Harry would sing happily in a beautiful, unforced baritone which was a pleasure to hear. So there was nothing to working the pump.

There came a day when Harry did not turn up for the morning service, whereupon the organist came into the vestry to conscript some free labour. Perhaps because I was a husky lad, the choice of a substitute for Harry fell upon me. Robed in cassock and surplice (which was a cut above Harry) I took up his place in the passageway, and was shown the bellows handle (which I well knew) and a bit of string dangling with a bolt on the end of it (which I didn’t). This device came from a hole high in the organ box, and was the indicator that the pressure of wind in the bellows was correct. The organist quickly explained - the service was late in starting - that all I had to do was pump until the bolt on its string descended from on high, and it was between the upper and lower of two pencil marks on the woodwork, about three feet above the floor; and there I had to keep it. Then he hurried to the console, and tapped the facade as a signal for me to start.

I started, gingerly at first, remembering Harry’s easy stroke. But the organ only gave forth a few clicks and rattles instead of the intended voluntary. Loud and impatient knocks on the facade clearly conveyed the peremptory message for me: “Get on with it!” So I pumped with the urgency of a galley-slave at his oar pursued after defeat in battle. Down came the bolt, comfortably between the two marks, so that I knew the organ had the right head of steam. Feeling sure I now knew my trade, I kept up this vigorous pumping, until I noticed the soft voluntary, intended to induce a mood of quite reverence, had thundered itself into what would have served well as a Fanfare for the Day of Judgement. Looking nervously at the bolt, I was horrified to see that it had plummetted nearly to floor level. In a panic, I stopped pumping, thereby averting what those nearly bursting bellows must almost have turned into the world’s first atomic explosion. Mercifully, the bolt went up again, only to go too far upwards, at which the Fanfare subsided into an asthmatic gasp for breath. In this emergency I again pumped as hard as before, whereupon that misbegotten bolt plunged to floor level once more; and so it went on, perhaps throughout the first hymn too, up and down, the mighty doom-saying Dies Irae motif alternating with plaintive wheeze of a tubercular possum. Then, to my utter relief, Harry arrived, and I went into the choir stalls, shaken, my days as an organ pumper thankfully ended. Maybe then the congregation settled down to normal, a few troubled consciences putting out of mind premature reviewing of whatever sins may have been uppermost in their minds a forebodings of the Day of Judgement had boomed at them.

There is a moral in all this; in pumping an organ, as in most things in life, take it easy!

Edgar Beale

THE EARLY STEEL INDUSTRY

[ In July 1983 the speaker at the Society’s monthly meeting was the late Miss Bessie Foskett, whose topic, based on her long association, was “Early Days of Port Kembla Steelworks”. Although no notes of the lecture were available for publication in the Bulletin, the Society has now happily received from Miss Foskett’s estate, following her death in February 1985, a copy of notes from which she spoke. Whilst not complete, they are excellent material and, with
It was my fortune to spend 40 years in the steel industry, always closely associated with management, and I can truthfully say that Port Kembla was a happy place. The going was tough, times were hard, but management regarded every employee as a person, and except in a few instances, the employees respected their employers and gave their best so far as effort was concerned, plus - above all loyalty. You may find that hard to believe, but I assure you it was true. Without loyalty the industry could never have survived.

I plan to tell you something of the beginning of the iron and steel industry in Australia, and this of necessity will involve quite a deal about the Hoskins family, the pioneers of the industry. Particularly I will deal with Charles Hoskins and his sons Cecil and Sid. The City of Wollongong developed and grew up largely because of the efforts of Cecil and Sid Hoskins - how sad it is that so few of our young people even know the name today.

The Hoskins pioneers were not born with a silver spoon in their mouths, they lacked money, education, and at times even food, which makes their life story all the more courageous and exciting. The family suffered many great tragedies.

