

# Dysons – Moving With The Times

**The 50 Year History  
of L.C. Dyson's  
Bus Services Pty Ltd**

Nicholas Martin

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L.C. Dyson's  
Bus Services Pty Ltd**

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# Author's Note

The story that unfolds in the following pages is the result of interviews and primary research. The interviewees for this book are noted below. The primary research involved access to the collection of historical documents held by the company. While the story represents my best attempt to faithfully, and at times irreverently, recreate the mood as well as the events of the past 50 years, the incompleteness of the primary material necessarily means that I cannot be sure that it is the definitive coverage of all the issues surrounding the development of the company.

My thanks to those who gave their time to this very important project, especially the Directors, and to those who assisted me in the many reviews of the text.

## Interviewees

Col Dyson

Bill Dyson

Maisie Deacon

Joan Robinson

Laurie Dyson Jnr

Lance Deacon

Neil Dyson

Shane Dyson

Greg Deacon

Jamie Dyson

Margie Dyson

Terry Henderson

Tony Locke

Jenny Stewart

Lou Varalla

May Cameron

Brian Cocks

Noel Skene

Bill Watts

Jenni Waldhauser

Frank Palma

John Sherman

Mick Reynolds

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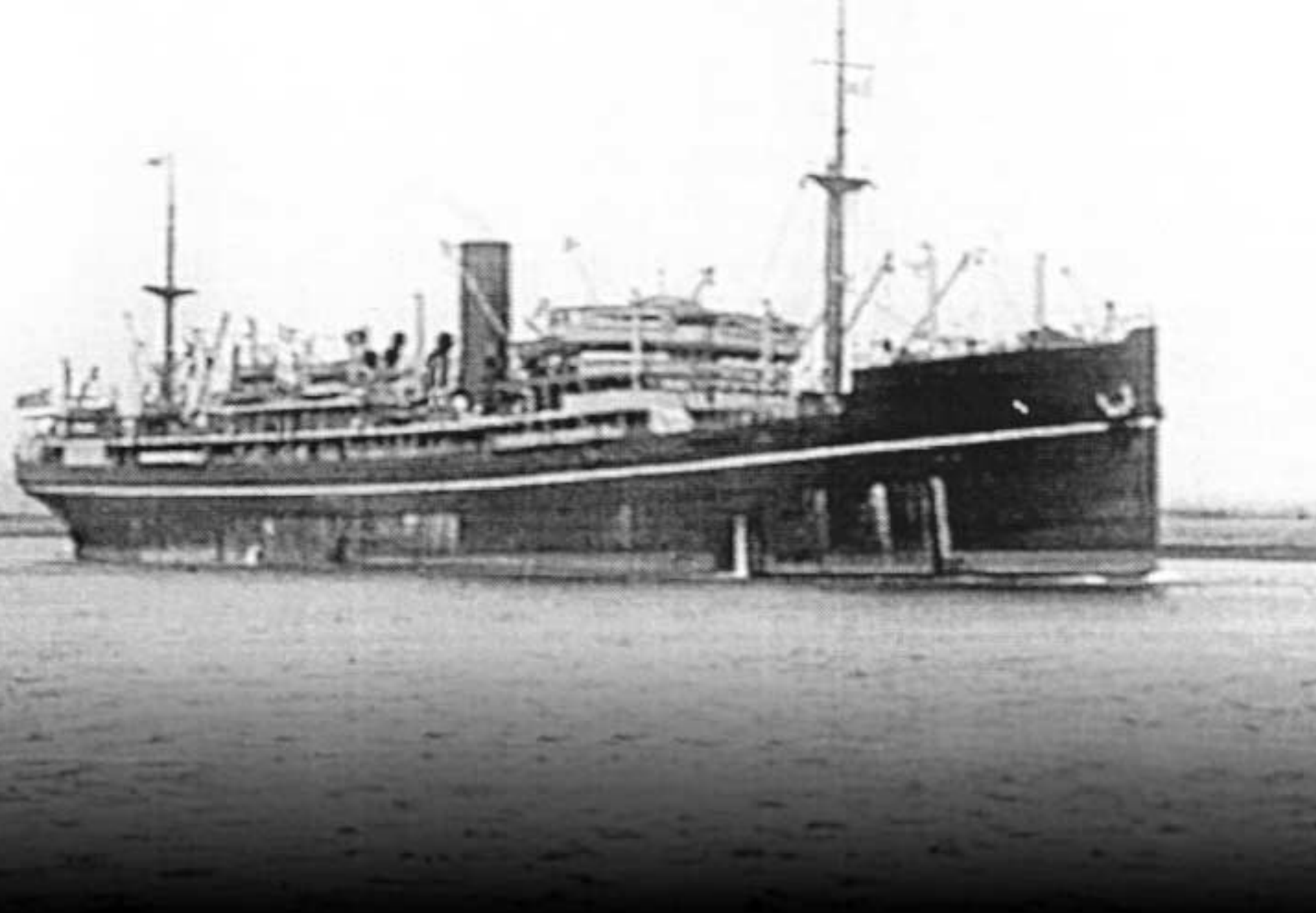
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'S.S.Baradine'. Courtesy La Trobe Picture Collection  
State Library of Victoria.

## Introduction

When it was launched in 1911, the Titanic was considered to have rewritten the history books: it was big, being in excess of 46,000 gross tons, and it was fast, with a service speed of 21 knots.

Ten years later, in Belfast Ireland, the Peninsular & Oriental Steamship Line (P&O) took delivery of their latest passenger ship, the SS Baradine. Even though ten years after the Titanic, it was a mere 13,072 tons and capable of only 13 knots. It was relatively small and it was slow. It was a workhorse.

P&O could get away with this strategy because they chose not to engage in the fiercely competitive trans-Atlantic business. That was the domain of the super liners. P&O had their sights set on the Far East and Australia.

So when an 18-year-old boy from Yorkshire embarked alone for Australia on the SS Baradine in early February 1923, he knew he was not going on the cruise of a lifetime. From when he left Tilbury Docks in London, the journey would take almost 6 weeks, via the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Town and Fremantle and for all that he knew at the time, he would not be coming back. No doubt, so did most of his fellow travellers: predominantly single males, in their early to mid-twenties, unskilled farm labourers, looking for a new life. However, there was one not insignificant point of consolation for the boy: England was on tour in South Africa and with any luck he might catch a day's play in Cape Town. His passion for cricket was legendary.

The boy's name was Laurie Collins Dyson, and this journey is the starting point for the two generations to come and the business that they collectively created and built.



Laurie (right) and brother Tom.

The Dysons story is, by any measure, remarkable.

L.C. Dyson's Bus Services Pty Ltd was almost an accident. It did not arrive with any fanfare. The business certainly struggled in its earliest years. In keeping its head above water, there appeared to be a good deal of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. In those years, it more often than not, followed its nose rather than some grander vision. But it survived.

In many ways, the remarkable and well earned success of Dysons is owed to the personality of the man, whose name, the company bears: Laurence Collins Dyson. Laurie was anything but a simple man. There were many sides to him, and each in turn would feature in the development of the company.

But, important as he was, the story of Dysons is more than the story of one man.

It is also a story of good fortune, good advice and of good management by those who came after him. While some would disagree, consensus indicates that if Laurie were alive today, he would be amazed at what has been achieved: at the time that Laurie passed away in 1984, Dysons was still only a relatively small local bus company. Today, it is the third largest road passenger transport company in Victoria, with substantial interstate and national commercial interests.

Of considerable surprise is the fact that the Dysons story is also a story of few regrets.

Dysons is a family business. Decisions have always been made jointly. And because they are made jointly, they are made – in the end – confidently.

But make no mistake, consensus decision making for the family has never been an entirely smooth journey. The Dyson genes carry plenty of personality, which time has not diluted. Having and expressing an opinion comes quite easily to the family: it's almost a badge of honour. Great grandfather Benjamin Collins Dyson was no wilting violet, and today, neither are his great grandsons, Lance, Neil and Shane.

However, despite the strength of personalities, the core and common value is family. It is this attribute, above all else, which has made Dysons what it is today and what it will continue to be through future generations. It is also Laurie's enduring legacy.

The story of Dysons is, therefore, the story of 'family business'.



A slightly older Tom, who would eventually join Laurie in Australia.



A rare picture of Laurie with his father Benjamin.

Benjamin Dyson drove motorcycles as well as cars. He is believed to have raced in the first years (post 1907) of what has now become an international event on the Isle of Man.



Laurie's mother Ada (centre) believed to be promenading at Brighton (UK).



## Like Father Like Son: The Making of Laurie Collins Dyson

Yorkshire moors and the swamp and bushland setting of Greensborough in Victoria. Even, or especially, in 1923.

It is even harder to imagine what a recently turned 18-year-old Yorkshireman would make of it, particularly on his own.



Born in Bramley, Yorkshire in 1904, Laurie left home at the age of 18. He was something of a 'wild' boy, who did not see a future for himself behind a desk. His father's professional career was not for him.

He chose instead to migrate to Australia – alone. Why he chose Australia was sheer circumstance. By 1923, immigration powers in Australia had shifted from the States to the Federal Government. Coinciding with this shift in power was the fact that the Australian Government, then led by the Nationalist/Country Party coalition of Bruce and Page, was in the middle of its greatest ever push for young migrant labour for farm settlement. There must have been a natural 'fit', therefore, between what Australia offered and what Laurie wanted.

Attractive as it may have been, someone should have told the Australian Government that as far as Laurie was concerned, their advertising was unnecessary. It didn't snow in Australia and that was all he needed to know. Laurie's alternative, if he wanted assisted passage, was Canada and going there, where it was cold enough for polar bears, was out of the question.

His father would not see him off at the Tilbury Docks: an appointed solicitor, a 'Mr Smith', would do so in his place. Such was the relationship between them, and such was the stubbornness of these two individuals.

While Laurie seeks to put as much distance between himself and his parents, he will however, carry with him for the rest of his life, many of his father's complex and seemingly contradictory characteristics. On the positive side, Benjamin loved cars – so did Laurie. By 1948 Benjamin was the proud owner of a Chrysler Imperial, which was not to be driven without driving gloves. Once he could afford them, Laurie always went for the British – of course – Rileys and Rovers. Benjamin was a dapper dresser – so was Laurie. Benjamin liked a small wager – so did Laurie. They each had personal interests: Benjamin's appears to have been photography – so was Laurie's, along with his chooks.

On the other side of the ledger, Laurie could prove to be a demanding person, especially, it seems, with his own family. Perhaps this is also part of the Dyson genes passed down from Benjamin. But this shared characteristic contrasted starkly with their approach to those outside the family. They could each be unusually generous, and it is this characteristic for which Laurie is richly remembered.

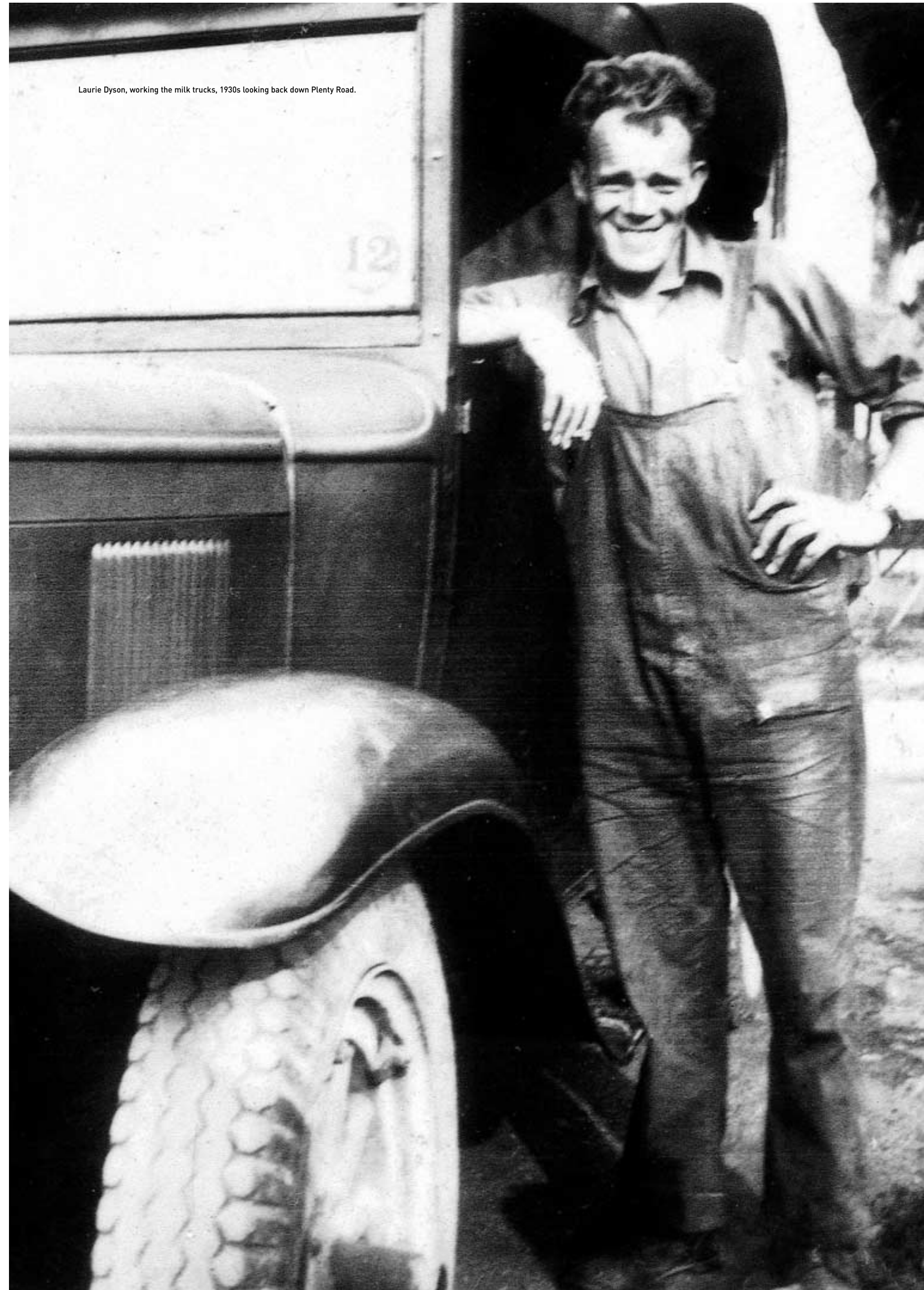
In looking back at Laurie from the year 2002, he will be remembered in many different ways by many different people. The fact of the matter is that many of those features were already well in place on Tilbury Dock in February 1923.

Laurie would not fondly remember his childhood. His father had been a hard taskmaster. Almost as a matter of procedure, he would be ceremoniously taken aside for his daily 'hiding' for seemingly trivial misdemeanors. What is more, his mother, Ada (ne Redington), was often the principal informant. To make matters worse, his parents separated, although exactly when is not clear. It seems that his mother could never settle in any one place, living in 23 houses in 22 years. Once separated, his father was very clear in not wanting Ada near him again, and left instructions to that effect, once he fell ill in 1948 with a stroke.

His father was also very hard working and successful. He was self-made, and at the peak of his career in the north England steel industry, was Managing Director of Carrick and Foster Ltd, Castlefields Foundry (Bingley), a Director of Ellerby Foundry Ltd (Leeds) and of Castleford Ironworks.

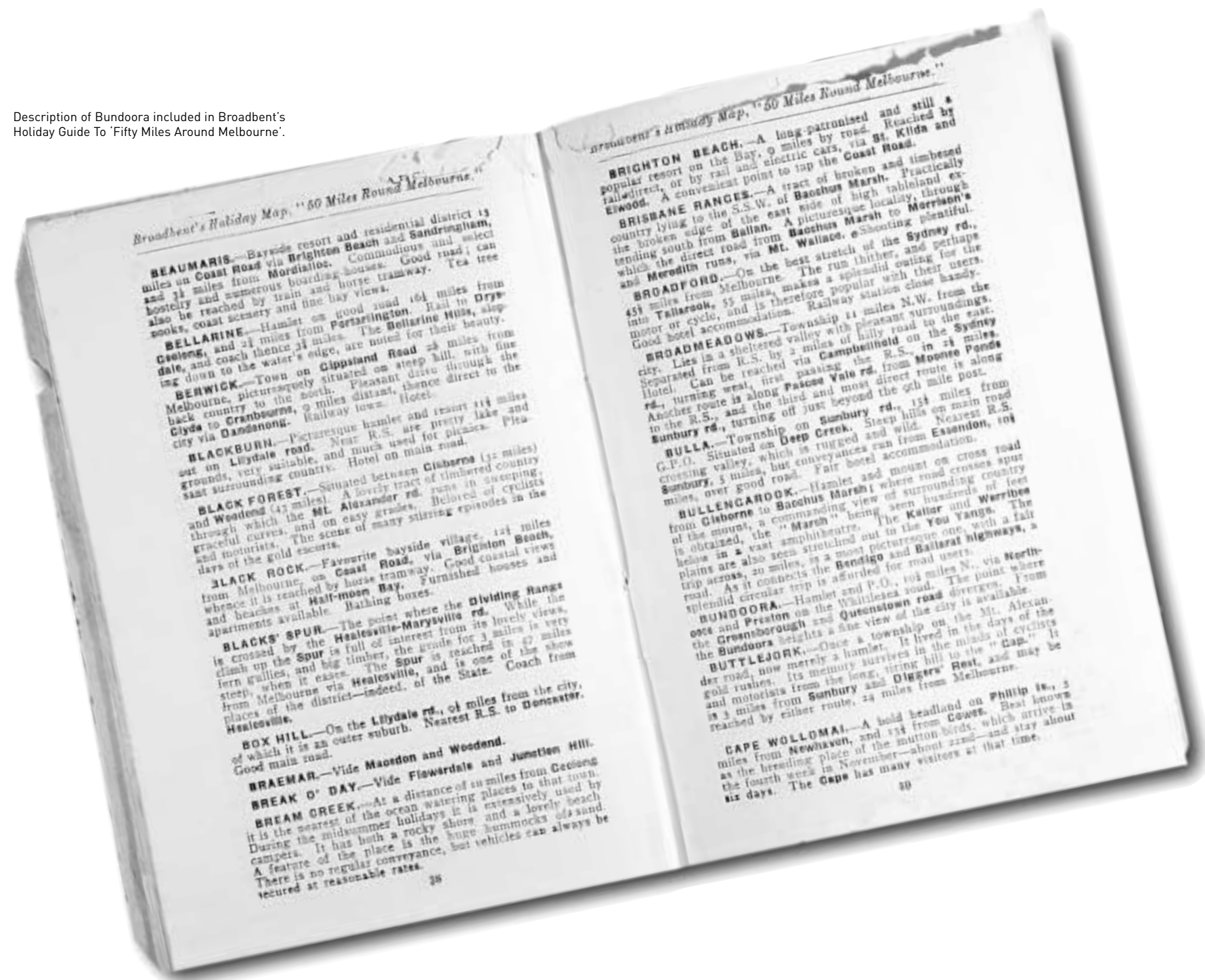
Benjamin, therefore, must have had expectations of Laurie, but Laurie clearly had expectations of his own. The Dyson headstrong genes inevitably clashed. Mix that with a not especially happy homelife and, as they say, 'the rest is history'.

Laurie Dyson, working the milk trucks, 1930s looking back down Plenty Road.





