

NAME: Bob Price

SUBJECT: Australian History

LECTURER: Margaret Henry

CLASS: 7pm/9pm

REGION\_HISTORY\_ESSAY.

SUBJECT:

Newcastle's relief organisations and Unemployed Camps in the  
Great Depression.

History records the Great Depression as beginning in 1929 and ending in the late 1930's. However for many Newcastle people the Great Depression began well before the 1930's and lasted a very long time. Because Newcastle's economy was dominated by the coal - steel industries its workforce experienced the intermittent unemployment which characterised these industries throughout the 1920's. During these years many men and women had suffered a precarious economic existence, before they had to face the crisis of the early 1930's. Then, although the heavy industries made a remarkably quick recovery, the workforce did not, and poverty and unemployment was still prevalent in Newcastle well into the 1940's.

During the decade of depression many relief organisations and unemployment relief works were organised by local and state governments to help alleviate the depressed situation in which the majority of the population of Newcastle found themselves. The Newcastle and Northumberland Benevolent Society was one example. This society had been active since 1884 and aimed to relieve the destitute poor and sick. This society offered 'indoor' relief in an asylum and 'outdoor' relief in the form of clothing and money for meals and beds. (1) In 1922 the society was "able to some extent to lessen the distress that was so widespread in the district", distributing 1,266 pounds in relief. (2) The Federated Society of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Structural Iron and Steel Workers of Australia was well represented in Newcastle and maintained an Unemployed Distress Relief Fund. (3) These two organisations were sorely tried during the 1920's by the enormous

(1) S. Gray, Newcastle in the Great Depression, Newcastle, p.14

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

tide of demands on their funds, to the point where in 1929 the Newcastle and Northumberland benevolent Society was taken over by the Hospital Commission of N.S.W. The Federated Society of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Structural Iron and Steel Workers of Australia's relief fund by 1929 could only offer small irregular payments to their members.(4) Thus all sectors were feeling the pressure of unemployment, narrowing resources and the downturn of the economy.

Local government aid to destitute children is shown in this extract from the Newcastle Morning Herald dated January 1st 1932, "on the last day of 1931 the Lady Mayoress, Mrs J. Parker requested: Newcastle Relief Depot distribute liberal slices of Christmas pudding to over one hundred of the poor children of Newcastle. The 301b puddings were made by a former army cook. These children would otherwise have had little opportunity to enjoy this usual christmas dish".(5) The Newcastle Branch of the Australian Labour Party on January 6th, 1932 organised a "Christmas cheer Benefit" for the children of its unemployed members "it was a great success".(6) On the 6th January, 1933 the Maitland Relief Committee organised a clothing distribution among the needy. "The relief committee secretary reported that boxes of Military clothing had been distributed to necessitous cases: 20 pairs of boots and 4 overcoats have been distributed by the committee. Items remaining are: 11 tunics, 8 hats, 3 pairs of breeches all of which have been held in hand until further necessitous cases were investigated".(7) Boxing contests were also

(4) Ibid. p 15

(5) Newcastle Morning Herald, 1st January, 1932.

(6) Ibid. 6th January, 1932.

(7) Ibid. 6th January, 1933.

organised by the Maitland relief Committee as a fund raising venture and at the same time served as a reasonably priced entertainment.

Many public works were undertaken by the Unemployed Relief Council. These works were made possible by grants from the State Government. In the N.M.H. January 6th, 1933 "The Minister for Labour and Industry told the Unemployed Relief Council, yesterday that 3,766,373 pounds had been made available for unemployment in N.S.W. the amount was to be distributed by the Water Board, Councils, Public Works and Education". (8) In the Newcastle region the public works made available by the grant included the Chichester Pipeline duplication from Chichester Dam to Newcastle, Wallsend and Cessnock drainage, Cessnock baths, drainage and river improvements at Maitland. Many men from the Newcastle area also worked on the road which was built at this time from the Northern Tablelands highway to the coast, from Tamworth to Port Macquarie. On 30th June, 1933 a census was taken, it showed nearly 38% of the cities male workforce was either unemployed or partly employed. The depression left no part of life untouched. (9)

Throughout Newcastle as a result of the depression distress, makeshift housing sprang up, and in some cases this housing lasted well into the 1960's. The State government was slow to take up the responsibility for food relief for the unemployed and it virtually refused to help with shelter. Whether they liked it or not, the Newcastle Councils became involved with the problem of depression housing. The usual pattern for the homeless unemployed was to occupy an area of Crown or other public land and to erect some kind of dwelling on it. People lived in these rent free or paid a

(8) Ibid.

(9) J.C. Docherty, Newcastle The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983. p 151.

nominal rental to the Lands Department for 'Permissive Occupancy'. (10) Unemployment camps as they were known, existed at Adamstown, Clyde Street, Merewether, Platts Estate, Platts Channel, Stockton, Wallsend (known as Hollywood), Birmingham Gardens, R.S.L. Diggers at Parry Street, Mayfield West, Nobbys and Shortland. (11) The shacks or humpies in which the camp dwellers lived were made of any material available: canvas, corn bags, kerosene tins, old timber or freshly cut bush logs, old tramcars, cabins of disused cranes, large pipes or tanks, (12) in fact anything which could be made into a shelter. One shelter at the Mayfield West Unemployed Camp consisted of a humpy gouged into the side of a sloping hill. It had a hard ground floor with guttering made to catch precious rain water in an assembly of drums. The beds consisted of bunks of bush timber, separated from the earthen wall by sheets of tin and corn bags opened out to make a sturdy lining. "Not as pretty as wall-paper but a great draught stopper". (13) At Platts Channel Camp, on the river bank, houses were built on stilts and jutted out across the mud. The people gained access by packed earth tracks between the houses and the bank. At high tide water ~~slapped~~ lapped under these houses. Sanitary arrangements were simple: Beneath the wooden toilet seat a hole in the floor facilitated the passage of wastes into the river where the current carried it away. Dangerous to health, but in those days considered no more pollutant than the steelworks discharge. (14) Tips and dumps in and around Newcastle were scavenged by the unemployed for materials to build and improve

(10) Gray, Newcastle in..., p17.

(11) L. Fox (ed), Depression Down Under, Sydney, 1977. p92.

(12) Gray, Newcastle in..., p17.

(13) Fox (ed), Depression Down..., p84.

(14) Ibid. p85.



their dwellings. National Parks sports ground was at first a tip where people collected copper, brass, bones, tins, bottles and rags. "the police regarded us as criminals but we had to live". (15)

The Carrington reserve camp was popularly known as Texas, apparently because it was originally an area on which people ran horses. One man moved into Texas in 1930, after he had lost his job as an ironworker at the B.H.P., and stayed there, until he moved into St. Joseph's Home for the Aged in 1956. (16) Carrington was an area of high unemployment and low incomes and the council was sympathetic towards the people living in Texas. The council attended to their water supply and resisted the Land Department's attempts to remove the camp. Hollywood camp situated between Wallsend and Lambton, did not receive such understanding treatment. This area had been used for camping since at least 1920, and as late as 1945 residents were still carrying water long distances in kerosene tins; neither Wallsend or Lambton Council being prepared to accept responsibility for the well being of the camp people. (17) Nobby's camp situated on a patch of beach known as Horseshoe Beach came into existence as a result of State and Commonwealth Government assistance. In mid 1930 there were at least 170 men camped around Newcastle beaches and because the Newcastle council was not prepared to look after the men, outside intervention was necessitated. The Federal Government supplied thirty tents and sufficient dixies for 120 men; the State Government was to subsidise the council to cover the wages of a caretaker for three months. Thus Nobby's camp came into being and

(15) Ibid. p86.

