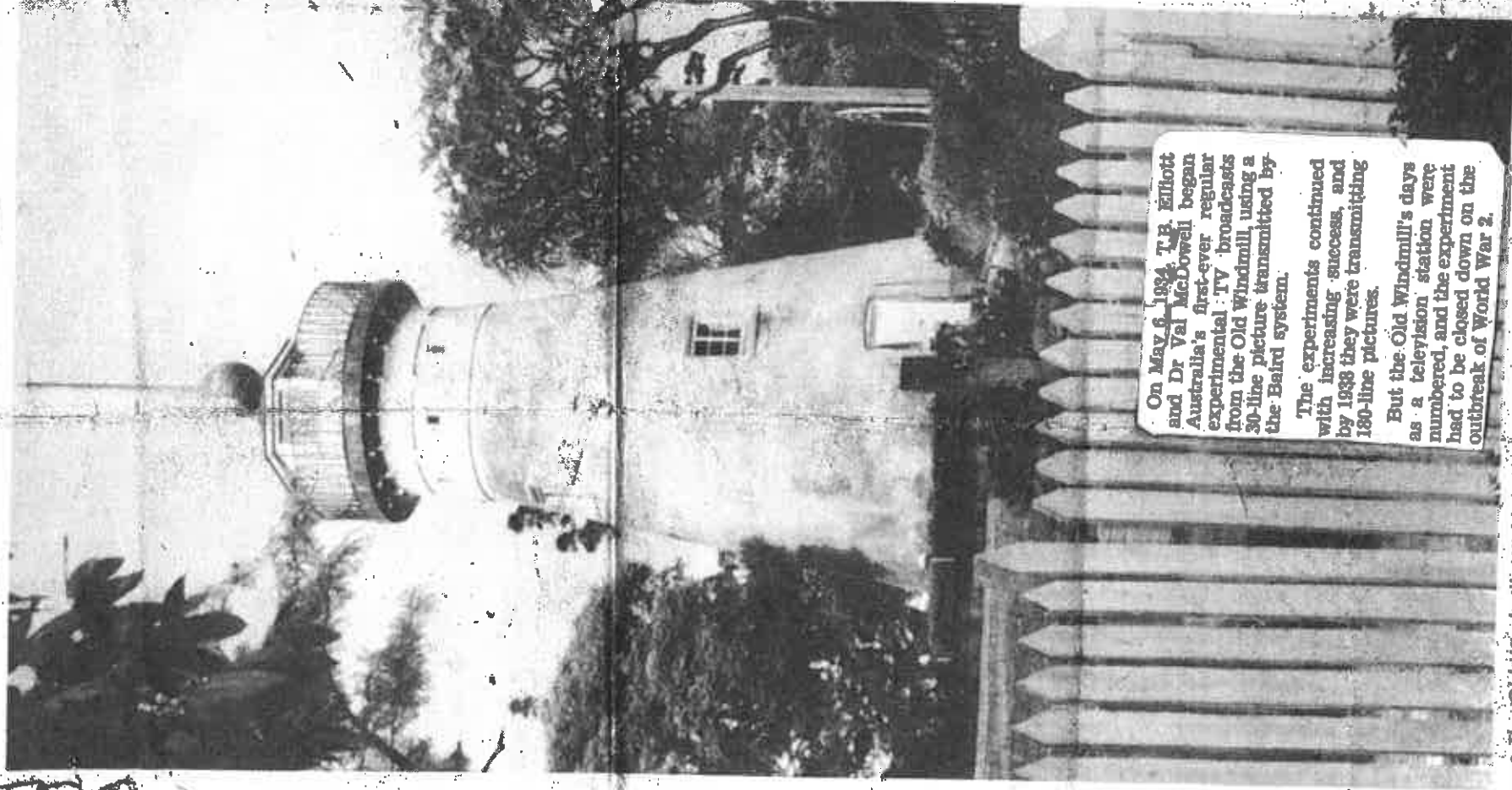


Ipswich received

TV first



On May 6, 1934, T.P. Elliott and Dr Val McDowall began Australia's first-ever regular experimental TV broadcasts from the Old Windmill using a 30-line picture transmitted by the Baird system.

