

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER: MARGARET HENRY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH MRS SELMA HARE

BY JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

ON

23RD JUNE 1989.

I am interviewing SELMA HARE for the Newcastle University
Open Foundation. The topic is "Retailing at Scotts -
A Woman's View".

My name is JENNIFER NOSWORTHY. It is 23rd June, 1989,
at Cooks Hill.

- JENNIFER: When did you start at Scotts Department Store?
- SELMA: 1938
- J: Why?
- S: I needed a position and it was the kind I would be happy to get.
- J: When you started at Scott's what kind of things did you sell? Were you behind the counter?
- S: Yes, instantly behind the counter. Beautifully presented packaged and single hankies and very lovely peeky or lace collars and jabots. We had to help in the selling of umbrellas too.
- J: What sort of training did you have? Did you go in raw or did someone show you what to do and how to say things?
- S: Ultimately we got training by a very wonderful senior lass in the hosiery department, Izzie McDougall. She trained us in the R.I.D.S.A.C formula, which meant reception, inquiry, display, selection, addition and commendation, and that was most enjoyable to apply oneself to.
- J: How was working from Scott's from day to day? Was it something you enjoyed doing? Did you like to go to work in the morning?
- S: It was a very happy experience really and had a lovely family atmosphere to it - a friendly atmosphere.
- J: Did you stay on that counter or did you move around the store at all?

S: No, I spent some time in the babywear department, four years in cosmetics and a couple in millinery. Ultimately spending the last fifteen years in handbags. Thinking about moving around the store as you asked me - whilst in babywear I made myself very unpopular because we had a lovely line of babies dresses which were selling very well and I thought "that's a very happy and wonderful thing" and the buyer asked me how they were selling and I said "oh they're selling like hotcakes." That wasn't the right thing to say so I fully realised later. So I never did that sort of thing again. Thinking about the millinery department, it was quite a delight in those days because everybody wore a hat. To see the hats being brought into the big millinery workroom headed by Miss Amm and to see them being transformed into extra beautiful hats, again with tender loving care and great skill, was a joy. All sections had their great joy to be there for. Being in cosmetics had a special memory - that during the war the Americans would come in and want nicely packaged things which we didn't have, so we had to gather little cardboard boxes from all over the place and we would go upstairs where we had our reserve merchandise and cover them with whatever pretty paper we had to hand, and that made the customer very pleased. Then we had a wonderful machine, made by Paul Duval, and from this we dispensed individually coloured face powders that suited the lady's own complexion. That was very exciting and interesting too.

J: You had a delivery service too, I believe, from Scott's?

S: Yes, Scott's delivery service was excellent - an ongoing part of the service that was expected and always looked after.

- J: And how was that organised? Did someone come into the store and say "I'd like this. Send it home for me." Or would they ring up?
- S: Yes, they could even ring up, or after they finished paying for their merchandise they would just say "send it out please". And it would happily be sent out for them.
- J: So other departments in the store were needlework? I guess a lot of people did embroidery?
- S: Yes, a very very popular and wonderful section and the busy, busy wool counter was nearby, plus the haberdashery and a very lovely jewellery section, all doing very well with precious merchandise.
- J: Through the War you would have had Air Raid Drills and things like that. Did they ring sirens or ring bells or where did you go when they did that?
- S: I just can't remember where we went, but I do remember we had Air Raid Drills, which were compulsory.
- J: What about blackouts? How did they handle blackouts?
- S: We went on serving the customers with the aid of a light from hurricane lamps. Also during the War I remember we all had the privilege of being students at First Aid Classes, conducted by one of Newcastle's most wonderful people, Paddy Pender. So that was a great privilege and joy too.
- J: Scott's used to hold concerts, at some stage?

- S: Yes and they would hold concerts for the actual servicemen in the City Hall too and the staff would comprise themselves into comedy teams and ballet and choir and a very satisfactory night was had all round actually. Then lots of raffle tickets were sold at Scott's corner all the years of the War to benefit the funds for the servicement. That was an ongoing thing.
- J: Someone used to stand out the front I believe with those?
- S: Yes, out the front or at the corner yes, doing a good job there, happily for the cause.
- J: So you would have seen a lot of changes. Tell me about the little cylinders they used to use.
- S: Oh yes, they'd pull a cord and they'd shoot up towards the cash desk with your money and come back with your change. Yes that was a great breakthrough from those to the cash register.
- J: And they would have been manual registers, not the electronic one we know now?
- S: Yes.
- J: How much competition did Scott's have?
- S: Winns offered the greatest competition, whilst John's had a wide range of first class merchandise within a limited space. Then there was Hustler's who had a wide range of merchandise, but unlike Scott's and Winns had no hairdressing salon or tea room.
- J: How about Mr Scott? Did you have much to do with him personally?

