

A Short History of the Moorabbin & District Radio Club

Harold Hepburn, VK3AFQ, put together an excellent short history of the club that was "serialized" over a number of issues of APC during 1997 and updated in 2018 by Ken Millis, Secretary. As the club approaches its 70 anniversary in 2018, it is an opportune time to look back at how we started.

In 1948 and 1949 a few amateurs living in the Moorabbin area got together, generally once a week for a "rag chew". These gatherings were, in the main, held in a radio shop owned by Col Gibson in Centre Road Bentleigh.

In the spring of 1949 the feeling arose that it might be a good idea to formalize these meetings and form a radio club to serve the growing number of licensed amateurs and other radio enthusiasts then settling in the area.

On the 25th October 1949 sixteen people gathered at Col's shop and the Moorabbin and District Radio Club was formed.

Jim Keenes VK3KE was elected President, Ted Scott SWL became Secretary and Eddie Manifold VK3EM became Treasurer.

According to the minutes of that meeting others present were:- Col Gibson VK3FO, Percy Sebire VK3MX, Frank Taylor VK3TG, Bill Sievers VK3CB and SWLs Bill Drysdale, Alan McPherson, Jack Harris, Ern Dowsett, Ross Blackmore, Ray Dawson, Laurie Stafford, John Russo and Len Jackson.

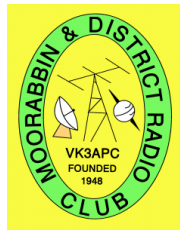
It was determined that the fees should be 10 shillings per year for members over 18, and 5 shillings per year for those under 18. It was further determined that meetings should be held on the third Friday of each month and that a constitution for the club be developed based on the one then in use by the Victorian division of the Wireless Institute of Australia. Finally it was agreed that the new club should be named "The Moorabbin and District Radio Club" and that it should affiliate with the WIA.

In the period following this foundation meeting someone must have been quite busy, since, less than a month later on 18th November 1949 the first general meeting of the club was held in the Moorabbin Library hall. 22 members were present.

The new constitution and by-laws were presented and adopted. The Treasurer asked for one pound eleven shillings and sixpence to cover expenses (including six shillings hall hire) and Len Jackson gave a talk on the triode valve.

The whole idea caught on very quickly. By the time the February 1950 meeting came around there were 45 people present. True, ten of these were visitors, but subsequent minute entries indicate that most of these joined up.

In 1950 the club applied for a callsign. Originally the call VK3MRC was sought but this concept was beyond the authorities of the day (we were only half way through the "A" series of suffixes) and VK3APC was allocated. It is still current.



Bits and pieces were donated, scrounged and otherwise liberated and a club transmitter was built. Its technical details are not detailed in the club records but the combined memory of those original members still with us seems to favour a 25 watt DC input crystal controlled CW rig with perhaps a bit of AM added for good luck. The receiver was a war surplus BC348.

Between 1950 and 1956 the club grew steadily in numbers and monthly newsletter, a series of social events, 80 metre transmitter hunts and an award certificate were incorporated into the list of activities.

1956 was a bad year. The introduction of television into Australia caused the membership to decline very sharply. This fall, combined with the loss of the Moorabbin town hall venue due to rebuilding meant that for some while the meetings were held in Eddie Manifolds' garage.

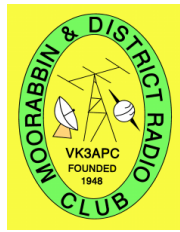
But as enthusiasm for radio returned, and numbers started to increase again, there was a pressing need to find a bigger venue. In 1958 Bob Hall VK3NZ came to the rescue by allowing the club to use a large double garage he had built at the rear of his house in Black Rock. Bob normally kept an equally large caravan in this garage so every meeting night several members had to put their shoulders to the wheel to push the caravan outside, and inside again after the meeting was over.

In any event the club worked out of Bob's garage until his untimely death in 1965. It was during these years arguably, the club reached it's peak in terms of member participation.

Amateur radio interests had not been eroded by the later advent of computers and every function run by the club – the meetings themselves with their attendant lectures, the social evenings be they card nights, theatre nights, bowling nights, trips to places of interest or construction nights and projects – all were well attended. Not all of the members attended all functions of course but for any given event thirty or more would be there. It was during the 1960s and early 1970s that the members of both the Victorian and the Federal body was domiciled in Melbourne and virtually the only other organised body of amateurs was the Moorabbin Club.

