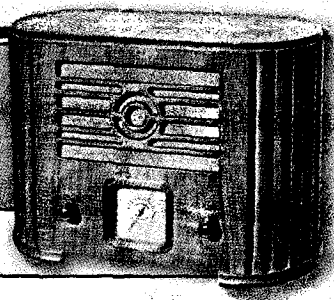


# Vintage Radio

By RODNEY CHAMPNESS, VK3UG



## Cataloging & disposing of your vintage radio collection

**Keeping records and other information is an important part of vintage radio collecting. It's also important to sort and store spare parts in an orderly manner, otherwise you'll never be able to find anything when you want it!**

From time to time, individual collectors and groups (such as the Historical Radio Society of Australia and the New Zealand Vintage Radio Society) organise special functions for displaying vintage radio collections and other artefacts associated with vintage radio. This equipment now forms a valuable part of our radio history, the more so

when additional information from the era is included.

Literature and signs and any other artefacts pertaining to the hobby all help to enhance any collection in an historical sense.

### Why keep records?

Keeping records and other informa-

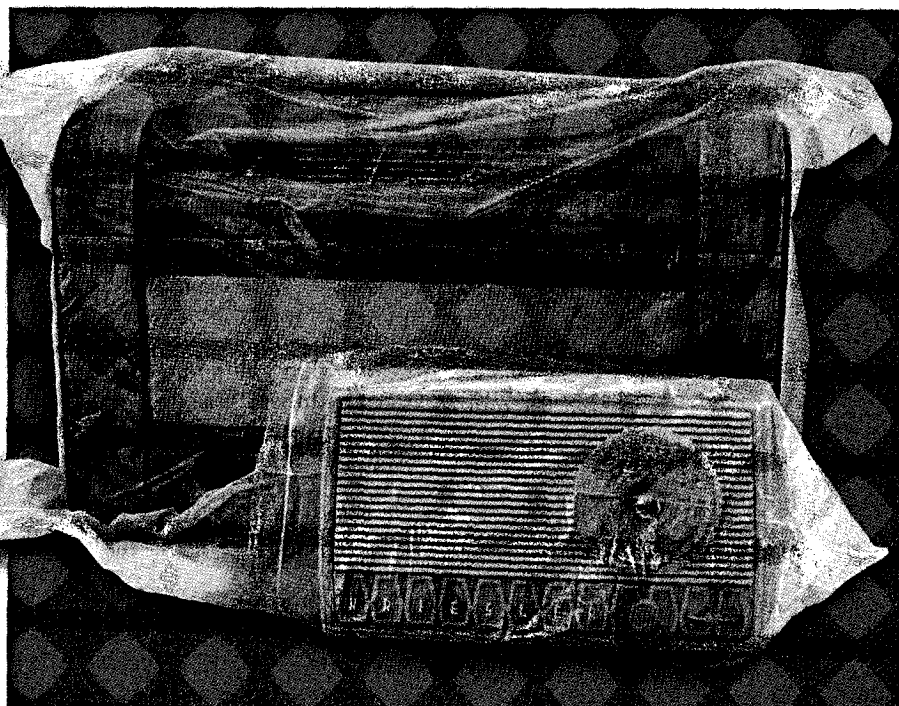
tion about our vintage collections is an important part of the hobby. However, some collectors find that their interests change after a number of years and may therefore wish to dispose of their collection. Another likely scenario is that the collector may wish to move to a retirement village and may no longer have the necessary space to store vintage radios.

Obviously, all the hard work involved in putting a vintage radio collection together will come to nothing if it is just carted to the local rubbish tip when you can no longer accommodate it. And that would be a great shame.

