

ANN NOUD

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

S U M M A R Y

A SECRETARYS PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD

RESEARCH PROJECT

1988

S U M M A R Y

A SECRETARYS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD

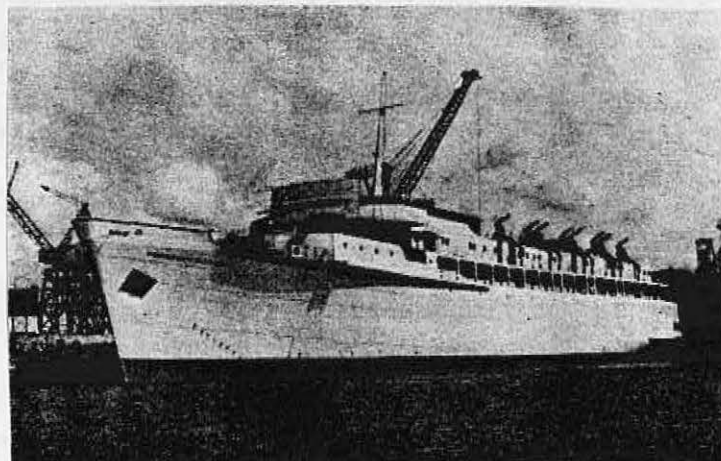
Miss Elizabeth Wilkinson (Betty), formerly a secretary at the Newcastle State Dockyard (NSD) had been employed by the same company for approximately 27 years (1954 - 1981/82). It was during 1954 that Miss Wilkinson obtained a secretarial position and was appointed to the position as secretary to the secretary of the Dockyard.

The Manager at that time was Mr D Lyon McLarty who had served continuously as Manager since the Dockyards' establishment in 1941. His secretary at that time was Miss Maude Brisley.

Miss Wilkinson performed a wide range of clerical duties such as typing, shorthand and other office procedures. Relieving in many positions whilst staff members were on holidays was another duty performed by Miss Wilkinson. Her familiarity with the terminology and other aspects of the ship-building and ship-repairing trade were due to her past employment experiences with another shipping industry.

In the years to follow, several men were to be appointed as Managers of the Dockyard. Miss Wilkinson witnessed this succession of Managers from the time she commenced employment until her retirement. Each man had obtained a reputation for their contribution and/or part they played to the State Dockyard. The most commorable contribution was made by Mr D Lyon McLarty, however, other recognised men such as Mr Harry Harding, Ken Wood, Ian Butler and Cyril Clark were to follow.

It was during May in 1971 that Miss Wilkinson was promoted to the position as secretary to the General Manager. The position was made available on Miss Grisleys' retirement. Miss Wilkinson was now responsible directly to the General Manager. Her past experiences and skills equipped her with the necessities required for such a demanding position. She actively took part in various activities of the ship-building industry, such as her participation in the launching ceremonies. On these occasions, catering, accommodation and invitations had to be organised as well as instructing the flower girls on their roles throughout the ceremony. The launching of the ship, "Princess of Tasmania" at the Newcastle State Dockyard was the first Vehicular Passenger Ferry built in Newcastle.



"Princess of Tasmania" fitting-out as at 12/2/59.

During the late 1970's the Dockyard experienced a downturn. It had been plagued with disputes and retrenchments. The number of workers at the Dockyard were steadily decreasing. Miss Wilkinson farewelled office colleagues, as they too were dismissed and transferred to other positions within Government Departments. The decline in employee numbers was (inevitably) due to the cessation in ship-building contracts. A "change in market" was attributed to this decline in orders. Many ships were under construction in the East as their costs were cheaper compared to the Australian prices. The Dockyard, in an endeavour to keep working, built condensers for power stations and demountable buildings (temporary accommodation for schools), amidst this unfavourable period.

The construction of a second Floating Dock (the old Floating Dock dates back to the Dockyards' beginnings on Walsh Island) took place in Japan by a Japanese based company 'Hitachi' and on its completion, towed to Newcastle Harbour.

Miss Wilkinson retired from full-time employment at the Newcastle State Dockyard in 1981/82. Following this, she had endeavoured to pursue media reports on the future of the State Dockyard. When a decision was made to finally close the State Dockyard in March 1982, Miss Wilkinson was reported to have been startled at the Dockyards sudden demise.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1988

I, Elizabeth Trevor Wilkinton ^(Betty) give my
permission to Ann Noud

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research, ~~publication and/or broadcasting~~ (delete one of
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the Library at Newcastle University

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for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed Elizabeth Wilkinton

Date 31 August 1988.

Interviewer A Noud.

Mina-

INTERVIEWEE: MISS BETTY WILKINSON	PETER & SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD
INTERVIEWER: ANN NOUD	DOROTHY WHITE
SUBJECT OF INTERVIEW :	THE HISTORY OF THE NEWCASTLE REPERTORY CLUB
ROLE OF THE SECRETARY AT THE NEWCASTLE STATE DYARD	
DATE : 31-8-88	20 SEPT. 1987
DOCUMENT AVAILABLE	

NUMBER

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TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW

A SECRETARIALS' PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD.

I N T E R V I E W E E

NAME: MISS BETTY WILKINSON
ADDRESS: 36 BOREAS STREET
BROADMEADOW
FORMER OCCUPATION: SECRETARY AT THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD
TOPIC: NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD
DATE: 31 AUGUST 1988

INFORMAL INTRODUCTION:

TODAY IS WEDNESDAY THE 31ST OF AUGUST 1988. I HAVE BESIDE ME MISS BETTY WILKINSON, FORMERLY A SECRETARY AT THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD.

