

THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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Bro. NORMAN PETER OLSEN (1897-1988)

Norman Peter Olsen was born on the 28th October 1897 and was the youngest of a family of three girls and three boys.

Their parents were Peter Olsen, a naturalised Swedish Mariner, born in Helsingborg, and Elizabeth Scott, a first generation Scot who was born in Honeysuckle Point, a suburb of Newcastle, New South Wales. They were married at St John's Church, Parry Street, Cook's Hill, Newcastle on the 16th December 1885 by the Rev. Francis Ashwood Bode.

On leaving the sea, Peter Olsen later became a member of the N.S.W. Police Force and after a period of service was transferred to the newly formed Water Police attached to Newcastle. The place of residence was at 65 Scott Street, Newcastle, which is just below the present Newcastle Hospital site, adjacent to the wharfs and Newcastle railway station. The old cottage is still in existence and is covered by the National Heritage.

Norman went to Cook's Hill Superior Public School for a period of five years, leaving in 1911. He played the Baritone in the school band in his latter years.

A story Norman liked to tell about those latter years at school was that, as his father was the Sergeant of Water Police, he, in conjunction with the Harbour Master was in charge of the fire fighting on the wharfs and in the local district. When a call came in by that new invention, the telephone, the boys had a set pattern of jobs to perform.

Eric, being the elder, answered the phone and Oscar, the second eldest boy, rang the fire-bell, which was located next door to their home, to summon what volunteers were available. Norman's job was to run down to Newcastle railway station and grab the nearest handsome cab on the rank.

Meanwhile the two elder boys rolled up the fire hose, instructed the volunteers where the fire was located, saw them off on their respective push-bikes, which was an essential to become a volunteer fire-fighter, and then loaded up the handsome cab, which had hopefully arrived by then, if no trains had arrived at the railway station. Norman's duties then included driving to the scene with the cab driver, and helping to unload the fire-hose. By this time, if the building was still standing and a water outlet was close-by, the fire was fought.!!! The good old days?

Back to our story! The following year Norman attended the Newcastle Technical College, completing a course in Carpentry. Not satisfied with this he attended Cook's Hill Evening Continuation School and completed a course in Book-keeping and Business Principles, a course which would stand him in good stead during the years that followed.

The Religious upbringing of the family was carried out in true Presbyterian fashion, as Mrs Elizabeth Olsen was the Superintendent of the Scots Church Sunday School.

Norman being the youngest had the job of cleaning down the pews before each service, as well as attending all services and Sunday School.

In 1913, at the age of 16, he did a course on Mathematics and Mechanics with the International Correspondence School.

His working experience during this period was as a Junior Clerk and Bookkeeper with H.H. MacDonnell, a public Accountant, then with Inglis Ltd, Merchants, until an opportunity arrived for him to become apprenticed as an Electrical Mechanic with H. Bingham of Newcastle.

Prior to taking up this position, he signed on as cabin boy on a ship touring New Zealand and San Francisco. No doubt the stirring of his Viking ancestors!

When war broke out in 1914, he along with his two brothers Eric and Oscar, joined up. Eric was 22 years old, Oscar 21 years and Norman 18 years. They joined as privates and each gained promotion and decorations on the field of battle. Eric rose to the rank of Captain was awarded a Military Cross, Oscar, the rank of Sergeant, a Distinguished Conduct Medal, and Norman the rank of Corporal, a Military Medal. He served in the 19th Battalion in Egypt, Belgium and France. An article in the Newcastle Sun, in 1920, referred to them as "The Fighting Olsens".

In France, in 1918, he obtained an "excellent" pass from the first Anzac Wireless Corps School, which no doubt whetted his enthusiasm for future studies in this new discovery of "voice transmission through the ether."

