

SUMMARY OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH MR. L.F.SHORT

Interview with Mr. Larry Short, a semi-retired licensed Real Estate Agent and Auctioneer, established in Mayfield. Mr. Short was asked to talk on the changes that he had seen take place in Housing in the Post War Era in Newcastle.

Some time after his return from the second world war Mr. Short started working in the Real Estate Industry in the Newcastle area. After working for various companies and in partnership he eventually started his own business in Newcastle.

Mr. Short remembers the immediate post war period as a time when people were still in a 'rationing' situation for almost all commodities relating to everyday existence and this included accommodation. Flats and cottages for families were just not generally available. Rents were pegged and there was a strict adherence to the landlord and tenants act. The post war scene in housing moved slowly at first as the availability of materials was just not there.

The migrant programme commenced in 1947 and Mr. Short remembers that the migrants in general were a rather prudent group of people and in particular the Europeans. They did not have too much trouble finding work and more often were in a position of being able to put deposits on homes a lot quicker than our own local people. They also created another form of industry, that of building on extra rooms and renting them. So not only were they able to make extra money by renting out these rooms they also created extra work for lots of other people, mostly their own kind. Most of this extra building work was of course done without council or water board approval.

Mr. Short also observed the move from the inner suburbs to the outer areas. After living in these close knit communities that they in many cases created, ^ realized they could buy small acreages or at least larger blocks of land in the outer suburbs where they could grow their own vegetables. Many of them had originally come from country areas of Europe.

I then asked Mr. Short if he felt the city skyline had changed a great deal since the post war period?

Mr. Short felt that there had not been a great change to the inner city skyline. There had been re-developments of older buildings and some new buildings, but not many. There has been though, a great deal of excellent development in the overall skyline when you look at the spread to the suburbs of Charlestown and into the City of Lake Macquarie. The retail scene had moved out into the outer suburbs and has taken a large proportion of trade from the central business district of Newcastle. Mr. Short feels the East End of the city has gone backwards as people have moved away and \blames the lack of town planning for having allowed this to occur.

The Northumberland County Council was set up in 1949 to cover town planning in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Maitland and the Coal fields areas and Port Stephens. Some parts of the plan, in Mr. Short's opinion were good, but they were much too harsh on residential development and so chased people out of the city. The Newcastle City Council is trying to encourage people to come back to live within the city area but not without a lot of controversy.

Mr. Short feels that town planners have been a thorn in the side of re-development in Newcastle for many, many years and is sorry that we have not had the development take place that might have taken place within the precincts of the City of Newcastle as much as it should have taken place. }

Newcastle's overall development has been quite good over the years but has not been fast. Places like Wollongong, Port Kembla, Gosford and the Central Coast have skyrocketed, but Newcastle has only ever gone up on a slower and less dramatic plane.

Interview with Mr. Larry Short, semi retired licensed Real Estate Agent and Auctioneer, established at Mayfield. Taped on 15 August, 1988 (15.8.88)

Mr. Short was asked to talk on the changes that he had seen take place in Housing in the Post War Era in Newcastle.

Following the end of the Second World War we have produced changes both physical and economical for Newcastle and its environs quite beyond the imagination of the work-a-day world person who had grown up in a period of the great depression and the excitement of the commencement of World War Two. For those who were astute enough to do, to allow their children to stay at school and matriculate, an opportunity was available to create a better future in the material world.

I was at work as a clerk when I was fourteen (14) and my pay was ten shillings (10) per week, five and a half ($5\frac{1}{2}$) days per week, 8.30 am. to 5.30 pm, and Saturdays 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 pm.

This short resume is a simple example of the more common situation obtaining for those of us who could not proceed to persevere at school and subsequently the adventure of a war in foreign fields appeared exciting and for many five bob a day (5) was the first pay many ever received. The immediate post war era was a time of people trying to break out of a situation of coupons and rationing for almost all commodities relating to our every day living.

