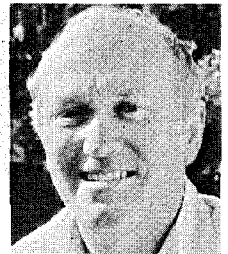


# VINTAGE RADIO

By JOHN HILL



## Vintage radio collectors and collecting

**Collecting vintage radio receivers can be a very rewarding hobby but to get the most satisfaction and value it is a good idea to have every receiver in your collection in working order. That way, if you want to sell it, it will bring a good price.**

Way back in 1987 I tried to sell the idea of having vintage radio stories in a modern electronics magazine but with only limited success. I reckoned that the subject of valve radio restoration could have been covered reasonably well with a series of about 10 articles but the powers that be allowed me only two. However, those two stories produced a surprising reader response and suddenly, valve radios and their restoration took on a new meaning.

The stories sparked off quite a lot of interest, for no other reason than that they appeared at the right time.

The photographs this month are mainly of the more unusual items that some collectors prize. Shown are 3LO window posters advertising the week's program highlights. The posters were displayed in radio shop windows during the early days of broadcasting. (1933?)

Radio collecting was just starting to kick off in the mid 1980s and the collecting and restoring of old receivers has grown in the past decade to a stage where many businesses have been successfully established to cater for the needs of an ever increasing number of collectors.

Now, both here and abroad, vintage radio columns are a regular item in some electronics magazines and are read by many thousands of radio collectors and other interested readers. I have had a number of people write to me just to say that they enjoy my column, even though they are not collectors themselves. So it would appear that the continuing interest in valve technology extends well beyond those who are directly involved in maintaining it.

However, many Vintage Radio readers are interested to some degree in collecting old radios and collectors are the subject of this month's column.

I have met many collectors over the past few years and they are a strange lot if you stand back and



take a close look - with some being stranger than others! Thank goodness I have been able to retain my sanity and not let my collecting enthusiasm take control. Who am I kidding?!

Radio collectors fit into many categories. Some are totally obsessed by their hobby, as though some kind of narcotic drug has taken over, while others can either take it or leave it as the mood finds them. I guess I fit somewhere in between.

I first became interested in radio when I was a kid in short pants. Although I was very interested at the time, lack of money curbed my enthusiasm and I never progressed past the crystal set and simple regenerative receiver stage.

My latent radio interests were re-awakened with the advent of the "Technicraft" series of kit radios that appeared in the mid 1980s. These sets were the "Unidyne", "Reinartz Two", "Super Crystal Set" etc.

Putting together a few vintage style kits really grabbed my attention at a stage when I was looking for a new hobby. So vintage radio came along at the right time.

From the Technicraft kits I graduated to the real thing when I was given a 1939 5-valve console model Radiola. After restoring that receiver I was hooked and just had to find another and go through the whole process again. Before I realised it, I had become a collector of old radio receivers.

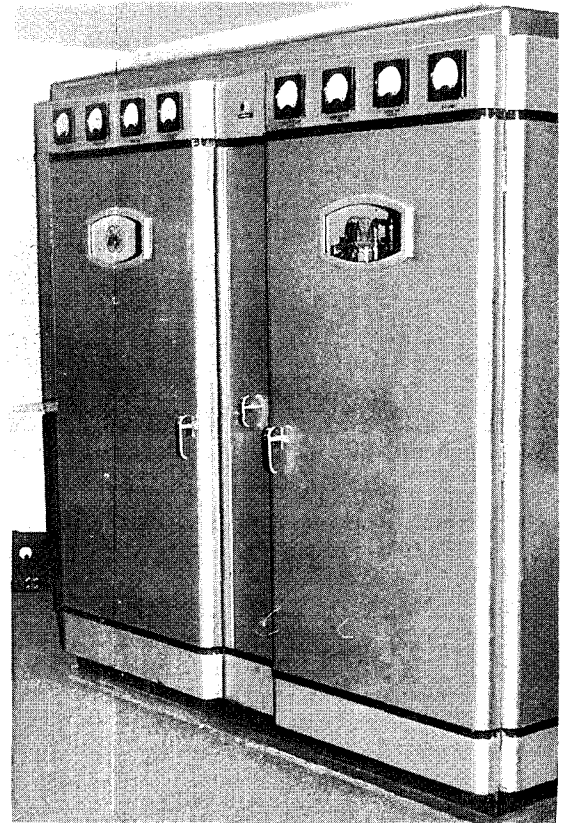
Collecting valve radios is one thing, getting them working again is another matter. While some collectors do not care if their radios work or not, most like to restore them or have them restored, to working

