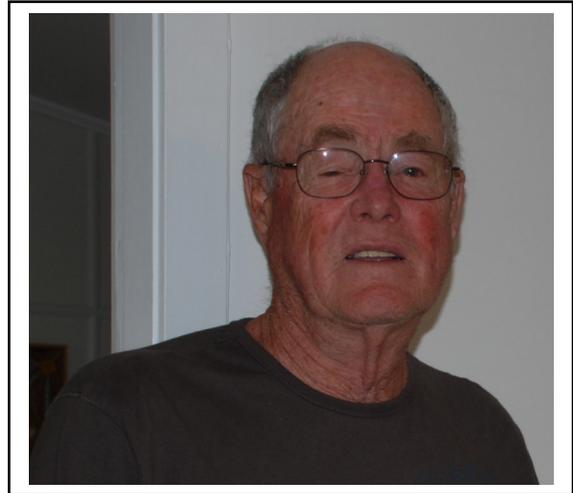


John Yeowart

Date of Interview: 2008

Interviewer: Margaret Cook

Assisted by Bevan Kathage



Let's start with the Coke ovens. It was a limited partnership with the people involved with Haighmoor. There were about 6 or 8 of them. They front loaded them through the little arch then sealed it up. That was a fair job. It took about 6 or 8 tons of coal if I remember rightly. Generally screened – it was fine coal. The better part of the coal that came out of Tivoli – it was not one of the lowest ash coals around. They would close it down and it would cook for a few days or a week. They would open it and drag it out with a big long rake or fork, on long handles. They would drag the stuff out and hose it down.

I got the job, well it fell to me as I was Secretary of Tivoli at the time and I went off to try and sell the coke as we weren't getting enough sales at the time. I am trying to remember who it was in Maryborough, a fairly big foundry that used to buy it. Probably with the name of Maryborough in the company's name. I tried to sell it to William Olds. They are still going. They were a small foundry and they were very well known for their engine. They designed and made an engine. They still sell them. The coke ovens are a side issue. I would

love to see the blokes in the mines today try and fill them. It would take a week as they wouldn't know how to shovel coal like that. The two guys that did it were good.

Interviewer: When did you start with the Ipswich mines?

I was working at the coke ovens plant at Australian Iron and Steel at Port Kembla. I was a metallurgical cadet but they gave me nothing to do. I just had to be there on time in the morning and get into my clobber and go round and look and learn it all with no-one telling me anything. I just had to do it. It became so boring it was the only time in my life that I became a clock watcher. I would think two hours had gone by and it was five minutes. So I learnt how to drive the larry cars to load the coke ovens. The blokes wanted to sneak off early so I drove the cars which helped me fill in the day.

One job I had was to go round all the underground mines on the south coast with somebody from ACIRL. It was ACAR before that.

They used to do dust sampling as there was a big thing about pneumoconiosis (the lung disease) at the time.

I got to know a lot of people in the industry down there. I had always wanted to work in a coal mine ever since I was about 16, when the Tivoli company was purchased and Haighmoor was being pumped out. My first visit underground I was taken down with my Dad and I came home covered in mud and slime and from that day I wanted to be a coal miner.

Interviewer: Was your Dad a coal miner?

No he was an accountant.

I was 16 – shortly after WWII. I am not sure of the actual date, around 1947 as I was born in 1931.

My father was one of the original 6 that purchased the old mine that was full of water, a little old hand worked mine that had operated at the turn of the century.

My father was a funny man. He was also a Director of New Ebbw Vale mine at Woodend at which there was an explosion and a number of men were killed. (*Probably in 1945*).

I think that was the reason he wouldn't countenance me working in the coal mines. At that stage of our lives if he said jump, we all said how high. There was no arguing. He and his brother, who was one of the original Directors of New Hope, decided to send me to Wollongong to be a Metallurgical engineer so off I went. This was circa 1951.

My father was William John Yeowart and my uncle was Robert Alfred (Bob) Yeowart. Dad was a First World War digger and Bob was a Second World War pilot. Anyway

they sent me to Wollongong and dumped me in a boarding house.

While I was at Port Kembla I got to know the men in NSW. I started to enquire about a job in the mines. Dad won't let me work in the mines in Ipswich so I'll go and work in the mines in NSW. There was a Joint Coal Board in Wollongong. There was a Joint Coal Board man in there that I went to see and I told him the story. "I want to work in the mines, can you get me a job and I will do anything" I told him.