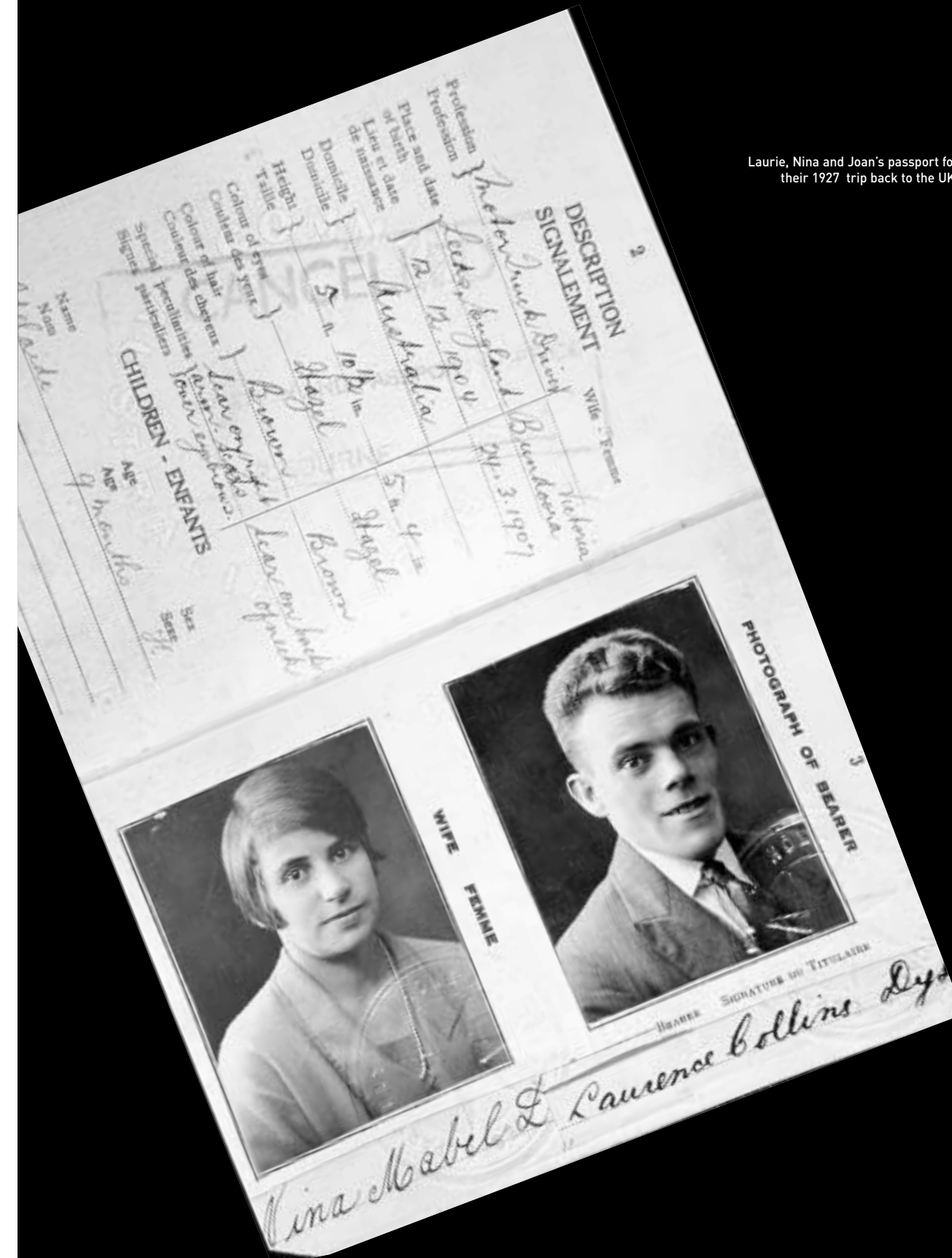
Description of Bundoora included in Broadbent's Holiday Guide To 'Fifty Miles Around Melbourne'.



# The First of the Pieces

Wanting to leave home is one thing,  
being able to do so is something else again.

Laurie, Nina and Joan's passport for their 1927 trip back to the UK.



Laurie, to this point in his life, does not appear to have worked, at least not in any 'formal' sense. He very probably had been working for at least two years doing something, and that something very probably involved work at one of the steel works associated with his father. Taking conjecture even further, perhaps it was this very experience, working inside and in very unattractive circumstances, whether in a clerical or manual labouring role, that led him to look to the warm open spaces of Australia.

Curiously, the only evidence on this aspect of his life lies in the single word statement in the passenger manifest of the *Baradine*, which would list Laurie's occupation simply as 'nil'.

Qualifying for migrant passage, however, would not be difficult. For a start, there would be no question of him not satisfying the cornerstone requirement of Australia's notorious 'White Australia Policy', the 'dictation test', a test that was purposely designed to make it impossible for perceived 'undesirables' to pass. In Laurie's case, he loved to write and had an excellent command of the written word. As this story will show, he would bring this particular skill to bear on more than one occasion in his quest to build a business.

Regardless of his prowess with the English language, to migrate to Australia as a farm labourer, he would need a sponsor and that sponsor came in the form of Ben Weir who ran a farm in *rural* Bundoora, off what is now known as Grimshaw Street. It would seem that Ben was a member of an association akin to the Big Brother Movement, an organisation set up in Australia in 1925 to give British youth an opportunity to build a farming life and lifestyle in Australia.

Laurie would remain inextricably tied to Bundoora and Grimshaw Street for the next 60 years.

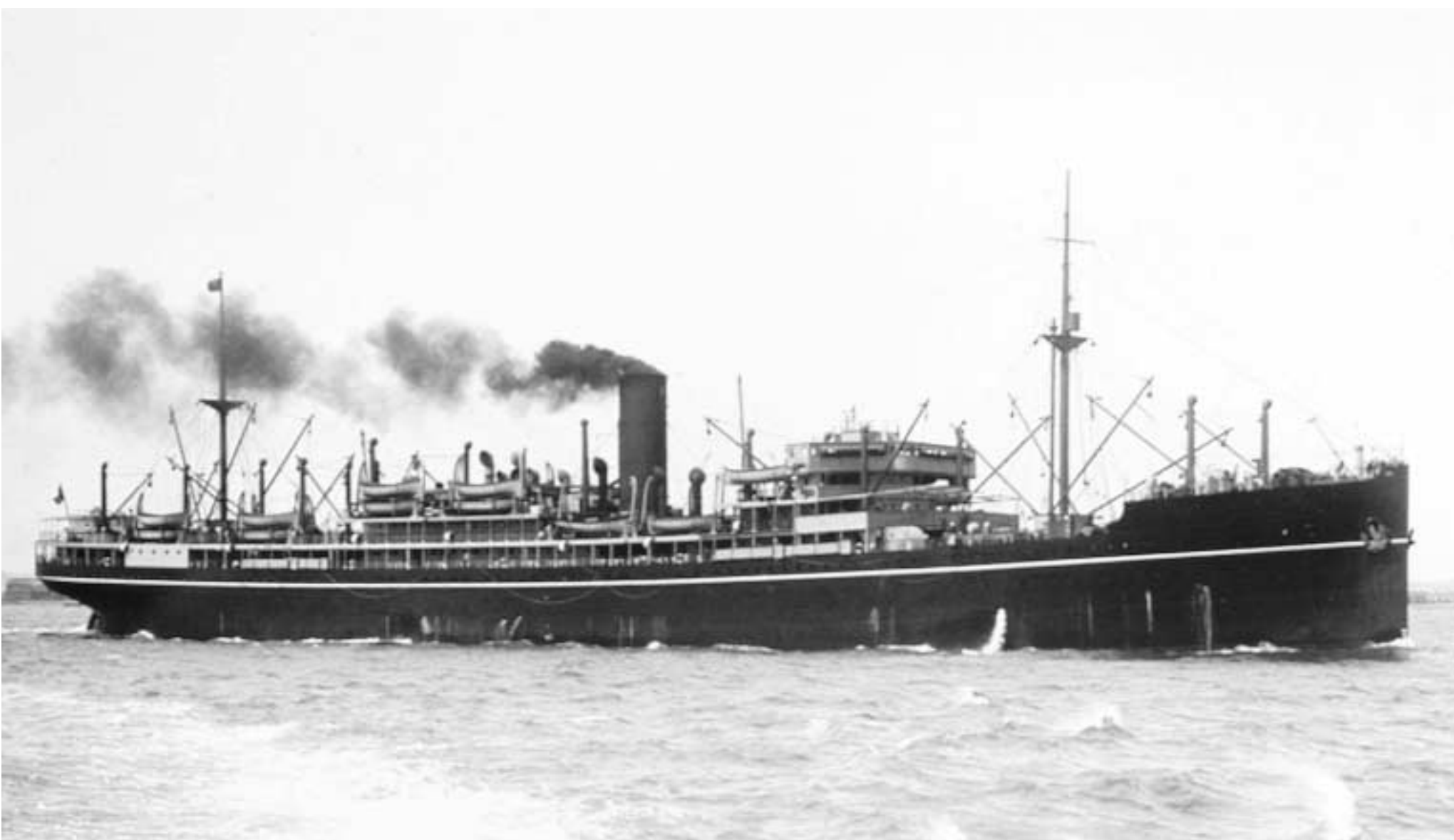
After some 12 months, he would take up employment with the McLean family, who ran a relatively large 40 acre dairy farm and milk carting business on nearby McLeans Lane (later McLeans Road), abutting the Darebin Creek. His job was carting milk, at first using horses, but graduating to a Model T Ford truck by the 1930s.

The name McLean had long been associated with Bundoora. The 1841 Census, the first to be taken of the area and undertaken by Chief Surveyor Robert Hoddle, records the presence of the few families occupying the area. One was the family of Allan McLean, and the other, was the family of Horatio Cooper:<sup>1</sup> names that will play a major role in the Dysons story.<sup>2</sup>

The McLean's of 1923 are a large family. After two years with them, and three years in Australia, Laurie marries one of the daughters, Nina (pronounced Nine-nah being ninth child) Mabel McLean at the beginning of 1926. They will remain together for the next 51 years.

That same year Laurie's first child, Joan, is born. At that time, he acquires 5 acres of land at the junction of Plenty Road and Greensborough Lane, known today as Grimshaw Street. Those 5 acres will become the centre of family life.

'S.S. Balranald'. Courtesy La Trobe Picture Collection. State Library of Victoria.



While Joan is still a baby, Laurie, Nina and Joan travel back together to the UK in 1927. What exactly prompted his decision to return to Yorkshire is not certain. What is clear is that Benjamin wanted Laurie to return permanently to Yorkshire and probably paid for the family's passage. Laurie must have given this a good deal of thought, for he stayed in England for a considerable time. But by September 1928, he had decided that his home and future lay in Bundoora rather than Bramley. This time, the dye would be cast. There would be no turning back. No doubt, the fact that Nina suffered from a heart condition, acquired at the age of 14, must have weighed on his mind. No doubt, too, was the fact that Nina was pregnant with their second child, Collins.

In choosing to return to Australia, where he had lived for only a relatively short time, Laurie had broken with his father for a second and decisive time. Laurie would never see his father again. They would return to Australia, steerage class, on the *SS Balranald*, via the Cape of Good Hope and Western Australia – just the same way as he had left in 1923.

Laurie would also be hoping that the *Balranald* kept to schedule. The ship had experienced an outbreak of measles amongst a group of 155 child migrants and consideration was given, at one stage, to quarantining the group on arrival at Fremantle. Apart from the obvious concern for young Joan and yet to be born Collins, any major delay would mean that Laurie would miss the beginning of the England tour of Australia. The touring side, which included the yet to be infamous Douglas Jardine, was due to begin the Test series in November. As fortune would have it, the concerns of disease raised by the Children's Farm School Immigration Society of Western Australia were withdrawn. The *Balranald* arrived in Melbourne on time.

He must have been close to penniless when he returned to his two-room house on the five acres that he had acquired at the time of his marriage. Collins was born in 1929, and Ada May 'Maisie', arrived the following year and just in time for the Depression. Laurie and Nina now had three children, and he drove milk carts for a living: not the type of credentials you would want to survive those times. Times would get tougher with the birth of Bill Dyson in 1934. He had survived the Depression by chasing work wherever he could find it, including fence mending in New South Wales.

However, it is likely that these times would profoundly influence Laurie's future direction and would inadvertently contribute some vital pieces to the Dysons story. What no doubt helped and protected Laurie and his family at this time was the fact that he worked for his father-in-law. The value of a family business, in tough times, must have struck home. Secondly, the milk industry would survive the depression because it was a staple product. Transport, also, would survive for the same reason, and this probably did not escape his attention.

'Coolangatta'



The 1930s are significant to the Dyson story in one other respect. When William McLean was to eventually sell his milk carting business, he sold it to the family who controlled much of the milk carting activity in the Bundoora and Greensborough region. The family concerned was the Cooper family.

One other person was to emerge at this stage who would have a central role in the formation of L.C. Dysons Bus Services. The man's name was Ned Gastin and he ran a local bus service. His path would cross with Laurie and his milk truck at the Balmoral Motors petrol station located at 753 Plenty Road, Bundoora. Both Ned and Laurie used the back of Balmoral Motors to house their vehicles.

Ned Gastin and Balmoral Motors, would prove to be the start of everything.



Memorabilia of Laurie Dyson's days in the army during World War 2.

## Encounters With Ned Gastin

The 1930s for Laurie meant carting milk. Nothing much changed. If opportunities presented themselves, he almost certainly could not have done anything about them.

The onset of the War, like for many of his age, may well have come as a welcome relief. Laurie was a patriot, and while he loved Australia, he was always and forever 'British'. The call of the Empire would have been taken very seriously. Despite Nina's chronic heart condition, four children with the birth of Frank and little money, he attempts to immediately enlist in the AIF. He is rejected the first time because he has 'hammer toes'. He attempts a second time, and fudging his age, for he is now 35, he is eventually accepted as the War escalates and takes him to the Middle East as a transport driver. He finally gets to enlist either three weeks before or three weeks after his youngest son, Laurie John, was born.

Regardless of the hardship that it imposed, the War changed the lives of untold numbers of people, and this could be said of one Laurie Collins Dyson. Who knows what otherwise may have happened, but the sale of McLean's business to the Cooper family meant that when Laurie leaves the army in 1945, at the age of 40, he needs a job.

The only job Laurie knows is driving trucks, combined with self-taught motor mechanics. Enter the man who was to unwittingly change everything: Ned Gastin.



Laurie's bus licence, 1945. 'Coolongatta', interestingly was the name of his home on the 5 acres, named after the much loved Queensland climate.

sharpening business at the back of the petrol station. What exactly prompted the move is not clear, but only after 12 months with Gustin, the three together decide to move to a service station in Smith Street, Collingwood – Kilford Repair Service. Dobson and Rule would continue to run their knife sharpening business out the back, while Laurie ran his service station.

For the first time, Laurie is self-employed, but with major responsibilities. This must have been a very major step but then again, major moves are not unknown to him. And beyond all else, he is a survivor.

Fortunately, he also has the help of his father. In early February 1946, Laurie receives 800 pounds from Benjamin. He receives a similar sum a year later in April 1947, a further 100 pounds in November of the same year followed by another 400 pounds in March 1948. It would seem that the rift between father and son was healing.

Ned Gustin, known to Laurie from the 1930s, offered Laurie a job as a driver. At the age of 40, with six children and a war gratuity of 75 pounds 15 shillings, Laurie begins the family's involvement in buses.

However, it is a false start. Balmoral Motors was a busy place. Laurie, who is always on for a chat, becomes acquainted with George Dobson and Jim Rule, who were running a knife

Life at Smith Street was not going to be at all easy. He works very long hours, and at one stage suffers a major fire in which all his records are lost. His eldest child Joan, who by now is 20 years old, helps Laurie sort out the mess. The strain of that work takes its toll. He takes time out to go to Western Australia to recuperate. Perhaps he remembers Perth from his earlier visits there en route to and from England.

One of Laurie's most enduring qualities was his ability to make friendships and keep them. To the outside world, he was always the 'happy-go-lucky' bloke who loved a roll-your-own smoke, a beer and a chat. In parting company with Ned Gustin, Laurie arranges with him that if Ned ever wanted to sell his business, Laurie would have first option on buying it.

For six years, Laurie ran the Kilford Repair Service. As fate would have it, Ned Gustin died in 1952 and his nephew, Jim, offered Laurie the business.

At the age of 48, with a largely grown up family, most people have finished their years of hardship. Not Laurie. 'Dysons Bus Service'<sup>3</sup> was about to be born and financial hardship, which had been with Laurie and Nina much of their married life, had only just begun.

Kilford Repair Service, Smith Street, Collingwood, late 1940s.





## Bringing the Threads Together

The price paid for Gustin's business was a very handsome 18,000 pounds.



The business consisted of what are now universally regarded as '... four clapped out buses ...'<sup>4</sup> Laurie Jnr would recall them as '... bits of bombs ...'<sup>5</sup> The business also involved the exclusive right to operate Route 46A: Janefield Hospital to Regent Station. And what a route it was! From Regent Station, it made its way to Strathallan Cemetery, then Mont Park (Larundel), the Bundoora Mental (Repatriation) Hospital and ending at the Janefield Sanitarium. Sundays and Wednesdays, the trip deviated to include Gresswell Sanitarium as well. The through fare was one shilling and 5 pence.

The buses included two 1947 OB Bedfords, one 1939 Ford and one 1941 International. So run down were these buses when he bought them, that he would sell the 1939 Ford ten years later for 40 pounds! Despite the trouble that that Ford created, to anyone brought up with buses, the attachment to these things on four wheels is unmistakable:

The old Ford, every time they would take it out on the road it would blow a piston or something. It was a beautiful bus. It had a wooden frame and leather seats, it was like riding in a limo ... but they only ever brought it out on Sundays to go to the cemetery ...<sup>6</sup>

So in selling the Ford, Laurie could honestly say, that it was only ever driven to church on Sundays.

To give some perspective to his 18,000 pounds outlay, in 1952, 2,500 pounds could buy you either a Porsche or a 3-bedroom timber home. The 1951 Melbourne Cup prize money was 14,000 pounds. By any measure, therefore, 18,000 pounds was a lot of money.

It is not entirely clear where Laurie got the money to pay Jim Gustin. As with most of Laurie's land purchases, it was almost certainly all vendor financed. However, he had the proceeds from the sale of the Kilford Repair Service and the birth of the first Australian made and affordable Holden car in 1948 would have helped boost its resale value.

Competition between petrol companies would have also helped, particularly given that at the time, they were independently owned and sold multiple brands. While there is no known record of what Laurie received from the sale of the 'servo', Laurie Jr believed that Shell Oil paid a 'large sum' for the service station in order to position themselves in the 1950s as the dominant player in the market. He also owns 5 acres of land and a house: the house itself, by 1956, had a balance sheet value of 2,900 pounds.

While his father had helped him financially in the past, this time, it was too late.

Ironically, the relationship between Benjamin and Laurie must have steadily improved since they parted company. By 1948, Laurie had not seen his father for 20 years, and in that year, it had been arranged that Joan would travel to England to spend the year with her grandparents. Benjamin must have paid for her first class travel, which was a major step up from Laurie's steerage class return to Australia on the *Balranald*. Indeed, it was Benjamin's intention that he was going to return with Joan to Australia. He had, in fact, bought a car in Joan's name that was to accompany them.

Laurie was probably too caught up in keeping his head above water with the Kilford Repair Service and a family of six children, to even consider going himself – but he must have been tempted. Virtue and common sense is one thing, but 1948 was the year of the 'Invincibles' tour of England: Bradman, Morris, Harvey, Loxton, Hassett, Lindwall, Miller – all together in the one team. He *must* have been tempted. In sending Joan rather than going himself, Laurie probably wanted to avoid the inevitable, since the Australians won 4 tests to nil. As if to accentuate the point, Bradman made 123 not out in his second innings on Laurie's home patch at Headingley, Leeds.

So what was the attractiveness of this business? In truth, it is not entirely clear. If he held a vision of the future, he kept it largely to himself. Few would regard him as a 'visionary'. He did appear, however, to have faith in the strategic value of Plenty Road and he had, to this point, some 20 years to see it develop.