A Miss Wilkinson, what is your full name please?

B Elizabeth Mina Wilkinson.

A When were you born?

B On the 7th July 1922.

A Where? Was it in Newcastle?

B No. I was born in Paddington in Sydney and I came back to Newcastle when I was eight and had most of my schooling in Newcastle and after leaving Newcastle Girls' High at intermediate year, I won half a scholarship to Eliss' [sic] Business College. My uncle paid the other half. (laughs). So I trained in shorthand writing, typing, bookkeeping, use of the phone and all, you know, the things covered in a Business College.

A And where did you go after that?

B Well, I had to stay on until I could get a position because you know, those days prior to the war there weren't many positions I think, so I did a few little part-time jobs like with the dredge service for three months, and then I got a job in a shipping company in Newcastle and didn't use any of my shorthand at all, which by that time I reached 150wpm. Typing was to the normal speed and I was mostly just a junior office assistant to the two men. They were an accountant and

a shipping clerk and a boss. I used to spend a great deal of my time early in the morning picking up certificates from the ships that had loaded coal in the port and sailed for Sydney, and making out things for Customs clearance and helping them to clear the ships going down to the Hunter Works Steamship Company, picking out things for the BHP.....byproducts. The shipping at that stage Napthalene out of the port of Newcastle.

A Right.

B And then after working there for about ten years I decided that I would try further fields so I left and went down to Griffiths, where I worked for a short time with a Solicitor for about nine weeks on a "Skin and Hides" case and then I finally got a permanent position with Griffiths District Hospital and I stayed there from 1949 until 1954. I came back to Newcastle because my mother was not well and the rest of the members of the family had married and moved away so I was the obvious person to come back home. (laughs) in which I did. And then I got a job at the State dockyard.

A So when was that that you came back? In 1954?

B 1954.

A Was it interesting working at the State dockyard?

B Oh, very interesting. I thought so. It was a diversity of jobs, you know, you just didn't sit there all day behind the typewriter although in those days there were no zerox machines or anything like that and all the correspondence that came in had to be hand copied for distribution to the various Managers who were concerned in the letters that came in. And sometimes between correspondence of the general secretary, we'd get through typing forty copies of forty letters per day. It was busy, yes.

A So did you actually join on a junior level or a senior?

B No, I was about aged 31 when I started because I'd done, you know, ten years down at the shipping office and another for about five years and I came in as secretary to the secretary of the dockyard. And, I worked in that position until the general managers' secretary retired and then I was succeded, I suppose you'd call it, to the position as secretary to the General Manager.

A And was that a bigger workload, more variety of work?

B More variety of work and more responsibility, more confidential, although most of the work was confidential in both the secretaries department and the general managers department. And, I'd been trained in confidentiality anyway when I worked in the shipping company before. You didn't discuss anything of vital information of course, there was alot of curious people that always worked with you and they'd

ask you a few questions, but you know quite well that you couldn't say anything so you didn't. (laughs).

A Was the environment, the workplace, was the relationship there very good?

B Yes, very good. I worked with quite a lot of very nice people and the correspondence secretary had been there a lot longer than I had of course. She was there. When I started first, she had leave to go overseas and visit her sister. I took on her job and the secretaries job as well with the help of a junior with the correspondence and opening the mail and that sort of thing. There was lots of varieties. Sometimes you were called upon to book people on trains and.... or you know, to pick up tickets and things like that or arrange for the office boy to go across on the ferry and pick up the tickets. The mail was always collected from the post-office in a sealed bag, everything had to be ready for a ten o'clock mailing conference.....so that.....

A Was that everyday?

B Everyday, yes. We'd start work at 8.30 in the morning and work till 4.30 normally. Sometimes you'd have to stay back if there was something urgent on or, in the latter stages more so when I was working for the General Manager. By that time we had telex machines and xerox copying machines. The things, the technicalities of the job changed very remarkably. In fact, I started on a manual typewriter and then when I came back from holidays, having been to New Zealand for about a fortnight, there was a brand new electronic typewriter on my desk and this was the first day of the preparation of the board papers...and of course you had to switch very quickly from a manual typewriter to the electric one. It was a bit hair-raising that week.

A Was that the only sort of adaptations that you had to make?

B Oh, well, you had to learn to use the telex machines and we often had to send overseas telexes and especially when we had people coming from Japan and places like that and we also had people coming from Europe to the dockyard in those days. They built a variety of ships in the ship-building department, and it was very busy in those days in the ship-building. When I was there every ship was a different type, you know. Only in one or two occasions were there ships of the same variety like the BHP Tankers. They were 35,000 tonne dead weight and there were two of them for that. But most of the other ships were just a 'one off' like, there was a dredge and there'd be a passenger ship and then a tanker and the 'Princess of Tasmania' was built while I was at the dockyard too. And that was quite an effort to get all the accommodation and everything for the men. The men did wonderful work in the spitting out of the ships and...you know, there'd always been a lot of criticism about the dockyard was always on strike, but I think the figures were compared with BHP probably on strike, but the dockyard got all the publicity. There were probably more occasions when publicity

did the dockyard more harm than good. And people were always saying "Don't work at the dockyard because they're always on strike". But ... well, I don't know about the men, there's probably people in every area who just don't want to work and leave the job for somebody else, but you know.. the girls in the office and the boys down in the clerical department, they worked jolly hard. And the foreman and superintendants, they had a bad or you know, not an easy job when you've got a lot of men to control. You've got to get around to see jobs progressing and then you've got to make sure the men are actually working at the same time....quite a lot of responsibility when you're in charge of staff. And I didn't have any assistance in my office because of you know just one person was sufficient for the General Managers' work.

