

**The Institute of Engineers, Australia; Sydney Division  
Engineering Heritage Committee**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**Interviewee:** Frederick John Batten

**Tape Numbers:** 1&2

**Interviewer:** Mary Ann Hamilton

**Date:** 6 August 1996

**Number of Tapes:** 2

**Restrictions on Use:** Copy of Tape to be forwarded to Mr Batten for audition as soon as possible.

Time	Subjects	Proper Names
<b>Side A Tape 1</b>		
0.00-1.13	Tape Identification	
1.20 5.14	Early Life, born in London 1908 Primary school at Battersea, scholarship to Battersea Grammar school from 1910-December 1924. His parents separated when he was young and he and his mother lived with his grandfather Studied Latin French, Chemistry and Physics, art- long term interest in painting which he has pursued in retirement.	<i>-Earl Spencer founder of school</i>
5.14 - 8.44	He started work with Henley's Telegraphic Works. Founded by William Thomas Henley in 1837 Company manufactured telegraphic cable - Made some of the earliest transatlantic cable. Originally Henley's was a wire covering "job" but later submarine cable and electrical light and telephone cable. Mr Batten started as an office boy - studied evening classes to become a chartered engineer - 5 years Description of work and study life, each evening's walk from Henley's head office, near St Bartholomew's hospital, past the Old Bailey to the poly tech. Henley's office moved to during the war.	<i>-Henley's Telegraphic Works Co. -William Thomas Henley  -North Hampton Polytech.</i>
8.44 - 11.40	Detail of different positions at Henley's - testing, design and investigation of cable installation for overhead and underground line all over British Isles- fault finding investigation, breakdown investigation at the laboratory in Gravesend in Kent.	<i>-Henley's laboratory. Gravesend, Kent.</i>

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|---------------|---|--|
| 11.40 - 14.10 | 1945 became assistant contract manager, supervising head office management of all outside contracts.<br>Henley's did Capetown suburban railways<br>Great Indian Peninsular railways, from Bombay to Poona, Central Argentine Railways and in China<br>-these projects were under taken by the company when he was a junior.   |  |
| 14.18 - 16.18 | He didn't really spend much time overseas until coming to Australia, first in 1951 when he spent 3 months doing a survey of all electrical supply authorities to see if there was room for Henley's to establish an electrical wiring installation contract office in Australia. Henley's had agencies in SA WA etc but not an installation outfit. They set one up in Melbourne based on Mr Batten's recommendation. |  |
| 16.18 - 18.00 | Moved to Australia with his family in 1955. Henley's, Enfield Cable Company and the London Electric Wire Company built a factory at Fairfield to manufacture underground cables, copper conductors and insulated covered wires.   | -Enfield Cable Company<br>London Electric Wire Company |
| 18.00         | <i>PAUSE TOO LOOK AT PHOTOGRAPHS</i>  |  |
| 19.07 - 20.00 | Mr Batten was sent to Australia by Henley's to establish and manage the Fairfield Cable Company. He did this for three years before the company was taken over by another company, Metal Manufacturers.   | -Fairfield Cable Company                               |
| 20.00 - 21.13 | 1959, he took job with Australian Electrical Industries at Auburn. He wasn't happy in a factory situation stayed only 2 years. Missed outdoor work and travel   | -Australian Electrical Industries                      |
| 21.14 - 22.13 | In 1961 took a job with the Electricity Commission of NSW where he worked at Head Office in Castlereagh St for 10 years, until 1971. He did very similar work to the work in England - supervising underground cable contracts but here he was commissioning contracts and making sure they were fulfilled.   | -Electricity Commission of NSW                         |
| 22.13 - 23.10 | Particularly memorable projects included one  |  |



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that went from Lane Cove to a substation in the city off George St. It went along George St, past a piano manufacturer's show room. The contactors jackhammers upset the piano manufacturer - so Mr Batten had to regulate hours of noisy work.

23.10

*PAUSE IN INTERVIEW*

23.40 - 27.29

Most of the cable work was around Sydney. An exciting project was one that involved laying cable across the harbour, parallel with the bridge from the old North Sydney Ferry Wharf to the city.

He details the process of managing such jobs - tendering, interviewing tenderers, awarding the tender, supervision.

Some companies tendering were British and some Japanese - the Sumatomo Company was one, British Insulated Callenders, Pirelli General Cable Works Ltd.

Finished with Electricity Commission in 1971 after 10 years.