Even *with* a vision, how was he going to make it happen? Just a few minor details to attend to. Like where's the money going to come from? A mechanic and a depot to work from would be nice?

Tragically, whatever plans may have existed between father and son failed to come to fruition. In 1948, Benjamin suffers a stroke and remains in England. A short time later, in May 1950, whilst crossing the English Channel on his return from a holiday in France, he suffers a heart attack and dies.

So, in finding the 18,000 pounds, Laurie would be on his own except for whatever inheritance he might receive. Under the term of Benjamin's Will, both Laurie and Nina would receive 3 pounds each, per week, for life.

And who was going to look after those 'four clapped out buses'? Laurie knew a good deal about motor mechanics as a lay person, but he needed a qualified mechanic. The answer to this was very easy.

When Laurie moved to Smith Street in 1946, he took on a 13-year-old boy as an apprentice mechanic. The boy's name was Noel Skene. It was not going to be easy for Laurie to get young Noel apprenticed, since Laurie himself was not qualified. Laurie, after some negotiation, arranges for Noel to be apprenticed to a mechanic by the name of Jack Bunce, who was located close by in Collingwood.

Laurie had the ability to attract, and give, great loyalty. So when it is time to get the business up and running in 1952, Noel signs on with Laurie: an amazing feat given that there was no business, at least not in the physical sense. There was no depot. There were no workshops. There were just those four clapped out buses.

Apart from everything else, Laurie needs drivers. Enter Brian Cocks and Eric Boyd. To run the 46A, he only really needs two buses, but at the weekends, the busy period, he would need all four on the road. Brian and Eric were the first full-time drivers for 'Dysons Bus Service'.

Necessity being the mother of invention, Brian fortunately brought more than his driving skills to the business. The deal with Gustin involved buses and exclusive rights to a bus route – it did not involve land. He had nowhere to house his 'fleet'. There was not enough room at Balmoral Motors.

'Skipper' Taylor owned the garage, and he was sub-letting space to Pat Cooper to house his milk trucks – there's that Cooper name again! Brian's father Reg owned vacant land beside his own house in Drysdale Street, just a few blocks away. Drysdale Street would do nicely. Never mind about the neighbours, Laurie now had the makings of an empire: four clapped out buses, 2 drivers, a mechanic and a 'depot'.

He was also broke.

Janefield Hospital today: boarded up and derelict.



## Starting at 46A



'Laurie was a tough old bugger ...': he smashed his right index finger between a tyre lever and a wheel rim at the Smith Street garage. He never had it attended to and carried it for the rest of his life.

There is no doubt about the fact that Laurie was physically and mentally tough. He would make the business work. He had to, because at 93 pounds a week out of the fare box, it didn't make money.

One of Laurie's first tasks therefore, was to fight to obtain a government subsidy of 32 pounds a week to make the business viable. He succeeded and just as well. The subsidy itself was obtained from the Mental Health Authority on the basis that the bus service was delivering Hospital staff to their place of work. Each year, the subsidy would be handed to the Transport Regulations Board (TRB) for review and it would ultimately be removed in 1981, following the introduction of statewide subsidised public transport.

46A was a difficult route to manage, because the loadings were highly variable. On weekdays only two buses were needed to deliver shift workers to the Bundoora Repatriation Hospital, Larundel and Gresswell Sanitarium from Regent Station. It was only one bus each way, and they were, not to put too fine a point on it, 'full'. The Bedfords were only 26 seat buses, but at least on one occasion, they were known to carry 104 passengers!

Overcrowding at peak times was inevitable. It was hardly his fault. Laurie had to fight hard for even the small subsidy he received. Complaints were inevitable, some bestowing an almost celebrity-like status on him:

... it would serve you to come up one night and watch these ... buses instead of being in the pub drinking beer. We suggest that you bring the cemetery bus down to the Mont Park Gates and that would get a lot of us home in comfort instead of being like a lot of sheep going to the sale yard ...<sup>8</sup>

And that was the problem! Laurie needed more 'sheep' more often – except for weekends.

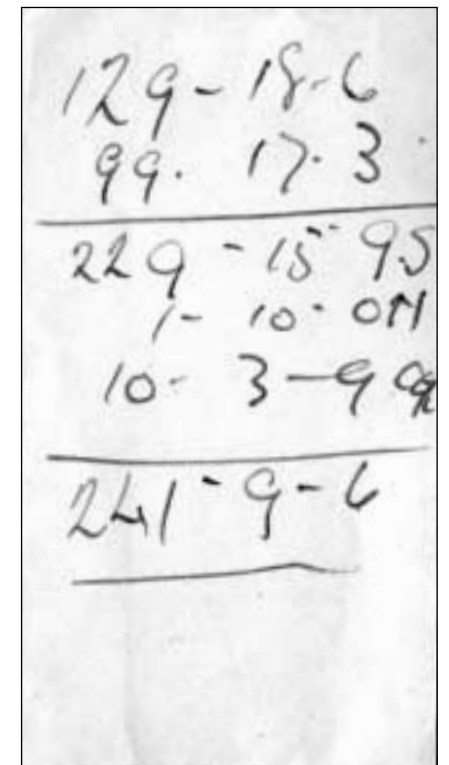
The weekends saved the business. Sunday, as well as Wednesday afternoon, were visiting days for the hospitals. Preston Cemetery was also a 'popular' spot. When Noel could get all 4 buses on the road on the

weekends, Laurie made money, but only just. In those days, it was a long way from the populated areas of Preston to the open fields of Bundoora. His weekly takings of 93 pounds and three people on the payroll, buses to maintain and taxes to pay, meant profits were very thin. Not much return for an 18,000 pound outlay.

The run to the hospitals would remain very clearly in the minds of those who drove them. Bill Dyson would vividly recall the circular cyclone fenced exercise yard for the inmates of Laurundel and the obvious distress of shell-shocked World War 1 veterans accommodated at the Bundoora 'Repat'. There were even stories of distressed inmates lying down in front of buses, out of sight of the driver, as they parked to pick up shift workers. Those days were not so much remembered with fondness as they were with respect.

But respect would only stretch so far. There was the problem of those 'inconsiderate' neighbours in Drysdale Street. They appeared to take strong objection to their now gulag-like lifestyle. Life for the neighbours would now begin punctually at 5.30 am when Brian 'gunned' the first bus. This invariably triggered a barking frenzy. The combined impact of these two events spared no one. Bus headlights flood lit, in turn, each of the neighbouring houses. Mudslides were the winter bonus. Then of course there was the odd collision with a gatepost. In fact the only time anyone can recall when the gateposts were not hit was when a runaway bus rolled backwards, clean through the gates into the house across the street – '... something the drivers couldn't do...'<sup>9</sup>

It is a testimony to the time, or perhaps Noel and Brian, that Laurie got away with it as long as he did.



In the early days, 'back of envelope' had real meaning.



If buses were essential to people during these times, that made their drivers 'kings'. They were relied upon and they were popular ... most of the time. Drivers always got someone who wanted to complain about something. One even produced a knife!

'I'm going to kill you, you b ..., you killed my cat! What cat?' I said, 'I didn't feel any cat! ... I didn't even see a cat'. She said, 'You knew you did it. You've been trying to get it.' I said, 'I didn't even know you had a damn cat!' Anyway, she calmed down.

Such was the life of a bus driver.

While complaints are surprisingly rare, they come with the territory. One in particular must have hit a raw nerve on the wrong day with Laurie. It was '... a petition signed by the residents of Kingsbury in regard to inadequate bus service ...' In his reply, and in an effort to correct false impressions, Laurie, with pen in hand, points out that a bus proprietor's lot is not always a happy one:

... There are quite a number of remarks in Mrs ... letter that I will not comment upon which are exaggerated ... This company is repeatedly putting new windows in the (emergency) exit door, also renewing handles which are broken or lost through children undoing them and throwing them away ... also it would amaze you the number of times we have to recover seats in the buses which have been deliberately cut with knives ... we do expect and rather appreciate high spirits in children, but we do not condone that type of behaviour ... may I emphasise the fact that I am always available for any discussion ... this would obviate the necessity of sending such a letter as was received and further would prevent a recurrence of the writing of a letter of this nature.  
Yours faithfully  
L.C. Dyson's

That last line! You tell 'em Laurie! The good people of Kingsbury had felt the sting of his pen.

The fact that the business survived this period was due as much to good luck as it was to good instinct and staff loyalty. In Laurie's own words, for the first two years the business ... (just) struggled along, but I had great faith in it ...<sup>14</sup>

I had a little chap that used to go down to Oak Street. A very, very inoffensive man, but he liked his drink. He got on this day and he's got his gladstone bag, and he's had quite a few, and he's a little bit mouthy, you see. Anyway, we get down Cravelli Street and he starts to swear. And I said, 'Look I said, I won't have you swearing on my bus. If you swear again, I'll put you off'. I had only gone another 20 metres or so and he swears again so I stopped the bus. 'I said you're off!' So I escorted him off the bus with his gladstone bag, took him over to the footpath, got back on the bus, and before I could get it moving, he was back on. Three times I did that. Anyway, in the finish, it was as if he was on a big elastic cord. He was back as fast as I could get him off, and I couldn't get going quickly enough. So in the finish what I did, I didn't take him off, I grabbed his gladstone bag, I took it, I raced over and there was a house with a hedge and I dropped it over the other side of the hedge, because he wasn't going anywhere without that bag. As soon as he was off the bus, I was off.<sup>10</sup>

This was the period when buses were very popular, though grossly overfull. At 733 pounds when they were first released, the Holden was still out of reach for very many people. Buses came into their own for the regular 6 o'clock closing crowd who had a culture all of their own. Then there was 'Needle Day': full mobilisation of the mothers of Melbourne. En masse and on cue, armed with prams they descended on baby health care centres: how do you get 14 prams into a 21-passenger bus? They just did.



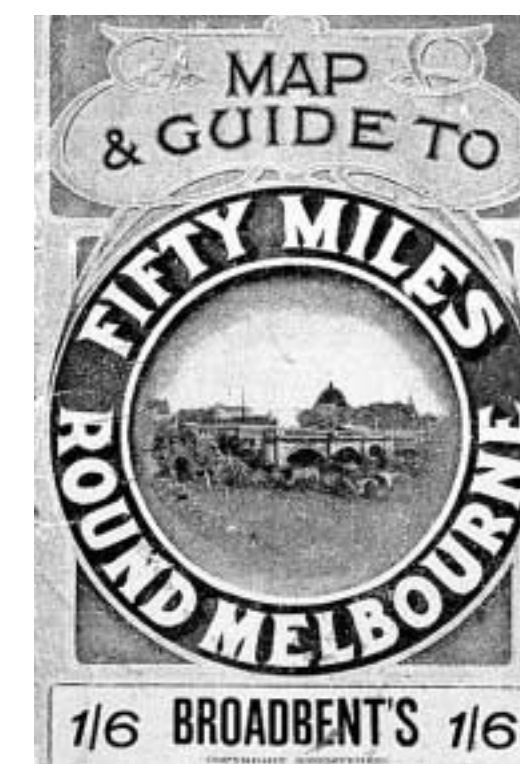
## 'I'm Going to Kill You, You B ..., You Killed My Cat!'

The period between 1952 and 1956 was anything but dull. It was primitive, it was risky, it was funny, it was improvised. For a start, buses had no doors ... which brought with it its own special kind of entertainment;

There was not a great deal of development, but enough to support the addition of Bill Dyson to the driving fleet. In March 1954, Bill Dyson was just old enough, at 20 years of age, to gain the necessary licence and leaves his job as a colour matcher at J.T. Dunstan's in Bell Street. It was a good job at Dunstan's, and Bill was particularly good at it, but he grabs the opportunity to work outside, much the same way as his father did before him.

1954 also saw Laurie's first plunge into hire purchase arrangements to finance his expanding fleet. As if a Christmas present, on 22 December, 1954, Laurie purchases a brand new Bedford, his first brand new vehicle, for 4,000 pounds, paying a substantial 1,600 pounds deposit and monthly payments of 101 pounds over 24 months.

He would really struggle for the next two years. He would expand, but only out of necessity and at significant cost. Buses, even on hire purchase, are expensive items. 1956, however, was a major turning point for the business. Things would start to happen quickly.



**REGENT—PRESTON—JANEFIELD  
BUNDOORA—GRESWELL**  
3d  
Dyson's Bus Service

Head Office: 753 Plenty Rd., Preston  
Phone: JU 2600

Patrons are requested to hail bus at regular bus stops. Please have the exact fare ready and state your destination when entering bus. Patrons should account for driver for fare, if not produced on demand, number must be paid.

Regent Street to Plenty Road Erskine Avenue, Camberra  
Armore, Cemetery, Mount Park Gates and  
Bundoora Station to—Fermian 6d, Erskine 8d,  
Regent Street to Plenty Road Erskine Avenue, Camberra  
at Preston Tram Cemetery 9d, Mount Park Gates 10d,  
at Preston Tram Cemetery 11d, Aqueduct 1/2, Janefield 1/5, Gray

Station — to —  
Section — to —

**FARE SCHEDULE**

**PUBLICITY SERVICES**

Service Operates on  
ESSO FUELS and LUBRICANTS

Obtainable at  
**COOPER'S SERVICE STATION**  
22 HIGH STREET, RESERVOIR

753 PLENTY ROAD,  
EAST PRESTON

Phone JU 2600

CHARTER BUSES FOR HIL  
Local Trips Catered For  
753 PLENTY ROAD,  
EAST PRESTON

Service Operates on  
ESSO FUELS and LUBRICANTS

Obtainable at  
**COOPER'S SERVICE STATION**  
22 HIGH STREET, RESERVOIR

**STATION**  
DYSON'S SERVICE STATION  
Petrol & Tyres  
Oil-Tubes & Grease

CHARTER BUSES FOR HIL  
Local Trips Catered For  
753 PLENTY ROAD,  
EAST PRESTON

Phone JU 2600

Service Operates on  
ESSO FUELS and LUBRICANTS

Obtainable at  
**COOPER'S SERVICE STATION**  
22 HIGH STREET, RESERVOIR

753 PLENTY ROAD,  
EAST PRESTON

Phone JU 2600

HEAD OFFICE:  
753 Plenty Road, Reservoir,  
Phone: 47.2600 47.5464.

**FARES AND SECTIONS**

**TRAIN TO TRAN.**

" ERSKINE AVE..... 6d.  
" CAMBERRA AVE..... 8d.  
" CENETERT..... 10d.  
" MONT PARK GATES..... 11d.  
" BUNDOORA GATES..... 1/-  
" AQUEDUCT..... 1/2  
" JANEFIELD..... 1/5  
THROUGH FARE..... 1/8

**STATION**  
DYSON'S SERVICE STATION  
Petrol & Tyres  
Oil-Tubes & Grease

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753 PLENTY ROAD,  
EAST PRESTON

Phone JU 2600

# Taylor Made

The earliest known financial records of 'Dysons Bus Service' relate to the Balance Sheet prepared for the year ending June 1956, prepared by Chartered Accountant, A.D. Burgoyne.

This was probably quite an achievement, given that Laurie's records management system left a great deal to be desired. As a sole trader, Laurie was not by law required to have professionally prepared accounts, but he would need to borrow, and this would necessitate at least the appearance of professional order. That having been said, the Accountants ducked for cover:

We report that we have prepared the accompanying Profit and Loss Account in respect of the year 1956 together with the Balance Sheet as at that date, from records, vouchers and information supplied by L. Dyson and that to the best of our knowledge and belief these statements are correct. 15

You could see fingers being crossed all over the place.

The Balance Sheet of 1956 indicated that the 18,000 pound business that he bought from Jim Gastin in 1952, was now valued at 13,800 pounds in cash, vehicles and goodwill. The goodwill was only valued at 2,000 pounds. Quite remarkably, net profit before tax for 1955/56 was almost 4,000 pounds, but he owed the bank almost that, and besides, he was facing creditors and hire purchase commitments of an additional 4,400 pounds.

Interestingly enough, this same balance sheet does not indicate any specific and outstanding loans to Jim Gastin or any other individual. By 1956, by whatever means, any possible debt to Gastin appears to have been cleared.

As tight as things were, the Balance Sheet also announces the acquisition, on hire purchase, of a Riley. While the book value of the car was recorded as 1,000 pounds, his house was valued at only 2,900 pounds. It's all a matter of priorities!

LAURIE COLLINS DYSON  
TRADING AS  
"DYSONS BUS SERVICE"

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30th JUNE 1956

LIABILITIES		ASSETS	
Bank Account - L.C. Dyson	2848.14.11	Bank Account - Dysons Bus Service No. 2 A/c	1065. 7. 5
Bank Account - Dyson's Bus Service No. 1 A/c	1091. 1. 4	Sundry Debtor & Cash on Hand	360. 0. 0
Sundry Creditors	1389. 6. 6	Vehicle & Plant	10733. 7. 6
Loan - V. Deacon	150. 0. 0	Goodwill	2000. 0. 0
Purchase Account - W.J. Buggy	1917. 8. 0	Deposit - Bedford Bus	25. 0. 0
Hire Purchase Account		Residence	2900. 0. 0
Bedford Bus C	610.12. 0		
Bedford Bus D	894. 1. 0		
Federal Bus II	450. 0. 0		
Riley Car	1081.16. 0		
<b>Capital Account</b>			
Balance 1.7.55	4366.19. 2		
Plus Net Profit for year	3942. 8. 6		
Less Drawings & Taxes	6650.15. 2		
	<u>£17083.14.11</u>		<u>£17083.14.11</u>

To say the least, Laurie loved his cars and the Riley was obviously going to be his treat. You cannot be too critical of Laurie's apparent extravagance. It, and the Rover that was to come after it, would assume a strategically critical role in the business. In the days when the business was just getting going, Laurie and his sons had to do everything, including locking-up at the end of the day. With six o'clock closing, the pressure was always on to get to the pub before 'final orders'. A fast and reliable car was, therefore, critical. It was common practice for Laurie to hit speeds of up to 80 mph along Plenty Road, to make the pub on time. He never killed anyone, but he came close.

The earliest days of L.C. Dyson's Bus Service Pty Ltd. 753 Plenty Road, Sunday morning: the busiest day of the week.

Equally, his grandsons have lived to remember their trips to Dromana where the family have a beach house. Hitting 100 mph was the challenge and Laurie never let them down. His excursions to Queensland each year up the Newell Highway followed a similar vein.

1956 was also the year of the Olympics. They would provide a major boost to housing development in the northern suburbs. East Preston, in particular, took off fed by the relocation of Camp Pell residents at Royal Park to a new Housing Commission development around the environs of Tyler Street. Housing development was also springing up in adjacent Reservoir. To survive, Laurie would have to expand into the adjacent regions. Either that or be swallowed up by his competition. So in the first few years, the business would progressively introduce new services to capture this business.

Between 1956 and 1960, the 'fleet' would increase from 4 to 12. New services would be introduced at the initiation of Laurie. Routes 134A and 135 were introduced which would capture urban expansion. Like 46A, 134A would start at Regent Station and travel to Plenty Road, then on to North Road, Boldrewood Parade and Strathmerton Street in Reservoir.

This expansion brought pressures of its own. Expansion placed considerable strain on his cash flow position. Such was his plight that he looked to family members for help. Bill Deacon, his son-in-law and married to Maisie, lent him some money. So did George Robinson, his son-in-law and husband of Laurie's daughter, Joan. As small as it may have appeared to be, Laurie is also writing to the guardian's of his father estate, seeking his inheritance payments that had been delayed. When the first of the payments arrives in

August 1956, he and Nina together receive 1,270 pounds. Handy! Particularly when it is realised that the average wage for a bus driver was about 630 pounds a year when Bill Dyson first began to work for Laurie in 1954.

