

HOBBY TALK

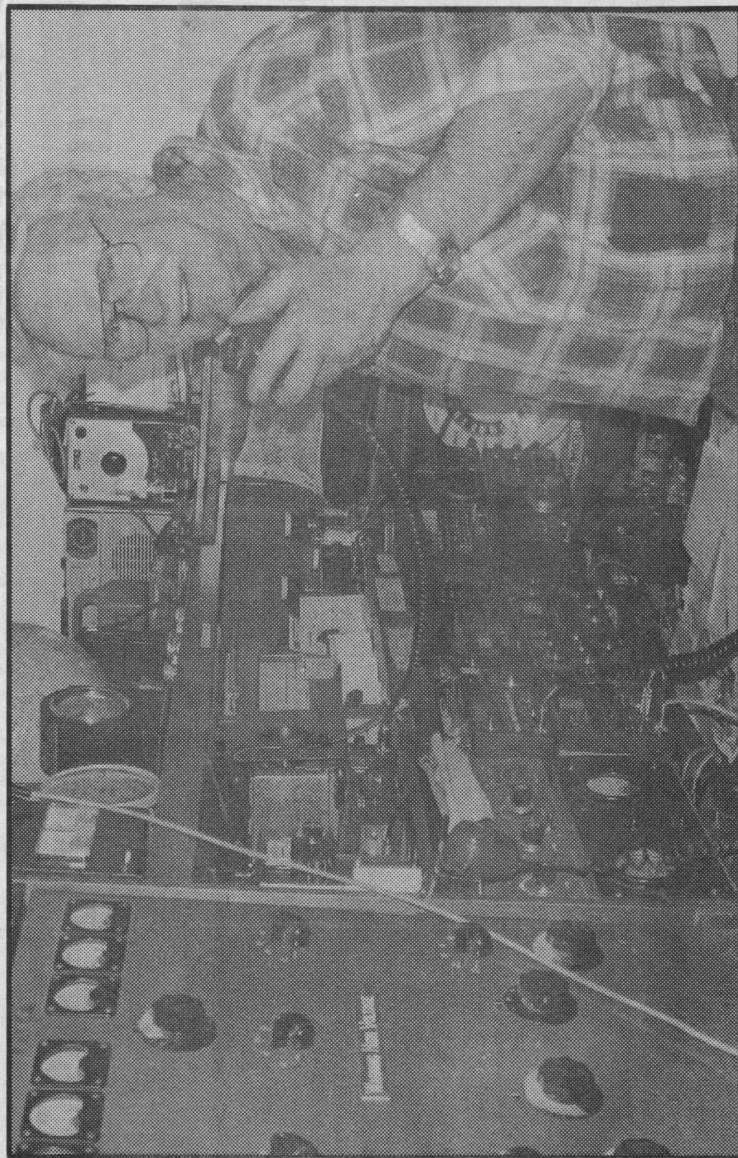
by Jeff Boyes

Communicator with the world at his fingertips



The front room of the Millin's home in West Hobart is Ken's Den and almost half the room is taken up with what is known in Amateur Radio circles as "the shack". In Ken Millin's case, the shack comprises three desks and shelving which house a radio transmitter, several communications radio receivers, five radio transceivers (which combine the functions of both receiver and transmitter), matching and measuring equipment and computers, keyboards and screens. For W.Bro. Millin, in company with many other Freemasons, is a very active member of another great world-wide, truly international fraternity, that of the Radio Amateur.

A Radio Amateur (with a capital A) is not just a non-professional radio operator. He or she is one who has studied the theory of radio propagation and reception, equipment, regulations and Morse code and has passed the necessary examinations for the Amateur Operators' Certificate of Proficiency. He or she may then be licensed with an Amateur call sign to communicate on a number of bands of frequencies with other amateurs (some 700 in Tasmania and 10,000 throughout Australia) in any one of 320 countries and geographical regions throughout the world.



• Radio Amateur, W Bro Ken Millin (VK7KA) with the world at his fingertips. The home-made 1959 transmitter (left) dwarfs the battery of modern transmitters that make up a modern Amateur radio station.

long time Amateurs, Ken Millin has shoe boxes stacked with QSL cards from the most distant parts but is especially proud of cards from North Dakota and Anchorage, Alaska.

As Amateurs gained experience, the sets they built got bigger and more sophisticated. Ken Millin's 1959 model stands 6 feet tall in a corner of the room,

Many Amateurs engaged on long distance travels by car and caravan or yachts, fit radios and are licensed as "mobiles". Whole networks exist for the purpose of maintaining contact with those

crossing outback deserts or sailing the world's oceans, thus ensuring their safety and a welcome at their destination.