- S: He was a very fine gentleman boss and he was proud of his business and proud of his staff, and I do remember he would come along from time to time to make sure we weren't standing there with folded arms, because to him that represented as though we weren't available to help anybody.
- J: He was fairly conscientious with his training ideas.
- S: Yes he was. He always had a very good training system going and one training person after another was always excellent and then when David Jones took over the same fine thread was kept going really as it is to this very day.
- J: How were goods displayed then? I imagine they would have been different to what they are now?
- S: Goods were displayed mainly within the actual counter area. Goods would be within the glass cases, in the fixtures, on top of the fixtures and on top of the glass cases. Unlike the kind of display we're all aware of now, that leads to open selling presentation.
- J: You were saying before, you had to hang things up above on little rods or on pelmet ideas.
- S: There was a time when I first started, there were like a series of lines which must have been on a sort of pulley and they had rows of perhaps hankies, scarves or something, on them and the merchandise would be taken down at night and put on again of a morning.

I had the pleasure of working at Scott's from 1938 to 1959 until I got married, and it was the happy atmosphere that I described earlier, where we worked as a team all doing our jobs and very happy to be doing it together. It was a lovely feeling. I do remember too that Mr Scott would remind us, from time to time, to treat, regard our customers as being friends and always to treat them as our guests.

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1989

I, MRS. S. HARE give my
permission to JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

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Signed S. Hare

Date 23rd June 1989

Interviewer Nosworthy

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH MRS SELMA HARE

BY JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

Selma Hare (nee Johnson) began work at Scott's Limited in 1938. She worked on the counter which sold handkerchiefs, collars and umbrellas.

Employees were trained under the R.I.D.S.A.C. formula which meant Reception, Inquiry, Display, Selection, Addition and Commendation.

Scott's had a friendly atmosphere. Selma then worked in the babywear department then on the cosmetic counter, millinery and the last fifteen years in the handbag department. Remodelling of hats was popular.

During the war the visiting American troops shopped at Scott's and the staff did fancy packaging.

Scott's offered a delivery service.

Goods for sale included wool, haberdashery and jewellery.

During the war air raid drills were held. "Black-outs" were common and the store was lit by hurricane lamps.

Staff attended First Aid Classes.

Fund-raising for the war effort included concerts featuring comedy acts, a choir and ballet. Raffle tickets were sold on Scott's corner.

Competition was from other department stores such as Winn's, John's and Hustler's.

Mr Eric Scott was a fine gentleman and very conscious of staff training.

Goods were displayed in glass cases and fixtures, not in open presentation which is more common today.

Selma worked at Scott's Limited from 1938 until her marriage in 1959. She remembers her time at Scott's as a happy experience.

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TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH MRS MAISIE SHARP

BY JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

ON

20TH JULY 1989.

This is Mrs Maisie Sharp. It is the 20th July, 1989.

MAISIE: I started at Scott's in 1940 and in order to get on, it was Christmas, coming on to Christmas, and you had to go and sit for an exam which was just around the corner and that part of it now does belong to David Jones, but in those days it was "Creer & Berkeley's" and depending on how well you did in that exam which was an aptibility test more than anything to be a shop assistant or an office worker was whether you were called back again or not for an interview. And Edna Kirkwood, who was Mr Eric Scott's secretary, did the interviews in those days, and they would ask you how you would sell your handbag if you happened to carry a handbag, and you were pretty well primed up in that by our friends at school. And you'd have to, your powers of observation - if there was a picture there - you'd have to tell her what was there. She'd turn it around the picture of the calendar and you'd have to tell her about that. Then having satisfied her you would then go on to have an interview with Mr Eric Scott and it would depend on that whether you were told to come back or not. So I was told to come back as soon as I finished the Intermediate, which I did, and they said I'd be on for that Christmas. So I started on the ribbon counter and worked there for really all the Christmas and would relieve on the Handkerchief counter if they were short and in the lunch hour if they were short. In those days ribbons was really big business. People used ribbons so much on their gifts and handkerchiefs were the real "in" thing for presents. It was lovely to get a box of hankies for Christmas. In those days Fridays nights were still in, that you worked back on Friday night till 9 o'clock. And every second Friday night was very busy, because it was the pay day for most of the industries in Newcastle and we'd find that people were paid once a fortnight and what they called pay Friday

night would be a big night. Friday nights were always big but the second Friday, to go with the pay days, was always big. We were paid weekly but the people in the industries were paid fortnightly so that made a big difference in the trade. We worked Saturday morning as well and it was a forty-four hour week and the pay was very low. Shop assistants right up until about, I don't know, about the late 1960's before they got even a decent wage. It was always the lowest paid union of all and we always had to really dress up. We always had to wear black if possible. The casuals were allowed to wear navy blue or black or navy skirts with white blouses. But if you came back onto the permanent staff for those first couple of years, until materials got really hard to get you had to wear black then after that you could wear anything but you always had to be neat and tidy. I can't remember when the shop assistants had a stop work meeting. I'd have to cast my mind back to when that was but during my time I can only remember once the shop assistants going out on strike and they didn't call it a strike they only called it a stop work meeting and the shop stayed open with just a few of the heads of staff to keep it going while they had the meeting and I can't remember where they actually had that but anyway we voted that we didn't want to strike. There were very few that did want to strike and people weren't influenced by what other people thought and we thought for ourselves in those days and we liked our jobs, we liked our work and whilst we would have liked more money and shorter hours it didn't matter because we were all so happy there.