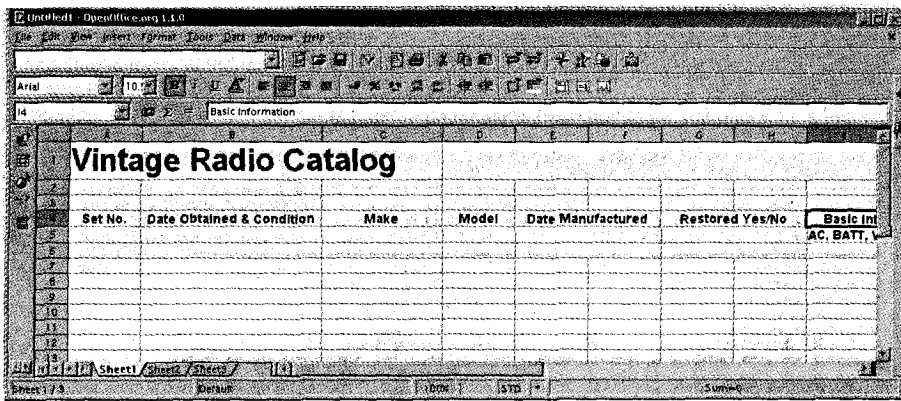
An article in the NZVRS Bulletin for February 2002 by George Newlands titled "Some Ideas and Advice On The Disposal of a Collection" got me thinking about what will happen to my collection when I eventually move to a retirement village (or die). What would my kids do when I can no longer take an interest in my collection? They certainly don't share my interest in vintage radio and I would hate to think that my collection would be taken to the tip because it is "just so much old junk"!

Recently, I saw the collection amassed by a (now deceased) hobbyist in South Australia and was asked to give an indication as to its value. Unfortunately, his wife had no idea where to turn for assistance in disposing of the collection. Her husband had died some time back and in the meantime, some so-called "helpers" had helped themselves to quite a few pieces of equipment, which left a nasty taste in the lady's mouth.

Going from what is left, there must have been some quite valuable pieces in the collection which are now gone.



Plastic bags can be used to protect vintage radio sets when they are not in use or on display. Be sure to store them in a cool dry place, away from direct sunlight.



A spreadsheet program is ideal for keeping details of your vintage radio collection. Don't have Excel? – try the spreadsheet that's included in OpenOffice (it's free).

And in some cases, the prices paid were so low as to be considered an insult. She has been offered \$3000 for what's left, which fills a shed around 15 metres square. However, just five items that I recognise are worth almost \$3000 – never mind the rest of the gear!

That said, there are a couple of good reasons why the collection is worth much less than it should be. First, the collector had dismantled many sets in the course of his restoration work and they are still in bits. Second, he had no record of the items in his collection. With sets in bits, it would take weeks to find out which pieces belonged together. Even then, with such a large collection, it may not be possible to be sure what belonged with what.

Identifying makes and models is not easy when they are in pieces and spread around the storage area. Unfortunately, the restorer had been struck down with a stroke in the middle of his work, hence the chaos.

### What do we do?

Most of us who start out in this hobby are initially so enthusiastic that we rarely organise our collections properly. Instead, when we come across all those "beaut" vintage radios out there, we tend to grab them and hoard them but we generally have no idea which way our hobby is going. The result is a garage or room full of equipment that we've collected and stored in all sorts of odd places.

To make matters worse, if you are like me, you tend to forget what you have and where you have put it. Keeping accurate records of what we have, where the items are and the spares that we have for restoration is usually not done – mainly because we think of it

as a chore to be avoided.

However, keeping accurate records doesn't have to be a chore, as even quite simple systems can be quite effective. For example, one of the members of our local vintage radio club does keep very good records and these are a good example of just how useful they can be to the hobby. Every set in his collection is given a number and a label is attached to each set with that number. The number is then recorded in a book and on a file folder.

The file folder includes all the information he has on the set and the work done to bring the set up to standard. He also knows where each set is located in his collection. Can I do this? Well, not really, although I do know where the important (to me) sets



An old chest of drawers makes a handy storage cabinet for vintage radio parts. Self-adhesive labels make the parts easy to find.

are located. I also know if they have been restored and I keep circuits and other information in various folders. However, I am like most other collectors, where record-keeping takes a back-seat compared to other activities of the hobby.

On the other hand, the article by George Newlands and my recent experience of seeing a potentially wonderful collection in disarray has really got me thinking. Most collectors, including me, really need to look at cataloging their collections. We also need to better protect restored receivers and become more methodical in our methods of storing and accessing spare parts.

This column has covered the restoration of many fine radios from the early 1900s to the 1970s. But once we've restored them, what do we do with them? Do we store them in the damp and dusty garage with junk in boxes put on top of them or do they have pride of place in the lounge room as they did many years ago? It really is a shame if we leave the elements to once again wreak havoc on a set that required so much effort to restore to working order.

