

LINDA MURRAY

Thursday 10-12  
Australian History  
Margaret Henry

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

TOPIC - 500 WORD SUMMARY OF TAPED INTERVIEWS  
TRAMS AND THE HUNTER STREET MALL

DATE DUE - Thursday, 11 August 1988.

The Hunter Street Mall did not always look the way it does today. The construction of the Hunter Street Mall played an important part in Newcastle's History because it was a major forward move for the area.

Before the construction of the Hunter Street Mall, Hunter Street was known as a 'shopping mall'. From early 1900 until 1928, Newcastle was known throughout the region for its Friday Night Shopping. The main street was closed to traffic and only pedestrians and shoppers were allowed to use the mall. On late shopping nights the mall was open until 10.30 pm. There were stalls, chocolate wheels, and many seats along the roadway so that shoppers could sit to watch the bands and orchestras that would play. Friday nights in the 'shopping mall' were always associated with a happy carnival atmosphere.(1)

With the advent of electric trams the 'shopping mall' ended. People without their own form of transport could go elsewhere to shop. As Newcastle grew so did the demand for more office space and gradually the residential areas around Hunter Street disappeared.

Before the advent of trams, most people used horse drawn carts as a means of transport, or--if they were rich enough--they owned a car. The tram line ran down Hunter Street and out to surrounding suburbs. The depot was at Gordon Avenue where the bus depot stands today. The trams terminated at Parnell Place.(2)

Gradually, tram tracks wore out, the cars needed renewing

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(1) Newcastle Morning Herald, 6 March 1969.

(2) Ibid

and extensive reconditioning of the electrical plant was necessary. The renewing plans would cost hundreds of thousands of pounds so, much to the disappointment of the public, electric trams were replaced by buses. George Booth fought hard for the restoration of trams. His plan was to have modern trams for inner suburbs as feeders to the city. Despite his efforts, trams are now a thing of the past or the dreams of a distant future. In 1953 the tramline that ran behind Jesmond Park was transformed into a cycleway.(1)

It was not until the 1960's that Newcastle began planning for an official Hunter Street Mall. The Lord Mayor of 1969, Alderman M<sup>C</sup>Dougall, declared that only buses were to run down the mall. Taxis would only be allowed down the mall if they were picking up the elderly or the crippled. The council was not sure whether the mall would be a success, so there was a three-month trial period from April 5, 1970.(2)

Inside the mall was a one-way traffic lane. Motorists argued that this cut off the entrance to King Street via the mall. Cab drivers were outraged and claimed the mall prevented them from collecting fares. But pedestrians and shoppers happily used the mall. Movement along footpaths was easier and shopping was much more enjoyable with less air and noise pollution.(3)

Despite the trouble that was first aroused about the construction of the Hunter Street Mall, it survived and grew. Hunter Street needed the Mall to attract shoppers into the city.

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(1) Ibid, 23 February 1953.

(2) Ibid, 5 April 1970.

(3) Ibid, 6 April 1970.

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- 1) Newcastle Morning Herald, 23 February 1953, 6 March 1969,  
5 April 1970, 6 April 1970.

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TOPIC - THE CHANGING FACE OF THE HUNTER STREET MALL

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In 1970 the Newcastle City Council still had not approved the permanent establishment of the Hunter Street Mall. After an extended trial period the situation was reviewed.

Most of the shopkeepers on the block between Bolten and Newcomen Streets objected to the Hunter Street Mall, so this block was eventually deleted. Many shoppers were disappointed as they--the 'forgotten majority'--had no say in the decision. That part of the Mall disappeared on August 5, 1970. The rest of the Mall remained until the end of September 1970, when it was again reviewed.(1)

The Newcastle City Council voted fifteen votes to four that the Mall should become a permanent fixture between Newcomen and Perkins Streets. Busses and delivery trucks still had access to the Mall. Alderman Palmer of 1971 would not support the Mall because in his eyes the Mall was nothing more than 'a narrow lane with double decker busses belching black smoke'.(2)

The Mall had not yet been officially named. Mall users were asked to vote between the names 'Hunter Street Mall', 'The Hunter Mall', 'The Golden Mall', and 'Newcastle Mall'. Replies favoured 'The Hunter Mall' or 'Hunter Street Mall'.(3)

The Mall ran into economic difficulties. It was argued that the sign posts and bins would outnumber the trees, and that the planned wider footpaths would be too expensive to be made level. The trees that were planted were about the size of a small shrub and would be hard to find through the numerous signposts. A count was done by University students and was

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(1) Newcastle Morning Herald, 4 July 1970.