order, which can be a difficult task at times.

Regarding the previously mentioned Radiola, about all that was required to fix it was the replacement of a faulty capacitor and the refurbishing of the timber cabinet. The set was in really good condition and needed very little doing to it. Even the dial lights lit up.

Alas I was soon to find out that other receivers had entirely different problems and more of them. Some of these faults were incredibly hard to locate, believe me. It took several years before I came to grips with most of the

**This old transmitter once powered 3SH Swan Hill. Once again, it is an item that takes up a lot of space.**



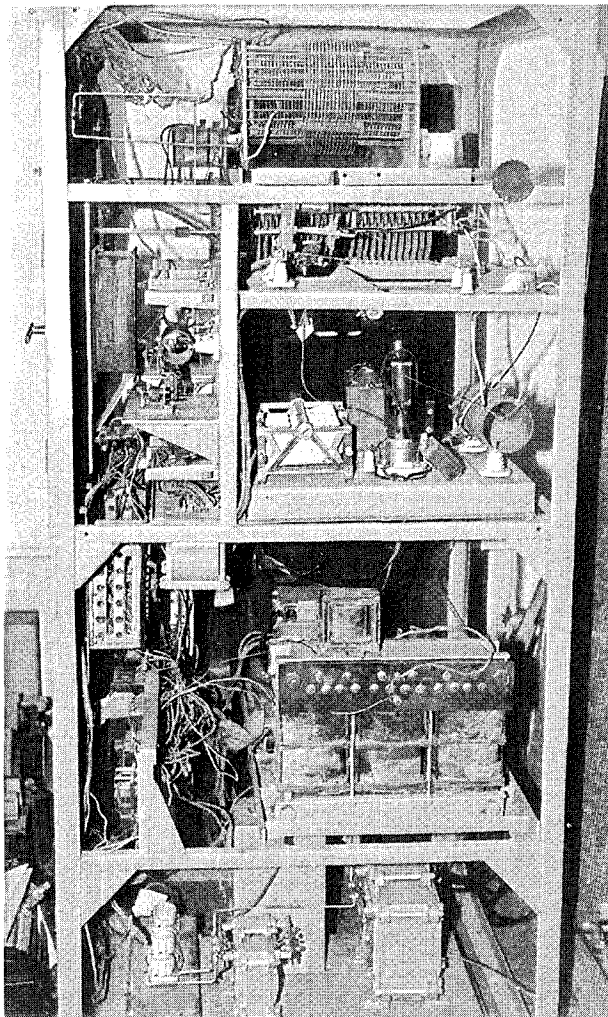
**Collectors of large equipment such as this 5kW AWA transmitter are faced with storage problems normal collectors never experience. To give some idea of size, the windows in the doors are about eye height. This transmitter was once used by 3TR Sale and was donated to the Maryborough Creative Arts and Science museum by the Bendigo TAFE College. Transporting it was no easy job.**

common valve radio faults.

Then, as now, I considered the fun part of collecting old radios to be the repair aspect. There is nothing quite like the satisfaction one experiences when some old wreck of a receiver bursts into life after being dead for many decades.

Once a restoration has been completed and the receiver goes on the shelf, it means very little to me from that point on, apart from the memory of getting it going. I guess that is where I may differ from most other collectors. Everyone sees vintage radio differently.