J: Did you have highly organised unions like we have today?
Was there a union delegate?

M: Yes we paid union fees. Practically everybody there, was in the union. It was just the normal thing to do

and we didn't query it, you know. They had a delegate. My first husband was a delegate later on in it. And they had a very leftist crowd used to be in the shop assistants' but it was more the middle of the road. The shop assistants always were. They were a passive lot in those days. They seemed to be happy in what they were doing. An escalator. They were the first people to get an escalator and I can't place exactly when that was, it would be after I left because I worked there for just on ten years, from when I was fifteen and left there when I was expecting my first baby. I met my first husband at Scott's. He at the time was working in the office. He ended up working throughout the store when he returned from serving with the forces. During those years whilst the forces were all away we used to knit for them. We had a lot of marines come into the shop, British Marines. A lot of them were stationed up Nelson Bay way and they would come down on leave down there to Scott's and that seemed to be the place that everybody came into. The Americans used to come in a lot, Yanks we called them and a lot of the girls used to go out with the Yanks. They were a whole different cup of tea to our own boys. They were very well dressed. They seemed to have plenty of money to throw around. But mainly, in the main the girls were interested in dancing those days and there always seemed to be plenty of partners at the dances, and that's what you looked for more than actually going out with one person from my point of view at any rate. You were just happy to get to a dance which you went to about two dances a week. I went to Tyrell Hall. I can't think of the name of the band that was there. Vincers', Mrs Vincers Band use to be at Tyrell Hall and the City Hall was called the Town Hall in those days. They had a very good dance of a Saturday night and also the Boys' and Girls' High School used to run a dance and you started at those dances at Girls' and Boys' High and you gradually went on to those other dances in town. But dancing was

a big thing. I got away from when I started at Scott's; that you were actually trained for the job even as a Christmas casual. Everybody had to go to a training class of a morning and when I went back permanently I think it was either the beginning of February I think I went back to work permanently at Scott's that they sent us of a morning, Mondays to Thursdays I think it was, because Fridays were too busy and Saturdays of course were too short and were trained for about a year. We had a staff training officer and everybody who went to be a shop assistant, they went for about that length of time. That's the class training. We were all very keen on our sales work. We didn't have to be sort of goaded on to take more money. Everybody seemed to want to make more than they made before. I started out on ribbons and when I came back to work permanently at Scott's I was on handbags and baskets and suitcases, belts then down onto neckwear. Neckwear used to be really beautiful in those days, lovely collars, gorgeous.

J: Somebody mentioned a jabot. What was a jabot?

M: It was just a little piece in the front which hung down and just clipped under your collar, a jabot. But you could buy some jabots which were jabots and collars. We used to love them because they looked beautiful on our navy or black dresses. We also had some beautiful peeky collars with a little edging around or lace collars. They were beautiful collars and until when materials got very hard to get, things got more austere then and we had ration books all during those War years and inside were tiny coupons and they had on them what they were for: butter, sugar, tea, were all rationed, dress materials and laces and anything to do with the manchester lines. They were all rationed and you had to pay out so many coupons and there was a great trading in those days.

I remember I wasn't a butter eater and my older sister was and the only way Mum could work this butter rationing out with the family was to give everybody their ration every day. And she'd just put it on a little plate and that was yours and if you ate it all for breakfast, well too bad. I wasn't a real butter eater. I used to eat porridge and all sorts of things like that and I'd lend mine out. So when I wanted a fair go at the butter I'd ask for my butter back and I'd trade them a bit of something else for it. So it's hard to appreciate it now, how you didn't have things like that - but we never felt deprived. We went through hard years and we went without a lot of things I suppose but none of us ever felt deprived all those years - we felt we had a wonderful time.

Scott's took a great interest in things that went on in the town at the time. They had a Ball and the Ball was really to raise money, a patriotic sort of thing. Everything was patriotism in those days. We were raising money to send parcels to the troops, comforts for the troops, so they ran a Ball with Debs. The Debs were from Scott's and they had the British Marines as partners, and the girls and boys trained. The boys came for the last couple of practices.

J: Was that something that only Scott's did? Did Winns or John's or anybody else?

