



The University of Newcastle  
History Club  
Department of History

**STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS  
IN  
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY**

No. 7

1982

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## PREFACE

The 1982 issue of Student Research Papers continues the practice began last year of publishing the best first year essays on aspects of life and work in Newcastle 1938. As explained in the last issue, the History Department of the University, along with colleagues from the C.A.E., is involved in research and writing for the 1938 volume of The Australian Bicentennial History Project. We have been training selected students to interview Novocastrians about life in 1938 from an interview schedule arranged by the National Oral History Project connected with the 1938 volume.

Ten students were selected this year to carry out at least one interview (one student Barbara Gaudry interviewed four people) and then, on the basis of controlled background reading, to write an interpretative essay on the problems deriving from work (or the lack of it) which faced a family during 1938. The results, like last year, were varied and many of the same problems were encountered despite our ironing out many of the wrinkles associated with the 1981 project. These papers are valuable mainly as training exercises for our first year students. We have continued to publish them in this form because, in spite of their incomplete nature, they help to give outsiders a glimpse of the rhythms of private experience associated with life in Newcastle and the coalfields.

The papers by Gaudry and Owens deal with the lives of men in Newcastle heavy industry in 1938. Payne's paper also deals with that work experience but adds a dimension to do with the Anglican church and its handling of industrial issues. The effects of religion, of Primitive Methodism specifically, on the lifestyle and expectations of a mining family at Dudley is also highlighted in Curtis's essay. Finally, Deacon examines reflectively the meaning of a single person's life experience in 1938 within the wider pattern of 'history'.

These are tentative steps towards 'people's history'. We hope the Student Research Papers will contribute a little to the data for a social history of this area and with it, to the story of what it meant to be an Australian in 1938.

Sheilah Gray  
Peter Hempenstall  
Margaret Henry

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CONTENTS

'IN A JOB' IN 1938: A REFLECTION OF DEPRESSION EXPERIENCES	by Barbara Gaudry	1
A TROUBLESHOOTER AND HIS ESTABLISHMENT CHURCH	by Murray Payne	8
STEEL OR STARVE	by Susan Owen	15
ISLINGTON 1938: A SINGLE LIFE WITHIN GENERAL HISTORY	by Brett Deacon	20
WORK AND LIFE IN DUDLEY 1938: EVERYTHING WAS ON THE UP AND UP	by Annette Curtis	27

## A TROUBLESHOOTER AND HIS ESTABLISHMENT CHURCH

by Murray Payne

Ever since Governor Phillip was instructed to give 'due observance to religion'<sup>1</sup> to the colony of New South Wales, the Church of England has dominated Australian church history and maintained a certain influence within our community. In 1938 as the largest religious group within Newcastle, the church claimed approximately 40% of the population as its adherents. In this industrial city the 'establishment church' attempted to grapple with industrial social problems such as unemployment in an indirect manner. Most of the Anglican churches were financially secure and had a conforming influence in their local community and especially within their youth work. The church's bishop was a man of stature who allowed a certain diversity of opinion to prevail despite the conservative nature of most church people. Since the majority of its members were industrialists, the church's success or failure depended largely on how it related to the working man. This paper is based on the reflections of Harold A., an industrial tradesman and active layman of the Anglican church in 1938.

Work at Stewart and Lloyds Ltd., (subsidiary of BHP), was very steady in 1938 as production was increasing rapidly. Harold A. was employed as a shift electrician and was nicknamed a 'troubleshooter', a man who could keep the welding machinery going so that production deadlines could be maintained.<sup>2</sup> This was very important to the employers in 1938 and for such electricians a generous bonus scheme operated to keep "breakdowns" to a minimum. Since the general recovery in BHP in 1933 production had gained a certain momentum due to increasing mechanisation. This was part of a deliberate speed-up programme by BHP which offered employees a bonus incentive for overtime work. Many trade unions did not welcome the speed-up rationalisation programme, which was enforced on workers. The Trades Hall Council pointed to its negative aspects: the low basic wage, the increasing accident rates and the general physical degeneration of ordinary workers were all attacked. According to trades unionists the management was able to take advantage of poor union membership to push through this programme.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this Trades Hall report, Harold A., both as a tradesman and a shop steward for his union, was able to describe the general working conditions and employer relationships as being "generally good".<sup>4</sup> However, he did admit that on the factory floor there existed a "fairly distinctive division between tradesmen and non-tradesmen".<sup>5</sup> There was some resentment felt against tradesmen because of their better working conditions deriving from their stronger trade union which enjoyed a greater access to management. It is easy to ignore the fact, even today, that there is this delineation of occupational status amongst factory floor workers. How much this extends outside the factory depends largely on individuals. Classification of workers' religious beliefs were often regarded as being indicative of their politics, and men would say "He's a 'tike' (Catholic) and a Laborite", or "He's a 'prod' and a Liberal".<sup>6</sup> So to some extent a worker's religion was part of his identity.

