

30 AUGUST 1989

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE - AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

REGIONAL HISTORY - RESEARCH PAPER

TOPIC: CHANGE FROM TRAMS TO BUSES IN NEWCASTLE.

INTERVIEWER: Tracey Kelty

INTERVIEWEE: Norman Kelty

Date of Interview: 13 AUGUST 1989.

CONTENTS

1. Taped interview.
2. Summary of the interview.
3. Transcript of the interview.
4. Paper on the topic.

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MEMO

The theme discussed on the above mentioned is the

opinion of the change from a transfer system of assignment to
a complete one. **SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW**
The interview was held on the 15th of the month of
November 1954. The interview was held in the presence of
various officials of the Department. The interview was
conducted in a friendly and informal manner. The interview
was held in the presence of the following officials:
The regular staff and the interviewee.

The interview was held in the presence of the following officials:
The interviewee and the interviewee's colleagues.

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SUMMARY

The theme discussed on the taped interview is Norman Kelty's opinion of the change from a tram/bus system of transport to a complete bus system of transport in Newcastle. Norman Kelty, now retired, worked for the transport department in Newcastle for thirty-four years. During this time he held various positions within the department. His time as a tradesman in the late 1940's was divided between bus and tram maintenance. He held the position of fitter in the bus depot workshop and occasionally did relief work on the trams when the regular fitter was not available.

Mr Kelty expressed concern regarding the financial situation of the transport department in Newcastle. He elaborated on the reasons he felt contributed to the visible financial losses the department incurred.

The bus maintenance took place at the Gordon Avenue Bus Depot, Hamilton at the time Mr Kelty joined the bus depot. The department had ninety buses and ninety trams in use for the Newcastle area.

The maintenance that was required on trams was minimal compared to buses. All parts for the trams were made locally, run by electricity and they carried a large number of people with ease. Therefore the cost to run the tram system was very economical and that is why the department showed a profit while the tram system was running in Newcastle. Mr Kelty explained that the main disadvantage of trams was that they ran down the centre of the road and often held up vehicle traffic.

After a while the trams were phased out of the transport system in Newcastle. It was decided that a panel of experts from England would come to Australia and assess the transport situation in Newcastle and decide on the type of system suitable to the area. The decision was one to abolish trams and introduce a bus only transport system.

In Mr Kelty's opinion the "so called" panel of experts ruling was a crucial turning point in the future of Newcastle's transport department. The experts from England were comparing a modern bus with a 1923 tram. There was also money involved because Leyland's of England were to supply all the buses to Newcastle if the panel ruled that buses were more suitable.

Bus maintenance was quite expensive and required a lot more maintenance than the trams. All parts for the buses were imported, which was very expensive. Leyland double decker buses were used for a long while and then the department switched to Mercedes buses. The bus workshop did one bus overhaul per week. This was a continuous process and at the time Mr Kelty was working in the workshop there was approximately 213 buses operating throughout Newcastle.

Approximately 105 to 110 persons were employed by the Bus Depot approximately 60 in the garage section as well as a large number of drivers, conductors and cleaners.

In later years single decked buses were introduced to cut costs. This meant the phasing out of the double-decker buses with conductors and the introduction of the one man operated buses. The introduction of the single decked buses did not have very much effect on improving the financial situation of the Bus Company. There were approximately 100 bus runs on a Sunday and the remittance received from fares did not even pay for the bus drivers wage.

Recently the workshop closed down and Mr Kelty attended the wake. Many fitters and turners lost their jobs and most will go into private enterprise or move to Sydney. It was an emotional get together for previous and past employees and he was sad to see the workshop close.

In Mr Kelty's opinion the double decker buses were a more economical form of transport than the single decked buses. But neither matched the economical tram. He feels that trams should never have been phased out of the transport system in Newcastle and that the modern trams should have replaced the old 1923 trams to modernise the system rather than abolish the tram system altogether.

Tracey: Its Sunday the 13th of August 1989. I am Tracey Kelty and I am interviewing Mr Norman Kelty who has retired from working at the Newcastle Bus Company.

And how long did you live in Newcastle?

Norm: I originally came from Newcastle when I was eighteen. I worked at Rylands originally and then the war broke out in 1939. I decided to join the Airforce as a fitter and from there I went to Richmond., then to Ascotvale then posted to Cootamundra as a fitter 2A and then were sent to England as a tradesman and worked in various squadrons mainly on Spitfires, Halifaxes and Lancasters. I had four and a half years in England and I met my present wife over there in Leeds and we were married. After the war I came back to Australia rejoined Rylands for a short period of about fifteen months and then transferred to the transport, Newcastle Transport Department as a fitter on the trams and buses.

