

Waverley Amateur Radio Society – 90 years on

The aim of this article is to summarise the history of the club, its current activities and to outline some of the events to celebrate its 90th anniversary in 2009.

The club was founded on 27th January 1919, following the end of WWI, by a group of 17 radio experimenters and enthusiasts living in the Waverley area. Three of these founders were among the 27 licensed radio experimenters in Australia in 1911.

Since that time the club has been continuously licensed, initially as N249 (licence 249 with prefix N for NSW), 2BV and from 1929, VK2BV, though it has not operated for periods of time including WWII when amateur radio operation was not allowed. In view of this, the club claims to be the oldest continuously licensed club in Australia.

The club has copies of the first licence application together with details of the transmitter and receiver proposed to be used which had to be supplied as part of the application. This and copies of all other material relating to Waverley held by the licensing authorities were supplied to the club in 1985.

Meetings up to 1954 were held weekly on a Thursday evening in the home of Frank Geddes, the club's first vice president, at "Almont" 13 McPherson St, Waverley. This was also the location of the club station.

Waverley has never been a large organisation, having a membership between 15 to around 40 active members currently. Today the club is flourishing with permanent premises at Rose Bay.

The 1920s period

Within a year of its founding, the club was able to obtain its first licence for a one valve receiver and a spark transmitter and was assigned a wavelength of 200 metres by the Navy department who then controlled the use of radio. Copies of the specification and circuits of the equipment to be used and the club rules were required as part of the application submitted in May 1920. The experimental licence was granted in September that year, one of only 16 throughout Australia of which 5 were in NSW.

For a number of years the club had to nominate a trustee who was responsible for the club's adherence to licence conditions, one of which was that anything the club heard on air whilst experimenting was to be kept secret. In addition a copy of the club rules had to be deposited with the authorities. This responsibility was still in force after WWII when the club secretary had to complete a Statutory Declaration for this purpose. Experimental licences at this time cost £2 and were issued for a particular wavelength, the club being

allocated 1000 metres in 1922.

Virtually every change in operating conditions had to be approved by the local radio inspector and in 1922 the club got into trouble when wishing to transmit music, which was not forbidden then, over the air to a dance hall in Coogee, an early demonstration of telephony and possibly the first amateur transmission of music in Australia. Permission was given for the club's receiver to be operated in the dance hall but apparently the club member making the transmission, R C Allsop, 2YG, had not got approval to transmit from that area. As a result the inspector recommended that the licences of both the club and Allsop be suspended for a period, but fortunately this view was not supported by his superiors after the club submitted its case.

Control of radio by this time had been transferred to the PMG who were very stingy, requesting that the club reimburse them for 8d for sending a letter with insufficient postage. After a second request the club paid this in postage stamps. Also in 1922 the club's call letters were changed from N249 to 2BV (the term "callsign" was not then in use). Call letters were in fact the licence numbers for receiving with licences being endorsed where transmitting had also been approved. At this period the club joined the Radio Association of Australia, which presumably was a rival to the WIA.

In May 1923 the club requested a change in wavelength to 400m and a few weeks later obtained approval to broadcast a concert from a church hall as another demonstration of wireless telephony. Apparently this was to a paying audience and the proceeds were shared between the club and the church.

By 1925, a certificate of proficiency was needed to obtain a licence, and the club's licence was not renewed until Gordon Thompson, 2GT, submitted his AOCP as evidence. In this year another change in wavelength to 90m was requested and granted with power limited to 10W. Use of additional shorter wavelengths of 30 and 40m were approved the following year as public broadcasting had been introduced which occupied the longer wavelengths.

The club became affiliated with the Wireless Institute of Australia in 1926 and has remained so ever since. Waverley was invited to set up a working radio station at the Sydney Town Hall for the week long Wireless Exhibition in May that year. Approval was eventually granted but not before both the club and the organisers had submitted the appropriate details.

The club requested permission from the PMG to transmit slow morse and telephony on 230m for 1 hour every evening in 1927 but was refused on the grounds of risk of interference to broadcasting in a densely populated area. Either postal services or the PMG's clerical procedures were unreliable around these years as several reminders were sent to the club requesting licence renewal or by the club to the PMG claiming no acknowledgement of their renewal payment. The 1928 licence permitted transmission on 125-250 metres with power again limited to 10W.

The 1930s

The club's transmitters covered 7Mc/s, 3.5Mc/s and 1200Kc/s in 1931 and it remained continually licensed throughout the 1930s.

During this decade there was a lot of interest in the possibilities of television and in 1933 two club members, Gordon Wells and Mr Pickering, 2KI, made what is believed to be the first Australian television transmission between Mr Pickering's home in North Bondi and the club room at Waverley. The technique was based on J L Baird's mechanical scanning procedure. Gordon Wells was club president for seven years but never became licensed. It was said that his with excellent technical abilities, he was too busy helping other members get their AOCIP to have to time to sit himself. He was made an honorary life member of the club.

In 1936 Mr Pickering donated his television equipment to the club who then applied to get approval for transmission in the 56-60Mcs band using a special callsign. Approval was granted but the special callsign was denied and the club was prohibited from transmitting commercial material.

