

Tracie Thornberry interviewing Alexander Young at his office in
Ranger Street. The subject of the interview is Young and Green
and the history of Mr. Young's family.

Interviewer (T.T.): I read that the firm was established in 1919,
and then I read that your dad went away
back from the war in 1920, do you know when
it was started?

Interviewee (A.Y.): Yes the organisation did start in 1919.
I'm not aware that he was here in 1919 it might
be correct that he did come to Newcastle in 1920,
but the organisation was originally started by
two men called Bert Hereward Young, who was my
father's brother and Reginald Victor Meggs.

Tracie Thornberry Tuesday 1pm

Transcript of the interview with Alexander Young.

19/8/89

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needed someone with some administrative
abilities and my father had been trained, he
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and he'd worked for other people and I think to
my knowledge that they sent to him and asked him
if he'd come to Newcastle and work at that side,
and it may well be that he came in 1920.

T.T.: Well that makes sense of what I have been reading. There
was also a Mr. Johnstone and a Mr. Green.

A.Y.: Yes, there was a Mr. Johnstone who worked with the
company for many years but was never a shareholder, and Green
was one of the original partners, but Green I understand was an
alcoholic and they got rid of him early on in the place. They
felt there was going to be trouble there.

T.T.: In the archives they had him down as a salesman.

A.Y.: That would be reasonably correct.

T.T.: Did you always intended to work for your father or while
you were at school were you aspiring to something else?

A.Y.: Yes my father had this thing about accounting and always
regretted the fact that he had no formal accountant training
and you've got to recognise that things were a lot different
then, than they are now. In those days jobs weren't easy to get
and there were certainly not the opportunities that there are
for young people, at an educational level, that there are now.
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the universities were much harder to get into and what really happened was that I had been sort of brainwashed to the point of accepting I would get involved in doing accounting work and an opportunity occurred in 1940 when I was a student at the Newcastle Boys Highschool at Waratah; one of the officers left the organisation and that was seen by my father as an opportunity for me to enter the organisation and that was why I started, I think it had always been one of the accepted things that I would end up in this business, yes.

T.T.: What year did you start working for your dad.

A.Y.: 1940.

T.T.: So you would have been working for him during the depression .

A.Y.: No, that was after the depression, we were just coming out of the depression it was the beginning of the second world war. To compare organisations today with organisations in those days is like comparing chalk and cheese. Things were much tougher, people think things are hard these days but it's a piece of cake today compared to the difficult situations and the hard competitive situations in those days. The level of demand was much lower and the commercial life was much more difficult, people just didn't have the money. So, yes I came in in 1940, but that was after the ^{second} first world war, but the Newcastle area was still working it's way out of the depression at that stage.

T.T.: Reading in the archives I've noticed there is a lot more written about buses and trains than people having motor cars. It was not until about 1945 in the old papers that you start getting accident reports.

A.Y.: Well, you see a perfect example of that is that there were not a lot of homes that had a car, let alone two or three cars and there were certainly no situations in which there were any parking problems at the Newcastle Technical College with young students, of the type they have at the Newcastle University now with young students, so it's a completely different ball-game. Public transport was used much more fifty years ago than it is now.

T.T.: Do you remember when your father was dealing out of a tent in Hunter Street?

A.Y.: Yes, even though I might have only been employed here for

fifty years I was sort of running around this place serving petrol out of bowsers when I was a school boy and in fact I used to work on Saturday mornings for the grand sum of two shillings which would be equivalent to about twenty cents. You try and get a kid these days to work for twenty cents on Saturday morning.

T.T.: Before the General Motors Holden dealership your father was selling cars imported from America. Buicks and Dodges and the like.

A.Y.: Yes, they merely came into Newcastle because Young and Green at that stage were acting as an agent for the distributors in Sydney, at one stage it was Marcus Clarke, who were a very widely spread organisation in New South Wales. Marcus Clarke were importing vehicles and the Young and Green organisation were acting as agents for Marcus Clarke, I think early on in the 1920's.

T.T.: And your father opened the first tourist bureau, opposite the railway station.

A.Y.: Yes, that was in an area that is now Commerce Park I think alongside the customs house.