In 19 that was in 1948 my time as a tradesman was divided between buses and trams I did all the relief work on the trams when the regular fitter was not available. At the time I joined the department there were ninety trams and ninety buses operating out of Gordon Avenue bus depot, which supplied the whole of Newcastle with transport, public transport.

Tracey: That's good.

Norm: We, at that particular time, the Transport Department in Newcastle was showing a profit. Which since they took the trams off and away from Newcastle and replaced them with buses we have shown substantial losses.

Tracey: Right, and did you have a lot to do with the tram maintenance.

Norm: Well, yes actually there was not a great deal of maintenance required on trams, because there was nothing much to go wrong with them.

Tracey: Yes.

Norm: And everything to do with the trams was made locally run on local produced electricity and that was virtually the reason why we were showing a profit.

Tracey: Yes.

Norm: After a few years working on the trams and the buses it was decided by the powers at be that it might be a good idea if trams were taken out of service in Newcastle. So they got a panel of experts from England to rule on the suitability of whether Newcastle should become an all bus district or a tram and bus district.

Naturally the panel of experts from England ruled that the buses were much more suitable than the trams. They were comparing a modern bus with a 1923 year old tram in 1950 so and also there was a lot of money involved because Leyland's of England was going to supply all the buses to Newcastle if the panel ruled that buses were more suitable than trams.

Tracey: I see, very good.

Norm: So consequently it was a forgone conclusion that buses would be selected over trams. I honestly think this was a very great error and it should never had occurred and Newcastle today in my opinion should still have modern trams running and we should, we would probably not showing a substantial transport and financial loss that we are at this present time.

Tracey: Yes, right and did the buses require a lot of maintenance.

Norm: The buses did require a lot of maintenance and all the parts were imported from overseas.

Tracey: Right.

Norm: At great expense.

Tracey: Right.

Norm: Well with the trams everything was made locally, the cast iron brake shoes were all cast locally, the tyres were made, everything about a tram was conducive to running at a profit. While it was the opposite effect with buses.

Tracey: With buses right, and

Norm: The first we had practically all Leyland double decker buses running in Newcastle and they run for a great number of years. I was employed in the workshop then on double decker bus overhaul, for quite a number of years.

Norm: We used to overhaul one bus per week. From the workshop we had a continuous line of bus repairs and these buses, these double decker buses were fully overhauled in the Gordon Avenue bus workshop and then put back on the road and this was a continuous process as we had then two hundred and thirteen buses operating throughout the Newcastle district.

Tracey: Right, and were there a lot of men that you worked with, was there a lot employed at the workshop.

Norm: There was quite a number employed in the workshop. About one hundred and five I believe from one hundred and five to one hundred and ten anyway were employed in the workshop with another sixty in the garage section on running repairs and of course there was quite a few cleaners as well. There was at that particular time they, course they hadn't drivers and conductors on the double decker buses and there was approximately six hundred in traffic and drivers and conductors at that particular time but then in later years when they brought in the single decker buses and costs were running very high the department decided to dispense with conductors.

Tracey: Conductors.

Norm: And they brought out the one man operated buses to try and save money. But didn't seem to have much effect really, I suppose.

Tracey: No.

Norm: Because we still showed substantial losses.

Tracey: Yes.

Norm: The are.

Tracey: Did the losses show, sort of, very soon after they switched from trams to buses, or did it take a little while for the loss to show. Do you know anything about that.

Norm: Well, yes in my opinion I found that the losses showed very quickly.

Tracey: Very quickly, yes.

Norm: Very remarkable, because mainly of the, of the high cost of buying all the parts from overseas which were very expensive for the buses and they were run on dieseline and tyre and all that sort of thing as a matter of fact we had a hundred runs of a Sunday and not even any of the drivers could possibly pick up their wages. So you can just imagine what the losses would incur due to the fact that not even the drivers could pick up their wages.

Tracey: Yes.

Norm: So are then after quite a number of years they transferred over to the Mercedes buses.

Tracey: Right.

Norm: By that time I was promoted from a fitter to a sub-foreman in charge of the engine re-conditioning and the..

Tracey: Good.

Norm: And the electricians and welders and later I was promoted to the workshop foreman which catered for most of the workshop and we then after a period we changed over to the Mercedes buses.

Tracey: Mercedes, yes.

Norm: And although they were quite efficient the Mercedes buses they were terribly expensive and the parts were exorbitant in cost. In fact I was amazed personally how dear Mercedes parts were.