I left the coke ovens and I took a job catching steel on a hot mill in the Commonwealth Rolling Mills. That was fine and I was making a bit more money than the 6 quid a week I made at the coke ovens. It was dead end labouring job. Gordon Sellers (Joint Coal Board) called me in one day and said I have a job for you as an assistant to the surveyor at Huntly Colliery. I said "that will suit me fine". I got pencil and paper and I wrote to my father "Dear father, I have a job finally in the coal mines." I told him what I'd got. I can imagine the turmoil he went through because he didn't want it. He had seen his own men killed and it terribly upset him. He wrote back to me "ok if you are that determined you'd better come back and do it up here".

I wanted to be a Mine Manager and I was going to go to school. I had been to the University and I was unsuited to it. So I had only done one year. I came back up. I jumped on my motorcycle with all my worldly possessions in the middle of winter. I got up here and said "where am I going to start?" I thought he might have organised something for me. "I don't know. Go find yourself something". So I said right-o. I got on my cycle and I went round all the mines. I went to Box Flat and I remember that Otto Puce was the Manager.

Bevan Kathage: Otto Pruce later became a member of the Coal Board.

We actually became good, firm friends when we were both on the Coal Board but at this stage he rather insulted me. I was in not a good frame of mind and I was going to climb off my bike and have it out with him. But I thought it was silly so off I went. I think my Dad was a phone call ahead of me at every mine I went to because Otto wasn't a bad bloke as it turned out. Dad had been ringing up saying don't give him a job. But I made my way to Rosewood and there was a man who lived in Ipswich who was Superintendent of the group of Collieries that were in a loose group of common Directors and owners. I will loosely call him one of Dad's superintendents but he didn't work for him directly. His name was Claude Richardson. I told him my story and that I'd like a job. "Good" he said "you can start as the clipper". This is the guy who clips the wagons together to be taken up the tunnel to be emptied. You have to be a member of the union. "When can I start?" "As soon as you are a member of the Union". Zoom. I raced back to Ipswich to the Union office and applied and paid my money and got my certification. I think Bluey Miller was the person then.

I went home that night to my parents' house where I was staying at the time. "How did you get on son?" says Dad. "I got a job" His eyes opened! "Who with?" A fellow called Claude Richardson. I thought he was going to choke on it. I am sure he rang Richardson but he said "We'll soon stop that". I said "Why" He said "I don't want to work in the coal mines". "Well" I said "You'll be on strike tomorrow". "Why?" "I am now a paid up member of the Union. I have a job at Neith Colliery and if for some reason Claude decides to sack me we'll have strike". This

was pie in the sky, I just said this because I had a little bit of experience at a union when I was a catcher on the hot mill – the Federated Iron Workers Union. Dear Comrade, they wrote me a letter. I still have that letter somewhere. He bowed down and away I went. I started working at Neath.

I was just what they said - a clipper or a rope runner or whatever in those little mines. They always wanted more coal out of the mine because it was only a little mine and not a lot of men there. You'll remember Augie Beitzel – Tom's father. He worked for Merv Johnston.

They were all hand worked mines in those days. They had tiny little shots at mechanisation like scraper chains and things like that. I got put with Augie Beitzel who was the faceman and I was to be his wheeler, they called it. You did what he said. He had to have two years experience with an experienced miner to become a faceman. After about 3 or 4 months we weren't getting anywhere. The mine wasn't conducive to pairs and the Manager was a weak sort of a character, named Woods. He came round one day on his inspection and said we have to get more coal. "I know how to get more coal. Give me a face on my own. This is no good, there isn't enough room for 2 of us." "You have to wait two years." "Just do it." Blow me down he did and I got a face on my own.

I'll never forget my first day. I bought my box of jelly in the morning and I blew hell out of everything. I filled about three wagons in the whole day. I blew most of it up the shaft I think. Some of the lads were waiting when I came up. I tried to come up late after they'd gone. They teased. I made some very good friends there. Two miners in particular and I followed them for years – Norman Hess and Bill Locke. They came

and worked for me when I became a Mine Manager. I don't know where they finished up. When I retired some of the mine people had a bit of a dinner one night about half a dozen of us and they asked if I had a couple of friends to come along. I got these blokes to come along and it was wonderful to see them again.