### Cataloging your equipment

Keeping a record of the equipment you have can be done in a couple of ways and need not be arduous. I simply use a large exercise book, suitably ruled up to keep track of my equipment and what has been done to it. Alternatively, computer-literate restorers could use a spreadsheet program to record equipment information and, in fact, I've recently started transferring some of my own records to a computer-based system.

What sort of data should be in such a catalog? The information can be as simple or as complex as will satisfy your own needs. Here are a few column headings that you could use.

- (1). Set Number: this is needed so that individual sets can be easily identified. This number can be attached to the set with a removable label in an inconspicuous location.
- (2). Date Acquired: this is often handy to know.
- (3). Make: this helps identify and catalog brand names.
- (4). Model Number: so that you can quickly check what you already have.
- (5). Year of Manufacture: so that you



**Multi-drawer parts cabinets (available from electronics retailers) are ideal for storing smaller components.**

can quickly check a set's age.

(6). Restored – Yes/No: let's you check whether or not the set has been restored to working order.

(7). Date Restored: so that you know how long ago the set was restored. If the set hasn't been given a run for some time, it should be "fired up" to make sure nothing has deteriorated since restoration.

(8) Condition When Acquired: this is purely so that you can look back and remember how much work was put into the restoration task.

(9). Brief Details On The Set: this information can include whether it is dual-wave, 4-valve or 5-valve, battery or AC operated, etc.

(10). Cabinet: wooden, Bakelite, plastic or other.

(11). Cabinet Type: console, table, mantel, portable, other.

(12). Work Done on Set: briefly indicates the work that was necessary to restore the set to working order.

(13). Where Located: in the garage, in the lounge room, etc, or loaned out to someone.

(14). Approximate Unit Value: this can be filled in when the prices of sets at auction and elsewhere become known.

(15). General: a column to record other bits and pieces of information about the set. Reference can also be made to suitable spares that may be stored in your workshop (wrecked chassis are a good source of parts).

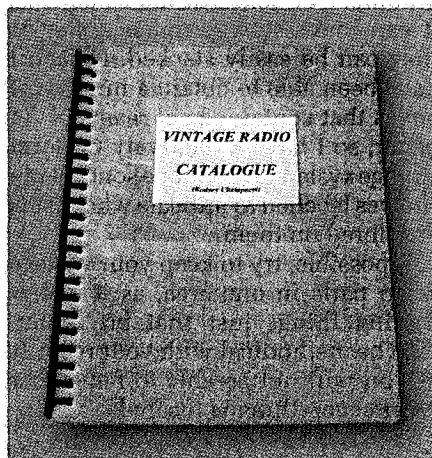
Of course, you may need more or

less columns than this but that's up to you.

### Cataloging other items

Having cataloged your complete equipment, it is also desirable to have a catalog of wrecked chassis, new and used components, and any literature and circuits that you have. Although I don't have a catalog as such for my new components, I do have them sorted in a logical manner.

For example, capacitors are sorted into values and voltages, and the physically smaller ones stored in small, resealable plastic bags (available from supermarkets, etc). A black marker pen is used to record the capacitor



**A ring-back binder is used to keep the author's vintage radio catalog neat and tidy. It lists all the sets in the my collection and their location, along with other relevant details.**

## Photo Gallery: 1934 Eclipse Radio "Endeavour Midget"



Manufactured by Eclipse Radio, Melbourne, in 1934, the Endeavour Midget was housed in a small, ornate wooden cabinet. It employed a 5-valve superhet circuit and tuned the medium-wave band. Its valve line-up was as follows: 77 (autodyne mixer), 6D6 (IF amplifier), 77 (anode bend detector), 89 (audio output stage) and a 280 (rectifier). Photo: Historical Radio Society of Australia, Inc.

values on the outside of each bag and the bags are all then placed in order in a suitably marked box.

It may sound like a lot of bother but it isn't really – not when compared to searching for a particular value among hundreds (or thousands) of other parts.

Similarly, my resistors are all sorted into values and wattage ratings and are housed in a number of multi-drawer parts cabinets. These cabinets are readily available from electronics stores, some of which advertise in SILICON CHIP.

I also keep a list of all the valves I have and whenever I acquire or use some, I note this down on my valve list. As a result, I can quickly check which valves types are in my collection and I also know how many of each particular type I have.

