

# VINTAGE RADIO

By JOHN HILL



## Two vintage radio museums

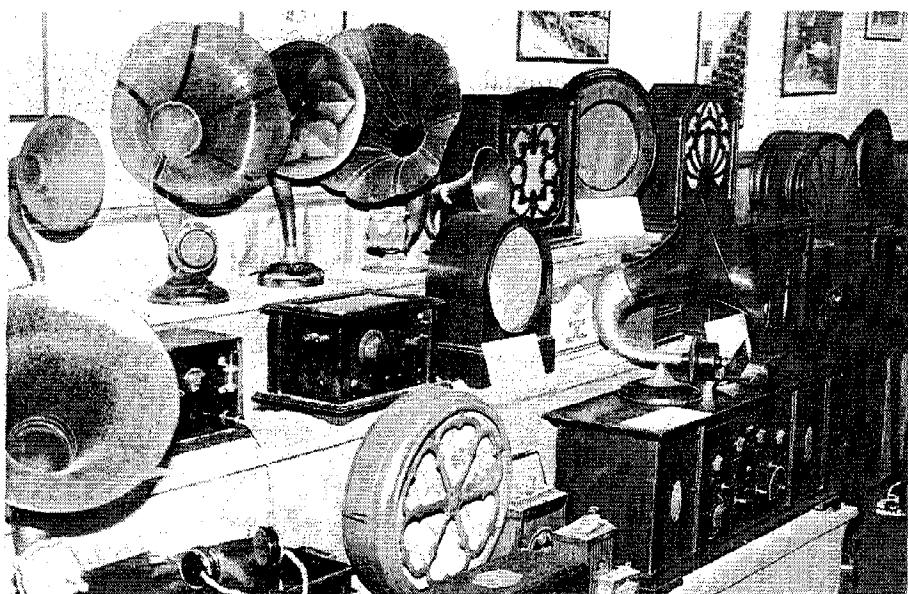
This month, we're going to digress slightly and take a look at two very interesting vintage radio museums. Both museums are situated in Victoria and include impressive collections of pre-war vintage radios, plus many other relics from the pre-war era.

When I first started collecting valve radios back in 1984, I found it an interesting and compelling hobby. Although I had engaged in many other hobbies over the years, none were quite as exciting as vintage radio.

At the time, I had this wonderful idea to combine my new interest with my approaching retirement. I could have my own radio museum where my entire collection would be on permanent display. In my mind's eye, I could see myself counting the admis-

sion dollars as hundreds queued at the door waiting to get in. Who needs Tattslotto?

Unfortunately my retirement fantasy will never become a reality. To set up such an enterprise requires a considerable amount of cash and unless a museum is situated in a high density tourist area, it is not likely to be worth the effort or the expense. Where I live (in quiet central Victoria), such a venture would be a financial disaster.



The Orpheus Radio Museum caters for a wide range of interests. This photograph shows part of the museum's 1920s collection. Included in the collection are a 1923 2-valve Marconiphone, a 1923 2-valve Crossley, several 4, 5 and 6-valve TRF models, and an early Radiola superhet from about 1925.

I keep telling my wife that we are shifting to the Gold Coast to set up shop, but she keeps coming up with all sorts of reasons why we shouldn't go. The most convincing reason is: "where is the money coming from?"

But despite my inability to achieve my retirement dreams, other collectors are setting up private museums all over the country. There are doll museums, car museums, clock museums, aircraft museums, and museums displaying anything from farm implements to old bottles. If someone collects it, there will be a display somewhere for all to see.

### The Catswhisker

One of the more recent radio museums to open is at Chiltern, Victoria. "The Catswhisker" radio museum is run by Bob and Marg Adkins and is a cut above the average collection of dusty relics. The name, in particular, is most appropriate for such an establishment and there is a special exhibit explaining the importance of the catswhisker in those bygone days of early radio. Such an explanation is necessary today because so few know about the old style crystal detector and its catswhisker.

Bob's museum is in his back yard and is housed in a large well built shed. The building is lined and insulated and is a comfortable place to be regardless of the weather. Items on display mainly include radios from the valve era plus quite a few early phonographs. Most of these exhibits are in working order and have been lovingly restored. Those that are not working at least look the part and, collectively, it is a very good display of radios and early sound equipment.