After a period of time at Neath I was sent by this group (Viv Walker was the main Superintendent of the group) to New Hope. In those days New Hope had a top tunnel and a bottom tunnel. (*No 4 and no. 5*)

I was the road layer in the top tunnel and I also helped build the gantry and all that sort of thing. At some later stage when I got my Deputy certificate I was Deputy in the top tunnel. Len Trevorrow was the Deputy in the bottom tunnel. What happened was that it was single shift working so the Deputy had to be there two hours before to inspect the mine. Len Trevorrow and I took it in turns week about and do both tunnels. One bloke didn't have to get up at 2 o'clock in the morning. That was me as I lived at Ashgrove. There was an electrician at New Hope – Bill Morris. I couldn't start the fan and I rang the electrician and he came out and we tested everything – switches, the whole lot and we couldn't get any power. The bottom tunnel was a big long track down before you got to the mouth of the tunnel. There were aerial wires running down. I don't know what prompted us to do it but we looked up at the aerial wires and they weren't there. They were copper wire and on every post there was a little bit of copper sticking out on each side. The boys had come and cut it all to sell the copper. They used to pinch continuous miner cables till we got them in a compound and even then some of them used to go off. I don't know how.

I left New Hope after a while. I think I got married at that stage of my life – I was 24 or 25. I had my ticket as a first class Mine Manager. One of the Directors at New Hope was a fellow called Dick Beaumont. He was also a Director of Moreton Extended Colliery on the other side of town and he came to me one day and offered me a job as a Mine Manager.

I went there for a while which is when I got Hess and Locke to work for me. Two other close friends also came to work for me – David Watson, who later became a Manager, and Morrie Tait, who I had worked with at New Hope sinking shafts and things like that. Morrie was one of the rescue brigade lost at Box Flat which was a terrible shock to me as he was a really close friend.

I didn't stay at Moreton Extended for more than a couple of years perhaps as there was a clash of personalities. There was a not so nice Director who drove the winding engine and gave everybody hell.

Bevan Kathage: It is an indication of the family type business where the winding driver was the Director.

They would pull terrible stunts on the men and they made me do it as I was Manager. For example the men would have a strike and on pay day I was forced to give them a blank envelope. Things like that. There was a solicitor - Fowler and something. One of their people was the Secretary of the company. As a Mine Manager pulling those stunts on men who you are trying to get to follow you doesn't work.

My father asked me to come into his office and see if I could pick up accountancy. But I didn't stay there long. I didn't like working for my Dad. There was a little mining

company working out of Maryborough called Queensland Collieries and they had been big time at one stage, Dame Annabel Rankin's father, Colonel Rankin, was the man on the spot. We were given this beautiful big house to live in as I became the Manager.

It is now an historical tourist attraction. We went there and tried to get somewhere with this little mine. It was low seam and very difficult. In the process Jack Case, the engineer, and I built a drilling rig to drill for coal. It was very successful. We claimed a closed area. I don't know why it was originally closed but I went to the Coal Board and got them to free the area. We went out a drilled and we found a beautiful seam of coal. You could eat it, It was shiny black beautiful coal. There wasn't a stone in it. It was five foot thick and pure. It later became Begowan No 10. I went to see the bank manager first. I worked out if I had £10,000 I could sink a tunnel and I would be into this coal. It wasn't very deep. The bank manager said I will give you the money as I would be like to be clear of this company as we were struggling along.

I contacted the Directors in London. He wrote to them also. The Chairman of the Coal Board, Alf Crowley, an Englishman, was in London and he called on these people to convince them to give me the £10,000. They didn't have to give it, they just had to guarantee it and the bank was going to provide it. They wouldn't see him and refused the money.

Tape 2

The Secretary said "Do you have an appointment?" "No I don't"; but I am only in London for a few days". "I'm very sorry the Directors can't see you if you don't have an appointment". Their office was in

Buckingham Place Road. They had to be 100 not out, all of them. Anyway then I left there after two or three years. I enjoyed it.

I went to the Darling Downs to Acland. There was a small underground mine that had a seam of about 7 or 8 feet which came down smaller in one section of the mine but turned out to be very good. I got hold of a long wall coal cutter. One you dragged along on a rope and cut your way through; PF chain conveyor and a number of chock releases and we set up a long wall. It was just a good height as I could stand with my feet apart and my back was against the roof so wedged in there you could turn coal onto the conveyor so fast it wasn't funny. We almost couldn't sell the coal we were getting off it. The Directors were very pleased with this idea and they wanted to see it. At this point we hadn't had our first fall. We were opening up an area behind us taking out all the chock releases.

I'll go back a little bit there. I wanted an extra experienced miner and there was a fellow on the Union's books named Dawson. Dawson had a very bad reputation as a trouble maker and he came and wanted the job and I said no way. Anyway the Union stepped in and told me who I could employ. The Union had a list of seniority.

