

## REFLECTIONS ON A RED 1957 STC BANTAM

By GRAHAM PARSLOW



Eye catching design from an exuberant age- the 1957 STC Bantam

Every radio is a TARDIS, an object that allows projection through Time and Relative Dimensions in Space, to transport us to another time and place. A red STC Bantam from 1957 transports me to my favourite Aunt's kitchen where her radio resided with pride and ostentation on top of the fridge. That small modern kitchen was my Aunt's pride and joy because it was part of a bright new cream brick house, right across the road from the larger stone-faced 1920s California bungalow

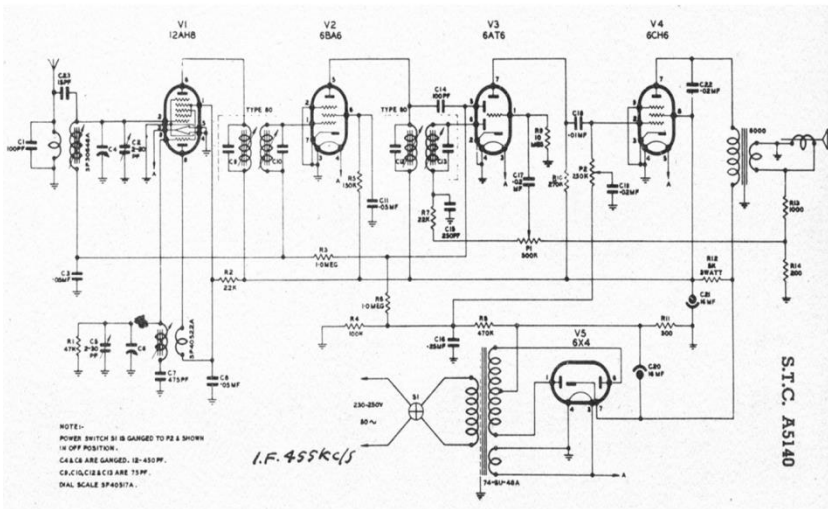
with dark sombre rooms which was their home before 1957. In the old house a grandfather clock and console radio were my uncle's treasures. My uncle was a kind, but stern man who exercised his right as head of the family to demand complete silence as he listened to *Dossier on Dumetrius* and other favourites on the radio. This was Adelaide before television when the radio was the entertainment and information hub of the house. I was born in 1948 and grew up in the SA country town of Edithburgh where I had a very pleasant childhood, but it was always exciting to go to the city to visit Aunt Mary and see that STC Bantam on the fridge. Aunt Mary was my mother's sister and they could pass for twins and often did. Our families had a kindred linkage that was very close, just like the harmonies my mother and aunt could achieve when they sang together. Those were the times when people sang to bond and even listened to community sing-songs on the radio. In the evening Bob Dyer and Jack Davey would compete for our attention in quiz shows. In my Aunt's happy house we clustered around a red STC Bantam.

STC is Standard Telephones and Cables, as proclaimed in the moulding of the back panel. The company began life in London as International Western Electric in 1883. It became STC in 1925 when it was taken over by ITT of the USA. High points for the company were supplying the entire radio systems for the liners Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth (1936-39) and patenting pulse code modulation (1938). Australian operations date from 1923 when Western Electric set up a subsidiary in Sydney. Local manufacturing expanded significantly in 1936 with a new factory in Botany Road Sydney employing 700 people. Domestic radios were only part of STC operations with commercial transmitters and military equipment being major activities. The sales motto for STC was "for tone it stands alone". After the war STC recognised the market for a second radio in the home and created the Bantam, a 4-valve radio for the first model which "will harmonise perfectly with your surroundings" (see p132 of the book *Radio Days* by P. Sheridan and R. Singer). At least two other major styles followed, bearing the Bantam



Indifferent ventilation leads to cracks in the main case.

name before the model featured here. The Bantam immediately before this one is otherwise known as the *Eiffel Tower* (model A4100) because of the distinctive tower on the station dial.



The Bantam features an economical, but conservative circuit design.