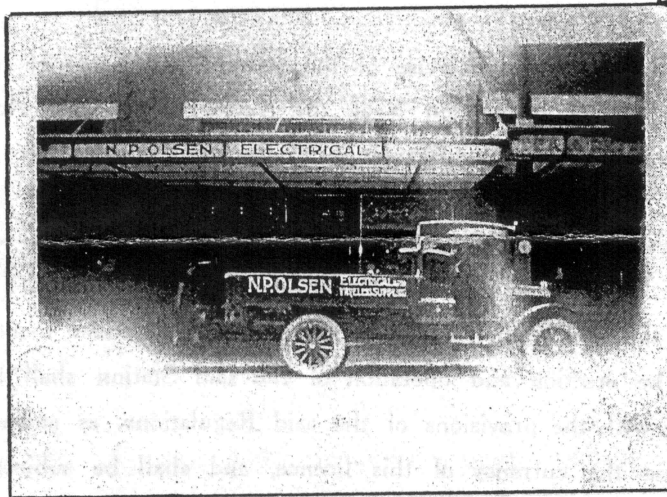
Whilst waiting in England, after the War, for his return to Australia he took the opportunity of studying production methods at the Ford Motor Works, Cadbury's Bourneville Factory and as he often claimed, one of the best factories, Walkers Distillery.

Norman was discharged on 18th July 1919 and joined Ring and Dark Ltd, Newcastle as an Electrical Mechanic, having served out the remainder of his apprenticeship in the Communications section of the Army.

In 1928 he obtained his Electrical Contractors License and became self-employed. His interest in electronic communications was furthered at this time from his wartime experience and his joining the Citizens Military Forces, 39th Fortress Company, Australian Engineers, at Fort Scratchley, Newcastle. (1920-1930).

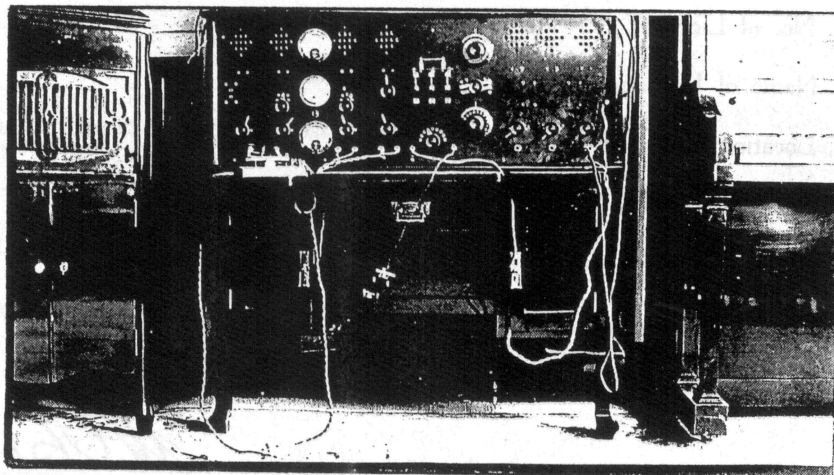
The production of Vacuum Tube Radio Valves had taken a huge step forward in these years and Norman saw a means of furthering his own business in the retail field. He opened up an Electrical Retail and Repair store at 18 Hunter Street East, selling and repairing Electrical Equipment, Wireless, Gramophones and Records.

During this period of time he met, courted with the help of a Harley Davidson motor-bike and side-car, Hazel Mary Wilson of Cook's Hill. They were married on 24th June 1922 at St John's Church, Parry Street, Cook's Hill, Newcastle by Rev Francis Vivian Drake.



*The shop and work vehicle.
18 Hunter St., Newcastle.*

In 1923, Norman had a bulky, hand-made Radio Transmitter/Receiver, constructed by Mr Raymond McIntosh, of Lane Cove, Sydney, shipped from Sydney to Newcastle in the old Steamer "Hunter". The Captain almost refused to allow it on board as he thought it was a coffin. The transmitter duly arrived and was set up, with an aerial and mast in Macquarie Street, Waratah, a suburb of Newcastle. An experimental license (Transmitting and Receiving) was obtained allowing for the transmitter and receiver to have a power of 10 watts, penetrating on a wave-length of 250 metres and a call sign of 2 Z X. The License number was 37, whilst his Amateur licence was 3404.



Talking Machine, Transmitter/Receiver and Gulbransen.

POSTMASTER-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT.

*Wireless Telegraphy Act 1905-1919.***Experimental Licence (Transmitting and Receiving).**

IN PURSUANCE and exercise of the powers and authority conferred upon the Postmaster-General by Section 5 of the *Wireless Telegraphy Act 1905-1919*, and by the *Wireless Telegraphy Regulations*, a licence is granted to---

M. R. NORMAN PETER OLSEN

to erect an Experimental Wireless Station at WARATAH, NEW SOUTH WALES, and to operate the said Station for a period of twelve calendar months from the date hereof. The erection and operation of the said Station shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the said Regulations, as amended from time to time during the currency of this licence, and shall be subject to such further restrictions and conditions as are from time to time notified by the Postmaster-General or by any officer thereto authorized in writing by the Postmaster-General.

