

Heritage Happenings for April 2008

Tony's Tales

Hi again everyone. I am taking the liberty this month to devote most of this newsletter to copying an article from a Christchurch District Newsletter dated 1971. Not only is the article interesting from an electricity perspective it is also a beautiful piece of social history that gives a wonderful insight into the years from 1931 to 1971.

The Newsletter is from the Warren Strong Collection that GridHeritage now has stored at Bunnythorpe. Warren kept accurate records of his many years in the industry and these will be of value to any researcher. Special thanks to Mrs Strong and Tony Mitton for getting the collection to GridHeritage and to Lynne Turner for retyping it for us.



Tony with part of the W. Strong Collection

Some interesting equipment

Recently the Stoke synchronous condenser was decommissioned and selected parts of it were given to GridHeritage. The Control and Protection panels are from a generation past and will be useful for future GridHeritage displays.



Stoke Condenser control and protection panels

The Damaged ECNZ Collection

We are still trying to sort out what to do with the remainder of the damaged ECNZ collection. Last week we reluctantly wrote off some more of the damaged original HVDC equipment as it was found to be beyond repair.

GridHeritage has sorted out what it requires from the collection and is now writing to the industry to see what others may want to restore. If there is no interest then we will have to dispose of it as space at Bunnythorpe is at a premium.

Bunnythorpe Collection

Work continues on identifying and photographing the ever-growing GridHeritage collection. Every week something new and interesting is added. Storage space is becoming an issue and we sincerely hope that Transpower continues to support our endeavours.

The history of System Operation

Mike Turner, recently retired, has been digging through the files at National Archives trying to source some of the early information about system operations. Mike was involved in the development of many of the computer based programs that were the forerunners of the modern market systems.

At his send-off Mike was presented with a framed Five Pound note. The note shows Te Kohai Island that was flooded with the raising of Lake Pukaki. Mike had a close involvement with this work.



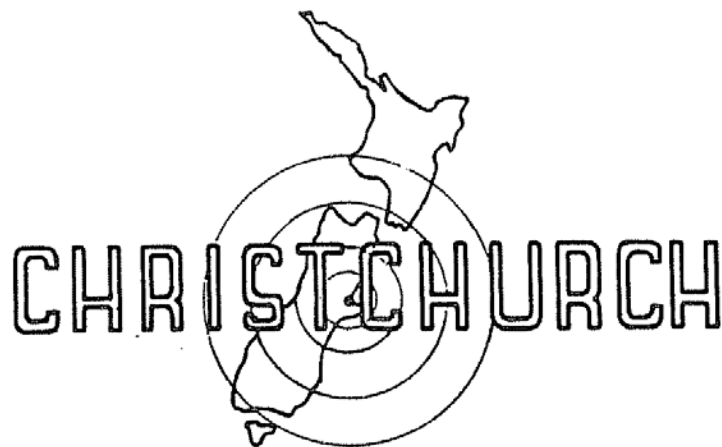
Connecting the Country

The Helen Reilly book on the history of the NZ electricity transmission system is completed and is now with the publisher. The printing should be completed shortly. The book which was commissioned by Transpower has grown to near 400 pages and contains hundreds of photos, many of them from our GridHeritage collection.

NEWSLETTER



New Zealand
Electricity



NOV 1971

Deferance
District Manager

Johnson
Editor

NEWSLETTER – NOVEMBER 1971

FOREWARD

The monumental effort which appears on this newsletter was contributed by our district storekeeper, Ron Hart, or to give him his nom-de-plume – “Blood Pump”. Ron is to retire in a few months’ time, and has spent his entire working life at Addington, having moved into the district from Lake Coleridge in 1915 at the tender age of seven years. Who could be better qualified to tell this epic story than he is, with such long service and the ability of a born raconteur?

Ron has painted a life size picture of difficult days, more with a certain nostalgia and spirit of cheerful acceptance than of resentment. Hardship can bring out the best qualities in a man and the camaraderie of those days seems to be missing a little today. Perhaps some indifference has crept in because we seem much more independent, or as Ron might say “spoilt”. I do hope that people will accept his challenge and that reminiscences may become a regular part of these newsletters.