(16) Gray, Newcastle\_in..., p14.

(17) Ibid.

under the appalled eyes of many Newcastle residents soon became a regular part of the Newcastle scene. (18) Nobby's camp was disbanded in 1937, a few people were helped by the Unemployed Housing Trust, but the majority of its occupants went onto Platt's Estate in Waratah, and some of the dwellings used then, were still in dispute in the 1950's. (19)

The Great Depression in Newcastle for the great majority of the city's population can find its origins in the 1922/23 recession. From this point onwards unemployment was a way of life for many. The unemployed camps' persistence indicates both the length of the depression experience in the region and the inability of the Newcastle City Council to take decisive steps to house their disadvantaged. The many relief organisations and committees only minimally eased the unemployed persons' lot. Newcastle was a place where hardship had long existed, and "making do and lasting out" had become a way of life.

(18) Ibid.

(19) Ibid. p20.

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Summary of Transcript.

Interview with:

Mrs Kathleen Jones of 4 Gorrick Street, Mayfield East.  
Newcastle.

Interviewed by:

Bob Price.  
Open Foundation Student.  
University of Newcastle.

Date:

29th August, 1989.

Subject:

Australian History-Regional History Project.

Topic:

The Great Depression.

Mrs Kathleen Jones was born in Petersham, Sydney in 1909. Six years later she moved to Newcastle where she has been a resident ever since. The early part of Mrs Jones' life is not covered in this interview, the main theme being, Mrs Jones' life after her marriage, and her memories of her life in the Depression years as a woman, wife, mother and homemaker.

During our interview Mrs Jones vividly recalls her memories of this difficult period of her life, but as the interview progresses she displays a feeling of resolve at her situation. The close family ties and sharing of necessities seem to bond the "Jones" family together.

As was the case of so many married couples in those times. Mrs Jones' husband, Bill, was unemployed, as she stated "right from the start". He joined the daily procession of the hundreds of men going to the steelworks to see if they might get a days work, in most cases to no avail. Mrs Jones recalled how for the unemployed there was no money available as social security, the government would give these families 'tickets' to buy groceries and other basic necessities.

The owning of a house for the vast majority of working class people in the period of Depression was an impossible dream. Mrs Jones states that most people were renting their houses at this time, her first house was rented for 9 shillings a week. Even though some houses were reasonably priced the majority of people could not afford the deposit. The rented houses were moderately furnished as reflected the financial situation of the residents.

Mrs Jones recalls the different things men would do to earn money. Selling clothes props for clothes lines, rabbit

rabbit trapping, and selling collected bottles. She states "everybody was trying all sorts of things to get a few bob".

Entertainment consisted of going to the theatre at Tighes Hill, the cost being threepence in the afternoon and a shilling at night. Vaudeville acts at the Victoria Theatre in Newcastle were also popular, and not expensive. Mrs Jones' sister, she recalls, often gave the family money to go to the pictures, while she minded the children. Her sister being employed as a bar maid and therefore having some money, helped those members of her family in need.

Supermarkets as we know them today did not exist. There were big grocery shops, however the little corner shop serviced the needs of the neighbourhood. Bakers came around the neighbourhood, as well as milkmen filling jugs at threepence a pint. To supplement the family's diet many households grew their own vegetables or kept chickens in their back yards. Mrs Jones was no exception to this practice, she states, "tomatoes being her husband's great success in the garden".

All through the interview the financial situation of all the community showed through. A more basic life style Seemed to exist, an acceptance by Mrs Jones of her situation and her family's situation is evident. Mrs Jones recalls the street photographers another example of men trying to earn a living.

For those people unlucky enough to have no housing, the situation was extremely difficult. Mrs Jones recalls, the "gun pits" at Stockton being used for housing. The little huts built along the Hunter River near Hexham, and also a shanty town near Jesmond named Hollywood. These people were less fortunate than Mrs Jones for as she states "my relatives

and family were always supportive in these difficult times".

Mrs Jones' memories of the Depression years, are but one facet of the whole story. Her unique recollections are now accessible to all who read this oral history document.

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Topic:

The Great Depression: A womans memories.



Bob Price: I'm interviewing Mrs Kath Jones, resident of Mayfield East, on her thoughts on the depression years, as a wife, housewife and mother. Mrs Jones, were you born in Newcastle?

Kath Jones: No, Sydney in a place called Petersham.

Bob Price: And what year was that?

Kath Jones: 1909 (Nineteen hundred and nine).

Bob Price: And when did you move to Newcastle?

Kath Jones: We left Sydney when I was six years old and came to live in Newcastle in Mayfield.

Bob Price: You moved straight to Mayfield?

Kath Price: Yes.

Bob Price: Whereabouts in Mayfield did you move to?

Kath Jones: A little a..a..little street called street Little George Street near Dangar Park.

Bob Price: And when did you move to Gorrick Street?

Kath Jones: Oh well, we stayed in..stayed in Mayfield for a good while and then we shifted to Stockton and from there I got married, and when I got married we came back to Mayfield.

Bob Price: What year were you married?

Kath Jones: 1928.

Bob Price: And that was the start of the depression years for you?

Kath Jones: Yes, I'd say it was, about the start. Yes and when I-ar-when I was..everyone starting to get out of work and you couldn't get anything going. Chap that I married, Bill Jones, he was a baker, and the baker that employed him, a Mr Koos from Mayfield, he couldn't afford to pay his wages so he said he was gonna get his nephew to work for him cause he'd take less wages, so he put my husband Bill off, and he was out of work right from the start. We went to live with his sister because we hadn't anywhere to live and he used to..er..go to the

steelworks with other men every morning, and if your name was called out, you might get a day's work, and if it wasn't, well you just went home and came the next day.

Bob Price: At those times, Mrs Jones, was there any social security or dole as there is today for unemployed people?

Kath Jones: There nothing like there is today, you never, at any time got any money given to you. You used to get a ticket-ar-maybe for groceries, it might include meat but I forget that but anything you got on that ticket, you had to get all at once, you couldn't like leave some of it till, for another week you had to take it all at the one time, which meant that by the end of the ti..the-the week or fortnight or whatever it was everything would be stale, and um, if you never had enough clothes, there was places in town where you could go, run by the government, you could get shoes, and if you were having a baby, you got what they call a layette, for nothing, from the government and that consisted of just the bare essentials to have the baby a dozen nappies, three little night dresses, three singlets, and that's about all..a bonnet and shawl, that's right.

Bob Price: You said you were living with some relations when you were first in Mayfield, did you pool the resources, those tickets you were talking about, did you share them together?

Kath Jones: Yes, yes, we ah..they used to, they were out of work too and they used to put theirs with ours and we'd do the best that we could. Wasn't much chance of getting any help. My..my mother, her husband, my stepfather, he was a coal trimmer, but he was out of work, but he had a bit of money in the bank, and they could get..they could get money and when they..when they told them that when the strike was over,

whatever they'd..the government had given, given them, they would have to repay it, because the banks were closed so you couldn't just draw your money out, so when the, when the things got better, and , m..Peter, my stepfather went back to work, ah he ah had to pay the money back and everyone around where they lived at Stockton, because they didn't have any money in the bank, none of them had to pay it back, they was just allowed to have it. It was another case of those that waste their money always get on the best.

Bob Price: This strike you were talking about, what year did that start? Was it a very long strike?