M: I don't remember them having Balls. But see you were so wrapped up in what you were doing yourself that it was like your life. When you worked in a firm like that your whole life revolved around that firm, because Scott's seemed to have a couple of good organisers. There was a fellow called Herb Holmes, he has died since and he was a wonderful organiser of shows and he put on some

really wonderful shows with the help of a lot of other people. They were reviews. We put on things like "The Pirates of Penzance" and all sorts of plays and things but his really big shows were reviews and they had a huge ballet and none of us had ever done ballet before, but they brought in a ballet teacher to teach us. I suppose she did it voluntarily too for the War effort in those days. But it was a wonderful time and I joined the ballet of course because I always loved dancing and I remember the first review I had, Jack Davey who was the biggest name in Australia in show business and they had him up to compere the show and it really was a great show because materials were hard to get and they had curtain materials and all sorts of things turned into costumes, brand new and the sewing department. It was a thing that everybody worked at night throughout the store. The one's that were in the show were hard practicing. They had a committee that organised it and sold tickets, also a committee that made all the clothes and you had all your dresses as well so it was a real exciting time. I remember I got my first break. As a kid I used to love to sing and to make up dances myself and I'd always be in the concerts at school and so they wanted somebody to open the show and I went on to sing "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and they picked on me for some reason. I don't know why but I was out in front of the curtain. I was about sixteen at the time and I wasn't a bit frightened. I sang this "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and fell back in with the ballet and we did the ballet and we did the opening ballet to it. But they were really good. It was a wonderful thing to have learned because all through my life up until I retired those things that I learned there I used for other peoples benefits. Where I came from when the Scout Hall was being built, the Tennis Club, the Lions Club, they would ask me to do the show for them and it was all from what I learned there at Scott's. I put on several shows and I ended up being in charge of the ballet in the end and making up bits

and pieces from what the ballet teacher had taught me and they wanted, I remember Selma; You know you've spoken to. They had a night at Scott's just a get together just for Christmas I think it was and Selma and I decided that we'd sing "The Blue Birds over White Cliffs of Dover" it was called the White Cliffs of Dover" and that was where they first heard Selma and I sing and one of the ladies that had a fair bit to do with the show, she said to me, "Do you think you could organize a threesome to sing because the Andrews Sisters were the "in" thing in those days.

J: Yes

M: And I said "Oh I've got two sisters that will sing" so I went home and I said to them "How about we get together and we, you know they want someone to sing in this review." So my older sister hated anything that was you know that she'd be up in front of people but she agreed to go and so we did very well over the years, the three of us singing together. And we ended up actually the first show. I've always wanted to know what happened to that. From that singing the very first show that went out of Newcastle live on the ABC. They had two pilot shows and we sang on both of them. They asked us to sing on them and it was all from that, from Scott's. So I've often been going to go to the archives in Sydney and see if they did keep a record of that because way back in those days, I suppose they mightn't have kept records like that, but they were the first two shows to go out of like a provincial place. Everything went from Sydney or from Melbourne. Then Pal Gilum, he was a comedian and Wilbur Kentwell was the organist of the area and he was sort of well known in Sydney too and there were just those two and my three sisters, my two sisters and myself and that came from that show business there and so it ended up like that. My sisters were in the show and then when my boyfriend

came home, they had a show afterwards. He was in the show too so it was quite a family thing, but we had a lot of fun with it so they raised a lot of money during the War and that made it very happy. You know you were practising at least twice a week for that and you were going out to dances twice a week and by the time you played basketball for which we'd get dressed at work on Saturday. I would get dressed there and we'd walk from Scott's up to National Park where they played basketball. They didn't have their own team at first but they ended up they did have a Scott's team but they were in a lower grade. I was playing with ex-high, a team that I created "Neutrals". During our time netball really grew in Newcastle and that was because the business girls all went for it. It sort of really blossomed into something big. But it was called basketball in those days. So we had a very busy time sports wise and socially.

- J: There was a hockey team too. Or a couple of hockey teams.
- M: Yes. Yes they had very good hockey teams and they had mens hockey as well but womens hockey teams were very good and then D.J.'s had a team in the basketball later on but I think it was when I had three children and they asked me would I play with them and I went back and I played with them for a couple of seasons. You know it was a much lower grade than I used to play but, by then, I had three children.
- J: A little bit slower perhaps.
- M: So that's probably why they asked me. So I'm trying to think if there was anything over those War years that was interesting other than fund raising. They had, Mr Scott was thrilled because they had a Grandmother competition in Newcastle and the staff elected that they would have his mother, Mrs Scott, who was a fine looking lady that they would have her

as their grandmother and the whole of Scott's would work - which the money they got went to patriotic causes - but they would work to make her the Grandmother of the Year. And they did win it for her and he was so touched, he was almost crying when he gathered the staff up. If he wanted to have a meeting with the staff we'd meet on the ground floor and he'd stand on the stairs and talk to the staff and that would be on a Monday morning and I can always remember how moved he was that the staff had worked and made his mother the Grandmother of the Year.

J: I can understand that.