Existence was dependent on how many coupons you had to buy this or than and this not only applied to food stuff and clothing, but also to petrol. Accommodation then, as it is now, was the single most important requirement. The single folk who required only room and board had the edge on most other folk, this type of accommodation was available and for the most part, the 'digs' were quite good. Married folk, young and older did not have the same good fortune, flats and cottages were not generally available and two families in homes was quite a common occurrence. Rents were pegged and for the most part strict adherence to the landlord and tenant was observed. However, there were ways around the act, and one of the most usual, being the payment by a prospective tenant of an amount of money called 'key money'. The whole scene of housing moved very

slowly for quite a long time. The availability of building materials in generous supply was just not there and prices were on the move ever so slowly but many had the idea that prices would or might come down and upon reflection, this situation could never have happened.

The influx of the migrant programme which commenced in 1947 started to take effect in Newcastle in 1949 and the first shipload of migrants came to Lee Wharf in 1949. They were Germans, Polish, Hungarian, Italian and in general the European races, some of whom could speak English quite clearly but mostly broken English and only the English that many had probably learned at school. This remained a difficulty for a long, long time of course and when migrant folk came in to enquire about housing they usually had to bring an interpreter with them. When they did this was a great help, if they didn't bring one we were all, always in all sorts of trouble because few of us could speak the European languages.

The migrants in general were a prudent group of people. They didn't have any trouble getting jobs in the B.H.P and subsidiary industries did employ them and many of them were skilled folk and it didn't take them long to learn the jobs. Their prudence paid off because they came into a position of being able to put deposits on homes much more quickly than our own native people and they were good buyers. They always bargained and they were good in the market place for themselves of course, but they created a market. For those who weren't able to afford deposits in the earlier years they sought to get away from the camps at Greta, Nelson Bay and Mayfield West to go into some form of more private accommodation and this created a building of flats in larger homes. Many of them of course were made without permission of the Newcastle City Council or the Hunter District Water Board or whatever authority had to be advised for these sorts of alterations and they were very successful. They were well made mostly by tradesmen, some by amateur tradesmen but they were made comfortable for the people. They paid good rents and they created another form of industry, that was the carpenter always had plenty of work to do at weekends in putting in a new lavatory or a new room or a new bathroom into some ones home so that

he could let it off as a flat and gain an extra income, and this in itself became quite an industry. The migrants moved into business also, they created restaurants and shops and many of them teamed with builders and very particularly the Italian folk who were rather expert in the field of concrete and tiling and this type of industry and thank you very much, they did very, very well. Some of them became extremely prosperous as the years went by.

After some time of living in the closer and inner suburbs the migrant folk realized that our countryside could provide them with all their own garden and anything they wanted to grow. Many had come from farming districts and they in turn started to look for property that had some large area of land and in fact with acreage in some instances and so the migrants then moved out and anywhere you went to look at a beautiful garden in somebody's back yard, particularly with vegetables, it was some 'New Instralian'. I use the word 'new instralian' because I can remember the children saying that, rather than 'New Australian'. I think the word 'new Australian' has gone now, but it was a word that was used for many, many years.

Question: Mr. Short do you feel that the city skyline of Newcastle has changed a great deal since World War Two, this is the period when you started out in business?

The skyline overall has changed a great deal in the post war era and there's been a lot of excellent development but the retail scene has now moved into the outer suburbs and beyond the city limits into the City of Lake Macquarie. In fact, Charlestown and other areas have taken over a very, very large proportion of what trade there might have been in what we call the central business district of Newcastle. Remaining within the city council limits is the shopping centre at Kotara, that was built on what had previously been some swampland. It was beautifully drained and developed and this had to become a good shopping area because that's where the people were. If anything, the Newcastle City area at the east end of the city has gone backwards because the people have moved away from the city and in some measure I blame town planning for having allowed this to occur. A town planning establishment was set up in 1949 and it was then called the Northumberland County Council and it was to