(2) Ibid, 29 July 1971.

(3) Ibid

recorded in the 'Newcastle Morning Herald' of July 29, 1971. It was found that there were 46 sign posts, 10 light poles, 11 rubbish bins and 2 letterboxes in the Mall.(1)

The greatest limiting factor to the success of the Mall was the limited parking space surrounding the Mall. The retail industry needs people and people need transport. If there was not going to be enough parking space for shoppers, then there would be no shoppers. There was a demand for parking space from both workers and shoppers.

Even though there was stiff competition from suburban shopping centres and problems with parking and economic support, the popularity of the Mall grew. In June 1971 the Newcastle City Council approved the permanent establishment of the Mall and it was officially opened in August. From then on the Mall grew. Two old-fashioned milk bars and a cake shop closed to make way for clothing shops and a building society. Various businesses found it necessary to specialise in order to survive in the competitive atmosphere. Five years after the opening of the Mall, Market Street Plaza opened in 1976. Appearances of popular personalities were organised to entertain in the plaza area. People were more inclined to stop to chat without being deafened by traffic.(2)

In 1980 the Newcastle City Council planned to pave the Mall with bricks from shopfront to shopfront. It was proposed that lines would be painted to mark bus lanes. Work on the paving began in July 1980. Plans were also being made to redevelop

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(1) Ibid

(2) Ibid

furniture in the Mall. New street furniture included movable planters, hanging planters, fibreglass sculptures, drinking fountains and an inverted umbrella shelter to cover the Market Plaza(Market Square).(1)

On November 17, 1980, Neville Wran opened the 'new Mall'. Workers on the Mall had toiled constantly for the previous 48 hours to complete the Mall in time for the opening. The new paving on the Mall forced busses to detour into Scott Street. So, finally, the Mall was a pedestrians only Mall. Neville Wran was quoted to have said at the opening, 'Newcastle no longer has the highest level of unemployment in the state'. Newcastle's first glass lift was built in the Mall and proved to be popular to joyriders. The streets crossing the Mall would be closed on Thursday Nights between 5-9 pm to make shopping easier and more inviting.(2)

In April 1985 a proposal was made by the Newcastle City Administration to extend the Mall east from Newcomen Street to either Bolten, Watt or Pacific Streets. This would provide an unbroken link between the main shopping centre, the business centre and the harbour developments. The extension depended on the attitudes of business people and landowners between Newcomen Street and Pacific Street. If the idea was opposed it would be dropped, but if it was in favour the plans would go ahead. The most important question raised out of this proposal was the effect on traffic flow. Hunter Street from Pacific Street to Newcomen Street was made into a one-way traffic road.

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(1) Ibid, 17 November 1980.

(2) Ibid



Vehicular access to Watt Street and Bolten Street was not restricted. Although it represents an extension of the Mall, this part of Hunter Street is not considered as part of the Mall.(1)

Local traders were horrified at the new proposals made in May 1987, to connect the harbour foreshore to the city by stairs and a walkway. They claimed that unnecessary cluttering on the south side of the Mall would cause shoppers to avoid it and only shop on the north side. After a protest by traders, a sloping walkway was designed to look as if the Mall sloped upwards to meet the exits and was not an eyesore. Planter boxes and street furniture were rearranged so that shoppers did not have to keep dodging them as obstacles. The walkway was modified to allow more standing room around the existing Mall stage.(2)

The Hunter Street Mall has developed and grown since the late 1960's. The appearance of the Mall has changed from a one-lane bus zone to a pedestrian shopping Mall. New proposals are being made for further development of the Mall, and in another twenty years the appearance of the Mall will have probably completely changed again.

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(1) The Newcastle Post, 25 July 1986.

(2) Herald, 25 July 1987.

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- 1) Newcastle Morning Herald, 4 July 1970, 29 July 1971,  
17 November 1980, 25 July 1987.
- 2) The Newcastle Post, 25 July 1986.

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TRANSCRIPT OF TAPED INTERVIEW

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The first person to be interviewed was Len Smith, who has lived in Newcastle for the last 50 odd years.

Have you noticed any changes in any main roads in Newcastle?

Well they would have to have improved over the years. From gravel roads that used to run from Wallsend to Lambton and numerous other improvements. Hunter Street was a pretty crook sort of a road at one time, but now it is all gone and there is a Mall there.

How do you remember the Hunter Street Mall? Do you remember any of the larger shops?

