

Day? Time?

OPEN FOUNDATION: AUSTRALIAN HISTORY  
SUBJECT: ORAL HISTORY OF VICTOR ALFRED STAMFORD  
THE GREAT DEPRESSION: EXPERIENCES OF ONE MAN  
INTERVIEWER: MRS. MAUREEN JANE SINCLAIR.

SUMMARY:

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The accompanying taped interview was given by Mr. Victor Alfred Stamford of 6 Braye Street, Mayfield on 18th June, 1988.

Victor commences his story early in the depression years in the township of Karuah at approximately 17 years of age. This was his first association with the dole, and he describes how in order to collect the dole, which was a food coupon to the value of five shillings per week, he had to travel a distance of approximately 19 miles to the Police Station at Raymond Terrace. His father at this time owned a 'T' Model Ford truck and he would drive Victor and any others he could fit in the truck in to Raymond Terrace for one shilling per man; Victor, I expect, was exempt. Others less fortunate rode horses, pushbikes or walked the distance.

Victor married Leila Davis, a Karuah girl in December, 1931 and shifted to Mayfield still on the dole. He tells of work he managed to pick up to supplement his income, penning sheep at the Sale Yards and of a somewhat 'shady' scheme connected with this work.

Victor was paid two shillings per pen and allowed to purchase a sheep for his own use. At the end of the day he would purchase an old sheep for two shillings, pen it in with the lambs and substitute a lamb for the old sheep to take home. He says it was 'no trouble' getting the sheep home, he only had to put the sheep on a coal train, sit on the brake rod, get onto the buffer, and finally sit there holding on to the sheep - no trouble at all. When he reached Waratah, he simply got off the train. He does explain that in those days the trains were run by steam and were very slow, especially going up hill, and this simplified matters.

To further stretch the food supply he would walk in to Newcastle to Arnotts Biscuit Factory and purchase a pillowslip full of broken biscuits for two shillings. He tells of another somewhat dubious practise which was apparently widespread and of which Victor took part, the acquiring of coal which spilled onto the railway lines from coal trains. Victor and his brothers would collect the coal, keep what was

needed for their own use and sell the balance for a shilling a bag.

In 1933 with the work situation still bad in Newcastle, Victor was lucky enough to gain employment with Ryland Bros. Working conditions at this time were not good and anywhere from 70-100 men would position themselves at the gates of BHP, Rylands and Lysaghts each morning in the hope of gaining work. Victor stayed with Rylands for ten years. He tells of the unemployed young men, teenagers, who were referred to as 'the station mob', who used to congregate on Waratah Railway Station to pass time with conversation and cricket matches, many of whom joined the forces in World War 11 and did not come back. Victor himself tried to join the Army but was told he could contribute more to his country by staying at Rylands and working in the ammunitions section of the works. He did so but eventually joined the Merchant Navy, but due to an injury to his back he was forced to resign and found himself once more on the dole.

At this time the State Government commenced a system of relief with the co-operation of local municipal councils whereby the Government paid wages and allocated percent funds to the councils concerned for maintenance and civic works. Victor gained work under this scheme and he describes the work as being entirely manual, very hard, and for half the amount of wages paid by independent industries at this time. However it was a vast improvement on the dole, and allowed a certain amount of self esteem to the worker.

He recalls the soup kitchens and humpy towns of Platts Estate and Texas, however of the first he says his family was not needy enough to use them and of the second he felt that the inhabitants were a 'bad lot' and he did not associate with them. It is evident from Victor's conversation that class distinction was felt not only between the employed and unemployed, but in the different classes of unemployed.

Victor says that he feels that communism was becoming prevalent in the unions at the time, however he disputes that there was an Unemployed Workers Movement (union) as he declares that there would have been no money available to set it up and no-one would do the work for nothing. This is Victor's own thoughts on that matter, but in Sheila Gray's book 'Newcastle in the Great Depression' there is reference to the Unemployed Workers Movement and its association with communism.

When asked if he had knowledge of the Anti-Eviction Committee, Victor acknowledged the existence of same and said that it was common practise for people to be thrown out of their homes for non-payment of rent, and although he himself did not participate in demonstrations he knew of them happening.