The experiments continued with increasing success, and by 1938 they were transmitting 180-line pictures.

But the Old Windmill's days as a television station were numbered, and the experiment had to be closed down on the outbreak of World War 2.

• The Old Windmill, Wickham Terrace, Brisbane. This convict-built relic was the site of the first television transmission in Australia in 1934.



A PLACE IN HISTORY
A series by **ROBIN MCHAMBER**
editor of *Chatterbox*, *Nightbeat*
Press of Queensland.

THIS year television celebrates its 25th year of full-scale operation in Queensland.

The first program was transmitted on August 16, 1939. Like many other Ipswich people, I remember the night well.

My grandparents had been keen radio listeners, and when TV sets became available, they switched loyalties and bought one.

For weeks prior to the magic night, the TV was regularly turned on for the test pattern. Then, on August 16 Channel 9 transmitted its first program: the news, read by Hugh Cornish.

Hugh was the son of the Rev and Mrs Cornish of St Paul's Church in Ipswich, so he was duly claimed as Ipswich's own TV star.

Channel 9 could not confirm my memory, but I seem to remember that later that evening, Hugh sang "Old Man River" in full costume in TV's first variety program.

The 25th anniversary of this event is being celebrated this year with many special programs. But in all the publicity, one important fact is often overlooked. This was not the beginning of TV in Queensland.

The very first television transmission in Australia was from Brisbane in Ipswich on April 16, 1934.

The transmission came from a laboratory set up in the Old Windmill on Wickham Terrace, Brisbane, by Mr Thomas Elliott.

The equipment was experimental, based on that in use in Britain and Germany at the time. Pictures were broadcast on the 5 metre or Ultra Wave frequency.

The very first transmission was from the Windmill to a little cottage on the outskirts of Ipswich.

I have tried to find out more about the identity of those first television viewers in Ipswich, who were also the first in Australia, but have been unable to discover any more information. Perhaps readers can help solve the mystery.

On May 6, 1934, a demonstration of television was given to Parliamentarians, government officials and the Press, all of whom were said to have been "astounded at the clearness of the picture".

In October, 1935, illustrated advertisements and the headlines of the Courier Mail were transmitted, again on a wavelength of 5 metres, using "high definition of 180 lines".

The pictures were received by Thomas Bidle, a lecturer at Brisbane Polytechnic. The headlines could be read clearly, and this experiment was seen as an outstanding achievement in the development of TV in Australia.

About this time, a licence to transmit was granted to the experimenters. Every Sunday night between 6.30 and 7.30, pictures were sent out to a number of keen viewers including several in Ipswich.

At the beginning of one evening's transmission, a picture of film star Janet Gaynor was sent out.

Thomas Elliott commented: "All this goes to prove that television will play a big part in the booming up of certain coming attractions in the film world." Prophetic words.

The experiments continued until 1939 when the licence to transmit was withdrawn because of the war. It was not until 20 years later that television began seriously in Brisbane and Ipswich.



Joe Crombie of Woodend, who celebrated his 89th birthday recently has been involved in many areas of electricity and electronics, including early TV experiments. Here, he is pictured in 1932, trying out a Philips Battery Operated Loud Hailer.

Joe turns up a few skeletons

A RECENT article in this series on early TV experiments brought back many memories for Ipswich resident Joe Crombie.

Joe recently celebrated his 89th birthday — and what an interesting and eventful 89 years he has seen.

His work and his interests lay in electricity, electronics and the cinema. He knew interesting people, and carried out pioneering work.

During World War 2, Joe was involved in installing searchlights on American aircraft

for the Battle of the Coral Sea. He designed lighting to fit inside the searchlight housing normally used on submarines; this was then fitted onto the Mitchell B25 bombers. For his work, Joe received a letter of thanks from the Commonwealth on behalf of General Macarthur.

Closer to home, Joe was involved in fitting up the Ritz cinema when it was first built. On the opening night, he was stage manager, with Terry Lambert as compere.

Joe was also involved in early TV experiments. His personal memories add color to the bare scientific facts.



A PLACE IN HISTORY
A series by ROBYN BUCHANAN
curator of Claremont, National
Trust of Queensland.

