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HISTORY CLUB

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS

IN

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PREFACE

The 1983 issue of Student Research Papers brings to a close the series of good first year history essays on life and work in Newcastle in 1938. For the past three years, as part of the department's involvement with the 1938 volume of the Bicentennial History Project, we have been training selected students in interviewing techniques and documentary research methods with a view to building up a mosaic of impressions about the social history of this area during the 1930s. The project has resulted in nearly 100 interviews on life in 1938 for the National Oral History Project, a chapter on unemployment in Australia for the forthcoming Bicentennial History, this series of published student research papers and a larger array of unpublished essays and surveys by students of this department and of the neighbouring C.A.E.

We have adopted the practice of publishing only the best local history essays each year. The group of selected students in 1983 was smaller than in previous years and, given our group method of proceeding with the project, the range of work we were able to achieve was somewhat circumscribed. Nevertheless the three papers of this issue provide information which helps to build up the pattern of social life we have been exploring during the last three years.

The papers by Doyle and Trim both deal with the lives of men who were involved in coal-mining in the Newcastle area in 1938, and show to some extent the impact coalmining had on the whole family. In contrast Munro's paper is based on an interview with an architect who left Australia to gain experience in England and Europe before returning to Newcastle to practise in 1937.

The 1938 project is now completed. Because of staff shortages we have decided not to mount a similar project in 1984 but to use the year to review the success or otherwise of this series. For it is important to emphasize that the essays issuing from this local history research have been training exercises largely for first year students and it is time to assess whether they have been effective teaching exercises. We expect to be back in 1985 with a new series of Student Research Papers to continue what we hope is a useful instrument in reconstructing part of the Australian past.

Sheilah Gray
Peter Hempenstall
Margaret Henry

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"We enjoyed every ounce of life then" -

A view of coalmining

by Annette Doyle

"But they were the days then. They were really good times. We never had no money or nothin'. We enjoyed every ounce of life then".¹ Despite a practically nonexistent social life and a ten-year period of unemployment, Mr Doyle was one of the lucky people to be employed in the coal mining industry. He recalls the Newcastle workplace in the late 1930s with a touch of nostalgia. Such an attitude is "the voice of the past....and it is a voice worth listening to".²

Born in Singleton in 1905 Mr Doyle, who lived most of his life in the former mining settlements of Lambton and Jesmond, gained much experience in his early working years. At the age of fourteen he left school and worked as a messenger boy at Walter Neve's Furniture Store in Newcastle for 14/- per week. His father was the foreman at Wallsend Coke Ovens and, as was the custom, his son could have joined him. Mr Doyle preferred to work elsewhere "because it was too hot there".³ Later he became a pit-top labourer at Jesmond mine, an employee at Jesmond soap factory and a shunter, then a wheeler at Lambton Borehole Colliery at Redhead until the mine closed in 1926.

Throughout the depression and until 1935, Mr Doyle was unemployed. A survey in October 1940 showed that 22% of the 3,134 registered unemployed miners in the Newcastle and coalfields areas had not worked since before May 1932.⁴ His brother, who was unskilled, had little hope of finding any job in the 1930s and his two brothers-in-law were also part of those statistics. One had been rejected as a police recruit because he failed the physical, and supplemented the family budget by selling blackberries door to door. Mr Doyle and his brother, whilst on relief, worked for the Lambton Council digging gardens, cleaning gutters and general maintenance work. They even worked as far as the Hawkesbury River on government road works.

During this time Mr Doyle became very familiar with the hardships of the needy. His mother and sisters, and his father, who was mayor of Lambton in 1931, organised unemployment relief. His father was also an active member of the St Vincent de Paul Society and his work with the poor encouraged in Mr Doyle an attitude that was to survive to the present day. Only recently he gave his three piece suit, which cost him £7.12.6, a week's wages in 1926, to the St Vincent de Paul.⁵ He has always appreciated anything he was fortunate enough to call his own. In 1935 B H P reopened the Lambton Borehole Colliery and Mr Doyle was employed as a shunter and then worked on the coal cutter. His brother and brothers-in-law remained unemployed for some further years.

