



Volume 32 No. 2
October 2022
S.A. Group
Newsletter



Above: Have you ever heard this great Aussie expression before?
Where did it come from???
What does it mean???

All will be revealed on the inside pages!!

At our November meeting we are featuring ASTOR radio receivers, TV's and transceivers in all their glory. But what's their story? Where did they originate?

See Inside: "The ASTOR Story".

Historical Radio Society of Australia Inc. – S.A. Group

Web Site: www.hrsasa.asn.au

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Planned Meetings for the Remainder of the Year:

Sunday 30th October

1:00pm to 4:00pm

CLUB AUCTION

Members wishing to book a table (max. 20 items) please contact the Secretary in advance.

- *St Cyprian Church Hall, 70, Melbourne Street, North Adelaide, SA, 5007*

Wednesday 9th November

12 Noon (for a 12:30 start)

MEMBER'S LUNCHEON

Formerly known as the "Retirees" Luncheon, it is open to non-retirees and partners of members

- *The Reepham Hotel, 273 Churchill Road, Prospect, SA, 5082*

Sunday 27th November

1:00pm to 3:30pm

"ASTOR" BRAND RADIOS - "SHOW & TELL"

Members who have any model of ASTOR Radio are invited to bring them along and talk about their history, restoration and performance

- *St Cyprian Church Hall, 70, Melbourne Street, North Adelaide, SA, 5007*

Saturday 10th December

12 noon (for a 12:30 start)

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Our annual Christmas Luncheon - Wives and partners are very welcome to attend

- *The "Maid of Auckland" Hotel, 926, South Road, Edwardstown, SA, 5039*

Wanted to Buy, Sell or Exchange

Are you looking for a hard-to-get part? A strange knob, or a replacement coil? Have an item that you'd like to sell? Why not place a free, classified advertisement on our website? Go to the TRADING POST page of our website at: <https://hrsasa.asn.au/page-16/> and have a look at what's on offer right now and help a fellow member. It changes frequently. *Why not make use of this resource yourself?*



Love the “Low Tech” support guy Perhaps he’s also a believer in the old saying, “A valve a day keeps the transistor at bay...”

President’s “Banter”!



From our President, Graham Dicker.

Astor Month by Graham Dicker

It was my recent pleasure to attend the ABC operator’s annual reunion at the Hamstead Gardens Hotel in October. It was good to catch up with the remaining technical and operations staff of ABC radio and TV, tell a few tall stories, and be the recipient of others. Across the table from me was Ron Geddes, a colleague from the Radio Switch room at Collinswood. Ron is now in his 90’s and for most of the lunch, he was somewhat silent until I got talking to him about how and when he joined the ABC. It was then that he willingly divulged some of his most interesting life history.

Ron started out as an apprentice with Astor in Victoria about 1944, while WWII was still on. He worked in every section (as an apprentice does) and ended up in the Military wiring line making AR88 receivers for land, fixed and airborne use. Some versions were built with 855 acorn tubes and a variety of power supplies. Astor undertook research in productivity while Ron was on the production line and found *12 people on a production line could put out 1 completed receiver a day*. Then they tested 6 people each on their own production line and found they could still put out one completed receiver each per day. The experiment showed that the overall output rose to 6 completed radios a day instead of one per day for the same number of employees!!!

After the war ended, Ron was put to task making Mickey and other mantle radios for Astor at the rate of 6-7 receivers a day that’s about 35 a week. Ron told me apart from wiring up his quota of sets, his other responsibility was to wind and can a week’s worth of IFT, RF and OSC coils for the team of assembly workers, at which he became very proficient. His other job was to make the tuning gangs for the sets. Some were 2-gang radios and others 3-gang. As a young lad, they used a fly press with punches and dies to knock out the plates. He could punch out a 2-gang set of plates with a bit of force, but the 3-gang ones he had to leave for the older and stronger production workers.

On the odd occasion or two when staff were “on the sick list”, he also ended up winding and packing power transformers.

It was great to find out something about Ron’s past – stuff about him that I had not known, and as the parallel universe does strange things, it was interesting to have this discussion just before our HRASA Astor Month and celebrate the work done by someone still living and able to tell us about our history.

The moral of this story (my articles always have one) “Don’t wait till you are over 90 to talk about your part in history”.



Secretary's Report:

Ian Smyth

IN MEMORIAM:

A few weeks ago, we were informed that a long-standing HRSASA member and former Secretary, **Mr Alistair McAllister** (from Gawler, SA) has passed away. He had been unwell for some time and had not attended any meetings for a couple of years. He will be fondly remembered by many of our longer-serving members.

This week, we have heard from both Marcus Chick, President of the *Vintage Radio Club of North-East Victoria*, and from Ian Batty, Editor of "Radio Waves" that **Mr. Rodney Champness** one of the great stalwarts of the HRSA nationally, has passed away after a long battle with cancer. Rodney was best known as a frequent contributor to both HRSA "Radio Waves" and to "Silicon Chip" magazine.