It might even be an easier way to make a retirement speech: Perhaps Ron is being cunning about this, but only the future will tell:

Any sort of incident can make interesting reading, so why not become a contributor? Remember, you do not have to retire to qualify:

The Editor

ADDINGTON MEMORIES – FORTY YEARS AND GONE

- R G Hart

Having spent almost forty years in this one spot, it would take many volumes of many thick books to tell the full story as I remember it. Even as I write, memories of faces, places, incidents – some gay some sad, keep flooding in upon me making it difficult to know what to put in and what to leave out. If I mention the story giving the reason for Bobby Jeal having a bald head, because he slept in a tin shed at Hororata with his head against the iron only to wake up and find that he was stuck by the hair with a 20°frost, then I must include all such incidents and there are thousands of them, and space doesn't permit.

Do you remember such personalities as Ferdi Fernandez, Jack Stephens, Jack Fazackerley, Harry Dyer, Bobby Jeal, Jack Dalton, Jack Stephenson, Bill Sly, Ernie Welsh, Jimmy Reeves, Jock Campbell, and Jack Ballantyne? Many names are forgotten, or not even known by most present day staff, but for some of us those names still mean something. Like all Government Departments, this Department has a full record of its official growth, but unfortunately there is no record of the exploits of men who really laid the foundation for the fine Department it is today. Now it seems too late! These men and indeed the men who knew them, have gone too. They were pioneers in the true sense. However, sometimes it is well to pause a while and look back to our humble beginnings, so we can appreciate the present better and build for the future.

Buildings

How different Addington was in 1931. The only permanent buildings then were the Substation and the Garage, with the Store in the course of erection. I remember the front of the Substation was equipped to charge the batteries on the battery trucks. The Distribution and the Test Room were only Poillite sheds; hence the term still used by us oldies, Test Room and not Test Department.

The Smithy was a wonderful place, especially on a cold winter's morning where the men would congregate well before eight o'clock to tell the stories of football, etc., as they do

in their own warm offices today. Who cared about smoke and dust? The glowing forge and the central figure of the anvil comes to mind with many and varied Smithy tools, swages, pullers, hardies, names unknown to the modern workman, and Bill Beene the typical Blacksmith with his mighty hands who in the days before welding at Addington did an amazing amount of jobs (not to mention 'foreigners'). Morning and afternoon tea breaks were not allowed in those enlightened days but many a brew of billy tea was boiled on the forge while somebody kept a sharp look out. Cracked, unwashed cups remain a memory, not very hygienic but no-one complained and nobody died. Something went out of our lives when the Smithy left us!

The stables stood on the site of the grass plot in front of the present Dining Room. When the last horse departed (in 1931) the stables were "renovated" to make a Carpenters' Shop (shades of Alfie Webb and Alf Westall), a peterlinium shed where crossarms were dipped in creosote and then in about 1933, a Welder Shop. This was part of the Carpenters' Shop and with the sparks and the shavings in close proximity one wonders how a fire was avoided. Safety was an unknown word in those days as we were in the depth of the depression. The Carpenters' Shop was the only place suitable for meetings and I remember meetings of the P.S.A going on until after six o'clock because of wage cuts which were common in those days. One could not get into these meetings because of the crowd. How different today!

Even before the Store moved into its new building, it was found to be wrongly planned. A visit to the old store today will show various features such as a large thick concrete floor, a high roof, part of the overhead gantries, and big doors on either side. This was planned for the storage and handling of transformers but was never used. The concrete succeeded in making a cold store even colder. Imagine that first winter, without plumbing, and light, - a big draughty shed, unlined and bitterly cold. The only way to get reasonably warm was to run around the Store or to stand around a forty-four gallon drum that was used to burn rubbish outside the Store. What a contrast today! The store was supposed to have the Public Works Department General Branch at the south end, the Electrical Branch at the north end, nearer to the substation. This system was all right in theory but it never worked because all of us, whether employed by the General Branch or the Electrical Branch, overlapped, so that a Storeman would be serving some electrical fittings to say, Andy Shore for a few minutes, then in the next