With the reopening of the mine came mechanisation and a place in history for the Lambton Borehole Colliery as the first mine in Australia to raise coal by completely mechanised methods.⁶ Mr Doyle worked with a unit of twenty-three men on the Victoria seam of coking coal used in the steel industry. The seam was at a depth of 200 feet and Mr Doyle

worked over an area of threequarters of a mile in any direction. An Ingersol punching cutter machine worked by compressed air and operated by two men would have taken about one hour to cut an eight foot bore nine feet into the coalface and twentyfour feet wide. With the coal cutting machine operated by two men the same amount of coal could be cut in fifteen to twenty minutes.⁸ A daily production cycle consisted of cutting, boring, firing, loading and timbering. Mechanisation was seen initially as a threat to the miners and appeared to favour the owners. Communist propaganda leaflets such as "Mechanisation: Threatened Catastrophe for Coalfields" were printed in editions of 30,000 or more⁹ and conditioned the miners' anxiety. W.Orr's warning words were that "the coalowners' plans for further rationalisation, if allowed to mature would destroy the economic life of the coalfields"¹⁰ but in the view of the miners it merely meant a reduction of employment opportunities.¹¹ Mr Doyle did not feel threatened even though the workforce did show a tendency to outgrow the labour needs of the industry.¹² His attitude was "you couldn't do anything about it, so why worry?"¹² He'd been through bad times before. In 1925 there were 24,038 men employed giving an output of 11,396 tons; in 1933 only 13,349 men were employed with a decreased output of 7,118 tons; by 1940 there was still considerable unemployment even though the output had risen to 9,550 tons and the employment to 16,812.¹³

Frequent stoppages occurred because 'in general, miners believed that they would only win concessions by industrial struggle'.¹⁴ The failure to come to quick decisions between owners and miners in a strike was demonstrated in a decline of Newcastle's coal export trade between 1935 and 1939.¹⁵ Most of the coal mined at Lambton Borehole Colliery during this time was used at the B H P steel works so this was not a reflection of any action by Mr Doyle and his workmates. A national strike was planned in July 1938 and in September was finally declared. A log of claims consisted of a 30 hour week (five 6-hour days), uniform mine regulations throughout the commonwealth, stringent steps in safety and health precautions and complete abolition of the coal dust problem. 23,000 miners were affected by the strikes, 90% of these men belonged to the Miners' Federation; 8,000 were active Newcastle miners and stood to lose collectively £60,000 per fortnight; 250 were employed at Lambton Borehole Collieries.¹⁶

Safety and health were high on the priority list of the Miners' Federation log of claims. The ever present risk of falling coal, high voltage of electrical equipment, fast moving locomotives and skips were all basic factors. Mr Doyle had worked in knee-deep water for days at a time and because of a change in the seam being worked at Lambton Borehole, there was more water under mechanisation. At Lambton Borehole large steam pipes running through the change rooms did provide hot showers and dried the men's clothes that were hung over them. The water money of 1/6 per shift¹⁷ was little compensation for the cramps, bad back and arthritis which the men suffered as a result of the water. Dust was an acute problem and finally forced Mr Doyle to quit the mines in 1953. Dust from the coal brought the danger of silicosis. Spraying the travelling ways with water increased the humidity which in turn caused various skin diseases.¹⁸ The use of steel skips was designed to eliminate the problem of coal dust dribbling through the timber cracks onto the roads, and a flow of fresh air was increased and controlled to get better ventilation. Compensation for dust could not be claimed by Mr Doyle but it was claimed for two separate accidents caused by falling coal. His head was split open and his arm was severely damaged and the "compo doctor was the only official to show

any interest".¹⁹ Sick pay of one day for every twentyfive days worked was never claimed by Mr Doyle although many of his workmates took the day off whether they were sick or not. Mr Doyle believed that "you were lucky to have a job and you stuck to it".²⁰ A rescue room with ambulance stores, oxygen apparatus and direct telephone communication to every working area was provided at Lambton Borehole.²¹ Sometimes men did not work to safety regulations and caused risk to fellow workers and a loss of time to the industry. For example, the borer's job was to bore eight holes into the work area and insert the powder; if it did not explode work would cease in that area for 24 hours. Often two or three fuses would be inserted together and there was no way of knowing if all the fuses exploded.