Around 1920, Joe was the electrician and projectionist at the famous Cremorne Theatre. His good friend Tom Elliott was the representative for the Stanford X-Ray Company.

The friends met people with similar interests including radiologist Dr Val McDowell, Jack Griffiths and Mrs Laidlaw.

An amateur radio station was started, with its transmitter in Dr McDowell's rooms in Preston House.

At his home, Joe had his own small private cinema, and Tom Elliott often visited him.

The progression from radio and cinema to an interest in TV was an inevitable one.

Joe carried out experiments at home in closed circuit TV, sending a picture the size of a postage stamp onto a neon pilot light.

Tom Elliott received permission from the Brisbane City Council to use the old Windmill rent free.

There, he and his friends experimented with TV transmission.

They set up a circuit consisting of a Logic Baird Hookup and a 44 line Nipko scanning disc revolving at 960 revs a minute.

Descriptions of equipment like this make the work seem very formal, and one tends to imagine serious boffins working on into the night.

But according to Joe, there was also a lot of human fun and practical jokes.

"When visitors approached the door of the Windmill," Joe said, "they broke the invisible beam of a photoelectric cell. The door opened — and out came a real skeleton to shake hands."

The skeleton was set up behind the door, wired up so that the opening of the door operated a counterweight which lifted the bony hand in a greeting. Tom Elliott tried to convince visitors that it was the skeleton of a convict that he had found in the Mill.

When the visitor was sufficiently recovered, he then ascended to the second floor, which was Tom's personal brewery.

Old square 4-gallon kerosene tins were constantly fermenting a home brew. There was always some ready for hospitality for visitors, or to help along inspiration for experiments.

Having survived the shock of the skeleton and the temptations of the brewery, the visitor eventually arrived at the top of the mill where experiments took place.

Tom's initial transmissions were of test patterns, sketches from the Illustrated London News, a draught board and a rooster.

About 20 people received the pictures. And, Joe said, the Ipswich person who received the very first transmission was Mr Tom Biddle of North Ipswich.

Joe's memories of these events and of many, many others, are drawing visitors to his door.

He has been interviewed by historians from Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra, and has now written his memoirs, recording those 89 interesting years.

Unsung hero of historic flight

It was barely sold that night—40 years ago, when amateur radio operators along the Australian coast hunched over their sets.

The air was electric with anticipation of just one signal—K-E-A-B. They were all excited because they knew Charles Kingsford Smith, pioneer aviator, was on his way.

He was on the last leg of the first trans-Pacific flight—and he was in trouble.

One person intent on the crackle of his set that night was Tom Elliott, a keen, young amateur radio operator from Brisbane.

He was not to know that soon he would play a crucial part in Smithy's epic flight.

If it had not been for

By SHANE BRADY

Elliott's assistance, the Southern Cross may never have touched down at Eagle Farm airport, 40 years ago yesterday—June 9, 1928.

After Kingsford Smith flew the second, and longest (Honolulu to Fiji) leg of the flight, he took off from Suva for the home run.

He thought the worst was behind him, but just four hours out of Suva, the Southern Cross ran into violent storms.

In the darkness, the four men—Kingsford Smith, Charles Ulm,

Harry Lyon and Janet Warner—huddled together in the cockpit of the Southern Cross without radio contact as their flimsy craft was

buffeted by the tempest. At times it took the combined strength of Kingsford Smith and co-pilot Ulm to keep the plane airborne.

Ulm later wrote it was the worst weather he'd ever flown in: "Lightning flashed across our path three times and the plane was blown all over the sky."



ABOVE: Queensland radio pioneer Tom Elliott at the controls. LEFT: Mr Elliott was first to hear the distress signal.

"They asked him to keep his key down so they could get a directional fix."

"Kingsford Smith turned west. Two hours later, he crossed the Australian coast near Ballinas, 100 km south of Brisbane.

"From there, they flew into Brisbane. At the time he picked up Elliott's signal, they were actually badly off course. When they got to Brisbane, they were almost out of fuel."

Some years later, Warner, one of the two Americans on the flight, visited Australia again and made a special trip to Brisbane to thank Elliott for saving their lives on that night.

Alan Shawsmith knew Tom Elliott and regards him as a pioneer of communications in the State.