A So you were actually, or you could say you were the personal secretary to the manager.

B Yes. There were other Managers in other different departments such as the Engineering, Ship-building and Ship-repair and they also had their secretaries, but then they had the responsibility of reporting to the General Manager. So they had their own workload in their own different areas too and the ship-repairs wasn't always busy, ship-building at the last minute was always busy, so, I suppose my job was comparable with the girls in the other area, but the Managers had the most responsibility. I suppose I had you know, as much work to do as any of the others, sometimes more.

A Can you recall who was the Manager at the time you started employment?

B Yes, David Lyon McLarty, D Lyon McLarty. And he had been appointed to start at the Dockyard and his secretary at that time was Miss Mord Grisley. So that.... when she went on holidays I did the relief work for the Managers until I was appointed in, I think it was the first of April in 1971, when Miss Grisley left. I think it was about 1971, I can't recall that date exactly. I began to wonder about the job, if I was April fool (laughs) because it was a hard job and a lot of responsibility. You had a lot of things to learn, but in the meantime I was still, you know,....as relieving you get to know the job when you do the relieving once a month, when a person goes on holidays.

A The Newcastle State Dockyard had got a reputation as having a lot of famous Managers. Can you elaborate on this at all?

B Yes, well I think Mr Harry Harding followed Mr McLarty and he had been working in the Dockyard as an Under Manager as well, so at that stage they called for, you know applicants to take that position but they couldn't; even from local and overseas, but they couldn't find anyone to equal Mr McLarty I suppose. So he (Mr McLarty) recommended that Mr Harding take the position following him. And then after Mr Harding, if I can get the sequence right, I think it was Mr Ian Butler and then Mr Ken Wood who was the man who came from Canada and he was, he had been in the job for a short while

when Miss Grisley left and then I took over on the first of May - first of April rather. Finally he, you know..... there were a lot of strikes and by that time the Board of Management had been appointed. When I started, there was no Board of Management there. Mr McLarty used to report directly to the Minister of Public Works. It was a quarzý Government undertaking, but it worked. And then Mr (Minister) Ferguson was the one who appointed the Board and the Chairperson at that stage was Mr Ron Raines (?) and there were several other people from different Government Departments and the General Manager was on the Board as well. And, the Secretary of the Dockyard Mr Will Rich, was the Secretary for the Board and he used to take the notes and prepare them for the minutes. At that stage, I was still working for Mr Rich so I was typing notes for the Board meeting and that sort of thing.

A So each time a new Manager came, did you have to help that person in settling in at all or...?

B Well, not until 1971, because Miss Grisley was there to help the others into the job. I went into the position when Mr Butler was in it and relieving in his area and then Mr Ken Wood was appointed. After that he went back to Canada finally, which was a shame because he was an outstanding type of person. Then I think Mr Cyril...well, I might have this sequence out of order, Mr Cyril Clark followed Mr Butler, that's right, and then I went away on holidays and came back and then found Mr Clark had gone too. So, there was... something happened behind the scenes that I knew nothing about because I was away for about four weeks on holidays and Mr Les Langson, who did relieving work in the General Managers' position. He was in charge when I came back and I finished my working days working with Mr Langson - when I finished in '71.

(NOTE: MISS WILKINSON DIDN'T FINISH EMPLOYMENT AS PREVIOUSLY STATED. IT WAS '81)

But during that time you know, we launched a lot of ships and we used to have to, in the General Managers area, used to have to prepare a list of people to invite to the function and you know, work out in most times in the early days, work out what to feed them and usually, the General Managers' Secretary had the responsibility of dressing the bottle for the launching of the ship and then contacting the little flower girl who presented the bouquets to the launching lady. And we had some very outstanding launching ladies.

A So you weren't actually stuck in the office, you played an active part.

B Oh no, a very active part. Upstairs, downstairs, that sort of thing. I was on the top floor but everything you wanted often at times was downstairs. I had a lot of contact with the rest of the staff and they did their part, really, it was a team work. It wasn't just that I had a grave heavy load, but it was all taken by a whole lot of people that worked there.....But I enjoyed it. There was such a diversity of work. It was....and I'd always liked ships, even though I had that spell of working in the hospital area, it was nice to get back amongst the ships.

A A challenge and a heavier workload?

B Yes a challenge. (laughs)

A During the periods when tradesmen were retrenched were any of the office personnel taken from employment?

B Yes they were. A lot of the ones that worked in clerical and administration areas were transferred to other Government departments and I think the first downturn was in 1977. The men out in the works you know, they scattered in all directions and one of the outstanding shiprights, who won shipright of the year, I heard later that he was working in charge of a hardware store and that sort of technical ability was lost. In lots of cases lots of really good tradesmen just did taxi-driving and did all sorts of things just to get a job, because they had a wife and children and a mortgage and they had to get work. They just had to take anything that was offering and their technical knowledge, which was really outstanding, should never have been lost in my opinion, but then I was only one of the workers. (laughs)

A Going back to the Managers again. Do you know why the Managers actually left and new Managers took their places? Did they move on or retire?