The dole form in itself was reported to antagonise many people, but Victor does not seem to harbour any grudges, his outlook seems to be that if you wanted to collect the dole, you had to fill in the form. He says that if the authorities believed that someone was trying to double collect or work and still collect, they would require that person to resubmit his application, but he questions whether it would have been worth the effort for five shillings worth of food.

From discussion with Victor it appears certain that his father was an industrious person who followed job opportunities in order to support his family and the same sense of pride in 'paying his own way' is apparent in Victor. He still lives in the house that the family rented when they first came to Newcastle from Karuah, however he has since bought and renovated the house.

OPEN FOUNDATION: AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.

TRANSCRIPT: THE GREAT DEPRESSION: EXPERIENCES OF ONE MAN.

TAPED: 18TH JUNE, 1988.

SUBJECT: MR. VICTOR ALFRED STAMFORD.

INTERVIEWER: MRS. MAUREEN JANE SINCLAIR.

TRANSCRIPT.

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This taped interview is given by Mr. Victor Alfred Stamford of Waratah. In his own words Mr. Stamford relates his views of the years of the depression.

O.K. - Is it on - Yep.

My name is Victor Alfred Stamford and I was born on the (ah) 26th of the 5th, 1913 - and I was born in a little place called Binnaway. Born in a tent - and me grandmother was the midwife - and from then on I don't know too much till I get up a few years older.

But the depression, I was at Karuah - pause - and went on the dole, and had to go approximately 19 mile to Raymond Terrace to get it at the Police Station. But me father had a T Model Ford truck and he used to take whatever it would fit on for a shilling each, and others rode horses and push bikes in. - pause - and you got a coupon, that was for five bob's worth of food, there was no money attached to it. And shifted down here to Mayfield and (ah) I used to (ah) go to the sale yards and get two shillings a pen for sheep, pen the sheep up,

(Interviewer - What did you actually have to do in penning the sheep - how did you go about it?)

Well you had to get them out of the trucks, they all come down in trucks, and you had to take them out of the trucks and put them in different pens, and different class of sheep - the old ones and the young ones, the lambs in different pens and I get two shillings each for that.

(Interviewer - And did you have to class them as well yourself?)

No, no there was an, a, an old (ah) the (ah) the (ah) the auctioneer was from Raymond Terrace, his name was Windeyere - and he paid me the two shillings each for all the pens all depends how many turned up that day, but (ah) when we'd finished I'd buy an old sheep for two bob, I'd put him in the pen where all the young ones was, and take a young one out, and got him home on the coal trains, of course they was all slow in those days they was all the old steam trains and on coming up the hill you could practically walk alongside them. Fetch the sheep home, kill him in the backyard, bury the skin, and the carcass, and that was all the meat we had.



And other days I'd go into Arnotts Biscuit Factory in Newcastle, get there the best way I could, pay two bob for a pillowslip of broken biscuits - that was for the family.

Then in 1933 I got a job at Ryland Bros. - it was shift work - 8 hours a day, 6 days a week. I walked from Braye Street approximately 2 miles over and back for two years then I got a Speedwell bike and paid it off at two and six a week. The wages was about three pound five then - they deducted threepence for the ambulance no holidays, no holiday pay - Jack(got) Lang (was the) got in as Prime Minister and he put a shilling a week tax on the pay, if you went over there and there was (not) no work on, you was sent home again but got no pay for going I stayed there 10 years till (I was) till war broke out - I tried to get in the Army and got a letter from Rylands saying I could do more for me country, working in the ammunition part of the factory, but eventually they let me go and I joined the Merchant Navy as they could not get any seamen the - pause -

And (there) at Waratah Railway Station there'd be anything up to 50 to 100 young fellas in their 18's. They got a job when the war broke out and (ah) going to the war and most of their bones are in Malasia now.

Then I got to mixing cement to make, for curbing, and curb and guttering but (ah) (you) everything was done with the hand, there was no other way of doing it - no (ah) mechanical work. - pause - And the (ah) the ganger's name was Perc White, he lived here at Waratah, not far from us, and he was the ganger for all of Mayfield dole workers. And there was another fella, he rode a motor bike around, and (that) his name was Maughan, but I can't think of his first name, but they used to call him Darky Maughan, and he was the whole ganger for Newcastle. And (ah) (if we was) if he thought we was going a bit slow, he'd say "Here, better get a move on, Maughan'll be around any minute/." The wages - for the fortnight was two pound six and nine - and they thought that was pretty good pay then.