M: Yes, I'm just trying to think if there was anything else in those War years that was interesting, but with the jobs we were always happy to take whatever job came. That's one of the differences today that people are able to choose. Well I possibly was able to choose because, but I didn't want to because you got into a job and you were happy you didn't look for anything different. I had applied. I might have been the head of "Bi-Lo" by now mightn't I? I applied for an office job at Richard Owen's which eventually became Shoey's and then they became "Bi-Lo" but by that time I was working back at Scott's I got word from a jewellers shop that I'd applied for a job that I'd applied at that I was after too but I was so happy back at Scott's that I didn't even think of going to the other place and that's how it was. You made lovely friends there. I've still got friends that I made over those years and we've kept in contact and also I ended up marrying my boyfriend that I met there and always remember that he was buying my first Christmas present when he'd gone down to try and get in the Army with two other fellows who worked at Scott's and they wouldn't take them because he was too short and one fellow had a bad leg and I don't know what was wrong with the other. What it was, the government was trying to get everybody conscripted - everybody regardless of size or what because they could get them

cheaper, you know - they got more by enlisting. But I ended up marrying him when they came home. I think I got married about, I can't remember, I know I worked for two years after I was married. I still kept working at Scott's and they were very happy days, I loved it all. I always remember how disappointed my husband was, boyfriend then, when he came home and he'd been rejected by the Army and I looked across and saw him and he was buying a Christmas present from Selma who's contributed to some of the news of the firm. Now when David Jones took over I wasn't working there but my husband was so I've sort of always had an interest in the place right through and my husband worked there till he died in 1973 and the children, we had four children, one boy and three girls and over the years they had worked either at Scott's or David Jones, yes I think it would be David Jones - yes it would be David Jones - when they were working there.

J: They took over in about 1957.

M: And my sisters had worked over the years for Scott's for short times and they'd been in reviews with us so I always had that close affinity with the firm even when it became David Jones because David Jones really recognised talent and it didn't matter who you were or what, they seemed to spot their talent and they were looking for people to become buyers and they paid them more money but they expected them to work long hours - longer than the ordinary staff for the money, but certainly, they were, if they were ambitious you could really go a long way with the David Jones system and ended up our son worked there too. He used to work casual and he ended up in the office. He worked there for a couple of years until he decided he wanted something different. So my association goes back a long way. My brother met his wife there at D.J.'s. She was also in the ballet and reviews.

J: We were talking before about at home.

M: Our home life during the time.

J: Yes.

M: Yes. Well home in those days was a real happy place. My dad always worked at the B.H.P. in those days. He had worked on the coal fields in our young days, but they got away from there because he worked on the mine top and you couldn't make much money on mine tops and came to Newcastle well he went into the mines first, the John Brown Mine and then into, over to the B.H.P. and whilst I was quite young they locked them all out of the B.H.P. so they were hard years for my parents and we had to go and, this was before I started at Scott's and we had to go and live in a little old condemned house on Maitland Road, Mayfield. A little house called "Lilydale" but it was such a happy house and everybody used to call in there when they went for their shopping and my mother had it all done up lovely, but that's another story - and then we ended up, we were able to buy a house and pay it off in Mayfield, in Braye Street, and that's where I started work, at Scott's from. Now Mum had always wanted a piano so she saved up the deposit and then a lady called Mrs Pritchard that she used to work for when she was young, taught music at Palings in Newcastle and she chose this piano so there was great excitement when we got the piano home and our life revolved around that old piano. My brother ended up a drummer. We all sang. My sister Pat, she sang in a dance band, a couple of the best dance bands in Newcastle for years. She sang with Harry Tabernacle and the City Hall which was the Town Hall then, and also down at the Palais, with Billy Bates which was one of the top sounds in Newcastle. So, it was that old piano that was responsible for a lot of happiness and we had some people that were really good artists use to come and sing around that piano or play

it for us. There was always band practice. I don't know how the neighbours put up with it.

J: And often lots of practice for the Scott's Reviews?

M: Yes, although most of that was done in there. With our singing when my sisters and myself, we used to sing a lot then at concerts around Newcastle all voluntary work because everything was for the War effort and I remember that not Sorby's where was the other shows they had, reviews there but they had a big tent show and near Civic Station and they weren't allowed to keep going around the country where they used to travel around. They had about a month in Newcastle then say on to Sydney and that but they grounded in Newcastle so that was very good for Newcastle because they had a change of show every fortnight and Bobby LeBrun was the comedien and he was one of the best comedians I've ever come across - and he was to compere a free show at the City Hall every Saturday so the troops would have somewhere to go. Even on Sunday afternoons the troops had somewhere to go to and we were often asked to sing in that. Herb Holmes who had such a lot to do with those shows at Scott's he would practice up for those shows and come and play and accompany us or Hazel Evans. Hazel was the best known accompanist in Newcastle. She was the accompanist for all Scott's shows and Hazel was very well known. She played for all the visiting artists. She was an excellent accompanist. So we used to practice with her or with Herb depending on what we were doing and we ended up they asked us to go proffessionally on Barton's Follies for about six weeks which was quite an honour but when they did finally move away they wanted my sisters and myself to go with them, as part of the show but one sister wouldn't go so

J: That was that!!