Kath Jones: I think, I really think that it started in 1927 because mum used to talk about it. That's what I think, I think it really started in about 1927. A few years it was, altogether. The B.H.P. were in it too.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, you mentioned the government giving you a layette I think you said, for the children.

Kath Jones: For one baby. The baby that was due, and..

Bob Price: And you had children during the depression years?

Kath Jones: One more. The first girl was born in 1929 and then the next one was..and we had a real bad struggle all that time. So did everyone else, and when I had the next child it was in 1934, and by then, just about then my husband had got a job at the steelworks. You worked one week and had one week off, and we..we were a good bit better off. As was everyone, but because, you know, you never had anything, you really needed everything to start off again. But we sort of managed from then, better, it wasn't over but it was..um..better than it was.

Bob Price: With your first child, did you go to the hospital to have the

baby?

Kath Jones: No, I had the baby at home. In those days, most people had the babies at home. There w..there was a couple of private hospitals, one down Mayfield, two down Mayfield, and a lot of people used to go there, but the biggest majority of women had their babies at home, and the doctor would generally be there at the birth. And..er..then you'd..the midwife, and the midwife, you'd send for the midwife first, and she was a nurse too, I suppose, and uh, then when the doctor came that was the finish of him and the nurse came every day for nine days, and you stayed in bed for nine days in those days, and you got up on the tenth day and that was the end, the nurse never came any more but you had to take the baby down to the doctor's surgery when you were able, to get a check over.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, these days when people have babies they have dozens of nappies, baby clothes, all those things prepared.

Kath Jones: Yes, that's right, that's the way it is now. But people in the, in the days of the depression they would..a lot of them couldn't believe the way things are now. Nearly everyone has a job and nearly everyone has plenty of..plenty of time to get all the baby's clothes together and most people, well I don't know anyone that had them at home, just occasionally you hear of it. Most people go into one of the big hospitals, where they have a maternity section.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, when you moved into Gorrick street, did you buy the house or were you renting?

Kath Jones: No we were renting the house. It was a very small one. We never had much furniture at that time. It was a very small house and we rented it for 9 shillings a week, and we stayed there in that place for about-oh-till the eldest girl was

about 16, and then a lady across the road, that owned this house that we're living in now, she..we were both renting at that time, and she changed houses. She..well we got the bigger one, and she took the little one, and then as time went on, we had the opportunity to pay a deposit and we got a loan through the building society to pay the house off.

Bob Price: During those depression years did many people own their own homes, or were most people renting?

Kath Jones: Most people were renting, and if you..we had a couple of chances. One good chance was if..if you had 50 pounds, you could put it on this house that was there. You could put the 50 pounds on and they were gonna sell it for 500 pounds, put the 50 pounds down and pay a pound a week. We couldn't get the 50 pounds from anywhere. None of us had it. So we couldn't get that one. But, no, most people were renting houses. They were pretty hard to get, but more plentiful than they are now.

Bob Price: The house you moved into in Gorrick street, to rent, was that a fully furnished house, or did you have to furnish it yourself?

Kath Jones: Well we lived..we shifted from the little one across the road, we had that furnished, but only in a very moderate way. It had..it only had one bedroom and a sort of a dining room and a little kitchen. When we moved over to the other one, that was bigger, and we gradually got extra bits of furniture. Some people, as they got work, lot of our relations, they used to get things on time payment, but I would never do that because I was always too short of money, and I thought something might happen and you wouldn't be able to pay it, so we never got very much until later.



Bob Price: You mentioned the little house across the road from the one you're living in now. What year did you move into that house?

Kath Jones: Oh, about, about 19..about 1930, it would be.

Bob Price: Yeah, well that's more or less the depression years.

Kath Jones: Oh yes it's still the depression but it was starting to improve, but not very much, there were still hundreds out of work, and men used to do all sorts of things. They u..they..in those days if..anyone that had a horse and cart or could get a loan of one, they'd go out in the bush and cu..and cut trees down and sell the..make the branches into clothes props, and they'd come round singing out "clothes props, p..clothes props, 2 and 6 each," and that's what..that's how they made a living and some men'd go rab..rabbit trapping, and they'd come round and sell rabbits. Pretty cheap. Sixpence each they were. And also, peop..man used to come round selling bottles. Not selling bottles, collecting bottles. A ha'penny each they'd give you, or else a lolly stick. Was all sorts, everybody was trying all sorts of things to get a few bob.

Bob Price: During the 30's, early 30's, what sort of things did you do for entertainment? When you..you would have been..had young children, and newly married..

Kath Jones: Yes, that's right. I don't..I can't just put me finger on when wirelesses came in, but the main thing you used to do if you had..if you could get the money, was..we lived in Mayfield and wasn't very far to walk up to the Tighes Hill theatre on Maitland Road in Tighes Hill. That's near Mayfield. And you could go, you could.. in the afternoon you could get in for threepence, and in the night it was a shilling. And I..and if you went in the afternoon, the kids,

it would be get..threepence to go in and a penny to spend. And that's mostly what people did. They used..peop..the pictures used to be on twice a week. Wednesdays and Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. And sometimes besides the pictures, it might be half pictures, and half vaudeville. They'd have a few vaudeville acts on as well. They were very popular in those days vaudeville, vaudeville acts. Lot of people came to Newcastle, and some went and w..combined theirs with..with the pictures and others went into the Victoria Theatre and had a full vaudeville show. Nothing was very expensive.

Bob Price: These vaudeville acts, were they people from Sydney or just local groups?

Kath Jones: No, they were what they call professionals mostly, from Sydney or where ever.

Bob Price: The Victoria Theatre, where was that?

Kath Jones: Victoria Theatre, it was in Perkins Street. And-ah-now its been..Mr..the Eastham brothers sell clothes there now, but that Victoria Theatre, as far back as I remember, they always had the shows there. The full shows. George Wallace was one of the actors that used to be on.

Bob Price: In those times, how did you go into Newcastle, did you catch the bus or tram?

Kath Jones: No, there was trams. Most of..when we..if we wanted to go to town, we'd mostly go by tram, because there was no buses then, and it used to..ah..to go right in, I think for an adult, it was threepence, and for children it was a penny, in the tram.

Bob Price: Did the whole family go to these shows together, or just you and the children?

Kath Jones: No, mostly we went by ourself. My sister used to do a little bit of bar work and she often gave us the money for our fare and so we could go, she'd stay home and mind the children. W..well, when we went to the pictures we used to all go together. We'd wheel the kiddies up in the pram.

Bob Price: So in those days, it was more if you weren't working, the people who were working used to help the ones that weren't.

Kath Jones: Yes, your relations did. My mother lived at Stockton, and when we first..when we first moved into the little house, we never had anything, and she gave us some of her furniture so that we could make it fairly presentable. And anyone..anyone that had anything, any of our relations, you know, everyone'd give any..anyone else a hand. And the ones that were working, always on payday, they always ga..gave s..the ones that weren't working, a parcel of groceries, or something. Might be just a pound of butter or some bread, but we were in a good family, the Jones. There was quite a lot of them, and they all helped each other. And for entertainment besides the pictures, they used to play cards in each others houses. Not only the Jones' but they had friends. Anything to, you know, to get a bit of entertainment into your life. You just accepted it. You didn't know things were gonna get good. You just didn't know the..well, I've never had it good. Never ever. We was always..my father used to be a..sell fruit out of a cart and we used to always be, you know, on the bread line, sort of.