In Hunter Street before the Mall was there, we came down from the Post Office and on the right-hand side there was a pretty big department store, Hustlers. As you came down from there Palings was a big musical store. Warren and Smith was on the left-hand side. As you came further down, Reg. A. Bakers that was a sporting store, that has gone. There was a big hardware store called Sorby's. Further down you had the Co-op Store and numerous other things. Trams used to run down Hunter Street, the terminus was up the top of town, Wheeler Place.

Do you remember any of the tram stops?

There was a tram stop in front of the Post Office. There was a tram stop at about every intersection down Hunter Street, until you got to where Hunter Street was two-way traffic. Then the stops got more spaced out, they were down at Darby Street and the Civic.

Did the trams used to run out to Jesmond?

They went to Wallsend, they went to Waratah, to Mayfield and Adamstown. Trams to Wallsend went through Broadmeadow, up through the Gully Line and ran out through Lambton. They went through the cutting out there where it is a cycleway. Back this side of it there was an overhead bridge, the road went through one side and the trams went through the other. It was back near this side of the swimming pool that there was a park with a coal pit and a line went over the top of it. Then they went on through that cutting across the road at Jesmond near the Woolworths store out there, cut through the back of the swamp, came out near the hospital, ran parallel to the railway line passed the old railway station and swang down Nelson Street. The terminus was at Nelson Street, the main street of Wallsend.

The next person to be interviewed was Emily Mahoney, who is in her eighties and has lived in Newcastle all her life.

Did many people own cars?

A fair amount of people did, the rich ones.

What was the public transport system like?

We had trams then, they would get the crowds away quicker.

What did Hunter Street look like?

Not like it does today, not so many buildings.

How many people were there in town when you used to go shopping?

Friday nights there would be crowds in town.

Where did you work?

The Oxford Hotel in Crown Street, I was a commercial waitress.

What were the wages like?

Three dollars a week. It wasn't dollars it was shillings, 30 shillings.

How do you remember Hunter Street?

The whole of Hunter Street is much the same as it was from what I can remember a long time ago except the Mall area, of course, is new and different. Where I used to work up the top of town, near the Post Office, a lot of that area has changed. Where I was in the A.N.Z. Bank, there was an old pub opposite and that is now a very new, modern bank building.

Did you go out in Newcastle?

Yes, the best eating spot years ago when I was working, the place to go I suppose or if you were taken anywhere in particular was The Great Northern Hotel. There weren't a lot of restaurants at all but The Great Northern Hotel was the place to be taken to, or to go to. In those days I was modelling and the chap I used to work for used to take all his models to The Great Northern Hotel for a night out, so that was the only place to be then.

Do you remember any Royal visits from the Queen?

I can, I can remember the Queen and Prince Phillip coming to Newcastle and it must have been their first visit, and we took in big long wooden stools into Hunter Street, that is up the top now about where Cafe Continental is. About in that area and I can remember we were there, I think, from very early hours of the morning sitting on this wooden stool so we had a good spot to see the Queen when she went passed.

What sort of transport system was available to the public?

Well, when I was working and going to school you travelled by tram, so there were trams and busses. We didn't have a car in the family. My father rode his pushbike to work. I can remember when I started work, two shillings was enough for me for the day and that was my tram fare to work and home--5<sup>c</sup> each way and I had a shilling for my lunch. So 20<sup>c</sup> was plenty of money for a day.

Do you remember the fashions?

Yes, I remember the fashions extremely well. When I was 17 I was modelling and modelled quite a number of years, probably until I was about 24, I suppose. I can remember when nylon first appeared on the scene and we modelled nylon dresses for the first time. That would have been at the City Hall in Eastham's Fashion Parades.

And that was Stella Smith. The information following this message is irrelevant to my essay, but is interesting Newcastle history.

What did you do for everyday commodities such as bread and milk?

Well the milko used to call, the baker used to call, they'd come around in a horse and cart. The milk was bulk, milk came in milk cans in the back of the milk cart. He'd bring a little bucket of milk and have a dipper thing that he measured it out with. You'd have the money there and put your jug out and you'd get fresh milk daily. The baker was a horse and cart. The baker come round and the horse would wander down the road, it knew where to go. The horse would just wander along and the baker would just duck in and out. You used to have bread tokens you would leave the bread tin out if you weren't home, just leave the token in the tin for a loaf or half a loaf and the baker would leave that amount of bread. There would be other people coming around selling ice. They came in a horse and cart too. The bloke that came around selling clothes props to prop up the old lines with, clotheslines that is.

Fruito?

Yes the Fruito he was a horse and cart show, although I do remember they got a bit modern before anybody else so they moved into motor vehicles. I think the baker was about the last bloke to stick to his horse and cart.