I had to have somebody so I agreed to interview Mr Dawson again. I told him the situation and laid it out on the table and told him he had a reputation as long as your arm. The Union tells me I can't have anyone but you, I need somebody, so I'll give you a go but I have to tell you the first sign of trouble I'll fire you. I don't care what happens. He said "you give me a go and I won't give you any trouble" and he didn't. He and my Deputy were the only two men who would go back and pull the cogs which is not a good job to do as you are waiting for the

thing to fall. Not like today when you have all these hydraulics and roof supports. Anyway the Directors came down the mine. We were half way along the face and I said just stay close to the face and follow me and do what I do. So we were half way along and crack, creak, groan crunch and then bang down it came. I was crouched to the face. You couldn't see anything but dust and they were hanging on to me! Len Board was hanging on to me and the next bloke was hanging on to him. The dust settled and you could see these eyes. Oh boy!

Then my father died and I took the opportunity of taking the job at Tivoli as Secretary. At this stage I hadn't done my accountancy and I didn't know the debit side from the credit side really. So I went to University at night to get the accounting qualifications which I did but I took a bit of an interest in the mine itself as it was a jump from being underground to the office. I loved being underground. I still do. I take the opportunity if I can go underground. At Coober Pedy recently people were getting worried and I thought it was wonderful.

I came down to Tivoli. It was still going. It was a good mine.

They had Haighmoor Extended mine. I don't know why it was extended as they only had the one mine. Haighmoor was a mine in Scotland somewhere so maybe that was the reason. All these names came from British mines like Neath Collieries where I started. I later got friendly with the NSW people through the rescue brigade, when I was on the committee and I found out there is a big Neath Colliery in NSW, near Cessnock.

When we were in Britain we went to Neath and there were connections with Ipswich everywhere. While at Tivoli it was just routine in those days. You went through the

mining routines. I was later appointed as an Associate Director and we were way ahead of present companies. We had women on the board. If a Director died the company's policy was to appoint his widow so they would have a bit of an income. It wasn't big but it was there. My mother had been appointed as a Director and she didn't know how to spell mine. I was an Associate Director and I used to help do her job. There were 3 or 4 of them and they wanted to talk about sewing and knitting and cakes.

Buller Kerr was appointed Chair representing one of the ladies. She never came. Buller and I got to be very good friends. He was a great bloke to work for.

Bevan Kathage: Buller was a solicitor in Childers who used to come down on the mail train. He was a Director ultimately of New Hope as well.

He would get on the train at Howard. He had a big Mark 9 Jaguar car and he would be roaring down from Childers and if he was late the conductor would hold the train. "Oh Mr Kerr thank goodness you made it." He got to the end of one trip and said to the conductor "my glasses case fell out of my pocket between the carriages when we stopped between Torbanlea and Howard". "Don't worry about it Mr Kerr" and the next time they went through they all got out and found his case. Next time he got on the train he got his case. We got to be very good friends. He showed a lot of confidence in my judgement and I showed the same respect for him.

It was sometime during that period, in the late 1960s, that because I was a Director of Tivoli and my father had been a member of the Coal Owners Association as one of the representatives of the area, I became a member. The Coal Owners Association used

to meet and make all sort of decisions about things. Principally it was an industrial advocacy job. I became a member. There was a chairman called Ken Patterson. We were in a rather difficult fight with the unions at that stage and Bob McQueen got hold of me at a meeting and said he was going to nominate me as chair. I said come off it. Anyway he did! Ken Patterson and I were told to leave the room and they came back and said I was it. I was shocked. Ken and I were fairly good friends and I felt bad about that. He represented a small company on the Downs. I can't remember the name of it. So that started a new phase of my time in the industry.

In fact it was shortly after that I was appointed, representing coal owners on the mines rescue committee. They had the Chief Inspector, somebody from the Workers Comp Board, trainees representatives and Mine Managers rep.

I stayed in that position for quite some time. As well as being Chair of the coal owners there was an arrangement that every two years the Australian Coal Association (ACA) would appoint the Chair of Queensland or NSW as the chairman of ACA so I got another job. None of these jobs paid any money.

There was lots of travel as there were terrible troubles going on with the unions and I would find myself in Sydney on a Saturday morning. The things that used to be said around the table was unreal. They would go on for hour upon hour those meetings. Anyway we all stumbled through it.

Interviewer: How often were these meetings?

It was getting to weekly stage for a short stage but every month at least.

Bevan Kathage: The QCOA would meet once a month and the ACA would meet once a month. If there was trouble in between you had to go and the Chair had to be present.

The Secretary of the QCOA, the Queensland one, was a bloke called Bill Lawrie. He was appointed Executive Director but he was the chief industrial advocate. They had 2 or 3 of them. I used to wind up in Sydney with him in front of the coal industry tribunal on a fairly regular basis.

