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Engineering Heritage Canberra
Queanbeyan Age Project



Interview with Bill Johnson



HMSS 0269 Engineering Heritage Queanbeyan Age Oral History Project

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Date of Interview Wednesday 23 May 2012

Time	Subject
00:24	Paperboy for 12 months before joining The Age in 1960 at 15 years of age Describes a typical working day as an apprentice Trained by correspondence for 12 months then attended Kingston Technical College ACT
2:00	As an apprentice, allowed to use the Hand Platen, a hand fed pedal machine Hands-on experience worked well until he started the Tech course Then apprenticed as a Hand Compositor Also worked the Letterpress machines The Age was a small business so gained experience doing different jobs
3:00	Describes the steps in producing the paper. Used Hot metal press when he first started, then the Linotype machine. Describes the Linotype Later worked on the Ludlow. Describes why this job was given to him and how the job was done Paper boys distributed finished product
5:00	Describes the tasks allocated to a first year apprentice Progressed to working machines & setting up & composing Describes using hot metal and type set on Linotype and compares length of time it took to set and print the paper compared with previous methods
7:30	Explains how the handset type worked and notes it was a laborious process
8:30	Details again equipment he used as an apprentice Describes the Ludlow machine and how it worked
9:40	New offset machine purchased in 1970 Describes how the three News King units worked and how the paper was assembled for printing, including photos Describes the camera used and outlines the process for printing photos Helped with the paste up, photographing, plates and printing
14:00	One wage dispute led to a strike and Jim Woods got the paper out on Another stop work meeting called in response to introduction of Bundy clocks Time cards made Bill's job easier for invoicing purposes for commercial work
17:00	Describes progression of equipment which provided greater flexibility for larger jobs and the introduction of colour
21:00	Jim Woods' membership of Country Press allowed him to keep up with changes and progress in the industry and the Age followed
22:30	Discusses the move to computerised equipment, how jobs changed and how this changed the whole way of producing the paper Unions intervened when staff multi-tasking Some staff successfully adapted and learnt new skills, others did not Took about ten years to settle in properly
25:50	Canberra Times owned one third of The Age so some camaraderie between staff and Canberra Times Engineers assisted with introduction of computerised equipment
32:00	Tells stories about mishaps with equipment including fire hazards Recounts the circumstances in 1972-3 of the scoop when a Mirage jet crash near Queanbeyan Mishaps less of a problem because the paper was regional
34:30	Discusses how The Age assisted other regional papers owned by Jim Woods Tells story of the old Wharfedale press being operated in the Monaro shopping mall in Canberra and then being sent to Bega
36:00	Recounts a few stories that caused some controversy when printed Describes how the editor decided where each story appeared in the paper, the use of fillers and how



	the content was trimmed or expanded to fit Stories also covered personal news, about football and horse racing
38:50	Talks about his colleagues, especially those who mentored him Some interesting stories about various apprentices he worked with
41:00	He had offers of other work but preferred to stay with The Age because of the family style of business and close to home Jim Woods was the owner/manager, but always reasonable, one of the team
43:50	Jim Woods assisted with renting a Decentralisation home, then assisted with the purchase of his own home Talks about how this style of management was unusual, but worked well
45:00	Equipment was regularly upgraded which made a difference to the success of the business and its circulation and the business as a Prior to Offset, the business was limited in what it could produce Following the introduction of Offset, circulation increased and the paper moved to tri-weekly production The introduction of computerisation meant more varied and commercial work and a better quality paper
46:50	Discusses how customer and community relations and the use of up to date equipment were the main reasons that contributed to the success of the paper The Age also participated in community events and supported the town's fundraising activities.
48:50	Bill left The Age in 1997 after Rural Press purchased the paper As Rural Press subsequently let go of the commercial work, Bill started his own business using his local knowledge and relations with previous customers
49:50	Prior to Rural Press purchasing the paper, circulation was 5,500, now 2,500. Describes how circulation is determined The Age was previously a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation, with sales mainly through paperboys, subscribers and a mail out list of 1,000 Gives his views about why production has returned to one edition per week, the drop in circulation and the reasons why it may not improve
52:50	Provides detailed description of how the Printing Museum was established, its premises and how it is staffed
53:50	Lists the equipment housed at the Museum and says more is elsewhere waiting for larger premises to be found Machines housed at the Museum date from the 1880-1900s up to about 1965 Talks about how donations of machines are sourced and received
59:00	Talks about how The Age assisted in printing other regional newspapers owned by Jim Woods, and assisting during times of strikes or when break downs occurred. Details how the content of these regional papers was delivered to Queanbeyan Explains camera ready art
1:00:00	End

