

TRANSCRIPT
OF ORAL INTERVIEW

ROSEMARY SOTO

OPEN FOUNDATION
WED, 7-9 P.M.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1989

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Signed Elizabeth Anderson

Date 25th June, 1989

Interviewer R. Soto

This is Rosemary Soto of the Open Foundation Course 1989.
Today I will be speaking to Mrs Betty Anderson, granddaughter
of Walter Edwin Bramble of the Bramble family.

ROSE: Well Betty the Bramble family are a significant part
of Newcastle's business history, can you tell me a little on
what you know on the Bramble history, or if you could tell me
a bit on your grandfather, Walter Edwin Bramble how he tied in
with this.

BETTY: Rosemary my father was Milton Edward Bramble who was
the youngest by a few years of Walter Edwin the first. My
father was born in 1899 in Newcastle. I don't know a lot
about my grandparents, only what I've read, but Walter Edwin
was born in Crawley England in 1857, his parents were Joseph
and Emma. They arrived aboard 'Joshua' and settled in Hinton
in 1858. My grandfather left school at age nine and worked as
a rouseabout with John Christian, for which he was paid five
shillings a week, which he saved. He drove sheep and cattle
to and from the Hunter River district as far as Breeza and
north as far as Glen Innes and Inverell. Now Joseph
apparently was a butcher and this is where he and his brothers
watched their father butchering during the early time in
Hinton.

ROSE: Apparently Walter and his brother became river
traders in their teen years, can you expand on this, is there
anything you can tell me on that?

BETTY: Well I would say that, from what I've read that
having a boat was really the main importance at that time.

ROSE: That's right.

BETTY: So he and his brother purchased a skiff. I would say
from the money he earned at rouseabouting and they became
river traders. At this time Walter Edwin supplemented his
education by attending night school at Hinton.

ROSE: Betty why was the row boat so significant in that
time, why did the village people feel that that was one of
their major items?

BETTY: Because of the seasonal flooding Rosemary I would
say, the same flooding that we're experiencing at the moment
and I suppose there were roads that weren't built at that
time, there weren't a lot of roads.

ROSE: That's right.

BETTY: It was mostly by water, by water travel wasn't it
that they were able to go from Newcastle to Hinton, up
that way.

ROSE: Anything else on that or, or anything else you wanted
to add with Walter and his brother?

BETTY: Apparently few people killed meat for their own use at that time and that's how the brothers were able to barter meat for produce or cash. Also independently Walter often rowed ten miles up the Paterson river to buy oranges and he disposed of these oranges at a handsome profit. Now they traded up and down for three years and they only interrupted their trading long enough each week for them to attend family services at Hinton on the Sunday and occasionally to play cricket on the village green and this is where, because my grandfather was always interested in cricket, this is where the cricketing side of the family probably started there because they only stopped to go to church and to play cricket.

ROSE: To play cricket.

BETTY: Yes.

ROSE: So Betty what drove Walter Edwin to go to Newcastle for business.

BETTY: While he was still working with his brother he frequently travelled to Newcastle with dairy produce and returned with groceries etcetera to sell to farmers and graziers, now he did this until 1875 when he was eighteen, and he became independent. He had his own business which was called a cut up and delivery butcher, but it wasn't as we know butchers this day, he didn't have actual butchers premises, he killed at Bowthorne only a short distance from a room adjoining his home at Hinton and joints were cut up on killing day, so he delivered the meat as quickly as possible by boat and in the immediate locality by horse and sulky and he made use of his rowing boat and the tides and took meat regularly to Newcastle, Raymond Terrace, Morpeth and Seaham.

ROSE: He obviously found Newcastle a better market for what---

BETTY: It seemed to. So within two years he'd made enough money with this enterprise to expand to Newcastle and he handed his Hinton business to his family and his brothers. Now John Henry continued living in Hinton and William moved to Largs.

ROSE: Right, and Walter moved to Newcastle.

BETTY: And Walter moved to Newcastle in 1877.

ROSE: Well because of the actual flood damage at the Paterson and in Hinton that's basically what brought Walter down to Newcastle is that right Betty?

BETTY: Yes and also because on his frequent visits to Newcastle I think he'd seen what was happening, the railway was bringing in increasing volume of wool and agricultural products to Newcastle and of course ----

ROSE: So economically it was----

BETTY: The port of Newcastle was developing and black gold was going overseas yes.

