

Bevan Kathage

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Interviewer: Margaret Cook



I was born in Ipswich in 1941, lived in Booval and I can remember the pit. The family owned Westfalen. We had an operation at Thagoona - Westfalen No. 1 which my grandfather, August Kathage, started in the 1930s. He immigrated from Herne, Westphalia in Germany in 1908.

We have gone back to Herne and met some of our relatives there. Augie came out here. He sank shafts for the people who owned Rhondda. He went out by himself in about 1930 and got hit by the Depression but survived. They still worked at Thagoona until about 1944. I can remember as a young kid being on the front verandah early in the morning, and it must have been winter because everyone was dressed in coats, at about 5.30 am, and all the miners would be sitting on a ute waiting to go to Westfalen for a day's work. We lived opposite the old Coronation Hall, where Aldi is now in Booval. That was probably my first memory. I ended up going down the pit at Dinmore

(Westfalen No 2) at 10 or 11 years old in sandshoes, hat and a light. I went down with my old man and there was no-one else at the site.

I didn't think anything of it. The other thing is tea was always early at home about 5 pm as it was in those days. We would have tea and then sit around the table talking about the pit and what was going on. I went to Silkstone State School and then St Peter's at Indooroopilly. I matriculated and went to UQ and did mining engineering. I got a BE Mining with First Class Honours and a University Medal. I must have done something right. I stayed on for 4 years and did a PhD which I finished in September 1967. I went and worked for Pop at Westfalen for 3 months before I took a job at Australian Iron and Steel in Wollongong as a Technical Assistant to the Manager at Kemira.

I'll give you a brief history. My first job was to recover the long wall at Kemira.

Then I went to Nebo and got tired and bored at Nebo. I applied for a job at Cessnock. I became Technical Assistant for the Superintendent at Maitland for Coal and Allied and based at Aberdare East. I was then asked to go to Aberdare North in Cessnock. I was there as the Under Manager but I didn't have a ticket so old "Bruiser" Victor signed the books and I ran the pit. When you look back it was all not kocher but it was done. I ended up getting my Under Manager's ticket and went back to Aberdare East as Under Manager on the afternoon shift. From there I went back as Undermanager in Charge to Aberdare North with a ticket.

Allied Coal closed Hebburn No. 2 at that time in 1972. I was given a choice of possible mines to work at as the staff blokes from there ended up at the Aberdare North and I ended up going to Coal and Allied Liddell at Singleton ultimately as Deputy Manager at a five unit pit. I stayed at Singleton for about 12 months and then I took a job at New Hope where I started in July 1973 as the Manager. We had 3 and half units there and about 160 blokes. Kemira had 350. From there I stayed at New Hope as Manager, Superintendent and finally General Manager.

We acquired Southern Cross and Tivoli operations. We started Jeebropilly opencut. We had continuous exploration licenses from the border up as far as behind Kingaroy. We were drilling all that. I was the only mining

engineer on the property, in the entire organisation of about 450 people. I was it as well as being the General Manager and signing all the cheques and chits. We also had a 15% interest in Denham Coal which became Gordonstone which is now Kestrel. We had a number of other partners including John Holland Constructions.

For a number of reasons I was sidelined at New Hope, not the least of which was the Managing Directors' son needed a job, and that happened in small operations. I ended up going to Gordonstone. We did the Feasibility Study and applied for the leases and I stayed with Arco which was the new owner until 1990. I put the drift in and took out the 5000 ton sample. Then Arco didn't like my approach to industrial relations which was hard-nosed and pretty tough and they wanted an easy way of doing things. It suited me not to leave Ipswich as we have a Down's Syndrome daughter who was born in 1974. Leigh had major health problems when she was young and so it suited us not to move to Emerald and stay near Brisbane.

Then I took a job with BHP Engineering as a contract mining consultant and worked for them until 1996 when I started my own business as Kathage Mining Consultants and I operated that until 2002 when I semi-retired. Now I have a job with ACARP (the Australian Coal Association Research Program). I am a research co-ordinator and I have overseen between

30 and 40 projects a year spending about \$3 million plus per annum. I am responsible for spending that improving the safety and productivity of underground coal mines in Queensland. I still do the odd job. That is a very brief history of who I am and where I have come from.

*Interviewer: Did you deliberately go interstate?*

Yes. I had difficulty getting into NSW but I did eventually score the job in Wollongong and the reason was that at that stage the NSW industry was technically more advanced than here in Ipswich. I didn't feel that I could gain sufficient knowledge and experience here. In 1967 there were half a dozen continuous miners here in Ipswich, maybe. Kemira had five miners and a long wall. Just a different scale of things. I moved from the South Coast where there was gas and those sorts of things to Cessnock. I moved there because the Greta Seam was fiery and I felt I needed to get some understanding of how people managed and controlled those sorts of situations to round out my experience. Then I came back to Ipswich for my family and it was a good opportunity. The bloke who got me to come up here was the original Superintendent I worked with at Coal and Allied (Maitland) in 1970 when I went to Cessnock. Merv Harris was the General Manager. The offer was good and it was home.

*Interviewer: Can we go back a generation to your father and his brothers? It was a family company?*

It still is. We still have the family company and still own the name Westfalen Collieries of which I am the Managing Director. August Kathage came here in 1908 and died in 1948. He worked at many things when he came here. He had been working in coal mines in Germany. He wanted to go to America and Grandma burned the tickets. So he bought tickets for Australia and this time she had no choice.

The eldest son was Bill. When you talk of Kathages there are two Bills – Old Bill and young Bill. Old Bill is my uncle and Young Bill is my cousin (his eldest son). Both are now deceased. Old Bill was born before they came out here. They came in a sailing ship to Melbourne. There was ultimately a family of ten and they were born as Grandfather moved around South-East Qld. He owned a pub which got burned down. He tried farming and tried his hand at many things. But he was a shaft sinker. So he got jobs around Ipswich and then then moved to North Booval. On his weekends he would go out exploring. He found the ground at Rosewood, at Thagoona, and they started a little pit there. Hand worked. They worked that from the early 1930s until 1944. By then they had explored and found the area at Dinmore which they started during the war, certainly by 1944. That place

finished in the early 1970s. It flooded in 1974 but they had already abandoned it. They had started the pit at Collingwood Park, - Redbank as we called it. Redbank was another enterprise. It was different. It was flooded in 1974 and pumped out. It was recovered and went back to work in 1975 and in 1977 it was sold to Bundaberg Sugar. That was the end of our involvement in the coal industry in Ipswich as a family company.

