

Ruth Graham.



By E. H. COX.



THE oldest and one of the most interesting commercial wireless stations in Australia will disappear in the next few weeks when the State Ministry carries out its decision to demolish the remains of the station which crowns a little hill in the Domain, off Domain road. Rising to a height of 180ft., the single mast of this station has been a familiar landmark in Melbourne for 21 years. In the course of its long existence millions of words have passed to and fro along its aerial.

The demolition of the old Domain station recalls a fact, known to very few people, that experiments in wireless communication were being conducted in Melbourne nearly 40 years ago, and that early experiments in Melbourne were contemporaneous with those which Marconi later brought to so brilliant a culmination. Melbourne's first wireless experimenter was Mr. G. W. Selby, who now lives in East Malvern. By 1896 Mr. Selby, who, like Marconi, Sir Oliver Lodge, and other early workers, adopted the striking laboratory experiments of Heinrich Hertz as the starting points of experiments in practical communication, had achieved much initial success. He had prepared a number of papers discussing the possibility of the commercial application of the electric waves discovered by Hertz. The importance of Mr. Selby's work was not appreciated. His experiments were hardly understood in Melbourne. It was left to Sir Oliver Lodge, with whom Mr. Selby was in communication, to acknowledge his results in Great Britain. Although Mr. Selby obtained no practical support for his experiments, he had the willing and warm co-operation of the Victorian naval authorities before Federation. Portion of his equipment was installed on the old gunboat Cerberus, now a breakwater at Black Rock. Thus the Cerberus was one of the first war-ships in the world, if not actually the first, to be fitted with equipment for wireless communication. Despite this early success and the work of other experimenters, it was not until 1911 that the Domain station was opened as the first commercial station in Australia. The equipment for the station was nearly all made at Randwick by the Maritime Wireless Co. It was installed by the late Mr. J. G. Babbie.

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War Time Services.

When the Melbourne station was opened for the first commercial services, it was allotted the call sign POM, a call which a few months later became the property of Germany by decisions of the International Wireless Telegraph Convention of 1912. The Domain station, for official purposes, was rechristened VIM. It is perhaps ironical that, having yielded its original call sign to the Germans, the Melbourne station almost immediately afterward was used against them with good effect. When the war broke out, the station, in common with the other Australian coastal stations, was taken over by the Naval Board. About the station building barbed wire entanglements were erected, and during the years of war it was always worked under an armed guard. The most interesting time in the history of the station was undoubtedly the first few months of the war. At Rabaul the Germans had a fine wireless installation, and, although the fact was not discovered until long afterward, they had even then completed plans for a direct wireless service from their Pacific colonies to Berlin. This station in New Guinea was within easy range of the Melbourne station, which was used until the occupation of German New Guinea to intercept German messages. At the same time efforts were made by the Naval department to use the station for "jamming" the German signals, or transmitting simultaneously with the Germans on the wave length they were using to render their messages unintelligible. These efforts, however, were unsuccessful, mainly because of the greater power employed by the Germans. In view of the movements of transports about the Australian coast, the constant coming and going of warships from Australian ports, the knowledge that the Wolf was in Australian waters, and fears that other raiders might enter the Pacific, the next few years were extremely busy. In 1916 a new duty was allotted to the Melbourne radio station. Under the direction of Commander F. G. Creswell, one of the first valve receivers used in Australia was installed in the station, and it was found immediately that signals from the high-powered German stations

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"VIM Closing Down"

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST WIRELESS STATION.

By E. H. COX.

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After the war the Naval Board handed the Australian coastal stations back to the Postal department and they were operated by that department until 1921, when they were transferred to the control of Amalgamated Wireless. Just before the Postal department relinquished control of the Melbourne station, a small wireless telephone transmitter was installed there, and it provided some of the first broadcasting in Melbourne.

As broadcasting developed, it became apparent that the Domain site would have to be abandoned as a transmitting centre. The signals from the transmitter caused severe interference with broadcast programmes in the southern suburbs. The transmitter was removed to Braybrook by Amalgamated Wireless in 1926; it has been there since. Until a year ago, however, the Domain mast and aerial were used as the receiving post, the transmitter being controlled from the Domain by means of land lines. About a year ago the receiving equipment for the station was removed to Rockbank, where the receivers for the beam wireless circuit also are installed and the Domain site was abandoned. The removal of the old mast is strongly recommended by those who remember its construction, as it is believed to be unsafe. It is built up of a great number of planks of selected oregon timber, each 18in. wide and 3in. thick, screwed together.