ROSE: I think there were a lot of opportunities there for him.

BETTY: I think he was a visionary really because he could see what was happening in Newcastle and he could see how it was developing and he saw that the future for him was in Newcastle and that's how he started his butchering business.

ROSE: Right, okay. I've also, I've got here Betty that apparently when he started as a butcher there he used to often race other butchers to oncoming sailing ships, can you tell me a bit about that? He used to basically----

BETTY: He had, the butcher shop which is now on land which was right opposite the Honeysuckle Point railway station and it's in Newcastle, Hunter Street West and he expanded his family butchering concern in providoring for ships and he used to, he was only a man of very small stature, I think he was only about five foot six, but he used to row out and sometimes beat superior oarsmen you know and beat them to the ships and, to win its' order for meat and milk supplies.

ROSE: And the actual, the actual land that he had opposite the railway station he finally built, in 1884 a new two storey building which apparently is still there today, the actual sign is still there today reading Brambles Butchering Establishment, is that correct?

BETTY: Yes.

ROSE: It is. Right, okay. From what I've researched also Betty apparently business boomed for Walter Edwin and he found that apparently, that the carrying business went further for him, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

BETTY: At the time when he bought the land at Newcastle, Hunter Street West, opposite the Honeysuckle Point railway station it was overlooked because of the tidal influence but he had quietly planned a solution for the tidal problem so he started, a lot of other butchers didn't have any, lacked transport and a scope for building, and there was a scope for building up carrying business in the trade so he started to carry meat for other butchers, then tallow, salt and produce and he diversified his carrying business further and soon his wagons would carry away spoils of demolished buildings and excavated land and my grandfather knew exactly where to drop their cargo of excavated land right on his own property, so this was how the land was filled and reclaimed and also I've read that many times in the future the security of this property helped the Brambles to weather various economic problems that faced them from time to time.

ROSE: Betty on the sign above his butchering establishment did it actually have a year of when it was erected?

BETTY: Yes it had 1884, so from the time when he first gave the Hinton business to his family and he travelled to Newcastle, that was 1877, then, on the sign of 1884 that was seven years that it took him probably to reclaim the land and to build his actual business there in Hunter Street.

ROSE: Apparently Walter married in 1885?

BETTY: Yes he married Hannah Cooper, the daughter of a Wollongong milliner. The marriage ceremony was held at St Johns Church of England and then they lived first of all in Charlton Street, Wickham and it was in that year that the municipality of Newcastle was proclaimed a city.

ROSE: And in what year exactly did he have his first child, wasn't it in 1886 from what----

BETTY: Yes Walter Edwin was born in 1886.

ROSE: So he actually named a child after himself Walter Edwin Bramble.

BETTY: Yes that's Walter Edwin the second.

ROSE: Well is there anything more you'd like to add to the Bramble history, or what you know about the Bramble history or whatever your parents might have told you.

BETTY: Rosemary I don't know very much because I suppose we, as we were growing up we were really only interested in what we were doing but I do remember how horses played a great role in the transport part of the industry and I know that during the depression that the family actually didn't, weren't paid any wages from the company because the horses had to be fed and the men were paid, where our food and clothing were catered for but because the horses and the men came first, we were second which was probably why the company, why the company lasted. I think it's, the one pity now is because it's a public company and it has grown and diversified so much that the family feel has gone out of it.

ROSE: Well thank you Betty for talking to me today.

BETTY: Thank you Rosemary it's been a pleasure.

SUMMARY

Betty Anderson, Granddaughter of Walter Edwin Bramble, relates on a sixty (60) minute tape in an oral interview, the history of her Grandfather's business which started in Newcastle back in the Eighteenth Century.

Betty describes Walter Edwin Bramble's teen years as a river trader, and the significance of the river as a trade and transport route to the people of Hinton and The Paterson.

Betty goes on to describe the establishment of Walter Edwin Bramble's butchering business, his Newcastle land development, and eventual diversification into the carrying business, well known today as Brambles Transport.

ESSAY

A SHORT HISTORY ON

W.E. BRAMBLE

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In April, 1858 Joseph and Emma Bramble with three children, Martha, William and Walter Edwin were the only arrivals to Sydney Cove from Crawley, a small peaceful village in England. They arrived on a ship of 804 tons which carried 293 immigrant passengers and was named the "Joshua".