T.T.: And would there have been much call for tourism then?

A.Y.: Well, you've got to remember the roads weren't all that good, for example a trip from Sydney to Newcastle, across the punt, and that came later, because originally, you used to go around through Cessnock to get to Sydney and that was a day trip. So you've got to recognise that transport was not what it is today. And I think it's probably wrong to call it tourism, in many ways it was simply transport, people wanted to get from Sydney to other places, some of them may have been on holidays and some of them may have been for tourism but certainly not the tourism of the type we understand today. There was only a week or fortnights holiday back in those days not a month, and certainly people wanted to get away from it all but that was somewhat restricted due to the low level of economic activity compared to the situation today. So what they were really doing was simply providing transport.

T.T.: They provided that transport in charabancs, is that right?

A.Y.: Yes, and what a lovely word, and one that very few people understand these days, and really they were just extended motor cars.

T.T.: Do you mean a limosine type of car?

A.Y.: NO, not a limosine type of thing, in those days the cars had canvas tops, there were very few cars with metal turrets They were all canvas tops so what they did was cut the chassis and extend it, filled in the body sides, because they only came up to what is referred to now as half doors then put a canvas top over it, so they weren't limosines at all.

T.T.: I found an article in an old paper about one of them having an accident with a tram, apparently it was owned by Mr. Johnstone.

A.Y.: Well the reason that the firm eventually gave it away, the charabanc business, was that one rolled over at Wallsend and someone was killed, and the third party claim on that in those days was enough to cause my father considerable concern and it was that situation that eventually forced them to say well, it's just not worth it and they sold that aspect of the business.

T.T.: I know that you're a pilot and interested in flying, did you know that at one stage your father had gliders?

A.Y.: Yes, they had gliders but my father would never have flown gliders nor would he ever have flown an aeroplane, he was actually opposed to me learning to fly. They had gliders because in those days there was a romance about the motor industry that to some people still exists today. They had more time to get involved in that sort of thing there weren't the other attractions and one or two of the people involved with the organisation were apparently interested in gliders and they had a tow truck and there was plenty of land out at Hexham for them to use. I don't think they ever expected to make any money out of it, they possibly thought that from a public relations point of view it kept their name in front of the public.

T.T.: Have you ever been involved in light car clubs or rally's or sponsored a Young and Green car?

A.Y.: No.

T.T.: What do you attribute your success to, your own personal policy?

AA.Y.: Hard work mainly, and purpose. If you don't have purpose ~~then~~ you don't have goals that you want to achieve. So I think that I have been very lucky in being able to set goals, I think

that has been tremendously important. I've been able to gather about me people who have been very supportive, if you don't have those people where your trying to do a lot of things you don't get time to finish anything properly so you need people about you who will support you and help you and I have been very lucky in that respect. So if anything I think the two things I would attribute to any success I might have had are simply ability to set goals, ability to have some visions, and luck in having supportive people.

T.T.: In 1965 Young and Green had 280 employees, has that increased?

A.Y.: Yes in 1980 it was about 610 but we've wound it back since then to about 300 or 330 today.

T.T.: How many show rooms do you have?

A.Y.: Well we came into the 1980's selling Holden only, we now have Holden, Mitsubishi, Honda, Isuzu, Mazda, Nissan and Suzuki. So there are seven lines we're running at the moment. We've got actual showrooms at Raymond Terrace, Maitland, Hamilton, Newcastle, Belmont and Toronto, so thats six. Additionally there's a big spare parts showroom at Kotara and a big work shop at Kotara.

T.T.: There are 846 people employed in Newcastle in the car sales business and you employ at least 300 of them.

A.Y.: Of that 300, some of them are employed in Sydney, some are in Dubbo, Tamworth, Orange, we do have spare parts outlets in Taree, Tamworth, we might have three or four at Tamworth or more, five. we've got Granville in Sydney.

T.T.: Do you have any ideas or thoughts about retiring?

