

Wireless—Pastime for "Cranky"



Activity Among Dunedin Enthusiasts When the King Came to the Throne

To-day, when his Majesty (left) sits before a microphone he knows that his voice will be heard in every part of the Empire. When the King came to the Throne exactly 25 years ago wireless was regarded as a hobby for "cranks."

AS far back as the final years of the last century, it is claimed, Dunedin experimenters were delving into the new problem of wireless transmission and reception. Their success at the time was regarded with amazement by their friends—messages in code were actually sent and received over distances varying from a few yards to a few miles. They foresaw the development of communication by means of wireless, but it is doubtful if they visualised what it would mean to the people of to-day. Ten or eleven years went by, and at the time when King George the Fifth came to the throne the ranks of the enthusiasts had grown to a dozen or more.

Speech broadcasting was a development of the science that was unknown, but the young men who were interested in Morse work continued with their experiments, and were greatly encouraged by every new discovery they made. They watched for every American mail coming in, so that they might learn what Marconi and de Forest and one or two others were doing, and they keenly "swotted up" and built new circuits as they came to hand.

It is almost impossible to recall who all the local wireless men were twenty-five years ago—only sketchy records of their work are available—but the name of Mr. Stark, who was a very keen "ham," comes to mind. Mr. Stark, who is now resident in Mexico, was the owner of a most impressive collection of gear, and, in collaboration with a friend, established regular communication from the city of Portobello across the harbour. Other pioneers more or less in the limelight at the time were a Mr. Robinson and Mr. Buchanan. Valves were unheard-of components of either transmitting or receiving sets, and it was impossible to buy the latter anywhere in town—the experimenters had to construct their own, so that the total number of those trying to further the cause of wireless was necessarily limited. However, these few men continued to spend all their spare time with their fascinating hobby, using strange coherers in conjunction with electric bells for the sending of messages, and all sorts of paraphernalia

that bore little relation to modern equipment.

Then came the Great War, and most of their experiments were cut short. During the period of conflict, it will be remembered, the first valves were introduced to the still small band of interested persons. These tubes were fitted to the face of a wireless panel by means of clips, and satisfactorily carried out their duties. Immediately after the war experiments were started with a view to radiating speech for the benefit of those fortunate enough to possess the necessary receiving apparatus, and in 1921 Dr. R. Jack, working in conjunction with Mr. J. Sutherland (both are still Dunedin residents), made the first actual broadcasts of music in New Zealand. The transmitter was located at the Otago University, and at certain times announcements were made in the local papers to the effect that the station would be on the air for specified hours on given days. Not long after this a group of those who had become interested in the broadcasts met to form the present Otago Radio Association, and to devise ways and means of building their own transmitting set for the purpose of providing more regular entertainment for those

who had assembled their own receivers. Those were the days when large numbers of citizens gathered at their friends' houses to listen in awed silence to broadcast music and speech.

After that the association secured a transmitter of a more modern type from the City Corporation, and so the good work continued. So far as can be ascertained, no other person in the country was yet broadcasting music. Then came Mr. F. J. O'Neill to the group of broadcasters, and he was followed shortly afterwards by Mr. N. Arundel, and wireless was then a more or less accepted thing.

It is interesting to mention that Mr. F. J. O'Neill, whose call-sign was 4YA, sold his gear to the newly-formed Broadcasting Company, who shifted it to the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition site, where it operated daily under the call VLDN. When the exhibition closed the transmitter was again shifted to rooms in Moray Place, and

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Marconi experimenting in his garden about 35 years ago. The primitive-looking set in front of him was the parent of the high-powered transmitters of to-day.