For the past 33 years, Alan has been an amateur radio operator and he firmly believes Elliott's role in Kingsford Smith's historic flight is largely unrecognised. "It's the one thing they've missed out in all

Kingsford Smith was flying blind and straying further off course all the time, wasting precious fuel.

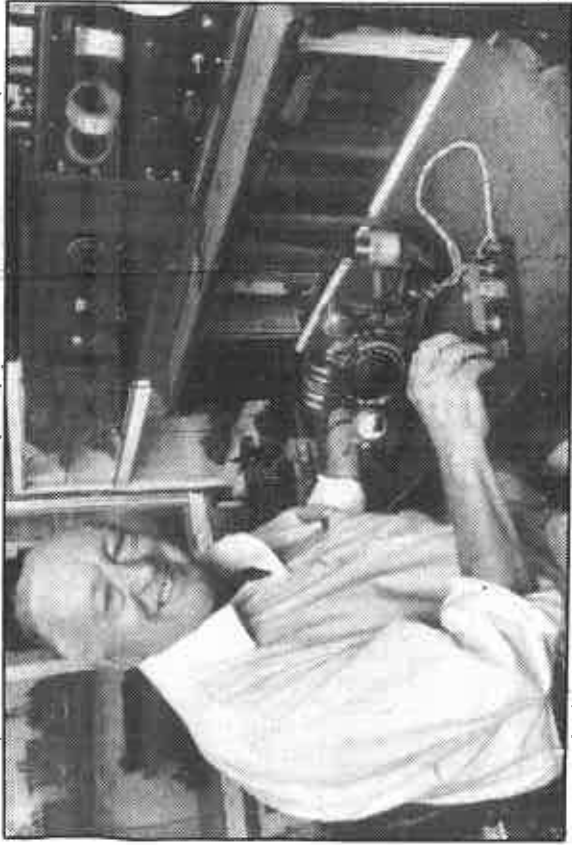
He knew that if he didn't regain radio contact, he would not be able to reach Australia.

While Smithy battled the storm, which raged through the night, young Tom Elliott was where he could most often be found—perched atop the Old Windmill in Spring Hill with his trusty radio set.

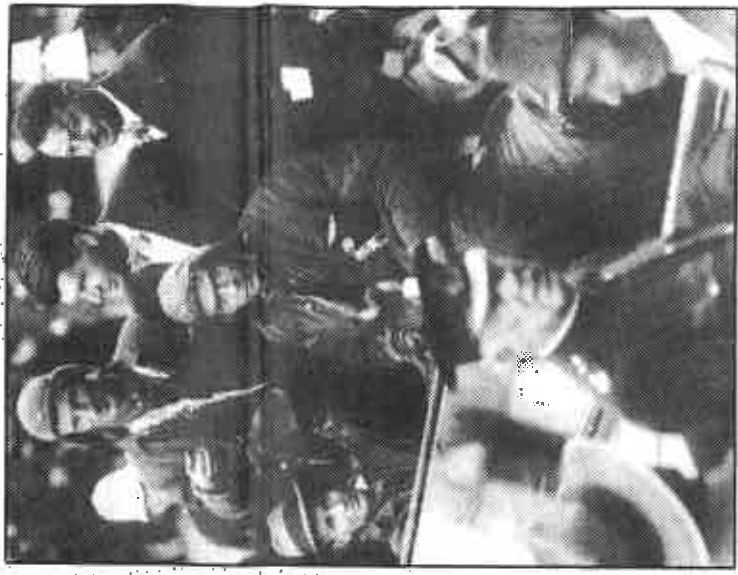
That night Elliott drifted off to sleep. When he awoke early next morning he automatically switched on his set. At 7.38am he received the long awaited signal—K-E-A-B. He replied immediately.

Southern Cross radio operator Warner later said: "The signal I picked up in that terrible racket was the sweetest sound I ever heard."

"Being an operator in World War II, I know what he meant," says Alan Shawsmith, historian for the Australian Wireless Institute.



Mr Shawsmith with a radio similar to that used by Tom Elliott.



Smithy and crew parade through Brisbane.