Bob Price: In these days, Mrs Jones, the food you buy, there's quite a big variety of food and lots and lots of different items on the supermarket shelves. In the 30's what was the food like in those days?

Kath Jones: Well like I..it wasn't like it is now. Ah..well mostly there was no supermarkets to start with. And the..people wouldn't have had the money to buy what you can now. I forget which year the supermarkets came, but you only got the things from a little corner shop. There was a couple of bigger grocery shops, you'd get what you call your order there, if you ha..if you were working on pay day, but there wasn't the variety. There used to be a ba..bakers used to come round, and also milkman used to come and you'd go out with a jug and you'd get a pint of milk in the..in..they'd turn a tap on a put a pint in..they'd have a pint measure and they'd put the milk in that and then pour it in the jug. That's threepence. And sometimes while the..while the chap had gone up the street a bit, to..um..serve a customer that he knew had a set amount, a woman in the street used to run out and turn the tap on and get hers for nothing. Mrs Morton. But..ah..as..as I said it wasn't..it wasn't as much as there is now.

Bob Price: Um..with regard to housework, washing machines, dishwashers, microwave ovens, those style of things are only fairly modern inventions.

Kath Jones: There was none of those..there was none of those. From when I..from when I was first married, many years, there was nothing like that. You had to ah..most poeple had a gas copper..some people. We had a fuel copper, and you used to..er..chop up soap and put that in. There was no..ah..we..in those depression years, there was no Rinso or Fab or any of those sort of things. You boil everything and then rinse them a couple of times. Had to do everything by hand. Most people had a washing board. You'd rub the..put the towels or whatever on the washing board and rub on some soap

and then scrub em. Mostly your nail..your fingers got skinned, because it was too hard.

Bob Price: And there were no vacuum cleaners or anything of that style?

Kath Jones: N..No, there was no vacuum cleaners. Most people didn't have any carpet. If you were lucky you might have a..a bit of matting up the hall or something like that. That's most people. I s'pose there was plenty of others better off. But in..you know..all of the people that I knew were all on about the one level.

Bob Price: I've been reading, Mrs Jones, that during those times, lots of people grew their own vegetables. Did you grow your vegetables?

Kath Jones: Yes, my husband..ah..dug up the yard in places and..ah..the main thing he grew that were a success were tomatoes. He got that many tomatoes, we always intended that we'd sell them, but a lot of other people had tomatoes too so really, we mostly k..kept ourself in them. Oh but they lasted for a long time, coming on all the time, and gave them to the neighbours and to our relations. And also a..at that time, in those days, nearly everyone kept some fowls. We had about..oh..eight down the back yard, and ah..you know, you're supposed to get eggs, but we didn't get very many eggs. It used to cost us more to buy the food than the eggs, so in the finish, we got rid of them. Mostly ate them and..ah..one time, my husband bought, was near Christmas, eight Black Orpinton rooster chickens and we kep..fed those and..er..when it was Chris..near christmas, we..a..we sold them for seven an six each. Which we didn't think that was too bad, but I think nowadays, you wouldn't think that was any good because, by the time you took off what you paid for the food you



didn't make much out of them. But still, we thought it was all right.

Bob Price: The other neighbours in the street, were they all in the same situation as you financially?

Kath Jones: Oh mostly, yes. Mostly they were. There was very few people better off. Oh..most of..most of the men that lived round us, they gradually got work at the B.H.P. And there was another work place just over near the school. It was Lysaj<sup>le</sup>'s. Some worked there. But..ah..in the real depression years it was very hard, but, as I said, it was getting better. By the time we shifted across the road it was a good bit better.

Bob Price: You've been showing me some old photos of your family, Mrs Jones, and the children. Was taking photos a fairly busy time in those days? You do that very often?

Kath Jones: Oh yes, we had..um..I had a camera. I'd had it for years. It was called a Brownie and it was a box camera, and the 'fillums' were only black and white. You..ah..never got coloured 'fillums', they came years after. Y'used to..um..,take any..take your children mostly. But another way with photographers, if you..when you went to town, which most people did, every now and again, you always wore a hat, mostly gloves, just to go shopping in town. And..um..y'were walking along the street and there was photographers that used to snap you as you came towards them. One on each side of the road. Whichever way you came, you'd run into one of these photographers, and they'd give you a ticket with a number on and you'd go to their studio in..in one of the shops in Newcastle and see the photo, and if you wanted it, I think it used to cost about a shilling early, and then it went up to about three and six. We used to get a lot of

photos like that.

Bob Price: In the depression years, I've been reading that there were quite a lot of people who didn't have houses. You stated how you had a house, had relations, but there must have been some people who didn't have, or weren't as lucky as you. In what situation were they?

Kath Jones: Well, there was quite a few people like that. Some cases that I know, over at Stockton they..up near the breakwater on a..on a block of land, or land over there, when the 1914, 1918 war was on they built gun..um..they called it..um..what is it? Gun..ah..

Bob Price: Pits.

Kath Jones: Ah yes, gun pits. And they were underneath the ground and they s..I was never in them, but it seems that they had so many rooms where the machinery f..f..firing the guns was. Well people used to live in there. And do..ah..cooking on open fire out the front. Washed their clothes wherever they could. And then other people, they built little huts along the um..th river bank, up Hexham. There was quite a lot of those. They b..they built them out of any old tin or material that they could get hold of. Anything, you know, just to keep them out of the weather. They were mostly people that never had any relations that had a house. And nother..another thing too, relations wouldn't always give people a hand. People were selfish then, just like some of them are now.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, I've heard people talk of a place called Hollywood, which was near Jesmond. What are your memories of that place?

Kath Jones: Oh yes, that was..um..on the way out to Jesmond, there's a park out that way now. Well it was beyond the park in bush.

It was all bush there. And that was another place where people lived. They all built their houses out of anything that they could get. There was no sanitary, or anything like that. I was never in amongst it, but I knew people that w..that were. And beyond that, ah..Hollywood, there's a whole lot of people lived there, but beyond that, in the bush, there used to be a two-up school. And often the police'd raid it and they'd race through and hide in the bush..n..near this Hollywood, and try and grab the..er..players that were playing. It was an illegal game. But..ah..that was Hollywood all right, and that was where a lot of people went.

Bob Price: The people that lived here, the same as the people that lived in the gun pits, and on the banks of the river, they had no employment at all?

Kath Jones: Well, I..I'd say when they first went there they had no employment, but they were gradually getting a day or something like that, but they couldn't get a house where they'd have enough money to pay the rent, so they really lived there, some people lived there for years and years till they were forced to get out because, as things got better, they were made get out and they..ah..the council sent bulldozers in and bulldozed them all into the ground. But that was years after. People lived there for years.

Bob Price: Were the buildings made of corrugated iron and tin?

Kath Jones: Some, yes, corrugated iron and anything. Bag. they used to do a lot with bags, and..er..you'd put the bags on then paint them over with tar. Mostly though they'd do that for the roof, and that..that wouldn't let the rain in. But there was all races there. There was Australians and Aborigines. All that sort of thing. There wasn't any..there wasn't any new

Australians then, like there is now. That far back I mean.

Bob Price: Thank you very much Mrs Jones for sharing some of your memories of the depression years in Newcastle.

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198

I, Mrs K. Jones give my  
permission to Mr R. Price

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for  
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of  
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for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed H. Jones

Date 6<sup>th</sup> September 1989

Interviewer Price

NAME: Bob Price

SUBJECT: Australian History

LECTURER: Margaret Henry

CLASS: 7pm/9pm

REGION HISTORY ESSAY.

