

### Vale Jack Southern

J.L.N. Southern, a Foundation Ordinary Member of the Illawarra Historical Society, passed away on Sunday 30 September, 2001. Outwardly Jack Southern was a quiet and studious man who went about whatever he was doing in a very thorough manner. He was almost like a schoolmaster. Jack was said to be a walking encyclopedia for in his mind he carried a large amount of knowledge on many topics.

Jack Southern joined Australian Iron & Steel as a metallurgical cadet in January, 1938 and spent two years working at Port Kembla, Whyalla and Newcastle before he returned to Port Kembla where he was permanently based. He was attached to the Blast Furnace Department and rose through that department to one of the highest managerial levels. If dedication to precise detail was a measure of a man's ability Jack would have risen to the highest levels.

Apart from being devoted to his work Jack was a passionate railway and local historian, he was very close to the Hoskins family admiring their tenacity in making their Lithgow iron and steelworks a viable operation, relocating the Lithgow plant to Port Kembla and their ability to survive the Great Depression. Jack took a great interest in the history of the Lithgow iron and steelworks and spent a great deal of time in researching and documenting that site.

Jack spent many days tramping around the Illawarra escarpment looking for evidence of the many collieries and their associated inclines, tramways and railways. Not only did he find them, he researched their history and documented what he found. A camera was his trusted companion and he frequently used it to record his finds, particularly steam locomotives.

Jack was an avid collector of photographs, plans, reports, stories, books, etc of the topics that interested him. Those who entered his study were confronted with this pile of material from floor to ceiling all round the room with stacks of files in cabinets. Ask Jack a question and he would say "yes, I have something on that" and he would put his finger somewhere in a pile and pull it out. That filing index in his mind was infallible.

Soon after Jack had established himself in Wollongong he and his good friend, Gus Parish, and a few others founded the Illawarra Historical Society on 5 December, 1944.

Jack did have one fault, even though he had this huge collection of data and had made copious notes in his very small writing (as if to conserve paper) he was reluctant to publish his research for the fear that it might contain errors. His contemporaries such as Bayley, Singleton, and Eardley apparently had no such fear and published profusely. In 1978 Jack did write "A Railway History of the Illawarra" which, was published by BHP, and has proved to be a very valuable research tool used by many. It took Jerry Platt to screw Jack's arm up his back and help him publish again in 1986 when "Iron Making in Australia, 1848 - 1914" hit the press and became a very useful and much used reference. For those who were game enough to let Jack look at any of their writings they did not have to wait long for pages of comments on its technical correctness, spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc to come back; in fact he didn't even need to be invited he just did it. But the work and knowledge of those authors was all the better for his comments.

When I look through my collection of material such as photographs, plans, hand written notes, etc it is amazing how many times the initials of J.L.N.S. appears. In many publications, particularly railway ones, Jack's photographs frequently appear and his name used in the references. He did have a particular passion for railways and was always researching them; it is said that Jack knew more about the locomotives of Victoria than the Victorian Railways themselves knew, that is amazing as Jack was only 24 years of age when he moved from Victoria to Wollongong. His knowledge of the New South Wales and Tasmanian railway systems was also very detailed.

Jack was always very willing to help others in their research and encouraged many of us in our pursuits of local and industrial history.

The historians of the Illawarra will sadly miss Jack's fount of knowledge. He has indelibly left his mark in the Illawarra and other areas. We are all the better for his having been with us as his attention to detail has rubbed off to some degree on us all.

Jack is survived by his wife Una and their daughter Sue and her husband, Richard, and to them we extend our sympathy.

Thank you Jack for having shared your knowledge with us.

Don Reynolds

October 2001

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