

INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: RONALD COLBY

INTERVIEWER: Frank JACKSON

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TAPE LOG

Tape Recorder: Inst. Engrs. "Genexxa"
Tape Counter: as above

COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
Tape 1 Side A		
0 - 7	Introduction	born Sydney
8 - 12	Family details	
13 - 18	Childhood, family holidays	Double Bay
19 - 24	Primary & Secondary schooling	
25 - 31	Influence of teachers - good reader- early preferences for technical subjects	
32 - 45	Decision for an engineering career at age 14 and began visit locations where examples of engineering works could be seen.	
46 - 57	Called up for industrial War Service 1942 - 17 1/2 yrs- (allergy prevented Military Service) Went to IT&T / STC for early tech. training	War Period
58 - 65	After one yr. basic training involved with construction of large naval radio transmitter for Belconnen and later manuf. of magnetrons for radar development	STC Radar

COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
66 - 72	Evening lectures for Diploma in Electrical Engineering at Sydney Technical College as work requirements prevented Univ. studies. Later, health problems stopped upgrading to Degree	Sydney Technical College
73 - 108	Joined Email in Central Engineering and Technical Services Section for 4 years building factories' eng. services etc. Post-War problems - Labor and material shortages- difficulties with enamelling steel Large boiler acquired from Katoomba P.S. & installed Orange factory to boost steam capacity - Oberon diesel generating plant purchased and installed Orange to provide back-up for power supply shortages Acquired Newnes Junction fuel delivery pump as main pressure source in die-casting factory. Solution of all these problem excellent training for young engineers.	Email Orange
109 - 125	Awarde a Management Training Scholarship with Westinghouse USA for performance in solving problems associated with the Orange Factories and storage facilities in Waterloo, Sydney. Problems with collapse of frame of latter which he solved in short time	
126 - 140	Went to Pittsburg with other Email trainees and American staff including management and legal people snd as well as engrs. After 3 months training sent on assignments to the various divisions to gain experience in own fields of interest. Actual work not permitted but plenty of "hands-on" training.	Pittsburg USA Westing -house
141 - 145	Following this 12 month scholarship visits England and Germany to gain experience in associated companies. Returned to Australia in Nov.1953 after 131/2 mths away.	
146 - 154	The outcome of this training was a solid grounding in modern production methods, engineering management and the oversight of the whole of the Westinghouse operations in the manufacture of various products.	
155 - 173	On return to Australia, found difficulty in applying the lessons learned overseas, because of the local culture and parochial attitudes. Email's factories still employed line shaft drives for machines. By 1958 a programme of motorising machines had been implemented with a resultant great increase in efficiency and a lowering of product cost.	return Aust
174 - 196	Transferred to Air Conditioning Division - contracting to gain direct exp. of installn. problems - with this info. to hand held classes to pass on to sales, eng. & field staff. At end of this program Co. offered position as Resident Mgr. with Westinghouse in USA where development program for high speed centrif compressor was in progress	
196 - 204	Returned to USA mid 1963 concerned with wide range of products Switchgear, transformers, appliances, fuel cell development. Job required extensive travel by road often in poor weather conditions which could be very hazardous in blizzards.	back in USA 1963
205 - 242	Returned to USA mid 1963 concerned with wide range of products Switchgear, transformers, appliances, fuel cell development. Job required extensive travel by road often in poor weather conditions which could be very hazardous in blizzards.	
243 - 264	Back to Aust. 1968 - smaller field of operations and much frustration in raising efficiency of local operation, but finally began to achieve profits for the Coy. Finally decide on a change of direction and went to work for Swiss based Coy which was planning Materials Testing facility	return to Aust 1968
265 - 280	Went to Geneva for training, then other parts of Europe, and then USA and finally back to Melbourne to start a materials testing and	Geneva

inspection service

COUNTER

SUBJECT

NAMES &
KEYWORDS

281 - 300	Unfortunately, a recession had started , and the project was no longer viable , so decided to take a position. with Stephenson & Turner	
301 - 346	S & T were engaged on a number of hospital projects so experience in air conditioning and mechanical and electrical services was particularly appropriate for the position. A major project was the Royal North Shore Hospital. It was a six year project - many difficulties- major contractor went into liquidation half-way thru project which required renegotiating the contract with another contractor. Extensive liaison with medical staff, with new equipt. and changing techniques requiring to be accommodated	Stephenson & Turner Royal North Shore Hospital
347 - 400	Continued with other projects after R.N.S.H. small hosp. at Jerilderie Solar heating adopted for heating water and also for space heating. However such systems only suitable for single story buildings. Operating costs low, but capital costs of plant high	Solar Heating
401 - 450	Mr. Colby here reviews the industrial situation in Australia at the end of World War II We were so far behind the rest of world that local coy's found it necessary to seek overseas licensing arrangements rather than spend time doing own research and development for production of peace-time goods. Use of redundant war production factories and warehouses to set up for production of consumer goods	

Tape 1 Side B

COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
1 - 3	Introduction	
4 - 14	A recession and Govt. action in the field meant the finish of consultancy work. Accepted a position with an American Coy on the design and construction of large cooling towers for industry and power stations	Mujs Power Station W.A.
15 - 21	Most notable was for Muja Power Station West Aust. Description of sizes and capacities of plant.	
22 - 28	On site difficulties with militant Unions.	
29 - 32	Other projects in Qld. for sugar industry, Victoria, NSW	
32 - 37	Health problems now made it necessary to leave this industry and took a position with BHP Sydney	BHP
38 - 42	The year was 1981, and there was a major project to design construct and commission a cement plant in S.E. China	
43 - 46	Another big job was the design and preparation of tender documentation and awarding of contract for a large drag line for Qld mining industry. Dimensions and capacity of plant.	
47 - 82	Other projects, coal washeries, mineral processing plant, feasibility study for electrification of Port Hedland - Mt Newman railway	
82 - 108	S.E. China cement plant - capacity, equipment sources - site works - six year project, completed within contract time	S.E. China
109 - 147	Difficulties with culture, language and ethics - reluctance to pay for requested contract variations	
148 - 155	At this stage Mrs Colby became very ill with cancer, and Ron Colby decided to retire, to enable him to better care for his wife.	
156 - 159	After her death, he went back to BHP as Manager of the Environmental Engineering Dept. to restructure its management and to get it on an economic basis- after a year in this position, he took a holiday, and then retired from BHP	Retires
160 - 218	From 1989 attended U. Of Syd. - lectures in Philosophy and German language - Social activities - golf In 1991 became involved with Red Cross first as an engineer, later being elected to the Board. Has been active in achieving better utilisation of office and Lab. space by improving layouts Has also greatly improved engineering services - power & air conditioning. Engineering background and management skills developed in the profession have been invaluable on the Board. Summing up, disappointed medical profession did not diagnose health problem earlier. Observations on society - decline in ethical standards, too great a degree of specialisation occurring in eng. profession. Should be more emphasis on value of general experience, and of lateral thinking, for all engineers.	Red Cross
219 - 229		
230 - 256		