hour he would possibly be issuing blankets, picks, shovels and such things for Glenwyne Unemployment camp on the Lewis Pass. It was a glorious example of how to do things the wrong way! The loft was designed to hold bales of blankets for the unemployed, as this was the Distributing Store for all the South Island. Dozens and dozens of bales of blankets and boots were issued, in fact for several months old Jack Clarke and I did nothing else but hand them out. The store interior grew like Topsy, something added, something taken away. The packing room to my knowledge has been shifted eight times during the life of the old store. The central offices and counters were added late in the 1950's, when the General Branch left us and we were able to put our counters in at the centre of the building. In the late 1930's the Workshop and Test Department came along and there too, something was not quite right. Perhaps you remember the old Distribution Office up that long flight of steps, with the noise of the machinery so deafening that "Stephie" was forced out of his office sometimes to think! Even the drilling of a 3/8" hole meant starting a 20 h.p. motor and then all hell broke loose with flapping belts and rotating wheels. The whole place shook and the noise was indescribable. Again, what a contrast today!

The Test Room as I remember it, was adequately laid out although there were complaints even in those days. Fern baskets, on loan to Mr Withers, hung from the roof. Insulators brought in from the transmission lines were tested before being placed back on stock! sparks, lightning, crackles, bangs – what a wonderful sight! They don't seem to do things like that these days (except by mistake). The "red shed" still so called although it has been painted aluminium for the last twenty years, was originally built early in the 1930's as a temporary measure from rusty iron and old timber, but in 1971 it is still standing. At one time it housed about 5,000 picks from unemployed caps, and thousands of crowbars and drills. I know because I helped to count them. What tales it could tell! In turn it has housed wheelbarrows, all types of Public Works equipment, cement, tyres, underground cables. It became a car park, and iron rack, a timber rack, a distribution shed, a yard workshop, welders shop, and you name it! Built for a rough, temporary shelter in 1931 it has certainly done a wonderful job and I heard just the other day that they're going to dismantle it. Why can't they leave it for another forty years!

The next building to go up was the Transformer House, later to become the old Mechanical workshop. The transition from a Transformer Build Store held by the Stores to the Mechanical Workshop would take a whole chapter to tell – like the building of Rome it just didn't happen in a day. One wet day, Arne Sandelin, then acting Depot Superintendent, asked the Storekeeper if he could put an O.C.B. in our transformer store to allow his men to work on it. The answer, of course, was "yes". The Stores always co-operate as you know, so he got his big O.C.B. in there and started working on it. From that day on they gradually took over more and more room for the Mechanical Workshop until the Stores were so squeezed up that inevitably they were pushed out altogether.

Of course it had to happen. Do you remember how the Mechanical Workshop for a time shared half of the Garage in those days and that wasn't a very good idea as Jack Hawker, Mr Pannett and others could tell you, because the Garage was growing too, and when they were put together things just about exploded. Naturally this caused friction and trouble at times but this was resolved at the expense of the Stores. The Mechanical Workshop also grew like Topsy, adding something here and there until it finally occupied a large area but was still hopelessly inadequate. How they did such marvellous jobs during the early days of construction in this Department only the boys of the Mechanical Shop could tell, but working conditions were certainly poor unlike today. Incidentally, the old building that has just been dismantled near the Yard Foreman's hut, was originally the Hororata Substation. Can you imagine it? Only half of the building was for Substation use. The other end was used by Bobby Allen, the Operator, his wife and family, as living quarters! Even this was living regally in 1931, there was no such thing as hotel accommodation then. If a workman had to go out into the country on a job, he was given a tent and a mattress cover called a palliasse. His first job would be to get some straw from a farmer to fill it. Later of course, the Department was to provide the single men's quarters at Ashburton, Hororata, Timaru, and elsewhere. It may be of interest to some that in 1937 over at Dobson, Andy Shore and George Roberts, both destined to become Distribution Engineers, shared an 8' x 10' tent for a year. This was during the building of the Diesel Station on the rainy West Coast. But to continue with the conducted tour, all round the yard were numbers of little buildings, just little huts, little lean-to's where all types of work were done. Nobody thought anything could be permanent. Everything was temporary, even the staff. I must mention the 'bike-sheds'.

