

# ACT Heritage Library Manuscript Collection

## Engineering Heritage Canberra Queanbeyan Age Project



**Lial James (Jim) Woods**



HMSS 0269 Engineering Heritage Queanbeyan Age Oral History Project

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Interviewed Wednesday 16 May 2012

Time	Subject
	Disk 1 of 2
00:00	Introduction
00:50	Recounts a brief history of the late John Gale who produced the first issue of the Queanbeyan Age on 15 September 1860 John Gale is considered by history as being responsible for the siting of Canberra near Queanbeyan instead of Dalgety NSW as originally proposed
4:50	Tells the story of how the Queanbeyan Age operated under John Gale's family Details the events leading up to his purchase of The Age in 1956 and tells how he ran the paper from Crookwell until 1958 when made the decision to move his family to Queanbeyan
9:00	When Jim took over the business, it was run down, there was no staff morale and the buildings were antiquated He moved premises and built several extensions later on Jim bought the business with five staff including a managing editor so Jim decided to bring his two sons into the business as well as a new Linotype operator, Jim Buckley, who was also a competent journalist and who stayed until the business was sold to Rural Press
14:00	When Jim Woods took over the business the plant and equipment was inadequate, circulation was 1,300 so he cancelled free subscriptions being given to 200 business owners, not a popular decision then
14:50	Describes the kinds of stories the paper began to print regularly, local news Jim's philosophy was to give the people the news they wanted This was different from how the paper was filled when he bought the business
16:00	Describes how a paper is funded mainly through advertisements but when he purchased the business no one was sourcing this kind of revenue Jim's son Bob began to source advertisements, wrote the ads and took the photos for the paper Describes how he also funded one staff member's wages from a new kind of advertising idea which proved to be very popular
17:50	Talks about how the paper was improving and circulation increasing Says it takes ten years to build a paper up and get regular subscribers.
18:00	Jim Woods held the position of Managing Editor for 15 years Frank Nash, a trained journalist joined and covered sports issues and also specifically covered council events which became a major feature of the paper Local news about weddings, birthdays and obituaries were also popular features
19:00	As circulation increased to tri-weekly, Jim employed paper boys to deliver the paper He had 42 paper boys when the business was sold to Rural Press Talks about the paper boys and describes how their delivery system worked Hired apprentices; keen to encourage them as he had been one himself
21:50	Says that the equipment he inherited when he bought the business (now on display in the Printing Museum) was very basic Describes the equipment and tells a story about the Wharfedale
24:50	Describes how he went about improving the equipment Advertising grew and circulation increased
25:00	Talks about two good Linotype operators – explains how they worked Explains how the hot metal worked in the old days Says he is probably the only man alive who has experience in hand setting, hot metal and computerisation
26:50	The paper is going along nicely, increased number of staff and doing more commercial work



	Explains how people were encouraged to bring in copy which he would rewrite if necessary Compares the Canberra Times to the Age in terms of local content printed
28:00	Talks about the press that he inherited from the Canberra Times – the American Battle Creek Duplex This press radically improved the production of work and he tells a story about this press after it went out of production at the Age
28:50	Describes how he had an arrangement with Mr Shakespeare who owned the Canberra Times that the Times would not intrude into local Queanbeyan news but when the Times was sold to Fairfax, they introduced a free paper into Queanbeyan in competition with the Age
30:00	Tells story about his meeting with the General Manager of Fairfax in Sydney to discuss the free paper and the subsequent offer of funding and advice to 'tool up' and compete against the Times
33:00	Old machinery had become redundant so Jim ordered three new offset units He owned and printed several more country newspapers Tells story about how he liaised with The Australian to deliver the Age to the south coast When they went to Offset the Battle Creek machine went to the Eden paper
38:00	Recounts an interesting story of how the paper content was sent to be printed at the Age via Cooma
39:00	Says that he continued using hot metal and eased into Offset, which was a key point in changing the technology of how the paper was printed The Age was one of the first papers in NSW to go to computerisation The keyboards cost \$20,000 and Linotypes and the Battle Creek were redundant Staff had to learn new skills Explains he did not operate the machinery but knew how it worked Left the offset to his sons and the staff, and explains how they learnt this
42:00	Other papers sent staff to the Age to see how it worked Says that although it was easy to adapt to these changes, breakdowns caused delays and the only person who could repair the machinery was the local Citroen motor mechanic Always had a spare machine to cover breakdowns
44:00	Explains how the new machinery improved circulation Jim was a long term Member of NSW Country Press Participated in the Audit Bureau of Circulation and considered taking the paper to five times a week
47:00	Computerisation introduced early 1980s which changed the look of the paper again and required staff to further adapt The hot metal press was obsolete and is now stored in the Printing Museum Talks briefly about the Printing Museum Talks about a printer in Perth wanting him to set some lines and a visit from a UK printer encouraged to keep the old machines
51:00	End of Disk 1
	<b>Disk 2 of 2</b>
0:00	Jim explains that even with his wide technical knowledge he did not participate in the actual printing process but kept tight control.
0:50	Talks about how he selected his apprentices and encouraged his staff to mentor them and tells stories of some of his apprentices working throughout the world Recounts how different this was from his apprenticeship Talks about how he started in the business and his parents initial opposition because of the health risks associated with printing at that time Tells how he overcame this obstacle and then how, after his indenture, the Linotype was introduced and the health risks dissipated
7:50	Explains his daily tasks as an apprentice and talks about the fact that he had no mentors Took a correspondence course through Technical College in Sydney and explains his teacher's dedication in helping him by post Studied in his own time, bought his own materials, but was allowed to practice on the machines at



