps where, at one stage, he could neither eat nor walk may seem a strange idea of 'luck'. But if it hadn't been for the mumps, he would have ended up in the same POW situation as Archie Caswell and Brian Breillat who, in retrospect, would have had only a 30-40% chance of ever returning home.

transcription turntables had replaced the ordinary 12-inch turntables of the original station.

Also evident was an AWA mixing unit and behind the announcer's back, a row of five Kingsley AR7 receivers. One of these served simply as the station monitor, with aerial and earth terminals shorted together.

News, sport & shows

The others were tuned to various short-wave stations in Australia. A regular news service was taken from Radio Australia, and on Saturday afternoons we had just about a complete sporting coverage from stations in the main capital cities.

'Air conditioning' was simple but effective. An electric motor of about a half-horsepower blew air through ducting directly down on the announcer's head. The motor was switched by a relay operated by the microphone switch, which interrupted the blast of air while the announcer was speaking!

Just off the front room of the building was the transmitter room, which would have delighted amateur enthusiasts of the time. Everything seemed to have been salvaged from something else. Even the knobs on the PA tuning bore Japanese inscriptions.

The rig was built in a rack which had obviously come from an AR21 transmitter, except that the sides were missing. The transmitter itself comprised an electron-coupled oscillator using a 6V6 valve, set nominally on 1180kHz.

I say nominally, because the tuning coil was hand wound on a Marquis brand ribbed plug-in former, common at the time. There was no shielding.

The buffer/driver stage was a well known 807, which fed a pair of 813 pentodes on the top shelf and wired in parallel, calling for a power input of about 300 watts. Their combined RF output was fed to a Pi coupler, thence to a wire through the roof and strung between two convenient palm trees giving a span of 30 metres or so.

The station operated 6am-8am, 12noon-2pm and 5pm-10pm, with an extension to 12pm on Saturday nights. I recall that records and transcriptions of some radio shows were supplied gratis by certain Australian radio stations.

My involvement ceased when I received news of my posting home for discharge on Christmas eve. In effect, I just walked away and I don't know what happened. Others would have been posted home in the same way, and all I can guess is that the whole thing would have fallen apart and been scrapped.

Thanks for your letter, Jack. I'm not sure whether or not John Moyle had a hand in sponsoring the station you mention, but it would be characteristic of his interests. He compered a music broadcast in the early days on behalf of the Sydney Recorded Music Society and, as an amateur, would have encouraged RAAF personnel to build the kind of transmitter set up in PNG. ♦