Cover Story:

That looks a bit "Mickey Mouse....."

Growing up in the 1950's and 60's I remember my dad using this expression many times, but where did it come from and what was its origin?

It is in fact a Sordid Tale of Shame, Woe, and Intellectual-Property Theft.

During 1933, the ASTOR Radio Corporation of Melbourne produced the first of the "Mickey Mouse" series of radios, with wooden cabinets.

In 1936 they produced their first Bakelite *Mickey Mouse* with a cartoon of the famous rodent on the dial.

Early brochures even sported a picture of Walt Disney and the mouse giving their "seal of approval". In it, Mickey is quoted saying "I'm a little fellow - but I do a man size job".



However, none of this was done with any kind of permission from Disney and as you might expect the Mickey range became victims in a long running court battle with Walt Disney over the illegal use of the Mickey Mouse name.

The upshot was that Astor was forbidden to use "Mickey Mouse" ever again on their radios, however this did not stop them from producing a "Mickey" radio for the next 16 years!

It is from here that the uniquely two-fisted Australian expression where something might be described as being a bit "Mickey Mouse" developed, and soon became a common expression.

In one sense it can mean "of high quality", but it can equally be applied to something "not quite right" or "a bit dodgy".

I'm certain it is a holdover from the days when a Mickey Mouse radio was both a good performing, high quality product and a little bit dodgy at the same time. *Ian Smyth (Editor)*

Component Corner

Many new members are probably wondering where to obtain components and valves. The following is a list in order of preference:

HRSА-SA Group Shop: We are working towards a publishable catalogue. Contact our Shopkeeper, Rob Olding on 0422-096-341 to enquire, or place an order. Rob's email address is: shop@hrsasa.asn.au

AZTRONICS, 170 Sturt Street, Adelaide. Houses the HRSА-SA Group valve bank and modern components. They will source components for members. Great supporters of the HRSАSA.

HRSА Melbourne (see *Radio Waves*) Houses the Victorian HRSА valve bank and odd passive components and kits, plus resource books written especially for members.

WES Components, Sydney. The catalogue is viewable on-line, and orders can be placed through the Shop Keeper or Secretary, as the SA Group has an account, through which we get "trade discount". Go to: <https://www.wes.com.au>



Sunday 27th November

1:00pm to 3:30pm

"ASTOR" BRAND RADIOS, TV's, TRANCEIVERS - "SHOW & TELL"

Members who have any model of ASTOR Radio are invited to bring them along and talk about their history, restoration, and performance

To be held at:

St Cyprian Church Hall

70, Melbourne Street, North Adelaide, SA, 5007

The Astor Radio Corporation

A quick history - From Wikipedia



Astor Mickey - 1946

Astor - Radio Corporation - Electronic Industries was the largest Australian electronics manufacturer, manufacturing across the retail sector of products from Washing Machines to Radio. Astor, which began operating in 1926, making electronics in Victoria was founded by Arthur Warner. The firm was innovative in that it offered radios in dynamic designs and colours compared with the conservative designs offered by other companies.

Astor bought its competitors, Eclipse and Essanay. Originally a partnership between successful tobacconist Louis Abrahams and Sir Arthur Warner, it was taken public in 1940, with the original partners holding 50 per cent of the new company. However, in 1956 the partners sold the majority stake to the English electronics company Pye Ltd, and Pye was later taken over in 1966 by the giant Philips electronics company.

Astor

Astor produced TVs, radios, washing machines, tumble dryers, and other white goods for the Australian domestic market, borrowing from design patents from other overseas companies' products with the understanding that the companies' free use of these in production and consumer markets would not become more ambitious than the local Australian market share.



Astor BPJ 5 valve,



Pale blue Bakelite Astor Radio circa 1950s

Astor's demise began in earnest in about 1970 as the company was turning a corner. It had been absorbed fully into Philips with a buy-out and had clearly started moving its manufacturing to Clayton from its South Melbourne factory. The daily organiser known as Miss Hurley who was in print for all jobs advertised at the firm was ubiquitous to all the job advertisements at Grant Street, South Melbourne. Mr Wood was the person of contact in the Clayton premises and records reflect that by 1971 all Astor dealings were from the Clayton location with all manufacturing completely moved over there.

News archives reflect that a very sudden demise occurred at Astor, better known as Electronic Industries at this stage (EIL, Radio Corporation). This happened sometime in 1972. By the beginning of 1973, Radio Corporation had ceased to exist, which reflects that a sudden end of production had come into effect - no further production of TVs or radios beginning in 1973, and no further positions were advertised. Hundreds of regular employment advertisements by Radio Corporation in 1972, and advertising for solderers, product designers, sprayers, and plastic moulders had disappeared by 1973. Astor refrigeration and

freezers were advertised until 1975. However, no jobs at Radio Corporation were advertised further. The white-goods advertisements like fridges and freezers ended after 1975.