Let us start from the beginning, with the migration to Australia from England of the parents of Charles Hoskins. John Hoskins was a gunsmith, but was not a strong man and he came to Australia with his wife and family to see if a warmer climate would help him. They settled in Victoria. They arrived at the time of the gold rush and John was tempted to try his luck, but luck was not for him. His venture was a failure and he died very soon after, leaving his wife and six children practically penniless. The two eldest boys, George 15 and Charles 12, had to leave school to seek work to sustain the family. This is the point at which we first meet Charles Hoskins, the father of Cecil and Sid.

Employment opportunities were scarce and the two boys went from pillar to post. They even tried the gold diggings, but, like their father, they had no luck. George and Charles walked 70 miles (because they had no money) to Bendigo in search of work. George served an apprenticeship and became a fitter and turner, while Charles got a job in an ironmonger's shop. They managed to survive but they thought opportunities were better in N.S.W. and they wanted to start their own business.

So, the whole family did get to N.S.W. and after many ups and downs George and Charles sub-leased a strip of ground in Ultimo with a 40 ft. frontage. Here they proudly built their first humble workshop and called it Hoskins Enterprise Ironworks. The building was 40 ft. square, made of light timber, with a roof of bark and sides covered with palings. Their scant capital only permitted the purchase of a few tools. For motive power they purchased a second-hand wooden cartwheel and mounted it on a wooden frame. A belt was put round the wheel hub and then up to the pulley. The brothers took it turn and turn about, pulling the cartwheel round and round while the other one operated the turning job. When it rained they were often waist high in water carrying this out. They took in any jobs they could get and undertook to supply them at prices being paid for similar imported
articles. They quoted too low for their work and many times were close to bankruptcy. As an example - one Friday evening when Charles arrived home from work late as usual, his mother asked him the time. Putting his hand into his pocket he said "Oh, I have not my watch". Further questioning by his mother elicited the information that he had pawned his watch to pay their one and only employee.

Both men were ingenious - nothing stopped them from having a 'go'. A produce merchant asked them to design a hydraulic hay squeezing machine to press the bulk of two bales of hay into the size of one. It was such a success the Agricultural Society exhibited it at the Show.

Another device manufactured by the Hoskins Bros. was a Potato Thrower for which they charged 15 pounds. The wharf labourers were on strike and there were 2000 tons of bags of potatoes awaiting loading. The crew of the ship were willing to stack them if they could by-pass the wharf labourers. Hoskins Bros., with the aid of an air pump, designed a device to shoot the potatoes from a platform on the wharf into a spread sail on the ship.

The Hoskins Bros. became known as craftsmen and business men of integrity, their customers increased, and they took on extra employees. They could not afford to waste manpower turning the lathe by hand, so they designed and built their own steam engine. This worked well, and business continued to improve, but both men were always looking for new challenges and new fields of endeavour.

They turned next to pipe making. At the time all pipes were imported into the country. This is the way they became involved in pipe making. In 1888 the Water Board had let a contract to an overseas firm to lay 5 miles of 6ft. imported riveted pipes which were connected with steel collars and sealed with lead joints. The pipeline was to carry the main water supply for the city of Sydney. The contractors failed because they couldn't get the molten lead to run completely around the joints. Charles Hoskins used to sit on the bank and watch them try and try again without success. As the pipes had a circumference of about 19ft., around which the lead had to run, their difficulty was to prevent the lead setting before it completed the circuit. Charles went to the Water Board and said his firm could undertake the work and guarantee success. They got the contract. Their method consisted of getting thicknesses of rope, soaking them in kerosene, and winding them round the joint, then lighting them and getting the joint as hot as possible. While the heat was still contained in the joint, the molten lead was run around and the joint was sealed successfully.

The success of this job lead to much more work for the Water Board and it became necessary for Hoskins Enterprise Ironworks to expand. Nevertheless their progress had its ups and downs. For instance they undertook an order for a private company to make a long main of steel rivetted pipes for an irrigation scheme at Mulgoa. However, the private company went bankrupt and could not pay for the pipes and the Hoskins Bros. made a loss of $28,000 on this contract alone.