In view of the world-wide, international and fraternal nature

of both Freemasonry and Amateur Radio, it is little wonder that strong though informal links exist between the two memberships. Ken Millin suspects that there are amateur networks providing contact between Freemasons throughout the world and probably some Lodges who have close associations with Amateur Radio. If any reader has detailed knowledge of such activities, we should be glad to hear of them.

By no means all of W.Bro. Millin's leisure time has been spent on the Amateur airwaves. For many years he was a painstaking builder and sailer of yachts, from centre-board dinghys to off-shore cruising yachts, notably Melita and Runaway. For many years he was in a part-time partnership with Shipbuilder Geoffrey Cuthbertson at Montague Bay, contributing to the mechanics and fitting out of a number of wellknown and beautiful cruising yachts.

Brethren who have been associated with W.Bro. Millin in his Masonic life will know that he has contributed to the enrichment of Lodge and most associated orders with the same thoughtfulness and zeal as he has to his family and all of his life's varied activities.

APART FROM providing more effective communication with low power or in poor conditions, morse code breaks down language barriers during international working. A Radio Amateur may also be a professional operator or administrator and many are. Amateurs are often referred to as "Hams" but most prefer the term Amateur.

Ken Millin inherited an enthusiasm for both Freemasonry and radio from his father and like so many other young boys of that time, had built his own crystal set and had the thrill of hearing for the first time in his headphones local broadcasting stations "loud and clear".

After service in the R.A.N. during W.W. II, Ken Millin completed a trade course at the Hobart Technical College and then set about qualifying for his Radio Amateur Certificate which he gained with his call sign VK7KA in 1948. He built his own small (2 watt) transmitter and logged his first contact with VK7GB, Ted Burne over the hill in Lenah Valley.

In those earlier days, Radio Amateurs built their own transmitters and receivers working from basic circuit diagrams and then adding experimental modifications of their own design. The proof of the pudding was measured in the range and quality of their transmissions.

When two Radio Amateurs establish contact with each other over long distances or into remote areas, the fact is recorded by an exchange of QSL cards recording the date, time, signal strength and quality and often a brief description or picture of the location. Amateurs collect QSL cards like stamp enthusiasts collect stamps. Great value is placed on those that are rare. Like most

awaiting the variety of models transceivers measuring some 28 x 12 cms high that radiate the same power.

1958 and 9 were obviously vintage years for VK7KA and Ken. Certificates bear witness to successes in international communications such as: A third in the New Zealand - Australia DX Contest, recognition of having "two way communication with other amateur stations in each of the six recognised continental areas of the world" and having scored 10,764 points in an American World Wide DX Contest on CW (Morse).

Ken Millin came into Amateur Radio at a time when half the pleasure was in the building of your own equipment and its success in doing what it was intended to do. With increased technical sophistication and miniaturization every item of factory-made equipment can be bought off the shelf from the retailers. Ken admits to gaining the greatest pleasure from designing, building and maintaining his own components and some of these of matchbox or tobacco tin size have the appearance of intricate jewelry.

The biggest changes in Amateur Radio since the forties and fifties has been not only in the range and miniaturization, but in the diversification. Hobbyists may now specialise on bands of very high and ultra-high frequency (VHF and UHF) equipment working through repeaters on hilltops throughout the country or even satellites. They may become enthusiasts for packet radio" in which computers store and transmit messages at ultrahigh speed as time on a single frequency becomes vacant, or in teleprinter telegraphy and computerised decoders for transmitting and receiving morse code.

HERITAGE MUSEUM

The Museum is set out in a former packing shed, which in its heyday gave employment to fifty workers.

The displays will transport you back to these days, showing you 500 different varieties of apples, restored working machines, also the Carpenter's and Blacksmith's shops, the kitchen, lounge and other rooms of an era long gone.

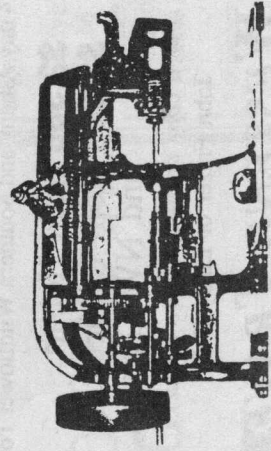
When you start on your guided tour (optional) and see the displays, artifacts and photographs, you will travel back in time a hundred years to when people worked by candle light and earned approximately 5/- (50c) per week.

The welcome then, is how it still is today — warm and friendly.

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