

LEIGH JOHNSTON

OPEN FOUNDATION - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

TUESDAY 1 - 3P.M.

ASSIGNMENT 6

CARDIFF RAILWAY WORKSHOPS

SUMMARY

Cardiff Workshops has always been well known in the Newcastle area for both the excellent workmanship and community spirit shown at the workshops. The employees have not only upheld their reputation for hard work, ingenuity and skill but they have also contributed to the community through their many social clubs and sporting teams. Cardiff has also been at the forefront in union relations and made definite contributions to the war effort. The talents of many famous local personalities have been encouraged at the Workshops. Although the buildings have changed since its inception, the essence of the Workshops will always remain the same.

Newcastle's original railway workshop was located in Newcastle at Honeysuckle Point in the 1800's, but by 1925 the growth of the city and the building of harbour facilities on the waterfront made it impossible to expand the existing workshop and a new site was needed.¹ In 1926, 172 acres were purchased at Cardiff from the Newcastle, Wallsend Coal Company for £13,000 which met the requirements of rail access and closeness to city and residential centres. By mid 1926 designing was complete and construction began of a building covering 150,725 square feet using steel frames with brick walls six feet above the floor level, above which was fibro-cement sheeting. The facility cost £201,000,² housed a Blacksmith Shop, Boiler and Copper Shops and Machine Fitting and Erecting Shops, and was equipped with the latest machinery. The official opening took place on 1st March, 1928 and the facilities were fully operational by this time. Within the first 12 months work output at Cardiff had far surpassed that of the Honeysuckle yard.³

There have been a number of name changes since its beginnings. Initially named Cockle Creek Workshops, the title changed to Cardiff Railway Workshops soon after. The name was later changed to Cardiff Locomotive Workshops and although now officially titled Cardiff Maintenance Centre, it will always be known as Cardiff Workshops to the community and employees.

Repairs and servicing of locomotives has always been the main function of Cardiff Workshops. With the planned closure of Eveleigh Workshops and the already closed Civic Workshops, Cardiff will be the main servicing centre for State Rail Authority and expansion of the facility is

1. Newcastle Morning Herald 18 May, 1925

2. Allan J Hughes, 50th Anniversary Cardiff Workshops, Newcastle, Pg. 8

3. Ibid.

already on the drawing board.⁴ In the steam era Cardiff overhauled the majority of the 34, 35, 53, 55, 59 and 60 class engines. 25th February, 1946 saw the test run of the first locomotive made at Cardiff - a C38 class engine(3807). Over the next three years a further twelve 38class engines were made at Cardiff.⁵ The last steam engine to be overhauled was 3820 released on 13 December, 1968.⁶

The change from steam to diesel electric locomotive brought many changes. Different techniques were used in maintenance and overhauling of the new engines and different tradesmen were needed to meet these new demands - fewer Boilermakers were needed, more Electricians. The first diesel electric 4805 entered Cardiff on 13 July, 1960 and Cardiff began the servicing of the 48 and 49 class engines. After 1972 the 47 and 45 class were also serviced at Cardiff. A general overhaul requires all equipment to be removed from the locomotive, stripped and reconditioned before the locomotive is reassembled. The body work is fully restored and painted, and extensive testing is done before the unit returns to service.⁷

The layout of the buildings has changed and a number of new buildings have been added over the 61years the Workshops have been operating. The amount of power necessary for locomotive repairs made the installation of an acetylene generator vital; this gave the workshops independence from outside power supplies. It was situated in an asbestos cement building behind the Boiler Machine Shop,⁸

4. Taped Interview - Douglas Bradford.

5. Newcastle... 2 March, 1946

6. Hughes , 50th ... Pg 24

7. Ibid Pg 25

8. Ibid Pg 12

but is no longer in use. World War Two brought changes to the Workshops when an ammunition factory was built at Rutherford and a modern tool room was built at Cardiff Workshops to supply the dies, tools and jigs needed for the factory.⁹ 1945 brought apprentice training to the Workshops and a training compound, referred to as "Beñlsen Horror Camp", was built in the traverser road at the north end of the shops. As the locomotives changed from steam to diesel electric the facilities were altered to meet the new demands. These are but a few of the changes in the Workshops buildings and even they have since been changed - the apprentices were later moved into the tool room extension when their compound area was needed for other expansions.¹⁰