	work
9:00	Also had a dance band and was a footballer, hockey player, cricketer, tennis player and was Secretary of the local Church, all whilst apprenticed and whilst studying his course through Tech Once he had passed the course he knew more about the business than the other staff Was not paid much
11:50	Recounts that as the war started he enlisted but his boss didn't want him to go because he was the only one out of three staff left, the rest had been called up The local Member of Parliament arranged for him to remain at home as he was needed to set up the papers His boss at the time at Temora owned four newspapers and he was eventually setting them all up on his own and singlehandedly carried the business for the next four to five years
13:50	Explains that in the meantime, his social activities provided him with a lot of valuable and newsworthy local knowledge When the other staff returned from the war he became journalist for 3 years Says he has done composing, proof reading, journalism and has been a machinist – he knew the whole process – very valuable skills as it was difficult to get staff after the War and he knew how to Linotype so carried the load
14:50	Recounts how he thought about buying a corner store but his boss at Temora offered to purchase a newspaper in partnership Talks about the process at the time of buying a newspaper Tells the story of how they purchased Crookwell Gazette which was so run down he had to work 50-60 hours a week He worked on the Linotype by himself with only one staff member and took on his first apprentice
16:50	Describes the role of his family in the Queanbeyan Age business and how he managed the difference between family and staff
18:00	Describes how he set up a 'superannuation' scheme for his staff and retained very loyal staff for many years, but the Unions objected
21:00	Explains how he acquired Decentralisation (NSW Housing Commission) homes which enabled him to advertise some jobs with accommodation and rented the homes to staff who subsequently remained loyal to him for over 30 years Says how he later backed the staff at the bank as guarantor to enable them to purchase their own homes
22:00	Gives a description of how he started each working day talking to his staff and had a had close relationship with them all He also knew when machines were not printing, whether they were broken or staff simply not working and describes how he would help out as a hands on manager
24:00	Talks about the kinds of stories the paper printed Says they covered everything that went on in the town Mentions how he liaised with his Editor, Barry Gilman
26:00	Describes his philosophy about the content he provided to his readers The Age reflected public opinion and was essentially the town's 'conscience' Contributed as much as the Council to local issues and says he refused offers to sit on the council several times due to a potential conflict of interest The paper assisted clubs, schools, societies and therefore made close contacts which were good for business
29:00	Says he worried a few times about printing stories which may have been considered slanderous but sought legal advice and was never sued Described a few instances where he reported court cases or news about gambling dens and prostitutes Realises he offended a few people in the course of his work but considered that just part of running



	a successful newspaper
32:00	Described how, towards the end of his career the look of the paper had changed from a broadsheet with the first press to tabloid with Offset Recounts how computerisation brought another big change which enabled the business to grow further
34:00	Says that it takes ten years – including increasing the circulation – from you purchase a paper to bring it to a successful standard (Sound of next door neighbour lawn mowing for about next 10 mins – through closed doors & windows) Says he bought the three worst papers in NSW and had a reputation as the ‘fix it man’ His most significant contribution therefore was to improve the Queanbeyan Age with better staff and better machinery and that when the paper was sold he had 32 staff doing 13 different papers.
35:50	Recounts in some detail the circumstances under which he sold the Age especially with 3 generations of the family working in the business
42:00	Says he has had 66 years working in the newspaper business and is now 98 years old (Lawn mower starts up again next door) Talks about the importance of the support from his wife throughout his career
45:00	Recounts a day in the life of Jim Woods, how his day started, progressed and ended. Talks about how the paperboys did the deliveries and how the deliveries to Canberra were dropped at the airport for delivery with the Sydney papers
52:00	Close