Sometime in the mid 1950s the club started to publish a monthly newsletter. At first its format was fairly simple, being dictated by the production means at hand. The task of compiling, printing and distributing "APC", as it was known, fell to the Secretary of the day, although there was always plenty of help on hand. The wax stencils were cut as "foreigners" by the secretary of one member, the duplication was done on the office machine of Ron Hebard, VK3XK, long after the staff had gone home and a half a dozen or so helpers did the folding and stapling. In those days there were no word processors and no label making programs so it was all done by hand. Some of the distribution was by hand too, perhaps half, and the balance went into the hands of PMG.

With Bob Hall's death there came the problem of finding alternative accommodation. This was solved by paying for the use of the Moorabbin Baseball Club rooms for two nights a month. It was not possible to have any fixed equipment at this venue, nor was there any storage space available, so a few of



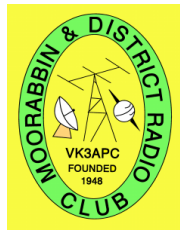
the club meetings were either curtailed, or carried on from the homes of members. The level of participation did not change to any degree and just as many functions were organised as previously. It became a standing problem of the committee of those days to seek out more amenable and permanent premises. During the period at the baseball clubrooms the membership was fairly static at around 150, but, because of the rental costs the annual fees had gone up to around \$5, with thought having to be given to fund raising activities. Constructional projects such as a very early 80M solid state receiver (1966) a solid state 2M converter (1968), a fully solid state four band transceiver (1968/1969) and a 2M solid state carphone kept the club and its members up with the state of the art. They provided a technical interest that spread far beyond the ranks of club members and helped to provide a reasonable club bank balance whilst still meeting club expenses.

In 1974 the committee of the day, headed by Bob Jordan VK3AKJ (now VK7JR) began to look at the possibility of leasing or buying land in the area with a view to building some suitable clubrooms. In the event discussion with the Moorabbin Council found that they were amenable to building a facility on the Turner Road reserve in Highett to house four local clubs – radio, archery, fly-fishing and pigeons. The council was to provide the land and buildings rent-free and the clubs were to pay their own operating costs. Each of the clubs put up \$500 of their money (mostly to pay for sets of chairs in each clubroom and in the communal main hall). The Turner Road Combined Clubrooms were opened by the Mayor of Moorabbin, Councillor G.R. Bricker on 1st August 1976.

In the twenty years to 1996 that the club was in the Turner Road location much happened. The membership grew to around 170-180 and many new activities came into being. Probably the most important, if the least glamorous, was that the radio club for most of this time supplied the majority of presidents, secretaries and treasurers for the Combined Clubs committee of management. This is the body recognized by the council for all administrative and financial liaison. The council does not recognize individual clubs for this purpose.

Having a large clubroom it has been possible to build up and keep up to date a first class amateur station complete with a crankup/tilt tower and an array of antennas. More recently a computer system has been installed together with interfaces to enable digital communications to be made. This installation has seen much service for events such as JOTA, the RD contest and other like events. All of this equipment had to be paid for and annual subscriptions alone would not have permitted their purchase after meeting the running costs of the club, so it became necessary to take on fund raising events of various sorts.

In addition to running various constructional projects – which had been going on since the mid 1960s – having space in which to operate and store things allowed the club to start a components stall for the convenience of members. This activity was started by John VK3UE and Roger VK3YGP. Over the years it has been carried on by the other members, the last being Chris Arthur, VK3JEG. The idea was to keep a small stock of the most used devices and components that were purchased in bulk to allow members to buy them at (hopefully) better than retail prices. Complete kits for current and ongoing projects were also held in stock.



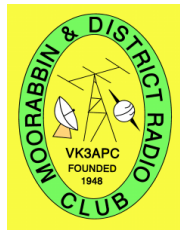
In the late 1980s two other activities were commenced. Bearing in mind that the early members were getting a bit long in the tooth and were starting to retire in ever increasing numbers. Ray Fowler VK3BHL organised what was to become the Tuesday morning coffee and chat session. The idea being that many of the older retirees were either unable or unwilling to drive at night so that the Tuesday morning get together gave them a chance to remain active club members. Starting with less than a dozen participants, the Tuesday morning group in its heyday seated between 50 to 60 attendees. This enterprise has also helped to swell the number of members since it attracted a lot of people that took up the amateur radio hobby after they retired and who might not have joined the more longstanding activities of the club.