- M: Yes. Now. You'd like to know what the service is like today - compared.
- J: How would you put it? You don't know that most retailing outlets have much in the way of training these days? They seem to choose their staff on, perhaps, whether they have a Higher School Certificate or something like that and they put them behind the counter and say "this is what you do" without much training, from what I've seen.
- M: David Jones did have for years. I doubt whether they still have it because I think there's a Tech Course that shop assistants can go to, but they did have a staff training system there at D.J.'s too. There were staff training on. Vill Buckman took it on and Vill eventually went up to Steggles. I think she's retired now. But then Herb Holmes took it for a while. I don't think they had staff training there for a while. But then, I've always shopped at David Jones because I always had that affinity with them having worked there when it was Scott's and then I used to do demonstrating for D.J.'s. So I really worked for David Jones. If they wanted a demonstrator themselves to demonstrate a product well, then they'd send for me. And also if they had a firm that wanted them to find a demonstrator for them, well then they'd contact me and I'd go in and demonstrate that particular product and I'd just swat it up the night before and everybody would think you were a real expert.
- J: You were talking before about the "Bun rush day".
- M: Yes, they were good days. You'd work like mad getting ready. I was in dress materials by then, and all the odds and ends of the materials - you wouldn't put them out at the time and sell them unless somebody particularly asked you for it and you'd save them up and put them into remnants so you'd have to measure them up and you'd put a little tag on them of how much

was in them and come to remnant day. The heads of the departments would mark all the remnants and they were all genuinely half priced. Well I know that for years I made all my childrens clothes out of remnants, half price remnants because I always got a good look at them before hand, having worked there, or the girls would keep me some of the remnants. I'd just go and have a look the day before and they'd keep me the ones that I liked. But materials were really pretty in those days. There were some lovely things but it was as good as any television show you see today. You'd see all the people lined up out to the footpath and you'd have to, you always came in by the main door and somebody would be standing there to keep them out until the staff all had to get there five minutes before the doors opened and then they'd shut the door five minutes before opening time so that nobody else could get inside and you knew you had to be early for work and then they'd open them up and the people would burst through and then they'd run to the department they wanted and they'd fight over the remnants they'd grab armfulls. Somebody would say "that was mine". They'd pull it out of their arms, you know and you'd work like mad. You were going flat out writing docketts and that was one thing too - You didn't have all these ready reckoners and things and you really took pride in the fact that you could work out three and three-eighths of a yard of material at three and eleven pence half-penny and get it right the first time.

J: Good heavens, I couldn't do that!!

M: No. That's one of the big things that have disappeared is that you had to use your brain all the time. Now they've topped that up.

J: Made it a little bit easy, perhaps.

M: Yes, well we thought it was easy. We didn't think that was hard. That was just a joy to see how quickly you could work that out because the quicker you worked that out, the more customers you were serving and see you were having a little bit of a competition with the rest you see. Who ended up with the biggest book at the end of the day. Not that you got any more money for it, but it was just your own pride in yourself that you wanted to do as well as anybody else there and you wanted to better your figures from last year. Nobody had to tell you to do that, you just automatically did it. Everybody just loved to get in and make more money.

J: So looking back from sort of even that time that you left work until what you see now, when you go into a shop, what do you think's changed? There doesn't seem to be that competition anymore. You do a day's pay and wait for time to knock off. Do you think that's the case?

M: I don't know. I'd have to work with the staff to know that. I think you're getting in a place like David Jones, you're still getting service and the staff are very nice but you often have to look for somebody to serve you. The supermarkets, you definitely don't get service there, you've got to serve yourself in the supermarkets. Places like David Jones and Grace Brothers seem to be a bit like that too. Assistants still help the customer with the things, but in our day we worked by what they called R.I.D.S.A.C. That was what we were taught in classes. That was reception, you receive the customer nicely with "Good morning Madam" or "Good morning Mrs So and So". So you knew most of your customers by name. "What may I show you?" And if Mr Scott happened to walk up and you weren't smiling and saying that, then he'd really have something to say about it, because you know a couple of them got asked to go up to the office and "I walked past there and I didn't hear you address that customer correctly." So you were always on your best behaviour because you

knew that was what was expected of you. But R.I.D.S.A.C., it was reception, inquiry - that meant that you were inquiring what you could show to the customer, display - you'd display the article and told the customer all about it and then you'd help the customer select it. Well I think if people are trying to help a customer select something today the customer themselves have chosen. The customer thinks that that shop assistant's trying to put something over them. But in our day you were really trusted. If you said to the customer "well this piece of material you'll find is better because it won't crease like this one will." And you honestly told the customer about the product and the customer whether they knew you were honest or not. I don't know but the customer really trusted the shop assistant, but you don't find customers trusting shop assistants today, do you?

J: No.

M: And that's one of the big differences that I'd go by is that the shop assistant knew the customers and customers really trusted them and customers would wait for their own shop assistant and if you were a newcomer to that department you find it hard at first because you might be standing around dusting while the fellow that's superior to you was getting all the sales because he knew all the customers. And until you worked out your own clientele you were sort of not getting as good a book as him.