Naturally the repairing of a receiver is not everything. I enjoy the scrounging, bartering, trading, etc and I also like to listen to some of my receivers from time to time. But the really rewarding part of it all is





An attractive display of EverReady batteries from the Dick Howarth collection.

getting them working again and that is why I like to collect valve receivers.

In my opinion, a lot of collectors are not really collectors; they are hoarders. This type of person often goes to a great deal of trouble and expense to obtain something but does nothing constructive with it once he brings it home.

I have been to see a number of collections only to find that you stand

in an obstructed doorway and have various items pointed out at the far end of the room. Whether a rare piece or common, they all share the same fate and gradually deteriorate because of inadequate care and improper storage. Mice, cockroaches, dust and dampness all take their toll over the years and a good collectable item eventually becomes a wreck.

I visited a place in Melbourne

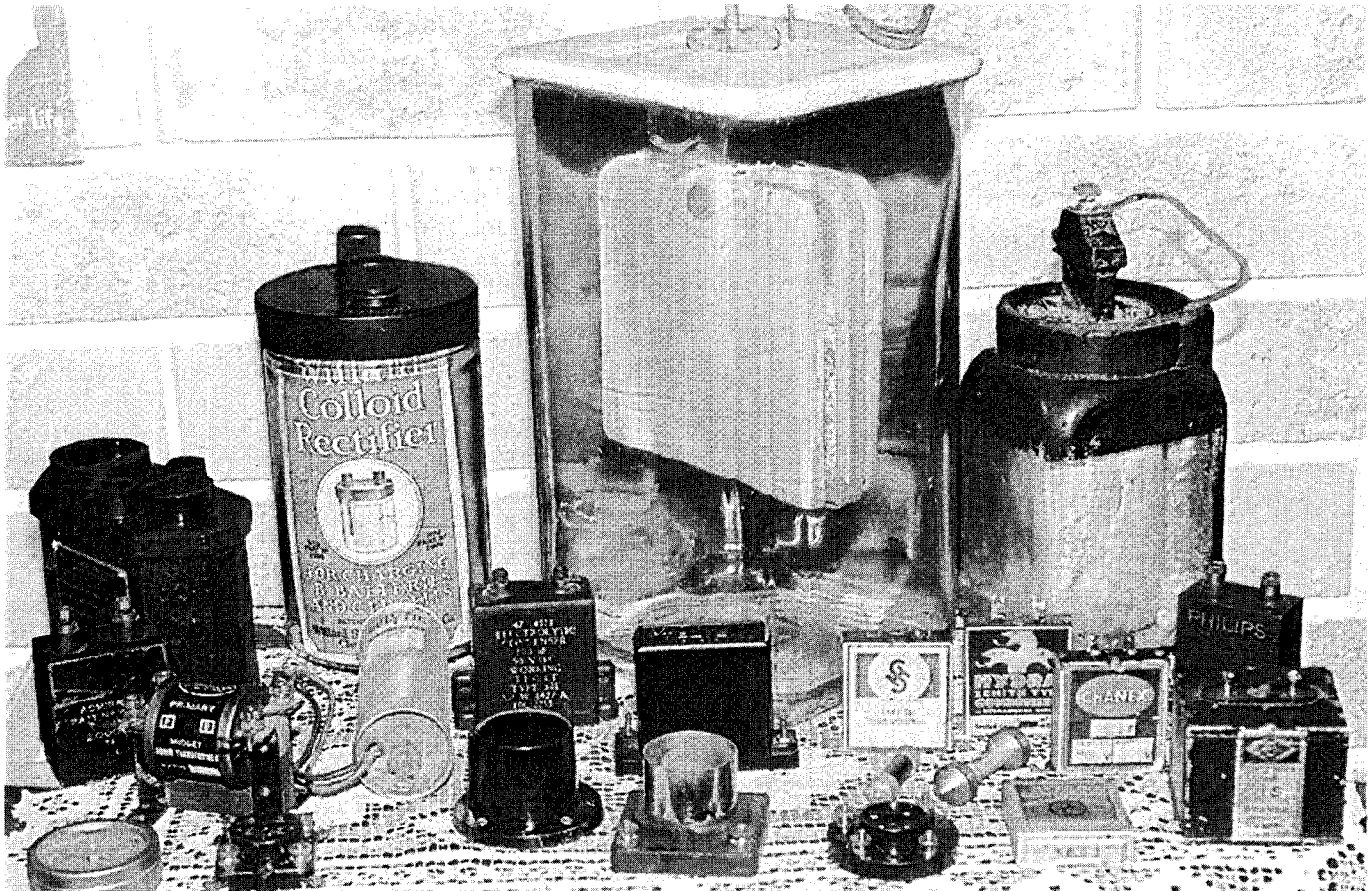
some time ago where every room in the house was stacked to the ceiling with "collectables" of many types. There were narrow, maze-like passages through the rubble and although the windows were unlocked no intruder would ever be able to get in.