Going back the original family had five brothers. One of them died. He fell off the back of a milk truck and died of a brain haemorrhage. Bill, August, Arthur and Otto. My father is Arthur. Grandfather had the boys made part of the company because they were working at the pit. Augy didn't want to become part of the company. He was engineer at Caledonian in Walloon so he stayed there. Ultimately in the 1960s he went to work for the family – they took him back. They looked after their own very much so. When Grandfather died in 1948 they didn't have much but Grandma was always paid. The blokes at the pit would get paid even if they didn't get paid. Those are the facts that I was told when only 7 or 8 but I had no reason to disbelieve it. They didn't have much. They always looked after their mother. They never looked after their sisters because the girls were to marry and their husbands were to look after them. That was their ethic. The girls had worked for the pit doing pays and things but that was grandfather's view. It was very strict.

The coal ran out. It was only a pond. The seam was named after my grandfather – the Kathage seam. It was about 6 foot something thick. There is a photo at home of people working down the pit at Thagoona. They drove down into the seam at Dinmore. They had three seams – the top, middle and lower. The lower seam is not much good. They are all supposed to part of the North Ipswich sequence of seams. The lower seam was coked and had a lot of dykes in it. (A dyke is an igneous intrusion which cooks the coal and makes it useless by driving off the volatiles. Hot liquid magma, cooks it.)

They drove down to the lower seam but never worked it. The middle seam was about 8 or 9 feet thick with a hard stone roof but it wasn't as lucrative as the top seam. It was 15 or 16 feet thick. The other thing about No 2 down there – Dinmore and No 2 are the same – it was very flat. But there were a number of faults through it. They worked the top seam with contract miners. It was 200 ton a day. The coal was very high reject. It had stone bands in it. They could only survive and make a quid if they had the volume but they had to have a prep plant. So they built their own. Water flowed down through a flue and the stone which was heavier went to the bottom of the trough and the coal would keep going.

The coal came in wagons, tipped and back out. That was a big effort in the 1940s to build something like that. They built it from scratch. They didn't

have anyone else to copy. They were given the idea.

*Interviewer: It was inventive again.*

Talk about inventive. In about 1960 they decided that they had never pulled any pillars. They only formed square pillars – one or two chain square pillars. They formed the roadways and they thought that was wasteful so they decided to try and mine the pillars without causing it to collapse. They decided to take the stone back and throw it into a roadway. They had what they called a slinger. It was a rotating disc with a series of metal paddles on it. As it spun anything on the disc got flung out. They used it to fill the roadways so they would then leave it and let it settle and then pull out the pillars. I remember going down there and it was so noisy and it seemed to work. They didn't really get ahead with it. They went so far but not far enough.

They then concentrated in the upper seam. Go back a step. There was lots of industrial strife. Blokes were spending more time at home than at work. Things were going backwards. There was sit down strike and they finally decided to move away from the contract system – two men in a bord and hand filling wagons to be pulled up to the surface. That wasn't going to go anywhere. So they introduced mechanisation. They brought in AB Dreadnought cutters to cut the coal. For a start that is what they used. The AB cutter had a cutter bar and you

could put on a little wing that you could open out. They would pin a number of these to the cutter bar and as you drove along it naturally dragged the coal back over. Then they loaded onto scraper chain conveyors – about 10 metres long, maybe 8 metres, with a flight bar. It went round and round. It was fed into skips and then pulled out to the surface. They then put the chain conveyor right to the face, covered it with railway slabs, back about 4 metres (I am guessing distances). Cover it and shoot the coal. So the coal fell all over the top but the chain was still running as it was protected by wooden slabs and they kept pushing the coal onto it.

Then they decided that we shouldn't have to shovel. So they got calf dozers, which were small bulldozers, as wide as the table. They were petrol powered and they took the petrol engine out and put a 15 horse power engine on it and a wand and the power cable came out the top. That is what they used to push the coal onto the conveyor. That is what they used in what they called the chain section.

The other thing I did when I worked in the chain section is they had a bord in the roadway would have a full crown across the top and two legs on either side. The brattice would go up one side and the other side the chain conveyor would come on the inside of the legs. So you had the rib, an opening, the timber legs, a chain conveyor, the roadway, the brattice, the props and then the other rib. Across the bord.

When they were loading the conveyor and pushing the coal up we used to have to stand astride the conveyor picking up the lumps of rock and throw it behind the timber line packing it up. That is how we got rid of most of the rock before it went out of the pit. People wouldn't do that these days. You wouldn't be allowed.

*Interviewer: How many people were underground?*

Maybe 10. There as a bloke driving the cutter and his off-sider. They would cut the place. Then there were 3 or 4 blokes who would timber up and that was pretty hard work because they were full round timbers. We had big timbers, maybe a foot in diameter. We had to get them up 15 feet and put them up and roof bolt them to the roof. Drag them up the heap of shot coal, put the short roof bots in and tighten them up. The same blokes who put them timber up would have to bore the place before it got shot. We didn't work off ladders we worked off the heap. It was hard work. We put the crowns up. We used to drill the holes at the top to start with. Plug the holes with paper so we could see them. As the heap got lowered we would drill the next holes. We didn't use ladders we just used the heap to get up there. Then we got up and put the powder (explosives) in and shoot it and go through the cycle.

They had two sections – the chain section and the car section. The car section was just a conventional unit -an

AB dreadnought coal cutter, a Joy shuttle car and I think an 8BU loader (a small loader). They used that rather than a calldozer to load it into the shuttle car and take it back to the conveyor belt. They had 40 cars a shift come off it. They only had one car, with the capacity of about 10 ton.