B Well, Mr McLarty retired and Mr Harding retired, Mr Butler finally retired but I think his position was down, I may be wrong in these areas but Mr Clark came in from Hong Kong. He was working up in shipping in Hong Kong and then Mr Harding finally retired before that or he may have gone back to shipping, I'm not sure. I can't remember the sequence now it's a long time; six years to be away from the figures. I don't know, I never ever found out why Mr Clark left, but then I was never privileged to that information anyway. This was something that was between the Minister of Public Works and the top Management of the Board and there's no way that I would be privileged to that information.

A There's been a lot of coverage in the Media regarding close contacts between the State Dockyard and Politicians, the Government and other very important persons (V.I.P.'s) Did you have any close liaisons with people of that sort?

B Oh, only in the areas where they came to visit the dockyard or if you had to contact them on the phone. The Minister of Public Works was the one directly in charge of the Dockyard and the General Manager used to go down to Sydney one day a week if it was urgent, you know, to report on anything that was happening or to get permission to do things. They had a lot of new machinery that was bought and those sort of things cost a lot of money and so they had to prepare a reason why that should be bought and what it was going to be used so that the General Manager had more close liaison with the Minister for Public Works and the Director for Public Works when I was there. He was there in that job for quite some time and I forget who took his place. I think it was Mr Brereton was appointed to his place. And I think it was

during Mr Brereton's role as Minister for the Public Works that the Dockyard was finally closed down, but the.. you know there were a lot of... I suppose a lot of things for it, but in the days of Mr McLarty they used to have what was called a 'proper charring scheme' and I think that worked better to the people because they were helping to get a little extra for themselves and they were prepared to put in a little extra work. (But) Then the market changed. A lot of work was being done in the East, you know, Hong Kong and those places where the wages were a lot lower than Australian wages and they worked longer hours so it was inevitable that their costs would be a lot cheaper than Australian costs. That contributed to the downturn as well but there was nothing wrong with the quality of the work that they did. They did a lot of work on condensers for power stations and the work for the Educational Department on demountables, the Schools', temporary accommodation for Schools'.

A So you actually noticed a decline in the workload towards the end of the year at the State Dockyard.

B Well, a decline in the workload for the men on the works. The numbers when I started were over 2,000, but I think by the time when I finished it was around 1,600 and I think that finally went down after I left to about 500 odd, and I used to read the articles in the paper, but of course that computer upstairs doesn't pertain all the information.

A Did it ever occur to you at sometime during your employment to actually find employment elsewhere?

B No, never. In '77 I thought, Well if I have to go, I have to go, but it never happened. I've finished work full-time now. You know I was pleased to be able to work when I worked because I feel sorry for the kids these days you know, they... they're all enthusiastic and they work hard and they learn but there's no jobs.

P A U S E

ON INTERVIEWEE'S DISCRETION

A Betty, as you were responsible to the Managers of the State Dockyard, your responsibilities went further than just as a secretary, you had to organise meetings for the launches and had contact with 'very important persons (V.I.P.'s), could you tell me a little about that please?

B Yes, well, the launchings in particular were a very busy time because all the Managers submitted names of people they wanted to be invited and then you had to make arrangements to have the printings done of the actual launching and what we called "dress the bottle" and on the actual day the invitations were handed out by other members of the staff and you had to make arrangements with other members of staff if they were available and would do it. And then you had to make sure that the catering went well, and the caterers got the right number of people to cater for. And then the men

in the Dockyard helped too. They... alot of staff helped around in doing things, but it was always panicky until the actual ship went into the water (laughs). The little flower girls, I had a soft spot for the little flower girls because they were so shy at times and they didn't know what to do. The parents used to come with them and I'd explain to the parents what was expected of the little girl and then you had to make arrangemets for the flowers to be delivered on time. There were alot of last minute details that you had to keep your eye on things. I had alot of asistance with other people doing jobs for me as well.

A Were you rewarded for a successful launching?

B Oh, I think so. I think all the people were glad to see it go down safely especially the men in the shipbuilding department because it was their major responsibility that the ship went well. And, to be in the actual launching ceremony and all the.....the behind the scene business was of no avail if the actual ship did get stuck in the mud or did something it shouldn't have done. I know we did have one occasion when the bottle wouldn't break and the poor lady was so embarrassed, and when they finally examined the bottle later on, they found that the glass was so very thick that that was the reason why it didn't break. It was a fault in the construction of the bottle of champagne. Ahh, but it was a thrilling day for everybody, I think most of the people managed to look forward to the launch. And then..... you know the people from the staff who were invited to the function as well as the owners' representatives...it was a day for relaxing and celebration for them as well.

A And what would you say was your most interesting part of work at the State Dockyard?

B Oh, I think every part had its interest but, I used to like ships and I probably think the launchings, although they were alot of hard work, were alot of interest to me but other areas were equally as important and there was alot of work to be done with Board papers but towards the latter end of my work it got put in the Wang Machines and they were able to put alot of work onto floppy disks which took a lot of the hard work out of typing individual pages and zerox copying for each Board members.....and ensuring that the transport department had them to deliver by courier, so that the Board members got their papers before the Board meeting (laughs). And, ahh, there were all sorts of tensions that would arise in a job like that but you just had to keep your cool and get on with the other work as well. You know, there were other things that had to be done inside. You just couldn't knock off answering the phone or sending telexes or anything just because you had a pressure point, you had to carry on and fit everything in. Sometimes I had to work late and often times if there were late telexes to send. You know the other staff would go at 4.30pm and you can guarantee half the time, someone would come along and say 'Oh, can you send a telex', and it's nearly time to go home. But, these are the sort of things that happen to most people at work and you did it because there's no other way. You couldn't, you never ever

refused it, or I never did, although some of the.....you know, you had other commitments and if you were going early you let people know and you just didn't go away with important work that had to be finished.