Once again, all the valves of a particular type are placed in a plastic re-sealable bag which is marked on the outside with a marker pen. A lot of my valves are "pre-loved" and so I can't

identify them by their boxes – because they don't have any.

Those items that aren't really suitable for cataloging can be stored in boxes that are suitably labelled with the contents. If you can obtain a number of boxes of the same size, it can make storage much easier as they can be easily stacked. In fact, I have been able to obtain a number of boxes that contained six reams of A4 paper, so I have a relatively uniform storage system. I also have some of my shelves labelled to indicate what items are stored on them.

If possible, try to keep your vintage radio parts in one area, as it makes finding things just that bit easier. And be methodical with your records as you will not be able to remember where everything is located.

### Books & circuit diagrams

I've always been a bit of a magpie and so I have accumulated many radio/electronics books, magazines, circuits and other literature over the years.

This collection has proven to be very useful, as restoration is much easier if you have the relevant information (particularly circuits). Additionally, these sources are invaluable for cross-checking the accuracy of the information in my vintage radio articles.

The storage of books and other printed matter is an art in itself and large libraries go to quite a bit of trouble to preserve their collections. Many will have noticed that some editions of their Australian Official Radio Service Manuals have paper that has discoloured and is very easy to tear. I understand that this is due to the type of paper used, which had quite a high acid content.

I'm not expert on how to look after printed material but I usually store valuable books in re-sealable plastic bags. If you're really keen, any really useful information can be scanned into a computer and stored on a disc to give fast access.

### Protecting vintage radios

The first thing to be aware of here is that ultraviolet radiation from the Sun can be quite harmful to the cabinet and general finish of vintage radios. After all, when the sets were made, it was not anticipated that they would still be around 50-80 years later. Keeping vintage radios out of direct sunlight and in a dry room will greatly increase the longevity of the cabinet finish and the internal works.

An example of the damage ultraviolet rays can do can be seen in the way that the red paint on many signs fades over time. Remember too how the clear 300-ohm ribbon feeder used on TV antenna systems many years ago would disintegrate within about a year when exposed to the Sun. So keep your vintage radios out of the Sun.

Dust and household airborne chemicals can be harmful too. I remember years ago having to service a TV set in a household of heavy smokers. The whole of the set was covered in a brown sticky goo, including the chassis components, the cabinet and the screen. In that set, simply cleaning the screen made quite a difference to the brightness of the picture! In addition, the tuner contacts needed cleaning, along with many other things.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that your vintage sets will suffer like this TV did. However, they will suffer to some extent if there are smokers in the



These cardboard boxes once held reams of paper but are now used to store the author's valve collection. Each box is clearly labelled to show contents.

house (as will the smokers).

One thing is certain: the lounge room will be a cleaner environment than the kitchen, with its cooking fumes. If a receiver is going to be used in the kitchen, a build up of muck can be expected over a period of time and this will need to be cleaned off occasionally.

If the radio is only used rarely in the home, it can be protected using plastic sheeting or, in the case of console sets, using a blanket. Ideally, though, sets should be stored in glass display

cases to exclude dust but this is hardly practical in 99% of cases.

### Disposing of your collection

Several members of our local club have disposed of either part or all of their collections in recent years. In fact, one member decided to auction his entire collection after losing interest in the hobby. Before doing so, he advertised his collection widely and, when auction day rolled around, there were buyers from interstate.

Another decided to auction his col-

lection as he was terminally ill and didn't want to leave the task of disposing of his collection to his wife. He hadn't kept a listing of his collection and several people were involved in cataloging it as best they could. This wasn't complete by auction day but it was still a successful auction, despite a few items being left unsold.

A third member decided to rationalise his collection and he arranged for it to be auctioned at a local hall. Fortunately, he kept very meticulous records which made it relatively easy to compile an accurate catalog. His collection was also extensively advertised and again there were buyers from interstate at the auction.

Another way of disposing of individual items is to see if any of your relatives or friends would like to have them. Local museums may also be interested in individual items from your collection, so keep them in mind.

In summary, well kept records will make your collection much more enjoyable, both for you and anyone visiting who may be interested in vintage radio. Additionally, it is wise to have your collection cataloged for insurance purposes. You may even need proper valuations to fully insure any really valuable items.

Finally, regardless of the circumstances, when it comes to disposing of your vintage radios, try to make sure that they are passed on to those who appreciate their historical value. **SC**