It was chaired by Gallagher and then David Duncan. They don't have this thing anymore. The coal industry tribunal doesn't exist. It got turfed out.

The tribunal heard industrial disputes. I can remember an industrial dispute at Box Flat. The owners of Box Flat were the McQueens and Bob McQueen was the boss. He was the guy who drafted me into the coal association. The men went on strike and they had been on strike for a few days. Before you could reopen the mine the Deputies had to be released and came in and check over the mine. The Deputies came in one day and said "we are ready to go back to work can we see Mr McQueen?" He wasn't the Manager but he was the owner.

"You can't see him. He has gone fishing."
"How long will he be?" A week, 10 days. We want to go back to work. Well you'd better find him. He is somewhere on the Barrier Reef in his boat. That is where he was. He would regularly do this as would some of the old managers. I can remember one of the old managers at Aberdare, when the men said they were going on strike he hooked his boat on the back of the car and

drove away. "What is he doing?" They asked the Deputy. He told him "He is going fishing." They were wild.

Bevan Kathage: I remember doing that. We had a problem on a Friday afternoon and we had already fixed a group to go fishing. So I said fix yourself up. It was in no. 6 tunnel. You sort it out. I don't have to do everything.

Then came the flood. For Tivoli it was disastrous. For Tivoli it was more disastrous for some as we did not have disaster insurance. We had all sort of insurance. The Coal Board controlled our price to the penny and they would not give us any extra for extra things so we lost the mine and we lost the whole lot. I can remember we lived at Moggill on a V between the Brisbane River and Moggill Creek and the water was coming up. We had acreage sloping down to the creek. The water was coming up and up. To get to the main road we had to go through a gully. Strangely enough we still had telephone working and power. The SES rang us up and said you are going under tonight you had better get out. We couldn't drive out as the gully had water in it. A lady who lived on the other side of the gully who we didn't know rang us up – a few of us on this little island. She said "we are stuck in Kenmore but the key to our house is under the mat so if you need it. Let yourself in and do what you like". A few families did. We had to decide what to take. It was Jill and I and the kids were only young and whatever we could carry was all we could save. We took a suitcase and photos and Jill said you had better take a proper suit. Why? We'd been phoned up and told that the mine had gone. When the water goes down you are going to have to get a new job. This is what we were faced with.

There was a shaft at Tivoli not far away from the main air shaft. It was 6 by 4. It was for the cables and everything else. When the bubble let go it was reworked to a 25 foot diameter. It lifted the whole lot up. The farmer next door who didn't like us rang up my mate Lex Cole laughing and said "your mine has just blown up". He thought it was wonderful.

So at first we washed coal for Rylance Mine and then we joined Normanton mine in Rosewood that was closing because they had an underground fire. They had the coal and we had the washing plant and river loading facilities which were all still intact. So we joined and I started a new company called Consolidated Collieries which was just a name I used for a new company. It comprised 3 of our Directors and 3 of theirs. So we open cut their mine, the old workings and the untouched reserves. We open cut it and carted it to North Ipswich to our washing plant. They had a little washing plant at Rosewood which helped a bit. We sent all the coal down the river to Bulimba power station. That worked very well. It was some of our most profitable years. Adversity has a good side sometimes. Until one day we had a whole pile of coal in the bottom paddock and we got a phone call that Bulimba was shutting down and they didn't want the coal anymore. They agreed to buy up all our stock.

We had just about finished that and I didn't know what to do next. I had an offer to go to German Creek where they wanted me to sort some industrial problems and be Manager of the mine. Merv Harris from New Hope came to my office one day and said we would like to buy all your facilities. We had a lot of land at North Ipswich, pretty well all undermined but a fair area. A washing plant, not a big one and an old one, and a good river loading facility in particular. We

agreed on a price. They wanted me and my mate to work for New Hope too. Bevan was the General Manager at New Hope. Originally they said they wanted to me to be Secretary. Buller and I went over there and there was Frank Robinson telling me he was interviewing blokes to be Secretary and I thought this was what he wanted me to do. I had said I didn't really want to go back to the mining side of it. I was offered Deputy General Manager under Bevan. We had some funny days. I think Bevan was given a lousy deal out of that.

Bevan Kathage: It is history.

Being quite candid I don't think we hit it off 100% but as time went by it settled down and then Bevan for various reasons suggested I should be the Superintendent of the mines. Even though I had said I didn't want to do that he did me a great favour as I really enjoyed that. I got back into again and I started to get the feel of it all again. I had a really good relationship going then.