A So were you entirely responsible to the Managers?

B Well, to the General Manager who was in charge of all the other Managers.

A And the State Dockyard had contracts with overseas personnel. Did you ever have close liaison with those personnel?

B There were a lot of visits from Japanese representatives and we had an agreement with a Japanese Company who built the Floating Dock and...

A That was 'Hitachi'?

B 'Hitachi' Engineering yes, and also with the Dredge people, the hand-dredging people (?). When a ship was being built they'd send their stand-by engineer to watch the progress of the vessel and they were often bringing other people out from Holland and Japan and Europe and those sort of things. Before the Floating Dock was actually built, they called tenders overseas and we had visits from Germany.....Norwegian.....who were putting in a tender to see just what was required and lots of people from the Public Works visited and other V.I.P.'s from the Ship-building companies and Engineering - when the condensers were built - and ship-repair men; overseas ships used to come into the Floating dock and they'd come and meet the General Manager. It was just a sort of courtesy.... And sometimes you had to make arrangements for flight tickets to be altered. Sometimes you had to do it for overseas travel, you know an alteration on a return flight saying probably the Engineer wanted to stay a bit longer than intended and you had to do all these bookings with these companies, Qantas and so on.

A Can you tell us what your first impressions were of the State Dockyard regarding your Secretarial role right up until when you retired?

B Well, when I started it was a really busy place and everybody you know, seemed to know what they were doing. There was a lot of activity and a lot of work at hand. But towards the latter end of my working time there, things started to rundown and I felt I had the best of it (laughs) when I started because I wasn't.. I was never frightened of hard work and you just did your work, that's it.

A You witnessed various changeovers either of Managers or changeovers of equipment to the office...

B That's right. There's a lot of technical change on the plant as well as in officework. When I started it was you know, as I said before, typing copies and getting copies made by hand half the time and then when I finished we had zerox

machines, floppy disks and all that computer equipment--we just didn't stop--and the wages and everything went onto a computer when I left.

A So you could say that your career accelerated from a, not from a junior level but, from an ordinary secretarial level up to a personnel or an executive secretary?

B Yes, I think they call them Girl Fridays' these days (laughs).

A Oh right.

B Yes alot of things that came into the job... you know, you did other little things as well..but then the confidentiality of it was the thing. You didn't discuss things with anybody else. I enjoyed it.

A You've still got a lot of confidential things (information) that you can't tell anybody now...

B Oh yes, well there are alot of things in lots of jobs that you couldn't ever discuss your work with anyone. Especially you know, you'd probably hear the discussions between the General Manager and whoever was in his office but you don't repeat things like that.

A No that's right. That's ethics.

B Yes ethics.

A How did you feel at the closure of the State Dockyard? Did you expect it to close so suddenly?

B Not so suddenly, no. I kept thinking well maybe they'll do something about it. But as they were loosing money each year, I think Mr Brereton decided that the Public Works wasn't intending to you know, keep funding the Dockyard as against other areas. The State Brickwork was probably in the same area and...but as you know the need for building ships had deteriorated. Most of the ships were being built in Japan, even BHP were building their ships in Japan and there wasn't the work for the Australian Ship-building and then the contracts for he condensers had finished. Engineering had a downturn in all areas, Port Kembla and Newcastle, everywhere. And ship-repair was still not as vibrant as it could have been. Not...when I started there was always a big waiting list for ships to go into the Floating Dock. Towards the end you know, those sort of ships, that sort of order book was getting less and less.

A Do you think that the other office staff and the time of the closure of the State Dockyard, found employment elsewhere in other Government departments?

B Well, some of them did, but alot of them didn't because I had met a few people since and found out that some were taxi-driving and doing other sorts of jobs. The work that they were doing in that particular area, there wasn't the

scope in Newcastle for it because the Dockyard and Carrington Slipways were probably the only comprable place in the ship-building area for the Ship-building boys to do it, but I believe that some of the clerical boys were transferred to other Government areas like: Housing Commission and Public Works Government Insurance Offices, but it would be interesting to get them all together and have you know, a pow-wow and find out exactly what everybody is doing and where did they finish up.

A I believe that some of the Managers have moved on to better career opportunities.

B Yes, our outstanding Naval architect Michael Pierson, he went into partnership in Newcastle with 'Barnes and Flett'. [sic]

A On behalf of Newcastle University and myself, thank you very much Betty.