(Interviewer - "That was two pound six and nine a fortnight doing  
• council work for the dole?")

Yeah. "And the ordinary pay for a week then was three pound five for a week?" That was (ah) when I started at Rylands, I got three pound five - but doing the dole work for the Council I got two pound six and nine a fortnight - so you could - what's that? - two pound, thats one dollar thirty four and one cent for the week isn't it? Umm, thats out of me head, I can't think too far back now.

(Interviewer - "It would be two dollars thirty eight a week")

Yeah, well that, that, thats what it would be then.

(Interviewer - "Umm - incredible")

And (ah) when I went to sea, I didn't tell you this, but (ah) there

was no showers then, (the) only for the officers, that was the (ah) engineers and (ah) the (ah) mates and the captain, they had a bath, but the firemen and sailors and the deckhands, they had nothing - they used to wash in kerosene tins or if you had a 44 gallon drum in the stokehole you could have a wash in that, salt water, if you wanted to. Cause they wouldn't let you use too much of the water, the tanks wasn't big enough then in the ships to carry fresh water. (Interviewer - "They'd get pretty dirty, did you heat the water, could you heat it?") Oh, you could heat it if you wanted to, you could put it over the boilers and leave it there, if you wanted to, that's what most of them used to do. What water they got. But most of them washed in salt water till they got a (got a) to shore, any port at all, (a) there's always fresh water on the wharf, as you know, and they'd get a bucket and have a good shower and bath in that - that was the only way you could get on. And (ah) on the old iron boats there'd be 30 of a crew, and there was 2 and 3 boilers, that's 6 and 9 fires, 3 fires each, and that was the crew then and when the (ah) when the (ah) Queen's (ah) yacht came out here, they had 50 of the crew, and everything was switched on, it was (ah) diesel fed or motor, and (ah) they'd have a crew of 50 on that, against 30 when there was work.

(Interviewer - "When you were, (you were) telling us before about the station mob, the boys on the (ah) railway station - what, why were they there, were they there to go looking for work or to collect their dole?")

Oh, they, no, they just collected there to have a talk and the (interviewer - "It was a meeting place") Yeah - and play a bit of cricket over the other side of the railway - But (ah) they insulted no one in those days if they saw someone getting bashed or though they was, they'd bash the basher up and they spoke to everyone with civility, not like it is now, you're not game to walk out of a night or women or young people are not, and (may remember) there's a lot of men getting, old fellas now in Mayfield, that's (ah) being bashed and killed and robbed.

(Interviewer - "You were saying, when, in the dole years, you actually rented, when you came to Mayfield, you rented this house you're in and it was five shillings a week rent, is that right?") That's right, for this place we're in now it was five shillings a week, but this place is 103 years old, you know. It was built I think when the railway went through for the Stationmaster, and (ah) cause we bought it, and (ah) it's done up a lot since then, and put a lot of work into it. It had four chimneys in it - I pulled the four out myself and I buried the bricks around, and (ah) we haven't got a chimney now at all - we got the (ah) the (ah) gas and the kerosene and electricity, whatever you will, we've got three.

(Interviewer - "So they had four fireplaces?") Four fireplaces, double ones, one in two, one back to back, in the two rooms.

But (ah) we used to get the coal off the railway, thieve it off the railway, off the old slow coal trucks - what we didn't use ourselves, thats the brothers and I, we'd sell that for a shilling a bag to those that couldn't get it. (Interviewer - "Was this in the dole years?")

Yes, that was in the dole years. (Interviewer - "And you were saying when you used to get the sheep, when you used to bring the one home, how did you get it home?") Got it home on the coal trains - they was old steam trains then and the little old trucks that they had built for coal, you could walk alongside, put the sheep on, and sit on the brake rod and then get onto the buffer, and sit there and carry the sheep. Trouble, no trouble getting him home.