The Bramble family transhipped to the Hunter River where they disembarked at Morpeth and went to Hinton, two miles away, where they settled on the Paterson River near its junction with the Hunter. In 1858 the population would have been approximately 1,000 people in Morpeth and 300 in Hinton.

In the year of the Brambles arrival in the Colony, an abortive private enterprise had been taken over by the Government and the first railway service was officially opened linking East Maitland with Honeysuckle Point (West Newcastle).

In 1861, Joseph and Emma Bramble added to their family another son, John Henry, the first of five Australian generations of Brambles, some of whom still reside in Hinton.

The Bramble children attended the Public School at Hinton. The school which opened in 1848, is of historical importance. It was the second public school established in N.S.W. by the Board of National Education created that year to control the system of public education in N.S.W.

Nearly every year there would be flooding all along the Hunter, especially near the Paterson at Hinton. The rowing-boat would often be the easiest and quickest mode of transport up and down the Hunter and the rivers joining it.

To the settlers of Hinton, a rowing-boat was an item of the greatest importance. It was their main medium of communication. The rowing-boat was an instrument of life preservation to the people on the banks of the Paterson at Hinton.

Walter left school to go to work at the age of nine years. He took employment with a famous member of the gentry, John Christian, an influential, landholder whose property 'Mount Pleasant' was located on the outskirts of Hinton.

Walter Bramble roughed it as a 'Rouseabout' with John Christian. He helped drove cattle and sheep to and from the Hunter River district and as far as Breeza and in a northerly direction as far as the Glen Innes and Inverell districts.

After six years of priceless experience and with the earnings that he had saved, Walter Bramble careered away.

By the age of fifteen there was no way of restraining Walter Edwin Bramble. He and his brother purchased a skiff and became river traders, bringing a welcome service to settlers.

For three years they travelled up and down and in and out of the waterways of the lower Hunter Valley. They frequently rowed down to Newcastle with dairy produce, returning with groceries and other goods they could sell readily to the graziers and farmers.

To have become the proprietor of any kind of business at the age of eighteen in 1875 was an outstanding achievement. Walter Bramble did this. He became a butcher - not in the ordinary sense of one trading from a shop, but a cut-up and delivery butcher.

Walter Bramble moved down river to Newcastle because of the repeating flood damage that drove most of the settlers of Hinton north and in the year 1877, the year Newcastle produced well in excess of 1,000,000 tons of coal, Walter Bramble reached out for his opportunity and commenced operations as a butcher in Newcastle.

The population of Newcastle was then about 25,000. Walter was soon rewarded for his vision and had bought land right opposite the Honeysuckle Point Railway Station, in the main street of Newcastle, Hunter Street West (then known as Blane Street).

Business boomed for Bramble. Before long he expanded his family butchering concern into the field of providoring for ships. 'Many a time W.E. Bramble, a man of small stature, used his superior oarsmanship to race some bulky butcher twice his size to an incoming sailing-ship, to win its order for meat and milk supplies'.¹

Walter Bramble sat down and worked out a scheme which later provided the basis for an operation which would have exceeded the imagination of most people. Other butchers lacked transport and allowed scope for building up a carrying business in the trade. He started to carry meat for other butchers, then tallow, salt and produce.

Bramble diversified his carrying business further. Soon his wagons were carrying away the spoils of demolished buildings and excavated land.

By 1884 a new two storey building was completed at 685 Hunter Street West, Newcastle, and the sign above which is still there today, read 'Brambles Butchering Establishment A.D. 1884'.

Walter Bramble married in 1885 to Hannah Cooper, the daughter of a Wollongong miller. His first son, Walter Edwin Jnr. was born in 1886.

In this year Walter Bramble advertised in Knagg's Nautical Almanac. The copy was short and to the point:

W.E. Bramble
Shipping & Family Butcher
Blane Street
Near Honeysuckle Point Station,
Newcastle
"The Primest Beef at Lowest Rates".

1: DL. MANUEN, MEN & MACHINES, THE BRAMBLE STORY, SYDNEY N.S.W. 1970 PG 13

Now in 1989 Brambles are a major Australian-based Company providing a wide range of specialised materials handling services throughout Australia, Europe and North America. The Company is listed on Australian Stock Exchanges is owned by more than 16,000 shareholders and employs around 9,000 people (either directly or through associated companies). Worldwide, Brambles assets total more than \$Aust 1.5 Billion.

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