Working conditions did improve between 1934 and 1939 and "were the greatest ever made to the advantage of the workers in the mining or any other industry".²² Hours worked in coal mining compared favourably with other industries, and wages paid were much higher.²³ Usual hours for a production shift were from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. The maintenance shifts were from 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. and from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. A meal break of thirty minutes and travelling time to and from the coalface were included in the eight hours calculated for a working day. An average of six hours was actual working time at the coalface.²⁴ Mr Doyle only worked day shift because like many other workers, he did not own a car, he rode a bicycle to Broadmeadow station and caught the train to Redhead. A weekly ticket cost him 6/8 and entitled him to return by the same train at 3.30. The family had owned a T-model Ford but because they could not afford the running costs gave it to relatives. Car registration cost £9.10.00 and a licence cost 10/-.²⁵

Contract wages were paid to men according to their output and effort. Average wage in 1947 at John Darling was £3.0.4 per shift and £2.10.0 per shift at Burwood.²⁶ Mr Doyle and the other miners at Lambton Borehole were paid on a daily rate. In 1935 Mr Doyle's wage was 25/6 per shift.²⁷ Machine men, which included cutters, borers and loader operators received the highest wages in the unit (with the exception of the deputy). In 1946 they received 32/11 and in 1947 the wage was 35/2.²⁸ Under contract wages individual miners were capable of earning more than the deputy whose wages were more stable and not affected by a decline in output. A week's pay for a deputy in 1947 was £9.7.8.²⁹ Many of the miners could not keep pace with the increased output even for the extra wages and were often agreeable to strike action because it meant a rest.³⁰

In 1936 Mr Doyle had married a young lady from Wallsend who was employed as a waitress and counterhand at Wade's Cafe throughout the 1930s. She belonged to the Hotel and Restaurant Union and the wage for an apprentice in 1938 was 14/6 per week. After six months it was 17/6 but Mrs Doyle's wage was 37/6 per week because she had worked there longer than twelve months.³¹ Women were not expected to leave Wade's once they were married but Mrs Doyle chose to leave and managed to budget with no skimping on essentials, especially food. Both Mr and Mrs Doyle emphasised this point several times throughout the interview and even today "always plenty of food",³² is high on the list of priorities.

Mr and Mrs Doyle lived in a modest timber dwelling at Lambton "a little suburb where everyone was happy"³³ and considered themselves very lucky indeed. Not so lucky were those families who lived in the shanty towns and unemployment camps at Platt's Estate at Waratah; "Texas" at Carrington or "Hollywood" at Jesmond. Mr Doyle can recall the little tin or bark humpies on the southern end of Jesmond Park and how people

relied on one tap for water and had no sewerage facilities. Some tended small gardens to supplement their diet and caught the occasional rabbit. His opinion of the upper class was indifferent - "we never had much to do with those people - there wasn't too many of them around".³⁴ "People with money, they kept to their own class in those days".³⁵ Apart from the occasional dance, family wedding or Christmas dinner, Mr Doyle's social life centred around cricket or football. He and his wife never attended the Newcastle Show nor dined out at a restaurant. An outing with their son, born in 1937, was a picnic at the beach or a visit to relatives. Church attendance was a very important part of the family life and the parish priest was a frequent visitor to the household.

Indifference towards politics and world events was also reflected in Mr Doyle's disposition. He never attended political rallies nor discussed politics, and during the meal break, in between jam sandwiches and hot tea, he listened to the usual discussion rather than give an opinion. The fact that his father was interested and concerned with local government made no difference in his behaviour - politics were never discussed at home!³⁶ His family were all Labor voters because they believed in the Labor policy and Mr Doyle "always liked to belong to the working class because...that's as far as (he) wanted to go and (he) was quite happy to be in that class of the workers and friends".³⁷ Little enthusiasm was felt for the Royal Family, the abdication of Prince Edward or the coronation of George VI. The observance of Anzac Day received no response nor did the Melbourne Cup day. Mr Doyle saw nothing to worry about from overseas countries and regarded America and England as the strongest powers.

"....Obviously untrue or inaccurate information is in itself of historical significance since it often provides clues to attitudes".³⁸ Whether time has taken its toll on Mr Doyle's memory or not, his attitudes have survived to the present day. They provide background information for a history of the miners in Newcastle in the late 1930s, "concerned with how they lived, what they thought about life, how they spent their working time and their leisure".³⁹ Mr Doyle's story has been a small part of that history.