This guy had even filled his bedroom and bathroom with junk to such an extent he was forced to sleep on the floor in the passage with his dog and took a shovel out the back when he wanted to go to the toilet. Believe me - it's true!

And where did all this hoarding get him? He died an unhappy and friendless man.

As he could not take his treasures with him, his sister sold me a car full of unrestored radios for about \$200. The radios were like the cameras, TV sets, clocks, watches, car parts and dusty books. They were all in poor condition through sheer neglect.

A true collector will try to restore and preserve the things he collects while the hoarder's collection slowly



Also from the Dick Howarth collection is this display of miscellaneous bits and pieces from yesteryear. Some of the more interesting items at the back are a Willard wet rectifier, an Edison battery and a Leclanche cell.

deteriorates because he can't be bothered to even throw a dust cover over something old in order to protect it. Unfortunately, there are a few hoarders in the vintage radio movement.

Having the best part of my collection restored and on public display pleases me greatly. There is little satisfaction to be gained from cluttering up one's home with collectable items, regardless of what they might be. When collecting takes over your life, it's time to seek help!

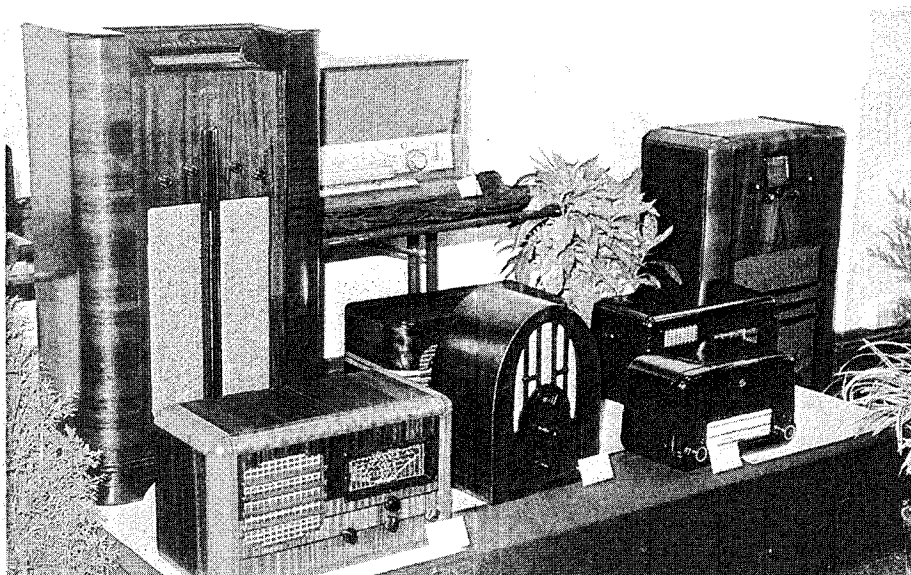
The following description would cover most radio collectors. They pick up a few sets at affordable prices, keep the good ones and turn the others over for a small profit which helps finance their hobby. There is nothing wrong with such an attitude, for buying, selling and trading is a good way to operate. It also involves other collectors and gives them the opportunity to buy or trade what others may not want. At least this approach keeps things in circulation and most of those involved get something out of it.