A.Y.: No, not really, the motor industry is passing through a rather difficult period and for me to retire at the moment, actually I wanted to retire ten years ago, and if I had retired ten years ago I had hoped by now that I'd done my masters degree and my Phd. Thats what I had in mind but that has'nt happened because the motor industry turned sour in 1980 and for me to walk away now would, I'm afraid, be walking away from the group who have worked in the organisation for so long and I'm just not prepared to do that. The Button car plan will do some good for the manufacturers in Australia but there's no mention of

the Button car plan for the distributors the dealers and we're going to be squeezed even further, this industry's going to become even more difficult in my opinion, until we can re-organise ourselves and fix our own structure to meet that situation I'm just not prepared to walk away from it. See, what people don't realise these days is that it's alright to talk about competition, but competition is very difficult with so many distributors and what really is happening, with all the good working conditions, compared to what we had fifty years ago, those people who own organisations are usually working harder than they ever did in order to make life easier for some of the people within the organisation. If you look around this place this morning there are only one or two of us here, the rest of them have Saturday and Sunday off. Now if I want to get involved in the things that I get involved in like the Hunter Development Board, that takes up some time during the week, and I've simply got to make sure that the things I want to give time to within the organisation I do during the week, but Saturday is the day in which I can get as few interruptions as possible, the phone doesn't ring and I can try and get some of those decisions made that seem to keep the organisation where we want it. So under those circumstances, no I'm not thinking of retiring.

T.T.: Have you ever done anything else, or have you always worked here?

A.Y: When you say have I ever done anything else, you mean have I ever worked in another organisation. Well, no, I've never had to. I've always used this organisation as my base and things like; I've been chairman of the Hunter Development Board for ten years, I started the Hunter Development Board, I was chairman of the Hunter Valley Research Foundation on one occasion; I've been the trustee of church property. All the other things that I've done for example I was in charge of looking at the Newcastle Dockyards for the government, I've been a member of the Australian National Airlines Commission for five years, now all those things I did as additional duties and I did on the basis that this was my base. I've always accepted that I have a responsibility to run this organisation. The psychology of it's all changed, once upon a time in this organisation one could enjoy just being the boss and helping people and doing things being reasonably efficient but not needing to be super efficient. Now this industry's so competitive that we're having imposed on

us management strains that certainly weren't imposed on us when I first came into the industry and that is why restructuring will continually go on, things happening in Australia about productivity at the moment is excellent and I'm in support of it, but I'm not convinced that it helps a lot of people down the line, it makes life much more difficult for them and there's just nothing we can do about it. It also makes it difficult for decision makers and they've got to make decisions at times that they prefer not to have to make, they're not all together satisfied that they're helping people, they just have to get on with the job. Now on that basis, having accepted that sort of responsibility, anything else I've done I've had to come straight back into the business, I might take half a day off to do a particular job, but that means, as I said, on Saturdays you will find me here catching up on things, now I don't resent that I think if I want to do it that way then I've got to be prepared to do it, and that perhaps is another thing that I believe may have some influence on whether I've done anything that's worth while or not. I've always recognised that you have to accept your responsibilities, if you weren't prepared to do that don't get into them because there are too many situations in which people take office and don't really perform and there's no sense in that. So the answer to your question is no I've always worked here, well this is the only organisation that's ever paid me anyhow, all the other things I've done have been of a voluntary nature within the society. My wife and I have reared seven children satisfactorily, and what's life all about anyway.

T.T.: I think it is probably of benefit to the community that you are so settled in your job so that you can do other things.

A.Y.: I'm not too sure about that but time will tell.

T.T.: I was told you went to university, what did you do there?

A.Y.: I've always wanted to do economics at university, I've always regarded accountancy as simply a trade, not that there's anything wrong with a trade, but I knew there was something I wanted to do further than that, accounting is a technique, and I believed there was another level of consideration of the economy, so as soon as Newcastle university started I registered in fact I was student number twenty one and my application form

was filled in by the vice-chancellor. We didn't have a lot of people in the university at that stage and I did Economic Honours and Geography, History and after I graduated, and that took a number of years, at night, because it was all part time, I took up flying. I learnt to fly for a couple of years, that's what it took to do all the licences. Then after a while I got annoyed about the fact that I wasn't getting enough time to do the reading I wanted to do so I went back and did philosophy for four years at night to just round that off. I've always been very glad of that because philosophy bought a lot of things together for me in my own personal life.