CALL TO HONOR TV PIONEER AT BICENTENNIAL

Radio hams sparked the first pictures

Last week a group of people who wandered past the convicted observatory on Wickham Tce stopped to read the plaque at its base.

They walked on, not terribly impressed. A quick glance over the last few lines of the plaque's inscription could never hope to recapture the feelings of wonderment that once filled the tower's walls.

In the 1930s the old observatory became almost a second home to a group of keen amateur radio hams, including the late Thomas M.B. Elliott.

They sat huddled together bleary-eyed night after night, working with primitive instruments and a silver screen on a table, from midnight until early morning.

After months of experimenting and studying the principles of Scotsman John Logie Baird, responsible for one of the first television demonstrations in 1926, a picture flickered magically on to their screen.

Twenty-six miles away in a house near Ipswich,

By REBECCA FIELDING

the same image — the smiling face of film star Janet Gaynor — appeared on a homemade receiver. It was April, 1934, and they had finally done it.

They had performed Queensland's, and probably Australia's, first television broadcast — almost 25 years before television officially arrived in Australian homes.

Advertising man Allan Campbell was one of only about 20 people to receive the first picture, masterminded by X-ray technician Thomas M.B. Elliott, on his homemade receiving set.

Mr Campbell, co-founder of Channel 9 and patron of the South-East Queensland Amateur Television Group, hopes Elliott's historically significant work will be rightly recognised in the Bicentennial year.

Before the first telecast Elliott spent years experimenting and working in radio with Wickham Tce radiologist Val McDowell.

Dr McDowell owned experimental radio station 4CM, beamed from the observatory.

Elliott used the station for his experiments —



A recent picture of late actress JANET GAYNOR — first face on TV.

working only late at night when the station was not being used for radio broadcasts.

For months, Elliott, then about 35, built his transmitter — an odd-looking contraption somehow assembled with crude materials — cotton reels, aluminium discs and Meccano set parts.

The receiving set which Campbell used to pick up the picture was equally as odd. It was made, with Elliott's help, of pieces of aluminium, copper and brass and had an 11cm wide screen.

Elliott had similarly instructed a small group of dedicated "hookers-in" on how to construct attachments to their radios to receive transmissions.

On April 10, 1934, the day of the first transmission, Elliott used McDowell's radio equipment to carry the television signal. Campbell waited patiently under his Wilston Heights home to receive it.

Nothing happened. The screen remained blank.

But Campbell, suddenly having a brainwave, adjusted the speed of his receiver's revolving disc to the same speed as the disc in Elliott's transmitter.

A crude picture of Janet Gaynor flashed before his eyes.

"It was fantastic. We couldn't really believe our eyes — it had come through after all those experiments," Mr Campbell said.

After midnight every Friday the enthusiastic experimenters continued to send out television messages to all who cared to join in.

The first news telecast was on October 2, 1935 — a transmission of an edition of a local newspaper. Soon, the experimenters were able to provide viewers with animation — Campbell's old advertising films of Mickey Mouse playing the piano and a film called The Chocolate Soldier.

Elliott played it on a portable 30cm sound projector which Campbell built and claims was the

first of its kind in Australia.

The Government became interested and in the same year station 4CM was granted a licence to conduct television broadcasts.

They continued their work until 1939 when all licences were withdrawn when the war started.

"The war started and it all stopped," Mr Campbell said. "We could have had television in Australia before the war if we'd got the necessary coverage from the Government."

"We were disappointed. We all got involved in the war but the interest was still there."

"Tom Elliott was really the brains behind it. He used to spend hours and hours perfecting these things."

"He was a very academic type and a bachelor. Everytime you talked to him he'd talk about equipment — he was just obsessed with it."

"Elliott and McDowell were really the founders of experimental television in Australia and I think it's important in the Bicentennial year for us to remember them and their great achievement."

Elliott realised his miracle would become an institution. He saw it as one of the world's wonders, but few others could.

In press reports of the time he said: "Australia can have television here and now if the authorities are willing to co-operate. There is no reason to delay."

But Mr Campbell said people could not really comprehend the ramifications of Elliott's incredible achievement — they were sceptical.

"They didn't take much interest. It was something new but they didn't realise television would one day be in every home," he said.