cover town planning for the whole of the area of Northumberland, that is the Northumberland County, it incorporated the Lake Macquarie, Maitland and the Coal fields areas and Port Stephens and some of the very, very important areas in and around Newcastle. Some parts of the plan, in my opinion, were quite good. The alterations of roadways, ingress and egress, but they were much much too harsh on the residential development and they chased people out of the city and they went to the outer suburbs. So much so that here in 1988, the City Council of Newcastle are trying to encourage people to come back to live within the city area. One of the most controversial developments that has taken place in 1988, has been the establishment of a housing commission set of buildings on a park opposite the Harbour and adjoining Nobby's Beach. There are arguments for it I'm sure, but a new government in this year is going to change what has been originally planned.

The skyline, in answer to your question, hasn't changed a tremendous amount on the inner city side. There has been re-developments of older buildings and some new buildings, but not many new buildings. Everytime someone wants to do something in this city there appears to go up a scream from minority groups who don't want anything changed and if anybody dares even to talk about anything above ten (10) stories high, the matter nearly finishes in the Supreme Court. I don't agree that we need 20 and 30 and 40 story buildings right up into our skyline, I think that's probably ridiculous too, it's somewhat out of character for a provincial city, but town planners have been a thorn in the side of re-development in Newcastle for many, many years. They print pretty little blue and red and purple pictures on their maps and if you want to move outside of that there's a demand for an environmental study and with this I disagree for the most part. I don't mean that the whole scene should move along its old bullock tracks at all, but our town planners in this city have been the means of frustrating and turning away millions and millions of dollars worth of worthwhile development and in this regard I'm sorry that we don't have all the development that might have taken place within the precincts of the city of

Newcastle as much as it should have taken place.

Vacant residential land in Newcastle has never skyrocketed to astronomical prices when one compares it with the metropolitan area of Sydney. The areas which have maintained good prices always in Newcastle have been land which was in pretty large measure owned by the Australian Agricultural Company in its earliest times, and if you read in history they came here in 1858 and bought from the State of New South Wales a million acres for a million pounds, and they've still got a few acres left over and I don't imagine they're about to go bankrupt just because of their holdings. Their most valuable areas in Newcastle are those around Hamilton North and some of those areas. The land was level and good and it always brought prices. Out in the areas of Kotara and west of New Lambton and Kotara in that earlier day was part of the Municipality of New Lambton and there's an exhibition of a plan that was offered by Greer and Berkley in 1925 and in conversation with Rob Henning, who was a proprietor of Greer and Berkley in more recent years, informed me that some of that land was still available in the middle 1950's and wasn't very, very expensive even by the standards of the day. But it wasn't expensive because few, if any roads had ever been made because people hadn't bought it. It wasn't sewered but it did have water and power and then with the advent of the New Australians and the non availability of land within the inner, inner inner suburbs, people did go there and they built very nice houses and to-day if you take a drive out into Kotara and Kotara South it is a most desirable suburb and land now would bring good prices but still not astronomical prices by comparison once again with in the metropolitan area.

Newcastle's development has been quite good over the years, it hasn't been very very fast. The skyrocketing areas of course in New South Wales were the ones with which we might make comparison with would be Wollongong, Kembla, Gosford, Central Coast areas. There the places that have skyrocketed but Newcastle has only ever gone up on a slower plane, its always developed and developed well. The only spiralling trend that I can recall occurred and

commenced to occur in the earlier 1980's and this wasn't as a result of Novocastrians making their bids on the market. This was caused by Sydney investor buyers who all of a sudden one day discovered Newcastle and that they could buy good cottage property here that would rent quickly and for good rents, and they could buy the properties for perhaps half the price that they would pay for similar cottages in equally convenient areas and so they created a market and week by week and month by month it increased until about 1985. And when they had finished buying the market plummeted quite as quickly as it had spiralled.