To help him through this time of expansion, Laurie persuaded his eldest son Collins, to join him. 'Col' was a motor mechanic. In 1956, at the age of 27, Col was well established as a mechanic at Preston Motors. He had a young family to consider and Preston Motors had offered him a Foreman position at Footscray. Looking back, Col would feel that there was no real decision to be made in joining his father, but at the time, it was the biggest decision of his life. For some nine months, Col would drive buses before moving permanently into a maintenance role. Col, along with his brother Bill, would remember these months with great fondness, but also as '... the hardest nine months I ever put in'.<sup>16</sup>

To digress just slightly, Laurie's two youngest sons Laurie Jnr and Frank, and his daughter Joan, would not formally join the business.

Joan, urged her father to keep Laurie Jnr at school. In any case, at the time, the business was not in a position to support another family member. Laurie Jnr would work out of school hours for his father. He would come to know the business quite intimately, but would never become formally involved in it beyond being a minor shareholder along with his brothers and sisters. Laurie Jnr instead, would eventually become a partner in a Patent Attorney practice in Melbourne.

Joan herself, like her younger brother Laurie, took no on-going role in the business. She did, however, come to Laurie's rescue when he was at Kilford Repair Service, but Joan would leave Melbourne in 1951 to work with the League of Health in Sydney. She returned to Melbourne the following year, only to return again to Sydney in 1953 and would marry George in 1954. Joan would again come to the aid of Laurie over the period 1958-1961 when she would review working hours for the drivers to ensure that her father conformed with legislative requirements.

Frank took to gardening for a living, working at first at Janefield Hospital before moving across to the company's Bundoora depot to look after its grounds. Frank would develop a particular skill for catching and killing the odd snake, which would be ceremoniously hung on the cyclone fence outside the drivers' room, much to the terror of the unwary visitor, and much to the amusement of on-lookers.

Back to the story. Apart from new routes, a major contributor to the increase in fleet size would be the acquisition of H.E. 'Skipper' Taylor's business. In August 1957, 5 years after outlaying 18,000 pounds for four buses, Laurie ups the ante by another 35,000 pounds to buy 'Taylor's Sales and Services' business, previously Balmoral Motors at 753 Plenty Road, East Preston. Laurie now moves into the place where it all began and he now has a real depot for his growing fleet. The residents of Drysdale Street can again rest easy.

This deal would position 'Dysons Bus Service' as a metropolitan and country operator, but significantly, would also take Laurie back to garage operations, and the hard days of the Kilford Repair Service. He would run his garage and bus activities side by side.

The deal actually struck with Skipper Taylor was by most measures, generous to Taylor. It included the purchase of licenses to operate the Melbourne-Nathalia bus service (operated by Taylor's Nathalia-Melbourne Passenger Service Co.) and the three buses used to operate it: a 37 passenger Federal, a 39 passenger Tilling Stevens and a 33 passenger Ford. For the buses and spare parts, he would pay 12,000 pounds, for the goodwill of Taylors Sales and Services he would pay 18,000 pounds, and for the garage stock an additional 5,174 pounds. As with Gustin's business, Laurie did not purchase the land. He almost certainly could not afford to do so. He would rent the property from Taylor for another 2 years before agreeing to pay 10,000 pounds for it in July 1959. Actual transfer of title of 753 Plenty Road did not occur until 6 years later in April, 1965.

It was all vendor financed and the terms caused a serious drain on his cash position. Purchase of the Nathalia service and garage, alone, would cost him almost four times his total original takings of seven years earlier. Altogether, after agreeing to buy the land in 1959, Laurie would be committed to monthly repayments to Taylor of 350 pounds: 220 pounds a month for the original purchase of the Nathalia service and garage and an additional 130 pounds a month for the land. The upside, however, was substantial. Laurie would finally



Whatever the ultimate motive, the purchase of Taylor's would be the start of Dysons now extensive country and interstate interests. The strategic value of the Melbourne-Nathalia service was considerable. The takings from this run came straight out of the fare box and would provide much needed assistance to the high cost of his rapidly growing metropolitan operation.

The terms of the Contract of Sale with Skipper Taylor were not without risk. On the one hand it did provide for the arrangement to be made null and void if the TRB refused to transfer ownership of the licences to Laurie. This would not be a problem. However:

In the event of the route ceasing to operate by reason of war, then all payments under this Agreement shall, until the route operations are resumed, be suspended.<sup>19</sup>

Of all contingencies, why a 'war' clause? The possibility of war was not completely ludicrous. World War 2 was still reasonably fresh in the minds of people as would have been the Korean war that had only come to an end in July of 1953. The western world was in the middle of a nuclear arms race, but it was not likely to descend upon Nathalia.

To say the least, a 'war' clause was a curious addition, no doubt a sign of the times, and one which few would lose sleep over. Nevertheless, war has many guises and the real ones were about to begin.

Twenty days after Laurie signed his contract of sale with Taylor, the TRB received the following official notification from the Victorian Railways:

Adverting to your recent oral inquiry as to my Commissioners' views on the renewal of permits to the Nathalia-Melbourne Passenger Service Co., and H.R. Dewar, authorising extension to Melbourne of existing licensed services from Nathalia to Heathcote and return, and from Lockington to Heathcote and return respectively, I have to advise that our service between Heathcote and Melbourne ... is adequate for present requirements and that there is accordingly no justification for the continuance of the road service between Heathcote and Melbourne.<sup>20</sup>

If Laurie had grand plans for regional Victoria, this decision did not augur well. The possibility of using the Melbourne-Nathalia service as the trunk route for a regional bus network was not going to happen ... at least not yet.

acquire a home for his business as well as spread his risk by moving back into the 'servo' business with the garage, while at the same time, extending his operation to include country services.

In fact, Laurie Jnr, would recall that it was his impression that the prime motive for the purchase of Taylor's business was not the Nathalia run, but in fact the garage:

He wasn't all that worried about the Melbourne-Nathalia bus run, he was desperate to get the garage.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the fact that the garage gave him the much needed room for his buses, there was business to be done, especially given his time and experience at Smith Street:

He saw the opportunity of getting into the passing trade. In those days the 'servo' sold quite a lot of petrol. We used to have quite good takings on Saturday mornings when I was working there ... I didn't get paid very much! ...<sup>18</sup>

Effectively, he was prevented from picking-up or putting down passengers anywhere between Heathcote and Melbourne. This was not 'war', but it may have been just as effective in its impact.

In the mean time, Laurie did have a depot, albeit, not all that big and rented. Certainly not big enough at the rear to house all his buses. He was going to have to rely on the rapidly diminishing goodwill of the people of Drysdale Street for a little longer.

The number of drivers needed to run the business, of course expands. Bill, Eric and Brian are progressively joined by George Graham, Tom Whitehouse, Ron Sowden, Mick Sweet, Jack Caton, Charlie Blackmore and Bill Watts. Some of these men, like Bill Watts, started on a casual basis, having full-time jobs elsewhere. Bill was a motor body builder, and like all Laurie's drivers, lived close to the Drysdale Street 'depot'. Bill would join in 1957 and stay with Dysons for 29 years, moving in that time, from driver to his trade of body building. Bill's long association with the company would be typical of many of its employees.

Apart from the young and single Bill Dyson, the drivers are all ex-servicemen, just like Laurie. That meant a strong underlying sense of loyalty, and Laurie would need it. More than once, Laurie would knock on one of their doors at night and ask 'Can you come out and do the night shift for me, boy' ... but never be paid. As far as the drivers were concerned, Laurie was 'one of them'; after all he spent the best part of 18 years driving milk carts. They also knew that money was tight. They also knew that Laurie could be a hard man.

All these drivers and buses needed management and Laurie had earlier recruited 'Mick' Simpson to take on the role. Mick was a part-time Bookmaker's clerk, which meant that he had a head for numbers that would make modern satellite navigation and positioning redundant. Mick could compile performance data in an instant. He probably also gave Laurie some useful inside intelligence for his odd bet. Mick, in fact, came across to Laurie with the Nathalia purchase as did Len Morgan and Bill Horman (Senior). These men would become long serving and highly valued employees of Dysons.

1957 was very important in one other respect. That year, Laurie brings into the business his son-in-law, Bill Deacon, Maisie's husband. Not only was Bill going to have a leading role in the future development of the company, he had the management qualities that Laurie knew he himself lacked. While the business was still quite small, it was finding itself, by necessity, becoming more involved with government regulatory authorities and unions. It would need someone with the negotiating and representational skills to take the business to the next level. Laurie was very comfortable dealing one-on-one with his employees, but that would not be enough.

Bill Deacon's arrival was indeed timely. Laurie was about to be taken on by the TRB.

Charter has always been seen as the flagship of any bus company, because it involves the top end of the market: luxury coaches. It represents quality and achievement. Unfortunately, Laurie didn't have a charter licence ... yet ... and that was about to bring him into trouble.

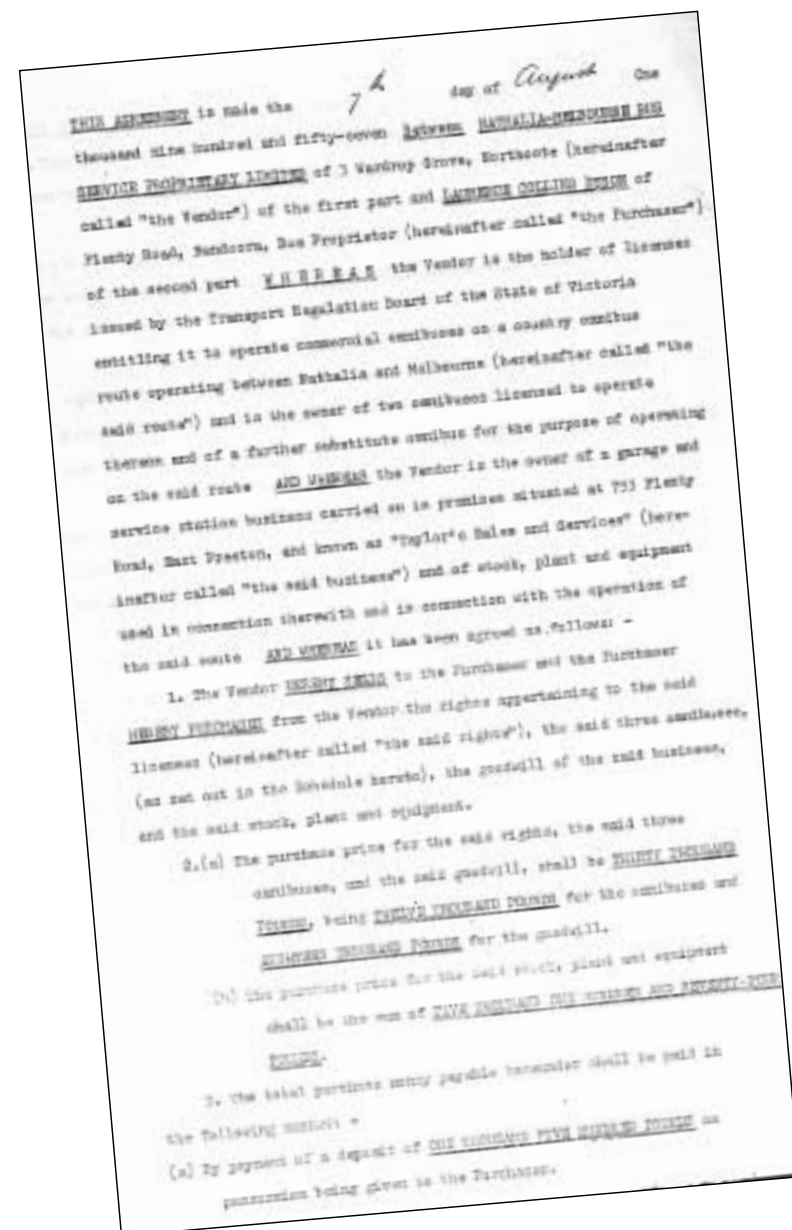
In July 1958, Laurie bid for and won a contract, tendered by the then Commonwealth Repatriation Commission, for '... the transportation of patients on amenity outings and other personnel as required to and/or from Repatriation institutions ...' for the year to June 1959. The institutions involved included Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg, MacLeod Repatriation Sanatorium, Mont Park, Repatriation Mental Hospital, Bundoora and the Red Cross Convalescent Home, Kew. The only problem was that to qualify for the contract, the operator required a charter licence and Laurie did not have one.

He won the contract over the existing operator, Brien's Coaches of Footscray. Brien's naturally appealed and, in the understated language of Bill Dyson, '... had words ...' with Laurie.

The appeal went before the TRB a month later in August, and again to quote the understated Bill Dyson, '... gave him some trouble about that'<sup>21</sup> ... when they found out the true situation.

Not hard to understand!

Undaunted, Laurie never hesitated to engage professional help when required, and on this occasion, he would engage Harold Lawrence, a very well respected Transport Consultant, to manage the appeal.



Contract of Sale with 'Skipper' Taylor.

If understatement was the order of the day, Harold's letter to Laurie, the day after the hearing, had to be its supreme example:

Dear Laurie  
I am not over (sic) optimistic about winning yesterday's case ...<sup>22</sup>

Harold was right. The TRB refused Laurie's application to run the service.

As always, when in a spot, improvise. With the 'heat' on, Laurie looks for a licence and the most expedient way of obtaining one is to buy out an existing charter operator. As always, Laurie loved a chat and came across a 'regular' at Skipper Taylor's service station that used to bring a bus service down to Melbourne each Sunday from Kinglake. He also ran a furniture removalist business. His name was Bruce Heather. Bruce owned three buses and a charter licence and that, as they say, was that.

Despite all that had happened, Laurie won the day and the contract. Pulling rabbits out of hats was a specialty: he 'produced' the charter licence he needed, albeit a little late, and persuaded the powers that be that all was fine in Reservoir.

All the activity of the latter 1950s would require a good deal more than 93 pounds a week plus a government subsidy. By 1959, his business takings would exceed 85,000 pounds. According to Laurie:

... This I have done without the assistance of any outside capital, which is, in my opinion, quite an achievement.<sup>23</sup>

Gross takings from Routes 46A and 134A/135 were growing very strongly and providing the bulk of the business' profit. Offsetting these gains, Nathalia, at this time, was struggling and the garage side of the business was losing money.

All in all, however, from a very shaky beginning, 'Dysons Bus Service' was beginning to take shape but still within an environment in which the choices were quite stark: either continue to expand or face extinction. Cash flow, therefore, was everything.

While times were still tight, they were not quite as bad as the first two years. In 1957, Laurie builds himself a new home with the assistance of a war service loan. He had been living in the farm manager's house now for more or less 30 years. There would have to be room for his new television set, over which he exercised absolute control, and of course, there was the new Riley. The new home is only next door at No. 7 Plenty Road. Col would move into his father's house at No. 1 and would stay there for the next twenty-six years before moving to Whittlesea while Bill Deacon would move into No. 11. Laurie Jnr was at No. 9. Life, overall, is starting to look a little better.

A slightly older Brian Cocks behind the wheel in the early 1970's.



Except for one last thing. Rates. Land Rates to be precise. Laurie seemed to have a passion for paying them, even when he had no reason to.

Laurie appeared to have little patience with the 'detail' of transactions. In the early days of the service station at Plenty Road, Laurie, on one occasion, settled a debt owed to him by accepting a small block of land near Grantville in South Gippsland. The only problem was that Laurie failed to have the title transferred to his name. There is even some doubt about whether he actually ever saw the land. The 'minor' legal technicality of legal title did not stop him from paying the rates, which he kept doing for many years, quite unnecessarily. It would only be in 1991 that his daughter Joan, and only after considerable negotiation, would finally win legal title to it.

The same situation applied to his five acres of land on the corner of Grimshaw Street and Plenty Road. When Laurie came to sell off the land that would not be used by the family, he was confronted by the fact that some of the land was not actually his! It in fact belonged to the Church of England. But that had not stopped Laurie paying the rates on that land for many years as well. On this occasion, and in view of the fact that he and not the church had paid the rates for so long and in good faith, he was offered title but he would not accept it. He would give the land to the church.

As the story will show, Laurie and his sons would become involved in a number of land dealings, all to do with finding a home for the company. For all of that experience, the world is probably a better place because Laurie chose to become a bus operator and not a real estate agent.

One of the buses bought from Bruce Heather. Bill Dyson never drove it: 'you'd freeze to death driving it'.



## 1959–1960: The First of the Company's Campaigns

The statement was simple enough but its significance was extraordinary:

It was reported that all matters in connection with the registration of the Company had been attended to. The Certificate of the Incorporation of the Company No. 43350 dated 16th June 1959 was produced together with a copy of the Memorandum of Articles of Association as registered.

*L.C. Dyson, Chairman*<sup>24</sup>

It was now official. As of June 1959, L.C. Dysons Bus Services Pty Ltd was born. Not too bad an achievement for the 18-year-old who stood alone on Tilbury Docks in February 1923. Nina, Collins and Bill Dyson would be Co-Directors and Laurie would assume the role of Company Secretary and Manager. Laurie, Nina and the five children were the shareholders.

The creation of a family business was the legacy of Laurie. There would be no outside capital. This guiding principle would be staunchly protected by subsequent generations. However, there would be two remarkable exceptions: Noel Skene and Brian Cocks. In 1962, Laurie offered both of these men a small share in the business ... but they had to pay for them. The dividends paid to Noel and Brian would be equally small, but that was not the point. Noel and Brian had given great loyalty to Laurie, and that loyalty was to be recognised, and what better and more significant way was there than this.<sup>25</sup>

It was not long before the newly formed family business, and more to the point, its newly appointed Directors, would be put to the test.

While the position of the Victorian Railways had earlier dampened prospects for growth in Central Victoria, it was opening them up quite quickly closer to home. The land and rail boom of the late 1880s resulted in some quite suspect rail development. According to Michael Cannon's expose of that period in Victorian politics, *The Land Boomers*, following formal government inquiries, certain celebrated politicians suddenly saw the need to leave not only the state but also the country. The rail network had overreached itself and was being replaced by road transport. Rail replacement activity was part of the government's agenda of the late 1950s, and it included replacement of rail services to Whittlesea.

In its first full year of operation, 1960/61, the Whittlesea/Kinglake routes would lose 3,000 pounds alone, which was getting close to wiping out the profit (4,400 pounds) derived from the mainstay of the business, 46A. Bill Dyson, in his typically laconic fashion, summed up the situation: '... it bled us white'.<sup>26</sup>

To underscore the poor performance of the route, Tony Locke of A.H.G. Clarke and Co., who was now the company's financial advisor, made note in his presentation of accounts for the year 1960/61 that:

... revenue expressed as pence per mile (for Whittlesea) is 20.91 which is almost 9 pence less than the average for all the company's routes. When it is remembered that the 1959 Statistical Report issued by the Transport Board disclosed that the average revenue received by the Bus Services was 35.38 pence, there is every reason why an immediate increase (in fares) should be sought for this route.<sup>27</sup>

Typical of the many people who would become associated with the company, Tony would develop a relationship with Dysons that would last around thirty years. He, and others who would follow him, brought financial discipline and stewardship to the business.

There was no government subsidy and nor was there to be one for some 14 years. The campaign centred on offering a more convenient service whereby passengers could make the interchange between rail and tram, closer to the city, using Plenty Road. Dysons protest campaign was successful. Bill Deacon with Col and Bill Dyson, won the right to operate the service but had just 6 days to make it happen.

Apart from everything else, they also had to find the buses, and acquiring the buses to operate the service would cost a considerable sum. The company's hire purchase commitments would rapidly escalate. To pacify their creditors, six months after having taken over the Whittlesea service, Laurie writes to WASPA with what was to prove to be a somewhat overly optimistic view of the world:

Last November, the Railways discontinued the Whittlesea-Melbourne service, and I took this over and had to get buses for it, and to do this, cost me a lot of money. The Railways, the previous year had lost just over 20,000 pounds on this one line. Until this month, I lost heavily on this run, but have now got it into a much more favourable position, and I am very confident that it will continue to improve, and in another one or two months we will make a profit on this run.<sup>28</sup>

Late in 1959, the rail service between Epping and Whittlesea was replaced by bus and a licence was granted to the East Preston and Epping Bus Service (to be known later as Reservoir Bus Company) to operate the service using Lalor Station as the connection. As irony or fate would have it, the Cooper family now owned this business – there's that name again!