Tape 3

Until one day, Graham Robertson, son of Frank Robertson. . . I am jumping the gun. Frequently we would go to a sports club on the way home for a beer with Merv Harris at Brothers. Merv was telling me that they had required a 15000 ton export shipment. I am supposed to be the mine superintendent and know about all this stuff. Where can you stack it? There was a place on the rail loop. I asked who was organising it – the loading and transporting and stock piling. “Well nobody, but come to think of it – you are!” This is the way things happened. I said that was fine as long as I know.

Bevan Kathage: New Hope had never done it before.

There had been no coal exported.

It was about 1988. I can name the ship. It was the *Floret*. It took on 15000 tons. I will never forget it because with no experience or knowledge of export I was given the job of getting this shipment away. And we did. We got it away beautifully. I have photos of a party in the Captain's cabin.

Bevan Kathage: It was all road haulage from Swanbank to the port. I think it went out through the grain loading facility.

It went out on the grain loading facility on the north bank of the river (Pinkenba). We had to clean out the big grain shed as they didn't want grain in it. It had holes in the floor onto the conveyor and onto the ship. As we were getting near the end I would have to tick tack with Richie Beaumont and ask for another 8 trucks, another 3. We had to get the last ounce on. We had to do it in a certain amount of time because the grain people wanted their bin back. We had to clean it out when we had finished. Cleaning out coal dust to put the grain in – well you can imagine!

Interviewer: This wasn't being done by anyone else?

No it wasn't. Swanbank power station, probably the Coal Board, got in touch with us and said you have 6 months and then your order to Swanbank is finished. Graham Robertson got hold of me. I had been sent back into the office to get leases through.

Bevan Kathage: We had a whole host of lease applications with authorities to prospect from here to Kingaroy continuously.

My job was to get these leases. Go to court and to talk to objectors and talk them out of

their objections. I did a great job on Spring Mountain. I got the objectors in. I had been sent to Japan to have a look at a tube system – an underground capsule in a pipe. (*Compressed air*)

It was operating in a steel works. I did a lot of work on that thing and I got these objectors in from Spring Mountain and they left withdrawing their objections. I couldn't see it happening as the cost would have been outrageous. Graham Robertson told me I want you to take over marketing and you have six months so we can live on export coal. So I did take over marketing and I had never marketed anything but I had a fair knowledge of coal and its qualities and what it was used for, enough anyway. I got to know some of the Japanese people pretty well because as Chair of ACA (Australian Coal Association) I had to lead a mission. Every couple of years we would hold a meeting either here or in Japan. The Australia Japan Coal Conference. I got to know a few people. When I went to New Hope Frank Robertson told me he wanted me to keep the Chairmanship for the contacts. It opened a few doors for us. It did in Japan. It opened some incredible doors. I would go up to try and sell a load of coal and all they wanted to talk about was things to do with the Australian Coal Association and at the end they would say by the way here is the order.

It carried a lot of quodos in Japan. You would go to power companies and the operations manager or whoever was in charge of the power plant would say half way through the meeting "by the way Mr Yeowart, our Chairman wants to meet you". I would talk to the Chairman. Some of them were really nice men. They just wanted to talk about Australia. They didn't talk business. That was for the minions outside. It certainly helped us. Not always.

This is quite funny really. I was Chairman of the Coal Association. Bruce Thompson was the Chief Executive of the one of the biggest companies in NSW, Coal Allied Industries and he was my Deputy. It was a bit incongruous in a way.

Bevan Kathage: But that was one of the strengths of the Coal Association in a way that John came from a small company but represented all the bigger companies. Bigger companies were never seen to be in charge. It was better to have someone from a much smaller company.

They couldn't trust each other. Truly. Somebody from an old established area like Ipswich was ideal. It was quite amazing. I have no idea why they tolerated me for so long. I was Chair of the QCA for 17 years.

The rescue brigade was about the same. ACA was about 15 years. It just kept going on and on. Eventually Roger Marshall approached me one day and said don't you think it is about time you gave it up? He wanted a go and I didn't mind giving it up. This was the Queensland Coal Owners. I said "you have to realise I am half way through the stint of two years at the Australian Coal Association". He said wait till the end of that and resign. But he never got it. I think Ian Roberts, the ex-Mines Inspector got it. I'm not sure.

