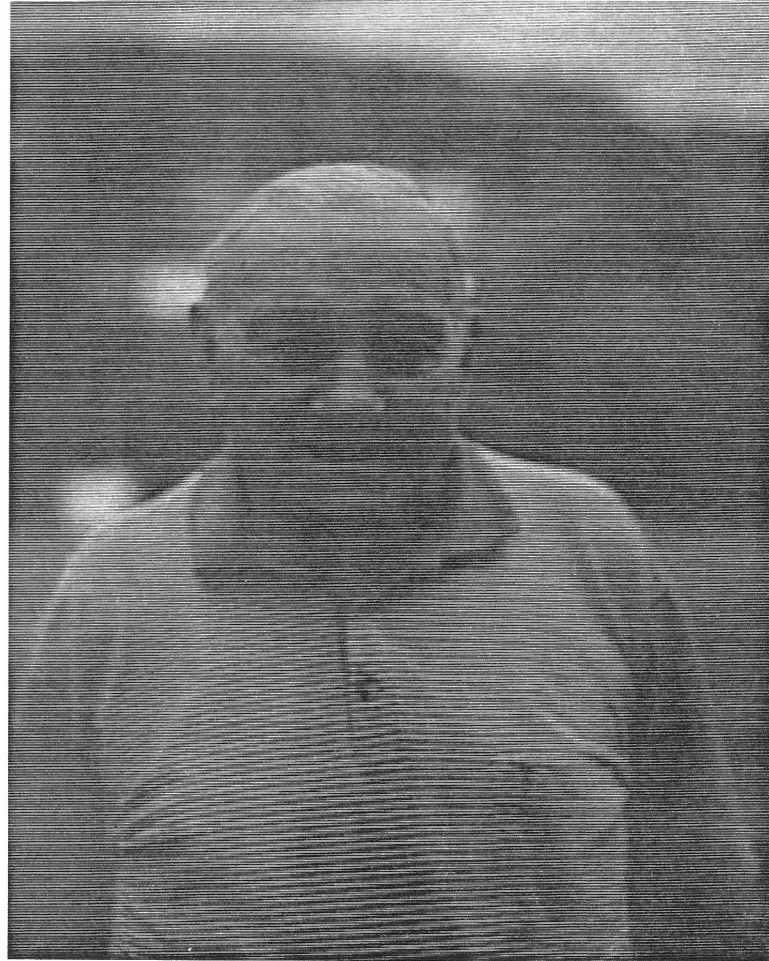


ALBERT SHAW

Albert was born in London in 1917. He emigrated to Australia in 1949 and after working for a brief time in Sydney came to Canberra later that year. He worked on the Snowy scheme, and for a year worked at Bendora Dam, principally as operator of the cableway. After working on various construction projects, Albert got a job with the BMG quarry at Mugga. He remained with the quarry until retiring in 1982. His wife Pearl, whom he had married in 1940, died five years ago. Albert has two daughters.



Tape 1 Side A

Albert became a plant operator with the British Army. During the Second World War he served in France, North Africa, the Middle East, Sicily and Italy. By 1959 work was running down in Canberra, so he enquired about work at Bendora Dam which was then beginning. He worked at Bendora for about a year.

His first job was driving a Caterpillar loader, on shift work. The diversion under the dam was being excavated, and following the blasting, Albert would remove the blown rock with the loader and load it into a truck. Only one truck could be used to take away the rock due to the narrow access track down onto the river. The blasting generally took place late in the day and he worked into the night.

Albert's major job for Clementsons was operating the cableway which transported the concrete buckets to the wall. The length of the shift depended on the size of the pour; another worker would take over from him at the end of his shift. Albert was located in the engine/control room for the cableway, which was near the concrete batching plant [above the left side of the dam wall]. Often he had the night shift. 'It was a long night. Particularly when we were pouring the concrete. You were only in an enclosed

wheelhouse type of thing. You couldn't see nothing outside, although you knew it was dark. You had a light inside. You didn't get many visitors up there, because nobody wanted to go up that way. It was a long night when you were on your own most of the time.'