In those days I think there were only three who actually owned motorcars. The rest of us, at least those who could afford it, rode bikes and there would be dozens and dozens of bikes to be housed here at Addington, probably hundreds of them at times. Anyway we had pretty dilapidated bike-sheds all over the place but there still was not enough room for bikes, just the same as in 1971 we don't seem to have enough parking for cars!

The big shed between the Depot Office and the Carpenters' Shop was built there in 1940 as a temporary store for the Public Works Department. This is a prefabricated building so that it can be taken away when not required, however, after thirty-one years it is still here, being shared by the electricians and the carpenters. When war broke out the Government commandeered vast quantities of all sorts of building materials to build military camps and other war establishments. This shed housed or should we say hoarded vast quantities of corrugated iron, glass, timber, all types of electrical, plumbing and joinery fittings – you name it, they had it. The building was so overloaded that the foundations gave way during the war and remained like that for many years. It seems strange to some of us that such valuable, irreplaceable material in those days should be housed near an electrical substation which in war time would have been a good target for bombers! After the war some of this went to the War Assets Realisation Board to be resold, as it was never used. The building was also used as a storage area for the famous Bailey Bridge spares. The place was absolutely littered with all types of couplings and braces. The Public Works General Branch were going to take this building away at one stage when they had to finally leave Addington, but it was Jack Stenhouse I think, who found a little clause in the agreement or whatever they had in those days that said it had to stay here, so we've still got it and it's still being used to the best capacity. Of course, since those days we have had more permanent buildings erected, the Carpenters' shop, the Amenity Block, the Garage, Mechanical Workshop and last but not least, the Stores.

How nice to think in this year of 1971 that after so many years we can now think of permanent things and nothing makeshift and temporary.

Going back to the war years here at Addington, of course most of the young fellows served overseas. Those of us who were left, young and old, were formed up into an

E.P.S., or to give it its full title 'Emergency Precautions Squad', but anyway, my recollections go back to when we formed ourselves into a fire brigade unit, under the capable Generalship of Jimmy Reeves, and old Jimmy was provided, (put on loan, of course, and recorded in the loan ledger), with a glorious brass helmet, a fireman's uniform, a hatchet and all the trimmings. He looked beautiful! On the odd days we would line up like a dark-town fire brigade. You've got no idea! We would go through all the motions of putting out and preventing fires. Just as well we never had any because I don't think we were that good. I recollect sometimes turning the water on when the hose wasn't properly coupled up, running away when the hose wasn't properly coupled up, running away when it wasn't even coupled up, - all those things; memories crowd in on you, but at those times it was very real and very close to us and we didn't know exactly what to expect. Around the transformers and the O.C.B's out in the structure yard were built big barricades of sandbags stacked so high that you couldn't see any of the structure, at least, any of the switchgear. They were there for many years and when they were finally taken down the sand and the soil amounting to some hundreds of yards, was spread over the sections where the houses are over in Blenheim Road and Dalgety Street and may account for some of the peculiar weeds that some of the tenants of those houses may still find there today.

We built an air raid shelter (where would this be now?) somewhere near where the bowser is today. It was dug wide and handsome, very deep, very long, very cunningly contrived but as it was built in probably one of the wettest parts of Addington in a bog hole, it filled up the first day and to my knowledge it was full of water up until it was filled in sometime after the war finished. I can't imagine what would have happened if we had had a bomb raid. Some of us anyway would have had a jolly good bath!

Some of the items that we had in stock here at Addington may be quite amusing by today's standards. We had hundreds of drums of a 'gooey' mixture called camouflage paint. We used to send it out to various camps and other places but I don't remember it ever being used on our electrical equipment. The tower structure steel was also camouflaged but I think that was a more permanent paint. Anyway this gooey stuff remained here for many, many years and for the life of me I just can't imagine how we ever got rid of it; I think some poor blighter bought it as a job lot when it was put over to the War Assets Realisation Board. We also had hundreds of bags of grass seed, well,

so-called 'grass seed', but I'm afraid that some of our lads didn't do too well out of it. It was roughly stacked outside in the open and the spillage was just simply left there. Some of our lads seeing the spillage thought that because grass seed was lying about they could take it home, but what they did not realise until too late was that this grass seed was just rubbish. Thistle, dock, and all the noxious weeds that you could imagine, quick growing and to be used so that when a hole was dug or some ground disturbed, its growth was quick enough to camouflage the area. Some of our lads had marvellous weeds in their gardens.

