

VINTAGE RADIO

By JOHN HILL



My no-hassles radio museum

Most of my collection now sits on show in a new museum in Maryborough. It didn't cost me a cent & I only have to spend as much time there as I choose. Here's how it all came about.

Way back in the October 1991 issue of SILICON CHIP, I did a story on two Victorian radio museums – the “Catswisker” museum in Chiltern and the “Orpheus” museum in Ballarat. In that particular article, I expressed the desire to have my own radio museum but dismissed the idea at the time due to the many problems associated with such a project.

Some of these problems are: finding a suitable building in an appropriate place, the overall expense of such a venture and the time spent in managing the museum itself. It doesn't take long to realise that a private museum could be a bad financial proposition. In many instances, the expense of setting up may never be recouped

because of poor returns and ongoing costs. Not all museums are successful ventures!

It is interesting to note that, at the time of writing, the “Catswisker” collection has been for sale for quite some time and the “Orpheus” collection has been relocated to one of Ballarat's other tourist attractions.

The small number of people visiting the original Orpheus museum did not justify the amount of space it occupied. Richard Wilson's growing electronics business needed room to expand and the museum space had to be utilised.

Personally, that was a bit of a blow because it meant the end of my Sunday job. Well, we are in tough times,

so I guess that part time museum curators are expendable.

Bob Adkins of the Catswisker found the museum a tic and it prevented him from doing all the things retired people like to do. Because of his museum commitments, he was unable to go away for a month or so and enjoy a holiday. Someone had to be there in case tourists wanted to see the museum. Richard Wilson was in a similar situation and he employed me on Sundays because it was the only way he could have a day off.

My museum

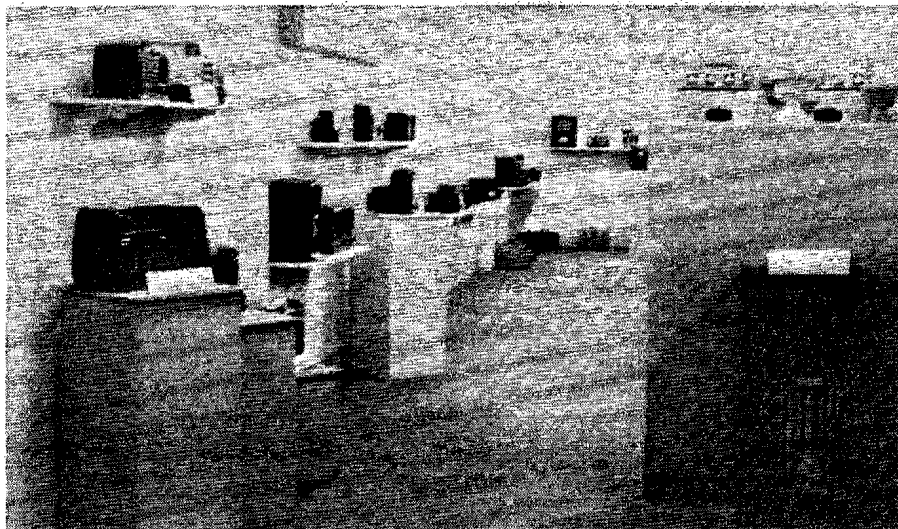
All of the forgoing put me in a good position to realise that having your own radio museum is not all fun and admission dollars. I was indeed fortunate to have this first-hand information as it prevented me from putting myself in a similar situation.

However, things happen in mysterious ways and it seems as though I was destined to have a radio museum. What's more, it is now a reality.

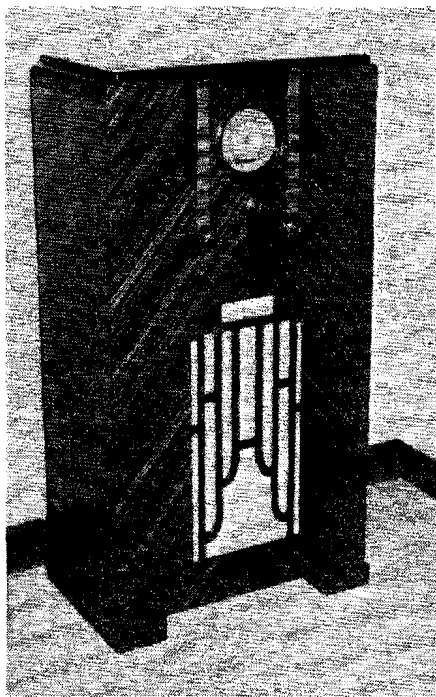
The good part about “my” museum is that it hasn't cost me a cent and it will require no more of my time than I care to put into it. Yes, I know that it all sounds too good to be true, so allow me to explain some of the details.

