



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 95

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY: Jim Ruxton

DATE: 28 July 2003

Bro. LEONARD LONDON - Radio personality.

The golden age of radio or as I prefer to call it the wonderful world of wireless was probably at its best in the 1940s to the 1960s. Remember such stars as Jack Davey, Bob Dyer, Dick Fair, Harry Dearth, Howard Craven among many others. This paper recalls certainly one of the most memorable of those radio personalities, Len London.

Len London was born of British parents, his mother coming from Cardiff and his father from Devonport. Charles London tried his hand at an apple orchard in Tasmania following World War 1 but this was not successful so in 1921 he and Lovina met again and married in Melbourne. They journeyed to Sydney where Charles tried many jobs before joining Mauri Bros. and Thompson. They settled in Lakemba where Len London was born on 31st July 1922. Len London was to have two sisters and one brother. This was to be the family home for the next thirty years and the London family were stalwarts of the local Methodist Church.

Len was educated at Belmore South Primary School and later at Canterbury Boys' High School. Len London learnt to play the piano at an early age and also had an excellent bass voice commencing singing lessons when he was 17 years of age. This voice was always his trademark as a radio personality. During the late 1930s 2GB ran programmes called Radio Youth Club and Radio Reporters, children's programmes compered by Charles Cousens. Len had an article published in the Wireless Weekly in 1938 and his voice was first heard on radio in a programme called Radio K. I. D. when he won first prize of two shillings and sixpence and an invitation to come back again. He returned many times to comper the children's show, with the producer saying he was a natural with an amazing voice for a fifteen year old.

Len and his future wife, Vivienne Jarbo, met very briefly for the first time when her sister appeared with Len in a play on the Radio Reporter's Show. They only met once more before World War 2 and that was at the Independent Theatre in North Sydney. Vivienne's father was employed at Johnnie Walker after World War 1. Her mother died when she was seven years of age and following the death of her grandmother two years later the three girls managed the house themselves.

In 1939 Len London left school and commenced work as a despatch clerk with J. Walter Thompson, the large advertising firm. In 1938 he had previously been heard on Radio for the same firm in a programme for one of their clients, Wrigley's Chewing Gum, who was sponsoring on radio a ventriloquist, Mal Verco and Ginger. He was also acting in productions by the Young People's Theatre and the Sydney Players' Club and appeared in many productions. He was soon promoted from despatch clerk to a radio assistant in the Radio Production Department and assisted with such shows as the Lux Radio Theatre, serials and variety programmes.