FOOTNOTES

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3. Untaped interview.
4. J.C. Docherty, Newcastle: the Making of an Australian City, Sydney 1983, p.74.
5. Interview Tape 1:1, 222-224 and Tape 1:1, 140-142.
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8. "The Newcastle Coalfield Development and Modern Working Practice" B H P Review Feb/April 1939.
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32. Interview with Mrs Doyle, Tape 1:2, 135-138.
33. Interview with Mr Doyle, Tape 1, 393-395.
34. ibid 402-403.
35. ibid 405-406.
36. Interview with Mr Doyle, Tape 1, 436 and 453-458.
37. ibid 419-423.
38. Osborne, New History, p.66.
39. Gollan, Coalmining, p.vii.

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Above the ground in 1938

by Dot Trim

Men employed by the coal mining companies in the late 1930s were faced with frequent stoppages causing loss of wages and unsatisfactory working conditions which in turn contributed to danger to health and safety. Added to these issues was the fear of unemployment: a fear that lingered from memories of the depression years. To the married man with a family to support these issues were a constant source of worry whereas the young single man, while still concerned, may not have been as deeply affected. The latter appears to be the case for Mr A., a single man in the late 1930s.

The third of five children, Mr A. was born at Charlestown and has lived there all his life. The tendency for children to follow in their parents' footsteps is true of the A. family, as all five children have remained in the area. Mr A. was born in Charlestown and lived his entire life there, his two elder boys followed their father into employment at the mines.

Charlestown in its early years was a small mining village. M.T.Daly states that most of Newcastle's modern suburbs commenced as mining towns and grew up independent of the port town.¹ Charlestown is situated six miles from Newcastle, and before transport links improved was considered to be isolated. People settled there to be near to their work place. Mr A. considered his family belonged to the working class as did the majority of the families living at Charlestown in the late 1930s.

Mr A. senior was working in the mines during the depression years and although never unemployed he was lucky to have one or two days work some weeks. Mr A. remembers times were hard during those years but the family thought it fortunate to have a roof over their heads, food on the table and reasonable clothing to wear. The worst of the depression was over by 1934 but for many individuals economic recovery was slow and every wage counted.

In 1933 Mr A., at the age of fourteen, left school after approximately six months' secondary education and commenced work at John Darling colliery as a stable boy. Mr A. said that further education did not make any difference to work opportunities and if a job became available it was best to leave school and take it.

John Darling colliery was opened as a result of an increased demand for coal by the steel industry. A geological survey was carried out in 1922 and John Darling colliery was begun in 1925, first producing coal in 1927.² By 1937 John Darling was the largest mine in the Broken Hill Proprietary group.³

Mr A. obtained his position at the mine through his father, who was a coal miner who had worked at Waratah, Dudley and John Darling collieries. This arrangement of employment was not unusual then and still occurs to some extent even now. Mr A. attended an interview and remembers feeling

a bit strange about his first job which was, in fact, in the stables belonging to the colliery. He remained in the stables until 1940-42 (Mr A. was unsure of the years) and then went into the mine as a shiftman.

Mr A. had six miles to travel to work each day. He worked a broken shift in the stables. Work commenced at 5 a.m. until 10 a.m. then resumed at 3 p.m. until 6 p.m. Because of lack of public transport at those hours Mr A. rode a bike to work; in later years he used a motor bike. Mr A. did not particularly enjoy his work in the stables, but said, "You had a job to do and you did it - beggars can't be choosers".⁴ Conditions were not too bad in the stables. Four people were employed there, three youths and one older man who Mr A. referred to as the 'boss horseman'.

The stables were close by the pit top. Mr A's duties included feeding the horses, cleaning the stables, harnessing the horses and taking them to the pit-top ready for the wheelers each morning. Mr A. said the horses returned to the stables by themselves. To use his words, "glad to get out, poor devils".⁵ After they returned they were hosed down and the boss horseman was responsible for checking the condition of the horses and for deciding if they were fit to go down the mines. Mr A said that the horses sometimes developed bad shoulders or suffered from injuries.

Alan Walker noted that the coal mining industry has always been,⁶ notorious for the extent and the frequency of its industrial upheavals. John Darling colliery was no exception although Mr A. was not always affected by these disputes, his father and older brother were as they were employed in the mine. He recalled that the horses were sometimes used as a reason for going out on strike, for example there was a strike in August 1936 over the condition of a horse sent down the mine. It was said that two horses had been injured and this one was the only horse available. The wheelers objected to the horse and the men left the mine and held a meeting. They would not return until the horse was replaced. Mr A. recollected that the wheelers would sometimes "go out" over the condition of a horse when they wanted a day off.