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COURSE:

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY - TUESDAY CLASS

RESEARCH

(1) TAPED INTERVIEW

PAPER:

(2) SUMMARY OF TAPE

(3) RESEARCH PAPER

Interview with Mr. L.F. Short, semi-retired licensed Real Estate Agent and Auctioneer. Mr. Short was asked to talk on changes he had seen take place in housing in the Post War Era in Newcastle.

Research Paper: 'The Spread of Newcastle and its Suburbs'

DUE:

TUESDAY CLASS, 6 September, 1988

Coal Mining created 19th Century Newcastle. (1) Although it was not the only coal mining region in New South Wales, it was by far the most important, accounting for two thirds of the mining workforce and about 70% of all coal production of New South Wales between 1880-1930. (2) The Australian Agricultural Company was given control of the Government Coal mines in 1892, along with a land grant of 809 hectares (2,000 acres) which took in much of modern inner Newcastle. (3) This particular company, The Australian Agricultural Company, had the monopoly of coal production until challenged by rival producers in the late 1840's. (4) From 1855 onwards they were joined by other large companies such as the Newcastle Wallsend, The Scottish Australian, the Waratah, and the New Lambton Companies. These companies operated in similar ways by founding settlements close to their mines to attract a work-force. This is how many of the suburbs of Newcastle were founded and resulted in some of to-days complex street patterns. (5)

Modern suburban Newcastle was in many ways shaped by the decisions of these large landowners, as the foundations of our city's urban pattern were laid during the early period in the many colliery towns scattered between the Hunter River and the northern shores of Lake Macquarie. As the Port of Newcastle began to increase in importance as a centre of commerce and industry, these townships assumed the roles of suburbs by expanding and linking to-gether. (6)

The greatest decades of building and land subdivision took place in Newcastle during the 1910's and 1920's. (7) The separate mining townships that made up most of Newcastle's suburbs were now being absorbed by the wave of home building that was taking place. (8) During this period, over half of the buildings were at Waratah, Hamilton and Mayfield. These were convenient residential areas for most forms of employment in Newcastle. In particular, the Broken Hill Pty. Ltd. Steel Works at Port Waratah had been established and was one of Newcastle's chief employers outside the mining industry. The standard house in Newcastle built in this period was a cottage usually of wood and containing four or five rooms. Eighty per cent (80%) of suburban homes in Newcastle were constructed of wood. Brick homes were considered to be more for the affluent workers. (9)

After 1923 there was a general movement to acquire land in the outer suburbs and build a home. The result was a volume of building activity unequalled until the 1950's, the post war era. These new growth areas were, Adamstown, Lambton, New Lambton, Merewether and Wallsend. These suburbs, with the exception of Wallsend, were declining mining centres. (10) By 1929 there were twice as many buildings as in 1910. This expansion had linked existing areas of settlement, in particular, Hamilton, and created many new suburbs. Not only the cheaper land in the outer areas was contributing to the expansion of Newcastle, the large industries were polluting the inner suburbs of Newcastle. (11)

Large scale subdivision of land in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie which took place in the 1920's, helped to prepare the way for the renewed suburban expansion which took place after the second world war. After 1945, the dominant feature of the growth of Newcastle was the spread of settlement southwards into Lake Macquarie. Not only was this area remote from the congestion and industrial pollution of the inner city, widespread ownership of cars made many areas accessible and permitted much more outlying land to be subdivided as well. These modern 'garden suburbs', contrast strongly with the older colliery towns which adjoin them. (12)