By direction of the Postmaster-General,



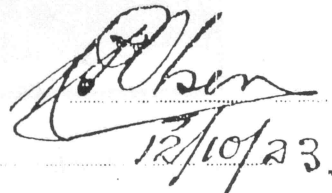
Chief Manager, Telegraphs and Wireless.

Date OCT 10 1923**SCHEDULE OF THE AUTHORIZED STATION.**

1. No. of Licence 3404 Expires 5-9-24
2. Name of Licensee NORMAN PETER OLSEN
3. Location of station "Normanhurst", Macquarie Street, Waratah, N.S.W.
4. Type of receiver Valve - Non Regenerative
5. Type of transmitter Valve power 10 watts
6. Operating wave-length 250 Metres Call sign 2 Z X

Signature of Licensee

Date


12/10/23.

The first programme in the Hunter Valley was put to air on August 18th, 1923. The music was supplied by a Gulbransen Player-piano and talking machine operated by his wife Hazel together with a number of player rolls and records. The transmitter microphone was placed inside the Gulbransen Player to broadcast, so as to obliterate any external noise and "chit-chatter".

A report in the Newcastle Sun on August 20th 1923, read as follows:-

"MUSIC by WIRELESS."

NEWCASTLES FIRST EFFORT. GREAT SUCCESS ACHIEVED.

The wireless concert which was broadcast from Mr N.P.Olsen's residence at Waratah on Saturday and Sunday nights was a huge success, and was expressed by several of the local amateur's as "the best they had ever heard".

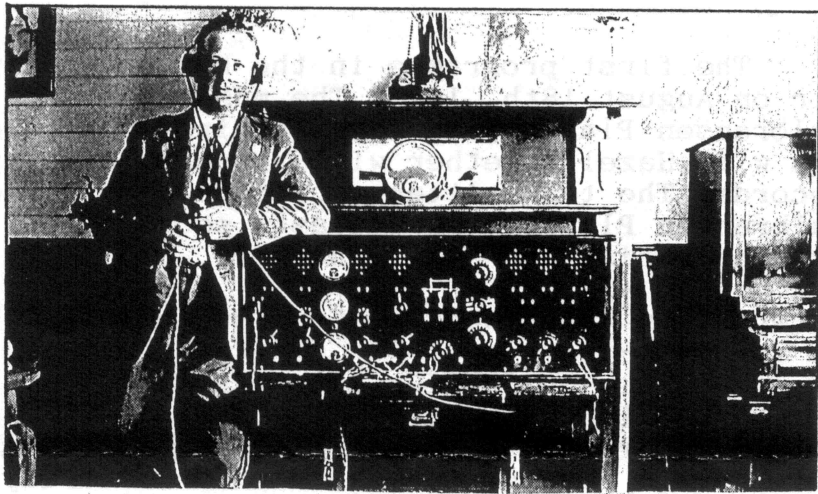
This program, which was broadcasted by special permission of the Post Master General, Melbourne, for the benefit of the wireless amateurs in this district and especially of the Newcastle Radio Club. It was intended for Saturday night only, but the request for encores was so numerous and persistent, Mr Olsen agreed to repeat the performance on Sunday night and all the "listeners" were advised by wireless.

Besides the demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday nights, experiments were carried out on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

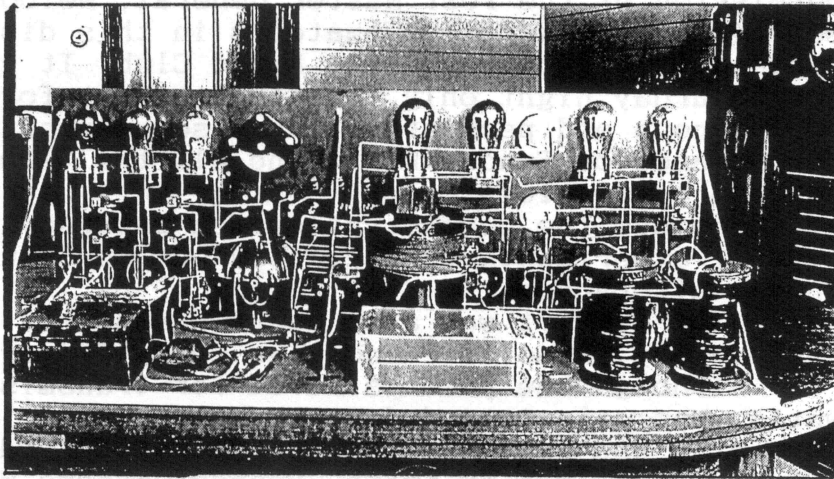
The concert was also heard plainly by listeners-in at Rose Bay, Arncliffe and Lane Cove, Sydney.