In July 1937 a wheeler was suspended for ill treating a horse. Mr A. remembers this wheeler as "a hot headed fellow who hit the horse over the head with a sprag".⁸ There was a demonstration by the men followed by a well-prepared stay down which commenced on the 30th July. One hundred and eighty seven workers stayed in, the majority of whom were wheelers. Mr A. recalls the men, women, and children waiting at the gate to the colliery. Police were there to control the crowd and the gates were kept locked until the men came out. There was a big reunion when the men left the mine at 8.10 p.m., 31 July, after thirty seven hours and ten minutes.⁹

This was not the finish of the dispute however; B H P told the men there would be no further work until they would guarantee there would be no more interruptions to operations that year. After a meeting held by the men Mr Hoare (President of the Northern District Miners' Federation) issued a statement saying the real issue of the dispute was not the horse. It was B H P's refusal to consider a log of claims directed towards increasing wages, safety, and employment opportunities. The men refused to guarantee there would be no further interruptions and so B H P closed its three collieries, Burwood, Lambton B and John Darling.¹⁰

The New South Wales Industrial Commission then called a compulsory conference and a compromise was reached.¹¹ The men agreed to guarantee uninterrupted operations and all B H P mines resumed work on 2 August 1937.

At one stage during this period there were nine mines idle, apart from the B H P mines, and four thousand six hundred and thirtyfive men were affected.¹²

Another issue of importance to coal miners in the late 1930s was the trend towards mechanization. Mechanization ranked high in significance as a means to stabilise the industry which had suffered a drastic decline between the years 1925 and 1930.¹³ Alan Walker noted two factors responsible for this drastic decline in N.S.W.: the loss of overseas markets and local disputes.¹⁴

Mechanization, to the extent of the introduction of one coal cutter in 1936 and one coal loader in 1937 in the Victoria Seam tunnel, had already taken place but with this exception up until 1938, John Darling Colliery was mainly worked by contract miners using picks and shovels to fill one ton skips which were hauled by horses underground.¹⁵ The skips were then wound in the shaft to the surface. This method had its drawbacks and from 1938 the mine was progressively changed.¹⁶

The mine workers saw mechanization as an immediate threat. It was generally feared that machinery would cause further unemployment in an industry that was already grossly over-supplied with labour.¹⁷ Mr A. cannot recall feeling that his job was threatened but his father was concerned that complete mechanization would displace him. This fear of displacement, by the men, was to result in a long and bitter struggle.

In 1937 disputes began at particular mines where mechanization was being introduced, notably Burwood and John Darling. Mr A. said he recalls the dispute was over who was going to man the machinery. Gollan recalls that "the company at first insisted that it should choose the men to operate the machines, and the union insisted that seniority should apply".¹⁸

In September 1937, a strike which was to see one thousand men idle and last three months, began. Mr A's father and brother were among those men and as the strike lengthened Mr A. was off work as well - when the pit ponies were sent to pasture on 11 November.

On 11 October the Miners' Federation paid out the first strike pay. Mr A. recalls this strike pay was only available to married men suffering severe hardship with families to support. He added that when the men returned to work they had to pay this money back to the Miners' Federation.

Mr. Jefferies (B H P Colliery General Superintendent) issued a statement in November saying there would be no loss of hands at John Darling colliery due to mechanization for eighteen months.¹⁹ Gollan states that there was no complete resolution of the difference between the company and the union. The union finally accepted a modified seniority principle and the men returned to work on 7 December 1937.²⁰

Working conditions had long been an issue in the coal mines. Mr A. saw his employment in the stables as a stepping stone to joining his father and brother in the mines. Mr A. recalled he felt the 1938 dispute over the log of claims to improve working hours, safety, and health hazards was of importance to him as these issues would one day also affect him. On 7 September 1938 twenty three thousand men stopped work; including dependants one hundred thousand persons were affected. With the exception of one or two privately owned mines every coal mine in Australia was idle for six weeks.