Contact with the men on the wall was by 2-way radios; you couldn't see down to the wall. Initially a system of bells was used for signalling, but it did not work very well, so radios were used instead. The foreman for the concreting, a Norwegian, would instruct Albert on the radio on where he wanted the bucket to go. The cableway was powered by an electric motor, which was fairly noisy; you had to concentrate on the radio instructions. Albert worked by moving control levers. He was on his feet all the time. 'It got a bit boring — 8 hour shifts were OK, but 12, 15 or 16 hour shifts got a bit tiring'! If you'd fallen asleep you would have been sacked.

The concrete bucket was filled at the batching plant, then towed behind a Land Rover along a rail to the point where it was hitched onto the cableway. Albert controlled whether the bucket went out or in, upstream or down. The bucket was opened by a man at the scene of pouring who attached an air hose to open it. The bucket might go down onto the wall 10 times per hour, or more. The size of the pour depended on the size of the block being concreted; it might be 100 cubic yards, or 200.

The Norwegian accent on the radio was not too difficult to understand. There were half a dozen Norwegians on the site, who'd all worked for Selmer Engineering at Guthega Dam.

There were anchor blocks for the cableway on either side of the valley, and pulley wheels about half a metre in diameter. The cable (which was new) weighed six tons, the cable itself being about 10 centimetres diameter.

The cement for the concrete came in bulk in trucks. Albert doesn't know where the sand and aggregate came from, but says a lot of sand at that time in Canberra came from the Murrumbidgee River, near Tharwa. The aggregate was about 3.5 centimetres diameter [see Rom Katauskas interview regarding larger aggregate].

Regarding protection of the river from pollution, Albert feels there wasn't much disturbance of the valley to cause run-off. As for health checks on workers, he never had to have one himself. He only went to the camp sick-bay for a 'flu injection once.

Tape 1 Side B

The 'flu injection put him in bed for a week; Albert feels he would have been better off without it. He does not recall any accidents at the dam, and no deaths, in contrast to the Snowy scheme.

There was no industrial unrest in Albert's time, nor particularly strong union feeling, and he does not know about the food strike reported in the *Canberra Times*. He makes the point that camps were often rough at first, but improved in time. The food at Bendora was 'just eatable'. Alcohol was not available in the camp [see other interviews regarding this point], but men could bring it back with them from Canberra. The company supplied a truck to take men into Canberra on Saturdays. As shift work allowed, Albert too went home at weekends, driving in his own car. He was married, with two children. He feels that his absence at the dam did not hurt his family life. 'We managed alright. We survived.'

The camp accommodation was in timber huts, a room per man, a corridor running down the middle of the block. Rooms had a single-bar radiator. Bathrooms were communal. Accommodation was 'nothing flashy'. The camp was far enough away from the site to be quiet, so shift workers were not disturbed by noise. Some workers went fishing in their spare time (though not Albert, it was too far to walk). No-one

seemed to go bushwalking. The recreation room at the camp had a dartboard. There was some gambling with cards, and some people had radios. The only woman was the nurse at the first aid hut. Apart from the Norwegians, the main other migrant group were Italians.

The only dramatic incident Albert recalls is when a kangaroo nearly jumped onto his car on the road once when Albert was driving out from Canberra very early one morning. His usual route ran via Piccadilly Circus and Bulls Head to the dam.

Albert doesn't feel that there were any particularly bad things about Bendora: 'it's work wherever you go'. The best thing was the shift work and the 7 day weeks when you could earn a lot of money. Without this a job wasn't worthwhile. On the Snowy he'd worked at Tumut Ponds Reservoir but left when the shift money cut out. At Tumut Ponds he was living under canvas and it snowed and there was only a kero heater in the tent. Bendora's living conditions were '100% better' than Tumut Ponds.

Albert did not see John Muir about much; he suggests Muir may have been more often in the site office. The interview [mistakenly] gives the impression that Clementson's site office was the same as that used by Works. The only way to get around the site really was to walk. Another of the Norwegians, Ziggy, walked everywhere. The weatherboard houses built by Clementsons probably did house Muir and another in the hierarchy. Separate housing was built for 'the bosses' so that they and the workers were kept apart.

Asked if Bendora was a highlight in his working life, Albert replies that probably the best job he had was when operating a crane during the construction of the Kings Ave and Commonwealth Ave bridges in Canberra, a job which was close to home as well.