Although the power allowed for transmission ie., 10 watts, was only intended to carry the music around Newcastle and Suburbs, reports were received by telephone and wireless from Mr Smith, Dungog; Messrs Woodhouse and Troy, West Maitland; Mr F. Silverthorn, Cockle Creek; Messrs John and Mark Reid, Belmont; Mrs Spenser, Cardiff; Mr Williams, Stockton; and numerous stations in the suburbs. They received the messages, and the music and voice were perfect; so loud that by placing the headphones on the table, the programmes could be plainly heard at the other end of the room.

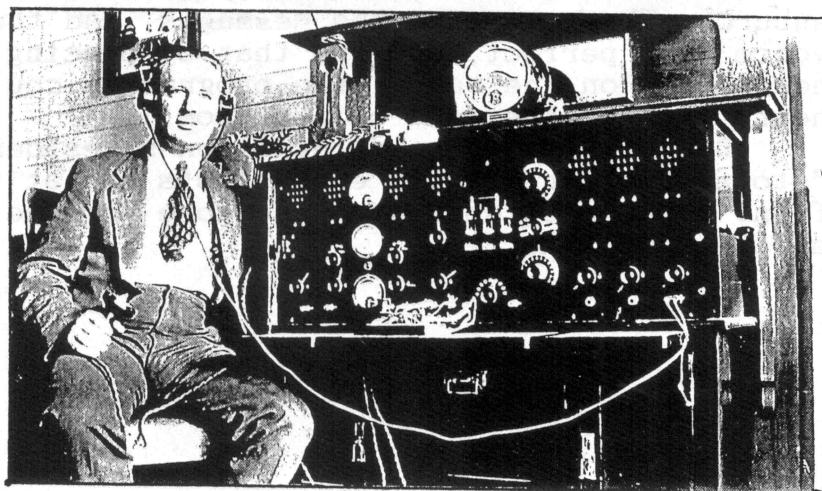
During the week-end, Mr Olsen's residence was "stormed" by interested enthusiasts and at times the front door, back door and telephone were being answered at the same time.



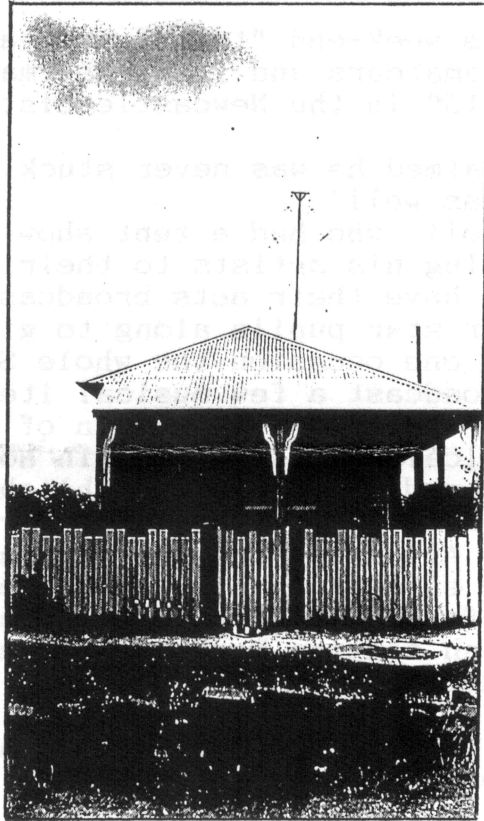
Norman at the CONTROLS.



Inside the "WORKS."



A Testing Session.



Macquarie St., and Aerial.