(Interviewer - "So you actually carried him home and just hopped on and off the train") On and off, yeah. Get off here at Waratah Station, cause those signs wasn't there then, that was all open slather then, you could walk, well no one ever walked over the bridge, they all walked across the lines in those days to Waratah.

(Interviewer - "And you said you, you used to bring it home and you'd kill, kill it and get the meat off, you'd skin it, and you used to bury the skin and carcass. Why did you bury it? Couldn't you, you couldn't have done anything with the wool or skin?") No - you couldn't sell them, you'd, because you'd be giving yourself up.

(Interviewer - "What, for having taken it?") And that wouldn't be worth taking the thing, no one would want it - And did I tell you about getting fined for smoking in the auditorium of the dance hall in Waratah? ("No") Never, I never - well this policeman was named Ball in Waratah and he was crooked on me because I wouldn't go his way on a couple of things he wanted me to do and (ah) this is in the old Scouts Hall over here now and I was, he summonsed me and I had to walk in to the Court in Newcastle and the old judge fined me two pound default two days imprisonment. You had to pay it was ten shillings a day then, that was the fine. Well the policeman from Mayfield come here one Friday morning and he said "I've got to put you in, Johnnie" - I said "Yeah, righto". So (ah) there was steam trams in those days - he said "I'll get in one compartment and you get in the other and I'll tell the conductor you're with me, I'm taking you into town" and I, I said "Righto" - so we got into town, he took me into the police station, the old one thats there now, near the post office, and they got a pad out and paper and he said "sign here" and I just read it, what I was fined and default two days, I signed it, he put me in and they made me clean every cell in that police station in Newcastle, of a Saturday and Sunday, I was in there. That was over Saturday, two days solid work.

(Interviewer - "And that was for smoking in the dance hall?")

Yeah - wasn't in the dance hall, it was out the little part that they had built on the front, you can see it when you go past there



now. Yeah - you know, and others, they'd put a dinner on for themselves and they'd all be smoking and dancing together. She's a different set up now to then.

(Interviewer - "When, when you were talking about the depression, um, can, can you remember anything about the humpy towns in Nobbys, Stockton, Carrington or Platts Estate, any of those?") No, I can remember Platts Estate, but I never ever got mixed up with any of them up there, they was nearly all Abo's and I knew a girl that I knew in Gloucester - she use'd to do a bit of rabbiting, setting rabbit traps, she was quarter caste, her mother was a quarter caste and her father was white man, he was an Aussie, and (ah) the last time I met her was at the races over here, she was in the Airforce then, she was a good style of a girl and I asked her brother what became of her and he said (ah) no one knows and I never heard of her since - but I asked a fella that knew her and he came over here the other day and he said she was living with a girl up at Platts Estate. So (ah) (Interviewer - "And you didn't actually see any of them, the humpy's?") No, I never went near them, because I had no need to go there, I could get enough work to suit me, and what was honest enough anyhow, in Mayfield without going - and they was a pretty poor class of people in all those humpys. They had one too at Carrington, that it, called that Texas. And they had humpys over there, built of old galvanised iron and a lot of (ah) I knew a lot of seamen that lived there, after I got to know them that told me they lived in Texas in the humpys, but I never ever got near them, I kept as far away as I could. I didn't go on the class that was living there.

(Interviewer - "Do you recall having any trouble at all during the dole times, with country men coming to Newcastle, looking for work?") No, no I had no trouble, you wouldn't know whether they come from the country or where they come from, because they wouldn't tell you too much, they never discussed them, because they couldn't get work. Cause it'd be nothing for 100 to 150 men sitting at the gate steelworks, Rylandsm Lysaghts every morning for a job then, so they could have took their pick.

(Interviewer - "Can you tell us how, how you happened to get your job at Rylands, what, how many men were there at the time?") Well, I couldn't tell you how many men was there, but I can tell you how I got the job. I was playing football at Waratah Mayfield, and the fellow named Lewis, he was playing too and his father was the (ah) (um) - pause - what do they call them, you call them, he started them ("The employment man") yes, he was the employment man, he was on the gate and (ah) he comes out this morning and (ah) after his son had told me he'd see him and (ah) he said "You" and pointed to this fella and he jumped up and he said "Not you" just like as he was talking



to a dog and "Me" - he said "Yeah - come over to the office". I went over and he said "start dog watch tonight". And thats how I got the job through his son being mates playing football see.