During these strikes families survived by "ticking up" goods at the local shops. Mr A. said the business people would stand by the miners until the strike was over and they were able to pay up. "You didn't feel any different to anyone else because we were all in the same boat around here".²¹ People stood by and helped each other as much as possible. Mr A's mother had £20 and she would lend £1 at a time to friends and neighbours around the area and they would repay her when they could.²² In exchange for this service the people would bring Mrs A. home produce.²² The A. family, unlike many others, did not have a backyard garden or keep poultry.

From earliest times²³ mine owners had been indifferent to the health and safety of the miners.²³ Mr A. said he did not consider the owners to be indifferent at the time. He said these issues were hard to remedy until more modern mining methods were introduced. He could not recall many²⁴ serious accidents at John Darling in the late 1930s, "maybe a couple killed", but he was not certain.

Coal dust and dust artificially introduced into the mines was a menace to the health of those employed underground. Mr A. said there wasn't any underground plumbing for water to spray the dust in the 1930s. His elder brother was employed as a 'water bailer'. His job was to take a fortyfour gallon drum of water down the mine and spray the travelling ways. Mr A. recalls his father and brother were lucky as their health did not suffer from working down the mines. Many miners suffered severe deterioration of health from pulmonary diseases. Mr A. remembers some men had difficulty breathing and coughed a lot as though they had tuberculosis.

In retrospect Mr A. and his family faced the same issues in their workplace in the late 1930s as the mine workers all over Australia. There was a constant struggle between the employers and the employees. The employers fought for more efficiency and greater production, the employees fought for what they considered to be their rights. Judge Drake-Brockman described the history of coal mining in Australia as "an unbridled and unregulated contest between employers and employees...."²⁵. The years from 1937 to 1940 saw a number of minor and major strikes but through these stoppages the miners achieved the greatest changes ever made to their advantage.²⁶ To gain these changes the workers had to put up with inconvenience and loss of wages often resulting in material hardship.

In 1938 Mr A. was nineteen years old, single and working above ground at John Darling Colliery. He felt that he was lucky to have a job and had an obligation to his employers and his parents. Even though the issues the coal miners faced did not always directly affect Mr A., he was indirectly affected through his father and older brother. Being young and employed above ground did not give Mr A. an immunity to the struggle of the mineworkers.

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24. Interview taped 13.7.83, tape 1 side A count 311.
25. Cited in Gollan, Coalminers of N.S.W., p.214.
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"Moderne - Come Back to Earth!" : A View of an Architect
and Architecture in Newcastle in 1938

by Paul Munro

In the official souvenir programme "150 Years in Australia", published for the sesqui-centenary in 1938, the Premier of New South Wales, B.S.B. Stevens, wrote, "In 1938, Australia will celebrate the achievement of its first one hundred and fifty years since Phillip. Our mines and our factories yield an increasing quota of wealth, while from the fertile hinterland the products of the soil pour overseas in a ceaseless stream to feed and clothe the peoples of older lands".¹ One is left with the impression that Australia had been booming and continued to boom yet, in Newcastle at least, the depression had not yet finished. Workers in Newcastle in 1938 were faced with conditions not very different from those which had existed for the preceding decade. Mr G, an architect, had recently returned home from England to "start again".² This paper seeks to outline some of the issues he faced at that time and the difficulties he had in re-establishing himself in the workplace.

Mr G's impressions are quite valuable as he had returned from England and Europe in 1937, a time when many developments in architecture had been taking place in Europe. First, an overview of Newcastle at that time. It is difficult to put a date on the end of the depression. Wendy Lowenstein suggests that you don't know just when it started or when it ended - only when it was over for you!³ The most reliable figures available show unemployment in the last quarter of 1939 and unemployment in the first quarter of 1929 as being equal at 9.3 percent.⁴ Even so figures for 1938 were showing a marked improvement on previous years.⁵ Newcastle at this time was still on the road to recovery. The working class in particular was still having a hard time making ends meet and even though things did not appear to be getting better, they were, but very slowly.⁶

Mr G was educated in Newcastle and having completed his "qualifying certificate" he decided to go into architecture. His father was an engineer which may have helped him to secure a position for his son with a local firm of architects. Mr G tells the story of the then organist in Newcastle Cathedral offering him advice and recommending that he go to speak with a certain firm of architects for advice. Mr G worked with this firm as a student for a number of years, gained his articles and became an associate architect in 1923. In 1929 he became a Fellow of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. About 1923 Mr G went into practice on his own. He continued in this practice until 1929 when he decided to go to England with a contingent of Boy Scouts. Mr G had been active in the Boy Scout Movement at this time and accompanied the Australian contingent as a member of staff. He thought that it would do him good to go overseas and he decided before his departure that he would stay on in England and seek work. He gained employment with a firm of prominent London architects. This firm specialised in the design and construction of cinemas and theatres. The firm did not confine its activities to England but also became involved in the construction of cinemas throughout parts of Europe. It was during this period that Mr G gained first hand knowledge of the "new" architectural movements (such as the International Style) that were growing during the early to mid 1930's.