B Pleasure. Thank you for your time.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

ANN NOUD

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

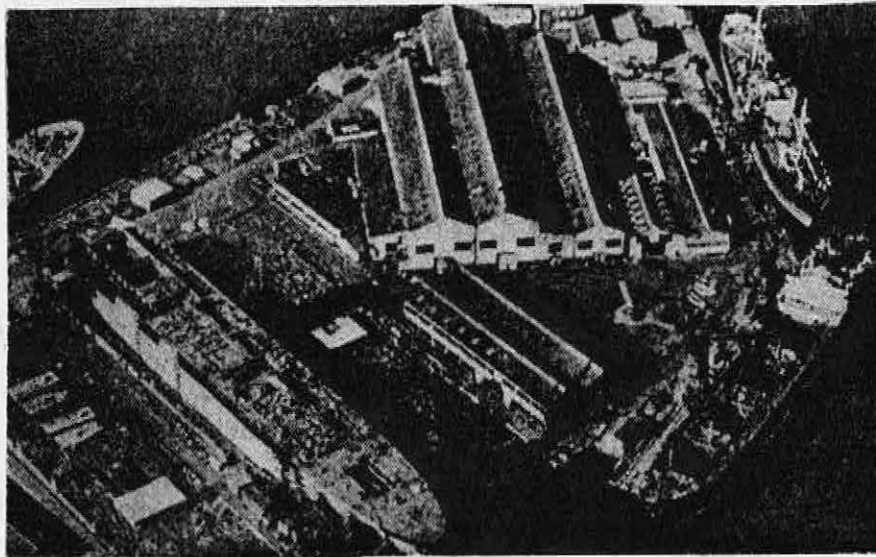
TUESDAY 1 - 3 PM

RESEARCH PROJECT/LOCAL HISTORY

ESSAY CONTENT:

"THE HISTORY OF THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD"

THE HISTORY OF THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD
(1912 - 1987)



During March 1987, the reputable Newcastle State Dockyard (N.S.D.) closed its' doors for the last time. The Dockyards' demise was expected by the surrounding communities; however, its' sudden closure was not anticipated by some. The Dockyard had profitable productive moments and was once ranked as one of the leading industries situated in the Newcastle region, ideally concentrating on ship-building and ship-repairs. The Dockyard had also suffered a history of periodical problems with catastrophic losses dating back shortly after its' initial establishment on Walsh Island. The establishment of the Dockyard in Newcastle created employment for hundreds of Newcastle residents. During its' extended period of operation, it gained a recognised reputation in the ship-building sphere for the important role it played during wartime conditions, and in the fields of marine and general engineering.

Historically, the first N.S.D. was the creation of one man, Arthur Griffith, who was (then) the Minister for Public Works in NSW. 1. Griffith forwarded a proposal to the Government to locate a dockyard on Walsh Island because the city of Newcastle was regarded as having possessed one of the best harbours which, when coupled with the economic stability and availability of resources in the area, had obvious potential prospects for the future. It would be ideally situated directly opposite the planned steelworks with easy accessibility to the sea. It was intended that the dockyard would eventually become the centre of the State's shipbuilding industry.

In 1912/13, the State Government established dockyard facilities at the Northern end of Newcastle harbour and on the 27th November 1914, it was officially opened. 2.

The establishment of a State dockyard had converted Newcastle into an industrial city. Its' construction had helped save the city of Newcastle from collapse because at the time, the coal trade had been transferred to Maitland. 3. By the close of 1919, the dockyard and steelworks had employed a total of approximately 7,300 workers 4. providing the greatest single period of employment opportunities in Newcastle's history.

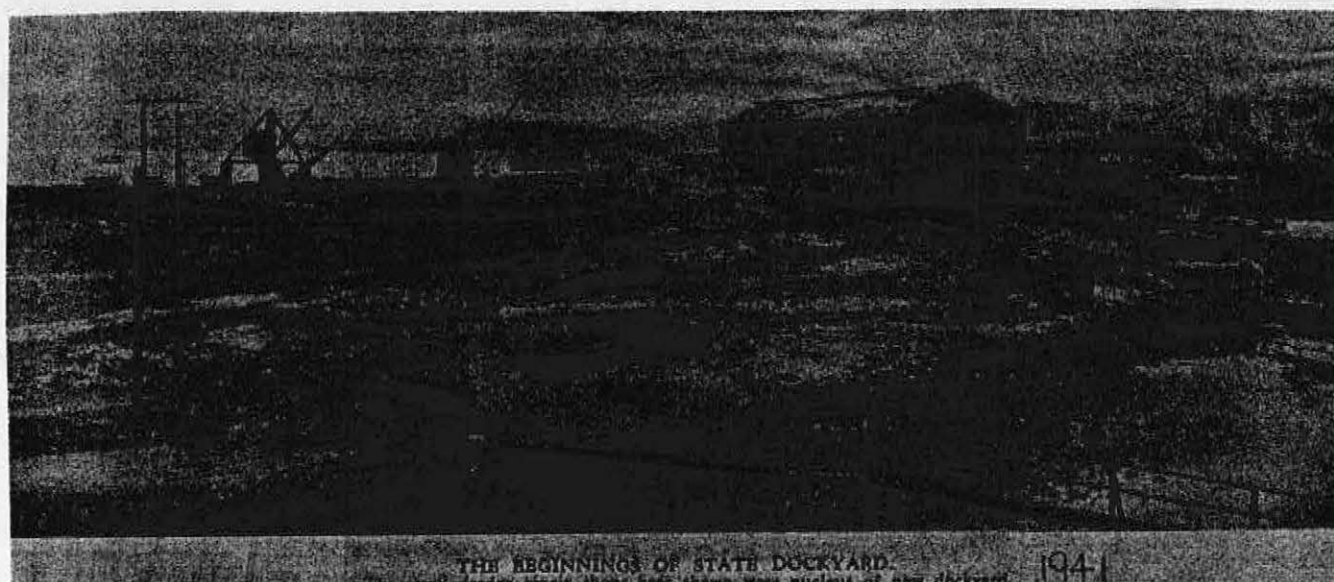
As well as the mainstream ship-building and ship-repairing workloads, the dockyard undertook dredge repairs and railway bridge constructions. The rapid growth in the heavy industries market of Newcastle, however, was primarily due to the wartime demands of World War I (WWI) for ships and steel.