The other interesting thing is that in those days you weren't allowed to produce coal before 7am. This is the mid 1960s. The blokes would go down at about 5.30 am and they would go down and they would fill the belts (when it converted to belts). They would fill every belt, the first belt into the pit and all the way into the system, and that would be chockers. At 7 o'clock they'd press the button and up it would come.

*Interviewer: So you didn't use pit time?*

They abided by the letter of the law. The other interesting thing at Westfalen is that they were all paid deputy's rates. That was significantly more than a shiftman or machineman's pay rates at that time. That was one of the perks.

You couldn't just walk up and get a job. It was like many pits in NSW, you had to be recommended by somebody. You were recommended and if you didn't shape up you left. It was the blokes themselves that did that. I think they thought they were on a good wicket – and they probably were. They weren't going to have somebody else lying back in the traces not performing for them.

*Interviewer: So you must have had long serving staff?*

Young Bill and his brother Alan were Under Managers and both had started at Thagoona as boys of 14 or so. I should also tell you that Bill, Arthur (my father) and Otto had no formal education. They didn't even do Scholarship. They learned their trade and they learned it pretty well because they could turn their hands to anything.

They used to do lots of different things. We are members of the Lutheran Church up here. Grandma Kathage provided the money and the spire and cross were made at Westfalen for St John's in Ipswich and the same for the Grace Lutheran Church at Riverview. I think my old man did that.

They did lots of things. They were just done. People didn't fly flags or look for pats on the back. That was done in pit time. His time. They worked hard. It was an all-consuming job. I have photos of going down to the pit as a kid on a Sunday afternoon to see if the dams were full for the washery.

When they started No. 3 at Redbank Mum and Dad used to go down on a Sunday afternoon and sit round the pit because hoons were coming in and wrecking things.

*Interviewer: How long were your Dad and his brothers involved?*

They started it and they left in 1977. Although Otto stayed on for another couple of years working for the new owners. But then he decided that was that. Effectively they finished in 1977. You look back and they must have done something right.

*Interviewer: Was Westfalen their main concern? Did they have other pits?*

No they never had more than 2 at any one time. As one depleted its resource they moved to another. I think it is fair comment to say that they were satisfied with what they had and it was a big enough problem trying to manage it. Just to give a comment about what those people were like, a mines inspector (who shall remain nameless) arrived down at Redbank and he was new on the job. He wanted to see the manager. There was a man sitting on a ride-on mower and he asked him where the manager was. He was politely told that Jimmy Edgar was in the office. It was then time for morning tea and the bloke on the mower comes as well and sits in the office and the inspector was introduced to Old Bill Kathage who owned the place – the bloke on the mower!

There were no frills. Old Bill would have been almost 70 but he still went to the pit. He could hardly see and he didn't go down the pit. That was the way they operated in all their dealings. They were pretty hard-nosed, don't get me wrong.

They ended up in a big fight with Rhondda over a lease at Redbank. I don't know all the detail and I don't think anyone will ever know. They ended up getting the lease which was odd. But it happened. It was sanctioned by the government. They were black labelled by the Coal Association so they said get stuffed (my language). We'll be independent and they walked out. You are not supposed to do that. After a few years it all quietened down and they went back. People had more than enough to go on with. So they rejoined the fold. If they decided to do something, then that was the way it was done.

They had a coal loading point on the Bremer River near Swifts Abattoir at Dinmore. That used to be Athol Locke's farm. That was an interesting story because Athol fought against the Germans in WWI. He ended up with a heap of shrapnel in him so he was a bit averse to these German Australians. At the end of his days he said he had been privileged to have been associated with them. Even though they were all out to try and make a quid, they weren't stand over merchants. If he wanted things done they did it for him.

The bin was originally a convict quarry. They cut sandstone there and took it to Brisbane for building. So in the early 1950s there is a big hole on the sides of the Bremer River. They had been taking coal from No 2 to Riverview station for loading into rail wagons. They would truck it up and dump it

into wagons. Coal suppliers were all regulated by the Queensland Coal Board and they were told where their coal would go to. New Farm and Tennyson power stations had river unloading points. Riverside Coal Transport, Campbells in Brisbane, had barges that came back and forth. They built a loading stage at the river where the truck would go down and tip into a chute. The barge might hold 250 or 350 tons. What they found was that the barge could be tied up there all weekend and it was a shemozzle.

They persevered with the loading point until they decided to use the old quarry. They built a loading point on the river. I think it opened in the mid 1950s. It was a 1500 ton bin. The trucks could dump at the top and there was a 6 foot belt – which was a big belt in those days – out underneath. It went straight from the chute and into the barge. They could turn around on the tide. That all worked well until a sister ship, the *Barrabin*, came up. It was the same size as the *Bremer* or thereabouts. They filled it up. But the crew had left the portholes open and it turned over in the river with two blokes trapped inside. The old man hurt his back as he jumped off the stage and grabbed a rope and tied the barge to a tree. Fortunately the skipper and the deckhand were thrown off. The police and others came and cut a hole in the hull and got the men out. The *Barrabin* was refloated because she was a hazard in the river and they couldn't use the loading point. Now she is part of an



artificial reef in Moreton Bay. That was an interesting story.

The loading dock was used until about the mid 1970s when No 2 was closed. Their new contract was with Swanbank so they built their own washery at Redbank and then it went by private road to Swanbank. They also used part of the Redbank loop and they could load straight into the wagons. The river bin then fell into disrepair and I suggest it is now a hazard. It was one of four loading points in the river – Westfalen; Moggill (which is further down towards Brisbane); Haigmoor and then Rylance had a loading point further up towards Ipswich. All those are now gone. All you can see is what is left of Westfalen's.

The other interesting thing about that is that it was high over the water. It had a snout that was raised and lowered by ropes and there was a pulley. We had a photo of the 1955 flood and all you can see is the wheel and people have built houses over the other side now. It used to be a dairy farm.