The staff at Cardiff Workshops have been known for their ingenuity; new techniques and equipment have been developed at the workshops that have saved the State Rail Authority millions of dollars. An example is the welding machine Cardiff fitter and machinist Barry Wells helped construct out of spare and surplus equipment from Cardiff for \$12,000. The machine came into operation in October, 1982 and saved State Rail close to \$1million a year on the cost of wagon wheel sets.¹¹

The Workshops have employed many hundreds of local workers. Although there are only 437 workers currently employed at Cardiff, there were as many as 1200 employees in the 1950's.¹² In recent years women have been accepted at the Workshops. By June, 1986 Cardiff had a higher percentage of females on its staff than other workshops. They have been employed as Boilermakers helpers, workshop labourers, electrical mechanics, fitters, fitters assist-

9. Hughes , 50th ... Pg 12

10. Ibid Pg 13

11. Anon. "Cardiffs Wheels Save a Fortune " State Wide July, 1986

12. Taped Interview - Douglas Bradford

ants as well as apprentices and office staff.¹³ There are currently 12 women employed at Cardiff.

The training of apprentices has been important to the Workshops. The trainees are always of a very high standard and many have achieved great success in later lives; Merv. Hunter, Sam Jones, Jim Lockhart, Len Howell and Denis Stewart are just some who served their apprenticeships at Cardiff.¹⁴ Approximately 1000 apprentices have trained at Cardiff since its beginning with 54 currently serving their time.

A Yard Committee (later called Shop Committee) was set up at Cardiff in the late 1930's consisting of representatives from most unions connected with the Workshops to resolve differences between unions within the Workshops quickly and with minimum disruptions. The committee was very successful, and along with Eveleigh Workshops S Committee, was used as an example in the formation of other committees throughout the State; a Council of Shop Committees was formed with representatives of each committee, submitting claims to the Minister of Transport for the improvement of conditions for railway workers.¹⁵ During World War Two especially, the Yard Committee had considerable influence on decisions made at the Workshops. Some unions which have been associated with Cardiff Workshops are Amalgamated Engineering Union, Australian Society of Engineers, Boiler-makers and Blacksmith Unions, Building Workers Industrial Union, Plumbers Union, Australian Railway Union and National Union of Railwaymen.¹⁶

13. Anon. 'Women at Cardiff' State Wide June 1986

14. Hughes , 50th ... Pg 36

15. Ibid Pg 32

16. Ibid Pg 31

Cardiff Workshops have been known not only for their excellent workmanship but also for their community spirit; many sporting teams and social clubs have been formed at Cardiff. The Male Voice Choir, Brass Band, cricket, soccer, cycling, rugby league, darts and table tennis teams have all represented the Workshops admirably. The Male Voice Choir was formed on 10th January, 1945 and continued until 1957, appearing at band rallies, recruiting rallies and many charitable and religious groups. Their highest award was received in 1947 when they won the A Grade Championship and the 'Jonal Bevan Trophy' at the State Eisteddfod.¹⁷ The Brass band gave recitals for many years at church functions, street processions, workshop picnics, Anzac Day and May Days. The cricket and soccer clubs have represented the Workshops for many years- the soccerclub was formed in 1932; they won 'The Telegraph Shield' in that year which they held for 7 years; the cricket club was formed in 1946. The workshops have also helped foster the talents of some famous sportsmen , Bluey Jones (Boxer) Harry Coates and Arch. Dellaway (soccer) are some!¹⁸Community spirit is still just as strong today; the Workshops donated the Date Palm trees that now grace the Newcastle foreshore.¹⁹