In the years following WWI, the State dockyard faced economic dislocation as large-scale ship-building ceased. During 1921, fewer than 1,000 men were employed and due to the cessation of the Government's ship-building programme, 5. the dockyard incurred high losses on the post-war market.

As Newcastle's second largest employer, the dockyard faced struggles for survival during the early 1920's. It was only after a failure bid had occurred in 1922 6. to sell the dockyard that it was converted to cater for contracts other than ships, such as bridges, cast iron pipes, cranes, punts 7. and dredges. By the end of the mid 1920's the average number employed was 650. 8.

A short-lived period of prosperity occurred when in 1925, the (current) Prime Minister Mr S M Bruce announced a Commonwealth Government grant of #120,000 9. to assist in the construction of a floating dock in Newcastle. Construction commenced in 1926 with a higher employment rate, tallying nearly 2,000 men. By July 1930, the floating dock was ready for use. It had a capacity of 15,000 tonnes and cost approximately #500,000. 10. In the years to follow the dockyard entered a period of declining orders, incurring significant losses. Between 1930/31 and 1931/32, #146,000 was lost. 11. Activity ceased at the end of 1933 when Australia was still experiencing general economic depression. The dockyard was to be dismantled and rebuilt at the Southern end of Carrington at the Dyke end of the harbour, where a dredge service repair shop existed. The Public Works was instigated to do the work. 12.

The State dockyard was relocated on the mainland in 1941 and operational by 1942. It had been well provided with amenities. It was to cater for all ship-building, repairing and associated engineering requirements of Australia, New Zealand and many adjacent countries in the Pacific. 13.



THE BEGINNINGS OF STATE DOCKYARD.
The small dredge repair shops here shown, was nucleus of new dockyard.

1941

In August 1941, Mr D Lyon McLarty was appointed by the Government with the title of State Director of Engineering and Ship-building. 14. His task was to re-establish the ship-building industry in Newcastle from the remnants of the Old Walsh Island dockyard.

One of the first contracts the new State dockyard was to receive came from the Naval Defence Forces in June 1942, for a naval vessel. And later, more orders for smaller vessels. This of course resulted in a re-establishment of the industry in Newcastle.

During the wartime conditions of World War II (WWII), the ship repair facilities at Carrington 16. had been developed to such a degree that 600 vessels of varying types of up to 14,000 tonnes deadweight had been docked and/or repaired. 17. Simultaneously, the need to concentrate important sections of industry on munitions production, resulted in many 'peacetime' services being neglected and of the most affected was the supply of electricity. The dockyard was requested to undertake urgent manufacturing of power house equipment, a necessity imposed by the needs of the community.

At the end of March 1946, war requirement had ceased. The dockyard's manufacturing facilities were employed primarily on the construction and repair of merchant and harbour vessels and their propelling machinery. 18.

An historical event occurred at the Newcastle State dockyard in 1955, when the dockyard manufactured the first Australian Polar Marine diesel engine. 19. These were a success for Australian shipping conditions and were mounted to more ships than any other engine by the dockyard.

The Manager of the N.S.D., Mr D Lyon McLarty, after his successful reign in rebuilding the dockyard to its present state (then), retired in September 1957, and his long time associate Mr H D Harding assumed the position as Managing Director. Mr McLarty was responsible for the dockyard for the last 16 years and it was suffice to say that the dockyard was a credit to his ability and leadership.



D. Lyon McLarty, M.I.E. (Aust.), M.I.E.E. (Stat.), Director, State Dockyard, Newcastle, N.S.W.



Mr. H. D. Harding.

The N.S.D. was to play another important role in one of the State's largest ship-building projects in 1959. It was responsible for manufacturing equipment of the turbo generators that were to be installed at the power station at Vales Point. This construction on Lake Macquarie provided a giant new powerstation to supply the State wide electricity network. 20.

From the 1960's, the dockyard faced a hopeless task of competing with outdated equipment against the ultra modern foreign dockyards. Newcastle faced a cessation of large scale shipbuilding. In March 1977, the McKell Government announced it would buy a new floating dock for the State dockyard at an estimated cost of \$16 million, 21. a decision which could possibly boost employment for the Newcastle region. There was no suggestion that it would be built in Newcastle as its predecessor in 1926. Agreements were made with a Japanese based company "HITACHI" to build the floating dock in Japan and on completion in January 1978, it was towed to Newcastle harbour. The older style floating dock which had served its purpose for the last 50 years was dismantled in preparation for its' successor.

In 1977, the dockyard was recorded as having the largest numbers of retrenchments in its' history. This was evidently due to the sharp decline in ship-building/repairing orders. In just eight months, 1,700 skilled personnel lost their jobs with the workforce falling from 2,300 to 600. 22.


Four years later in 1981, the dockyard was believed to have improved its' status as a result of receiving several orders for ship-buildings, controversial to its previous deficiency in contracts. The dockyard had obtained contracts and believed this would undoubtedly provide a 'stumbling block' for future workloads. However, the existing contracts were dwindling. Disputes and strikes that had plagued the dockyard now for more than a decade 23. were making an impact alongside of the catastrophic losses encountered.

The next few years leading to the closure of the State dockyard were to remain very turbulent times. In 1982 the dockyard faced closure as 500 more positions were lost as ship-building drew to an end. 24. The dockyard had failed to win any major building contracts that could enlighten their current "limbo" status.