From 1973 onward, only the Astor Music Division continued from the same company location in Clayton where manufacturing had taken place. Advertisements for music developers and experts in vinyl pressing were sought. The most famous release by this date was "Joe Dolce - Shuddup-You-Face" from 1981 under the Astor label - of Lygon Street, Melbourne fame. This record reached number 1 on the Australian music charts.

Mr Huyer (of Philips of Holland) featured predominantly in the media discussing the 25% tariff reductions. After Philips took hold of EIL, which also meant the takeover of Astor and its subsidiaries in 1970, all Astor dealings were from Clayton within 2 years and the promise of "great employment with career progression" which was touted in advertisements for positions at Astor / Radio Corp swiftly ended after 1972. Welders, solderers, and wiring experts (who could follow diagrams) were previously advertised for in the hundreds in the papers. In 1972 Astor completely vanished from the employment section of the newspaper database under Radio Corporation.

Electronic Industries continued to produce its fridges and dryers up to 1974 from its Clayton plant, however, a news article from Mr Huyer of Philips cites the tariff reduction scheme of 25% in 1973 as the reason workers would be laid off in stages in 1973/4. However, it seems that the company manufacturing had almost certainly ended completely by 1973. It may have been an early decision by Huyer to shut down the radio and television manufacturing first. Some alarm clocks and transistor radios bearing the Astor logo appeared in the late 1970s but were produced in low-wage regions like Hong Kong, and ultimately it was decided to drop subsidiary trademarks like Astor sometime around 1982 as Philips streamlined its product offerings.

Astor House in Grant Street, South Melbourne was being sublet by 1974 to office space - perhaps vacated by Astor/Radio Corporation - and had completely cleared out by this date or perhaps they used only several floors of the building at this stage. It was noted in an article that receivership meetings were being held here by then, with no other affiliation with Astor other than that the meetings took place at Astor House in South Melbourne. By the late 1970s, the Astor name had been removed from the building and the famous name had vanished from the domestic appliance market completely.

The local electronics industry had completely disappeared by 1980, with none of Astor's or any subsidiary of EIL/Philips' factories in operation by the end of the 1970s. After the local production of Astor TV and radio units ceased along with other local manufacturing, the speaker factories also went out of business. Plessey-Rola, the producer of locally manufactured speakers became a victim of the chain and link effect and closed its doors in 1975.

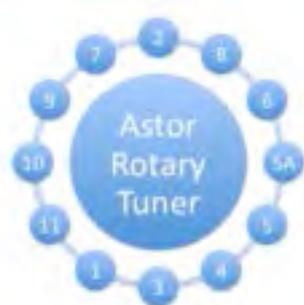
"As engineering manager, I was saddened, disappointed and devastated to witness the closure of the loudspeaker manufacturing division such an icon in the Australian audio and manufacturing industry. Plessey / Rola ceased production of loudspeakers in Australia in 1975. Tariff protection had been significantly reduced in 1973 with the result local manufacture of audio products and customers diminished, car manufactures opted for cheaper imported loudspeakers demand for local manufactured speakers diminished making speaker production on the grand scale we were accustomed to was no longer viable overnight." - Rola Employee Statement.

Television

The Astor radio corporation was a major manufacturer of early monochrome television sets in Australia, commencing production in 1956 in anticipation of services in Melbourne and Sydney. Between 1969 and

1971, Electronic Industries engineers, Willem Sparrius and Ian Maskiel, developed an early domestic colour television set under the Astor brand. Approximately 400 units were produced for training purposes.

Some early Astor television sets featured a rotary dial that located the available channels adjacent to each other, rather than in numerical order, especially for the capital cities which were allocated channels 2, 7 and 9.



Channel 0 was not included, possibly because the tuner mechanism could only accommodate 12 places. As a result, in Melbourne 1964 (and later in Brisbane), service technicians were required to convert the place marker for either channel 10 or 8 to receive Channel 0, which is evidence of the significant problems that ATV0 had at its commencement. Channel 10 could not be used in Melbourne at the time because that would have resulted in interference with the regional station (GLV10). Brisbane had a similar problem a year later with a nearby regional station in Toowoomba DDQ10. That was not a problem in Sydney or Adelaide, where the channel 10 frequency was used by

the 0/10_Network.

The company sponsored an early Australian television series, *The Astor Show*, which aired in Melbourne during 1958, and also sponsored a Sydney television series, *Astor Showcase*, from 1957 to 1959.

Photo Gallery: From our August EDDYSTONE Meeting



One of Peter Holland's classic Eddystones'



Some of the assembled throng....

Photos courtesy of Stephen Parker