T.T.: So you hope to go back to university, what would you do?

A.Y.: First of all I'd do a masters degree in Economic Philosophy and work from there on .

T.T.: I hope you finally have time to do it.

A.Y.: Well that makes two of us.

T.T.: You sound like such a busy man. Is there anything else you'd like to add.

A.Y.: No.

T.T.: Thankyou.

Tracie Thornberry interviewing Alexander Young at his office in Hunter Street. The subject of the interview is Young and Green and the history of Mr. Youngs' family.

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Interviewee (A.Y.): Yes the organisation did start in 1919, I'm not aware that he was here in 1919 it might be correct that he did come to Newcastle in 1920, but the organisation was originally started by two men called Bert Beresford Young, who was my father's brother and Reginald Victor Meggs. Now they were engineering type of people and they needed someone with some administrative, clerical abilities and my father had been trained, he worked for the government before he went to the war and he'd worked for other people and I think to my knowledge that they sent to him and asked him if he'd come to Newcastle and work at that side, and it may well be that he came in 1920.

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Tracie Thornberry Australian History OFC Tuesday 1pm

Local History Project; Assignment.

Young and Green car sales business.



Newcastles' first tourist bureau was opened by Young and Green. Along with Mr. W. Johastone, a fitter who was with the company for many years, they set up a tourist bureau opposite the railway station in 1920. The office was situated on railway property so it ran on a weekly tenancy. They ran a network of charabancs to Newcastle's outlying regions. There were regular services to Saltash, Dudley, Swansea, Catherine Hill Bay and Wallsend. (4) The roads were shocking and transport to these then out of the way places was virtually non-existent. The charabancs were extended cars with canvas tops which provided a very rough and dusty ride for the travellers. Broken wheels flat tyres and broken springs were a daily occurrence. In 1927 a tram and a charabanc collided injuring some passengers and not long after this a charabanc rolled over at Wallsend, killing a passenger, which prompted the firm to give that side of the business away. (5)

In the 1920s' and 1930s' Brown Street, one of Newcastle's steepest streets, was used as a testing run for cars. Customers had to take more interest in the mechanical performance of their vehicles because they were not as reliable as they are today. An interest in mechanics was essential in order to keep their cars on the road and light car clubs and rally clubs flourished. These gave drivers more expertise in coping with the dangerous road conditions. The streets all over Newcastle's hill were used as demonstration tracks.

4. Newcastle Morning Herald 6th April 1950

5. Ibid 19th December 1927

The firm of Young and Green is a family owned and run company that was established in Newcastle in 1919. It was founded after the First World War and has weathered the depression and the Second World War. It has kept up with the times, changing with the economic climate. The Young and Green organisation has been maintained through the hard work and dedication of the people involved.

Three of the founders of the firm served in the same unit in World War One and after returning from the war they set up a repair garage in Castlereagh Street in Sydney. They were B.B.Young, a mechanic; R.V Meggs, a mechanic and electrician; and M.J.Green, a salesman.(1) They shifted the business to Newcastle after becoming sub-agents for the distributors Marcus Clarke, who imported cars from America. Walter Edward Young, B.B.YOUNG's brother, returned from the war in 1920 and, having some clerical abilities, was invited to join the firm to take care of the administrative side of the business.(2)

The first Young and Green showroom was opened in Hunter Street next door to where the Theatre Royal was later built. They sold cars with exotic names such as; Chandlers, Maxwells, Reos, Austin, Republics, Cleveland, Oldsmobile, Chrysler and Cadillac which were all imported by Marcus Clarke from America. They opened a showroom in Cessnock in the 1920's and in Maitland in the 1930's. (3)

1. Newcastle Morning Herald 29th August 1983.

2. Interview with Mr. Alexander Young, 19/8/89.

3. Newcastle Morning Herald, 29/8/83.

During the depression the company hired a tent and conducted their business from it on the site where the main Newcastle showroom stands. In 1932 Young and Green became the sole distributors for General Motors Holden in Newcastle, this eased the effects of the depression for them and enabled them to continue operating. The firm had some property at Hexham that they built a shed on to house gliders. The gliders were flimsy aircraft that were launched by being towed behind a cadillac. This venture was never ~~expected~~ to be profit making, however it did manage to keep the name of Young and Green in front of the public.