SUBJECT:

Newcastle's relief organisations and Unemployed Camps in the  
Great Depression.



History records the Great Depression as beginning in 1929 and ending in the late 1930's. However for many Newcastle people the Great Depression began well before the 1930's and lasted a very long time. Because Newcastle's economy was dominated by the coal - steel industries its workforce experienced the intermittent unemployment which characterised these industries throughout the 1920's. During these years many men and women had suffered a precarious economic existence, before they had to face the crisis of the early 1930's. Then, although the heavy industries made a remarkably quick recovery, the workforce did not, and poverty and unemployment was still prevalent in Newcastle well into the 1940's.

During the decade of depression many relief organisations and unemployment relief works were organised by local and state governments to help alleviate the depressed situation in which the majority of the population of Newcastle found themselves. The Newcastle and Northumberland Benevolent Society was one example. This society had been active since 1884 and aimed to relieve the destitute poor and sick. This society offered 'indoor' relief in an asylum and 'outdoor' relief in the form of clothing and money for meals and beds. (1) In 1922 the society was "able to some extent to lessen the distress that was so widespread in the district", distributing 1,266 pounds in relief. (2) The Federated Society of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Structural Iron and Steel Workers of Australia was well represented in Newcastle and maintained an Unemployed Distress Relief Fund. (3) These two organisations were sorely tried during the 1920's by the enormous

(1) S. Gray, Newcastle in the Great Depression, Newcastle, p.14

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

tide of demands on their funds, to the point where in 1929 the Newcastle and Northumberland benevolent Society was taken over by the Hospital Commission of N.S.W. The Federated Society of Boilermakers, Iron Shipbuilders and Structural Iron and Steel Workers of Australia's relief fund by 1929 could only offer small irregular payments to their members.(4) Thus all sectors were feeling the pressure of unemployment, narrowing resources and the downturn of the economy.

Local government aid to destitute children is shown in this extract from the Newcastle Morning Herald dated January 1st 1932, "on the last day of 1931 the Lady Mayoress, Mrs J. Parker requested: Newcastle Relief Depot distribute liberal slices of Christmas pudding to over one hundred of the poor children of Newcastle. The 30lb puddings were made by a former army cook. These children would otherwise have had little opportunity to enjoy this usual christmas dish".(5) The Newcastle Branch of the Australian Labour Party on January 6th, 1932 organised a "Christmas cheer Benefit" for the children of its unemployed members "it was a great success".(6) On the 6th January, 1933 the Maitland Relief Committee organised a clothing distribution among the needy. "The relief committee secretary reported that boxes of Military clothing had been distributed to necessitous cases: 20 pairs of boots and 4 overcoats have been distributed by the committee. Items remaining are: 11 tunics, 8 hats, 3 pairs of breeches all of which have been held in hand until further necessitous cases were investigated".(7) Boxing contests were also

(4) Ibid. p 15

(5) Newcastle Morning Herald, 1st January, 1932.

(6) Ibid. 6th January, 1932.

(7) Ibid. 6th January, 1933.

organised by the Maitland relief Committee as a fund raising venture and at the same time served as a reasonably priced entertainment.

Many public works were undertaken by the Unemployed Relief Council. These works were made possible by grants from the State Government. In the N.M.H. January 6th, 1933 "The Minister for Labour and Industry told the Unemployed Relief Council, yesterday that 3,766,373 pounds had been made available for unemployment in N.S.W. the amount was to be distributed by the Water Board, Councils, Public Works and Education".(8) In the Newcastle region the public works made available by the grant included the Chichester Pipeline duplication from Chichester Dam to Newcastle, Wallsend and Cessnock drainage, Cessnock baths, drainage and river improvements at Maitland. Many men from the Newcastle area also worked on the road which was built at this time from the Northern Tablelands highway to the coast, from Tamworth to Port Macquarie. On 30th June, 1933 a census was taken, it showed nearly 38% of the cities male workforce was either unemployed or partly employed. The depression left no part of life untouched.(9)

Throughout Newcastle as a result of the depression distress, makeshift housing sprang up, and in some cases this housing lasted well into the 1960's. The State government was slow to take up the responsibility for food relief for the unemployed and it virtually refused to help with shelter. Whether they liked it or not, the Newcastle Councils became involved with the problem of depression housing. The usual pattern for the homeless unemployed was to occupy an area of Crown or other public land and to erect some kind of dwelling on it. People lived in these rent free or paid a

(8) Ibid.

(9) J.C. Docherty, Newcastle The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983. p 151.

nominal rental to the Lands Department for 'Permissive Occupancy'. (10) Unemployment camps as they were known, existed at Adamstown, Clyde Street, Merewether, Platts Estate, Platts Channel, Stockton, Wallsend (known as Hollywood), Birmingham Gardens, R.S.L. Diggers at Parry Street, Mayfield West, Nobbys and Shortland. (11) The shacks or humpies in which the camp dwellers lived were made of any material available: canvas, corn bags, kerosene tins, old timber or freshly cut bush logs, old tramcars, cabins of disused cranes, large pipes or tanks, (12) in fact anything which could be made into a shelter. One shelter at the Mayfield West Unemployed Camp consisted of a humpy gouged into the side of a sloping hill. It had a hard ground floor with guttering made to catch precious rain water in an assembly of drums. The beds consisted of bunks of bush timber, separated from the earthen wall by sheets of tin and corn bags opened out to make a sturdy lining. "Not as pretty as wall-paper but a great draught stopper". (13) At Platts Channel Camp, on the river bank, houses were built on stilts and jutted out across the mud. The people gained access by packed earth tracks between the houses and the bank. At high tide water clapped under these houses. Sanitary arrangements were simple: Beneath the wooden toilet seat a hole in the floor facilitated the passage of wastes into the river where the current carried it away. Dangerous to health, but in those days considered no more pollutant than the steelworks discharge. (14) Tips and dumps in and around Newcastle were scavenged by the unemployed for materials to build and improve

(10) Gray, Newcastle in..., p17.

(11) L. Fox (ed), Depression Down Under, Sydney, 1977. p92.

(12) Gray, Newcastle in..., p17.

(13) Fox (ed), Depression Down..., p84.

(14) Ibid. p85.



their dwellings. National Parks sports ground was at first a tip where people collected copper, brass, bones, tins, bottles and rags. "the police regarded us as criminals but we had to live". (15)

The Carrington reserve camp was popularly known as Texas, apparently because it was originally an area on which people ran horses. One man moved into Texas in 1930, after he had lost his job as an ironworker at the B.H.P., and stayed there, until he moved into St. Joseph's Home for the Aged in 1956. (16) Carrington was an area of high unemployment and low incomes and the council was sympathetic towards the people living in Texas. The council attended to their water supply and resisted the Land Department's attempts to remove the camp. Hollywood camp situated between Wallsend and Lambton, did not receive such understanding treatment. This area had been used for camping since at least 1920, and as late as 1945 residents were still carrying water long distances in kerosene tins; neither Wallsend or Lambton Council being prepared to accept responsibility for the well being of the camp people. (17) Nobby's camp situated on a patch of beach known as Horseshoe Beach came into existence as a result of State and Commonwealth Government assistance. In mid 1930 there were at least 170 men camped around Newcastle beaches and because the Newcastle council was not prepared to look after the men, outside intervention was necessitated. The Federal Government supplied thirty tents and sufficient dixies for 120 men; the State Government was to subsidise the council to cover the wages of a caretaker for three months. Thus Nobby's camp came into being and

(15) Ibid. p86.