In 1938 St. Philip's Anglican Church in Waratah had a large membership which attempted to fulfil the spiritual and social needs of its people within the community. The church was regarded as being 'typical' of many suburban parishes in that it funded itself adequately and was thought to<sup>7</sup> exert a stabilising influence in this orderly upper middle class suburb. It had been served by a long list of competent ministers and was able to

afford a curate as well as a rector. In December 1937 the church was able to undertake a building programme to extend the church size and Bishop Batty was invited to bless the foundation stone of the extensions. The Bishop "congratulated the people of St. Philip's on the work they had undertaken and expressed his pleasure in the fact that the great majority of money necessary for the work was already in hand".<sup>8</sup> The successful financial management of the parish by the church laypeople was no doubt indicative of their middle class background, and many industrial tradesmen of the parish earned above the average wage.

During this time the church also catered for social needs of its members either within the church groups or by encouraging informal social gatherings. On such social occasions there was no alcohol available as the majority of the parish were temperance supporters. This was an unusual situation for, as J. Sloggett points out, the Church of England in Newcastle was not generally supportive towards the temperance movement, much to the annoyance of many non-conformist temperance supporters.<sup>10</sup> Probably this exception was due to the tendency of the parish to identify with 'evangelical tradition'.

Although many women were active in church life in 1938, leadership was largely a male prerogative. Women in the parish were not only active in women's groups such as the Mothers' Union and the Women's Guild, but through these organisations they were expected to be the main fund raisers.<sup>11</sup> "All the women in the Anglican Church raise the money and the men spend it!".<sup>11</sup> This statement on the role of women in the Anglican Church reinforces the view of sexual inequality that many perceived within the churches generally. It can be argued that the churches have regarded women as having "to fulfil a discrete and traditional function".<sup>12</sup> It appears that most women within Waratah parish were happy to keep within their "traditional function" and let their husbands stand for the parish parochial council. Although no women thought of standing for such positions, there were many husband and wife teams involved in the parish council's work. One woman, a Mrs. Spens, commenting in the Anglican national paper on a patronising report on the ministry of women, thought that "it might be for the advantage of the church to allow women more scope for the exercise of their gifts, and to attach more weight to their opinion".<sup>13</sup> Along with the local parish, Newcastle diocese generally appeared to consider a woman's opinion to be of lesser importance than a man's, for in 1939 among the lay representatives in the Church's governing body, the Synod, there were no women.

The Anglican Church in 1938 played a large part in youth activities. Throughout the depression years and late into the 1930s, youth unemployment remained very high in industrial cities like Newcastle. Many of the parish clergy organised social welfare groups to help unemployed people with food and finance. Through its Synod the Anglican Church in Newcastle voiced its concern about youth unemployment and the need for increased government assistance. In 1937 it urged the Premier to introduce legislation to prevent the dismissal of young people from occupations due to age.<sup>14</sup> Synod set up a committee to make recommendations and enquiries about this whole problem. Like many church leaders it was "convinced that the spiritual and moral deterioration of youth consequent upon unemployment is far more serious than any economic loss".<sup>15</sup> Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s the Synod urged government action but its recommendations were largely ignored. At parish level, however, the church appeared to be more effective for it "provided a very necessary part of the activities for youth".<sup>16</sup> The Church of England Boys' Society, the Girls' Friendly Society, Scouts, Guides and various recreational activities and programmes were provided for at many suburban parishes. Although

largely restricted to Anglican youth, they did provide activities for a wide range of children and teenagers. Being part of the largest church group in Newcastle the influence of these clubs had quite a marked effect on suburbs like Waratah. As many parents did not take annual holidays, the parish church organised holiday camps for children and young people. The churches generally, along with the YMCA organised all the sports events between the various church youth clubs before sports clubs themselves took over this role.<sup>17</sup> "There was no trouble in filling the lists for these clubs, either!".<sup>17</sup> This situation continued into the 1940s when, after the War, there again appeared an increased demand for youth activities.