Dysons mounted a protest, and from this time on, Dysons is no longer just Laurie. Laurie has the support of both Col and Bill Dyson and Bill Deacon. A campaign is mounted. The Whittlesea service is seen as critical to the future growth of the company since it would protect the company from competitors threatening its principal artery, the Plenty Road corridor. Dysons succeed.

The campaign strategy to acquire the Whittlesea service was full of risk. The service would not make money; in fact it would lose money, lots of it.

Whittlesea offered one other major challenge: making sure that you collected the fares! Train travellers were quite used to fare dodging. Before the days of subsidised travel, bus operators survived by whatever they were able to collect directly out of the fare box. Fare dodging simply wasn't on. This would be a job for 'Booming Billy' Dyson:<sup>29</sup> a tremendously jovial bloke – just don't mess with him. Making sure that you collected the fares would prove to be an amusing, but at the same time, deadly serious issue for the company:

We had to convert the people over to the buses, which they didn't want to do, mainly because they couldn't get in the door without paying a fare. They used to try lots of ways of doing that ... if you were out of your seat they would be in like a shot and you would have to go down and ask them for the fare, which wasn't very good public relations in front of the people (prolonged chuckle), but Alf Oldham and I, we used to do it.<sup>30</sup>

By 1960 the business is now turning over 80,000 pounds compared to just 93 pounds in 1952. However, the company's costs were equally sizeable. Laurie is certainly feeling 'the pinch'. Whittlesea is eroding profits and the garage is just breaking even or worse. The final words of his letter to the WASPA are ominous:

We hope that you will realise from this letter the honest attempt we are making to meet all our commitments and meet them we will, for we have never yet been guilty of not doing so.

We hope that, understanding our position a little better, you will endeavour to carry on allowing us credit and we will, to the very best of our ability, meet our payments as promptly as possible.<sup>31</sup>

One of the more inventive ways in which the company attempts to address its cash flow problem is to acquire 'loans' from the petrol companies, in return for exclusivity of dealing. Competition between petroleum companies was particularly keen at this time leading them to offer attractive inducements to service station owners to gain exclusive dealing arrangements. How timely. In Dysons case, they were given at least one loan in 1960 of nearly 7,000 pounds, secured by a mortgage, which did not appear to have to be fully repaid, and in addition to which, they also received a small monthly payment for a period of 10 years.

Meanwhile, and much closer to home, the neighbours, as well as the Preston City Council, are getting increasingly restless.

Space was always a problem. While one hand is attempting to pacify creditors, the other is attempting to keep Preston Council from effectively shutting him down.

By May 1960, the Council takes action to remove Laurie's kerb-side petrol pumps. They are a safety hazard. The letter from the Council is brief and to the point:

Dear Sir

I am directed by my Council to hereby give notice that licenses granted to your company for operation of two kerb-side petrol pumps at premises at 753 Plenty Road, Reservoir, will not be renewed after expiration of the current period ending on the 30th September, 1960 ...

Yours faithfully

Town Clerk<sup>32</sup>

This probably came as no surprise. There had been many complaints, including those from his neighbours at 755 Plenty Road, Mr & Mrs Barry. There must have been enormous frustration on both sides.

In a draft of a letter to Council, Laurie's response is to seek Council approval to purchase 755 Plenty Road from the Barry's. That, it would seem, would solve everyone's problem. Laurie could extend the business premises across 753-755 Plenty Road, have extra space to house his growing fleet, stop annoying his neighbours, and move his petrol pumps off the street.

In Laurie's own words:

Mr A Tinning  
Town Hall  
Preston

Dear Mr Tinning

I have the opportunity to purchase the property adjoining my bus depot at 753 Plenty Road, Reservoir and have obtained an option on it. It is very desirable that I do so for many reasons, the main one being that my present depot is too small for the yarding of my buses, eight years ago I had only three, but now the number has grown to 20<sup>33</sup> ... no alterations would be made to the house in which I would house one of my staff, which in turn would ensure the safety of my buses etc, as at present I am pestered with vandals, and have been robbed at various times ...

In the same letter, and turning to the order to remove his kerb-side pumps, he gets a little more serious:

... this in itself is a death warrant for my petrol sales etc, and again in this respect, your permission to purchase the Barry's property would ensure that after the removal of my kerb pumps, I would be able to incorporate off-kerb pumps without any difficulty ...

Death warrant! Tell them what you really think, Laurie! But, he keeps the best to last:

... further, the purchase of the Barry's property by this company would most certainly make life much more pleasant, as Mr Barry goes to extremes to ensure that I am at all times aware of his displeasure in the most petty matters. I am sure the Council is aware of this. I have at all times tried not to annoy him in any way, and have never retaliated though at times I have been sorely tried, especially when he has gone to such extremes as parking his car right across the front of my double petrol pump for hours. All in all the purchase of the property is very desirable and essential.<sup>34</sup>



## BUS ROUTE ALTERATION

**FROM MON. JULY 6th**

Due to a transport regulation board request the section of bus route between Baldrewood Parade and Strothmerton St. shops will be deleted. The new route will be known as Kingsbury via Baldrewood Pde. and Dunne St.

### NEW ROUTE

From Regent Station via Tyler St., East Preston Tram, Plenty Rd., Baldrewood Pde., North Rd., Charlton Cres., Keilor Ave., Winters Cres., Baldrewood Pde., Dunne St., Link St., Green St., Niblick St. and Flag St., terminating at Golf and Keats Ave. intersection.

Fares & Sections		Patrons To North Road	
REGENT STATION TO TRAM	6d.	Keilor Ave and Winters Cres. Area not affected by change of route.	
REGENT STATION TO NORTH RD	8d.	SLIGHT ALTERATION TO TIME TABLE	
REGENT STATION TO DUNNE ST. BRIDGE	10d.	Patrons from Strothmerton St. area wishing to travel to East Preston Tram or Regent Station can connect with buses at corner of Evans Crescent, (Dunne St.) and Baldrewood Pde. or Dunne St. Cres. (Winters Cres.) and Baldrewood Pde. FARES UNCHANGED TO THE TRAM.	
REGENT STATION TO KEATS & FLAG STS	1/-		
THROUGH FARE	1/-		

#### MAP OF NEW ROUTE

**L. C. DYSONS** BUS SERVICE Pty. Ltd.  
Enquiries 47-2600

Early days of expansion.

No doubt, the Barry's had their own story to tell.

Laurie did not have long to wait for a reply. At the beginning of July, the company receives approval to use 755 Plenty Road, in conjunction with 753 Plenty Road, for the '... purpose of a Manager's residence, offstreet bus park and service apron ...'<sup>35</sup>

Without wasting any time, Bill Deacon, in his role as Manager, L.C. Dysons Bus Services Pty Ltd, approaches the Barry's who are happy to sell, having bought a property elsewhere, and arranges with the Atlantic Union Oil Company, to relocate the petrol pumps ... at Atlantic's expense.

The title to 755 Plenty Road passes to the company on the 21st of October, 1960, ironically some four and a half years before the title to 753 Plenty Road.

As if all this activity was not enough to handle, the concluding remarks incorporated into the company accounts for 1959/60 were to forebode an issue that was going to stay with the company for virtually the rest of the century:

We were given the impression by the Company's staff that the charter work undertaken by the company was highly profitable, but as will be seen the profits from the Charter section are by no means great compared with 46A and 134/135A.

We are also informed that certain Charter work is undertaken on a cut rate basis and, if this is still the case, we would suggest that the practice be discontinued when practicable.<sup>36</sup>

It would never become practicable! The number of bus operators, and the level of competition would continue to plague the industry. Dysons, like most operators, would continue to struggle with this issue for the next 40 years.

In quick time, therefore, the company, having been formally established, would almost immediately confront some of the most significant issues in its first 50 years of operation. Simultaneously, it entered into forward and rearguard campaigns to keep itself viable, and in the process, it was haemorrhaging badly.



Transport Regulation Board

12 May, 1961

Dear Sir,

Further to the Public Hearing of the 4th of May, 1961, of an application by L.C. Dysons's Bus Service Pty Ltd, to extend into Reservoir, we would like to request that if the Board should intend to grant the application, the Board's decision be reserved until the latest application by Mr Dyson to operate a deviation of Route 46A, as per Government Gazette dated 10th May, 1961, is determined ... The granting of Mr Dyson's application already heard by the Board, and the granting of the new application, could lead to the most dramatic results on the service which we now operate from Reservoir, via Broadway to Boldrewood Parade ... To grant the application now undetermined, appears only to be the first step, to be followed up by his later application, which with subsequent re-organisation, could completely upset the balance of the services now operating...and would (enable Mr Dyson to) operate a large loop, routing Reservoir, Mont Park, East Preston and Regent ...

Yours faithfully

S.W. Cooper

Director<sup>37</sup>

## Battle Tactics

If the 1950s were spontaneous and raw,  
the 1960s would be strategic.

Opportunities for growth were apparent on a number of fronts. So was the need to protect the company from encroaching competition. The Coopers and the Dyson's had already crossed swords over the rail replacement contract between Epping and Whittlesea. It was not going to be long before they were to cross swords again, only this time, the stakes would be higher.

Reservoir and Greensborough, like Preston, offered excellent growth prospects as housing developments extended further into these regions. Dysons, from the very beginning, had been using Plenty Road as the principal artery for building a network of offshoot services. First into East Preston, then further into Reservoir via its service to Regent Station. The East Preston and Epping Bus Services, controlled by the Cooper's, had similar aspirations concerning its activity in Reservoir. In the absence of clear lines of demarcation, and only a little more than 12 months after their first clash, the inevitable happened.

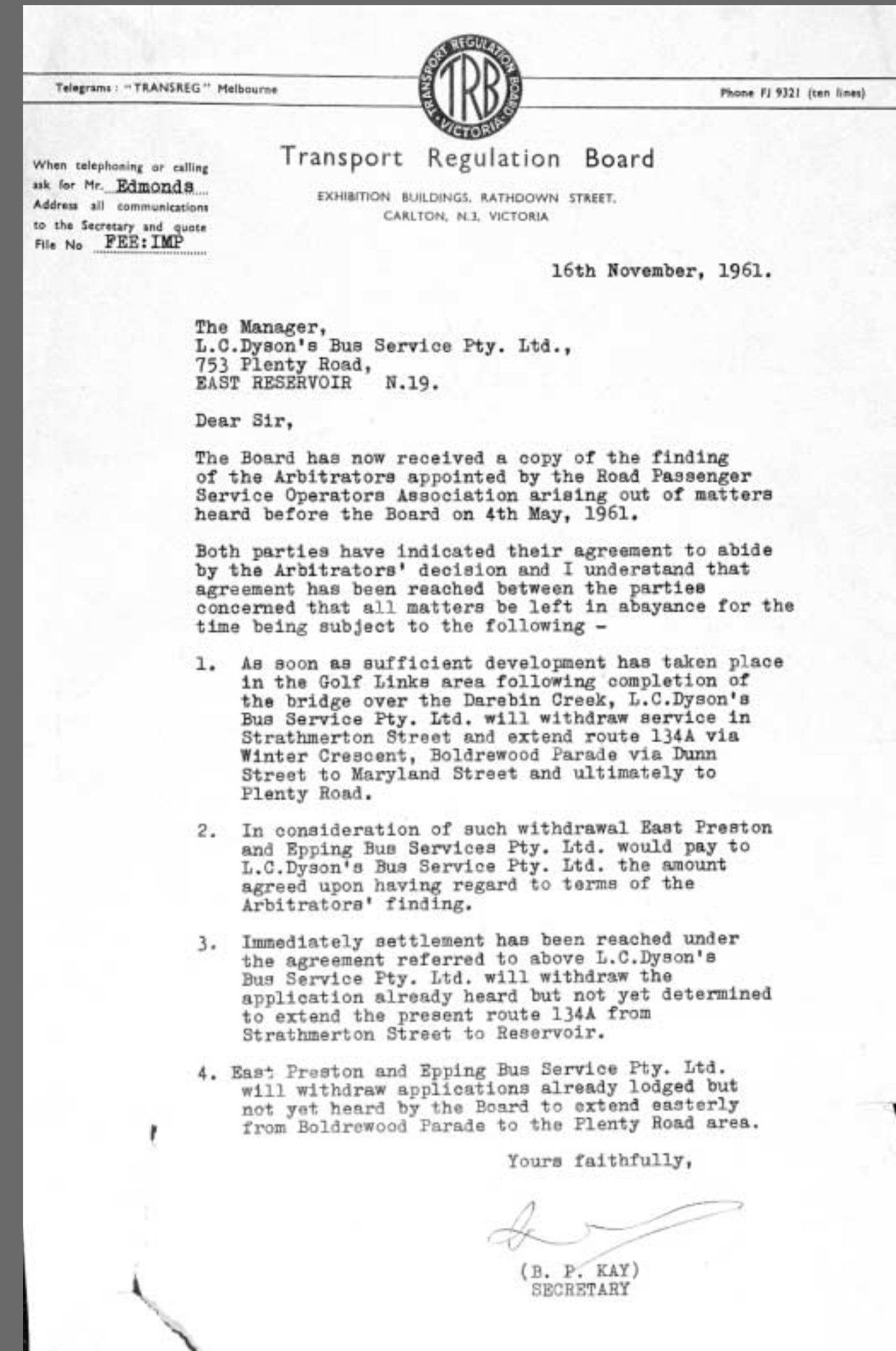
1. As soon as sufficient development has taken place in the Golf Links area following completion of the bridge over the Darebin Creek, L.C. Dyson's Bus Services Pty Ltd will withdraw service in Strathmerton Street and extend route 134A via Winter Crescent, Boldrewood Parade via Dunne Street to Maryland Street and ultimately to Plenty Road.
2. In consideration of such withdrawal, East Preston and Epping Bus Services Pty Ltd would pay to L.C. Dyson's Bus Service Pty Ltd the amount agreed upon having regard to terms of the Arbitrator's finding.
3. Immediately settlement has been reached under the agreement referred to above, L.C. Dyson's will withdraw the application already heard but not yet determined to extend the present route 134A from Strathmerton Street to Reservoir.
4. East Preston and Epping Bus Service will withdraw applications already lodged but not yet heard by the Board to extend easterly from Boldrewood Parade to the Plenty Road area.<sup>38</sup>

In essence, Darebin Creek, which runs north-south across the region, was now the agreed boundary, which neither company would in future attempt to cross. In many ways, this decision was full of symbolism, since the McLean farm, where Laurie first lived and worked, was only metres from the Creek and a little further to the bridge which now defined the western boundary of his rapidly growing business.

Private L.C. ('Boots') Dyson of the 61st Battery, 2/11 Army Field Regiment, AIF, had served some time in the Middle East during the war. He had obviously studied Rommel's tactics with considerable care. From deep in the bunker of 753 Plenty Road, it would appear that Laurie and his Co-Directors were about to launch a 'pincer-like' campaign against their major protagonist. The battle lines were now drawn, with considerable consequences for both companies.

The Coopers retaliated with a number of applications to extend their Boldrewood Parade services to Plenty Road. Unlike Laurie's contract with Skipper Taylor, this was war.

By November, 1961, the TRB produced a finding which has more or less lasted quite successfully until this day, and indirectly, laid the groundwork for what was later to become a very successful partnership in East West. Combining logic and common sense, the TRB determined:



The 'Darebin' Creek Agreement.



## 'We Now Have a Solid Business'

Having successfully negotiated 'peace in our time', it was now time to pass the baton on to the next generation.

In October 1962, Bill Deacon, who had been by this time managing the day-to-day affairs of the business for 5 years, was formerly appointed a Director. Bill would direct the company's financial and administrative matters. Col would continue to direct bus acquisition and maintenance activity while Bill Dyson would oversee bus operations. Together they made an effective trio ... although it is also true to say that Col and Bill Deacon would share the odd 'fair and frank discussion' from time to time about how to best manage the business.

Bill Deacon was the man with the people skills: unlike Laurie, he was more than capable of approaching anybody, be they unions, government or other bus operators, on any matter of importance.



A young Col Dyson in his corporate headquarters.

Col, was the 'technician': a man with the eye for detail. A perfectionist, a person who brought practicality and intelligence to the decision making process. Typical of the business today, to Col, quality of service was and remains everything. His involvement in the business, however, would not be confined to maintenance issues. His presence would be found throughout the company. As his sister Joan would relate:

... (prior to assuming leadership of the business) Collins' claim to fame was that he knew precisely where each route bus should be at a given time. As a bus passed the depot in Plenty Road, he invariably consulted his watch. If a bus was running late or early, he wanted to know why.<sup>39</sup>

Bill Dyson, was the man at the 'front line'. He drove the buses, he supervised operations, he collected the fares. He developed an excellent feel for the day-to-day performance of the company. He spent all his time out on the road. From the days of his early involvement with the business, his perceptions of route and driver performance would prove invaluable.

With his sons and son-in-law now fully in place within the company, in 1963, at the age of 58, the Directors felt it necessary to send Laurie and Nina on an around-the-world study tour. Afterall, 'best practice' has always been the hallmark of the company.

In the words of the company Minutes:

The meeting was advised that all arrangements had now been completed for the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Dyson on an overseas trip. During the period of this trip, the two Directors will inspect various Bus Depots and ancillary operations with a view to introducing the latest ideas and trends into the Company's bus routes and management. The meeting was also advised that the company has already paid for the return fares for Mr and Mrs Dyson and the question was raised as to the payment by the company of the costs incurred whilst the Directors are overseas. Resolved that the company will reimburse the Directors travelling and accommodation costs on their return to Australia.<sup>40</sup>

Laurie's report back to the company on the international road passenger transport system was 'impressive'. As the report states:

In the last few years, the business has grown rapidly. Actually, 10 years ago there were three<sup>41</sup> buses and I had no, or very slight knowledge of bus operations ... there is still a lot to learn and ... to that end I undertook the trip visiting Italy, France and all of Great Britain. To further my knowledge of the practical aspects of running bus services, I undertook as many bus trips as possible. Some of the trips were as follows: Adelaide, Fremantle, Naples, Cannes, London, Luton (Bedford Bus Chassis Works) and Hendon (Duple Bus Passenger Body Works). After departure from Britain, we had visits to Bus Depots and also bus trips at Curacao, Balboa, Panama City and Papeete.<sup>42</sup>

No doubt there were useful and immediate comparisons to be drawn between Whittlesea and Panama City.

In fact, it is probably just sheer coincidence, but the West Indies were scheduled to commence a 5 test series in England, just after Laurie and Nina were due to arrive, so perhaps he found some time to see the 'Windies' play at Headingley, where they won by 221 runs. The Windies team included the likes of Kanhai, Hall, Gibbs and Sobers; the 'Poms' included Dexter, Trueman, Titmus and Barrington.

The following year, 1964, sees a major break from the past. The four clapped out buses, and those which were part of the deal with Taylor, were progressively sold off. From this point, the Dysons fleet would rapidly modernise. Of those bought from Gastin, the Ford had already been sold in 1962. In 1964, the original Bedfords would go, each for 330 pounds, and the International would go for 75 pounds. Of those bought from Taylor, the Federal had already been scrapped and the Tilling Stevens and the Ford had all been disposed of two years earlier in 1962. Even the Riley was sold! (to Laurie Jnr).

So by June 1965, the schedule of buses now operated by Dysons shows a modern fleet of 16, all of them Bedfords, three of which had been bought on hire purchase within the previous nine months.