In the small rural city in which I live (Maryborough, Victoria), there is a group of people who call themselves “Golden Era Steam and Rail, Maryborough”. Basically, they are interested in steam power and railways but they also have some affiliation with the local “Creative Arts” group. In fact, many members belong to both groups.

Together, they decided that Maryborough needed an additional tourist attraction and reckoned that a top class museum would be a great asset for the



The radio museum has been tastefully arranged, with the exhibits being well-spaced & uncluttered. Most of the receivers are in working order.



The radio museum has five console style receivers on display, all of which are in working order. This one is a mid-1930s model Commodore, a 5-valve autodyne superhet.

city. Accordingly they sent letters to several local collectors (myself included), inviting them to attend a meeting to discuss plans for a museum and to have "meaningful talks".

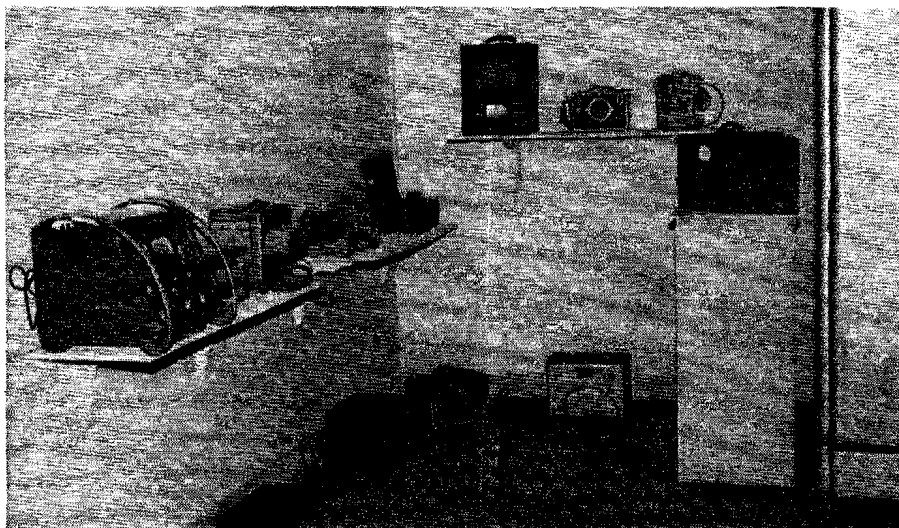
Those invited to that first meeting were Bill Harper, Bill Holland, Warren Tattersall and myself, plus delegates from the Maryborough City Council and a few other interested people.

Bill Harper is a retired radio technician who spent about 40 years with radio station 3CV Central Victoria, which transmits from Maryborough. He has worked in many different aspects of radio, including being an announcer. In early broadcasting, people had to be versatile.

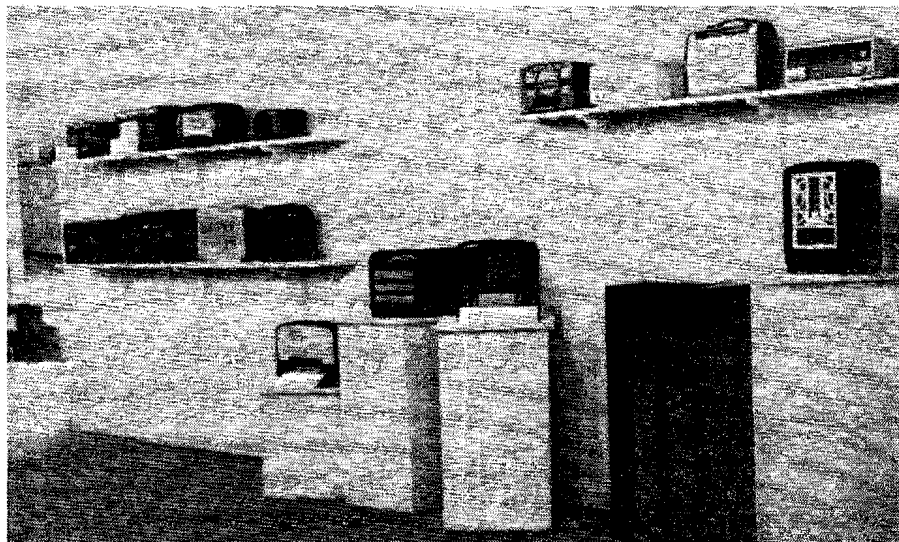
Bill Holland is in his 70s and is a radio/TV repairman from way back. He is also a collector of old radios and associated equipment which he has acquired during his lifetime. Warren Tattersall runs a camera shop in town and is a keen collector of cameras and photographic equipment.