(to be continued)

BUSTLE FARM COTTAGE—HOUSE—HALL

The Council recently received a letter referring to a talk given by Frank Osborne, in which he said that C.D. Smith's home in Wollongong was known as Bustle Farm,
Victorian rather than mediaeval. A daughter of the great house accepted the proffered heart and hand of a "lowly, poor and humbly born" suitor, one Anderson, a bank clerk. Her father would have agreed with Captain Corcoran of H.M.S. Pinafore: "In a matter of the heart I would not coerce my daughter - I attach little value to rank or wealth, but the line must be drawn somewhere". He cut her off, not with a shilling, but with a stately home.

Mr Anderson died comparatively young; his widow (who by deed poll prefixed her maiden to her married name) lived for many years. To her only child, a daughter, she left by her will a life interest in Camelot; after the daughter's death it was to become a hospital or convalescent home (for which it is hard to imagine a building less suited). Miss Faithful-Anderson also made a will devising Camelot to the National Trust.

The result of the conflicting wills was that the estate got into Chancery, or its successor the Equity Court, which decided that the provisions of the mother's will regarding Camelot were impracticable, and those of the daughter's a nullity, for, having only a life estate, she had nothing to leave. So there was nothing the executors could do with Camelot but sell it. So, at any rate, went the story told to us. We were told also that it is to be converted into a restaurant and convention centre, and consequently there will be no more inspections. So our visit was not merely an experience, but, worse luck, an experience not to be repeated.

THE EARLY STEEL INDUSTRY

(Continued from June Bulletin)

Abbreviating the story from here on Hoskins Bros. great financial break came when they won a contract to manufacture and lay 330 miles of pipe to bring water from near Perth to Kalgoorlie. This contract was won against tendres from England and America and was the greatest lift the Hoskins Bros. had ever received. Without it they could never have taken over the Iron and Steel Industry in Australia.

After many attempts over 30 years had failed to make iron and steel in Australia, James Rutherford made the next major attempt at Eskbank Ironworks at Lithgow in 1874. The quality of iron produced was reasonably successful but the venture failed financially and Rutherford loaded two drays of blasting powder into the base of the furnace, detonated it and demolished the foundations.

The next man on the scene was William Sandford who acquired the whole undertaking at Lithgow in 1892. He became the first man to make steel in Australia from a 4½ ton furnace. However he was in constant financial difficulties. In 1907 he completed a new blast furnace at a cost of $100,000 which was $30,000 more than estimate. The finance for this furnace was obtained by bank overdraft, which unfortunately Sandford could not meet, and the bank foreclosed within three months of the commissioning of the furnace.

The N.S.W. Government approached G. & C. Hoskins to see whether they would be interested in carrying on the infant iron and steel industry. Following negotiations with the Bank, G. & C. Hoskins did take on the Lithgow Iron & Steel Works for a total outlay of $202,000. In addition they made a handsome gift to Wm. Sandford in recognition of the work he had done in pioneering the industry at Lithgow. Of the two Hoskins Bros. it was Charles from now on who undertook the development of the iron and steel industry and George and his sons confined their interests to pipe making in Sydney.
Briefly I will give you a description of the Lithgow Iron & Steel Works when Charles Hoskins took over. His son Cecil, aged 18 years, took over with his father, soon to be followed by Sid who was 2 years younger.

Industrial relations were very strained as previously the men were engaged on contract and considered themselves their own bosses. There were political problems also as this period saw the advent of the Labour Party. Thw work site was not fenced. There were no washing or showering facilities, no septic system, no provision of transport to the plant, many of the men had to walk four miles each way, no shelter for outside workers, no issue of overalls or protective equipment, no change rooms or lunch rooms, and smoking was not permitted during working hours. Within a short time this latter rule was revised to the extent that men were permitted to smoke provided they rolled their cigarettes before coming to work.