They started building Redbank in 1966/ might have been early 1967. Once again they had to put two entries in. They law changed in 1973 and you had to have 3 entries if you had a conveyor. One entry was a vertical shaft which they blind bored from the surface down about 100 feet, 4 feet diameter with what is called a calyx drill. This is a thing that rotates and pulls the core out. Then they put a fan

on that. Then they put the drift down, about 150 metres, about one in 6. It was driven in the stone. In some parts they actually cut the floor with a cutter bar. Some of it was sandstone. You didn't have to concrete that. Then they made their own steel sets. There were steel arches every metre down that drift, hand-made back at the workshop. They were rolled, curved, at the top. Then they went down, across, connected to the shaft, so they were set ready to go. They couldn't go down straight ahead because there was a fault on the left hand side and the seam took off and went off. They couldn't go on and had to drive a cross dip. What is important about the steel sets is that in the 1974 floods the steel sets came off and were washed down into the pit and were never found.

They were bolted to the floor and the roof and it took the lot. They couldn't build a sandbag wall quicker than the rate at which the water was rising. I was at New Hope at the time and we couldn't help anyone else as we had our own troubles. Our fan shaft had fallen in and we had to fix it on the weekend of the floods. I had my blokes persist in recovering what we had to get the pit back on line. I could see there was so much damage around that we could all be in strife. As it happened 5 pits were flooded and only one re-opened in Ipswich – Westfalen No3. It was devastating blow to the industry.

They had a three inch bore hole at Westfalen No 3 which they had used to

explore for coal. It was not sealed. It was just drilled, capped and left. Water ran that fast into the pit the air and whatever was in the pit blew up this hole and it became a crater 30 feet in diameter on the surface and 10ft deep.

My old man was at the coast with Mum and I rang him up as there were conflicting stories but I knew my pit was all right. Southern Cross and Box Flat were alright. We couldn't get into North Ipswich. We had heard reports that Aberdare No 8 had gone. We knew Westfalen was flooded. I rang him up and told him to come home as his pit was flooded. He said it can't be. It was 60 feet above normal level. The pit was designed to be 15 feet above maximum level. He couldn't get home. He had to come back through Beaudesert and Boonah.

We met at my sister's place and we went down to have a look. This was Australia Day night and he was shaking because his livelihood was gone. The supports, the belts were all gone – nothing! We went down the cross dip and there was water up to my knees. We got across that and went up the return and I can never forget looking down this roadway which was parallel to the drift and then connected back ultimately to the shaft, which had another roadway coming into it. We stood at the intersection and we could see all the crowns just march down and the timber legs going straight down and into the water. That was where the water was. Then we heard this boom –

big bubbles coming out. So Dad said get out. We didn't have a light to test it. You could hear the bubbles. We got out. I do remember Tuesday or thereabouts after the flood had come up and went down, we have a photo of a tinny moored outside the bathroom at Westfalen No 3.

They ended up putting a big pump down a hole – a 12 inch diameter hole. They pumped it out for weeks and weeks.

*Interviewer: Did they contemplate closing?*

I am sure they did. Going back there was a nightmare. They couldn't get a continuous miner. The Marietta borer miner was flooded. They got a couple of diesel shuttle cars out but then they couldn't get anything else. They had to revert back to conventional type work to get something going.

The government, Sir Llew Edwards, helped them no ends, in that regard. We have always been indebted to him for that. The government was very helpful. The problem was that there was no alternative. They had no fuel for Swanbank. The only solution was to start bringing coal from Central Queensland down to Swanbank.

It made sense to restore what you could. One of the major banks wanted to foreclose on them. They wanted them to shut the doors. They went cap in hand to the Commonwealth Bank and they made an arrangement.

All the blokes that got displaced from Westfalen, got dispersed amongst the remaining operating pits and there weren't too many. We took some at New Hope. But they all went back. There was that connection.

*Interviewer: How long did it take to get back to full production?*

1976 I would say.

There are stories that could be told about the floods. It was a disaster of epic proportions and I think it was the death knell of the coal industry in Ipswich and West Moreton and I don't think we ever recovered. The last mines closed in 1996/997 but I think the loss of that much production at that time hastened the end.

The powers that be moved away from underground mining in this area and Tarong power station and others was built. Tarong was the right decision in my opinion. It sterilised the Walloon coal for what it is good for – which is petro-chemical industry – even though it hasn't been done. The government moved right away from Ipswich. I would damn the Queensland Electricity Commission and their people at the time. New Hope was struggling to meet our quota. We had Jeebropilly. We were going to blend coal from Walloon with the coal in Ipswich and feed it to Swanbank. The beauty was that we could always get supply from the open cut. Because we blended it the power

station got a cheaper fuel and all we were told was that Walloon coal would never be used at Swanbank. Today Swanbank is only powered by Walloon coal which comes from as far west as Acland and Wilkie Creek west of Dalby. That was a terrible indictment. Politics had a part to do with it. Ipswich had become a safe Labor seat. It was short-sighted. I don't know the real reason but we tried and failed.

*Interviewer: It hastened the decline?*

It wasn't because we didn't try. There are another 500 million tons of underground coal in Ipswich, proven not indicated or inferred. It is there.

There is coal from Blackstone right through to City View in West Ipswich - right through. My house was undermined by Aberdare Extended at 1200 feet (400m). You wouldn't know it was there. I have a bore and there is plenty of water in it. The goaf hasn't cracked yet to the surface. It was drilled in 1942 or 1944.

*Interviewer: Will there ever be more mining?*

No mining is finished. One, in my opinion the skills aren't here so you can't do it. Two, it would be high risk. Three, it would very expensive. The corollary of that is that you can mine cheaper coal elsewhere but the biggest threat hanging over all power stations is climate change argument.

At Westfalen No3 at Redbank, we had to strip the shaft to 15 feet while they were working underground. The air was being drawn up the shaft and we put a piece of reo over the hole. Then we would drill our holes in the stone, charge them and between day and afternoon we would fire that. They would go down and move it away from the bottom. We would go down the next day and start again. These days that would be frowned on. I have to say that the holes were only 4 feet deep and we were using electric borers. The stone was that hard that we couldn't push them. We had to sit on the drill to make it sink in to form the shot holes. We had to change the bit three times a hole in every foot as it was that hard.

It wasn't conglomerate it was sandstone. It was hard going. You would take the bit off and send it back over to the workshop at Dinmore and they would sharpen it up and send it back again. The workshop was a big tin shed where 5 or 6 men worked.