In 1940 W.E.Young was elected Lord Mayor of Newcastle, an office which he held for two years. He had served for several years on the original Newcastle County Council and the Greater Newcastle County Council. Walter Young was also a member of the Newcastle Hospital board of directors and founder, board member and president of the Newcastle Masonic Club for two terms. He was president for eight years of the Newcastle Royal Empire Society, and president of the Newcastle District Bowling Association (NDBA) for a total of nine years, becoming a life member in 1956, and was elected as their patron in 1958. The NDBA opened their district headquarters in National Park Street in 1957 and in 1958 it was named Wal Young House.

Alexander Young succeeded his father as director of the company and has in turn been succeeded by his son, Chris. Although Alex Young continues to work for the company he has stepped aside to allow hi son to become the managing director.

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LHD 919.442 Vol.32

Tracie Thornberry

Tuesday 1pm

Summary of transcript

Young and Green was established in 1919 by Alexander Youngs' uncle, Bert Beresford Young and Reginald Victor Meggs. They invited Walter Edward Young, who was the father of Alexander, to join the firm because of his administrative and clerical ability. Mr. Green was one of the original partners, but he was an alcoholic and did not last long in the company. Mr. Johnstone worked for the company for many years but was never a shareholder

W.E. Young always regretted not having any formal accountant training and he had always expected Alexander to become an accountant and work for the firm. An opportunity arose in 1940, while Alexander was in high school, for him to join the firm and so he started in the organisation. Newcastle was working its way out of the depression, commercial life was difficult and there was very little money around. Not a lot of homes had cars and there were no parking problems as there are today. Public transport was much more popular then than it is today.

Alexander Young had been working around the business since he was a school boy, serving petrol on Saturday mornings for two shillings pay. When Young and Green started out they were agents for the distributors Marcus Clarke, who imported vehicles. The firm opened the first tourist bureau in the area that is now Commerce park. The roads were not good, it was a day trip to travel from Sydney to Newcastle, and the tourist bureau transported people in charabancs from the train station to Newcastle's outlying regions. The charabancs were extended cars with canvas tops. A charabanc rolled over at Wallsend and a passenger was killed, the third party claim concerned Walter Young and soon after they sold that aspect of the business.

At one stage the firm was involved with gliders. It was not a money making venture, just an interest that some

of the people in the organisation had.

Alexander Young attributes his success to hard work, purpose and the ability to [^]est goals. Also to being surrounded by supportive people and the ability to have some visions. In 1980 the company employed about six hundred people and about three hundred today. In the 1980's they sold Holden cars only but now they carry seven different lines and have six showrooms in the Hunter region, and at least six spare-part outlets throughout New South Wales.

Alexander Young has put aside any thoughts on retirement because of the difficult period the motor industry is going through. His role as the boss has changed over the years and he finds that he now has to spend more time at the business and is under greater management strain.

Alex Young is also very active in the community. He started the Hunter Development Board and has been the chairman for ten years. He accepts his responsibilities and is of the opinion that if your not prepared to follow something through to the end then it should not be started. He was the twenty first student to register at Newcastle University and studied Geography and History and did Economic Honours. He then took afeww to become a pilot and returned to university to study Philosophy for four years at night. He hopes to complete a masters degree in Economic Philosophy, time permitting.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

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I, ALEXANDER YOUNG give my
permission to TRACIE THORNBERY

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
the NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

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for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed

Date

Interviewer T. Thornberry

Trace Thornberry

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE 1989

I WOULD BE VERY PLEASED IF YOU COULD ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE :

WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM YOUR REGIONAL HISTORY PROJECT?

I gained a better understanding of what it's like to run a business in Newcastle, and had the opportunity to see the driving force behind a successful business and family.

WHAT EFFECT DID THE PROJECT HAVE ON THE PERSON YOU INTERVIEWED?

I'm not sure that it had much effect at all. He was more than happy to help, but because he is such a public figure and has been interviewed many times it didn't seem to effect him.

COULD YOU PLEASE RETURN YOUR ANSWER TO ME AT THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES
THANKS .

Mary