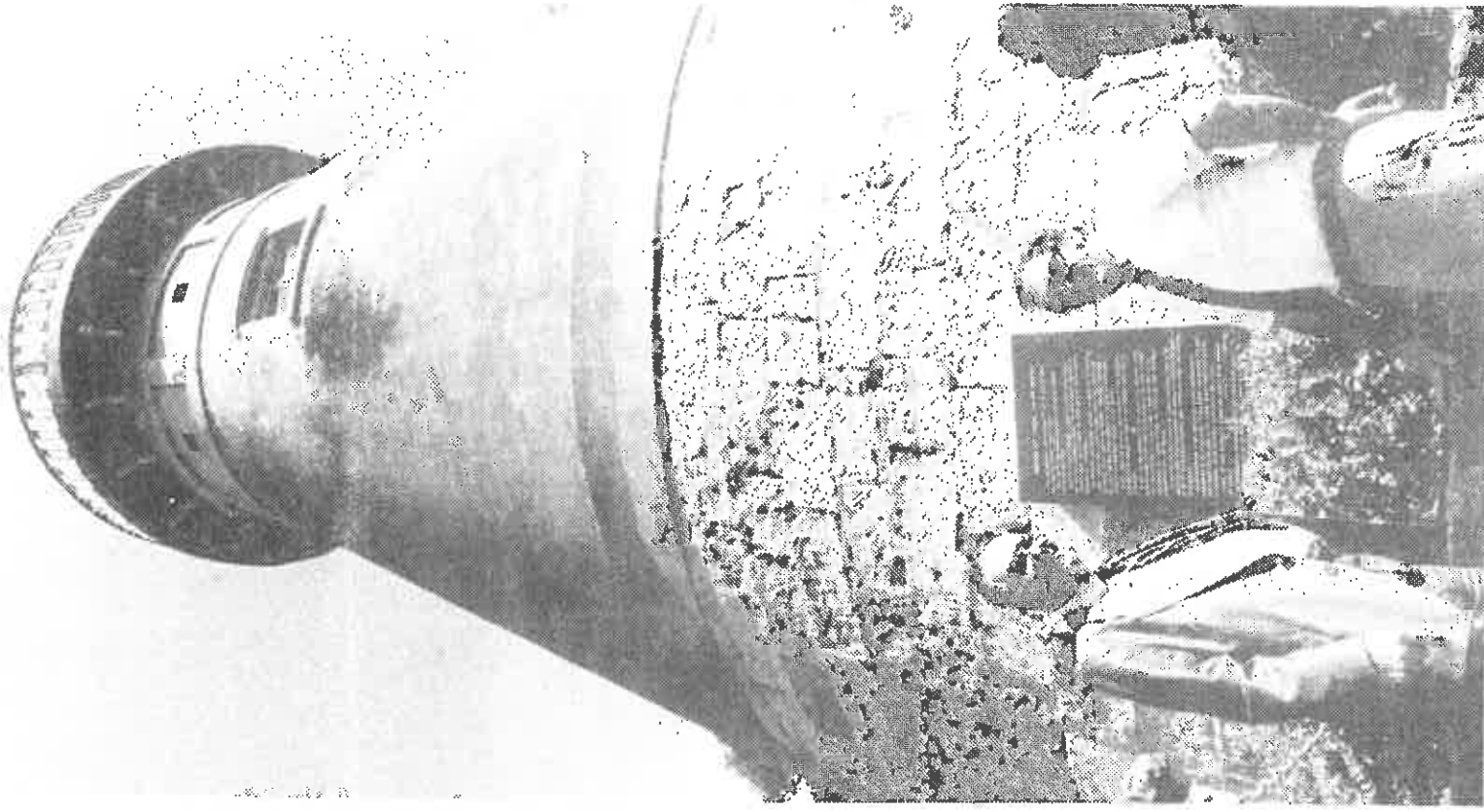
The group did not continue to develop their findings after the war.

"Five years of war — we nearly forgot what we did," Mr Campbell said. "The experimental equipment is displayed at the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, William St, City."



THOMAS ELLIOTT

television mastermind.



Patron of the South-East Queensland Amateur Television Group ALLAN CAMPBELL, left, and president TOM IVANS outside the old Tower Mill.