Laurie Dyson on his fact finding mission to the UK, 1963.

Finding the ideal bus had been, and was to remain, an on-going issue for the company, as it was for all bus operators. At one time in 1968, Dysons experimented with a Commer, a 3 cylinder 2 stroke engine – known as the ‘Commer Knocker’ for obvious reasons. It was built specifically for the company for the Nathalia run, simply because they did not make big diesel buses at that time. That proved to be an expensive experiment that almost sent the company under: it was involved in accidents and was generally difficult and expensive to maintain. They also experimented with the Duple from the UK as well as the Tilling Stevens. The cost of petrol, maintenance and design problems meant that none of them proved successful. The Bedfords, however, remained true ... *almost*. Bill Dyson would recall the exception. The company numbered its fleet sequentially, starting with the No. 1. No. 13 would be a Bedford. However, No. 13 was converted to No. 12A in very smart time:

... it acted like No. 13. Trucks ran up its behind, it was driven into a ditch, it had every panel changed on it from accidents. Anyway, we changed the number to 12A and we had no more problems, and that’s a fair dinkum story.<sup>43</sup>

The 1965 schedule of buses would also show the addition of a Rover to replace the Riley. Life must have its rewards.

In an effort to give their support to the modernisation of the business and its further expansion, the payments to each of the children out of the estate of Benjamin Dyson are converted into debenture loans to the company, in all totaling 15,750 pounds. These debentures progressively mature over the period 1968 to 1973.

As Laurie and Nina move towards retirement, their sons are looking to expand. Stymied to the west by the ‘Darebin Creek Agreement’, growth would need to come from elsewhere.

The first opportunity was the highly strategic purchase of the Melbourne-Lockington service from Harrison’s Coaches of Echuca, formerly owned by the Dewar family, in July 1965. As indicated earlier, having bought the Melbourne-Nathalia service back in 1957, it was quickly realised that the Victorian Railways was going to pre-empt any attempt by Dysons to build a major competing road service through Central Victoria. However, subsequent rationalisation of country rail services saw VicRail withdraw its Kilmore-Heathcote service. In the absence of competition from rail, suddenly, many opportunities presented themselves.

The value of the Lockington-Melbourne service was that it offered a common route with Dysons as far as Heathcote, after which it diverged through Elmore and Rochester. The obvious economies to be gained through the rationalisation of the two services, made the acquisition of the Harrison’s service an attractive proposition. Again, all vendor financed. The company paid 11,000 pounds, providing this time, an unusually sizable 6,000 pound deposit and twelve quarterly installments of 416 pounds paid by means of promissory notes.

Closer to home, and in keeping with residential development, Northland Shopping Centre was opened in 1966 and this provided the single biggest opportunity for the company to date.

Three partners, Norman Craig (Northcote), Alec Caddy (Alphington) and Thomas Johnson (Thornbury), had founded the Northcote Bus Service, which was a small 3 bus operation, running from the corner of High and Mitchell Streets in Northcote to the corner of Rathmines and Station Streets in Thornbury. What was needed was a fourth bus to connect Mitchell Street with Northland. Dyson’s provided the fourth bus and the vital link. The four parties joined together in 1966 under a reconstituted Northcote Bus Service. In typical style, and, reminiscent of the Drysdale Street days, for the next 16 years, these buses would be housed on private property on Victoria Road. In forming the company, six shares would be issued: 3 to Dysons and one each to Caddy, Craig and Johnson. Seeing the financial value of this small but potentially profitable business, Dysons negotiated options to buy out the other parties, either on their death or if and when they individually decided to sell. As forecast, the service was profitable. For the first time, they were experiencing high and consistent volumes of passengers throughout the day: ‘... we’d never seen these volumes of people (before) ...’<sup>44</sup>

	DAIVER	MECHS	ADMIN	BUS	DAIVER	DRIVER	ADMIN	BUS	MECHS	DRIVER	MECHS	ADMIN	BUS	DAIVER	DRIVER	ADMIN				
7																				
4	80	00	25	00	Nov 8	80	00	35	00	Mar 28	99	58	35	00	Mar 28	80	00	35		
11	80	00	25	00		15	88	47	35	00	26	64	90	35	00	Aug 6	95	13	35	
18	80	00	25	00		22	80	00	35	00	Apr 4	89	48	35	00	13	95	13	35	
25	80	00	25	00		25		15	00	9	80	00	35	00	20	94	69	35		
31	80	00	25	00		26	83	56	35	00	17	94	69	35	00	27	20	00	35	
7	80	00	25	00	Dec 5	104	47	35	00	23	103	14	35	00	Sep 3	98	69	35		
14	84	45	25	00		12	80	00	35	00	29	80	00	35	00	10	29	79	35	
15						19	98	25	35	00	May 7	27	12	35	00	17	80	00	35	
22	80	00	25	00		28	95	44	35	00	14	80	00	35	00	24	80	00	35	
29	80	00	25	00	529-43						21	172	56	35	00	Oct 1	80	00	35	
6	80	00	25	00			1232	85	760	00	28	158	320	35	00	7	113	32	35	
12	83	45	25	00	1965-2 Jan 3	101	36	35	00	6	00	June 6	126	20	35	00	15	104	27	35
19	88	01	25	00		9	108	48	35	00	12	111	62	35	00	22	80	00	35	
20						23	70				18	104	92	35	00	29	80	00	35	
26	80	00	25	00		23	80	00	35	00	25	25	06	35	00	Nov 6	116	19	35	
3	80	00	25	00		31	97	80	35	00						12	118	23	35	
10	90	68	25	00		6	94	24	35	00						19	80	00	35	
16						13	27	84	35	00							26	90	00	35
17	114	71	35	00		20	20	00	35	00	1968					Dec 3	90	00	35	
24	101	36	35	00		27	86	67	35	00	Jul 2	80	00	35	00	10	90	00	50	
31	80	00	35	00		5	21	98	35	00	9	103	14	35	00	17	93	72	40	
						13	80	00	35	00	16	80	00	35	00	24	277	40		

Not only was the Northcote Bus Service profitable, it saved the day. In the absence of opportunities in Reservoir, it gave the company the high margin business it desperately needed. It also gave some of the Directors the first real sense that

... we now had a solid business ...<sup>45</sup>

The company by 1966 had a fleet of some 19 buses plus the 7 buses of Northcote Bus Service. It now operated over a growing but still relatively limited metropolitan network, which sought to capitalise on the rapid residential and recreational activity of north-eastern Melbourne. At the same time, its country network had taken a major leap forward. It was no longer restricted by the monopoly control of rail, and now had the basis for considerable growth in country services.

To top off a significant decade, the makeshift depot-come-service station of 753 Plenty Road was combined with 755 Plenty Road, to become the company’s first ‘custom designed’ depot. It was officially opened in October 1969, but not before, as always, considerable wheeling and dealing.

The ‘elaborate’ accounting system for Northcote Bus Service.



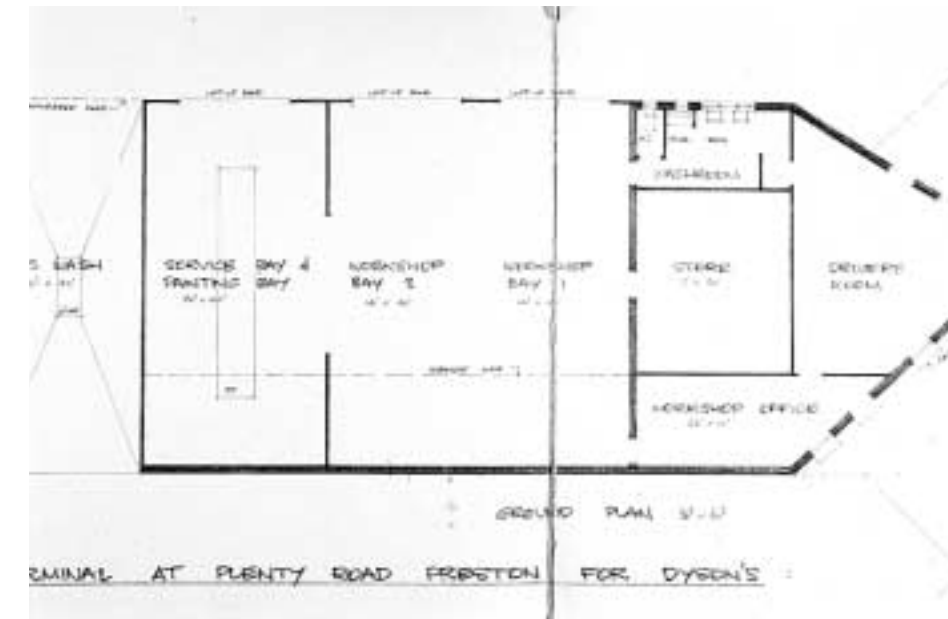
As early as July 1960, following formal notice from Preston Council that his kerb-side pumps were to be removed, formal plans had been drawn up which indicated the amalgamation of 753 and 755 Plenty Road. The plans were very simple. The house on 755 Plenty Road would remain and be used as an office. All he wanted and needed was the land: at the rear of 755 for his buses and the front of the block for off-kerb pumps. In fact, Col wanted to live in 755 while he built his new home, but Mrs Burns, who was Dysons first office administrator, and Bill Deacon, would not have it.

The plans did not go anywhere. They couldn't. 753 Plenty Road still belonged to Taylor. Perhaps Laurie anticipated paying out Taylor for 753 well before 1965. Either that, or the 'plans' were a ruse to convince Council of the urgent need for 755 Plenty Road for his buses – before he could actually do anything about it. Laurie is regarded universally, as a very honest man, but was he now telling some 'fibs' to Council? Afterall, he had told Council that he had 'purchased' 753 Plenty Road. It was not exactly a fib, he had paid a deposit, but there is the 'minor' distinction between paying a deposit and actually having legal title to the land.

However, after 1965, the possibility of a formal depot became real. Laurie cleared his debt with Skipper Taylor. He now owned 753 Plenty Road. Plans were again drawn up, in 1968, by J.S. Engineers of King Street Melbourne. This time, they were undoubtedly serious. The property on 755 Plenty Road was to be converted into office space and a counting room. More to the point, 753 was no longer to be a service station. There was no provision in the plans for a garage. According to the plans, 753 was to be converted into a workshop and amenities block for his buses and drivers; by this time, his fleet had grown to 22 and how he ever managed to house them at 753 – *and get away with it* – was nothing short of inspirational.

Laurie's near 20 year history with service stations was about to come to an end. This was not surprising. The garage side of the business, at least on paper, lost money, reaching a net loss in excess of 5,000 pounds by 1965. Something had to give.

The plans also included an application for parking facilities at the back of 757 Plenty Road, then owned by Ashley Dyer of Clifton Hill. Being a small world, Brian Cock's father and Ashley Dyer's father both worked at the large



Plans for 753-755 Plenty Road. Note there is no provision for a 'servo'. Laurie was moving out of the garage business.

department store of Foy and Gibson in the city. According to company accounts, Laurie, some time in 1968/69, agrees to the purchase of 757 on vendor terms, just as he had with Taylor. He agrees to pay \$17,375 for the property. He will continue to rent the house until he finalises payment for it in 1974.

The plans for 753-755 Plenty Road came to fruition with the opening of the new depot in 1969. Council permission for the use of the back of 757 Plenty road would eventually be given in June 1970, on the condition that the "... buses in this area shall not be started or marshalled other than between the hours of 7.30am and 5.00pm Monday to Saturday inclusive".<sup>46</sup> The days of the Drysdale Street gulag would no longer be tolerated. The buses to be parked at 757 would and *could only* be charter. As for the residents of 757 Plenty Road, it was not going to be a problem because the house was rented by a Dyson's employee: a mechanic by the name of Max Knight. The company would eventually acquire ownership of 757 Plenty Road in September 1974.

The new depot, 753-755 Plenty Road, 1969.



## New Faces



By the beginning of the 1970s, Laurie ('Pop') is approaching 65 years of age and is enjoying life: his English cars and the humble but popular beach house at Dromana. Nina loved the Dromana house and the opportunity to go fishing. She loved the tranquility. Telephones dominate a bus company's life and all who work for it. Consequently, there would be no phones at Dromana.

Even better, Laurie still had not killed anyone on the road. He was President of his much loved Bundoora Cricket Club, which he had supported from its very beginning. At work, he was even known to treat the drivers to fish and chips for lunch. He was no longer fully involved in management issues and his time was now spent supervising the counting room or enjoying the Queensland sun with Nina.

In fact, as President and founder of the Bundoora Cricket Club in 1928, he had taken to writing his Annual Report whilst on holiday. His 'reports' bore his unmistakable penmanship:

### Presidents' Report

As is usual, Mrs Dyson and I are at Caloundra, Queensland, away from the cold of Victoria and enjoying the beautiful winter sun of Queensland. We have been very fortunate with the weather, very little rain and warm sunny days. The temperature varies between 20-25C. We just sit around and lap it up, plus as far as I am concerned, many games of bowls. Well enough from me - on with my report.

Last cricket season was just wonderful, as we have achieved what I have been waiting for, wait for it - 50 years - to wit an A Grade Premiership. This, as you all saw me on the night we celebrated that epic event, was to me the high spot of my long and happy association with the club. Surely, I must have been the proudest man in Bundoora that day ... 'Thanks Boys' from a very happy President.<sup>47</sup>

Back, left to right:  
Luke Dyson  
Les Dyson  
Glenda Monardo (Dyson)  
Bradley Dyson  
Lance Deacon  
Jenny Stewart (Dyson)

Middle, left to right:  
Richie Dyson  
Kath Dyson  
Margaret Dyson  
Laurie Dyson Jr  
George Robinson  
Neil Dyson  
Matthew Robinson  
Liz Deacon  
Frank Dyson  
Greg Deacon  
Col Dyson  
Terry Newton  
Joan Robinson  
Maisie Deacon

Front:  
Margie Dyson





And of course, Laurie and Nina, did not just play bowls and entertain their grandchildren. There was shopping to be done:

Nana would always come back to Melbourne with big shells, big bowls of coloured sand and all that ... and every time they went to a big joint, like the Big Pineapple, Nana would go in there and say, that looks great, I'll buy that and Pop would say 'Arrrgh, you're not buying that ... @!\*#^ ... and the next minute he would be turning around and giving her the money ... the Old Man would always tell the story that she would always come home with a boot full of that tropical stuff.<sup>49</sup>

While Laurie is in the sun, and Nina's buying shells, Bill Deacon, along with Col and Bill Dyson, had long provided the major direction for the company.

On the recommendation of Tony Locke, Dysons would appoint in 1973 a full-time accountant. As circumstance would have it, the chap chosen was a 24-year-old accountant who had previously spent some time with Ipec before taking a year off to travel around Australia with his young family. He needed a job. His name was Terry Henderson and he would prove to have a major impact upon the future development of the company.

Along with Tony Locke, Terry brought professional order to the company, and more importantly, strategic thinking.

Internal company reports suddenly took on a professional sharpness that was not evident earlier. He was also meticulous. His report of a visit to agents on the Nathalia and Lockington services, noted:

... in Colbinabbin we make sure that we stop everyday so that we get the cat samples away ...<sup>50</sup>

Cat samples! Such was the life of a bus operator.

Laurie retired from the Presidency in 1977, but the 'Pop' Dyson cricket trophy for best player remains today.

Time must have softened Laurie. Not only was he found shouting the drivers fish and chips, but he would also be found shouting his teenage grandsons, Lance, Greg, Jamie and Neil, trips to Caloundra to stay with he and Nina:

We flew to Brisbane and then we hopped on a little Cessna and went from Brisbane to Caloundra in a ... @#!##... thunderstorm ... @!\*#^... unbelievable ... that was hairy. I remember the pilot's there, I'm in the front, Lance is in the back with this little old lady. We didn't know her, she was just another passenger ... the pilot was a bit like Rambo. He got us off the big plane from Brisbane and says 'quick, quick, we've got to get going, there's a storm coming. So we ran over and got in the plane ... we took off, he's got his hand over the windscreen to keep the rain out ... we landed on the length of this table ... we still laugh about it.<sup>48</sup>

Laurie was obviously very astute in his selection of his finance staff. A few years before Terry arrived, Mrs (May) Cameron had joined the business to take over the bookkeeping/administrative role originally undertaken by Mrs Burns. Both Scots! As a sign of the times, tradition demanded formality: both women would be addressed using surnames only. Formality was not always strictly observed: to those in the office she was 'mother'. May worked along side Coralie Galvin (Smith) and Julie London and would remain with the company for 20 years.

As for Terry Henderson, he would not stay for very long on a full-time basis with the company. In April 1974, he would establish his own business, 'Henderson Transport Accountants and Consultants', which he would run independently and on a part-time basis. In time, this business would grow substantially, eventually becoming Henderson Consultants, a national transport logistics consultancy. His tax practice would expand through his network of relationships throughout the bus industry. At the same time, and having taken over the transport consultancy practice of Harold Lawrence, he would involve himself increasingly in general transport consultancy work.

The infirmed Laurie Dyson at the official opening of McKimmies Road. Accompanied by from left to right: Bill Dyson, Bill Deacon and Col Dyson.



The consequence of the development of Terry's business affairs was to provide the groundwork for the introduction of two additional people to the business.

The first person was Lou Varalla, an accountant, formerly of Ernst & Young. The consultancy side of Terry's business would grow to the point where Terry would bring in a partner to take care of the tax practice. In 1983, the firm, Henderson and Varalla, was officially launched and Lou would be introduced to the family. He would assume an advisory position on the Board of Dysons and continues in that capacity today.

Though it would happen some few years after Terry's arrival, in 1979, the second person would be a brash young 17-year-old to whom Terry offered employment over Christmas as part of a work experience program. At the end of Year 11 this young man '... had had enough of school ...' and wanted some money in his pocket. He was also a 'charmer'; like his father, he had an excellent rapport with people. His problem was that he wanted a job, but he also wanted his Christmas holidays! Typically, he managed to get both, but on the condition that he continue with night school, which he did quite successfully. His name was Lance Deacon, Bill Deacon's youngest son.

Lance would not join the business until 1987, as his 'work experience' program would continue with Terry for another eight years. More immediately, in 1975, two other young men would appear on the doorstep, Shane and Neil Dyson.

One of these young men had actually been waiting around the door step for some time. Neil, son of Col Dyson, from the age of 13, had developed an obvious passion for the family business. He would be found in the yard every night after school, fueling and cleaning buses. May Cameron would recall Neil, as well as his two cousins, working hard for their pocket money:

You would be sitting at your desk and a bus would be coming past and you'd think to yourself, 'Lord, there's nobody in that!'. But it was Neil along with Lance and Shane. (They were so young and short) you couldn't see them behind the steering wheel. They used to shift the buses from where they were parked, to the pump, fill them up, and put them back ... they would work hard for their money.<sup>51</sup>

In true family tradition, Neil Dyson loves cars, even, and especially, if they were someone else's. Drag races up and down the depot yard were a favourite; 'smoking' the tyres of either Col's or his uncle Frank's carefully maintained cars was a favourite. After leaving school at the end of 1975, like his father, he took up a motor mechanics apprenticeship with the company. Neil's older brother Les, by this stage, had other ambitions, and would join the business later, eventually as Yard Supervisor.

Shane Dyson, son of Bill Dyson, joined the family business slightly earlier than Neil, in March 1975. Shane started in a general clerical role before becoming involved in detailed operations work. When he first joined the company, he was regarded as a bit of a 'wild' boy: like all Dysons, a young man with an enormous sense of fun who liked the outdoors. But he had to be tamed. At first he was put under the supervision of Mrs Cameron in the office, but '... he wasn't interested in doing book keeping - that wasn't his thing'.<sup>52</sup> The Company Minutes of February 1977 expressly refer to Shane's erring ways with one simple sentence: 'Shane will learn the switchboard properly'. From a 'grounding' in general administration, Shane moved into the operational elements of the company, which was his thing, learning from Graham Storay in charter and Gordon Beattie in operations. Like Lance, Shane too would attend night school.