While Mr G had been overseas his practice had remained in limbo and on his return he virtually took up where he had left off. He had been well known to the Newcastle community before his departure and therefore

it was not as if he was setting up a practice for the first time in an unknown locality. Many people were curious to see what he had learned while away, several interesting commissions resulted, and several examples of International style dwellings were built in Newcastle.

One of the first comments made by Mr G about the depression was that it was worse in Australia than it had been in England. The table supplied in Lowenstein⁸ compares unemployment in seven countries during the depression. Both Australia and the United Kingdom had peak unemployment in 1932. The five year average percentage showed Australia at 28.1% (23.4%) and the United Kingdom at 22.1% (19.2% average). Using this data Australia seemed worse off during the period 1930-1934. By Australian standards Newcastle lagged behind in recovery which perhaps prompted Mr G's comment. Also this comment may be influenced by the fact that in London Mr G had been in the employ of a large firm of architects whereas on his return to Australia he had to seek out clients himself for his work to continue. He said that it was not easy to find work initially though other architects had provided encouragement. He had gained publicity in the local press and perhaps some people thought, "Mr G's back, we'd better give him a job"¹⁰ From this point Mr G said that he survived alright and "got some jobs".¹⁰ These jobs were obviously enough to support his family.

Mr G saw the conditions in Newcastle in the field of architecture as being difficult yet he was able to exist in his practice and did not have to merge with another firm of architects. Conditions of work at that time were "not too bad", as Mr G remembers. Of course one must consider that by virtue of his practice Mr G had the opportunity to regulate conditions anyway. He had a draughtsman assisting him and they both worked basically nine to five, five days a week. In reality he worked much longer hours, returning to the office after dinner to complete a job and working weekends. Mr G said that he always paid his staff and adhered to conditions set out in the relevant awards and determinations laid down at the time. Two weeks holiday were allowed each year. Before the World War 2 it was much easier to gain co-operation from builders, and works were usually completed on time because of the shortage of work within the building industry. Lowenstein makes several references to the fact that builders often undercut each other fiercely and that award rates were rarely paid because of the availability of tradesmen and labourers.¹¹ Given the length of the depression in Newcastle this condition still applied in 1937-38, and obviously the cutting of contracts would extend to architects as well.

During the interview I asked Mr G whether he was aware of any government financed public works that had taken place in Newcastle from 1937 to 1939. He said that a lot of unemployed people were used to make new cement roads and streets during that period. He also said that unemployed people were used to maintain public buildings such as the painting of the Ocean Baths. The types of public works undertaken at that time depended upon the organising body, state or local government. These "relief works" were designed to employ the largest number of men possible. Municipal bodies were encouraged to promote schemes which would normally have been financed by loans. The co-operative councils were usually given a grant equal to the amount loaned. The works undertaken included road construction, municipal buildings, sale-yards, electric lighting extensions, swimming baths and surfing accommodation.¹² Works of this nature were undertaken in Newcastle though they gave little work to local architects.

Mr G seems to have received quite a lot of support from his professional peers on his return to Newcastle. The fact that he and his family had been well known in the Newcastle community before going abroad assisted on his return to the Newcastle professional arena. Mr G is a