The STC Bantam pictured here is from my collection. To me it is the epitome of 1950s exuberance, made possible by the new polymers that DuPont presented to the world. Thermoplastics allowed any concept to become reality, cheaply and in great quantity. The fifties was a time when plastic was fantastic and atomic

energy was about to transform the planet. This was a time before Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Chernobyl told us that the optimism and excesses of the fifties would need to be moderated by more care for the planet. It was the period that gave us extravagant Cadillac's and Chevrolets and radios in every colour of the rainbow. In one respect it was a time like any other, in which stylists trumped the practical requirements of engineers, but this was the zenith of style dominating practicality. The 1950s STC Bantam was a concept that we can deduce was created on the stylist's drawing board. After that the engineers needed to make compromises to bring the concept to reality (more on the engineering later). Every colour of the rainbow was made available for the STC Bantam and there were striking combinations of the facia and case, like bumble-bee yellow and black. To capture the radio-clock market the radio came as the Tymatic with a clock mounted in front of the speaker. The STC factory also fitted the same radio chassis into the rather more conservative BGE Dapper case.



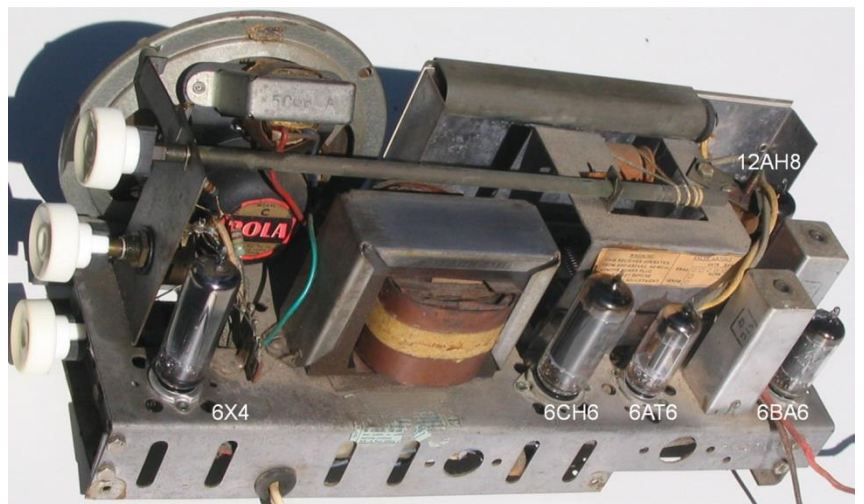
The BGE Dapper shared the same chassis.



The three controls are on the side.

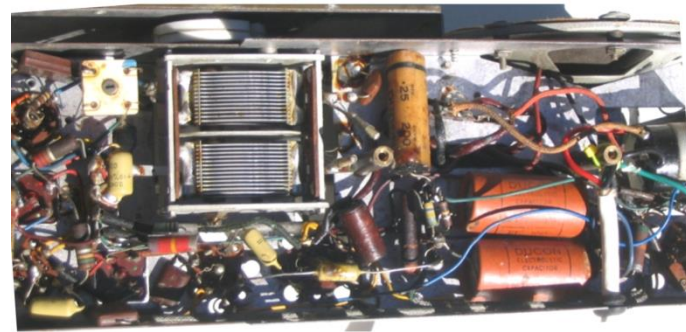
Many radios before this Bantam had knobs on the side to change the band or other functions,

but this design called for tuning, tone and on-off-volume to all be on the side. This is fine for the pots to control volume and tone, but the tuning was solved in a

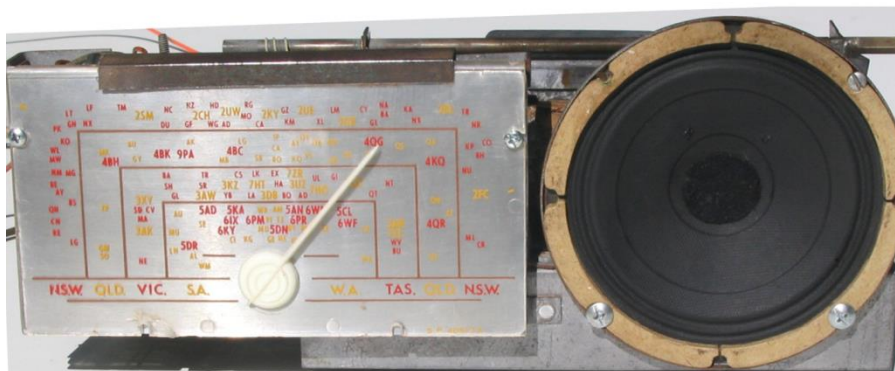


Note the unsophisticated rod and wooden bobbin that drives dial-cord to the tuning condenser.

manner that is extremely inelegant. A rotating rod runs the length of the radio and drives a dial cord around a wooden bobbin that changes the direction 90 degrees to rotate the tuning condenser. The compact sleek space enclosed by the design also presents problems in locating the five valves and a lot more. A low profile chassis with an inset tuning condenser was part of the solution, but this led to a cramped jumble of components under the chassis that is particularly bad in the RF-IF section. Later examples of the model do not seem so cluttered because condensers became smaller through the mid fifties. The Rola 5C speaker has a remarkably small speaker transformer mounted on the top of the speaker frame. There is no space for a larger speaker transformer, as I found out when I needed to replace one. The hottest spot in



The shallow chassis has the tuning condenser in-set and crowded components.