Cardiff Workshops has always played an important role in the development of Cardiff and its environs; it has provided employment for many workers and social clubs and sporting teams have given enjoyment to many. When writing a history of the Workshops, not only the changes in buildings and work performed at Cardiff must be considered, but

17. Hughes 50th ... Pg 48

18 Ibid Pg 57

19. Taped Interview - Douglas Bradford

LEIGH JOHNSTON

OPEN FOUNDATION - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

ASSIGNMENT 6

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW OF DOUGLAS BRADFORD

SUBJECT: CARDIFF RAILWAY WORKSHOPS

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INTERVIEWER: LEIGH JOHNSTON.

I interviewed Mr Douglas Bradford of Speers Point, who was an Asbestos Worker at Cardiff Railway Workshops for 18 years before becoming a Fitters Assistant for a further 16 years until his retirement due to ill health in 1978.

He worked on the first steam engine to be made at Cardiff, 3807 and on all engines which were built or serviced at Cardiff during this time. Servicing involved the stripping down of all engines to the base block and checking of all parts.

He describes the work done to prepare engines for use and also the disappointment felt by workshop employees when work they were more than capable of doing was contracted to outside interests.

We are also told of changes, not only to the layout of the Workshops, but also those needed when women made their entrance at Cardiff.

A number of men who began their railway careers at Cardiff returned to fill top management positions and others who have worked very hard to achieve very high standards in other fields.

When Mr Bradford joined the Workshops in 1945 there were 1250 employees, now there are only about 430, with a threat of over 60 more jobs to go.

The sporting clubs earned great respect when volunteers built all the Workshop pitches and greens and did so in their own time, to say nothing of the choir and brass band who played at many rallies and charity events for

free.

First aid was learnt by over 80% of the employees, individuals and teams representing the workshops in many first aid competitions. We are also told of the Volunteer Fire Brigade at the Workshops.

Cardiff had its share of colourful characters such as Hoppy Bill, Kid Tanner, Bluey Jones. They also had a money lender, bookie and barber.

Mr Bradford retired from the Workshops in 1978 after having been diagnosed as being Asbestos dusted (Asbestosis).

He has nothing but praised for the management and workers who helped him during the build up to his retirement.

He sees it as another example of the camaraderie that has always been part of the Workshops. Mr Bradford believes Cardiff has the potential to be a major Maintenance centre for the State Rail Authority and with the threatened Eveleigh Workshop closure, they may now have that chance. The land that surrounds Cardiff Workshops provides plenty of space for expanding the facility.

The Railway Veterans Association meetings provide an excellent opportunity for the retired men from Cardiff to keep in touch, but Mr Bradford still visits the Workshops and stays friends with the many men still there that he worked with during his 34 years.

Although he has been gone from the Workshops for 10 years he still stays in touch. He is very proud of his association with Cardiff Workshops and its achievements throughout the years.

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1989

I, DOUGLAS BRADFORD give my
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research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
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for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed D Bradford

Date 5th SEPTEMBER 1989

Interviewer Leigh Johnston

LEIGH JOHNSTON

OPEN FOUNDATION - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

TUESDAY 1p.m. - 3p.m.

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF DOUGLAS BRADFORD

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INTERVIEWER: LEIGH JOHNSTON

My name is Leigh Johnston and today, 5th September, 1989 I am interviewing Mr Douglas Bradford at his home in Speers Point. Mr Bradford was a Magnesia worker and Fitters Assistant at Cardiff Workshops for 34 years.

INTERVIEWER: Mr Bradford, when did you join the Workshops?

MR BRADFORD: I started at Cardiff Workshops on 23rd April, 1945 and I retired in June, 1978 owing to chest complaints and ill health.