(16) Gray, Newcastle in..., p14.

(17) Ibid.

under the appalled eyes of many Newcastle residents soon became a regular part of the Newcastle scene. (18) Nobby's camp was disbanded in 1937, a few people were helped by the Unemployed Housing Trust, but the majority of its occupants went onto Platt's Estate in Waratah, and some of the dwellings used then, were still in dispute in the 1950's. (19)

The Great Depression in Newcastle for the great majority of the city's population can find its origins in the 1922/23 recession. From this point onwards unemployment was a way of life for many. The unemployed camps' persistence indicates both the length of the depression experience in the region and the inability of the Newcastle City Council to take decisive steps to house their disadvantaged. The many relief organisations and committees only minimally eased the unemployed persons' lot. Newcastle was a place where hardship had long existed, and "making do and lasting out" had become a way of life.

(18) Ibid.

(19) Ibid. p20.



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Summary of Transcript.

Interview with:

Mrs Kathleen Jones of 4 Gorrick Street, Mayfield East.  
Newcastle.

Interviewed by:

Bob Price.  
Open Foundation Student.  
University of Newcastle.

Date:

29th August, 1989.

Subject:

Australian History-Regional History Project.

Topic:

The Great Depression.

Mrs Kathleen Jones was born in Petersham, Sydney in 1909. Six years later she moved to Newcastle where she has been a resident ever since. The early part of Mrs Jones' life is not covered in this interview, the main theme being, Mrs Jones' life after her marriage, and her memories of her life in the Depression years as a woman, wife, mother and homemaker.

During our interview Mrs Jones vividly recalls her memories of this difficult period of her life, but as the interview progresses she displays a feeling of resolve at her situation. The close family ties and sharing of necessities seem to bond the "Jones" family together.

As was the case of so many married couples in those times. Mrs Jones' husband, Bill, was unemployed, as she stated "right from the start". He joined the daily procession of the hundreds of men going to the steelworks to see if they might get a days work, in most cases to no avail. Mrs Jones recalled how for the unemployed there was no money available as social security, the government would give these families 'tickets' to buy groceries and other basic necessities.

The owning of a house for the vast majority of working class people in the period of Depression was an impossible dream. Mrs Jones states that most people were renting their houses at this time, her first house was rented for 9 shillings a week. Even though some houses were reasonably priced the majority of people could not afford the deposit. The rented houses were moderately furnished as reflected the financial situation of the residents.

Mrs Jones recalls the different things men would do to earn money. Selling clothes props for clothes lines, rabbit

rabbit trapping, and selling collected bottles. She states "everybody was trying all sorts of things to get a few bob".

Entertainment consisted of going to the theatre at Tighes Hill, the cost being threepence in the afternoon and a shilling at night. Vaudeville acts at the Victoria Theatre in Newcastle were also popular, and not expensive. Mrs Jones' sister, she recalls, often gave the family money to go to the pictures, while she minded the children. Her sister being employed as a bar maid and therefore having some money, helped those members of her family in need.

Supermarkets as we know them today did not exist. There were big grocery shops, however the little corner shop serviced the needs of the neighbourhood. Bakers came around the neighbourhood, as well as milkmen filling jugs at threepence a pint. To supplement the families' diet many households grew their own vegetables or kept chickens in their back yards. Mrs Jones was no exception to this practice, she states, "tomatoes being her husband's great success in the garden".

All through the interview the financial situation of all the community showed through. A more basic life style Seemed to exist, an acceptance by Mrs Jones of her situation and her family's situation is evident. Mrs Jones recalls the street photographers another example of men trying to earn a living.

For those people unlucky enough to have no housing, the situation was extremely difficult. Mrs Jones recalls, the "gun pits" at Stockton being used for housing. The little huts built along the Hunter River near Hexham, and also a shanty town near Jesmond named Hollywood. These people were less fortunate than Mrs Jones for as she states "my relatives

and family were always supportive in these difficult times".

Mrs Jones' memories of the Depression years, are but one facet of the whole story. Her unique recollections are now accessible to all who read this oral history document.

Transcript of Interview with:

Mrs Kathleen Jones, of 4 Gorrick Street, Mayfield East,  
Newcastle.

Interviewed by:

Bob Price,  
Open Foundation Student,  
University of Newcastle.

Date:

29th August, 1989.

Subject:

Australian History-Regional History Project.

Topic:

The Great Depression: A womans memories.



Bob Price: I'm interviewing Mrs Kath Jones, resident of Mayfield East, on her thoughts on the depression years, as a wife, housewife and mother. Mrs Jones, were you born in Newcastle?

Kath Jones: No, Sydney in a place called Petersham.

Bob Price: And what year was that?

Kath Jones: 1909 (Nineteen hundred and nine).

Bob Price: And when did you move to Newcastle?

Kath Jones: We left Sydney when I was six years old and came to live in Newcastle in Mayfield.

Bob Price: You moved straight to Mayfield?

Kath Jones: Yes.

Bob Price: Whereabouts in Mayfield did you move to?

Kath Jones: A little a..a..little street called street Little George Street near Dangar Park.

Bob Price: And when did you move to Gorrick Street?

Kath Jones: Oh well, we stayed in..stayed in Mayfield for a good while and then we shifted to Stockton and from there I got married, and when I got married we came back to Mayfield.

Bob Price: What year were you married?

Kath Jones: 1928.

Bob Price: And that was the start of the depression years for you?

Kath Jones: Yes, I'd say it was, about the start. Yes and when I--ar--when I was..everyone starting to get out of work and you couldn't get anything going. Chap that I married, Bill Jones, he was a baker, and the baker that employed him, a Mr Koos from Mayfield, he couldn't afford to pay his wages so he said he was gonna get his nephew to work for him cause he'd take less wages, so he put my husband Bill off, and he was out of work right from the start. We went to live with his sister because we hadn't anywhere to live and he used to..er..go to the

steelworks with other men every morning, and if your name was called out, you might get a day's work, and if it wasn't, well you just went home and came the next day.

Bob Price: At those times, Mrs Jones, was there any social security or dole as there is today for unemployed people?

Kath Jones: There nothing like there is today, you never, at any time got any money given to you. You used to get a ticket-ar-maybe for groceries, it might include meat but I forget that but anything you got on that ticket, you had to get all at once, you couldn't like leave some of it till, for another week you had to take it all at the one time, which meant that by the end of the ti..the-the week or fortnight or whatever it was everything would be stale, and um, if you never had enough clothes, there was places in town where you could go, run by the government, you could get shoes, and if you were having a baby, you got what they call a layette, for nothing, from the government and that consisted of just the bare essentials to have the baby a dozen nappies, three little night dresses, three singlets, and that's about all..a bonnet and shawl, that's right.

Bob Price: You said you were living with some relations when you were first in Mayfield, did you pool the resources, those tickets you were talking about, did you share them together?

Kath Jones: Yes, yes, we ah..they used to, they were out of work too and they used to put theirs with ours and we'd do the best that we could. Wasn't much chance of getting any help. My..my mother, her husband, my stepfather, he was a coal trimmer, but he was out of work, but he had a bit of money in the bank, and they could get..they could get money and when they..when they told them that when the strike was over,

whatever they'd..the government had given, given them, they would have to repay it, because the banks were closed so you couldn't just draw your money out, so when the, when the things got better, and , m..Peter, my stepfather went back to work, ah he ah had to pay the money back and everyone around where they lived at Stockton, because they didn't have any money in the bank, none of them had to pay it back, they was just allowed to have it. It was another case of those that waste their money always get on the best.