A last attempt made by the dockyard to regain future contracts unsuccessfully occurred when a large building contract was available for the construction of submarines. 25. Bids forwarded by the dockyard were discarded as they were regarded as having neither the facilities to cater for such a venture and had a recorded unreliable reputation noted by former strikes and disputes.

On the 5th March 1987, the long awaited verdict regarding the future of the State dockyard was passed. The State Government had prepared a tender document for the sale or lease of the dockyard. The dockyards' demise was proved as a continuous drain on public money and was infested with disputes between workers and the Government.

Overall, the N.S.D. has made a major contribution to the well-being of Australia both in war and peace. It played an important part in constructing, refitting and repairing all types of vessels and made a contribution to the maritime needs of the Allied Nations in its turbulent history. This dockyard had emerged purposefully and to an extent successfully from the shades of the abandoned dockyard at Walsh Island. It will always be recognised as an Industry that developed its potential that saw it become one of Australia's major ship-building and engineering establishments. It covered more than thirty acres on a peninsula in the centre of Newcastle's harbour and was a tribute to its Management and its' labour force.



NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

FOR LEASE

AUSTRALIA'S PRIME INDUSTRIAL WATERFRONT SITE

NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD

The New South Wales Government invites registration by companies/groups interested in acquiring and developing all or part of the State Dockyard site in the Port of Newcastle. Such registration will involve the establishment of company credentials and business record plus broad proposals for site utilisation.

Newcastle is a major industrial centre of New South Wales. It has a long tradition in ship building and repair, heavy engineering and fabrication. Today it offers a wider spread of skills which have extended to light engineering, high technology and service industries. Its population, together with the Lake Macquarie area, totals some 300,000.

The available sites occupy two prime deep waterfront locations of approximately 8.5 hectares, and are equipped with a large variety of engineering equipment and engineering back-up resources, including a Floating Dock.

Proposals may involve the use of all or part only of the sites on a leasehold basis. Assets and equipment, excluding the Floating Dock, are available for sale.

It is the Government's intention that the Floating Dock remain in Newcastle, and proposals for its use are invited, either in conjunction with other facilities, or as a separate entity.

While the facilities are likely to be of special interest to enterprises already operating in the fields of ship repair and/or heavy engineering manufacture, all proposals will be carefully considered on their merits.

In assessing registrants and their proposals, the Government will take particular heed of their potential to create jobs.

In addition to a record of achievement and stability registrants should be able to demonstrate creativity, innovation and enterprise in their business dealings.

For full details, including the location of the sites, the supporting infrastructure and the equipment and facilities on site, contact Mike Zaroyko, Manager, Commercial Property Unit, Public Works Department, on telephone (02) 228 5998.

Registrations in the prescribed form are to be submitted no later than 2.00 pm, Tuesday, 7th April, 1987, at the Public Works Department's District Office in Newcastle.

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* AS OF SEPTEMBER 1987 THE NEWCASTLE STATE DOCKYARD IS CURRENTLY BEING LEASED — UNDER THE NAME "FORGACS".

1. Mr A Griffith - Minister for Public Works from 1910 - 1915.
J C Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of An Australian City, Sydney, 1983, p.34.
2. IBID. p.35.
3. Newcastle had gained almost 17,000 new inhabitants between 1911 - 1921.
"The Second City", Social and Urban Change in Newcastle NSW 1900 - 1929 published PHD Thesis, November 1977, p.33.
4. IBID. p.35.
5. IBID. pp.36 - 40.
6. IBID. p.42.
7. 'Punts' are associated with trains/railways.
8. Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of, p.42.
9. Newcastle Morning Herald, 9 April 1925, p.4.
10. Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of, p.42.
11. IBID.
12. 'The McKell Government had re-established the Dockyard on its new site'.
IBID. pp.42 - 44.
13. The Newcastle State Dockyard (handout), Newcastle, 1980. p.1.
14. Australian Coal, Shipping, Steel and the Harbour, 1 June 1949. p.39.
15. Ship Shape (Collation of State Dockyard Editorials) owned by Miss Wilkinson - Newcastle 1955 - 1964. No pages marked.
16. 'It wasn't until 1943 that the Floating Dock at Walsh Island was towed to its' new site at Carrington, joining the Dockyard.
Newcastle Morning Herald, 10 January 1978.
17. 'Many of the vessels had been damaged by enemy actions/collisions.
Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of, p.47.
18. IBID. pp.47 - 49.
19. Ship Shape, 1955 - 1964.

20. IBID.
21. Newcastle Morning Herald, 1978.
22. IBID. 2 August 1982.
23. IBID. 24 September 1981.
24. IBID. 1982 edition.
25. IBID. 1984 edition.
26. IBID. 5 March 1987.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

MONOGRAPHS:

- Docherty, J. C., Newcastle, The Making of An Australian City, Sydney, 1983.
- Docherty, J. C., "The Second City", Social and Urban Change in Newcastle NSW, published PHD Thesis, 1977.
- Giles, Greg, Bitter Bread Newcastle, 1988.

ARTICLES:

Australian Coal, Shipping, Steel and the Harbour, newspaper clippings.
Newcastle Morning Herald.

Letters and articles stored in the Archives section of the Library at the University of Newcastle.

EDITORIALS:

Ship Shape: A collation of Editorials from the Newcastle State Dockyard.
Owned by Miss Wilkinson.