INTERVIEWER: What were your duties during your time at Cardiff

MR BRADFORD: I started there as a Shop Boy on the elements and then from there to a Shop Boy with Stan Baker on Asbestos. I was with Stan Baker on the first 3807. I worked as an assistant to him until I turned 21. When he retired at that time to go to another job, I took over as Magnesia Worker, which is an Asbestos Worker in actual fact, until 1963, then because of ill health I changed over to Fitters Assistant.

INTERVIEWER: What were the main sections over at Cardiff?

MR BRADFORD: Well, the main sections would start with the Boiler shops, boiler mountings, erecting shop blacksmiths, copper shop, machine shop, the annex - I would say they would be pretty well the main ones.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the duties performed at Cardiff?

MR BRADFORD: Well, we started, when I first started there, we repaired all steam locomotive engines, then we changed over in later years to diesel. We did the first 38 at Cardiff and the last engine to leave Cardiff in about 1968 was 3820 and diesels came into vogue in about 1960. We had to strip them down to the base block and service all parts and when a diesel engine

was repaired at Cardiff a load box was built which was to load test all diesels without them going out on the main line. When they passed the required test that was put on them on the load box, we would get in touch with Broadmeadow and they would send out a driver and fireman and they would take it down to Gosford, they would pick up trucks loaded with all different stuff, they would then pull that load back to Broadmeadow. If there was any trouble or any faults, they would reject it and it would be sent back to us to be redone. If it passed that test, it would be put on the main line and be signed out of Cardiff, so we were finished with it. We always used to wonder why all the high profit jobs went to outside firms; we could do the jobs as good as them, but they used to give us all the no profit jobs because they knew they would get done. They made an engine one time and when they put it on the traverser track they found out the doorway leading out of the Workshops was four feet too small, so they had to take the wall out to get the engine out of the Workshops.

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the changes that took place at the Workshops?

MR BRADFORD: In my time, I came there in 1945 as I said, at that time they were just filling in the traverser track or a portion of it, to make Beltsen Horror Camp, which was the apprentice section but it was then shifted over to the annex and they made an apprentice section over there. The old canteen was pulled down which was only an old shed and a new medical centre was built there. They brought a nursing sister Sister Reimer, replacing a First Aid Officer. She replaced him, but not many men in the workshops were very keen about it but after she had been there about six months all attitudes had changed about a female being there

and we couldn't give her greater credit for what she did at the workshops as far as medical service went. After that there were women apprentices came in; they didn't come in til about 1980. I didn't have anything to do with them, they came after. Diesel engines, when they came in, they had to lengthen the pits, build stages at the side so the men could work level with their jobs, not climbing up and down ladders. They use to have 6 steam hammers in the Blacksmith shop, when I left they only had one. One peculiar thing over there was Jack Daley's hammer boy, Ron Cooper, he was so skilled with one of the big steam hammers, he could close a match box without breaking it, he was exceptionally skilled.

INTERVIEWER: There have been a number of men who have worked their way up through the ranks from Cardiff. What are some of those names and what are they doing now?

MR BRADFORD: Jimmy Lockhart served his time at Cardiff, before my time of course, when he came back to Cardiff as a Works Manager while I was there Denis Stewart served his time over there; Lenny Howell and Reg Farnham, the last two, both became assistant Works Managers; Ron Preston I'm not sure where Ron served his time, he became a Works Manager at Cardiff and he has written 3 or 4 books on Steam locomotive engines so he is pretty well up in Steam and he is now Works Manager, now that we changed over to diesels. Bluey Bear and Gordon Stallard were two other chaps that served their time. In later years they did all the railway photography for the railway in the Newcastle area and any smash jobs or anything, they took the photos and sent them to Sydney. They were very skilled in their trade.

INTERVIEWER: How many workers are there at Cardiff Workshops now?

MR BRADFORD: In the late 40's, early 50's, roughly when I started there, there were 1250 men approximately and its has gradually dwindled away now to about 430. There are about 60 more to leave Cardiff in the new shuffle in the near future. I believe there are twelve women employed at Cardiff at present and there are about fifty apprentices on the books at Cardiff. Years ago the apprentices had to do six months at Broadmeadow and Port Waratah in the running sheds so that they could gain running shed experience and they had a fortnight in Sydney during their apprenticeship which was another way of passing their exams which they had to do in Sydney, so that helped give them extra skills.