Bob Price: This strike you were talking about, what year did that start? Was it a very long strike?

Kath Jones: I think, I really think that it started in 1927 because mum used to talk about it. That's what I think, I think it really started in about 1927. A few years it was, altogether. The B.H.P. were in it too.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, you mentioned the government giving you a layette I think you said, for the children.

Kath Jones: For one baby. The baby that was due, and..

Bob Price: And you had children during the depression years?

Kath Jones: One more. The first girl was born in 1929 and then the next one was..and we had a real bad struggle all that time. So did everyone else, and when I had the next child it was in 1934, and by then, just about then my husband had got a job at the steelworks. You worked one week and had one week off, and we..we were a good bit better off. As was everyone, but because, you know, you never had anything, you really needed everything to start off again. But we sort of managed from then, better, it wasn't over but it was..um..better than it was.

Bob Price: With your first child, did you go to the hospital to have the

baby?

Kath Jones: No, I had the baby at home. In those days, most people had the babies at home. There w..there was a couple of private hospitals, one down Mayfield, two down Mayfield, and a lot of people used to go there, but the biggest majority of women had their babies at home, and the doctor would generally be there at the birth. And..er..then you'd..the midwife, and the midwife, you'd send for the midwife first, and she was a nurse too, I suppose, and uh, then when the doctor came that was the finish of him and the nurse came every day for nine days, and you stayed in bed for nine days in those days, and you got up on the tenth day and that was the end, the nurse never came any more but you had to take the baby down to the doctor's surgery when you were able, to get a check over.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, these days when people have babies they have dozens of nappies, baby clothes, all those things prepared.

Kath Jones: Yes, that's right, that's the way it is now. But people in the, in the days of the depression they would..a lot of them couldn't believe the way things are now. Nearly everyone has a job and nearly everyone has plenty of..plenty of time to get all the baby's clothes together and most people, well I don't know anyone that had them at home, just occasionally you hear of it. Most people go into one of the big hospitals, where they have a maternity section.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, when you moved into Gorrick street, did you buy the house or were you renting?

Kath Jones: No we were renting the house. It was a very small one. We never had much furniture at that time. It was a very small house and we rented it for 9 shillings a week, and we stayed there in that place for about-oh-till the eldest girl was

about 16, and then a lady across the road, that owned this house that we're living in now, she..we were both renting at that time, and she changed houses. She..well we got the bigger one, and she took the little one, and then as time went on, we had the opportunity to pay a deposit and we got a loan through the building society to pay the house off.

Bob Price: During those depression years did many people own their own homes, or were most people renting?

Kath Jones: Most people were renting, and if you..we had a couple of chances. One good chance was if..if you had 50 pounds, you could put it on this house that was there. You could put the 50 pounds on and they were gonna sell it for 500 pounds, put the 50 pounds down and pay a pound a week. We couldn't get the 50 pounds from anywhere. None of us had it. So we couldn't get that one. But, no, most people were renting houses. They were pretty hard to get, but more plentiful than they are now.

Bob Price: The house you moved into in Gorrick street, to rent, was that a fully furnished house, or did you have to furnish it yourself?

Kath Jones: Well we lived..we shifted from the little one across the road, we had that furnished, but only in a very moderate way. It had..it only had one bedroom and a sort of a dining room and a little kitchen. When we moved over to the other one, that was bigger, and we gradually got extra bits of furniture. Some people, as they got work, lot of our relations, they used to get things on time payment, but I would never do that because I was always too short of money, and I thought something might happen and you wouldn't be able to pay it, so we never got very much until later.



Bob Price: You mentioned the little house across the road from the one you're living in now. What year did you move into that house?

Kath Jones: Oh, about, about 19..about 1930, it would be.

Bob Price: Yeah, well that's more or less the depression years.

Kath Jones: Oh yes it's still the depression but it was starting to improve, but not very much, there were still hundreds out of work, and men used to do all sorts of things. They u..they..in those days if..anyone that had a horse and cart or could get a loan of one, they'd go out in the bush and cu..and cut trees down and sell the..make the branches into clothes props, and they'd come round singing out "clothes props, p..clothes props, 2 and 6 each," and that's what..that's how they made a living and some men'd go rab..rabbit trapping, and they'd come round and sell rabbits. Pretty cheap. Sixpence each they were. And also, peop..man used to come round selling bottles. Not selling bottles, collecting bottles. A ha'penny each they'd give you, or else a lolly stick. Was all sorts, everybody was trying all sorts of things to get a few bob.

Bob Price: During the 30's, early 30's, what sort of things did you do for entertainment? When you..you would have been..had young children, and newly married..

Kath Jones: Yes, that's right. I don't..I can't just put me finger on when wirelesses came in, but the main thing you used to do if you had..if you could get the money, was..we lived in Mayfield and wasn't very far to walk up to the Tighes Hill theatre on Maitland Road in Tighes Hill. That's near Mayfield. And you could go, you could.. in the afternoon you could get in for threepence, and in the night it was a shilling. And I..and if you went in the afternoon, the kids,



it would be get..threepence to go in and a penny to spend. And that's mostly what people did. They used..peop..the pictures used to be on twice a week. Wednesdays and Saturday afternoon and Saturday night. And sometimes besides the pictures, it might be half pictures, and half vaudeville. They'd have a few vaudeville acts on as well. They were very popular in those days vaudeville, vaudeville acts. Lot of people came to Newcastle, and some went and w..combined theirs with..with the pictures and others went into the Victoria Theatre and had a full vaudeville show. Nothing was very expensive.

Bob Price: These vaudeville acts, were they people from Sydney or just local groups?

Kath Jones: No, they were what they call professionals mostly, from Sydney or where ever.

Bob Price: The Victoria Theatre, where was that?

Kath Jones: Victoria Theatre, it was in Perkins Street. And-an-now its been..Mr..the Eastham brothers sell clothes there now, but that Victoria Theatre, as far back as I remember, they always had the shows there. The full shows. George Wallace was one of the actors that used to be on.

Bob Price: In those times, how did you go into Newcastle, did you catch the bus or tram?

Kath Jones: No, there was trams. Most of..when we..if we wanted to go to town, we'd mostly go by tram, because there was no buses then, and it used to..ah..to go right in, I think for an adult, it was threepence, and for children it was a penny, in the tram.

Bob Price: Did the whole family go to these shows together, or just you and the children?

Kath Jones: No, mostly we went by ourself. My sister used to do a little bit of bar work and she often gave us the money for our fare and so we could go, she'd stay home and mind the children. W..well, when we went to the pictures we used to all go together. We'd wheel the kiddies up in the pram.

Bob Price: So in those days, it was more if you weren't working, the people who were working used to help the ones that weren't.

Kath Jones: Yes, your relations did. My mother lived at Stockton, and when we first..when we first moved into the little house, we never had anything, and she gave us some of her furniture so that we could make it fairly presentable. And anyone..anyone that had anything, any of our relations, you know, everyone'd give any..anyone else a hand. And the ones that were working, always on payday, they always ga..gave s..the ones that weren't working, a parcel of groceries, or something. Might be just a pound of butter or some bread, but we were in a good family, the Jones. There was quite a lot of them, and they all helped each other. And for entertainment besides the pictures, they used to play cards in each others houses. Not only the Jones' but they had friends. Anything to, you know, to get a bit of entertainment into your life. You just accepted it. You didn't know things were gonna get good. You just didn't know the..well, I've never had it good. Never ever. We was always..my father used to be a..sell fruit out of a cart and we used to always be, you know, on the bread line, sort of.

