

SHERWOOD RADIO: 1934 to 1948

As related by Ted Sherwood (82 year old son of Sherwood Radio's founder) to his sister Bronte Somerset 18th May 2010.

By DR BRONTE SOMERSET



Eddington Sherwood (1894-1948) sold a jam factory he established in the Depression in Isabella Street, Balmain to Henry Jones of IXL. In the 1930s, the radio station 2FC was broadcasting from the Farmer and Company building in Market Street, Sydney. So Sherwood anticipated that people would want to buy radios and founded the manufacturing company, Sherwood Radio. The company logo on the radios is the rampant lion.



The business operated from 6 King Street, Balmain NSW Australia. His wife, Nellie, and son Ted lived in the back of the house, there was a small production area and a front room was used as a showroom. As the business developed, a manufacturing area was built over the whole backyard. The phone number was W1642.

The first office assistant was a Miss O'Donnell. The second was a beautiful intelligent lady, Norma Smith, who worked for the business until it closed. Carl Auert was employed as he had a brilliant mind and was a tremendously efficient technician. He used his own initiative and modified normal radio circuits to improve them. At least three or four staff made and built circuits to his specifications. Stan Furner installed the clients' radios. He delivered them in a T-model sedan with the back seat removed and the radios and record players protected with specially made padded covers. He also worked for Sherwood Radio for its duration.

A large electric sign advertising Sherwood Radio hung outside the front of the Balmain premises. Advertisements were published in local newspapers and the punch line on every one was: Buy Direct from the Manufacturer.

In 1946 Sherwood Radio opened a shop in Goulburn Street, Sydney and sales reached a bigger marketplace. Two rooms displayed about fifteen to twenty radios. In 1948 the business had a stand in the Hall of Industries at the Sydney Show. It

displayed a dozen or so different radio and radiogram models. Young Ted promoted the business by playing Tchaikowsky's Piano Concerto so people could hear the richness of the sound. After the Show people came from everywhere to Goulburn Street. This led to the sale of many radios and the factory was 'flat out' delivering them for many weeks.



The business developed a couple of innovative marketing ploys. After ordering a radio and to make sure that they received it, customers were asked to sign their names on the inside of the radio cabinet which they had chosen. People bought directly from the manufacturer and Sherwood was one of the first traders to sell on credit using Industrial Acceptance Corporation. A contract was created for that purpose and was used from 1936 onwards.



Sherwood Radio made a range of mantel radios in a variety of styles. One popular mantel radio with a plywood cabinet was covered in either dark green, dark blue or dark brown embossed leather. The push-button style of radio was one of the innovative mantels produced. The mantels had speakers only 5" in diameter. They were all AM, and from the mid 30s all were Dual Wave (BC & SW) and cost 20 to 25 Australian pounds.



As the business developed some radios used 6, 8 or 10 valves. Auert introduced the type 807 valve, which vastly improved power and depth of output. Console radios and Radiograms were also produced including single play record players with an arm which was manually placed on the record. As technology improved, Garrard automatic record changers were used, which could take up to eight records and play them automatically. The styli were manufactured from metal needles and fibre needles were used in later years.

Most radio manufacturers of the time used bakelite then later plastic cabinets, but Sherwood radios were made with timber because of the higher quality of resonance. Ricketts and Thorpe made some of the wooden cabinets. Farrell made a wide floor model with a central opening lid. The largest radio manufactured was a 10-valve unit called *Big Bertha* made of solid rosewood with front opening doors, Florentine bronze handles. It took two men to lift it.

Sherwood Radio made contact with a man named Buyer, from Melbourne, who had imported a turntable with a stylus which recorded sound onto blank acetate discs. This technology could not only cut but also play ordinary records. It was incorporated into the cabinet radios to both produce and play voice and music. Sherwood Radio could have been first in Sydney to incorporate this technology in their domestic radios.

Three Sherwood radios are known to be in existence today and are owned by family members, but there could be more. One floor model radio was delivered to a man working on the

Warragamba Dam project. Sir Norman Nock at Moss Vale bought one. Another buyer was stationed at Fanning Island. He wanted a radio that would withstand tropical conditions. Auert constructed a special circuit and completely sealed it in something like bitumen or wax. It was shipped according to his instructions. The business received acknowledgement of its safe arrival and that it was working perfectly.



This style of radio continued until the Japanese entered the market place and revolutionized radio production. Sherwood died in June, 1948 leaving Ted, Helen (6), Jean (2, myself) and Suzanne (born after he died) and, by his first marriage, Jim and Verle. His wife sold the company to a man named Emmett. What eventuated after that is unknown. In more recent years, a Japanese company used 'Sherwood' as a brand name for their radios. Why the name Sherwood was chosen is also a mystery.

As a young girl I listened to my favourite radio serials on a push button mantel radio. The standard floor model radio was played full bore all weekend. Beethoven used to bellow out over the bush across from the house at Killara where we grew up. At seven I knew when enough was enough and would climb into the back of the floor model cabinet, turn the radio off at the wall, remove the valves and hide them under my pillow. When the family realized the radio was 'broken' I would furtively replace the valves and announced that I had 'fixed' it. As children we would cut thorns from shrubs or orange trees and insert them into the stylus to continue playing our records.

Sherwood left a legacy to his family of entrepreneurialism, sound business practices, skillful marketing and financial competence. His contribution to the enjoyment of fine music via the use of enduring and quality wireless technologies still lives today. The few known remaining Sherwood valve radios remind us of this heritage.