What the Golden Era Steam and Rail people had in mind was to utilise the three collections as the basis for a museum display, adding to it as time progressed.

Bill Harper's task was an advisory



This corner of the museum houses a collection of test instruments. Shown are valve testers signal generators, oscilloscopes & other items of test equipment from the past.



The radio receivers are displayed on shelves or pedestals of various heights. At this stage, there is plenty of room to accommodate additional exhibits.

one. It was hoped to build a replica of 3CV's original broadcasting studio and as Bill is one of the few people still around who remembers what it looked like, his input was invaluable.

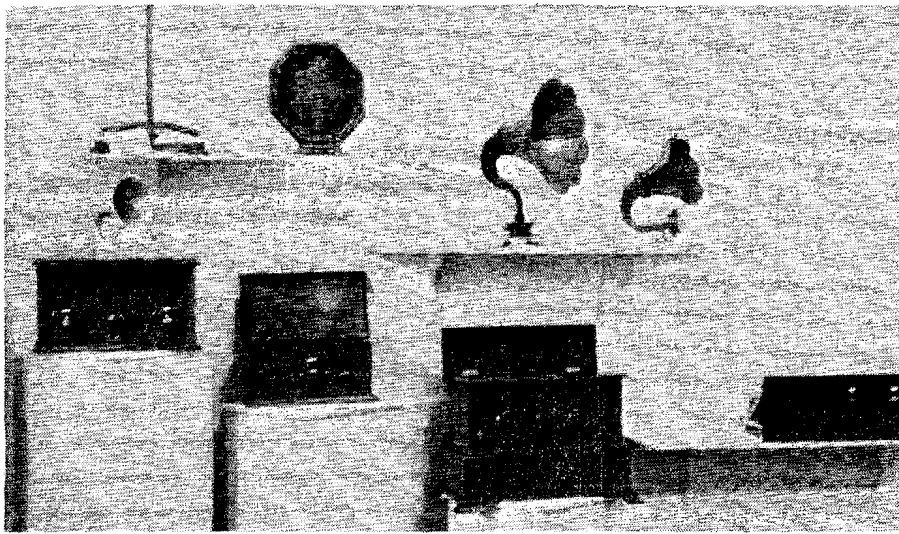
It was also planned that the studio would be connected to a street loud-speaker system, enabling music and announcements to be "broadcast" to shoppers and city visitors in High Street, the main shopping area. The studio was to use the call sign 3HHH, the "triple H" standing for Harper, Hill and Holland.

It was a bold plan and its main instigator was Jim Tanner. Jim had a vision in his mind's eye about every detail of the museum and without his efforts the museum complex may

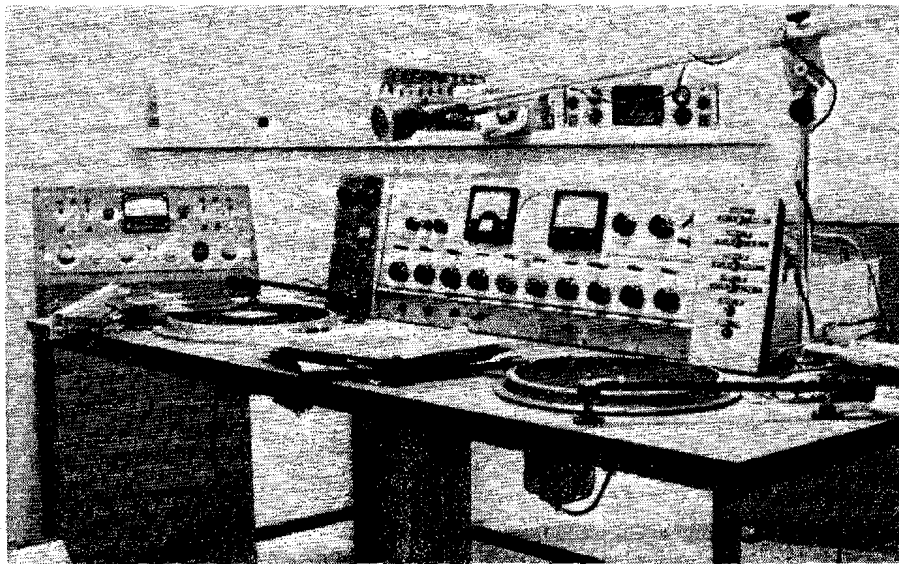
never have been completed - or even started for that matter!

