

CHAPTER 17

The two friends with the mobile were Roger and Vic - they both worked at the ITV studios on the South Bank and had the idea that they could go into business for themselves with a mobile recording studio. They both lived north of London so the bit of our land they borrowed from Ernie was very convenient for them. With us living there they could also be sure that the caravan and the expensive equipment gradually filling up the interior would be safe from damage and theft. Of course, we were very interested in the project and they were pleased to find someone already involved in the sound, lighting and recording business, although in a less sophisticated way. Thus we got on well and we were equally interested in the progress as they were.

Once they had installed the specially commissioned mixing desk, and a 24 track recorder with all the ancillary items needed, they made a very good job of interior decoration as well as fitting a highly usable cable bay. The caravan itself was an old and large touring model from the 30's and to make it suitable they had blocked in all the windows and built in a cable locker and plug bay at the front. The roof of the new locker inside the van became the platform for the monitor speakers and screen. Unfortunately on the first trial run the whole thing proved to be so heavy that the suspension springs collapsed and the tyres rubbed right through the wheel arches! They had to slide in a reinforced chassis frame to carry bus wheels and tyres with the appropriate suspension.

With the Land Rover that Rog owned, which doubled as tow vehicle and cable store, they were all ready for work! Initially they managed to get some subcontract location work from ITV and then branched out for themselves. One job was recording of a live concert for the Bay City Rollers. The van came back rather the worst for wear as some fans got close enough to hear sound leaking out from the monitors so mistakenly thought that the group was inside the van. They climbed all over it, and the weight was enough to buckle down the roof by a few inches!

Unfortunately for their aspirations, Vic was being steadily promoted in ITV as a Sound Supervisor and was becoming much less inclined to put his finances at risk by working for himself. The mobile had been in use only a very short time before he decided to pull out. That left Rog wondering what to do as he was mainly an equipment man and Vic had been the recording brains of the partnership. Vic wanted his money back and Rog did not want to keep the equipment by buying up Vic's share, so they agreed to sell what they could and give up the whole idea. Rog used his money to buy a printing business that was up for sale near his home, and the last we heard from him was some years later when we wanted some printing done!

Having stripped out most of the equipment, they were left with a nicely decorated van internally wired with distribution cables and a plug bay, all mounted on two large bus tyres - not much use for touring anymore! Neither of them wanted it at their homes and could only think of towing it to a scrap yard. We however had other ideas! It seemed to me to be a useful adjunct to our potentially extra work in recording - I could move into it our tape recorders and other bits and pieces we had acquired over the years, and so fit it up as a little re-recording and editing room. After the school

recording project went so well, we had simple ideas of using our equipment to earn money and being able to install the machines in the good acoustic environment that Rog and Vic had created would work well. We offered to 'take it off their hands' and they welcomed the chance. I think we paid them a hundred pounds or so for it. The bus tyres were worth more than that! This must all have been around 1975 or so.

Of course, the editing idea was just a first step!!! With a ready made mobile, why not, I thought, put in a simple mixing desk to complement the tape recorders, a pair of good monitors, and advertise our very own mobile recording studio? Myrtle agreed, as long as it didn't cost much, so my part time activity for a few months was to build a desk and put it all together. First, I had to learn how to design one, and then Myrtle and Eric were roped in to help make and wire the 12 modules I decided would do for us. Once assembled it worked *fairly* well - I learnt a lot from it and managed to modify the design well enough to get it working *really* well, and we were ready to go! And go we did, quite surprisingly with some of the jobs we did with it over the next few years. None earned us a fortune, but it paid for itself, we made a profit, learnt a lot, and had a lot of fun. It also led the way to many other things, so was a very important point in the story.

I remember some of those jobs - here are the main ones that I can remember:

- § Recordings at St Johns, Smith Square; twice I think.
- § Recording at the Albert Hall - carried the equipment in for that one
- § Recordings at the Queen Elizabeth and Purcell Rooms; at least twice
- § A recording at an army barracks in South London of a school brass band that the army musicians were sponsoring - one unexpected happening there was when we were all evacuated in the middle of a take as there was a bomb scare!
- § A recording of the revived Dagenham Girl Pipers in a hall attached to a Leisure Centre and swimming pool. Pipes go out of tune VERY fast!
- § Another school band at a Town Hall - they wanted 8 track tapes
- § Snake Ranch Studio - an odd one. They needed a recording on a 4 track recorder of a particular type, and I happened to have installed in the mobile the only one in London!
- § A weekend in Harlow to record several pop groups in competition.
- § Using the mobile as the Public Address control in local parks for Summer Shows - I think about 4 times
- § Recording the organ at the Hammersmith Odeon.
- § Recording at Ealing town hall where the road and back of hall approach was so narrow that we had to add a steerable jockey wheel to push the mobile in at sharp enough angle!
- § Drag acts at the famous Cricketers pub!
- § The last one we did was at a venue in Camden Lock on 8 track tape.

By then bookers were expecting mobiles to have at least 24 tracks and there was no way that we would want to spend that sort of money, or work for the sort of people who expected such facilities - "Duh, if we need 24 microphones, like man, you must have one track for each; know what I mean."