On V.E. day and V.J. day Cecil Tonkin and the boys from the Stores, plus a few more, decorated Addington up and it looked absolutely beautiful. In the Stores loft there were a lot of decorations and great big cardboard effigies of the King and Queen, - Crowns and all that sort of thing, left over from the Coronation or the time of their last visit. Naturally, we took these and suspended them over the Test Room wall facing Clarence Road. Jack Fazackerley gave us some searchlights, we had all the colours of the rainbow as well as flags of all allied countries flying merrily. We hung an effigy of Hitler with a big swastika on his stomach from the yard arm of a big wireless mast and left it there for many, many days. We were deliriously happy and this was our attempt to show our joy.

When the war was almost over, the boys started coming back, and every few months up at R.S.A. in Christchurch we would have a 'smoko' and gave our boys a royal welcome home. Of course some faces were missing and we missed them very badly indeed. At some stage during the evening the lights would be lowered and I, or somebody else would make reference to the boys who had not returned, then somebody would recite "They will not grow old as we who are left grow old" – it was a very touching thing.

Perhaps I should tell you what the actual yard at Addington looked like from 1931 onward. There was no such thing as a lawn, or flower gardens, as a matter-of-fact I don't think there was a lawnmower in the whole of Addington. There was only a 3-bay pole structure, the Substation, Stables, the Test Room, the Distribution Room, one or two 'eight by ten' huts or Poilite buildings, the Garage and that was about it. The back road was called Semple Street and it was rather ironical that after the war, Bob Semple who was the wheelbarrow's greatest enemy, (in one camp he drove a bulldozer over a

wheelbarrow and I think the storeman had difficulty in putting a write-off through for it), got the Public Works Department mechanised and then did away with all these wheelbarrows. We had thousands of them and we stored them in – you guessed it – Semple Street. They were there for many years and we sold hundreds and hundreds of them at the good price of ten bob each. To get back to the yard, it was just a wilderness with a maze of water courses saturating the place and nothing but thick heavy peat, mud, willows and weeds of every variety. Where the Depot Office is now situated an old fellow used to try to grow vegetables. He had an old house there and one further down about where the car park is now and two old people named Anken had one and an old batchelor named Hamilton had the other. You couldn't imagine what Addington was like, without any attempt to beautify it. There were no roads, no permanent concrete or tarsealing, only shingle tracks. We haven't got much tarsealing today, but we're getting it! The place would be absolutely littered with rubbish. In those days there was no salvage value in anything. Scrap copper wasn't even worth picking up.

Things have changed! We sold oil drums for a shilling each just to get rid of them, yet today they cost you five or eight dollars. One of my memories of the yard in 1931 was the gateway itself, when every morning there would be anything from six to twenty men hanging around the gates hoping for a day's work. The conditions of employment were bad. Remember there were 60,000 unemployed and more, in the country at that time. On rainy days men were sent home, with a resulting loss of pay. There was no decent way of transporting the men. They just climbed on the deck of the truck, without cover, in all weathers. Many a man has found difficulty in getting down from a truck because he was frozen to the deck. Many of us were on 10/- per day with unemployment tax, that meant a take home pay of £5.4.6 per fortnight, and we were the lucky ones. It is hard to forget even today. I recall a young man dressed in a navy-blue suit in those days washing his hands at lunch-time at a cold water tap, (No soap or hot-water then) and he had had a job for the day helping to unload a railway truck that had come into the Gas Company with clinkers in it. He had never done anything like that in his life and yet that man finished up as a senior draughtsman of one of the local boards around there, so it just shows you the type of men who were looking for jobs. What a wanton waste of material and manpower! There were no such things as steel structures in Addington then. They were to come later on, with the gantries which have been and gone since that time. These poles always fascinate me. Down in the pole siding by

Wright Stephenson's I can remember watching the truck being unloaded. There were no cranes, I think the only crane they ever had was a Leyland with a jib behind it which was pretty limited in its use. These poles would be unloaded by ropes, snatch blocks, cant hooks, crowbars and all such things. Makes you wonder how they ever did it, but, they did. Some of the most popular tools in stock in the 20;s were the adze, the draw-knife, the chisel, the pole step spanner and everything connected with pole fitting. We seemed to have unlimited stocks of coach screws and bolts. There was not much in the way of road transport in those days. It was the great day of railways. Our sidings would be busy with railway trucks. I can see it now, before we got a diesel loco. Long lines of men roped to these trucks pulling them into position. Talk about the song of the Volga Boatman!