In 1908 crane drivers were the highest paid employees at six shillings per day for 10 hours' work, and there was a downward grading of daily wage until the labourers were reached. There were no extra payments for shift work, there was no sick leave or annual leave, and very few public holidays.

Over the next twenty years the Hoskins had much to learn in every sense, and above all they had to improve and extend all facilities and conditions at Lithgow as well as extend and improve their pipe making operations in Sydney to meet increasing demand and generate greater cash flow for advances at Lithgow and for development of raw materials such as coal, iron ore, limestone, etc. and for overseas research.

We will omit the technical details of these developing years but as time went on Charles Hoskins became convinced that if they were to supply the Commonwealth and not only N.S.W., it would be necessary to relocate the works to a sea port.

After long deliberation, Port Kembla was selected as the new location and in 1924 Charles, Cecil and Sid Hoskins purchased 400 acres from Mr. W.C. Wentworth which became the site for the first section of the Port Kembla Steel Works.

In 1952 Charles Hoskins relinquished the position of Chairman of Directors of Hoskins Iron & Steel Co. Ltd. to his son Cecil, and Cecil and his brother Sid became joint Managing Directors. Charles and his wife went on a long overdue holiday on an extended overseas trip. Unfortunately Charles died on his return from this holiday. However, both Cecil and Sid lived the life of iron and steel since school days and it was in their blood to continue the pattern set by their father for the development of a successful modern iron and steel works at Port Kembla. This they did. Charles died content in the assurance that his plans would be consummated.

The rest of the story you all know.

Before closing, I would like to give you an insight into the lives and characters of Cecil & Sid Hoskins. Two most wonderful men, but so little known or understood except for their families. To most people they were just business men. They were two of nature's gentlemen, and if the two of them could have been rolled into one, we would have had the perfect man. They were absolutely complementary to each other. What characteristics one lacked the other had, and vice versa. They each knew this, and they knew also their own shortcomings, and they worked
in perfect harmony using the best of each. They had the utmost respect and affection for each other. In fact, I have never known any two brothers more closely knit. At the same time they were as different as chalk and cheese.

They both placed women on a pinnacle and woe betide anyone who belittled womanhood. They worshipped their mother, who incidentally was a Quaker, and adored their wives and daughters. I can honestly say that in forty years I never heard either of them use bad language, or anything approaching bad language. They were keen business men - some perhaps would say hard business men - but they had hearts of gold and were extremely kind towards their fellow men, including their employees.

They loved Australia, and were extremely generous and philanthropic, but almost always they gave anonymously. As you no doubt would guess, I could go on for a long time telling you about the Hoskins brothers, but I will take a short cut and tell you just a few little anecdotes which will help you to believe that the Steelworks for at least 40 years had a heart.

So ends Miss Foskett’s text. Then came headings as a basis upon which she recounted stories of the Hoskins family and their contribution to local life, culture and well being. Those subjects might be listed for completeness: Strike (C.H. Hoskins); Apprentice (Sidney Hoskins); Boy on Bike, Gerard’s Hill; Beautiful Scout Camp, Mt. Keira; Gleniffer Brae, King’s School; Botanic Gardens; Bessie Foskett, $10; Lithgow Church; Cheque A/c, A.S. Hoskins; Weekly Prayer Meetings and Carol Service. It is to be hoped that the above list will stir the memories of others; but the present reporter will start with what (if anything) he can recall on some of the subjects.

The Apprentice: very much subject to correction, this was a story to the effect that a young man, well on in his apprenticeship, wished to break it so he could earn better money, if only temporarily, as an unskilled man, in order to marry. The plan was of course short-sighted; but Mr. Sid dissuaded the young man, lending him money so that he could continue to qualify in his trade and ultimately earn real tradesman’s wages, whilst marrying in the meantime. As usual, this act of generosity was done in strict privacy.

