

*The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee*

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

John Hedley DEARDEN (1929 -)

Civil Engineer

- Birth & Family:** Born 11 June 1924 at North Sydney, New South Wales. Eldest child of John and Violet Dearden (nee Middleton); mother formerly a primary school teacher, born 12 June 1891 at Orange; father a shipwright and in the maritime services, born 28 July 1895 at North Sydney. Siblings Eileen Frances (1926), Robert Henry (1929), both born at North Sydney.
- Married Jean Rina Small, a nurse, in November 1951. Four children, Ross, Peter, Janelle, Greg.
- Education:** Attended primary schooling at North Sydney Primary School (also known as Greenwood), which was later relocated to Crows Nest and known as Lady Hay's School; completed the Intermediate Certificate at North Sydney Boys' High School in 1939.
- Qualifications:** Civil Engineers' Diploma 1950
- Memberships:** FIEAust.
- Awards:** NSW Long Service Medallion for Meritorious Service
- Work History:** Began work with the Department of Main Roads in May 1940 as a junior clerk in the Records Section, and later became a junior draughtsman around 1942, plotting road sites from surveyors' field books. In order to pursue an engineering career, Dearden completed a 2-year Diploma Entrance Certificate at night school (equivalent to the Leaving Certificate), then began studying for the Local Government Engineers' Diploma (later known as Civil Engineers' Diploma) in 1943.
- Dearden joined the AIF in late 1943 serving overseas at Tarakan near Borneo. Following discharge in February 1946 at the end of hostilities, he returned to the Main Roads Department and his engineering studies, completing the Civil Engineering Diploma Course in 1950.
- Dearden was posted to Port Macquarie Works Office in early 1951 as Assistant Engineer. His road design experience was invaluable on the reconstruction and sealing of the road from Heron's Creek to the Oxley Highway junction, as he did his own surveying work with very basic equipment: an axe, a stringline, a 100ft tape and a level. In early 1952 he was transferred to Frederickton as Acting Works Engineer supervising a team working on the reconstruction of Telegraph Point-Blackman's Point section of Pacific Highway, also the construction of a four-span concrete bridge over Algomera Creek, and two experimental bridges which were designed at Head Office - a timber three-span bridge with timber girders and longitudinal decking, and a bridge with timber foundations and a concrete deck.
- In May 1956 Dearden became Divisional Engineer of South Western Divisional Office at Wagga Wagga in an administrative role; he also established a works office at Narrandera.
- The transfer to the Advanced Planning Section in Sydney in 1961 was the worst in his career, mainly due to illness and bad housing. Working

with a small staff, his duties were analysing and tabulating information leading to the establishment of the ten-year programs.

In 1965 Dearden was transferred to Tamworth as Supervising Engineer, second in charge to the Divisional Engineer of the North Western Division at Tamworth, an administrative role at a higher level than his other appointments.

While there, Dearden was the Supervising Engineer for the construction of the new bridge over the Peel River, consisting of six spans of pre-cast pre-stressed units with a concrete deck which was an entirely new type of bridge.

In 1970 he transferred to Lithgow as Divisional Engineer of the Central Mapping Division, a newly formed Division, and the most senior position available for field engineers in the Department of Main Roads, responsible for everything that happens within the Division, as well as being the representative in the field of the Commissioner for Main Roads.

A lot of work needed to be done between Lithgow and Bathurst, such as the Kirkconnell re-alignment project, and other road deviation projects including the construction of a major deviation bypassing Little Hartley village, all of which would result in greatly improved traffic conditions.

In 1975 Dearden transferred to the Highway Section of Head Office as Assistant Highways Engineer, an administrative role which included the responsibility for the Safety Officer and Health Officer, as well as the supervision and membership of a number of committees, including Inter-Departmental Committee of Occupational Safety and Occupational Health, Sub-committee of Paint and Protective Coatings, National Plan for the Control of Oil Pollution, the State Emergency Services and Civil Defence and the NSW Bushfire Council.

Dearden became Engineer for Country Council Works 1982 where his main role was to determine the priorities regarding the allocation of funds for road works throughout the State.

Retired in October 1984. Received NSW Long Service Medallion for Meritorious Service from the Premier of NSW, Hon. Neville Wran.

Prepared by Jill Willis, October 2003, from oral history interview conducted by Edie Swift on 22.04.2001.