The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle was the first diocese in Australia to form a branch of the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF) but its life span was short. In his presidential address to Synod in 1936, Bishop Batty mentioned the formation of a branch of the ICF based on the Fellowship's methods of work in Britain. Its main aim was to "promote the study of social and industrial questions from the point of view of the Christian religion and in the light of its fundamental principles".<sup>18</sup> The ICF sought to stimulate public discussion on complex matters which conflicted with the Christian faith. So its work was evangelistic and educational. In 1937 the organising secretary, Rev. R.S.Lee, reported that when he had visited many different centres, both rural and industrial, to preach or to lecture on Christianity and social and industrial problems he had found much interest. The ICF committee had also concentrated on arousing the public conscience on the plight of the unemployed.<sup>19</sup> However, by 1938 the ICF committee secretary reported disappointing results. Although Lee had delivered a number of addresses which caused some interest at the time, any attempt to establish local centres for ICF work had failed. In trying to discern some reason for this failure, the committee made a perceptive comment on the apparent apathy of many church people towards social and industrial issues. The committee felt it "a very serious symptom of spiritual deadness that such an important aspect of the church's work should find so few active workers".<sup>20</sup> This symptom of "spiritual deadness" was much later identified in a report by the Diocese of Newcastle which showed the church losing members, particularly between the years 1937-1947.<sup>21</sup> Harold A. felt that the ICF was largely just for academics and that it did not relate to the ordinary industrial worker.<sup>22</sup> This appears to be correct, and along with other evidence shows the church was losing support, particularly amongst poorer working class people. In the 1920s this is also apparent in A. Walker's social survey of Cessnock, a coalmining town.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising that in later years the ICF appears to have been abandoned by the church, for most industrialists perceived it to be largely an academic exercise.

Bishop Francis De Witt Batty was a man of great ability who made a significant contribution to the life of the church within the Diocese of Newcastle and within the wider Anglican Church in Australia. In Batty, the church "had not only a sound theologian, but also a political philosopher of no mean power".<sup>24</sup> Despite a certain shyness, Batty won the respect of many people for his fairness and academic ability. Like many church leaders he saw the problem of this turbulent period as being spiritual and not economic. To this end he sought to strengthen the church's organisation. Through his pragmatic approach in addresses and writing, he attempted to direct his laymen and clergy in political matters. A true conservative, Batty, along with many Anglican and Protestant churches, tended to support the non-Labor parties. A staunch churchman,



Batty kept his reforming zeal largely within the church structure and it is here that he was an active innovator in two areas. Firstly, within the area of the constitution of the church he wanted the Australian Church to be autonomous. Secondly, he encouraged the church to be more active and accomplished in religious broadcasting, and became a popular broadcaster himself. His addresses were broadcast locally and Harold A. felt that they did have an effect on the general churchman and possibly paved the way for improved ecumenical relations.<sup>25</sup> Batty's openness to different community groups and his attention to detail were evident in that he personally invited industrialists from the Trades Hall Council to hear his live broadcasts, and to have dialogue with him.<sup>26</sup> His personalised approach and kindness won him affection from individuals who got to know him personally. For Harold A., "He was one of the greats!"<sup>27</sup> Despite an openness of mind on many issues, Batty did not come to fully understand the need to allow the Communion times in most parishes to be more flexible so as to accommodate the industrial shift workers. This he failed to understand until much later in his career, and it indicated, perhaps, a lack of realism on his part towards industrial workers.

