

An early dot and dash man revisits Hobart

ONE of the first Tasmanians to coax dot and dash sounds out of the air is revisiting Hobart after a virtual absence of more than 50 years, and he is pleased with what he has seen.

He is Mr Harry G. Lewis, of Melbourne, who in a talk the other day admitted neighbours described him as a "crank" when he erected a radio mast in his former Hobart home in Forest Rd.

He left Hobart in 1923, and his visits since could best be described as fleeting — Hobart was a mere port of call for tourist liners on which he was a passenger.

This time, however, the serious illness of a sister brought him for a longer stay.

Revolutionary

In a lifetime spent in radio first on the technical side and later on the commercial side, he has watched it grow from Morse code messages captured out of the air to the amazing development of transmission by satellite, and he claims that no activity of man has been so revolutionary in so short a time as wireless and radio communication.

My contact with Mr Lewis came as a result of a picture published in this column last week of the GPO tower decorated for the peace celebrations after the First World War.



MR HARRY G. LEWIS

Revisiting old Hobart scenes.

He said it was an amazing coincidence that it should have been published during his visit because he had taken part in preparing the decorations in 1919.

"It was just after I had returned from the First World War," he said. "The Hobart firm of Medhurst had been given the job of lighting the GPO for the celebrations and I went back to work quick and lively.

"Bert Ellis and I had the job, and I still have vivid memories of climbing over that green dome preparing the decorations."

5s a week

Mr Lewis was a member of the 7th Field Artillery Battery, a Queensland unit, in the First World War.

Mr Lewis as a "ham" enthusiast was among the first in Australia to get an official radio licence to conduct a transmitter.

That was in 1912, and he still holds the official parchment document.

He said he was keen on anything to do with electricity and radio, but there were few jobs offering in that line.

Eventually Mr F. W. Medhurst ("Papa") gave

him a job because of his "persistence" at the princely rate of 5s a week, but his first pay envelope contained 15s.

He was one of the first radio operators ever to communicate by radio telephone with Melbourne on an experimental basis.

His partner in this exercise was Mr Ross Hull, who became a very important radio man in the United States, and was editor of the American radio magazine QST.

Self taught

Mr Lewis said he could find nobody in Tasmania to teach him Morse Code in the early days and he had to teach himself.

It paid dividends, because in the First World War he was commandeered to become an instructor in Morse Code and portable field telephones.

Printed information on radio work was almost non-existent in Tasmania at the time, so he sent to the United States for radio publications, and they are among his treasured possessions.

But he added they make quaint reading now. The set-ups were "the most inadequate things you ever saw," and, of course, radio telephone was unheard of.

Mr Lewis concedes that in all his experiments he was not lucky enough to pluck any sensational SOS messages out of the air, but his scrap book records communication with the Mawson expedition in the Antarctic, and a demonstration he gave of time signals from Minneapolis naval station in the United States attracted a lot of public attention.

Engineer

A long newspaper article records what a wonderful thing it was to receive signals from America "off a tin roof".

Mr Lewis transferred to Melbourne about 1923 and became radio engineer for Oliver J. Nilson.

As such he was responsible for the manufacture

A.G. BRADLEY
ON
FRIDAY

and reconditioning of 3UZ's first radio transmitter (Melbourne's second) at a time when broadcasting was just getting under way.

Another transfer took him to Sydney in the wholesale side of radio parts.

He described that as a huge business because there was no such thing as a manufactured radio set.

They were all bits and pieces that had to be assembled.

Mr Lewis found that the sale of wireless parts was a much more lucrative undertaking than that of a wireless technician and on his return to Melbourne remained in that side of the business.

Astounding

He described Hobart's development as "astounding". He said the strongest impression on his previous brief visits was the cleanliness of the streets, particularly around the waterfront.

"On this longer visit," he added, "it still remains a strong impression. In fact I would say, it is the cleanest city in the Commonwealth."

The cleanliness of the waterfront and the Railway Roundabout fountain combined to give visitors a delightful first impression.

Business grew

Mr Lewis recalled that many years ago a young man named Arthur Warner came to his Melbourne shop offering radio parts for sale and inquiring whether there was a market for such things. An order for the parts was arranged.

Eventually the young man became associated with Mr Louis Abrahams, another "crank" on radio, and that led to the establishment of the business that grew into the Astor organisation.

PROBABLY THE
SEE PHOTO IN
7DX BOXES
Charles
Regards!