(Interviewer - "And how many men were there that day that you got picked?") Oh, there'd be anything up to 70 to 100 I'd say.

(Interviewer - "And was it like that all the time, that many men hanging around looking for work every day?") Practically every morning - yeah, that was 6 days a week 8 hours a day and you got no (ah) no pay for holidays or anything like that - anything broke down in the machinery, they'd send you home again, and you got nothing for that because they wouldn't, they wouldn't have a tradesman on, they'd only pay him of a day see, they'd keep him there for the day to do the job to fix the machinery, whatever broke down.

(Interviewer - "I believe you've had a bit to do with the unions, do you remember anything about, there was supposed to be an Unemployed Workers Union?") No, I don't know nothin about that, and I don't believe it - because if there was I'd known about it - because I knew a few as was mixed up with the Trades Hall and (ah) I don't believe it. Even - I couldn't imagine anyone taking the job on because they couldn't get any money - no one had any money to pay them and I couldn't imagine or see them doing that sort of work for nothing - ("No you wouldn't think so would you?") Very - (cough) - (Interviewer - "And how about (ah) the Salvation Army Soup Kitchens or other soup kitchens, and, did, did you know anything about any of them operating around here, or?") Yes, there was one going in Wickham in Hannel Street in Wickham, I know that, but I never ever went there, I, none pf the family ever went there, we always seemed to manage on what we could scrape up. I don't think anyone was hungry, I can't remember anyone dying of hunger or anything like that.

(Interviewer - "And how about communism - have you heard, did you hear anything about people being afraid that communism was spreading at that time?") Yes, well, it was - communism was spreading around them, around the unions, but (ah) but the Army they bought the (ah) the old -pause- the Army bought the old Council building down here in Hanbury Street and started what the, the club there, thats there now and I was one of the first club members to join there, but I was away for a couple of months at sea and I didn't get home and when I got home, there was a (ah) bill for me (ah) for the year anyhow and it had on the top of this paper 'Are you a communist - Yes or No'. Well when I seen that I went down and I said to the old fella that was running it eown there - and his name was Bell - I said " What I am is my business, you shove this up your jumper. I'm finished, I don't want nothing to do with your joint again" - and I never ever been back there since, but if I want to go to the club I go to Waratah Bowling Club now - but that was the only thing ever I ever heard

of communism.

(Interviewer - "Why, why did you feel so strongly about it - did you not like communism, or did you just think it was really none of their business?")

I didn't think it was their business what I was, its just like religion, what I am is my business, its not, not anyone els's. So if you ask what they are they don't like it - but I don't care what anyone asks me - I got no religion - I,I go along with those whatever they want me to, because I know its all baloney (laughter)

(Interviewer - "Um, I've seen pictures of some demonstrations that were carried on with an Anti Eviction Committee - did you ever hear of anything to do with the Anti Eviction Committee?") Oh, there was one of those on, but I never had anything to do with it, but I used to hear about people being thrown out of their homes and couldn't pay their rent - I think there was a lot of that went on - but I had nothing to do with that at all.

(Interviewer - "Can you tell us, how hard , was it hard to get the dole and what did you have to fill in on the forms, because I believe there was a bit of controversy about the forms as well, people didn't like them?) How old you was, married, single, live at home, (ah) where'd you work last, if you've worked at all and all, that's all I can remember that was on it on the form you had to fill in - but (ah) you had to take that, that in to Honeysuckle from here at Mayfield to get that (ah) five bob there too.

(Interviewer - "How long was the five shillings for? How long was that to last?") Fortnight. And you'd brought it out to the shop, whatever shop you nominated and they gave you five shillings worth of food for it - No, that was a week (a week) but you got it every fortnight, go to get it.