J: Left out.

M: And you didn't like that even though he was a senior and he was being paid a lot more money than you were. In those days they had to keep a ratio of so many seniors to so many juniors. You go into shops today and you might see all juniors.

J: That's true.

M: But the union rules in those days were very strict on, I just forget what the ratio was, but they couldn't put on all juniors. They had to have their seniors so a junior took great pride in if they could beat the seniors. It was really good. So I sort of think I would say that's the greatest difference today is that they don't always know the staff, that's because the population's so much bigger and also the customer doesn't believe the shop assistant like we were believed. I think that you've still got your born shop assistants. They went through a stage where they used to put university trainees on and they found out that that wasn't as good as picking people for aptitude for the job because it's not always the academics that can sell things. Shop assistants have to like people and you found that the, that was why Scott's was such a happy place because they chose staff who really wanted to sell or really wanted to work there to do office work there. It's what they particularly wanted to do and I think that's why the staff were happy, because they were doing what was expected of them and they really wanted to do a good job at what they were doing. Because you were expected to work, your family expected you to work. Nobody was expected to stay home in those days. It was an unheard of thing in my circles that anybody didn't work because there were enough jobs for everybody during those War years. Women got into munitions factories and over at the B.H.P. women were much in demand for jobs all through those War years. So there wasn't the unemployment there is today. And we would never have understood that anybody would have expected anything for nothing because if you were off work you just didn't get any pay. When we started there didn't seem to be any sick pay. Then it got to be that you got a week's sick pay and we had our own welfare club where you paid in something like threepence a week and then if you were off sick a week you got a small

payment, which helped you because everybody lived at home. Very few people went out into - I remember one of the girls lived at Cessnock and she had to get a flat in Hamilton and we thought that was so funny, somebody living away from home. You had that close family circle you know and a close lot of friends and your friends were all sort of part of your family. So I don't know if it's still the same as that today. That's the main thing I'd say.

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I, MRS. M. SHARP give my
permission to JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

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Signed M. Sharp

Date 20th July, 1989

Interviewer Nosworthy

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER: MARGARET HENRY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW WITH MRS MAISIE SHARP

BY JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

Maisie Sharp (nee Junor) started work at Scott's Limited in 1940 and was employed on the ribbon counter.

Shops were open until nine p.m. on Friday nights and assistants worked a forty four hour week. Pay was low until the late 1960's.

A stop work meeting was held once that Maisie remembers and staff voted not to strike.

During the war staff knitted for the forces. British Marines, stationed at Nelson Bay, shopped at Scott's.

Staff were trained for two hours every morning, four days a week, for a year.

Maisie moved from ribbons to handbags, suitcases and baskets to neckwear.

Ration books were used during the war. There were coupons for food, dress materials and manchester.

As part of the fund-raising effort for the war Scott's held a ball. Debutantes were from Scott's and were partnered by British Marines.

Scott's Limited had basketball teams and men's and women's hockey teams.

Mr Scott's grandmother was voted Grandmother of the Year in a competition for money raising.

Calculations were made without the use of calculators or cash registers and docketts were hand written.

Staff members were happy and thought of their work mates as friends and family and had pride in their work.

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER: MARGARET HENRY

TERM 3 RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

TOPIC: RETAILING AT SCOTT'S. A WOMAN'S VIEW.

BY JENNIFER NOSWORTHY

Since its opening in the late 1800's until being bought by the Sydney firm of David Jones Proprietary Limited, the House of Scott's prospered. William Scott who was a shrewd businessman devoted much of his life to the business. His son, Eric, followed in his father's footsteps and Scott's remained a large and prestigious department store.

In 1890 an unimposing shop known locally as "the hole in the wall" was opened by William Scott and employed three people.¹ William's wife, Edith, did not work in the shop but played a supportive role which undoubtedly contributed to the success of the business. The idea for the name of the shop "Scott's, The Busy Draper" was² initiated by her.

There had been many difficult periods. Many institutions failed during the great Australian Bank Crash of 1893. As a result³ thousands of firms were forced to close. Due to a friend's forewarning Mr Scott withdrew all his money from the bank on the day before the crash so enabling Scott's to survive.⁴ A series of strikes in the mining industry caused waiting sailing ships in the harbour to berth three deep at every available wharf and trade was virtually paralysed.⁵ During this time of economic hardship, Scott's not only survived but was extended credit of five hundred pounds by a leading Sydney textile wholesaler.⁶

1. 1890 - 1947. The House of Scott's Souvenir Programme.
2. Letter from Mr W D Scott
3. The Newcastle Sun 8th September, 1947
4. Souvenir Programme
5. Newcastle Sun
6. Souvenir Programme.

