

A HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL IN 100 OBJECTS

A RADIO CLUB QSL CARD

Size: 3½ in x 5½ in / 90mm x 140 mm

Description: A buff and old rose-coloured card bearing the standard information for such cards. The country name is given first, then the club name (MOUNT ALBERT GRAMMAR SCHOOL RADIO CLUB), followed by the address, the call sign (ZL1ACU) and spaces for technical details.



Discussion: This card is a gift from Lewis Rowden (1947-1952), in June 2014.

As well as general cards there were maritime service cards and aeronautical cards. QSL is a morse code device meaning 'I acknowledge receipt'. Electronic 'cards' are common now.

The first mention of the Radio Club was in Lewis Rowden's first year, 1947. *The Albertian* of that year reported (p8) that:

"... regular meetings of both Senior and Junior groups were held under Messrs. Woolloxall, Clark and Penman ... Radio apparatus and equipment to the value of nearly £500 was given to the school by the Education Department ... the club is also the proud possessor of quite a large library dealing with many aspects of wireless. Most members are keen home constructors and an enthusiastic group have been engaged in the Upper Lab ...". The Upper Lab (and Lower Lab) were in the south wing of the main building. In 1947 the upstairs area was a classroom.

Despite the fact that the 1947 *Calendar* listed 31 'School Institutions', the Radio Club did not feature among them. In 1948 (the year that all schools were closed for the first term due to an epidemic of infantile paralysis – poliomyelitis), the *Calendar* listed:

"THE RADIO CLUB, Senior and Junior meet during the Second and Third Terms at times to be arranged. (Mr Woolloxall)"

Things looked on the up-and-up in *The Albertian* report of that late-start year:

"The mystery of communication through the ether waves still attracts enthusiastic groups of boys ... [the senior] group has installed a transmitter-receiver, a short wave aircraft

receiver and a morse oscillator in the Upper Lab. Many receivers have been built by members, from the humble crystal-set, to the more complicated superheterodyne.”

In 1949 the club gave notice that it was ready to reach out to the outside world: “... the club hopes to transmit next year from Upper Lab.”

Although the outreach didn't happen in 1950 there were considerable advances. There were: “... forty five seniors having adapted radio as a hobby.”

They built and installed a new high-powered amplifier in the Hall and they moved accommodation to the old projector room at the back of the gallery, and:

“... an emergency service for masters' radios proved popular.”

In 1951 *The Albertian* reported that:

“... our transmitter was put into operation with a new half-wave antenna and we have made many interesting 'contacts'. Things went well for the club on Parents' Day, two members were qualified radio operators and another had constructed a public address system.”

The 1952 report was the first to mention the call sign on the card; ZL1ACU, using a 30 watt transmitter and a 10-valve aircraft receiver presented by Mr Woolloxall. Laurie Woolloxall had been an RAF instructor during WWII.

In following years they continued to reach out, not only in the ham radio field, but “... attending to numerous private radios ...”

There was no news in *The Albertian* from 1954 to 1961 and then in 1962 there was, among other things, a new aerial. The following year, when club numbers were down to just three, the new aerial fell down in 'high winds'. It was re-erected 'permanently' and the notes ended, optimistically, with:

“The 120 watt transmitter has been obtaining good reports from all over the country, but with the new antenna and after correcting the T.V. interference we hope to work stations outside New Zealand as we have done in the past.”

They were still operating behind the “... bullet-proof, fire-proof, even master-proof ... door of the radio room.” (1965)

In 1966 they were taken under the wing of the Science Department and regarded as Laboratory Assistants. There were twenty senior boys in the 'Radio Hobbies Club' and the Science Department gave a grant of £25 for the purchase of four electronic kitsets.

In 1969 there was mention of continuing “... this year under the usual unobtrusive efficient manner of the sanguinary guidance of Mr Kenzie ...” and “... giving artificial resuscitation to the old D.S.I.R. oscilloscope which seemed, for a while, to deny most of the laws of physics.”

An important year followed, for in 1970 the Radio Room had “... spacious new quarters, built in the corridor outside Upper Lab 2. The old room was demolished as part of

preparations for hall redecoration for the Jubilee ...". The old projection room had been there since the opening of the hall in 1926. Upper Lab 2 is no more. That 'spacious new quarters' is, in 2014, incorporated into the upper classroom at the end of the south wing, and renamed B1.

The club did not last much longer. In 1972, a short report was written by DB (David) Thomson, HOD Mathematics, in which he said that the club was, in that year, responsible for a sound system on sports day, the wiring of speakers for audio-visual language teaching and the sound effects for *The Miracle Worker*. Transmission had "... quietly faded away."

The final Radio Club report was in 1973 and the club went out with a bang, under the guidance of NA (Noel) Walker, tec. teacher.

"... three awards were gained by ZL1ACU. The first: the WALZ No. 270 for working 45 branches in N.Z. The 2nd: (the first to be awarded to a club in Auckland) the A.R.A. Award for working 120 areas around Auckland, Cert No. 227 for working 112 countries. Lastly the Buller Reefton Centenary Award has been applied for."

It is probable that these certificates represent the activities of earlier years. If they still exist where might they be?

After this all that remained in the record was the background static of a couple of lines in the *Calendar* alleging that the Radio Club met from time to time. It may have. In secret.

Like some other school institutions the Radio Club was a child of its time, though it lasted for nearly three decades, from the time when the 'wireless' was a piece of furniture with glowing valves, to the television age.

During the life of the Club scores of boys gained some insight into the magic of radio and some former members are involved, to this day (2014), in radio and related activities.

Brian Murphy