INTERVIEWER: Sporting and social clubs were always well known at Cardiff.

MR BRADFORD: The men themselves used to come to work early and they built their own quoit pitches, the cricket grounds were rolled and marked and everything by them. They worked in their own lunch hours going out and doing the same type of work and mowing the grass. It was all volunteer wrk. They built their own bowling green, it was all volunteer work by members of the Cardiff Workshops Bowling Club. The workshops supplied the material of course to do this type of work because it would have cost to much money, but the greens were brought up to a standard that was as good as any in Newcastle. Thompson Dixon, the boss of the blacksmith shop, formed a choir which had a very good name outside and anybody would be very pleased to get them to come and sing for them.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of things were done by the men at the workshops for the community?

MR BRADFORD: 80% of the workers learnt first aid in case it was ever required while they were travelling on trains or anywhere else. They donated the Date Palms that were planted at Cardiff in 1928 to the Newcastle Foreshore project and there are now four I think it is in there. The choir and brass band played at many events around Cardiff free. We had our own Fire Brigade at Cardiff Workshops, they were all volunteers. Darby Creek, another chap from there, learnt first aid. He was State Champion on one occasion and runner up on numerous other occasions and our first aid teams were always highly placed in any competition they went into, which was always an advantage to the public and the railway.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us a bit about some of the characters who have worked at the Workshops.

MR BRADFORD: There was Bluey Jones, his brother Ernie, one-legged Bill Gardner, Kid Tanner, Jack Bottrell. We had our own bookie, our own money lender, our own barber, Headlock Harris there was that many real characters amongst them, you couldn't mention them all, but Jack Bottrell became head of the Pigeon Association in Newcastle for about 20 years.

INTERVIEWER: What about this One-Legged Bill Gardner?

MR BRADFORD: There was two Bill Gardners- one was up in the side rods and the other one, one-legged Bill Gardner, one they called Old Bill the other they called Hoppy Bill. Hoppy Bill, during the war, they tell me when the Americans staffed Newcastle, two men were supposed to help him down to the air raid shelter, if ever the alarm went off, when the alarm did sound, he was the first one in the air raid shelter, the two who were looking for him were the last two to the air raid shelter. Kid Tanner was a boxer in Newcastle, Bluey

Jones was one of the three title holders in Newcastle and his brother Ernie, they tell me, was as good a boxer, if not better than Bluey There are a few others but I can't think of their names offhand.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned earlier that you retired because of ill health. What was the illness?

MR BRADFORD: The illness was because of Asbestos Dust, which they claimed I didn't have for quite a number of years. When it became known that I was Asbestos Dusted, I had a lot of trouble through unions trying to get something done about it.

INTERVIEWER: What was the management and workers' attitude like at this time?

MR BRADFORD: The workers and management at that time were exceptionally good. I found I had no trouble with the management, they went out of their way to try and get something done for me. We were always under the impression the management, the top office, were always against the fellows down in the workshops, but as far as I found out when the time came and I needed help, they were the best people to see. My own medical officers at the Railway Medical Centre, they couldn't do enough for me and the men on the job, when they found out I was crook, were always trying to do my work for me. But we always found that throughtout the railway, that everybody helped everybody else in those days. What it's like in other industries I wouldn't like to say, but we always found that everybody helped everybody else. They built me a chair so that I wouldn't have to bend over and it used to swing out from under my bench and that's where I was supposed to sit all day. If I wanted anything lifted, there was always two or three blokes there to lift it up on the table for me. To

me that was carrying things a bit far, but that's what they wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get much support from your union?