(Interviewer - "So how often did you have to fill the form in? Only once a year or ?") Once a year - just the once. I know I've heard of others though, that had that they reckon was working and getting it and they had to fill another one in, but it was very seldom (ah) it wouldn't be worthwhile running after it working at the same time. ("No - must have been really hard to live in those days, to exist")

OPEN FOUNDATION: AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.  
 SUBJECT: MR. VICTOR ALFRED STAMFORD  
 TAPED: 18.6.88  
 INTERVIEWER: MAUREEN SINCLAIR.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION: EXPERIENCES OF ONE MAN

Victor Alfred Stamford was born on 26th May, 1913, one of four children of working class parents, in a little town north of Newcastle called Binnaway. He was born in a tent and his grandmother acted as midwife. Victor's family moved about following the fathers work, but it appears that priority was given to ensuring that the children received the best available formal education. His recollections of his childhood years are of a normal, happy family life with most members working and contributing to the upkeep of the family.

During and after World War 1, Newcastle industry expanded to the extent that it was predicted by the then General Manager of BHP, G.D. Delprat, that Newcastle would become the industrial capital of Australia. (1) However by the mid 1920s the falling demand for coal both on the domestic and international scene, led to available work for those directly engaged in the industry, which at this time was still Newcastle's largest employer and exporter, being severely disrupted and affected employment in associated industries as well. In an effort to counteract the effects of falling demand and therefore loss of profits, mine owners lowered the price of coal which resulted in a clash with the Miners Federation and culminated in the closure of most collieries in the north from February, 1929 to May, 1930 affecting over 12,000 mine workers. (2) The lockout in the coal industry directly led to job losses in other industries and commercial businesses and the final figure for job losses would have been much higher.

The steel industry during the 1920s fared no better. The early belief that Newcastle was set to become an industrial giant attracted both investors and employment seekers to the city, swelling the population by 16,000 between 1921 and 1929. (3) Early in the 1920s a glut of overseas iron and steel hit the domestic market and this together with BHP's high production costs forced the company to drastically reduce the number of men employed in 1921, and by June 1922 to close the works retaining 900 men, the majority of whom worked part-time only. Although the works re-opened on a reduced scale in 1923, it was not until the following year that employment figures approached 5,000. (4)

(1) J.C. Doherty, Newcastle, The Making of An Australian City, Sydney, 1983 p.38

(2) S. Gray, Newcastle in the Great Depression, Newcastle, 1984 p.12

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.



The associated industries, in particular the firms of Rylands and Lysaghts, were affected by the downturn suffered by BHP and were also forced into firstly closures and later operation on a reduced scale.

The last of the city's three main employers, the State Dockyard, was dealt a death blow in 1921 when it launched the last ship to be built at the yards. It carried on, operating with huge losses and threats of sale by the Government at various times, but its ship building days had passed. Its future was uncertain and employment figures fell dramatically.

The economic disasters in Newcastle industry and trade in the decade immediately preceeding the depression left the community ill-equipped to deal with the problems ahead.

1930 found the teenaged Victor and his family living at Karuah, a township north of Newcastle, and Victor on the dole. "The dole" was not unemployment benefits as such, the State and Commonwealth Governments did little to assist the unemployed, it was a food coupon allowing the holder to acquire five shillings worth of food per week from a nominated storekeeper. In order to receive the coupon, it was necessary for the person concerned to present himself to the dole office fortnightly. In Victor's case this meant travelling from Karuah to the Police Station in Raymond Terrace, a distance of approximately 19 miles. Victor was fortunate that at this time his father owned a T Model Ford truck and would drive Victor to Raymond Terrace to collect the dole, and for a charge of one shilling, he also took as many others as he could fit in the truck, thus paying for petrol and making a small profit besides. Those less fortunate walked, rode push bikes or horses.

On 21st December, 1931 Victor married Leila Davis, a Karuah girl, and shortly after he and his bride together with the rest of the family shifted to Newcastle where Victor's father went into business for himself. Victor, still on the dole, supplemented his income by penning sheep at the Sale Yards. This entailed unloading the sheep from trucks and after they were classed by the Auctioneer, a gentleman from Raymond Terrace named Windeyere, they were penned according to their class. Victor received payment of two shillings per pen and allowed to purchase an old sheep for his own use. Using his initiative, Victor further improved his lot by purchasing an old sheep for two shillings, penning it in with the lambs and at the end of the day, substituting the old one for a lamb.