The Catswhisker has an excellent collection of radios from the 1920s era. They range from simple crystal



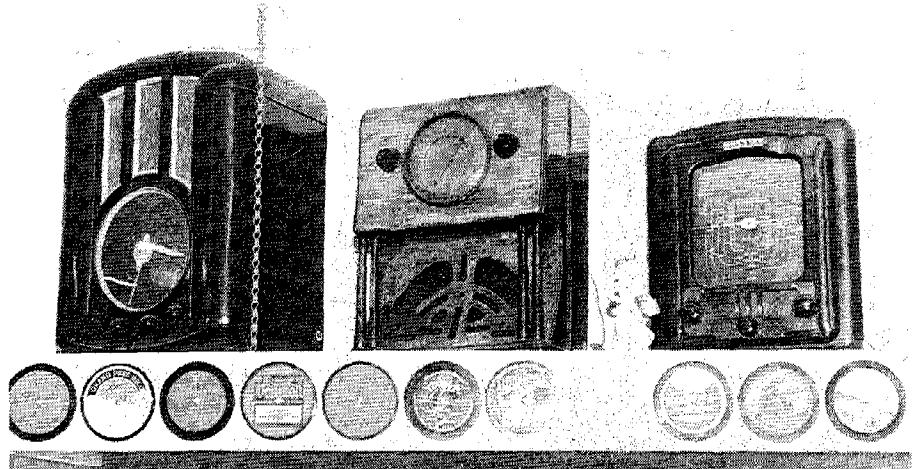
**Bob Adkins, owner of the Catswhisker museum in Chiltern, Victoria. The Catswhisker houses an excellent collection of old gramophones, radios and movie posters.**

sets to some very stylish 5 and 6-valve TRF sets that were typical of that period. Many of these old receivers are accompanied by the usual horn speaker and the 1920s collection really looks the part.

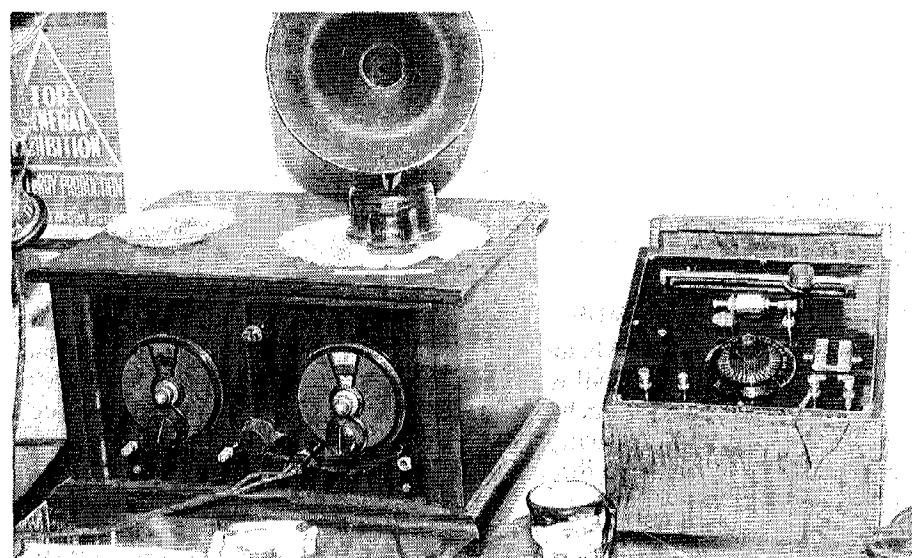
Perhaps the best aspect of this section of the museum is that these valuable items are on display in a huge glass-fronted cabinet. The cabinet is illuminated from the inside and its contents are neatly displayed with a few old household ornaments which provide added appeal.

The radios in the 1920s cabinet are arranged in three tiers and together make up one of the most impressive displays I have seen. It often grieves me to see a valuable collection gathering dust and slowly deteriorating due to neglect and improper storage. Bob's big glass cabinet solves many problems and its contents are not only well-preserved but very well displayed.

The Catswhisker's valve collection is also under glass. Once again, these items are not only well displayed but



**These vintage radios are just a few of the many radios in Bob Adkin's collection. They are, from left: an Airzone, an Astor Mickey Grand and a Tasma.**



**The 1920s cabinet at the Catswhisker vintage radio museum includes this old Harness reflex receiver (left) and an elaborate home-made crystal set.**

are well protected from souvenir hunters and the like. Although it is great to have working displays for all to touch and use, some museum relics need to be out of reach – particularly anything that is easily broken.

But Bob Adkins doesn't have everything behind glass. Most of his radios, apart from the 1920s collection, are out on open display and in working order – and Bob has some very interesting old sets in his collection.