Bob Price: In these days, Mrs Jones, the food you buy, there's quite a big variety of food and lots and lots of different items on the supermarket shelves. In the 30's what was the food like in those days?

Kath Jones: Well like I..it wasn't like it is now. Ah..well mostly there was no supermarkets to start with. And the..people wouldn't have had the money to buy what you can now. I forget which year the supermarkets came, but you only got the things from a little corner shop. There was a couple of bigger grocery shops, you'd get what you call your order there, if you ha..if you were working on pay day, but there wasn't the variety. There used to be a ba..bakers used to come round, and also milkman used to come and you'd go out with a jug and you'd get a pint of milk in the..in..they'd turn a tap on a put a pint in..they'd have a pint measure and they'd put the milk in that and then pour it in the jug. That's threepence. And sometimes while the..while the chap had gone up the street a bit, to..um..serve a customer that he knew had a set amount, a woman in the street used to run out and turn the tap on and get hers for nothing. Mrs Morton. But..ah..as..as I said it wasn't..it wasn't as much as there is now.

Bob Price: Um..with regard to housework, washing machines, dishwashers, microwave ovens, those style of things are only fairly modern inventions.

Kath Jones: There was none of those..there was none of those. From when I..from when I was first married, many years, there was nothing like that. You had to ah..most poeple had a gas copper..some people. We had a fuel copper, and you used to..er..chop up soap and put that in. There was no..ah..we..in those depression years, there was no Rinso or Fab or any of those sort of things. You boil everything and then rinse them a couple of times. Had to do everything by hand. Most people had a washing board. You'd rub the..put the towels or whatever on the washing board and rub on some soap

and then scrub em. Mostly your nail..your fingers got skinned, because it was too hard.

Bob Price: And there were no vacuum cleaners or anything of that style?

Kath Jones: N..No, there was no vacuum cleaners. Most people didn't have any carpet. If you were lucky you might have a..a bit of matting up the hall or something like that. That's most people. I s'pose there was plenty of others better off. But in..you know..all of the people that I knew were all on about the one level.

Bob Price: I've been reading, Mrs Jones, that during those times, lots of people grew their own vegetables. Did you grow your vegetables?

Kath Jones: Yes, my husband..ah..dug up the yard in places and..ah..the main thing he grew that were a success were tomatoes. He got that many tomatoes, we always intended that we'd sell them, but a lot of other people had tomatoes too so really, we mostly k..kept ourself in them. Oh but they lasted for a long time, coming on all the time, and gave them to the neighbours and to our relations. And also a..at that time, in those days, nearly everyone kept some fowls. We had about..oh..eight down the back yard, and ah..you know, you're supposed to get eggs, but we didn't get very many eggs. It used to cost us more to buy the food than the eggs, so in the finish, we got rid of them. Mostly ate them and..ah..one time, my husband bought, was near Christmas, eight Black Orpinton rooster chickens and we kep..fed those and..er..when it was Chris..near christmas, we..a..we sold them for seven an six each. Which we didn't think that was too bad, but I think nowadays, you wouldn't think that was any good because, by the time you took off what you paid for the food you

didn't make much out of them. But still, we thought it was all right.

Bob Price: The other neighbours in the street, were they all in the same situation as you financially?

Kath Jones: Oh mostly, yes. Mostly they were. There was very few people better off. Oh..most of..most of the men that lived round us, they gradually got work at the B.H.P. And there was another work place just over near the school. It was Lysaght's. Some worked there. But..ah..in the real depression years it was very hard, but, as I said, it was getting better. By the time we shifted across the road it was a good bit better.

Bob Price: You've been showing me some old photos of your family, Mrs Jones, and the children. Was taking photos a fairly busy time in those days? You do that very often?

Kath Jones: Oh yes, we had..um..I had a camera. I'd had it for years. It was called a Brownie and it was a box camera, and the 'fillums' were only black and white. You..ah..never got coloured 'fillums', they came years after. Y'used to..um..,take any..take your children mostly. But another way with photographers, if you..when you went to town, which most people did, every now and again, you always wore a hat, mostly gloves, just to go shopping in town. And..um..y'were walking along the street and there was photographers that used to snap you as you came towards them. One on each side of the road. Whichever way you came, you'd run into one of these photographers, and they'd give you a ticket with a number on and you'd go to their studio in..in one of the shops in Newcastle and see the photo, and if you wanted it, I think it used to cost about a shilling early, and then it went up to about three and six. We used to get a lot of



photos like that.

Bob Price: In the depression years, I've been reading that there were quite a lot of people who didn't have houses. You stated how you had a house, had relations, but there must have been some people who didn't have, or weren't as lucky as you. In what situation were they?

Kath Jones: Well, there was quite a few people like that. Some cases that I know, over at Stockton they..up near the breakwater on a..on a block of land, or land over there, when the 1914, 1918 war was on they built gun..um..they called it..um..what is it? Gun..ah..

Bob Price: Pits,

Kath Jones: Ah yes, gun pits. And they were underneath the ground and they s..I was never in them, but it seems that they had so many rooms where the machinery f..f..firing the guns was. Well people used to live in there. And do..ah..cooking on open fire out the front. Washed their clothes wherever they could. And then other people, they built little huts along the um..th river bank, up Hexham. There was quite a lot of those. They b..they built them out of any old tin or material that they could get hold of. Anything, you know, just to keep them out of the weather. They were mostly people that never had any relations that had a house. And nother..another thing too, relations wouldn't always give people a hand. People were selfish then, just like some of them are now.

Bob Price: Mrs Jones, I've heard people talk of a place called Hollywood, which was near Jesmond. What are your memories of that place?

Kath Jones: Oh yes, that was..um..on the way out to Jesmond, there's a park out that way now. Well it was beyond the park in bush.



it was all bush there. And that was another place where people lived. They all built their houses out of anything that they could get. There was no sanitary, or anything like that. I was never in amongst it, but I knew people that w..that were. And beyond that, ah..Hollywood, there's a whole lot of people lived there, but beyond that, in the bush, there used to be a two-up school. And often the police'd raid it and they'd race through and hide in the bush..n..near this Hollywood, and try and grab the..er..players that were playing. It was an illegal game. But..ah..that was Hollywood all right, and that was where a lot of people went.

Bob Price: The people that lived here, the same as the people that lived in the gun pits, and on the banks of the river, they had no employment at all?

Kath Jones: Well, I..I'd say when they first went there they had no employment, but they were gradually getting a day or something like that, but they couldn't get a house where they'd have enough money to pay the rent, so they really lived there, some people lived there for years and years till they were forced to get out because, as things got better, they were made get out and they..ah..the council sent bulldozers in and bulldozed them all into the ground. But that was years after. People lived there for years.

Bob Price: Were the buildings made of corrugated iron and tin?

Kath Jones: Some, yes, corrugated iron and anything. Bag. they used to do a lot with bags, and..er..you'd put the bags on then paint them over with tar. Mostly though they'd do that for the roof, and that..that wouldn't let the rain in. But there was all races there. There was Australians and Aborigines. All that sort of thing. There wasn't any..there wasn't any new

Australians then, like there is now. That far back I mean.

Bob Price: Thank you very much Mrs Jones for sharing some of your memories of the depression years in Newcastle.

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198

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Signed L. Jones .....

Date 6<sup>th</sup> September 1989 .....

Interviewer Price .....