I gave that away and I continued on until I went on a marketing trip and I was to be away 3 or 4 weeks. I was in Jakarta on a Sunday night in the Hotel Indonesia and I had 2 heart attacks. I got home. I said to myself that night I am going home and if I don't make it Mum and the kids will know I was trying to get here. Our Indonesian connections, they weren't customers yet, if any of them had heart problems they came to Australia and I would pick them up at the

airport and take them to the hospital. They didn't trust their own hospitals and I wasn't going into an Indonesian Hospital. I came home and had 4 bypass operations. I went back to work. I went to Japan to a conference about 10 weeks later against the doctor's orders. I said I am not really interested. I and going and what should I do and he told me. After that I was back at work 18 months all up and it was during that time that Bevan went to Gordonstone. John Braddock became the General Manager of the mine and I stayed on for a while. I gave up at the end of 1987 and Brian McClellan took over after I left.

Strangely enough New Hope offered to pay me half salary for 2 years to keep me out of the market place. They all do it. In case I went to work for somebody else. I accepted an approach from a Japanese company to consult for them. Kyoto Oil Company. Quite a bit later it merged with Nippon Mining and were later Jomo. I consulted for them.

Bevan Kathage: remember when we sent a load to Japan and they came back us and asked about the rocks in the coal. So we had you on a plane that night.

After we did the load through the grain loader New Hope and TNT had built an export loading facility at the mouth of the river. Queensland Bulk Handling (QBH).

Bevan Kathage: It still exists. The loader came from Mourilyan.

It was a spin loader that went round. When they put down the beds for the stock piles there was a lot of pea sized gravel. Our coal was fairly hard. It had a high hard grove index that they refer to. This particular power station at Sendi in Japan, north of Tokyo had to put our coal through extra

mills to have it fine enough. One or 2 of their mills jacked up as it couldn't grind it. This was only a week or so before Christmas. It got thrown back into my room – what are you going to do about it. I'll be on a plane tomorrow and I went back up there. They said Mr Yeowart it is Christmas time you didn't have to do this. No way we did something wrong and we're going to fix it. So they showed me and I knew straight away where it had come from. So the boys organised sensors on the dozers that would squark if they went below the level of the base.

That company was so grateful for the trouble we went to and fixed it that we never had any trouble. Some companies would have cancelled the order. That was one of the old Chairmen that used to have a chat.

That is a brief history of my involvement. It was pretty insignificant in many ways but to me it was a lifetime and I had a lot of wonderful experiences. Bevan would appreciate those to do with the mines rescue as he was one of the team leaders that was highly successful. Every year we would have a competition somewhere in Queensland or New South Wales and we got to meet some incredible blokes.

Interviewer: What was the competition?

There was their team and our team and we would have a simulated underground disaster. The teams would have to go and compete with each other for points. They did a fire fighting drill, first aid drill, an underground exercise or a gas outburst. It was always with full breathing suits and they would have to do hard things like timber up roofs and goodness knows what. It was highly competitive. If I remember rightly you were about the first that I knew of that won, Bevan.

Bevan Kathage: We were the first to win the Australian competition. It was about the 16th competition but it was the first time a Queensland team won.

We had a Queensland competition and the winning team of that went to NSW for the inter-state competition.

Interviewer: A state of origin.

Yes it was real state of origin stuff. You had to be an operating member up here. That station at Bundamba, the Booval Mines Rescue was an active place. These guys went for training every second week and weekends.

It wasn't just the men in the mine it was also Managers. Some of the men killed in the Box Flat explosion were Mine Managers. But the camaraderie of rescue brigade people interstate and everywhere else was so good. Mining people have a bond with one and another but mine rescue people have more of a bond. They are appreciated more by the rest of the industry than any crew from any mine would be. The mines rescue blokes, I used to tell them, were the cream of the industry. They truly were. You imagine. You have seen the result – Box Flat.

Bevan Kathage: You have to understand that it was different in Queensland than in New South Wales. New South Wales had people on the staff permanently available to go to a mine. Queensland was totally volunteers.

Our station had a superintendent and one permanent staff member - an assistant superintendent.

Interviewer: So they were paid staff?

They maintained the station in every way. We were so backward compared to the New South Wales people. It was all to do with funding.

Interviewer: How many men would have been in the Booval Mines Rescue Brigade?

Up to 44/45. Not permanent. Volunteers. They were called trainees. It didn't matter how experienced they were, they were trainees.

Bevan Kathage: We didn't do it for the money. We got about \$6 or \$9. You would go to your training and spend what you made at the pub.

Interviewer: Some people did it for a long time?

Some of them were trainees for most of their underground life, especially the older guys. They were there until they retired.

Bevan Kathage: You actually finished at aged 50 because you physically weren't up to it after that. That was the theory.

You couldn't drag them away.

Interviewer: You can hear the pride in your voice.

I was not a trainee but I was so proud to be associated with them. It was quite a significant part of my life. I regretted having to give that connection away but when I was resigned from the Coal Owners I was their representative so I had to give it away. That was one of the highlights.