*-Sumatomo  
Company  
-British  
Insulated  
Callenders  
-Pirelli  
General Cable  
Works Ltd.*

27.29 - 28.05

He describes work involved in designing routes for cabling.

28.09 - 28.40

He describes the differences between working as an engineer in private enterprise and in a government agency. Constraints on decision making in the public service meant that jobs took far longer to do. Preferred being in a private company, takes so long to do things in the public service.

28.48 - 32.30

He speaks of the highlights of his career.

The Second World war years - Deputy Contract Manager at Henley's.

Henley's installed a lot of work for RAF - all over the British Isles.

**Side B Tape 1**

He notes a project for the Fleet Air Arm in Northern Ireland near Inneskillen.

He describes the problems faced in war time - in getting the work done namely the safe and timely delivery of materials etc.

He describes a contract with Brisbane where submarines sunk the ships supplying cable.

*-Fleet Air  
Arm  
Northern  
Ireland*

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Contracts normally 1 year in duration  
would take the length of the war.

- 32.31 - 34.20 The War Years. Notes Henley's airfield work in the Orkney Islands and in Northern Scotland - cable laying and jointing. He speaks of the skill involved in jointing cables and the school Henley's set up teaching jointing at the Gravesend factory. Also a school was set up during the war for the Royal Engineers army regiment, training them as overhead linesmen and jointers - at Mowbray. *-Orkney Islands*
- 34.50 - 35.57 He speaks of his experience in the Home Guard during the war particularly fire watching duty for incendiary bombs.
- 37.15 -37.20 Comments that the highlight of time in Australia was the day of arrival.
- 37.28 - 40.55 He comments that he experienced no great differences in lifestyle and career living in Australia and England.  
He knew most of the Henley's branch personnel in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth etc.  
The most exciting thing was looking at the new factory (Fairfield Cables).  
Compares it to Gravesend factory in England.  
He details the work done at the factory, installation and troubleshooting.
- 40.56 - 44 54 Technological change he saw included the development of oil-filled cable - by Pirelli 's Henley's had the contract to manufacture the cable - he describes tooling up for the change. He explains technology and installation.  
He talks of difference in types of cable and mentions Henley's development of gas filled cable. *-Pirelli 's oil-filled cable*
- 44.54 *PAUSE IN INTERVIEW*
- 44.56 - 46 45 He comments further about changing cable technology - gas filled cable was "not a howling success"
- 46.45 *NOISE AS MR BATTEN LOOKS FOR SAMPLES OF CABLE - PAUSE IN INTERVIEW*
- 47.05 - 50.00 He recalls his experience at Henley's in 1936/7 - electrical breakdown in Devonshire on the day Prince of Wales was to announce his



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abdication. The problem was rectified 2 minutes before he went to air.

50.05 - 50.38

After Mr Batten retired from the Electricity Commission he spent some time overseas where he investigated developments in cable manufacture.

54.30 - 59.40

Final comments - He enjoyed work in England because of the travel involved. He travelled throughout British Isles and worked extensively with Henley's Belfast Office on projects for the Belfast Electricity Corporation.

*-Belfast  
Electricity  
Corporation.*

He refers to how local British Authorities used to run their own electricity supplies and speaks of the development of a centralised electricity supply in England 1928/9 - Central Electricity Board. Henley's did contracting work for the central electricity authority.

*-Central  
Electricity  
Board*

He recalls bomb damage to a power station in Fullham.

He notes that Croyden had own electricity supply

- Speaks of one of his first jobs, early 1930s laying cable from Croyden to Epsom along a railway track supported on concrete supports. Problems with this method of cabling.

59.40 - 1.01.14

He recalls that when he came to Australia in 1955 the Electricity Commission was already formed

Side A Tape 2

1.01.31-1.13.18

He notes that the challenges he faced in Australia were not that different to in Britain except that Trade Unions were stronger here. Despite this he didn't experience many labour troubles at the Electricity Commission or at the Fairfield factory. He noted that Henley's sent many of their own people out to work at Fairfield - charge hands and foremen - to train Australian workers.

1.03.20 - 1.06.00

He talks of other similar firms operating in Australia at the time Fairfield Cable Company was established.  
- Metal Manufacturers at Liverpool and Olympic cables in Victoria and a winding wire factory at Brookvale. The Liverpool firm eventually took over Fairfield cables but the Enamel and Winding Wire people, who were initially part of Fairfield Cables, maintained a separate identity and continued to trade after the amalgamation.

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1.06.00

*END TAPE*