The WIA held an amateur exhibition at the Presbyterian Assembly Hall in 1936, where the first public television demonstration was conducted by Gordon Wells and Maurice Lusby. Gladys Moncrieff, a well known singer of the day, was the star and can claim to be the first woman to be televised in Australia.

The club continued operating their equipment until WWII was declared and all transmitting activities were curbed. Members still continued meeting with the Secretary Mr. J. Howes, VK2ABS, becoming interested in motion picture projection. He built a professional quality full size projector and sound system which was used to entertain members.

Post-War Activity

In 1946, following the end of WWII, the club requested that their licence be renewed and their old callsign re-allocated. This was done, but not until the secretary has completed the Statutory Declaration regarding secrecy and the names of licensed members supplied. A warning was issued with the experimental licence pointing out that it did not permit the club to receive broadcasting stations unless a separate broadcasting licence was purchased.

The club had to supply a copy of its constitution to the PMG. Amongst other things, the club required that new members be elected by secret ballot with 50% or more in favour of the applicant and that members be over 13 years of age and of British parentage.

At the end of 1946, an application was made to hold a field day, which presumably meant operating portable equipment and were asked for more detail but no further correspondence can be found.

Official records over this period required inspection of the club equipment and these

reports signified that operation of the club station was patchy for the next few years. For example the 1951 report stated that the club had no equipment and was not operating radios. In 1954 however the transmitter was described and 1955 represented the last days at "Almont" with new official addresses of the club as Meymott St, Randwick and, from 1965, Birrell St, Bondi being supplied to the PMG until the 1970s. Inspection reports show that these addresses housed operating club equipment.

The club seems to have been dormant by 1970, but a few amateurs, including Phil Card, VK2ZBX, Duane Foster, VK2VE and Eric Van de Weyer, then VK2KUR, kept the licence active and decided to construct and operate a 2m repeater in 1975 with the callsign VK2RBV. A licence to operate was issued after endorsement from the WIA and it was installed at Clovelly and later moved to Bondi, continuing in use for a few years. During the 1980s the 2m and 70cm repeaters at Paddington, VK2ROT, covering the Eastern Suburbs, was set up by the now defunct OTC Radio Club on the roof of their building.

1985 Rebirth

In the meantime the club licence had been renewed regularly by Duane Foster and in April 1986 a meeting was held to reconstitute the club and was attended by many Eastern Suburbs hams. Officers were elected and a new set of rules formulated. The club was able to obtain the use of the Scout Hall in Cooper Park Road, Bellevue Hill for its meetings and radio station.

For at least the next two to three years the club operated a station from this site and hosted the annual Jamboree of the Air (JOTA) for local scouts but then had to move out at the request of the council who wanted the building demolished. For the next few years meetings were held in various rented locations around Bondi Junction.

In 1995 a request was made to the Scouts for use of part of the Rose Bay Scout Hall which at that time was unoccupied. This was granted as it meant that the building continued to be used and the upstairs area was made available for use by the club. Since then, the club built up its operating station, provided audio-visual equipment and furnished the room for meetings.

Late in 1995 the club was honoured with a visit by Gordon Thompson, by then VK2AVT, one of the original founders, who fascinated members and visitors with his reminiscences of the early days of the club where he held a number of positions including those of Secretary and Trustee of the licence. He was made an honorary life member and became a silent key in 2001 aged 96.

At this time the Waverley website was created by one of our teenage members, Ben Buxton, VK2XUF, which we believe to be the first ham radio club website in Australia.

The club still operates from Rose Bay but it now shares space with a Rover Scout group and in the past few years the NSW scouting body has done a considerable amount of work

towards essential maintenance and improving the building so that it can provide a more functional venue and be available to other users.

The Waverley club currently has around 40 active members, a number of whom have joined following training for Foundation licences. The club has two regular meetings per month, a Saturday afternoon project day to carry out radio related activities and improve club facilities and a weekday evening meeting with informative talks and to discuss club affairs. In addition there is an annual auction in June as well as increased participation in contests and portable operation. Hosting JOTA for local scouts has occurred every October since moving to Rose Bay. Being close to the city, hams from overseas often drop in to the clubhouse when visiting Sydney.

Management of the Paddington 2m and 70cm repeaters, VK2ROT, was taken over by the club a few years ago.

90th Anniversary Activities

A number of activities will occur to celebrate the club's 90th anniversary this year. In November 2008, the ACMA allocated the club the special event callsign VI2BV90 for use over the period from 24th January to 1st February 2009. Other activities, not related to the special event callsign include a commemorative dinner and a special award over 12 months for contacts with the club, its officers and members. Award points depend on the station contacted, with multipliers based on the contact mode.

A commemorative DVD has been produced containing archive material including photos, video clips, historical and other documents as well as several versions of the club's website over the years. The anniversary has also created interest by club members in restoring or building replicas of early radio sets and additional on air activities are being investigated. Full details of the award or other anniversary activities are posted on the club's website or may be requested by post to the club at PO Box 634, ROSE BAY NSW 2029.

The club's web site at www.vk2bv.org is kept up to date and has expanded over the past 12 years providing a large amount of information about Waverley's history, membership and activities.

Simon Buxton VK2UA

Publicity Officer

Waverley Amateur Radio Society