

THE BLOOD HOUSE

I note that your November meeting will refer to the Hoskins & the Steel Industry. You may (or possibly may not, of course) be interested in an encounter I had with this industry during the 1930s Depression, when I was carrying the swag'; this would have been in 1935 or 1936. I've recorded it in my (unpublished) autobiographical m.s.. If it would be of any interest, I'd be quite happy for you to quote it. I had previously been employed for a while as a city salesman for a chemical firm in Sydney. The note goes on:-

"When the chemical firm split up and my job vanished I said goodbye to Sydney and set out for Port Kembla, about fifty miles to the south, where I thought I might get a job at the steelworks. There I joined, each morning, hundreds more at the gate, with no success. Opposite the works, roughly in the area since taken up with coke ovens, there was a cluster of humpies, in which lived a number of unemployed men. According to the residents, this was a good place to camp for the following reason.

A car was always likely to drive down the track between the rows of humpies in the middle of the night with the horn blowing. This was a sign that someone had been killed or seriously injured. Anyone who woke up and ran out quickly enough had a chance of being taken on in place of the dead or maimed worker. Locally the steelworks was known as "The Blood House". I stayed in one of the humpies for one night, at the invitation of its regular occupant who had gone to Sydney to try to sell the belts and other leather work he spent days in making. One night was enough; the place was infested with hungry fleas."

This may not, of course, be the picture painted by others who have not experienced the 'humpy life'. However, as far as I'm concerned, it is 100% truth.

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