They used to make their own roof bolts at one stage. They used one that was a slit wedge which meant they would turn a thread on one end and then the other was a slot and then they cut a wedge from a round bar.

Underground the wedge was inserted in the slot in the bar and pushed into the drilled roof hole inserted it into the roof bolt hole. A dolly was screwed on to the end of the bolt. You would drive

the dolly underneath the roof using a 7lb hammer to split the wedge in the hole and hold the bolt in position.

They made their own roof bolts because it was cheaper. Not only that but they made them to suit. They didn't put 6 foot bolts up if they only just wanted to hold the crown up. They might be three feet long. One foot hanging out and two feet in the roof, just enough to hold it until they put the legs under it. It was a temporary support.

I should tell you that in the 1974 the whole of the shaft house and the fan at Redbank was just gone. Beautiful brick building – gone! Some of it they never found. The power of water!

In early 1973, Peter Bilbrough was the Manager of New Hope and for whatever reason he decided to move on. Merv Harris who was in charge got hold of me through the miners' network. He flew Bev and I up to Ipswich showed me round the pit. They were working 3 ½ units, two shifts a day. Dog watch was a maintenance shift. 165 blokes. I don't know what our quota was. Maybe 300,000 ton a year for Swanbank. We were working the Lagoon seam which was 14 plus feet. So I took the job. I started on 2 July 1973. It was quite a change.

At that time, I was Deputy Manager at Liddell Colliery and was responsible for 5 units round the clock for 5 days per

week. We were producing coking coal for export. We had to produce coal at less than \$12 a ton in the ship that was the price in 1973. New Hope was quite a change.

At New Hope we were under quota system organised through the Queensland Coal Board. The Box Flat tragedy had already happened. It happened in July 1972. Interesting comment there was that I was working as the Under Manager in Charge at Aberdare North. I was up at 5 o'clock in the morning and to the pit for a 6 o'clock start. Over the news came the flash that 17 men had been killed in a pit in Ipswich and the mine was not named. I knew that the old man's pit was there and I knew he would tell me if it was his. I only found out at 12.30/1 o'clock when I came up from my underground inspections that it was Box Flat that had exploded.

That was a bit of a long day. I came up here and the industry at that time had lost a lot of its production capacity with the loss of Box Flat. It used to be said that Box Flat produced equal to the combined production of Southern Cross and New Hope. Those 3 mines were the original suppliers to Swanbank Power Station

Box Flat went on but it was never the same. They lost their main mines.

Once again it was a family company. I don't think that old Bob McQueen who owned and operated the mines

was ever the same again. People he lost were part of his family operation. It wasn't like the flood that you could repair it. You couldn't bring the blokes back. Did you hear the story that all they found from the 3 blokes in entrance to No 5 tunnel was enough to bury in one coffin.

They couldn't identify the parts even. If you talk to Alan Berlin, who was there, for weeks after, they would find fingers, toes in the yard between No 5 and No 7 tunnel and the power station and they would put it paper bags and take it over to the power station and have it put it in the boiler.

Hats off to those blokes who continued on. Some of them should have been down there with them. Ron Hollett will tell you that he was supposed to have been down there but someone jumped on the rake and said you've been down a couple of times. I'll go instead. He never came out.

They were coming out. They had decided it was too bad. One bloke was on the phone, ready to get on the rake and then they were in a gun barrel. It would have been worse if they were up near the top as they would have gone up right over the power station. They didn't know what hit them. It was a very sad day.

In 1975 Kianga blew up. Three years later – 11 or 12 killed. It was caused by a spontaneous combustion incident as well. Industry-wise, across the board,

we felt that. I was in Mines rescue at Booval at the time. Our station was on standby to be airlifted by the RAAF to go to Moura.

I was supposed to take over the station and the two teams were on standby. But we didn't go. It was decided it was impossible. Those blokes were never recovered.

When I came to New Hope it was clear how the industry had changed from 1968 to what I came back to as a Manager in 1973.

My first problem was that I had a NSW Manager's ticket which didn't apply in Queensland at that time. Merv Harris said that Jimbuck Lawrie (James Raleigh Lawrie) would be the registered Manager till I got my ticket endorsed.

He had a ticket so I was told I had to get my ticket but I had to be at the pit everyday to run it. It was the old story, someone signed the book. I had a degree, an undermanager's ticket and a NSW manager's ticket but it didn't count. All I had to do was go and do an oral exam in front of a Mines Inspector. I passed.

The Inspector and I never got on. He was a Welshman. Why didn't we get on? Because New Hope had to be dragged, brought forward in time. It was stuck in a time warp – the way we used to do it in the last 1960s. It had not advanced.

We had to stone dust the pit. I was told at the end of July you have to stone dust the pit or you'll be shut down. They knew this before I got there but the first thing I knew was that I had to stone dust the pit – all our transport roads and belt roads. We were a mile and a half in. We didn't worry about the returns. We managed to do it all but 3 pillars at the end of July. It was a big effort and we got it done. So I rang up Charlie McPherson who was standing in as the Mines Inspector who wasn't there. I said to Charlie we have done it all except three pillars to go and I hoped to get them done on dogwatch tonight. But I am starting the pit, if you want to come out. He was a dour old Scotsman and he knew my family from way back. He said I'm coming out. So we went down the pit and it was pretty rough walking. The belt went through some of fallen ground-but it was safe. I can never forget Charlie walking down in his good shoes. -no boots and a pair of overalls over his trousers and shirt. He said "lad you've done reasonably well. Make sure the other three pillars are done" and that was it! We weren't supposed to get it done, that was the point. I must say that I worked as hard as my men stone dusting to make sure the mine was ready for production and that we did some quite amazing things to achieve the target.

The next real story was that the pit was ticking over. We were doing about 220 – 280 shuttle cars a day about 1400 – 1500 tonnes per day. The units were running ok. We had a 60H Lee Norse

continuous miner in the fleet of 4 miner units. Late in 1973, they had to get a head hinge pin out and they couldn't get it out. So they did something illegal and they pushed the pin into the side of one the ripper motors. They did this on the Saturday afternoon and I didn't know as I was at home. On Monday morning I was told we have a problem with No. 3 section. What happened? We had to change the ripper motor. Why? Then it comes out and the Mines Electrical Inspector arrived on site and saw the motor with a big hole ripped out. I'm in strife as the Manager as the blokes had done something illegal and I had sanctioned it because I hadn't stopped it. I didn't even know it was being done. As it turned out it was common practice in the district to do what they had done. I didn't know that at the time. I was threatened with having my Manager's ticket off me and prosecution and losing my job – it was a very worrying time.