During the model run the dial varied between brushed aluminium and all painted. There were various styles of pointer.

the radio is above the 6CH6 output valve, followed closely by the 6X4 rectifier, and this has cooked the plastic above on every early example of this model I have seen. The hot spot is exacerbated by the relatively closed design of the back

panel. In later production an aluminium sheet was fitted internally as a heat shield across the top and this did a serviceable job of protecting the plastic case.

The radio itself is fairly state of the art in design in keeping with the STC claim to be the Rolls Royce of radios. The 12AH8 is an efficient mixer-oscillator and facilitates high sensitivity, in fact too high for my location at Lower Plenty adjacent to a number of AM transmitters. Even a short aerial wire leads to overload by some stations in my location. What is most annoying is the inability of this design to achieve zero volume and a poor gradation of volume control as the level rushes up to high and distorts very rapidly. The volume control (P1, 500KΩ) is incorporated in the negative feedback from the speaker and changes the grid feed to the 6AT6 detector-preamplifier, rather than varying input to the 6CH6 output pentode. Nevertheless it works well enough and it has the fifties look that will be immortal.

Figure descriptions:

Fig 1. Eye catching design from an exuberant age- the 1957 STC Bantam.

Fig 2. Indifferent ventilation leads to cracks in the main case above the 6X4 rectifier and 6CH6 output pentode.

Fig 3. The Bantam features an economical, but conservative circuit design.

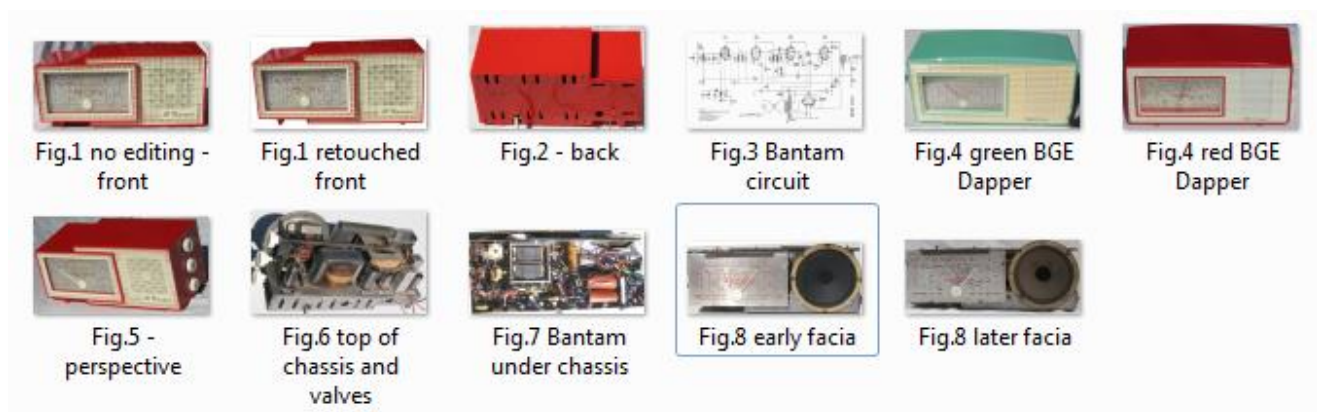
Fig 4. The BGE Dapper shared the same chassis.

Fig 5. The three controls are on the side.

Fig 6. Note the unsophisticated rod and wooden bobbin that drives the dial-cord to the tuning condenser.

Fig 7. The shallow chassis has the tuning condenser in-set. As illustrated here, the large capacitors in early models led to a crowded layout.

Fig 8. Early in the model run the dial background was brushed aluminium with the major stations presented in yellow. Later the background was silver painted with the major stations printed in black. There were various styles of pointer with round or octagonal hubs and sometimes gold painted segments.



For Fig.4 choose either or both.

For Fig.8 choose either or both.

Fig.7 unfortunately has poor focus and came from a radio I gave to my cousin. It serves the purpose well enough, if not blown up too much.