Much of the pattern for urban development came into existence between 1910 and 1920 as a direct result of the Government, The Coal Mining Companies and three estates belonging to the Dangar, Merewether and Quigley families. Their interests were responsible for Newcastle's present parks. The dedication of unwanted land by these large landowners as parkland was the forerunner of the modern land use pattern whereby they attempted to subdivide areas into certain socio-economic groups. During the 1920's a new style of subdivision was carried out in two areas, one at Birmingham Gardens and one at Kotara. They were very influential in shaping the renewed subdivision expansion which was to take place in the late 1940's, 1950's and 1960's. Birmingham Gardens was a carefully planned subdivision intended for 'industrial workers', whereas Kotara was carefully planned for a 'socially mixed' population. The depression of the 1930's and the war years delayed expansion for quite a long time. It was not until the boom era of the 1950's and 1960 that renewed interest and expansion was able to take place again. (13)

Almost half of inner Newcastle's present stock of houses was built before the great depression which gives the impression that Newcastle is an old city. As late as the 1970's the buildings that dominated the business district of Newcastle were still those of the 1920's.⁽¹⁴⁾ The big building boom of the 1950's and 1960's was having little effect on inner Newcastle. It was all happening in the outer suburbs. The inadequacies of former town planners and various authorities are blamed by some for the lack of development in inner Newcastle, as residential development was not encouraged during this period.

By the late 1950's the suburban sprawl brought about a growth of large single storey supermarkets in the outer suburbs and large modern centres were designed to handle motor cars. This trend toward development of suburban shopping centres was and is at the expense of the city centre.

Most of the population of Newcastle still lives in detached bungalows. The Californian bungalow was a most predominant style in the inter war years.⁽¹⁵⁾ In the early post war years while there were still war time shortages and rationing, the simple double-fronted bungalow with no verandah, was the style of the day. By the 1960's this had grown to a third front and brick was used rather than wood or fibro as the main material. Most people in Newcastle had only ever lived in bungalows. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Metropolitan Newcastle now spreads over an area of approximately ninety (90) square miles. Two thirds of it is in the City of Lake Macquarie. Within a five (5) mile radius of the city centre, the suburbs are continuous but beyond this the pattern is scattered in many places by stretches of open land undeveloped, because it is still held for coal mining. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Newcastle is the states second largest city but because of its scattered pattern, Newcastle is a city of low overall population densities. Its development since the second world war has not been as fast as some other areas, such as Wollongong, Port Kembla or the Central Coast. Those particular places have skyrocketed in recent years. Newcastle's development has been at a much slower rate and at a more even pace without the spiralling trends throughout other parts of the state. Newcastle's character as an urban community reflects that of the industrial worker, its politics, social attitudes and feelings revolve around things industrial. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The aspects of Newcastle, not commonly known outside this area and needing more emphasis are our cultural achievements. Our University and man Colleges of Education, our extensive library network and our Conservatorium which is unique to a provincial city. These, and the beauty of our natural surroundings, Ocean, Lakes and Mountains, are many valued facets often smothered under the image of an industrial city.

1. James Cairns Docherty, Newcastle, The Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983, Page 8.
2. Ibid, P.8
3. " P.8
4. " P.8
5. James Cairns Docherty, The Second City, Social and Urban Newcastle, New South Wales, 1900-1929, Canberra 1977 - Theses, Page 149
6. State Planning Authority of New South Wales, Hunter Region Growth and Change, Prelude to a Plan, Sydney 1972, P.90
7. James Cairns Docherty, The Second City, Social and Urban Newcastle, New South Wales, 1900-1929, Theses, Canberra 1977, P.150
8. James Cairns Docherty, Newcastle the Making of an Australian City, Sydney, 1983, P.24
9. James Cairns Docherty, The Second City, Social and Urban Newcastle New South Wales, 1900-1929, Theses, Canberra 1977, P.170
10. Ibid, P.171
11. " P.172
12. " P.185
13. " P.155
14. Jeans, D.N. and Spearitt, P. The Open Air Museum, Sydney 1979, P.82
15. Ibid, P.96
16. State Planning Authority of New South Wales, Hunter Region Growth and Change, Prelude to a Plan, Sydney, 1972, P.92
17. Ibid. P.95

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