I said come on, this is a bit rugged. The Mines Inspector came out and he wanted to interview the crew on the job. He got them into the old office which was pretty rough. Old table, rough chairs and hadn't been painted for 40 years. He comes in and Hoot Gibson (the Deputy) and others were there. The Mines Inspector started to read the riot act. The Electrical Inspector was there also and I said after a while "You can't do this. They haven't got their union representatives here and I don't think it is right that

you should do this if they aren't present". Boy did I cop a tirade from the Mines Inspector.

You can't interfere with the rights of an Inspector. I'm not I just think it is not the right way to do it. Later the Electrical Inspector told me I was a pretty brave bloke and he agreed with everything I had done. After that all my troops were right behind me.

I just said I didn't think it was right that the Mines Inspector should be judge and jury. They were miners and not knowledgeable in all the things that go on. If he wants to interview them then he should do it with their advisors who could help them. Well!!!

I pushed the limit. I didn't know it had happened but I wasn't having my people abused or treated unfairly. It went right up to Chief Inspector, Bill Roach and he asked what happened? I think I know Bill. How about writing me a note? It got pretty serious because I wrote a story which went through New Hope's legal people. New Hope backed me on this which was very good. Finally the heat disappeared out of it but the Mines Inspector would never accept that I had bettered him. He had come on too strong.

Another example was that there used to be industry Christmas parties put on by the suppliers. Noyes Brothers had one at the Melbourne Hotel at South Brisbane. They supplied our equipment. This was about 1977/78.

At the same time the Mines Department had got an expert, Madame Gesunker (Don't know her name) from Poland to talk to us about spon com. It was the same day and time as Noyes Brothers party. We had to make a decision. I went to the party as did the rest of my management team and those of all the other West Moreton coal mines. Come Monday I was in all strife. The Mines Inspector with whom I had problems was now Chief Inspector. "You were at the party. You didn't bother to come and listen you have no interest in safety. You were conspicuous by your absence as all the other pits were represented. Not one representative of New Hope was present".

I got back to him. My safety office George Robinson was present and what's more he told me that there were no other representatives of Ipswich pits. You are not supposed to say that the Chief Inspector. But it was true. George used to work for Rhondda. He joined us and he was my safety man. I trusted George. It went right to the Directors of New Hope Collieries. I got the flack. He didn't like it.

Anyway I started in 1973 and we had all sorts of ventilation problems at New Hope. It was continuous miners only. It had been hand worked and had conventional units – cutters, loaders and cars – and got their first miner in 1968 I think. That was a 48 H Lee Norse. When it went down the pit it never came out until 1978. It was just

about rusted out. We couldn't get it out. We had to strip it off. We had a big haulage but it couldn't hold the weight of the machine on the grade so we had to strip the head and shovel off and bring the carcass out and the pieces separately. That was a big effort. The rails ran beside the main conveyor belt so we didn't want to pull the conveyor out. I went out late one Saturday afternoon when we got it to the surface.

We had 4 continuous miners. 3 worked double shifts. We had a half unit, a 5 man crew, which only worked day shift. We had awful ventilation problems. The reason being, that all the returns had fallen in. How high were the falls? Eric Cooper, my Assistant Manager when I started, went round one side and I went the other and I could just see his light up the top. I reckon it was 25 metres high. We were trying to ventilate over that!

We decided it was getting a bit tough and we decided to by-pass the problem areas and we put in No. 6 tunnel. It went in against the Southern Cross boundary and they gave us some land and we gave some to them. Merv Harris negotiated directly with Derek Cribb and an agreement was made off-site. It was a commercial arrangement – that was the way things used to be. Pieces of paper ultimately flowed but it was never a big deal. We ended up starting 6 tunnel. It was hard going. We got to grades of 1 in 2 ½ about 22 degrees. We had to put in a conveyor in



that. We had trouble keeping coal on the belt and it used to slide back. We had a miner parked in a return one day, a 48 H Lee Norse with the stab jack down at the back and heads down at the front and it ran away down the hill. Literally ran down the hill. We were outside having crib in the companion road and we heard a horrible noise and we rushed in and here is the miner running down the hill. It was pretty bad.

We had a bloke killed there. Ross O'May. He was a fitter. Changed a pump motor on the miner on dogwatch (in Jan 1975) and his mate got back on the miner to trial it but he kicked the back boom on the miner over and he started the motor and it just went. The boom was tilted enough to catch Ross between it and a prop and squashed him. The phone rang at home at 6.30 in the morning. I was sitting down to bacon and eggs and Eric Cooper rings me to tell me there had been an accident. How bad? I'll be there shortly so I finished my breakfast and didn't tell my wife. There was nothing I could do. We went down the pit with Reg Hardy. Our normal Mines Inspector was away and hadn't bothered to tell us he was gone. I rang up and got Bill Roach- the Chief Inspector, and told him I had a fatality. He said get hold of Reg. I knew Reg because he was in Rotary. I rang him and got him to come out.

We went down the pit and they put Ross O'May's body in a scout car. The

copper was there and he said you can see why this accident happened. "Yes it's steep", I said. "Bloody steep" he said. You could hardly walk down there. We used stone dust to cover up what happened and went on. It is a sobering moment. We tried to go and see his widow at their house but she wasn't there. We went to his funeral.

We kept pushing ahead and I ended up doing more behind the scenes sort of stuff. New Hope had the leases at Swanbank and we worked the Lagoon seam. Underneath us we knew we had the Strip of Bacon and Rob Roy which nobody had taken much notice of. We got a drill rig in and proved up the outcrop which we then open cut. This gave us more coal and we started some more little open cuts. We would drive a dozer down at 4 o'clock in the morning and get whatever we could and send it back where it came from at 7 o'clock. Then start work. That went on for quite a while.