As S.R.Gray points out, not all the Newcastle Anglican clergy were in tune with Batty, but the comprehensive nature of the church allowed for individual clergy to follow an independent course.<sup>28</sup> Ernest Burgmann, warden of St. John's College, Morpeth, from 1925 to 1934, and Roy Lee, his vice-warden, were two such men. Although Burgmann left the diocese to become Bishop of Goulburn in 1934, many memories of his work among the unemployed and within theological and adult education remained in 1938. Strongly criticised for his 'socialist' views, his idealism encouraged many workers. Harold A. thought Bishop Burgmann was the first bishop who "seemed to produce for the Australian the idea that there could be an Australian culture for the church".<sup>29</sup> Lee, as the organising secretary for ICF, shared Burgmann's critical view of the capitalist system. He also shared with Burgmann a sympathy with the unemployed, and a desire for a more broadly based education programme for the clergy. When Burgmann left St. John's College, Lee was bypassed for the position of warden, for the more conservative T.M.Robinson. Remaining as vice-warden, Lee continued Burgmann's style of work through his addresses and writings. However, some conservative clergy found his 'socialist' ideas rather unpalatable, and this became obvious at a College Council meeting in 1938. By then a financial crisis had developed at the College, and the Council felt that they could not afford to employ another lecturer for the College. Robinson stated that he found it impossible to carry on with Lee as his only assistant, and expressed the opinion that Lee was not the right person to lecture students on biblical subjects or Christian doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Another member of the Council thought that Lee's services should be dispensed with, mainly on the grounds "(a) that his presence at the College is and always will be a source of unrest" and "(b) that his cost to College funds is too great".<sup>31</sup> Not surprisingly in 1938 Lee left Newcastle for study leave in Britain where he remained to become a prominent figure in Anglican church life. With hindsight many people became aware of the valid contribution Lee had made as a social and theological thinker within the diocese of Newcastle.

For most Novacastrians like Harold A. the 'establishment church' in 1938 showed a diversity of character. This reflects the church's comprehensiveness, which has always been its strength, allowing a diversity of opinion within its structure. Considering the church's historical link with the State, and given its conservative support from business and professional people as well as industrial leaders during the depression years, it is not surprising then, that the Anglican Church reflected the status quo in Newcastle, and reacted against those who

threatened it. Although at parish level the church saw its task largely as having a moral influence in the community, its activities among the youth possibly had a palliative effect on the miseries of youth unemployment. Then, although Bishop Batty was respected as a man of strong leadership within the Newcastle community and the wider church, many working class people saw the church as being indifferent to their needs. S.R.Gray's criticism that the church as a whole did little to influence the government in favour of the depression victims, or to earn working class support for itself, is largely justifiable.<sup>32</sup> However, the fact that some local attempts to meet the material and social needs of the depression victims were successful, should be kept in perspective. For Harold A., the failure of the church in general to come to grips with the city's industrial identity, and the needs of its workers, was a major disappointment. Unlike its counterpart in Britain, the Australian Anglican Church vision of society seemed to have diminished to become largely a reactionary and moralising force. However, for all its weaknesses and strengths the Anglican Church in 1938 showed a certain resilience in making a contribution to the life of the people in Newcastle.

FOOTNOTES

1. J.Woolmington, Religion in Early Australia, New England, 1976.
2. Interview with Harold A. tape 1. side A, count 361.
3. The Workers Case Against the BHP, Trades Hall Council Report 1936,  
G.Bass, Secretary.
4. Interview Tape 1. side B, count 103.
5. Interview Tape 1. side B, count 093.
6. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 311.
7. Interview Tape 1. side B, count 229.
8. Newcastle Diocesan Churchman, February 1938, p.110.
9. Harold A. as an electrician, earned £10.0.0 per week, when the  
average man's wage for 1938 was £4.15.0 per week.
10. J. Sloggett, 'Freedom, control or prohibition: a history of the temperance  
movement in Newcastle and mining townships 1860-1901',  
Honours Thesis, University of Newcastle, 1979, p.33.
11. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 244.
12. A.Summers, Damned Whores and God's Police, Melbourne, 1975, p.433.
13. W.Spens, 'The ministry of women: an address to the Church Union Council'.  
The Australian Church Quarterly September 24, 1937, p.30.
14. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1937, p.99.
15. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1940, p.200.
16. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 152.
17. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 146.
18. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1936, p.92.
19. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1937, p.174.
20. Diocese of Newcastle Yearbook, 1938, p.169.
21. Diocese of Newcastle, 'Report on the Decline in Church-going', 1951.
22. Interview with Harold A., 13th August, 1982.
23. A.Walker, Coaltown: a Social Survey of Cessnock, Melbourne, 1948, chapter 4.
24. A.Elkin, The Diocese of Newcastle, Sydney 1955, p.678.
25. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 339.
26. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 369.
27. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 476.
28. S.R.Gray, "Social aspects of the depression in Newcastle 1929-1934".  
M.A. Thesis, University of Newcastle, 1981.
29. Interview Tape 2. side B, count 509.
30. Minutes of St. John's College Council meeting, February 1938; St. John's  
College correspondence (unpublished) 1st January 1931-  
November 1939, Diocese of Newcastle Archives.
31. Ibid.
32. S.R.Gray, op.cit.

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