The music was supplied by a Gulbransen player-piano and talking machine with a number of player rolls and records which were kindly loaned for the occasion by Mr D.Devine, the Manager of the Gulbransen player pianos.

On Sunday night, Mr Olsen announced to all "listening-in" that if there was any particular piece they liked, he would be pleased to broadcast it for their benefit; immediately after, requests were coming in from all over the district for their favourite fox-trot; most of which were complied with.

A report in the Newcastle Sun on September 11th, 1923 stated:- "Mr Olsen will be heard almost every night now and has arranged his tests so as not to clash with Mr Marks broadcasting from Sydney. The music from his station next Sunday will be supplied by Miss Ruby Guest's Banjo and Mandolin Orchestra. This will be novel in wireless music."

On Monday 17th September 1923, the Newcastle Sun reported:- "Wireless amateurs were treated to something exceptionally novel and good on Sunday night when Miss Ruby Guest's Banjo and Mandolin Orchestra broadcast a musical programme from Mr N.P.Olsen's wireless station at Waratah. The Orchestra rendered 14 selections including solo's and duets by Mr Roy Abbott and Messrs Carl Anderson and Arthur Scott. The items included 'Beneath Thy Window', 'Leave Me With a Smile', and 'In Old Manilla'; the popularity of which was evidenced by the number of requests that were received for encores by telephone and mail.

Mr Olsen's week-end "tests" are eagerly looked forward to by amateurs and it is estimated that they are heard by over 150 in the Newcastle District."

Norman claimed he was never stuck for variety , and all top-class as well!

Charlie Zoli, who had a tent show in Newcastle, would often bring his artists to their home on Sunday afternoon's to have their acts broadcast. Ruby Guest, would bring her star pupils along to give their repertoire. On one occasion the whole Strand Orchestra arrived and broadcast a few musical items.

The orchestra, under the baton of Mr Harold Vincer, played the musical score from "Robin Hood" on 3rd December 1923. and as an added highlight the Manager of the Strand Theatre, Mr McGrath, was persuaded to sing "Believe Me of All Those Endearing Young Charms".

When such entertainment was not forthcoming, Hazel, like a good wife, played the Gulbransen De-Luxe.

The Waratah station broke new ground as being the first to broadcast radio talk shows.

The Town Clerk, Mr Glassop, was invited to outline a council scheme, over 2 Z X, for installing Speakers in Newcastle Parks, to bring Music to the people. Mr Glassop underestimated the number of people listening, when in the course of his speech, he asked all those who heard him to ring in on Mr Olsen's telephone. It was not very long before Mr Glassop was sorry that he made the request as listeners phoned to talk about the scheme whilst Mr Glassop was on air and for a considerable time after. Sound familiar?

By now reports were coming back that the programmes were heard as far away as Rose Bay and Lane Cove in Sydney, Dungog, West Maitland, Martins Creek, Lismore, Berrima, Braemar and Deniliquin in New South Wales, Clifton and Toowoomba in Queensland.

Norman's brother, Eric, who was at this time a Marine Captain sailing on coastal vessels, would often pick up programmes 60 miles (100Km) at sea.

Norman's great achievements at this time earned him an invitation to join the Board of Broadcasters (Sydney) Ltd of 126 Phillip St Sydney, which was the group set up to co-ordinate all the Amateur and Commercial transmitting stations into one organised body of control.

Needless to say the electrical business was expanding rapidly, due no doubt to the novel form of discreet and cheap advertising, and before long Norman opened another shop at 431 High Street, Maitland, under the Management of Mr Lance Jones, who was a Wireless enthusiast. Later in life, Lance Jones, became an Electrical Engineer in the Electricity Commission of N.S.W., before retiring as the Engineer in Charge of the Efficiency section of the Generation Division.

Radio inspectors were now becoming a source of constant irritation because of the large area being received from the transmitter, but what was not appreciated in those early days was the effect of the "ground plane", that is the swampy nature and the close proximity of coal base and iron-stone deposits around Waratah and Mayfield, giving such high efficiency to transmitting signals.

When Radio began to become highly commercialised, Norman decided his "unique little station" at Waratah could no longer be appreciated, nor compete against full time commercial stations, so he sold the transmitter to Harry Douglas for £80, (\$160), the amount he originally paid for the unit. Harry Douglas used the set to form the nucleus of the present radio station 2 H D.