Interviewer: As a member of the mines rescue board what was your role?

I was Chairman for a long time. Our role was to look after the management of the station, the condition of the staff which was only two. We built them a house. We got involved in the exercises – competitions and training. We were incompetent to tell them how to train but somebody had to run it and pay the bills and get the money.

Bevan Kathage: They managed the system.

It was really significant.

Bevan Kathage: It was the first mines rescue station in Australia.

Interviewer: Did it cover the whole West Moreton district?

It went as far west as Burgowan. It was the Queensland Mines Rescue Brigade. Later brigades had their own names but this one was Qld Mines Rescue. I still have the badge. I have a coaster from the 25th inter district competition.

Interviewer: How long did the competitions go?

Bevan Kathage: Just a weekend.

We'd hire a plane and take the team up to central Queensland.

It still exists. If you ever see a bloke like Bevan (**Tape 4**) physically jumping for joy when he was announced captain of the winning team. It was particularly important as it was in Cessnock. It was four 4 years after Box Flat.

Joe Sbeghen, the Superintendent didn't come down. Then they had to ring up old Joe and tell him that we had won. We won the EK Healey cup a month before - another

team from Booval. We had won the two major competitions.

Interviewer: How come that team didn't go interstate?

It was the team that won that local competition that went to the inter-district. The team that came second went to the EK Healey cup. So if you weren't quite good enough you had another competition in Queensland. If you won you went interstate but everyone had an opportunity. It was a weekend away with your mates.

Bevan Kathage: How did you do your Mine Managers ticket? Did you have to go to College?

It was a Diploma then. If we were successful in getting the Diploma the department automatically awarded you a ticket. It was supposed to be a higher exam. One year, I'll never forget, we were given calculus as a subject. I had never heard of it. When I was at High School and even in my first year at University I had never even heard of the word. I have got to be honest and say that I didn't fully understand it and I didn't study it much but in the week before the exams I thought I had better do something about this. I got hold of a lot of past papers and I went through them all and I got questions I could answer. I passed the exam and I never ever used it again. Did you use it?

Bevan Kathage: Not really. I used to take an educated guess. All I was really getting at that you did College at night in your own time and you did your study in your own time which is not what happens now.

The first couple of years when I was working at Neath Colliery there were other people like Ivor Ramussen, Lex Cole, Keith Teske, They were all cadets. Dad's partner

Vic Walker wouldn't give me a cadetship because he didn't want me in the industry either because I might compete with his son-in-law Lex. Lex Cole and I became good friends. I wasn't supposed to know about Lex Cole getting a cadetship but Viv Walker wasn't clever enough to find where we were living and we were staying in the same boarding house. Claude Richardson came one day and I had the pick going and a durry hanging out of my mouth. You weren't supposed to smoke underground but gas was unheard of up there. I sensed the presence of someone so I swallowed the thing and it was the Superintendent Claude Richardson. "I want to talk to you" and he sat down and stoked his pipe. I thought "and I have that thing burning a hole in my stomach". "I need to tell you about fellow called Lex Cole". "I know Lex, he and I share a room. He is a cadet at Tivoli. We go to class together". "Well you are not supposed to know about him. You and your father are not supposed to know about him".

Bevan Kathage: The cadets didn't go to college?

Yes, the coal owners used to pay them a day's wages to go to college. They had to go nights as well but they had the day too. I was not a cadet and not entitled to that but because I was enrolled in the Diploma course the Coal Board did the same for me. I was one of a couple – Roy Scheifelbein was another. There were just a few of us. The Coal Board would chip in a day's pay for a couple of years, while I was at Neath at least. I just had to do it at night after that.

Bevan Kathage: You did it in your own time. Apprentices are given release for so many weeks. None of that.

Interviewer: So you were very busy with the training, the Coal Board, Mines Rescue?

Life's busy anyway if you are interested in what you are doing. I sat out the front of my house for the past 10 years and I think about the mines and I want to go back. I dream about it at night still but not with the same urgency. I will wake up in the middle night and I am dreaming about being underground.

If you put me on a platform off the ground I might fall off. I have no balance. If I climbed to the top of a bin at Tivoli I have this terrible thing about falling off. But send me underground and I am as happy as a pig in mud. Some people get claustrophobic but I am the opposite. No balance.

Notes:

ACAR: Australian Coal Association Research

ACIRL: Australian Coal Industry Research Limited (followed ACAR)

ACA: Australia Coal Association

QCOA: Queensland Coal Owners Association

QCA: Queensland Coal Association (followed QCOA)