To complete the picture, the wives of the Directors are brought onto the Board for the first time. Nina, who had retired from the Board ten years earlier, was talked into returning. In April 1976, Nina, along with Maisie Deacon, Kathleen Veronica Dyson (Bill's wife) and Joan Dobney Dyson (Col's wife) are officially appointed Directors.

Therefore, by the second half of the 1970s, family involvement in the company had taken on a very new and expanded dimension.

The 1970s, however, would not end well. In 1977, en route as usual to Caloundra, Nina suffers a massive heart attack at Goondiwindi. She would die later in Melbourne. Laurie handles the shock well, but within days, he himself, suffers a debilitating stroke. The chap who loved a chat, a beer and a smoke, could no longer enjoy any of them.

The fact is though, that the man who started the business at age 48 with 'four clapped out buses', as from December 1977, would no longer officially participate in it: he would pass away seven years later in August 1984, toughing it out to the end.

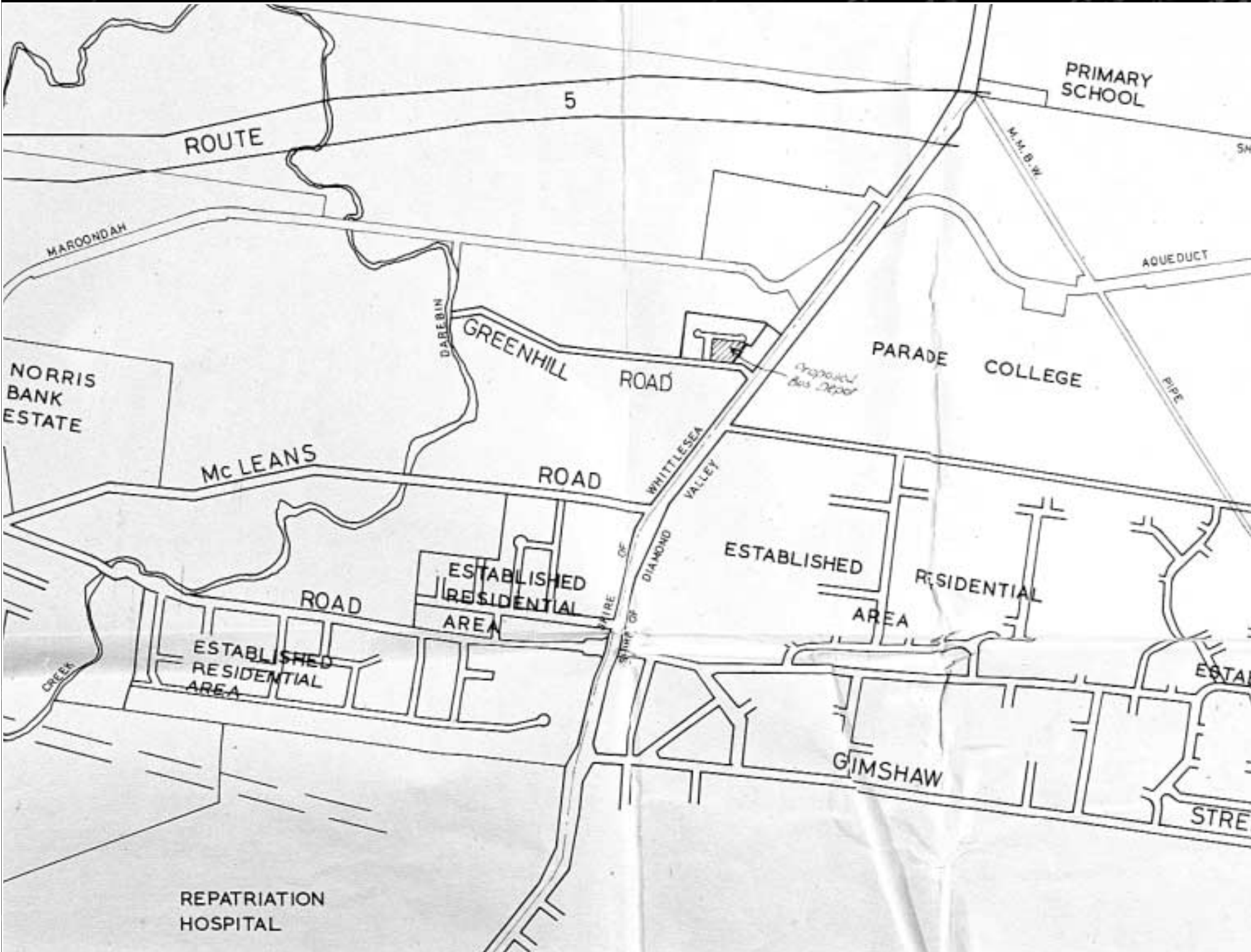
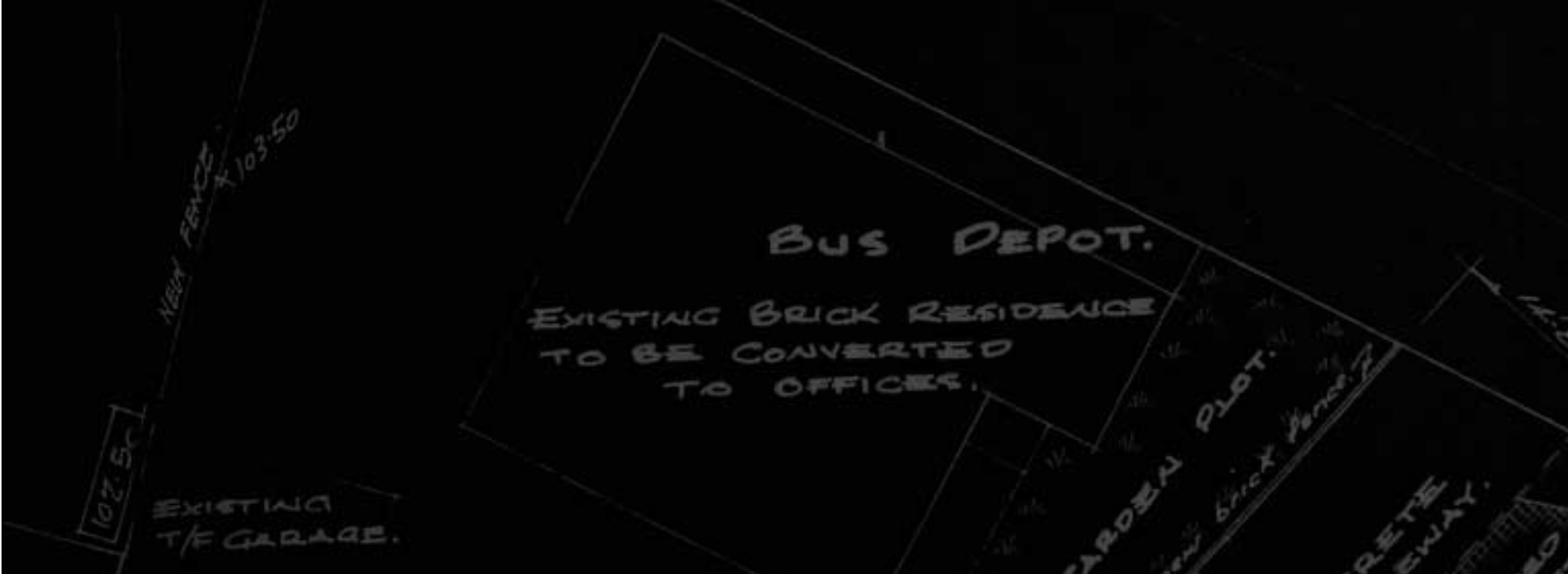
Possibly the most memorable statement on Laurie, and the one that sums him up best, were the words of his youngest son, Laurie Jnr:

He was an Aussie, there's no question about that, he loved the place, and there was no way that he would ever go back to England, but there was something about his soul that was still in England ...<sup>53</sup>

Cheers Laurie.

Laurie Dyson, 1905 - 1984





The proposed location of the Greenhills Road depot.

NOTE: A SUITABLE COVER IS TO BE PROVIDED FOR THE CONCRETE LOCATED WHERE DIRECTED BACK OF SERVICE STATION E.G. :-



EXISTING LEVELS: 101.8  
NEW LEVELS: 104.1

# Lot 5 Greenhills Road

The 1970s not only signalled a new generation. Like any other time in the company's history, it was busy. It was now a larger company facing larger issues.

The action started early in the decade, April 1971, and again with the issue of a depot.

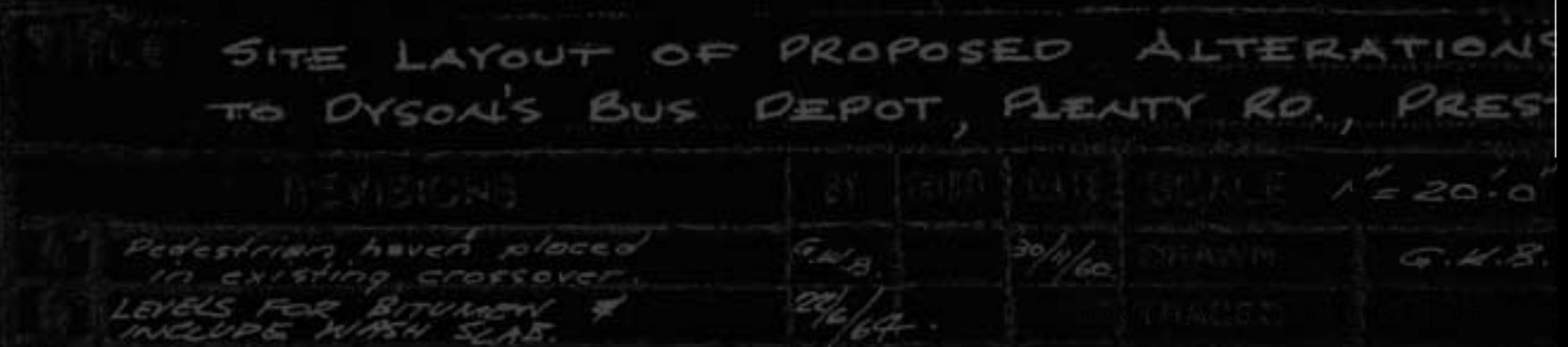
No sooner had the company moved into its new depot, and it was seeking to move out. The size of the fleet had grown to around 26 buses and was already beginning to outgrow 753-755 Plenty Road. Bill Deacon had become aware of 4 acres of land that was on the market. It was on the corner of Greenhills and Plenty Roads, known as Lot 5, Greenhills Road, Bundoora (now the site of the North Park Hospital). A Mr. L.C. Andrighetti owned the land. As the Company Minutes explain:

... The meeting was advised that the land in question was ideally situated for a bus parking depot and due to the considerable expansion of population and schools in the Bundoora area, it was becoming obvious that additional bus parking facilities would be required in three to five years time. Opinions were expressed at the meeting that land suitable for a bus parking depot would become increasingly expensive and therefore the company should investigate the possibility of financing the purchase of the land ... but that investigations should be made at the Whittlesea Shire Offices with a view to ascertaining what land is available for a bus parking depot in the locality required.<sup>54</sup>

Mr Andrighetti wanted \$30,000 for the property. A second Board meeting was convened a week later on 30 April to consider the matter.

Bill Deacon advised the Board that, having visited the Whittlesea Shire Offices, no suitable industrial land was available in the area and therefore the company should proceed with the purchase.

As usual, there was just a 'slight' problem. This time it was Permits.



Bill was advised by the then Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) that a permit for part of the land for use as a bus depot should be taken out immediately as the land was presently zoned as reserved living. However, it seems that Bill was advised informally by the Shire that the company had 'a good chance' of obtaining the permit and would 'favourably receive' an application for the permit.

There was also a problem of time. Bill indicated at the meeting on 30 April that to secure the land they would have to move quickly as Mr Andrighetti was anxious to sell.

The deal is now suddenly starting to sound, with the benefit of hindsight, a little risky. Land, licences and permits were problems that had plagued the company from the start and would continue to do so.

So was money! Where would they get \$30,000? The Board would sound out their financiers and meet again later that day. When they resumed, the news was not all that good. Firstly, 753-755 Plenty Road would not be acceptable as collateral, since:

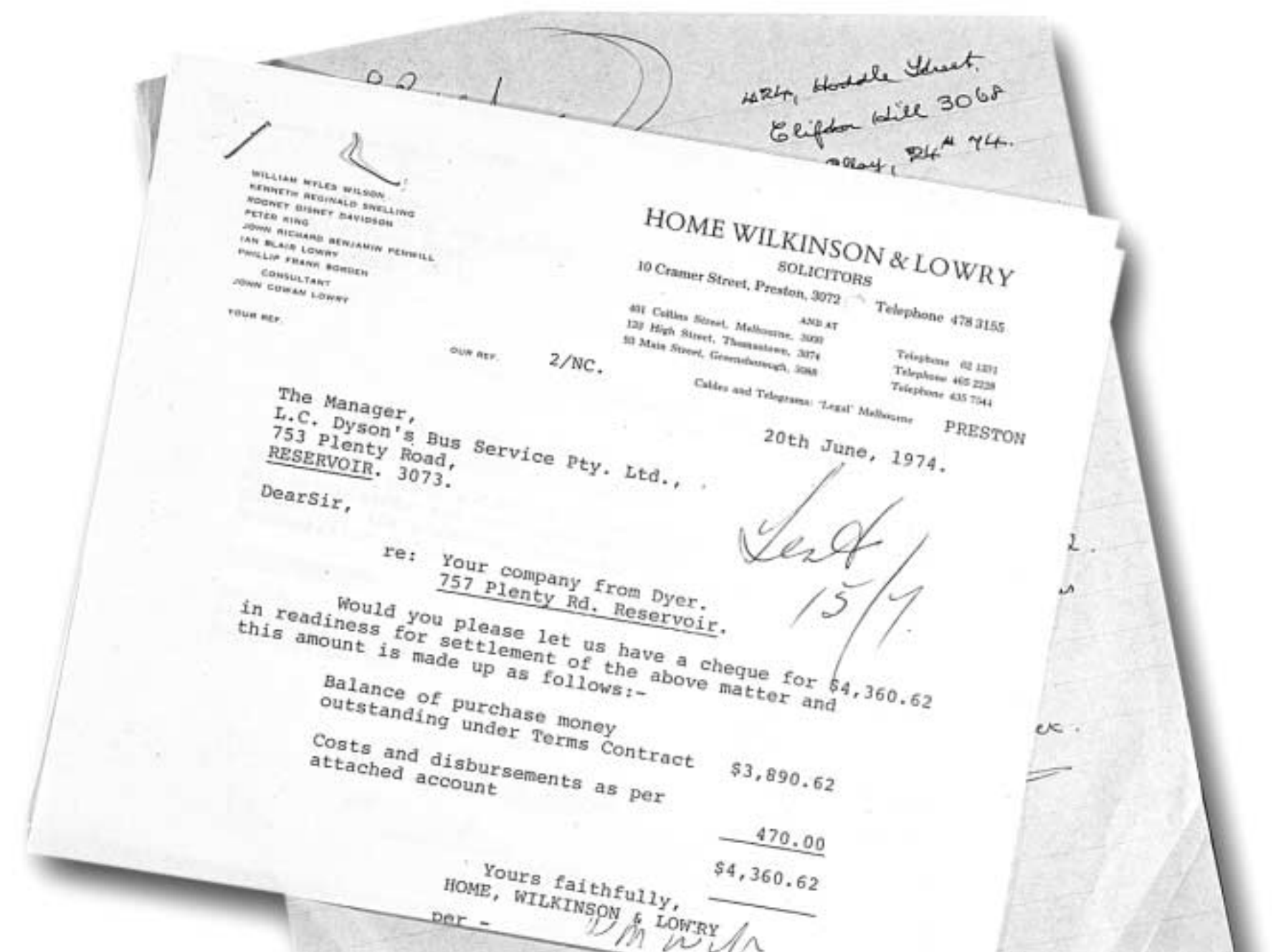
... [on advice from Mr W. Wilson of Home Wilkinson Lowry, Solicitors that since] ... 753-755 Plenty Road was zoned a non-conformative use in a residential area, the property itself had virtually no value for finance purposes as a security, and it was therefore resolved that the Company should take all steps necessary to affect the rezoning of the property to conform with its present use as a bus depot.<sup>55</sup>

Never say die! – and not much time to say it in. The company proceeded with the purchase of Lot 5 regardless, financed by a mortgage loan over the property from General Credits, a company who had financed many of their bus purchases.

In proceeding with its application for re-zoning of 753-755 Plenty Road, the company's solicitors, Home Wilkinson Lowry, engage expert legal assistance. Unfortunately, that expert advice was not going to be good news either:

... At this stage, I do not think any further evidence is necessary to enable me to draw the application for re-zoning. However, before I draw that application, there are matters which I think it proper to draw to the attention of our client. I must say that it is my view that the application for re-zoning will not be successful ... I think, if I may say so, that it is worthwhile exploring every other possible solution ...<sup>56</sup>

Alternative sites to Lot 5 had been considered. The Trustees of the Christian Brothers owned 97 acres of land, immediately to the north of Parade College on Plenty Road. The Christian Brothers were refused permission to subdivide it due to the fact that a 'proposed freeway' will ultimately be constructed. In effect, this meant that there was a large area of land available until the Freeway was constructed which at the time, it was thought, may be as long as 15 years away.



Documents relating to the purchase of 757 Plenty Road from Ashley Dyer.

As we now know, the Freeway was constructed, but it took longer than 15 years to come to fruition.

Wisely, that possible solution was not pursued as history records the eventual construction of the Freeway.

As history also records, the MMBW and the Whittlesea Shire Council both, in fact, rejected permits to use Lot 5 Greenhills Road, Bundoora as a bus depot.

At this point, therefore, the company owns two sites, both of which fail to satisfy zoning requirements. Things are not looking good. The company has no option but to seek a buyer for Lot 5 and continue the search for a secure and permanent home.

After some extended negotiations, a permit from the MMBW is granted in September 1973, enabling the construction of a medical /surgical/ maternity hospital on Lot 5 Greenhills Road. The block is sold and Dysons has one less problem to deal with, and besides, they were able to show a 'tidy' little profit from the transaction. The block had been bought for \$31,145 but they managed to find a buyer at \$45,000: a profit of \$14,000, or almost the equivalent of the company's net profit for the preceding year.

Except ... their Reservoir depot. While it now looked like a bus depot, and was designed to be a bus depot ... there was simply not enough room. They will have to move from Plenty Road and being a non-conforming use of the land would only hasten that decision.

Left to right: Noel Skene, Max Knight and Billy Marchbank



## Changing The Rules

The 1970s also brought a wholesale change to the rules by which the bus industry in Victoria was managed.

The OPEC oil 'shock' of 1973, which was to see an overnight quadrupling in the world price of oil, was to have a profound impact on the bus industry throughout Victoria.

The double digit inflationary pressures which these shocks triggered, meant dire consequences for movements in public transport fares. Faced with this consequence, the Victorian Government acted to cap fares, and provide compensation to bus operators through a very intricate system of subsidies.

These subsidies would, in effect, directly control company profitability. It was direct and heavy intervention which, if inappropriately administered, could mean financial disaster for industry participants.

Up to 1974, bus companies had been required to produce annual performance data to the state government, which were very limited in their scope. The exercise was largely statistical. That was about to change radically. For the purpose of determining subsidies, on a company-by-company basis, operators would be required to complete Uniform Financial Returns. They were very extensive in their coverage. They required information that even the operators themselves did not keep. Co-incidentally, it was the preparation of these 'UFRs' for Terry Henderson, that served as Lance Deacon's introduction to the bus industry. Their preparation and accuracy would be the basis for effectively determining company profitability. They would also be used as a basis for providing concessional loans to operators to assist them in the purchase of vehicles and Dysons was to take maximum advantage of these loans over the next decade.