The story of the acquisition of the Scout Camp at Mt. Keira has been told before. The local Boy Scout Association, deciding to acquire some land of its own, duly choose a site. It was not much of a place, to be sure, but it was the best they could afford. Then, to their surprise and slight annoyance, the executive found their president, Mr. Sid, being dilatory and not responding with his usual promptness to requests made of him. He was strangely unco-operative. Later the reason emerged; he had had a plan of his own. All along he had been quietly conducting delicate negotiations for an extended lease of steelworks land in a much better location. His long-sightedness and vision won the day; the intended purchase was abandoned, and the local Scouts thus acquired, virtually free, the present Mt. Keira Scout Camp, a site unsurpassed in beauty and suitability by that of any other scouting group in the world, if it has its equal.

Gleniffer Brae (without the ridiculous “Manor House” which has since been tacked on to it) was the home of Mr. Sid and his family. Built just prior to World War II, it was occupied in 1939, its lands embracing the whole of what are now the Wollongong Botanic Gardens. Becoming too large for family needs, Mr. Sid offered it, with a substantial sum of money, to the King’s School to enable it to re-locate from its small site at Parramatta, but after initial promise the scheme fell through.
Then the Housing Commission built a large subdivision of expedient but unimaginative cottages adjoining the Hoskins land on the east. Moreover, that body had then a propensity towards resuming land to expand into sites such as these gracious parklands, so that Glennifer Brae was potentially under attack. So perhaps there was a touch of defensiveness in Mr. Sid's reaction, though the citizens of Wollongong have every reason for gratitude; he gave the eastern section to Wollongong City Council for the purpose of establishing Botanic Gardens. Then the house was acquired by Sydney Church of England Girls' Grammar School, and, to acquire an adequate area for its purpose, at Mr. Sid's request some of the land was sold to the School (full market price being extracted by the Council for what it had obtained for nothing). Eventually the entire property was acquired by the Council, to be consolidated in the present Botanic Gardens. But it is certain that only for the original generosity of Mr. Sid and his wife, who was the actual owner, Wollongong would never have had this attractive civic amenity.

Miss Foskett, incidentally, saw Gleniffer Brae rise from the turf, because every morning at 9 a.m. she went with Mr. Sid to note progress and matters of attention. The building of the house was a real labour of love. All this, and much more Miss Foskett told us, and could have told lots more. Although unfortunately she has not recorded more, our Society must be grateful to have the notes of the substantive part of a memorable talk.

E.B.

BEN RIXON

The late Mr. Benjamin Rixon — Who in this colony had not heard of the celebrated "Ben Rixon", who for well nigh half a century was the most famous and successful tracker in Australia. In the course of the active portions of his long life, he tracked many a man over hill and dale alike in the interests of humanity and law and order but now at last, he himself had crossed the bourne from which no traveller returns. After a protracted illness of two or three years, he died on Tuesday last at the residence of his son, Mr. James Rixon of Bulli. In the course of his life he rendered much valuable service to the country, in a public sense as well as privately, to persons his aid as a tracker. Many a person was rescued from the wilderness by Mr. Rixon. As a tracker, he was superior to any of the quick eyed aboriginals of the country. And his unequaled power in that respect caused him to be sought after far and wide when any persons were lost in the bush, or the Government required the whereabouts of some desperado to be ascertained by the police. He was a native of Parramatta, being one of a triplet birth. After living in that locality and the Campbelltown district, for a time he settled at American Creek, near this town, on the farm now owned and occupied by Mr. Deighton Taylor. There he reared a somewhat large family, but about fifteen years ago this land passed out of his hands. Since then he has resided with members of his family, and occasionally with Mr. F.R.Cole, the Customs officer of this port, who at all times treated the old man most hospitably. Never was any man treated more unfairly by his country than was the deceased. So many and so great were the services he rendered to the Government and his fellow men, that in justice to him he should have been in the receipt of a liberal pension, during the last thirty years at least. But although the Government of the country failed so much in doing their duty to Benjamin Rixon it is to be hoped that the people of this district will do honour to his memory in some suitable manner. He was 80 years old.

Illawarra Mercury, 22nd. July 1886