We started pretty small. We were one of the last pits in Ipswich to open cut. Southern Cross already had some big open cuts and Box Flat was open cutting over some of their old mines over near the new waste water pump station. We were last in the field. We made a conscious decision to open cut all the old pit tops. I spent a lot of time with our Surveyor Neville Hay and the people in the survey office trying to identify where we could attain more reserves. We ended up ultimately putting a new Joy 12 HM7 which is a

hard head continuous miner which we purchased new in 1978 into No 7 tunnel. That was working the Strip of Bacon and Rob Roy seams. It was pretty dirty. It was 50% recovery to get 21 % ash but it gave us an alternative source of supply. It helped us over a big hump, which I'll mention later.

During that time I was in court about every month making lease applications. We applied for leases all over the place. We applied for lease licenses where the loop line goes now where they unload the coal. We open cut all that and put the railway line back. We applied for leases in Ipswich in Tivoli and where the old Eclipse mine was. What we were doing was continually acquiring readily mineable open cut areas. We didn't stay just at Swanbank. We were moving out. All that came to help us in 1979. We then went out to Jeebropilly and we drilled that and proved up a resource. We ultimately started to mine there.

In April 1979, April Fool's Day mind you, we had to seal New Hope No 5 due to a heating. We acquired Southern Cross on the same day. Derek Cribb died 5 days later. Here we were, me and the Superintendent, Ronnie Barker who had come up from NSW. Barker was my Vice Captain in the rescue team. Barker was made Superintendent at Southern Cross. We had to take over Southern Cross and integrate it with New Hope, re-open No. 5 tunnel, keep 250 blokes at New Hope employed and

still keep our quota up. It was a challenging time.

We never fully recovered No. 5 tunnel. It was caused by heating, I would suggest. Failure by management and I would put myself amongst that, for not sealing it at a particular time. We had never had a heating incident at New Hope until then so we got caught. We spent a lot of money. They ultimately recovered 2 of the 4 miners. We went back down through No. 6 tunnel and continued mining there for 4 or 5 years. But it was never the same. It was always something that might have been.

We ended up with a number of high walls near the gas fired power station, in amongst all that. We knew there was coal there. Some of it was pretty hard to get. We had a Stevenson's Caterpillar D10 bulldozer, one of the first in the district. It couldn't crack the stone. It used to just mark it. It was terrible. I think we screwed him to the wall a bit in terms of making him work hard to get the coal. We had the high walls so we flogged equipment from wherever we could in the company. Southern Cross had a spare miner. We put 2 units into No 7 tunnel. A miner went into No. 21. That was a disaster but it got some coal and kept blokes employed. Then we had a go at getting back into No 23 which is where we open cut the loop and it was the old Eureka pit.

Roy Schiefelbein, the Under Manager, was inspecting No. 21 with Pat Farrell,

the Mines Inspector. They went in a scout car. Roy asked the driver to stop as he was going to No. 23. Pat hit the roof. What is No. 23? "We have another pit over here". In strife again! We started the pit without the authority of the Coal Board. We hadn't filled in the necessary forms. You are done!!! Pat says "I'm bringing the Coal Board up here tomorrow and we're going through you like a ton of bricks!"

Merv Noume member of the Coal Board came up and asked what I'd been doing. I've lost my main pit, I've got 250 blokes, I'm trying to mine coal to keep it up to the power station. Now I'm getting crucified because I haven't filled in the paperwork to tell you I've done it. We sat done with Pat and it disappeared. We broke the law. In hindsight we should have known better. I don't think we endangered anybody. I took the view that the paperwork would catch up anyway. If I can be accused of anything it is that I go ahead and do things and let the rest of the world come along. If I hadn't done it there would have been 100+ men unemployed so what was the choice.

As it turned out No 23 was a fizzer. We worked the western leases – the Bluff and The Lagoon – and that is where New Hope underground operations finished in the Lagoon seam. That was 1979. A disastrous year in many ways but we continued to meet our quota.

*Interviewer: What happened if you didn't meet your quota?*

We lost it. We were fearful of losing our quota but we also needed the cash flow to stay afloat. We didn't have much choice but to keep pushing. People would say we did the wrong thing. We borrowed coal from Southern Cross and sold it as New Hope and it was different prices. We paid Southern Cross back, not with the same coal. We were in survival mode. I make no bones about it. There was nothing in it for us. It was about survival of the company and the blokes that worked there.

In 1980 we moved further forward and we acquired Rylances which included a washery at North Ipswich. Across the road from the BP at Tivoli was the Rylance mine. It was a mine flooded in the 1974 floods. There was a prep plant there and we got the prep plant as well as the open cut. We bought it. I was in charge of 5 underground mines, 4 open cuts and three prep plants. Plus an exploration programme that went from the border to Kingaroy. Then we got interest in Denham Coal as well. I had 450 people working for me and I was the only mining engineer.

It was a challenge. In 1981/2 we bought the sugar loader from Lucinda in North Queensland. It was made redundant when they built the new port at Mourilyan. They extended the jetty and put a new loader out there. We were offered the loader. We went up

and Merv Harris bought it. We stored it on the surface at No. 7 tunnel. I think a lot of people around here thought we were mad. We probably were except – that loader is now the coal loader at the Port of Brisbane. New Hope owned 50% of Queensland Bulk Handling (QBH) in conjunction with TNT. They own 100% now. A bit of foresight along the way.