I can remember going over to where the structure is now because somebody wanted some pipe. When they handed me a pick I asked, "what's the pick for?" and they said "To get the pipe". I was a callow youth then and naturally thought they were having me on, but anyway I took the pick, and when I got over to the pipe I found that I needed a pick alright because the pipe was the only way to get the stock item out of the ground!

I could tell some wonderful tales about the battery trucks. They used to be charged up at night and they would be lined up in front of the substation and plugs would be set in. In the morning at eight o'clock the men would go off merrily, probably out to White's Bridge, or further afield, and then on their way back sometimes as a little boy, I used to see them pushing their vehicle back up Clarence Road without power. This was a regular performance and sometimes as a little fellow I'd even give them a hand to push. When motor trucks came in I remember Earnie Welsh had a Ford truck, Mr Stephens had a Ford car, Mr Withers had a car, I think the Office had two cars, one for Mr McGibbon and one for Mr Davenport and that was about it, except for the old Leyland.

Jack Fazackerley told me that in the early days he used to go out on a job with a couple of rolls of cable on the handle bars and a ladder on this shoulder and bike five to ten miles out to do a job. What a feat of strength!

Some may still remember the cattle that used to charge up Princess Street every Wednesday afternoon. Many times they came into the yard, chased by men on

horseback. Just like a rodeo and much better than you see on television today! made Bonanza look like Peyton Place! One day they charged into a gang who were stringing wires, which flew up and made electrical contact. There were dead cattle everywhere and the place smelt like a gigantic barbeque for days after.

The story of the Ranfurly Shield possession may interest some. Then Canterbury had just beaten Wellington for the Shield, and we were invited, quite unofficially, to enter the procession. We got a loan of a truck from a carrying firm, and did it up with model towers; all the notices, signs and gear appertaining to the Department. We had a portable generator lighting up 1000 watt lamps. Needless to say it was the best float in the procession, but what we didn't appreciate was that it was in the time of power shortages and black-outs, and the photographs of the Departmental truck were featured in all papers throughout New Zealand – The Free Lance, Auckland Weekly, the lot! When we realised what we had done we were horrified, but there was silence from the higher-ups, although we heard on the grapevine later that Head Office was going to reprimand us, but didn't.

The main project in the early thirties was the Standby Building at Lyttelton. It was subsequently shifted to Dobson. It is sad to see the old building now, when we remember that it was once priority No.1.

In 1931 the transmission lines comprised the three pole lines from Coleridge to Addington. Waitaki was still a year or so away. Highbank and Tekapo were just a dream away. The Transmission lines had all Thomas pin type insulators and aluminium conductor, and if my memory serves me right, they were always breaking down! The storeman could be called out several times a week. In fact he was so important that he was the first one to get a house. What a change today! During winter men could be out all night with searchlights looking for breakages. Communication was practically non-existent. You could ring as far as Ashburton or Hororata, and by shouting, give them a message to pass on further south or to Coleridge. The telephone lines ran along under the Transmission lines, so you can just imagine the interference!

After forty years it is sometimes hard to remember which was fact and which was legend. Wonderful stories of personalities would have been better told 20 years ago. Is

it still too late? Could someone revive stories of these men; those Christchurch Office, Joe Ainsworth, Jack Green, Johny Duff, Bill Gregory, Doug Gower, to mention some that come readily to mind. Here is a challenge for someone!.....

Some call them the good old days. Yes, perhaps they were too. But somehow, out of all the good and the bad, there was something; just how to define it is not easy, but it isn't there today. Life was slower. We knew each other. In spite of everything, I believe we were happier. One wonders what Addington will be like in another 40 years, in the year 2011. The mind boggles! But do you know the last 40 years went very fast – at least it did to the writer.

“He who knows others
is Learned;
He who knows himself
is Wise.

.....Lao-Tsze.”