A collector I met just recently has built up his entire collection from his local tip. Over a period of years he has been able to gather together quite a few reasonable receivers (mainly 40s and 50s mantel types) plus a considerable collection of valves and other very usable radio components which have been stripped from chassis that were also deposited at the tip face. Someone's rubbish is another's treasure!

On the other hand there are other collectors who only want the very best and nothing else will do. No 50s plastics, no 40s Bakelites, no battery sets or portables, only those gems of receivers from the late 20s, early 30s era. This type of collector thinks nothing of spending \$1,000 or more on a particular receiver.

Needless to say such a collection requires a lot of money to put together. Whether that cost will be returned when the time comes to sell remains to be seen, because there are very few up-market buyers.

There is a radio collector of my acquaintance who some may not regard as a collector at all simply because he has only a few commercially made receivers. This guy prefers to build his own: they can be



The author is pleased that the majority of his collection is restored and on public display. This is part of that collection.

simple battery regenerative sets, perhaps a 4 or 5-valve superhet or maybe a mono or stereo amplifier with a push-pull output. He likes to build a variety of valve equipment.

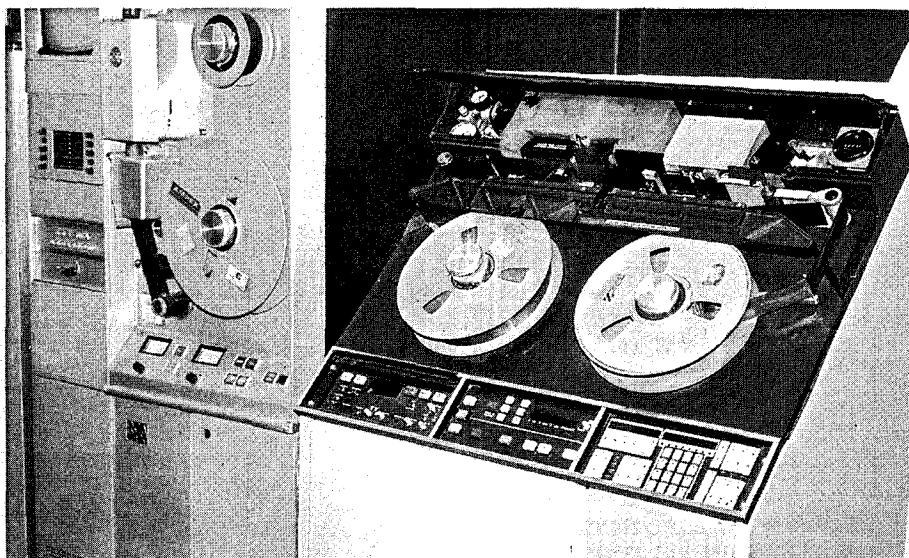
When building one of his creations, the first step is to draw up a circuit, which usually combines the good features of many circuits.

Once the circuit is finalised, the next step is a plan of what parts go where. This usually takes the form of a full scale detailed component wiring diagram. He then knocks up a chassis of suitable size and builds his own special creation. What's more, they look good and work really well too.

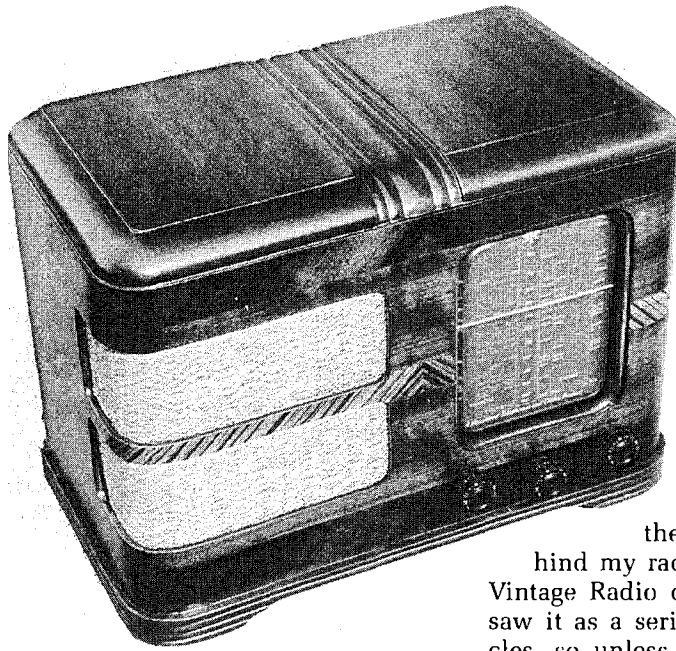
In my opinion it is this type of collector/experimenter that gets the most out of vintage radio. They obtain really good value for their money and that that's how a hobby should be.

