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Fares Please! Retired Transport Workers' Oral History Project

Interview with Robert Hawke Biographical Notes and Timed Summary

Background

Robert Hawke joined ACT Transport in 1967/1968 as a fourth year apprentice panel beater. He completed the fifth year of his apprenticeship in January 1969. He then spent two years on National Service but almost immediately after returning to work at Transport he took up the opportunity of work in Indonesia on a Colombo Plan project which involved assisting in the refurbishment of the Jakarta bus fleet and training local staff. He returned to Canberra and his job in Transport in 1972 and over the next years completed his Higher Education Certificate and further education qualifications in administration and management. In 1978 he became the first panel beater Foreman of Maintenance at ACTION – he held this position at Belconnen once that depot opened. He retired in 1995 as he felt he needed a change in his working life. The offer of employment as a security guard at Old Parliament House (OPH) led to a new career. In his Security position he became increasingly interested and involved in the interpretation of OPH and was then offered a job in Public Programs. He retired from this position in 2010 but continues to work as a volunteer.

Robert was born in 1948 when his parents were living in Novar Street Yarralumla. He was one of three children. His maternal grandfather and his father both worked for the Government Printing Office in Kingston. Robert's father's career in Rugby League took the family to Sydney for some years of his childhood but most of his school years were in Canberra. He started school at Yarralumla Primary and finished at Telopea Park High. He started a panel beating apprenticeship with a private company in Fyshwick in 1963.



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Robert married in 1970. His wife and young son went with him to Jakarta when he began his two years of work there. In 1972 were offered a government house in the then new suburb of Melba where they still live.

Robert's interview highlights aspects of Australian history – National Service, The Colombo Plan – as well as changes in Australian working life and developments in ACT Transport. His work at the ACTION workshop covers a similar period to that of Darryl Peckham who began work as an apprentice and became foreman of the mechanics' workshop. When Robert joined Transport in 1968 it was part of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior. During the 1970s under the Department of Territories (and its various forms), Transport became ACTION and a number of its earlier functions such as cars and trucks became separate entities. At the same time new depots were opened in response to Canberra's growth. Changes in approach to management, in technology and in awareness of occupation health and safety issues also mark this period and are reflected in Robert's interview as in Darryl's. In addition, both reflect, in quite distinct ways, the contemporary more flexible approach to working life that developed as a general trend over the period of their work for ACTION.

The interview took place at Robert's home in Melba.

Interview Summary

Track 1	0:22:41
0:00:00	Introduction. Family background in Canberra: printing industry; Kingston shops. Early childhood in Yarralumla. Father's career in Rugby League 1940s-50s. Parents' later life. Yarralumla Primary School.
0:05:05	Completion of schooling at Telopea Park High School. Panel beating apprenticeship. Yarralumla in the 1950s and 60s: Canberra Brickyards; Westbourne Woods; Molonglo River; Corkhill's farm; makeshift canoes. Yarralumla identities. Yarralumla shops.
0:09:39	Father's early football activities in AFL and Rugby League: captaincy of Eastlake; achievement of position in Australian Rugby League side. Football memorabilia. Father's role in professional football. Mother's role as backbone of family. School years, recreation and friendships.
0:14:46	Apprenticeship. Role of father in move to Transport. Interview for Transport with Garth Fisher. First day as apprentice. Experience of Technical College. Work as apprentice in Transport workshop: tradesmen at the time; physical environment of Kingston workshop.
0:20:02	Other trades in the workshop. Formality of work culture. Bundy clock and time regulations.
0:22:41	END
Track 2	0:26:42
0:00:00	Transport hierarchy in early years. Completion of apprenticeship. National Service and





	reflection on this experience. Decision to take work in Indonesia on Colombo Plan. Details of work refurbishing Jakarta bus fleet and training local staff.
0:05:15	Arrangements of work for Colombo Plan – ‘seconded’ to Department of Foreign Affairs. Value of experience in Indonesia. Return to Transport workshop. Father’s advice on career and value of further education. Allocation of government house in Melba. Further studies. Successful application for position of Foreman Panel Beater. New emphasis on qualifications in industry.
0:09:45	Value of studying and management course. Changes in Transport during time as Foreman: expansion; new depots; increase in panel beating staff. Success of panel beating apprentices. Number of staff and types of trades managed in his role as Foreman. Recruitment process.
0:15:00	Demands of recruitment process and skills required. Impact of technological changes. Environmental and health and safety issues in panel beating. Improvements in equipment. Summary of main elements of job as Foreman. Issue of moving into management from position in ranks. Approach to management. Managers above Foreman. General managers of ACTION from Nelson Simpson’s time.
0:19:58	Management career paths. Special projects undertaken during time in head office in 1988 – particularly issues of how to address corrosion on buses. Maintenance department’s venture into private work during 1990s. Industrial relations over time. Union membership. Reflections on union concerns with pay rather than industrial conditions. Impact of introduction of Rostered Day Off.
0:26:42	END
Track 3	0:27:17
0:00:00	Discussion about the interview. Enterprise Bargaining. Workplace response to dismissal of Gough Whitlam and impact of this experience. Changes in composition of Transport workforce: variety of nationalities; first employment of women and introduction of girl apprentices.
0:05:06	When women first employed. Reactions to women in the workshop. Decision to retire. Invitation to work at Old Parliament House as security guard for MSS Security 1995; increasing interest in history of OPH and invitation to work in Public Programs section.
0:10:01	Work for Public Programs. Retirement January 2010. Move to Lennox Head and return to Canberra. Reflections on move to OPH. Details of work as Public Programs presenter. Further discussion of change in career.
0:14:29	Reflections on work with Transport: friendships, support of people; diversity of work; grounding that Transport provided. Atmosphere of Transport in 1990s. Desire to have retirement life that father never had.
0:19:15	Influence of father and father’s experience. Father’s character. Reflections on changes in Canberra: development of suburbs; allocation of house in Melba 1972. Influence and friendship of long term neighbour.
0:24:04	Additional comments about Transport: growth; spread into new depots; closing of





	Ainslie Depot; refurbishment of Kingston depot (the heating that never worked); growth and changes in composition of bus fleet. Refurbishment of the old Regal bus. The quality of Canberra's bus fleet – vehicles, service and maintenance
0:27:17	END



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