MR BRADFORD: At Cardiff the union was really good. But when letters were sent away from Cardiff we found that you didn't get a reply from head office. They didn't want to know anything about Asbestos in those days because it was a hot potato and nobody wanted to handle it, but when the Combined Unions over at work took it up for me and got in touch with the manager at Cardiff Jimmy Lockhart and through him to the Commissioner of Railways I got something done then and from then on I went through the Dust Board and things were looked after for me.

INTERVIEWER: What type of compensation did you receive from the Railway and the Government for your Asbestosis?

MR BRADFORD: The railway doesn't pay compensation, they pay so much a year into the Dust Board, so you become then a Dust Board liability. You cannot get a lump sum through the Dust Board, you only get paid a pension. That pension you are supposed to take and leave it go at that. You only get that pension off them when you finish work. You don't get it while you are still working.

INTERVIEWER :How does that affect your invalid pension?
Are you entitled to an invalid pension?

MR BRADFORD: I am entitled to an invalid pension but when you are getting a Dust Board pension on top, you go over the amount of eligible income so for every dollar you get they take fifty cents out of our pensions and twenty cents in tax, so we end up with about thirty cents. So really a pension isn't much good, but you can't claim a lump sum.

INTERVIEWER: How does that affect you as far as benefits on your invalid pension, like if you get your full dust board, are you still *eligible* for medical benefits?

MR BRADFORD: As long as you stay on the fringe benefit mark you get all benefits associated with the invalid pension but if you went over that you would lose the fringe benefits, then I would have to try claiming back through them, but as it is I still retain the fringe benefit with the invalid pension but I don't have to worry about that.

INTERVIEWER: No health fund would consider taking you on.

MR BRADFORD: You are supposed to notify any health fund if you have any illness that you've had over a number of years and if you mention that you are asbestos dusted, well, I'd say no health fund would take you on at all.

INTERVIEWER: We mentioned Denis Stewart earlier. What is he doing now?

MR BRADFORD: Denis Stewart is a well known herbalist in Newcastle and its funny to remember him learning his notes out in the Asbestos humpy which everybody now knows was dangerous to the health. Now you mentioned that, there's two other identities, Bill Crowther and Joey Huntley. They have the model railway at Edgeworth and their interest stems from their work at Cardiff. They still take a very keen interest in model trains and as far as I know they don't charge, which in my opinion shows the community spirit of men from Cardiff.

INTERVIEWER: There has been some talk of the closure of Eveleigh Workshops. How will that affect Cardiff do you think?

MR BRADFORD: That would be hard to say. Plans are already underway for Cardiff to be expanded but we get told that many different stories that it

it make you wonder. In my opinion, Cardiff is one place that could be expanded, possibly will be. In the future Cardiff will be doing all the work of Newcastle, but that's only my opinion.

INTERVIEWER: There's plenty of land around Cardiff which was one of the reasons they did move out to Cardiff.

MR BRADFORD: That land that's all around Cardiff was originally to be for Honeysuckle to come out to Cardiff and Civic to be brought out to Cardiff, that way they would have pretty well all the railway things in one place. They would only have then the yards at Broadmeadow and the goods yards and running sheds there. that wouldn't be taken over by Cardiff. The way things are going today, we don't know what's doing.

INTERVIEWER: There has been talk over the years, since virtually the railway moved out there, of reclaiming some of the railway land over there Is that still...?

MR BRADFORD: They still talk of reclaiming land. They want land between the workshops and the Main Road but if the plans go ahead for Cardiff to be expanded, they will need land, so I can't see why they would want to sell it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you still keep in touch with the workshops with the men at Cardiff?

MR BRADFORD: Most of the fellows I worked with are now retired and we go to the veterans meetings at Anzac House at Hamilton, where once a fortnight we all get together. Its supposed to be a meeting but its more or less to talk over old times and things like that. But I still do go to the workshops once or twice a year just to see any of the others that I still know over there and see the management

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because they always said if ever you need anything or things are not going the best always get in touch, so I do keep in touch as far as that goes.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you Mr Bradford for sharing your knowledge of Cardiff Workshops. I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.