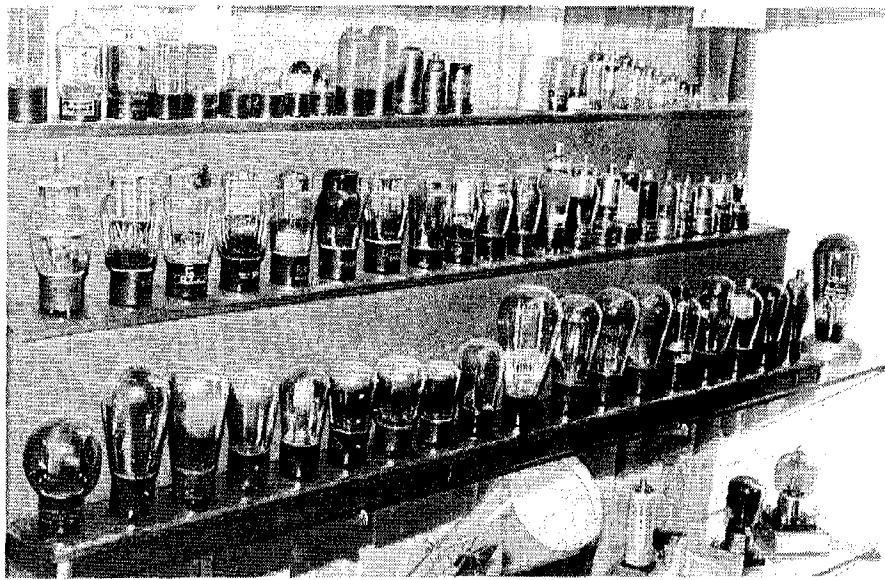
Two of the more noteworthy receivers are a stylish old "Majestic" and a "Sonora" from the late 1920s. These very large sets are typical examples of some of the up-market receivers of those times. Another rare piece is an "Astor Mickey Grand" which is of 1935 vintage. Many of the more everyday mantel and table model radios

are displayed in the museum on shelving around the walls.

Also on show is a range of old gramophones, including an early "Columbia" and an "Edison" cylindrical. These machines are fully operational and visitors to the museum can compare between the recorded sounds of yesteryear and those of today.

Bob Adkins's museum also boasts an incredible collection of old movie posters and these add considerable interest to the museum. They are very colourful too, and give the place quite a lift.

The Catswhisker is not a stuffy room filled with dusty junk. It houses a collection of interesting items which are nicely arranged in pleasant surroundings. The museum is open on Sundays and public holidays, or by



An extensive valve collection is also on display at the Catswhisker museum. These date right back to the early days of radio and include many odd and interesting types, some of which are now virtually unobtainable.

special arrangement, and is situated at 1 Gaunt Street, Chiltern - phone (057) 26 1233. It is well worth a visit if you are passing that way on your next holiday.

### Orpheus Radio Museum

The Orpheus Radio Museum at Ballarat, Victoria is also well worth a visit. This particular museum has been open since July 1987 and many thousands of visitors have been through it in that time.

Like the Catswhisker, the Orpheus museum has similar displays of early gramophones and radios, with the added attraction of 3BA Ballarat's original transmitter. Also included is a sizeable collection of old cameras

and early sound recording equipment. Amongst the latter is a wax cylinder "Dictaphone", a wire recorder and a reel to reel tape recorder with a clock-work motor.

The museum has been dedicated to Warne Wilson, the founder of 3BA, by his grandson, Richard Wilson. Richard runs the museum in conjunction with a modern electronics factory where a range of products is produced under the "Atron" tradename.

Orpheus is a very significant name for the Ballarat Radio Museum, as Warne Wilson manufactured radio receivers in the 1920s under the "Orpheus" brand name. Orpheus (from Greek mythology) was given a lyre by his father Apollo. Upon mas-

tering the lyre, his voice and music were truly perfect and this apparently also applied to Orpheus radios.