A building was available in High Street, its position being a great advantage because of its central location. This building has since been extensively altered to accommodate an arts and crafts shop at the front, the museum complex in the middle and an art studio at the rear. The building is quite large and it runs from the main street through to the street behind where there is ample room for parking (including tour buses).

The City Council provided a loan to help get things started. Such an enterprise cannot succeed without a sizable injection of funds. As the Creative Arts group comes under council



Bill Holland's 1920s corner - a display of early loudspeakers & regenerative receivers. Bill also has a glass cabinet full of early radio equipment & other interesting items.



After much searching, 3CV's old studio console has returned to Maryborough. It was retrieved from a collector in Deniliquin.

control, that makes the museum, in effect, affiliated with the council which is a definite advantage for an undertaking of this magnitude.

Another good aspect of the museum project is the fact that a large proportion of the work was done by volunteers and approximately 30 people toiled relentlessly in order to outfit the museum and renovate the building. These people have helped considerably in containing costs to a reasonable level.

Naturally, there had to be proper steps taken to protect and insure the exhibits, because the collections involved are worth many thousands of dollars. Establishing a museum costs

money - big money - and I was glad that my personal finances were not involved.

An agreement has been signed by all parties concerned to the effect that the collections are on loan for a minimum 5-year period, after which a new agreement will be negotiated. Part of the agreement also states that if the items on loan are subjected to unreasonable damage due to poor supervision or careless handling, the collections can be withdrawn by their owners.

Dust problems

I noticed during my time at the Orpheus museum that dust can be a

problem as far as valuable old radios are concerned. Admittedly, I'm a fanatic when it comes to dust but a dusty display area will eventually reduce a well-restored radio to something of lesser value. Over a period of time, dust and its constant removal can do considerable damage to polished surfaces such as those on timber and bakelite radio cabinets.

My collection of radios has always been kept under wraps and in a darkened room. The reason for the darkened room is that continual exposure to sunlight will fade timbers and speaker cloths and eventually destroy the delicate paintwork on dial glasses. Some plastics also react unfavourably to regular daily doses of sunshine.

If the Golden Era Steam and Rail people wanted to display my radio collection they would have to look after it in a similar manner. And so a dust-free environment was another aspect of the agreement.

Dust control has been achieved by relatively simple means. The display area for the radios is basically a very large carpeted room with three archways for entrances. Filtered air is pumped into this room to create a slight pressure build-up. The air thus continually flows out of the room and this prevents dust from coming in.

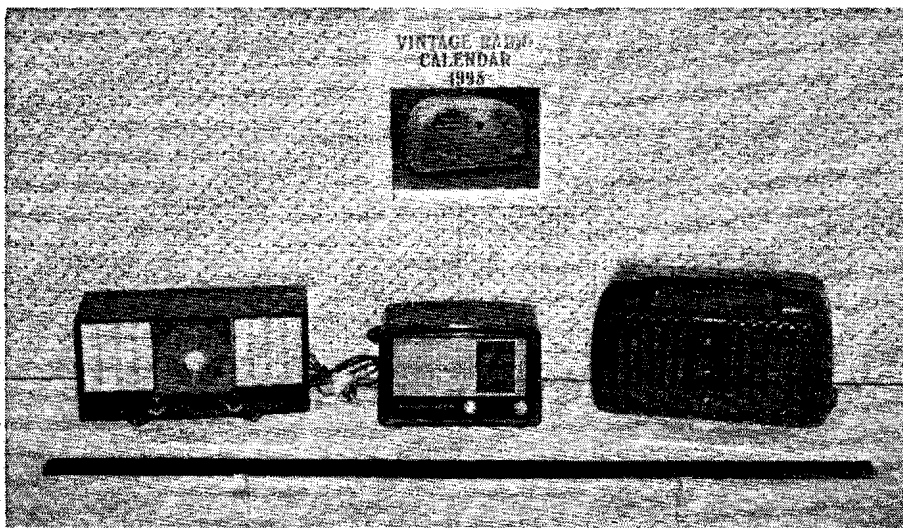
The dust-free room may not be 100% dust proof but it is very close to it. As entry to the museum is through the arts and crafts shop, that area acts as a buffer zone for the museum. The filtered air method of dust control is a far better arrangement than doing nothing at all about it.