In order to get the lamb home Victor would have to 'jump' a coal train. Victor explains that in those days the trains were run by steam and were so slow going uphill that it was possible to walk beside them, lift the sheep on, get on yourself and hold the sheep until you wanted to disembark, then simply get off. Once home with the sheep, Victor would kill it, skin it, cut it into portions and bury the skin and bones. Victor stated that this was the only meat the family had. To further extend and vary the food supply, he would walk in to Newcastle to Arnotts Biscuit Factory where it was possible to buy a pillowful of broken biscuits for two shillings. Whilst Victor's family appears to have been able to keep themselves adequately fed, clothed and sheltered, many others were less fortunate. No actual cases of

No actual cases of malnutrition were actually recorded but it appears that the weak physical condition of Newcastle men was known to officers of the C.M.F. in 1931/32 and also to employment selectors in heavy industries, who, because the work required strong men, bypassed those in a weakened condition. (5) This became a vicious circle; because they were weak they couldn't get work, because they couldn't get work they were weak.

In May 1933 the Emergency Relief Scheme was introduced in Newcastle and operated with the co-operation of Shire and Municipal councils. Under this scheme the Government agreed to pay wages and bonuses for approved public works. (6) Victor gained work under this scheme for through Mayfield Municipal Council and was paid a wage of Two Pounds, six shillings and nine pence (£2.6.9) a fortnight, the wage in ordinary employment at the same time was Six Pounds, ten shillings a fortnight. The council work was exacting, physical and manual and no labour saving devices were used.

Unemployment and hardship were problems which affected the whole of the community, but those worst affected and least helped were youths and women. Victor recalls 'the Station mob', youths who congregated on Waratah Railway Station, 50 to 100 each day, to talk, play cricket in the adjacent park, socialise and fill in time. Victor says this was the case right up until the outbreak of World War 11, when he says that many of the young men joined the Forces though not many came back from overseas duty.

Later in 1933 Victor gained permanent employment with Ryland Bros.,

(5) Ibid. pp 21,27

(6) Ibid p.27

shift work, 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, and for two years he walked there and back until he could afford to buy a bicycle which he paid off at two shillings and six pence (2/6) per week. Victor recalls that on the morning he was selected to work, there were approximately 70 to 100 men waiting at Rylands gate hopeful of getting work, and that it was usual for the same amount of men to be at BHP, Lysaghts and Rylands.

Along with relief work carried out by Church groups, the Salvation Army set up soup kitchens in various locations in Newcastle to provide some sustenance for the needy. Victor states that he knew of one soup kitchen which operated in Hannell Street, Wickham, but that neither he nor his family ever had to use it, they could exist on what they could 'scrape up'.

Another problem facing the unemployed was housing, and several municipal councils were forced to relax laws relating to temporary housing and allow people to set up tents and shelters on council owned land. This emergency housing was supposed to be temporary, but some camps became permanent residences for some of the inhabitants. When asked if he knew of any humpy towns, Victor said he knew of one at Platts Estate in Waratah and another called 'Texas' in Carrington. There were many other camps, one at Adamstown Rifle Range, another at Stockton and the one which appears to have caused the most problems for Newcastle council, Nobbys camp at Nobbys Beach.

The fear that communism was spreading within the camps grew, and Nobbys camp was pinpointed as a trouble spot as the camp secretary was a known member of the Communist Party and many members of the Unemployed Workers Movement also lived there. The Unemployed Workers Movement was thought to be connected with the Communist Party, but was already in a state of decline by 1932 which probably accounts for Victor's disbelief in its existence, his reasoning being that if it was for the unemployed and run by the unemployed, there would be no money available to set it up and maintain operation, and that nobody would take the job on unpaid. Victor declared that he personally would not associate with people from the humpy's as they were 'a poor class of people'. Probably some were, however many were simply unable to get work, but what emerged from this statement was the evidence of class distinction, not only between employed and unemployed, but also distinct classes within the unemployed.

After working at Rylands for ten years, Victor tried to enlist in the Army in 1943, however he was told he was more valuable to his country working in the ammunitions section of Rylands. He then learned that the Merchant Navy was experiencing difficulty in getting seamen and Victor signed up and went to sea. He tells of baths in kerosene tins or 44 gallon drums, washing in salt water until a port was reached where fresh water would be a welcome comfort. Unfortunately Victor suffered a back injury which forced him to resign after many months of hospital treatment, and he returned to Mayfield and the dole.