member and past president of the Newcastle Businessmen's Club as well as being a member of other service organisations. He seems to have taken part in many business, social and cultural activities that occurred in Newcastle. He spoke of travelling exhibitions, concerts and displays and as well he attended Sydney social gatherings. Mauldon pointed out that people in Newcastle in commercial and professional pursuits lacked a corporate outlook.¹³ Perhaps this was true at the time of Mauldon's writing but by 1938 changes had taken place which point to the non-wage earning class becoming more and more assimilated and beginning to become involved in the development of cultural activities and social service within Newcastle. In 1938 activities set down to celebrate 150 years in Australia ran for the whole month of February in Newcastle and included such activities as band championships, golf tournaments, processions, pageants, surf carnivals, exhibitions, congresses, balls, dinner and sports carnivals.¹⁴ The community had organised itself on a cultural level at least by this time. Docherty claims that as a consequence of the lack of local control over the city's economy, and profits being directed away from Newcastle, these conditions have bred a strong tradition of self-help in Newcastle.¹⁵ Certainly by 1938 it appears that co-operation between community leaders and industrial workers did exist. Indeed by 1947 the community was proud of its community ties and its self-help in the proposed building of a cultural centre, "a gift from the citizens of their city".¹⁶

It became quite clear that Mr G and family were never poorly off and this is perhaps why to them the depression period both in England and in Australia does not seem radically different from any other period. The fact that people who were not themselves unemployed tended to ignore or dismiss the unemployed and their related problems is borne out in many of the interviews contained in "Weevils in the Flour".¹⁷ Mr G had always had a car; before he went to England, in London and again on his return to Newcastle. The car has long been an indicator of the standard of living. Certainly an imported expensive English car would indicate a higher standard of living. Car ownership in the late 1930's had barely passed the 1929 level in Australia.¹⁸

The architecture of Newcastle during the mid to late 1930's was not at all characteristic of the approach to architecture in Newcastle before that period or since. Generally the architectural styles used had been very traditional, conservative and almost backward. Then during the late 1930's a spate of almost avant-garde buildings appear. They were mainly constructed in the International or Art Deco styles. Rosemary Auchmuty points out the backward looking architecture up to this period and gives examples of the offices of the Newcastle Herald in Bolton Street (1929) and Tyrrell House in Zara Street (1925) as being not recognisably interwar but harking back to an earlier age.²⁰ This seems to be the attitude taken by many local architects. Mr G agrees because when questioned as to his attitude to the moderne or art deco styles; his reply was that he didn't like it and that they "should come back to earth".²¹

Mr G's reaction to Nesca House, Newcastle's best example of international style, was "it's alright".²² Nesca House was designed by Emil Sodersten, a leading Australian architect, in association with local architects, Pitt and Merewether. Construction was completed in 1939. Nesca House had been a try out of one of the modern European styles that Sodersten had experienced while overseas in 1935.²³ This building is classified by the National Trust and its preservation is felt to be essential.²⁴ The other surprising piece of architecture in Newcastle is the City of Newcastle incinerator in Parry Street. The incinerator was designed by Mr. F.A. Scorer, a Newcastle architect and won the Sir John Sulman Award in 1938.²⁵ Many of the buildings that were viewed as being avant-garde at the time were designed by architects from

outside Newcastle. Therefore this award was indeed an honour for a Newcastle architect as the award was made for buildings throughout Australia. The Edgeworth David Building at the Technical College, Tighes Hill, designed by the State Government Architect and opened in September 1938 was also nominated for the Sulman Award but at a later date.²⁶ Another surprising building is Peter Gannon's Nurses' Home at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Waratah. This building has very beautiful art deco features and was built in 1939.²⁷

Many buildings undertaken during the thirties were quite innovative in design and reflected the art deco style. This was a departure from the traditional and staid architectural style usually found in Newcastle. Perhaps the finest example of art deco in Newcastle is the Great Northern Hotel in Scott Street. Other examples include the Royal cinema in Hunter Street and the CML building also in Hunter Street. The dominant domestic style during the twenties and thirties was the Californian bungalow. Blocks of flats in Newcastle tended to be the exception rather than the rule. Those flats built tended to be two storied and contained few flats. The exception is Segenhoe, Wolfe Street, one of the only large blocks of flats built during that period outside Sydney.²⁸

For Newcastle the late thirties had brought great change in style during a period when few buildings were undertaken. The acceptance of these changes helped to attain the maturation of Newcastle as the second city; an effect that was not recognised until the post Second World War period.

For Mr G the late thirties meant a return home, a picking up where he had left off seven years before. It did not seem that he had suffered greatly during the depression years. He remembers most of the time with enthusiasm, particularly the time that he spent overseas. If anything he had escaped the depression virtually unharmed. He had acquired many skills while overseas though he appears to have not had the opportunity to use them.

FOOTNOTES

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