Putting that list together just now, I began to realise how much I had forgotten, and kept remembering and adding all those different places. There were probably more. Most were fun to do, but hard tiring work. Mostly no rehearsal was possible so our theatre experience of doing things on-the-fly was invaluable. Funnily enough, the biggest difficulties we encountered were getting the mobile in and out of our driveway! The whole rig was over 40' long and so we had to ask neighbours to be sure to leave their cars well clear so I could swing right across the road to get in and out; often early in the morning or late at night. Our Land Rover was a long wheel base one, unlike Roger's, so it needed quite a bit more room - Poppa Webb even allowed us to cut back his gateway at an angle to get just those few inches more! The clearance in the long driveway was only about one foot.

When at home I used the mobile for general recording and editing work. Several jobs were for the music for ice dancing programmes where I had to edit various pieces together in changing tempos and to exact lengths. Another job was for a local audio company called Turnkey who had produced a piece of equipment called The Great British Spring - it is/was an artificial reverberation device and they wanted a demo tape to give to potential customers to demonstrate what it could do. In addition to the fee, they gave us one to keep after we had used it to make up the demo. I mounted it in a prominent place on the wall!

With all this unexpected addition to our business, we came into contact with many audio professionals, and started to get several trade magazines. In one of those we saw an advert for membership of the main UK trade association, so applied and were accepted on the strength of having the mobile and being able to quote some of the work we had done. The two of us made the smallest ever APRS member. That was the Association of Professional Recording Studios (later the Association of Professional Recording Services) which was a welcome cachet, and played an important part later in our lives. Through that we met a new friend who had a used audio equipment business in Watford (TRAD), John Southard. We also took out a regular classified ad in Studio Sound (SS) and kept that up for the next 20+ years.

Amongst the ads we read in SS there was one in 1977 that seemed of particular interest. It was for the sale of a complete disc cutting room in Scotland. The owner was Derrick Marsh who had a business, Deroy Records. As we seemed to have done so well with the one record we had made, and as our recording work was coming on well, we wondered if we could have our very own cutting room. When I rang Derrick he seemed keen on selling to us, and told me that he would pass on his order book to us, which included work for a pressing factory with which he was involved - sounded good! We arranged to take the train to Glasgow where he would pick us up and drive us round the coast to his house.

Duly met, we admired the rugged scenery on the drive there, and then the equipment setup he demonstrated to us. It looked a bit DIY, but was all there and working as advertised. He wanted (if I remember correctly) £ 12,000 for it but offered a deal where he would expect us to do any work he needed at cost, and would accept the major part as a deposit with the remainder to be paid after we had some time to earn. I had already spoken to our friendly bank manager (yes he really was then and since!) so we knew that we could commit ourselves. Derrick said he would have to confirm it

as there was a possibility of another buyer, although it did not seem as if he was really interested in that.

When after a few days he telephoned to confirm the deal he suggested a date for collection, after he had finished off a few orders and dismantled the equipment. We agreed, and so I immediately got to work on the garage!!! Our plan was to put the Land Rover out in the cold, move the marquees in to the storage part - plenty of room, just needed rearranging - and then build an insulated room within the outer brick wall complete with floor, electric heating (some old storage heaters that Jack knew of and others we bought s/h nearby) and nicely decorated. It took a couple of weeks, and when we announced that we were ready, disaster! Derrick said that he had decided that he could not wait for any money and if we did not pay him the whole amount that week, then the deal was off. There was no way that we could do that, and anyway, we now distrusted him so much that the equipment no longer seemed such a good buy as it did at first - so what do do with our nice new cutting room and the new brochures etc we had got Rog to print for us? In fact, we did two things, neither related to the other.

The first was a job that had come out of the blue a month or so before. This was to record several modern poets reading their own work. We had already gone a long way with it at a friends small private studio a couple of streets away. That was in Rob's mother's house and worked quite well, although fitting in a group of children for one of the poems was a bit difficult! We had also taken a recorder to a poetry reading in London to get some more poets on tape. Now we had to fit in four more who were coming to London for other business, and Rob was not readily available, so this time I fitted up the new room with microphone and talkback from the mobile just round the corner on it's parking space, and away we went. Problem solved.

The second was to ask John Southard if he knew of any cutting equipment for sale. "funny you should ask that Tony - would you like to come with me to Paris to have a look at a couple of systems in the Pathe-Marconi Studios (EMI)?" That was my first trip on the overnight train ferry via Dover. A great experience and quite a while since I had been in a sleeper. That one was even better than going to Larne as we stayed in our beds while the train was moved onto and off the ferry. In Paris we met Serge who was the intermediary and at the studio were taken down to the basement where the Scully/Westrex/Telefunken equipment was set up ready to demonstrate it. All their cutting rooms had been re-equipped with Neumann some months before and this older equipment was in fact the last two sets to go from all of the EMI studios around the world. John wanted £ 9,000 for a complete set - much better condition and more complete than the Deroy setup so I agreed on the way back home that same night on the train.

The story of getting that from Paris, setting it up, and all the good things that came from that deal is quite another story which was told in SS and other places. I won't put it in here, but there is a link to it below.

[Link to Chapter 18](#)

[Link to the disc-cutting story](#)