Running the museum on a daily basis is made possible by a team of helpers who give what time they can. Once again, costs are kept to a minimum because of volunteers.

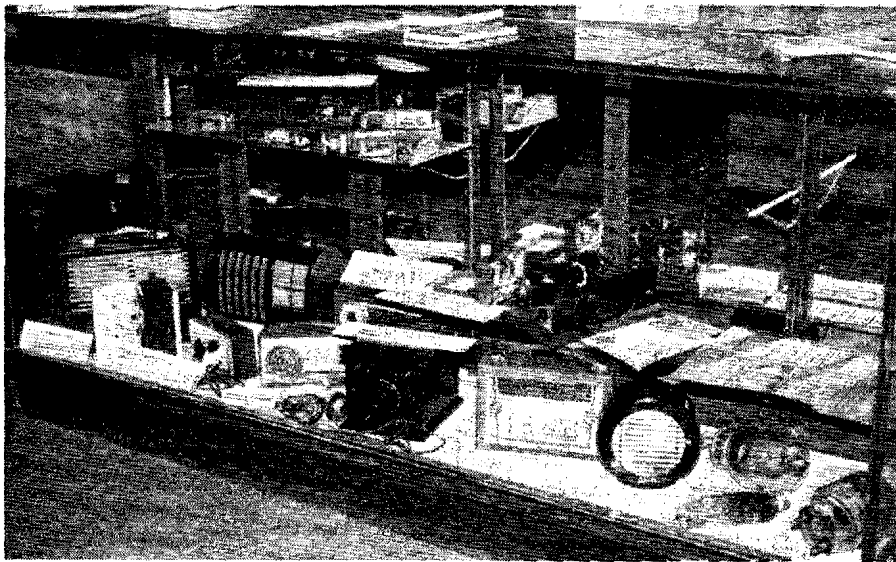
The next stage

The completion of the radio museum sees the end of stage one of the proposed development. The camera display is next on the list and will be followed by another area which will include antiques, collectables and memorabilia. These items will be supplied by interested local supporters.

Already in place is a huge twin-cylinder, double-acting steam engine and alternator. The old steam engine originally powered the Maryborough Knitting Mill and lit up the streets of the city back in the days before



These three Stromberg-Carlson receivers are all on display at the Museum of Creative Arts & Sciences. They are all post-war models.



Many smaller items, including some early transistor radios, are on show in this glass cabinet. Perhaps the most interesting exhibit here is the well constructed home-made crystal set (centre front).

Maryborough was connected to the SEC power grid. A display of early lighting is planned to complement this part of the museum.

The Central Victorian Car Club has also offered to display the odd vintage car for short periods from time to time if space permits. It appears as though the Museum of Creative Arts and Sciences will be well supported by various groups and individuals.

Now some readers may be surprised to read that I have let my collection of old radios go out of my control, so to speak, for a period of five years or more, as the case may be. Well, to be perfectly honest, I was glad to see them go because they had taken up so much space at home and storage was

becoming a real hassle. Marital problems were imminent if something wasn't done!

For the first time in many years I now have room to move and work in my den and it's great feeling! If you are in a similar situation with more radios than you have storage space for, then just give them away for five years - it solves the problem instantly!

A few toys

Of course I wasn't generous enough to give everything away and I've kept some of my real treasures. A bloke my age needs a few toys to play with when the mood demands it.

So there it is! "My" museum is a reality, it cost me nothing to set up, I

don't have to look after it and I have access to it at any time. What's more, the radios are well insured and I can take them back if they are not looked after. That's a very good arrangement as far as I'm concerned!

Really, it's great to have my collection on permanent display. It should be available for people to see instead of being locked up in a dark room where no one can appreciate those fine old receivers from yesteryear.

I might add that those fine old receivers have taken me nearly 10 years to find and restore, so the radio museum display represents most of my spare time for the past decade. If you're ever driving through Maryborough, be sure to call in and take a look. The museum hours are 10am-4pm Monday to Saturday and 1pm-4pm on Sundays.

Footnote: since writing the above, John Hill advises that the replica 3CV studio may soon become a genuine radio studio. The museum committee has applied for a broadcast licence and hopes to start a community radio station, using a 10W transmitter on the AM band. SC