Tracey: Right.

Norm: Because, they were all imported from Germany and at an astronomical cost.

Tracey: I see, and which brand of bus do you think, which brand of bus do you think was the best knowing they were all quite expensive to run which brand do you think was the most economical and the most cheapest to run to keep the maintenance on.

Norm: In my opinion I favoured the old double decker really it was are a pretty efficient bus but in my opinion still not as efficient as a tram because trams could move tremendous crowds very easily.

Tracey: Very easily.

- Norm: And very quickly.
- Tracey: Yes.
- Norm: But, the double decker buses were definitely and improvement on single decker buses in that regard you could put more people on and also. But the big disadvantage with a double decker bus was the fact that it had to have a bus conductor.
- Tracey: Conductor.
- Norm: And they were a two man operation well the single decker buses were a one man operation. Well and that's the main reason I think that is why the double decker's were taken off.
- Tracey: Right.
- Norm: For that specific reason.
- Tracey: And what about accidents, were there many accidents in the trams that you know of, or compared to buses. Do you know anything about the accidents.
- Norm: Well, no not really. There was a....
- Tracey: The safety record of them.
- Norm: The main disadvantage with the trams was that are they used to hold up the vehicle traffic. They were running in the centre of the road and consequently cars weren't allowed to pass a tram at a tram stop because it was a danger to people getting on and off the trams therefore all cars had to stop and wait till the tram was, the passengers get on or off the tram, which was a bit of a nuisance to motorists there's no doubt about that.
- Tracey: I see.
- Norm: But that was the main disadvantage in my opinion in my opinion in regard to the operation of the trams.
- Tracey: Right, so recently the workshop closed of where you worked for many years.
- Norm: That's true.
- Tracey: Would you like to talk about that... and...

Norm: Well I can because I was most disappointed to see the work shop close. Even though the area Manager said there wasn't a great deal of work to be required to do done on Mercedes buses. Seeing they were all fairly new and they run a tremendous milage before they needed any major repair. But, even so we did a tremendous amount of other work like small running repairs and gear box repairs and also we had quite a few collisions which required extensive repairs to the Mercedes buses and apart from that it was a personal service to the department which we have now lost.

A lot of these staff will have to go out to private enterprise or they will have to be sent to Sydney which is a big delay and I honestly think its a retrograde step that the closing of the workshop even though there is no doubt about it will save a bit of money I suppose.

Tracey: And you attended the wake didn't you. For the closing.

Norm: Yes, I did as a matter of fact I attended the wake. It was a very emotional get together of past and present employees and we mulled over old times and one thing and another and it was a very sad day for all of us to see the workshop close. After well I was there for thirty four years and the place was operating some considerable time from 1923 I think the workshop first started to operate up until 1950... I'm sorry.

Tracey: That's okay.

Norm: 1989 which is a great span.

Tracey: A long time, yes.

Norm: And a long time and consequently it was a very sad day for everybody concerned. Its a pity to see enterprises like the workshop being phased out of Newcastle particularly when there is a big unemployment rate in Newcastle. Particularly amongst the tradesmen and all that sort of stuff that so, a lost of those tradesmen that will find it very difficult to find an alternative job.

Tracey: Job, yes in Newcastle.

Norm: In and around Newcastle which is a sad day. But still I suppose these things do happen don't they.

Tracey: Yes they do.

Okay and when did you actually retire from the workshop.

Norm: I retired in 1982.

Tracey: 1982.

Norm: Which is approximately seven years ago and I have enjoyed my retirement actually and but I have kept in touch with the department and with my fellow work mates during that period.

Tracey: That's good.

Norm: And so they have kept me up to date with all the latest alterations and improvements and but I do think that I would like to see the trams come back to Newcastle, that's modern trams, but I don't think it is ever going to happen. Because the cost would be exorbitant now relaying all the lines and over head wires and all that sort of thing. Which they were all in place before and they only needed modern trams to replace the old wooden trams in the first place and were no great cost and but now it would cost a lot of money. See in Melbourne they run their trams with buses and with the motor cars and all that sort of thing and they don't have a great deal of problems down in Melbourne.

Tracey: That's right.

Norm: And the traffic problem in Melbourne is must be more severe than what it is in Newcastle.

Tracey: Yes.

Norm: But, they get by down there and they are happy with the trams and so I think it was a very foolish act to remove the trams I honestly do.

Tracey: That's good okay well we will finish there. Thanks very much for your time that was very good.

Norm: Good thankyou.