Other collectors prefer to tinker with more unusual items such as military equipment and communications receivers, while some collect transmitters and even radar installations. To find the necessary storage space is, no doubt, a problem of some magnitude for any collector with a passion for the big stuff.

Although a keen collector myself, I try to maintain a balance in my collection and do not concentrate on any



This professional video equipment became redundant and unwanted with the advent of aggregation. Again, difficult equipment to store because of its size.



**Most collectors will settle for more realistic items such as this STC mantel radio with its timber cabinet. Somehow it is a little more appealing than several tonnes of transmitter.**

sive valve collection.

particular make, model or era. I collect only those radios that appeal to me and come my way at what I consider to be reasonable prices.

I have receivers from the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s. There are consoles, table models, mantel models, portables and even some early transistor radios. There are a few novelty items too, such as home-made receivers and crystal sets, plus a few interesting old valves, although nothing in the way of a comprehensive

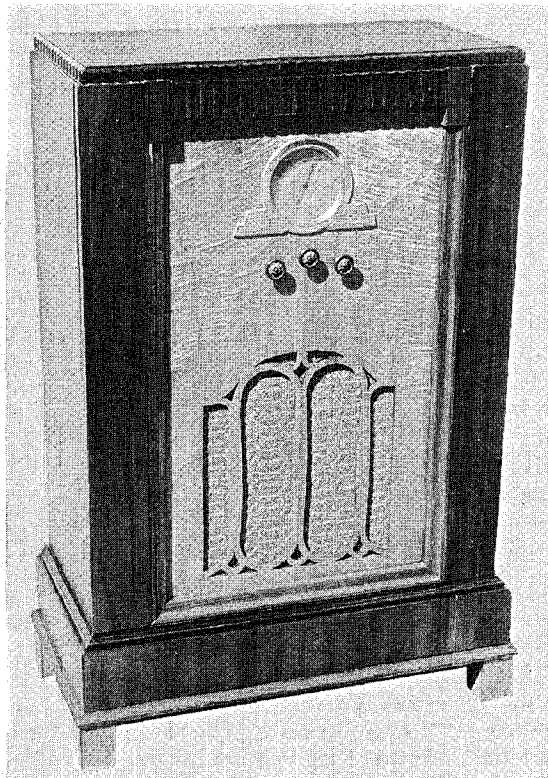
Perhaps one of the driving forces behind my radio collecting is this Vintage Radio column. Originally I saw it as a series of about ten articles, so unless I pursue my hobby fairly intensely, I will find it difficult to maintain a variety of subject matter to write about. Believe me, it is not easy coming up with a suitable story plus photographs each month. It takes a considerable amount of time and effort!

The writing aspect of my vintage radio activities is actually a secondary hobby in itself, which also includes another of my interests; photography. So radio collecting for me is a threefold affair - radio, writing and photography, all rolled into one big hobby.

How people can spend their time watching TV every evening is beyond my understanding, especially when there are so many more interesting things to be done. Doing something yourself is much better than watching others doing things on the magic screen.

So if your radio collecting is in the doldrums and focused on a narrow spectrum, then it may be time to diversify a little, broaden your horizons and try something different.

The various aspects of vintage radio are many. SC



**Many collectors favour receivers from the 1930s era. This one was made by Eclipse Radio back in the days when big was beautiful. It is a 7-valve superhet.**