As the business began to expand Scott's was seen as a threat by one of the already established business houses in Newcastle. An attempt was made to put William Scott out of business by threatening to close their account with any wholesaler who extended him credit. Fortunately the leading Sydney wholesaler of Patterson, Laing and Bruce ignored the threat and a crisis was averted. As a result this wholesaler became the preferred supplier for Scott's.⁷

In 1897 Mr Scott opened an office in London, England which allowed the House of Scott's to keep in touch with the best known manufacturers.⁸ This enabled goods to be purchased at the best prices.

After the early 1900's inland mines opened up around Cessnock. As the lower Hunter Valley began to prosper so too the city of Newcastle benefitted. Scott's conducted a very convenient mail order service.⁹ In 1903 Scott, The Busy Draper became Scott's Limited.¹⁰

In 1904 the dress making sections of the retailers Kingsborough's, Scott's and Winn'S employed three quarters of the Newcastle and districts total female factory workers. A further five hundred women worked as shop assistants compared with four hundred men. The women's pay was half that of the men.¹¹

7. Letter

8. The Newcastle Morning Herald. 1st December, 1915.

9. J.C. Docherty. Newcastle. The Making of an Australian City P. 124

10. Newcastle Morning Herald.

11. Docherty. Newcastle. The Making of an Australian City P51

By 1908 business had expanded. In 1914 just before World War One the corner structure was opened. It comprised five floors including tea-room and luncheon room. One whole floor was given over to the War Chest and Comforts Fund until 1918.¹² Building continued over the next few years and the clothing and mercery building was opened in 1920 by the then Governor of New South Wales, Sir Walter Davidson.¹³

William Scott died in 1926. His son Eric became Chairman of Directors. He did not have his father's flair but was a good businessman in his own right. Under his management the business continued to prosper. The "Mitchell building" was purchased in the 1930's with a view to expand the selling area. Eric Scott was dissuaded from this initiative by one of his senior staff members and the building was used as a storage area. Consequently Scott's never stocked shoes or electrical goods such as radios.¹⁴

Eric Scott was totally committed to the business, seldom taking time off for holidays. He took a keen interest in his staff and was friend, confidant, advisor and supporter where appropriate. He built up a senior staff of buyers and heads of departments who were dedicated to their work. He always chose staff on their ability, not whether male or female. Executive members were evenly represented by both sexes.¹⁵

12. Newcastle Sun
13. Souvenir Programme
14. Letter from Mr WD Scott
15. Ibid.

In 1937 a two storey building was erected by Scott's in Wolfe Street. The ground floor was to accommodate six shops including Lane and Trewartha the grocer and others.¹⁶ The upper floor was for offices and suites. "The building was erected on the site of part of the first settlement of Newcastle."¹⁷

During World War Two from 1939 to 1945 portions of the buildings were used by the Red Cross and Victoria League. The staff was prominent in raising money for the war effort. They staged their own musical revues, concerts and ballets.¹⁸ Scott's was the central receiving depot for the appeal for Food for Britain. Thousands of tins of food were collected by the church, schools, the Red Cross and the Scouting Movement while the Greater Newcastle Council played a prominent part.¹⁹ A Grandmother of the Year Competition was held to raise money for the war effort. Eric Scott was thrilled when his mother, Edith, won the competition.²⁰ Raffle tickets were sold, often someone standing at Scott's corner.²¹ Large air raid shelters were built in the parking area and auxiliary power generating plant was installed.²²

Scott's Limited was not just a place of work to the staff. They worked together in true team effort and were one happy family.²³ Within the organisation that was Scott's, there was a Patriotic

16. Letter from Mr WD Scott
17. The Newcastle Morning Herald, 4th December, 1937.
18. Interview with Mrs Selma Hare
19. Souvenir Programme
20. Interview with Mrs Maisie Sharp
21. Interview with Mrs Selma Hare
22. Letter from Mr W D Scott.
23. Interview with Mrs Selma Hare

and Comforts Club, Welfare Club, Revue Committee, Choir and ballet. Birthday parties and annual reunions were held. Even in 1989 the former staff held their reunion to renew acquaintances and reminisce. Staff at Scott's were active in sporting areas. There were women's basketball and women's and men's hockey teams. Voluntary subscriptions were given through the Welfare Club for staff sickness benefits.²⁴

William Scott believed much of his success was due to advertising. Not a working day passed without an advertisement appearing in newspapers advising readers of the latest local and overseas purchases.²⁵ In 1915 he said of Newcastle, "Providence has blessed it with an abundance of natural resources, which allied to enterprise, will ensure its future prosperity".²⁶

In the early 1950's the first escalator in Newcastle was installed at Scott's.²⁷ Eric Scott's son, William, declined the offer to pursue his father and grandfather in the business and took up a career in agriculture. Scott's Limited was sold to David Jones Proprietary Limited in 1957 when Eric Scott retired.

24. Interview with Mrs Maisie Sharp
25. The Newcastle Sun
26. The Newcastle Morning Herald
27. Letter from Mr W D Scott.

EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS
OF
SCOTT'S LIMITED.