It was a lot of hard work. Funny times. We were drilling for coal around the pit top at New Hope. The main bathroom and entry was 400 yards down the road from the old office and bathroom. The old bathroom was a fibro shed with showers etc. If you were new you got a hammer and a nail and that is where you hung your gear. We ended up building a new bathroom at No. 5 tunnel in 1976/7. I got into strife there too. We went to 8 hour 25 minute shifts. They got an hour and 25 minutes overtime to transport the men to and from the bathroom to their work places underground. Prior to that it had been 9 and a half hour shifts. I said you don't need that now. The bathroom is right beside the rake you can get straight in and off. I said on the Friday that on Monday you are all going to the new bathroom. Pick your numbers for your lockers and lights. You'll start at 7 o'clock and finish at 3.25. Wow was I in strife. You can't unilaterally change the start and finish time at a pit. "You can't do it". "I have". "You'll have to stop it". "I'm not". The blokes didn't mind. They worked the same hours underground but they didn't get paid as

much. Once you got to an hour and a half overtime you got double time. They were still pretty well paid and they could duck out earlier if they wanted to and many of them did. That is the story of the bathroom;

There's another story about the bathroom. We had a scheme of Coal Owners cadets where young blokes who had matriculated could work for the Coal Owners for a period of 12 months at each individual mine over a period of 3 years. That would give them their underground experience time of 3 years to be able to sit for a deputy or Under Manager's ticket. We had this bloke start at the pit in 1976. He had worked somewhere else – maybe Box Flat. He came in at the end of his first shift and told me exactly what was wrong with the pit in no uncertain terms. This isn't right, that isn't right. I let it go on. My office as the manager had walls but they didn't go to the roof. Opposite was Col Small, my chief clerk. Col was listening to every word that was said. I took it. I didn't react but I fixed him because he spent a fair bit of time shovelling on the belts after that cleaning up. I don't know that he ever learned that there is a way to approach superiors and it is not to hit them over the head.

The same bloke was very scared of snakes. The story goes that one night he was in the shower fully soaped up and another bloke, who shall remain nameless, got a carpet snake and

wriggled it in front of his nose. He went up the wall!!!

Another story was reported in the press. To get into No. 6 tunnel we had rails into it – heavy rails 102 per yard rail. We had a conveyor belt in another tunnel. You could probably get into the tunnel with the rope into it sliding on the rails. At the entry to that a creek flowed through. We had excavated all that and made sure it continued to drain. We put the rails across the gap which was about 1 metre wide. The steel rails went across and they were firmly anchored on either side. One Monday morning on pre-shift, Scotty McMurdo (pre-shift Deputy) went down the pit, down No.6 tunnel. All of a sudden he sees the tail lights of a car and a white apparition beside it. A bloke who we subsequently discovered had a brain tumour, had driven from Paradise Point on the Gold Coast out to the pit, bounced his car across the trench and went down the track until he reached the point where he didn't know where he was. Then he told Scotty that he was following another car! All hell breaks loose as they race around trying to find a 2<sup>nd</sup> car. There wasn't one down there. How he got there we don't know. He died 3 weeks later. There are some famous photos pulling the car out on a flat top. Can you imagine seeing the white apparition and a car underground at about 5am?

We had our own drilling rig. We used Peter Mitchell from Mitchell Drilling as well and we still used him quite a lot

but we also as a matter of principle had our own rig and our own drillers. We were looking for extensions to the Bluff Seam on the pit top of New Hope. It probably went under the old office. Col Small is sitting at his desk looking out the window. He knew we were drilling in the immediate area around the old bathroom. The surveyors, Neville Hay and Denis Barrett decided to pull a stunt. Neville sets up the tripod and Denis has the staff and Neville is saying further, back further until Dennis backs into the office and says there and puts a big cross on the floor. The cross marked where we intended to drill for coal

We also worked an open cut beside there. Wilbur Frankish was the shot firer. We had to shoot the stone over the Bluff because it was too hard to rip. Wilbur had to fire a set of shots up near the office. He and Jack Flynn decided to pull a stunt. The management and clerks used to all have our lunch around the table – about 10 of us. Wilbur rushes up and yells fire, fire and then lets it go. Jack who was part of the stunt threw stones on the roof. Here we were sitting there having lunch and there were stones hitting on the roof!

It was part of the process to liven things up. We had plenty of fun. Some of it was pretty serious but we had to lighten it up a bit. We had some interesting times. New Hope also rented four shops in Raceview Street in about 1978. I had my office there. We

moved out of there in 1981/2 and went to Lowry Street, North Ipswich. That was the old SEA office/workshop and we bought that. It became our main office. They are now moving to Springfield.

It was a big effort from my perspective to get around the pits. I always made an effort to do so every day if I could and talk to people.

That was the way you did it. There were no mobile phones. We ended up having the best year (about 1980/1) when we mined almost two million tons of raw coal and sold 800000 tons. Some of our sales were exports as we could see decreases in the supply to Swanbank coming.

It might not seem a lot these days of mines producing 10 million tons but in those days it was. Some of our coal was only 30% recovery in some of our open cuts. But we did it!

I always made it a rule that I would never be at the pit at 7am when I was Manager. I got there at 7.10. Why? So the miners could make their minds up and go to work. The union committee could stay on the surface and we could have a chat about any problems. But if the blokes stayed on the surface they might as well have gone home because I would have blown the whistle. That was the way I ran it. Others ran it differently. Once the crews go down the hole, they don't come back-" I've come this far, I'll work."

We had some awful rows with some people. Some justified, some not. Generally the New Hope blokes were fairly reasonable, We had fights. Merv Harris, the boss, gave in a bit too often in my opinion but he had the right to over-rule me. The worst problem we had was with Southern Cross in my time. When we took over Southern Cross it worked 8.5 hour shifts, 9 days a fortnight and on the second Friday they worked a 6.5 hour shift. All their operations did that. It had to change. We wanted it standardised across the group that everyone did the same thing. It meant the pit was open for less than 6 hours work per shift on every second Friday. We didn't think it was good business. Also it presented problems when we wanted to transfer people between the mines.

We spoke to the Southern Cross blokes about it. Typical at the time the issue that triggered the strike was some innocuous safety issue but the real issue was the change in working hours. They didn't like it at all. I think I made the comment that if they kept going on with the old ways the place would close and they would be out of work. They went out on strike for 3 weeks and tried to get the New Hope blokes out too but they were not interested as there was nothing in it for them. Somebody, one of the blokes, pulled a knife on somebody else at the pub arguing over the strike. That was not done (it was not the way disputes were resolved in Ipswich mines) and they went back to work and the strike

terminated. However, we did not get the changes we wanted. The irony of this story is that in 1985 Southern Cross lost its contract with Swanbank and so closed. I am sure that the early Friday contributed- but I was no longer at New Hope and was working on the Gordonstone project.