Victor and Leila still live in the same house the family rented when they originally arrived in Newcastle from Karuah all those years ago. The house has seen family births and deaths, good and bad times. Victor and Leila purchased and renovated the house which Victor claims is 103 years old, originally being built for the Stationmaster, being located in the immediate vicinity of Waratah Railway Station. Both Leila and Victor worked and saved to purchase their home, and this story and their memories testify to the determination and perseverance of the 'Aussie Battler.'

GROCERY LIST FROM LEILA STAMFORD'S  
HOUSEKEEPING BOOK SHOWING FOOD PRICES  
IN 1940'S.

COMPARISON ON STAPLE ITEMS 1940-1988.

LOAF OF BREAD	1940	1988
LOAF BREAD 5½ PENCE	.06C	\$1.15
1 LB. BUTTER 1/8½	.19C	\$1.40
MEAT ROAST 3/9	.38C	\$6.00
VEGETABLES 6PENCE	.05C	\$2.50
RENT 16/-	1.60	\$100.00

ALTHOUGH PRICES IN 1930'S WOULD HAVE BEEN LOWER, FOR EXAMPLE THE STAMFORD'S RENT AT THAT TIME WAS 5/- PER WEEK (SO WAS THE DOLE), THIS GIVES SOME INDICATION OF HOW DIFFICULT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN TO EXIST ON THE DOLE.

stamps 5½  
1 loaf Bread 5½  
1 lb onions 4  
1 lb butter 1-8½  
Daily Paper 10 amish  
2 doz cakes 7½  
1 lge cordial 10  
2 envelopes 4  
Beans 6alt  
Raisins 1-3 pot  
a nice roast 3-9  
rabbit 1-9½  
1 lb tomatoes 1-1  
+ lunch bag  
1 tin sunbina milk 1-9½  
Pictures for Reg 1-0  
4 meat pie 2-6  
Pastic 3½  
chips 6  
1 lb peas 1/2 pumpkin 1-6  
Lamb's Fry 6  
Egg crispies milk 3-0  
was living in  
Sunside bt  
in affull  
rent 16/-  
1 tin cocoa 4 pence  
envelopes 5 pence  
fish & chips 1/9 pence  
Reg lunches for a week  
5/-  
Reg 9 food 1  
C.S. 8 pence  
June 206

2 lb sck S.D 1-10  
carrots 4  
parsnips 5  
turnips 2  
Baked Poty 8½  
Salt 2  
mince 6  
sultanas 10  
Eggs 1-2½  
salmon 4-6  
cabbage 10  
Bacon 4-6  
Hamburgers 2+8  
Spring roll 2/3  
Tobacco & papers 4/6



No 12700

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Passport Act 1938 and Regulations

SEAMAN'S DOCUMENT OF IDENTITY

Printer: Canberra

PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER.



*V. Stamford*

IMPORTANT.—This Document of Identity should be carefully preserved by the person to whom it is issued and not allowed to leave his possession, unless he is required to surrender it to an authorized officer. If it is lost or stolen, the fact must be immediately reported to the nearest Superintendent, Mercantile Marine Office.

THIS DOCUMENT OF IDENTITY IS ISSUED TO

*Victor Alfred Stamford*

a British subject by birth, to enable him to engage in a seafaring occupation.

\*Strike out which does not apply.

*Superintendent,  
Mercantile Marine Office*

(By authority of the Minister for Immigration.)

*11/11/49*

PERSONAL PARTICULARS OF BEARER.

Place of Birth *Birmingham*

Date of Birth *26th. June. 1912*

Height *5* ft. *8* ins. Colour of eyes *Blue.*

Colour of hair *Dark*

Any Special Peculiarities

SEAMAN'S DOCUMENT OF IDENTITY  
ISSUED TO V.A. STAMFORD ON  
11.11.49

NOTE DISCREPANCY IN BIRTH  
DATE TO THAT GIVEN BY  
VICTOR ALFRED STAMFORD  
IN HIS TAPED INTERVIEW.

UNEXPLAINED.