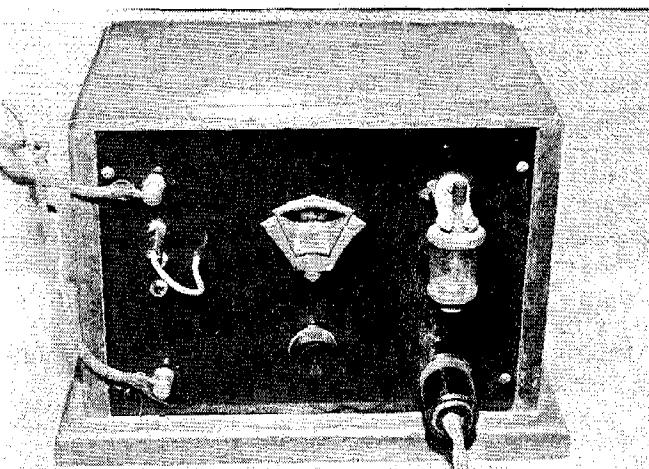
There are several working exhibits at the Orpheus museum, the most fascinating of which seem to be the old crystal sets. As 3BA's transmitter is about 1km away, crystal sets work well with a small aerial. Many museum visitors obtain hands on experience adjusting the crystal detector to find that elusive "good spot". These working relics from the past attract a good deal of attention.

Other working exhibits include the gramophones and the "Sounds of the Twenties", where a tape of 1920s radio program extracts and music is played through an old Amplion horn speaker. Such a working display gives visitors to the museum some idea of the toneless reproduction of early loudspeakers and how much they improved with further development over the years.

3BA's original transmitter is interesting in that its output rating was only 50 watts. Today, where 2kW is minimal for commercial stations and most ABC stations run 50kW, 50 watts sure sounds a bit feeble. No wonder everyone had a big aerial mast in their backyard back in the old days.

There are many other pieces of equipment from 3BA's past, including the "Liberty Chimes". Remember the days when all radio announcements were preceded by chimes? These melodious sounds put a smile on many a face because it instantly brings back memories of long forgotten broadcasting techniques.

The Orpheus display of early ra-



There's nothing like an old crystal set to bring back memories. This particular receiver in the Orpheus collection has a built in lightning arrester.



This 1910 Columbia gramophone is part of the Orpheus display. Others include an Edison Cylindrical and a Diamond Disk.



Also on display at the Orpheus Radio Museum is this assortment of disc, wire and tape recorders from 3BA's past. The tape recorder at centre front is interesting in that it has a clockwork motor to drive the reels.

dios is particularly good and many well preserved receivers and speakers from the 1920s era are on show.

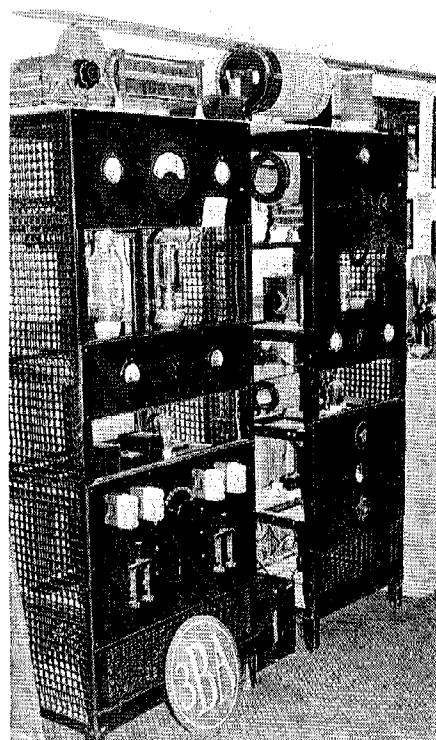
The Orpheus Museum has no movie posters on its walls but it does have many old photographs from the past. These include early amateur radio stations, old radio advertisements and portraits of famous radio pioneers such as Hertz, Marconi, Armstrong and de Forest.

When one thinks of radio museums, one usually thinks of receivers and equipment from the 1920s and 1930s. The Orpheus museum has a good selection of these items.

In conjunction with the museum, Richard Wilson also operates a mail order vintage radio spare parts service. This service offers a good supply of radio and TV valves, high voltage electrolytic and polyester capacitors, and numerous other vintage radio bits and pieces. Kits for 1 and 2-valve battery receivers and crystal sets are available, as well as numerous publications.

The Orpheus Radio Museum is open seven days a week and is situated at the corner of Ring Road and the Western Highway, Ballarat - phone (053) 34 2513. The postal address is: RSD B98, Ballarat, 3352.

Both of the museums mentioned in this article confirm the growing interest in vintage radio. Like vintage motor cars, vintage radio has a considerable band of followers and new devotees are joining the throng daily.



3BA's original transmitter is now an important display item at the Orpheus Radio Museum. The 50-watt transmitter was commissioned in 1930 and was in service for six years before being replaced with more modern equipment.

But unlike vintage cars, radio collecting is a relatively cheap hobby that most people can afford to indulge in. What's more, there are still lots of old sets around to collect, provided you're prepared to look for them. SC