Concurrent with the start of the Tuesday group came the idea of a Trade Day. In the late 1970s and the early 80s a flood of commercial gear was coming on to the market and the retailers of this equipment were scattered over the whole Melbourne area. It seemed a good idea therefore to use the large communal hall at our disposal and invite all the commercial vendors to come along and display their wares. This way, club members who had decided to buy gear could compare specifications and prices without wearing out a lot of shoe leather. At first the Trade Day was cash neutral, with no charges being made for table space. Exhibition of the prowess of the archery and fly fishing clubs (not the pigeons – they were too much of a problem!) and side-shows put on by such organisations as St. Johns Ambulance and the State Disaster Organisation were features of early Trade Days. Once we even had a band!

After a while the old idea of an annual auction of members gear was merged with the Trade Days and members could get a table and buy, sell or swap secondhand and other pre-loved gear. By this time of course there were quite substantial costs associated with staging the event and it became necessary to charge both a table hire fee and an entrance fee. After a very short while there was pressure from non-members to participate and soon even the large hall was not big enough to house all of those wanting to attend.

It is of interest that the idea of a Trade Day has been taken up by all other major radio clubs in Victoria and elsewhere. Now they are commonly called Hamfests.

After 1990 Trade Day it was obvious that a new venue would have to be found. In 1991 a school near the clubrooms was hired, but because the stalls and tables were scattered among several classrooms it was not as good a function as would have been liked. It was still, however, a financial success. In 1992 Morrie Lyons VK3BCC obtained the use of a large hall at the Brentwood Secondary College in Glen Waverley (where he taught) and all subsequent meets have been held there. A further source of funds grew out of an idea by Ron Higginbotham VK3RN. Ron steadfastly ignored the advent of the solid state age while all around him were converting to the new technology. He – with quite amazing forethought as it turned out – felt that it would be a good idea to scrounge around for posterity all the thermionic valves that seemed likely to be tossed out into the rubbish heap. Ron's initial request for unloved valves was overwhelming. Ron took them all home, tested them, threw out all the sub-standard ones, catalogued them and if any member was reconditioning old valve equipment Ron could most likely fix them up. At first no charge was made for this service. It was not long however



before individuals, professional reconditioners and even government departments were asking for help, so appropriate charges became the order of the day. Unfortunately Ron did not enjoy the best of health and shortly before he died in 1990 passed the valve bank over to Ken Bridger VK3JII.

Ken expanded the service well beyond the original concept by exhibiting at all the local and sometimes interstate Hamfests. Ken's efforts have made the valve bank the largest contributor to the club funds after subscriptions and trade days. In early 1996 Ken relinquished this service and it was passed on to a group centered in Wangaratta whose interest was the refurbishment of old valve radios.

In 1994 the club took over sole occupancy of the garage that we had shared with the fly fishers since the rooms were built. The garage is well used for storage of donated goods and infrequently used assets. Much of these are sorted and cleared for the annual Hamfest.

The Club has been an active participant in Field Days and competitions in the past and on a number of occasions won awards for its achievements. John Moyle, RD, JOTA, and VHF. Sadly, our enthusiasm for these group activities has waned and now individuals have branched out into their own DX activities, and Lighthouse, SOTA and WICEN activations remain open for members to join in.

The Museum has been a feature of the clubrooms since the 1980s and ably curated by Colin Durrell, VK3UDC. This contains some unique items and encompasses a cross section of components and equipment throughout the evolution of radio. It provides a talking point for guests and members alike.

In closing, I wish to acknowledge the efforts of Ron Cook and members of the Committee who have worked in recent times to organize this event. I trust that you have all enjoyed the day and propose a toast to the future of the Club!....

To the Club!!
May it continue for many more years....!

Thank you.

Ken Millis
Secretary
2013 – 2021

This version of the Club history was read at the 70th Anniversary Dinner in November 2018 at the Bentleigh Club.