How did the beachfronts look compared to how they look now?

I'm not really happy with the way the beachfronts look at the moment, I suppose what I'm referring to the newer buildings.

The beautiful old pavillions with the beautiful old Rotunda, was part of Newcastle Beach was beautiful. I don't like the grey building that is up there now, it is ugly. I'm not happy with the renovations they have done at Newcastle Beach at all. But in the old times, when I was a child growing up with my parents, there was Pacific Park, and we used to walk as children with our parents from Adamstown all the way into Pacific Park. We'd sit in the park and have watermelon. I can remember that as kids. Probably the reason we walked was because our parents didn't have bus or tram fares at that time. Then there was that beautiful Rotunda that was part of the foreground of Newcastle Beach. There used to be bands playing there and then Newcastle South, part of Newcastle Beach, there was a great big building there with all picnic tables and we used to have lots of get-togethers there with the family.

Do you remember any famous movies, like we have Crocodile Dundee and Dirty Dancing now?

I can't remember, I think the first one that comes to mind is 'Gone With the Wind', which was a wonderful movie and I've seen it many times since. The movies that were famous to me were all of the beautiful old musicals with, perhaps, Jane Powell, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers and the Esther Williams films.

Where did you get your first job?

I got my first job at the Bargain Arcade, that was little shop and it was down where the Water Board is today. It was similar to Coles or Woolworths. My sister used to work there so I actually was waiting to be accepted into the Dental Nursing proffession, but I was offered this job to work at the Bargain Arcade over Christmas selling Christmas decorations. My other job hadn't come through as a Dental Nurse by the time Christmas was over so they asked me to stay at the Bargain Arcade, which I did, working behind the lolly counter. I worked there for about 7 months and then I was offered a job as a Dental Nurse with Mr Con and Mr Bell in the A.N.Z. Bank chambers in Hunter Street. So then I worked as a Dental Nurse for 6 nearly 7 years. Then after that, the man I used to model for, Mr Bill Eastham had been asking me to work for him for a number of years, so after much decision I decided to leave the Dental proffession and go into fashion retail. I worked for Mr Eastham until I was married.

Do you remember the wage?

My very first wage at the Bargain Arcade was 2 pounds and three-pence. When I was working as a Dental Nurse I was getting 7 pounds. Mr Bill Eastham offered me 11 pounds to go and work for him. I had only been working for him for a short while and he put my wage up to 13 pounds.

What did you do before T.V.?

We used to play a lot of cards. We used to spend a lot of time sitting around talking. I can remember as a child Sundays was a day to expect visitors. I've got a lot of strong memories of visitors of a Sunday. Growing up and going out it was a big night out of a Saturday night at the movies. I can remember spending a lot of time listening to the radio, especially the Sunday night serials, and serials through the week. So I suppose you listened to the radio a lot more, but we did play a lot of cards.

Do you remember any of the surf carnivals held in Newcastle?

I can remember they were always a really big event, but I wasn't terribly involved in any activities associated with them. But, yes, I can remember them as being really big events.

Do you remember Newcastle during the Second World War?

Well the things I can remember are as a child going to school, an Air Raid Shelter under the school and we had to carry/wear a cotton bag. I think it was called a 'DillyBag' and it had a piece of chocolate in it, and a piece of rubber or something which you had to bite on if the bombs dropped. I can't really remember what else was in them, but I know that was part of your uniform that you had to wear to school. I can remember vaguely mum being frightened when there was an attack close to Newcastle. I can remember flashing lights and everyone being very frightened. I can remember the Air Raid Wardens going around and checking and making sure that your blinds were pulled down so that you didn't have any light showing. I can remember we had pieces of paper stuck on the glass on all the windows in the house, criss-crossed so if a bomb dropped the glass wouldn't shatter.

Do you think Newcastle has progressed?

I think at the moment, Newcastle is on the verge of making decisions that is going to really decide the future of Newcastle. With the plans that have been put forth for development in the area of a monorail to do away with all that ugly railway line that we have in there from the westend up to the top of town. I think that will be a wonderful plan. I hope it is accepted and I hope it goes ahead. Because what has been done with the Queen's Wharf area and all of that lovely park land up there is really putting a new face on Newcastle. I just wish our leaders would be a little bit more progressive in their thoughts so that we would have a big future because Newcastle is a wonderful to live. I'm a true novocastrian through and through. I love it, I love every little bit of it and I feel it is a very big part of me, Newcastle. I only wish the best for it and that 'best' is, progress, plans made by very progressive thinking people, who will not think of themselves or politics, but only think totally of a good future for Newcastle.