The only memento of the tramway system in Newcastle stands outside the recently closed Urban Transit Authority of New South Wales Hamilton Bus Workshop. The front of an old 1923 tram is set in glass as a reminder of the first tramway in the northern district of New South Wales. The steam tramway system in Newcastle commenced in 1887. It was then converted to electricity in 1923 and ran for a number of years before changing to an all bus system of transport. (1)

On 5th July 1887 the first depot was officially opened in railway yard near Burwood Street, Newcastle. When this depot was established the first steam tramway commenced between Perkins Street, Newcastle and Plattsburg, now known as Wallsend. (2) Originally the Newcastle tram system was controlled by the railway department, however in 1893 it was brought under tramway control (3) From 1887 to 1918 steam tramway lines opened across Newcastle and spread throughout inner and outer suburbs.

1. State Transit, 100 Years of Government Trams and Buses in Newcastle - The Main Events, Newcastle, 1987.

2. Ibid.

3. Newcastle Morning Herald - 10 June 1950.

On 4th December 1923, the first electric tram line opened between Telford and Perkins Street, Newcastle. From 1923 onward most lines were electrified except West Wallsend and Speers Point services which ceased in 1930. (4)

A tram carriage held approximately 100 persons, seated and standing. The carriages ran down the centre of the road and had set tram stops to which people would alight and depart. A conductor sold tickets to all passengers as well as ensured the safety of passengers within the carriage. This form of transport was very economical as the electricity was quite cheap to run and the tram and maintenance was very low. The Newcastle transport system phased out trams from the public transport system. On 23 June 1950 the last tramcar ran in Newcastle. (5)

4. State Transit, 100 Years of Government Trams and Buses in Newcastle - The Main Events, Newcastle, 1987.

5. B., Carroll, Getting Around Town, A History of Urban Transportation in Australia, Adelaide, 1980, P.147.

The first Leyland double decker buses arrived in Newcastle in September 1936. (6) These buses carried 69 passengers and needed a conductor to collect all tickets. All of these buses required maintenance from time to time and this maintenance was carried out at the Hamilton Depot Workshop.

Most private bus services were taken over by the department in April 1937. These included Swansea - Emelin Brothers; New Lambton - Jones; Dudley - C. Hancock; Speers Point/Warners Bay - A. Hancock and Beaumont. (7)

From 1937 to 1950 all tram lines were converted to bus operation. Initially the Leyland double decker buses operated in their place.

After a while the financial situation of the transport department started to suffer. Several cut backs occurred. In 1958 the Swansea South and Catherine Hill Bay services were discontinued.

6. Newcastle Morning Herald, 10 June 1950.

7. State Transit, 100 Years of Government Trams and Buses in Newcastle - The Main Events, Newcastle, 1987. P.P. 1 - 4.

The Newcastle Bus Department have approximately 161 buses. The new 'one-man' operated bus system was introduced from 1956 to 1975. Gradually all bus services were converted to one-man operation. On 2nd August 1984 the last double decker bus trip run with a conductor took place. (8)

In the late 1970's the single decked Mercedes buses were introduced to Newcastle and replaced the Leyland buses. The Mercedes buses were a more economical bus and did not need a lot of maintenance. They run a long milage before any repairs are required and are very reliable.

Following the purchase of the mercedes buses the department decided to close down the Hamilton Depot Workshop. This closure was another step to try to improve the financial situation of the transport department, along with a change in management practices.

With the workshop closing down any major repairs to any bus in Newcastle will have to be carried out by a private business. Small running repairs are still carried out in the depot garage.

8. Ibid.

The Newcastle Bus Department have approximately 163 buses currently running from the Hamilton Depot. At peak time 145 buses run at a time. The current Mercedes bus is licenced to carry 63 passengers. (9)

Woolley K. and Clark, P., A Century of New South Wales

Comparing the days of trams to buses is very difficult. Times change and demands of people differ. Trams were, no doubt, much more economical to run as ^{they} it carried a large number of passengers with ease. The department's decision to abolish trams from the Newcastle area was not necessarily the best judgement for the area in the long term. The financial situation may have been a lot healthier if they had kept trams running and modernised the tramway system rather than abolish it altogether. The trams tracks were all in place and all the department would have had to do is modernise instead of eradicate this fine system of transport. A closer study of modernization of the tram system may have turned out to be a better solution for the public transport system in Newcastle.

9. Newcastle Bus Company records.

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1989

I, NORMAN KELTY give my
permission to TRACEY KELTY

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Signed. *N. Kelty* Date: 13 / 8 / 89
Norman Kelty

Signed. *T. Kelty* Date: 13 / 8 / 89
Tracey Kelty