On the 28th January, 1999, the Newcastle Herald's front page headline was:-

"HUNTER RADIO WAVES".

'People's station' 2 H D to go in \$11 Mill sale.

A bad experience with an absconding accountant in 1927, caused a financial crisis with the two businesses, so Norman sold up and joined the New South Wales Government railways as an Electric Power Maintenance Mechanic and was later retrenched, last in first out syndrome, in 1930 as the Great Depression began to bite.

Not to be phased by this unfortunate turn of events he obtained a position in the N.S.W. State Public Service - Department of Labour and Industry Section, as a temporary employee. His previous Wireless, Electrical and Business experience were soon utilised and he rose to become Officer in Charge of State Labour exchanges at West Maitland, Waterloo, Kogarah and Newtown,

During the period 1920-1930, he continued serving, part time, in the Citizens Military Forces and obtained the rank of Captain. Whilst stationed at Fort Scratchley he renewed his friendship with an old school mate, Frederick Galleghan who with his wife Vera were very taken with the new wireless broadcasts and spent many hours at the "wireless home" of Norman and Hazel. Their close friendship was to continue until Sir Frederick's death in 1971.

In 1935 Norman was transferred as officer in Charge of the Wollongong branch of the Department Labour and Industry. In his spare time he became treasurer of the Wollongong R.S.L. and rejoined the Citizens Military Army Service, joining the 34th Battalion Reserve, until October 1940, when he joined up for regular army service with the rank of Captain.

He was stationed at Wollongong, Ingleburn and Liverpool Army training camps until February 1942, when his abilities and experience were required by the Manpower Directorate and he was honourably discharged.

In September 1941, he was appointed a Justice of the Peace, an appointment he held until he voluntarily relinquished it, in August 1987 due to ill health.

In June 1942 he was seconded to the Allied Works Council as Personnel Manager, being responsible for the registration of trades groups and seeing them placed for the greatest efficiency for the War effort. As the War moved further north, Norman found himself spending a lot of time in Queensland, being the direct representative of the Director General of Manpower for Northern Queensland and a major liaison officer with the American Army construction groups. This area ran from Mackay to Thursday Island.

From January 1944 to October 1945, he became responsible for the Supervision of twenty four National Service Offices, as Area Inspector, on the East Coast.

At the completion of hostilities, Norman was appointed officer in Charge of the Civil Re-establishment Wing at the Sydney Showground, a position which entailed the de-mobilising of troops and re-establishing them back into Civil life and employment.

His main function being to co-ordinate the activities of several agencies, such as the Repatriation Department, Legal Aid department, Post War Reconstruction, War Service Homes Division and other minor departments associated with this vast task.

When this vital work was completed he was transferred to the Commonwealth Employment Service (C.E.S.) and from its inception was stationed at Mascot, which was the largest Employment Office in the Commonwealth at the time.

The main function was not only to see to the employment of ex-service men and women in the multitude of heavy industries in the area, such as General Motors Holden, Austral Bronze, Lysarts Steel, and BHP iron and steel subsidiaries etc., but also to see that migrants were suitably placed in these swiftly expanding industries.

Norman held this position until his retirement in 1962. He and Hazel lived at Kogarah at this time but ill-health caused them to return to their roots at Newcastle, where they spent many years at Mereweather.

Old habits die hard, and Norman soon found time to become Hon. Treasurer of Mereweather R.S.L. for ten years, until creaky joints forced him and Hazel into a retirement hostel at Old Church Close, Brown Street, Newcastle, back in the heart of the city they loved so well.

Norman passed away on 17th July, 1988 aged 90 years whilst Hazel passed away on 25th July 1989 aged 88 years. They were survived by one child, Alan, four grand children and nine great-grand children.

Norman Peter Olsen was initiated on 5th October 1921, passed to the Fellowcraft Degree on 15th December 1921 and raised to the Sublime Degree on 30th March 1922 in Sedgwick Lodge No 125 at Wickham, Newcastle. He was advanced to the Degree of Mark Master on 4th of August 1923 in the Sedgwick United Lodge No 75 N.S.W. Constitution.

He called off from both of his Lodges in 1928.

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Family Archives and History - Lenore Olsen.

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☆ *Top right: Newcastle radio pioneer Mr Norm Olsen with his transceiver 50 years ago. Right: Mr Olsen, 75, tunes in a program on his present receiver.*