Needless to say, the subsidy issue would dominate the activity of the Bus Proprietors' Association, and Dysons, in particular Bill Deacon, for the next decade. It would lead to claims that the system was inconsistently applied, inequitable and forcing efficient operators into bankruptcy.

There was one bright light out of all this otherwise doom and gloom.

As from its very beginning, the Whittlesea service had been losing significant sums of money. Dysons had repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to rationalise the operation and raise fares to enable it to at least break even. As far back as 1964, the company had been embroiled in some form of controversy or another over this service. Its threatened attempt to reduce services met with very publically expressed acrimony. The front page headline of the Whittlesea Post read:

**“THREATENED CUT IN WHITTLESEA BUSES**

**- Operator “Not Dinkum” In Blaming Road**

Dyson’s Bus Company was attempting to use council and the condition of the roads as an excuse for reducing its service to Whittlesea, when the reason for the cut was the lack of patrons, Cr Vic Michael told Whittlesea Council on Monday ‘... he charged Dyson’s with attempting to “hold a gun at council’s head’ ... However, Cr Kelynack said he had interviewed Mr Dyson about the cut in services, and in his opinion he wasn’t bluffing ...’<sup>57</sup>

Another one to Laurie.

However, the introduction of subsidised fares gave Dysons a chance of finally achieving their goal. As if overplaying their hand, in May 1974 the company threatened the TRB with withdrawing the service. The TRB relented.

In January 1975, the company receives its first subsidy for Whittlesea. \$14,000. Equivalent to the loss which the service suffered.

Ironically, the Northcote service, which in stark contrast to Whittlesea, was one of the company’s, and Melbourne’s, most efficient and profitable services, was to also receive a pensioner subsidy based on 3% of anticipated revenue. This was a surprise to everyone. But this unusual generosity was to prove to be a two-edged sword.

In accordance with the terms of agreement with their Northcote Bus Service partners, the shares held by Johnson, Caddy and Craig would eventually be sold to Dysons, with the last of the shares, held by Norman Craig, passing over to Dysons in July 1976. In the case of Johnson and Caddy, their shares passed to Dysons on their unfortunate passing. In the case of Norman Craig, Dysons, having decided to acquire full ownership of Northcote Bus Service in July 1976, offered Craig a cash pay out plus full-time employment with the company until age 65. Craig agreed. In October of the following year, the Northcote Bus Service Pty Ltd, with its 7 buses and other assets totaling \$43,000, ceased to be and was formerly absorbed by L.C. Dysons Bus Services Pty Ltd.

However, the move to acquire 100 percent of the shares of the Northcote Bus Service in 1976, resulted in the almost immediate reassessment of the Whittlesea subsidy. In the eyes of the government, the company no longer needed it:

... as a result of the recent amalgamation and improved financial position of L.C. Dysons Bus Service Pty Ltd, the special subsidy for the Regent/Whittlesea service is no longer necessary ...<sup>58</sup>

To add insult to injury, the subsidy system would also result in Dysons losing its subsidy which it separately received from the Health Commission for delivering staff to and from Janefield. In 1981, six years after the introduction of subsidies, it occurred to someone within the TRB that Dysons was being subsidised twice for the same service: once from the Ministry of Transport and once from the Health Commission. From July 1981, the Janefield subsidy, which Laurie so desperately needed to keep the company going in 1952, would be no more.

Figure 1. Size of Fleet and Profitability 1962 - 1975

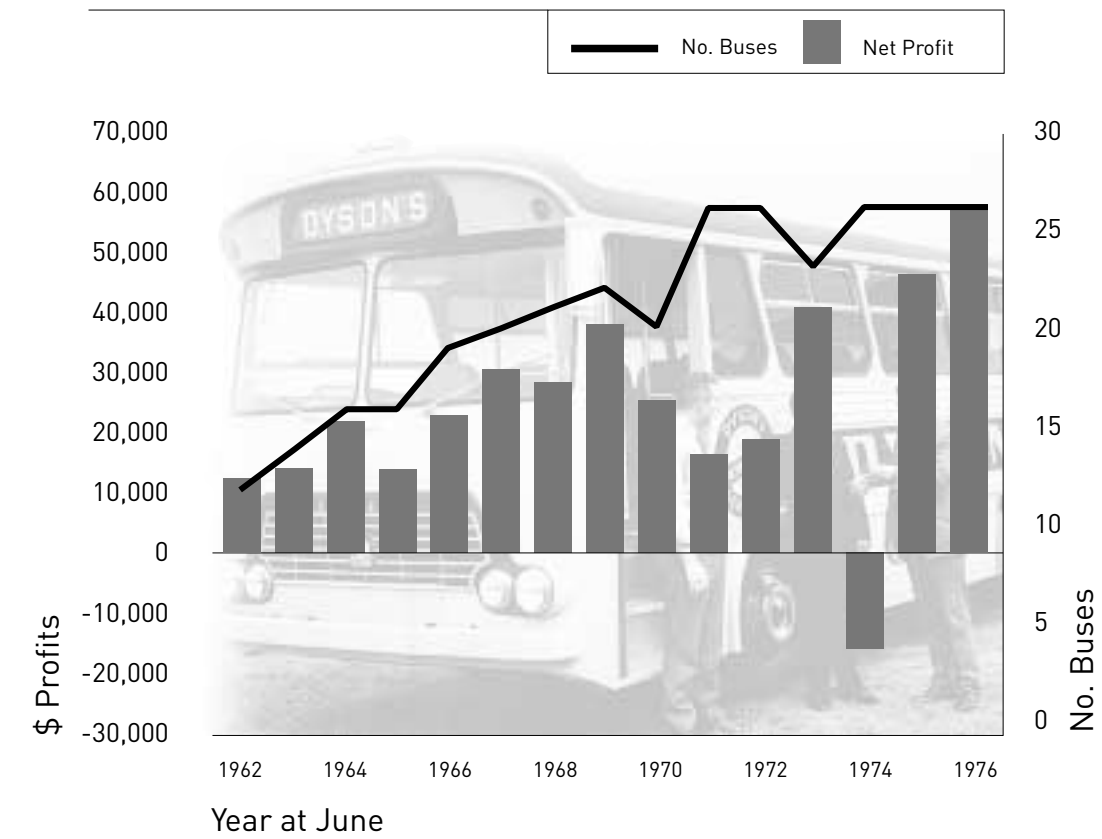
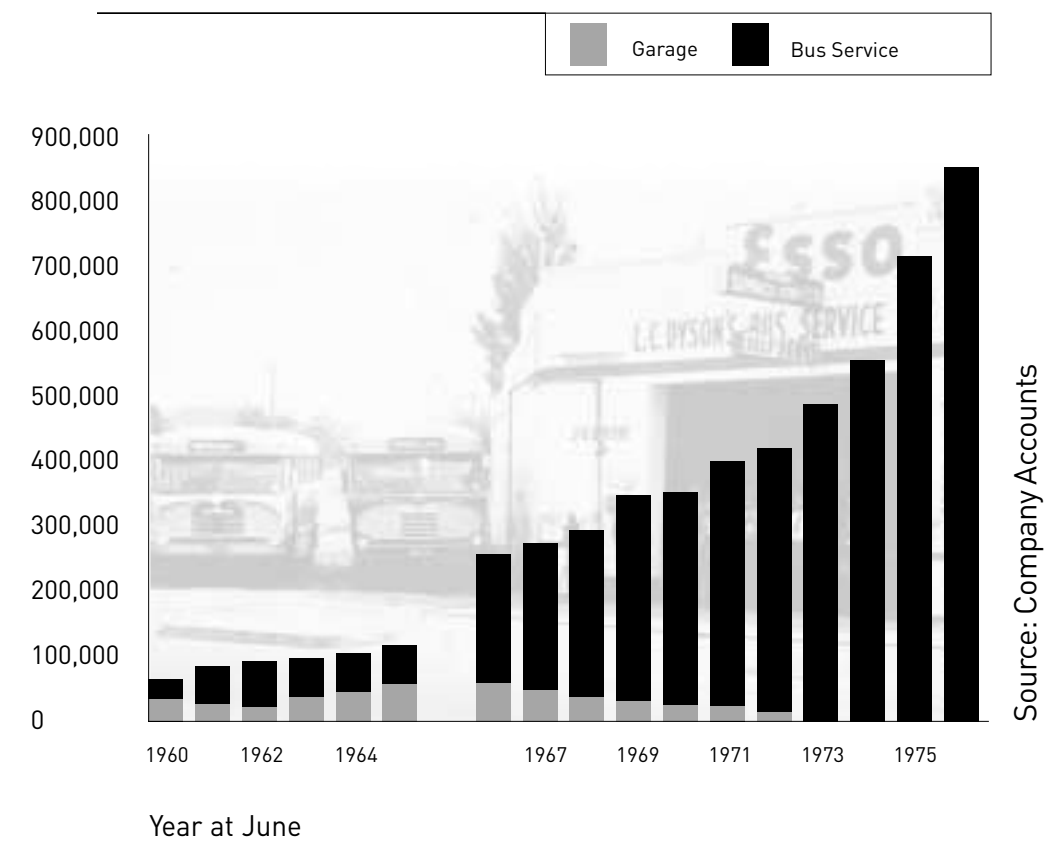


Figure 2. Gross Revenue Contribution Garage and Bus Services



DYSON'S



BUS SERVICE

## Consolidation



One of the Northcote Bus Service fleet

During the 70s, if it was not enough that the company had to deal with a new generation of employees, finding new premises, and negotiating government subsidies, it also had to be ready to seize the opportunities which would present themselves in and out of Melbourne.

Looking back at the growth of the company up to the mid 1970s, the overall picture, as depicted in Figure 1, is one of more or less steady development. It was not what could be regarded as a picture of spectacular success. Certainly it grew rapidly in the early years, but off a virtually zero base. In an absolute sense, it was still quite small, though above average in its fleet size, given that by 1974, the average fleet size for the state was 15.4 vehicles<sup>59</sup> and Dysons now had 26. Company profitability tended to track fleet size, although there were some notable exceptions in the first half of the 1970s. In 1974, in particular, following the blow out in inflation, the company was hit with a major increase in labour costs that largely contributed to the net loss incurred by the company in that year. Inflation also triggered major increases in revenue as shown in Figure 2.

Emphasising its less than spectacular growth through its earliest years is the pattern of growth in gross revenue of the business as shown in Figure 2. The lack of contribution from garage activity is strikingly evident: by the mid 1960s, the garage side of the business was contributing as much as it was ever going to.

Not to be deterred, Dysons would stay committed to charter, establishing Dyson's Specialty Tours targeting the interstate tourism market, and in the process, would build a dedicated fleet of 5 star coaches to service it.

Having formally established charter, the company would move to consolidate its position in the market.

In October 1977, the Northcote Bus Service Pty Ltd, with its 7 buses and other assets totaling \$43,000, was formally absorbed into L.C. Dysons Bus Services Pty Ltd.

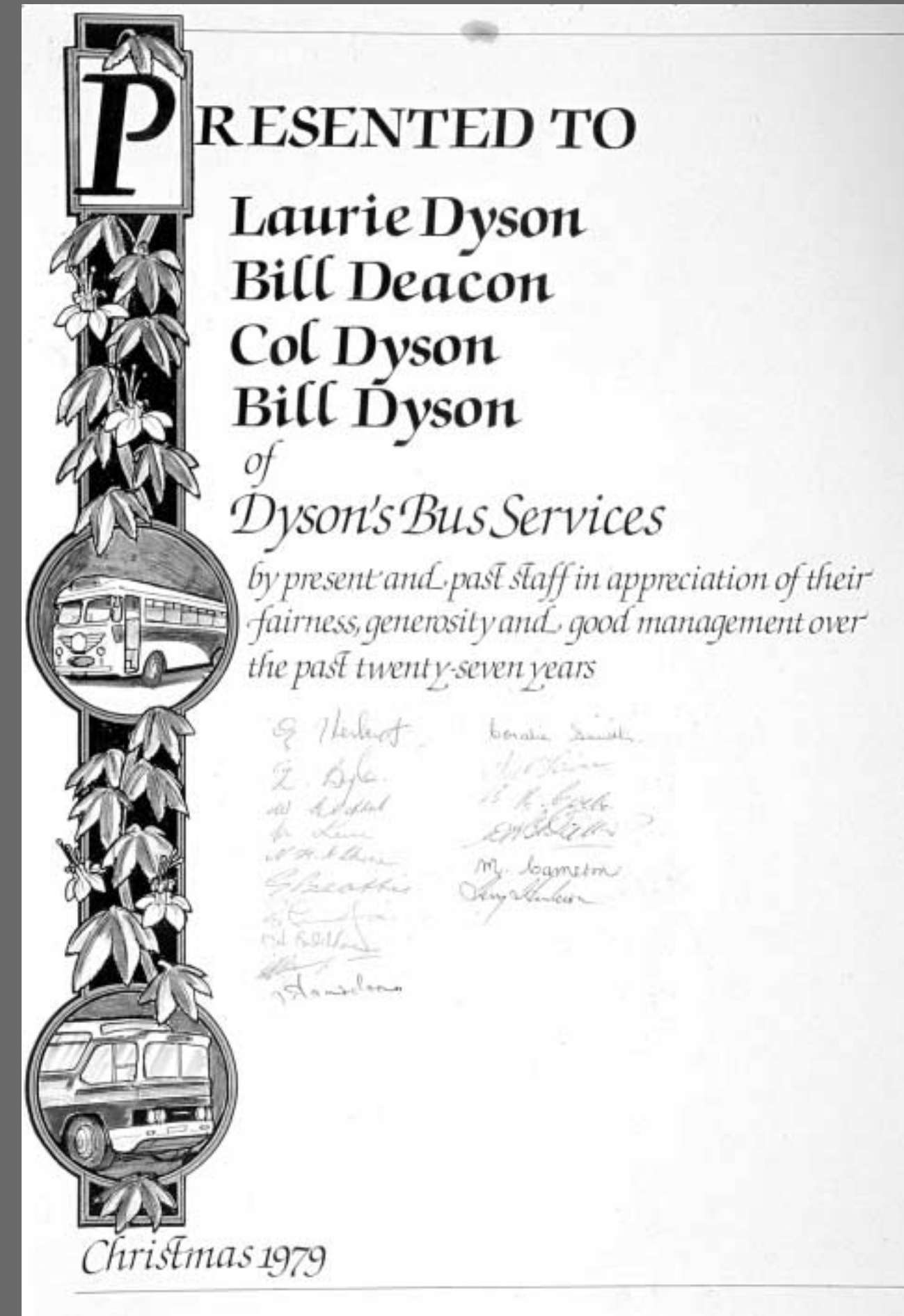
That same year, the company acquired the unlicensed service of J & A Anderson's Coaches of Echuca, that ran between Barham and Melbourne via Kerang, Cohuna and Moama. The attraction of the Barham service was that it could be integrated with Dysons Lockington service to provide a much more commercially viable operation overall. It would also mean that the company would need to establish a country based depot, and the most obvious place was Moama.

The logistics surrounding this deal were impressive. Having bought the unprotected right to the service, the company negotiated the purchase of land from the Murray Council for \$7,000. The company also negotiates with Alan Anderson to retain his services as the local Manager. In attempting to make literally every post a winner, Terry Henderson, with his earlier contacts at Ipec, negotiates the leasing of some of the land and building to Ipec. At the same time, arrangements are put in place with Alan to relocate his Barham 'shed' to Moama. The shed itself will need to be extended to accommodate both companies. In the interim, the local bus operator in Barham was approached to store buses there. Simple but effective. All up, the cost was expected to be just \$26,000. Brilliant! The Moama depot is opened for business in 1979.

There was a 'bigger picture' attached to the targeting of Anderson's and it was not without controversy.

Unspectacular though it might have been, what is important to note, is that the company never sat still. Growth was always top of the agenda.

By the beginning of the 70s, charter activity started to expand. In 1974, the company had decided to invest in state-of-the-art coaches: 2 Denning GM coaches were bought which gave the company the first class 'branding' it wanted and needed. The following year, as business continued to grow, at first through education contracts, Graham Storay was moved into the newly created position of Charter Manager; at the same time, Gordon Beattie, who came across from the TRB in 1971, was appointed the company's Operations Manager. The Board awarded Graham, in recognition of his elevated role, a salary of \$160 a week for which he would work 10 hours a day Monday to Friday and 4 hours on Saturday. The Board generously noted that '... he will no longer be required to drive the Whittlesea service'.<sup>60</sup> Hard task masters the Dysons! He was going to have a job on his hands, as charter, while in many ways the flagship of a bus company, has been notorious for not making money. Too many operators chasing a market with very thin margins.





On the surface, Anderson's Barham-Melbourne service was unlicensed and therefore of not as much commercial value as it might otherwise have been. So why buy it? Certainly, it would enable, as Bill Deacon put it, '... (the creation of) one viable service out of two existing unprofitable services':<sup>61</sup> Barham-Melbourne and Lockington-Melbourne. But there was more to it. It was also inspired by a meeting held the previous year, 1976, with the Victorian Railways and the TRB. At that meeting, the TRB appears to have indicated to Dysons that three rail services were to be deleted from Northern Victoria: Cohuna-Bendigo; Deniliquin-Bendigo; Koondrook-Kerang.<sup>62</sup> The deletion of these rail services gave Anderson's a strategic value. The ownership of the Barham-Melbourne service, as Dysons saw it at the time, would enhance the company's chances of being granted *licences* between Cohuna, Echuca (including the intermediate towns) and Melbourne.

As events transpired, Bill Deacon prepared a substantial submission to the Victorian Government that he duly submitted in April 1977 in the expectation that it would be favourably received. Whether it was favourably received or otherwise, the fact is that to Dysons great surprise, tenders were eventually called for these services at the end of the following year, December 1978. Dysons won neither contract. Furthermore, the Cohuna-Bendigo contract was awarded to Harrison's Coaches of Echuca. Bill was obviously incensed and wrote to the Minister for Transport:

... you may not be aware however, that the Cohuna/Bendigo contract was awarded to Harrison Coaches of Echuca, an operator which had, in 1966 (sic), sold its licensed Lockington/Melbourne service to my company, for a substantial goodwill figure.

Life had a lighter side. The 'team' in the early 1980s, from left to right: Ian Bennett, Rosie Micallef (French), Gordon Beattie, Neil Dyson, Jenni Waldhauser, Dave Boyle, Julie London, Bill Deacon, Bill Dyson, Terry Newton, May Cameron. Kneeling left to right: Shane Dyson and Noel Skene.



Given the operation to be carried out by the rail contract, and the nature of our costing for the tender (only marginal profit given their attractiveness), I cannot believe that our tender figure would have been substantially higher than the successful tenders, that is, providing the accepted tenders took full account of all costs involved.

Indeed, Mr Minister, I consider that my company has been improperly and immorally treated during this saga ...

Dysons appeal the decision. Terry Henderson, now acting as Transport Consultant, lodges a formal objection with the TRB against the appointment of Harrison's to the Bendigo/Cohuna contract. The Heads of Objection cites the following:

The application lodged does not optimise passenger services to the public along the stipulated route, given the existing licenced and interstate services.

Change in timetable from the existing motor rail service may adversely affect the Objector's current licence service in the area.

The Objector has displayed a willingness to develop and rationalise services in the area not only by improving standards of vehicles used on his services but also by purchasing, for a substantial goodwill figure the licenced Lockington to Melbourne service previously owned by the applicant.<sup>64</sup>

This was a dispute that Dysons would lose. Regardless, Dyson's had secured Anderson's business and had proceeded to establish a depot at Moama. With Moama strategically in place, and with charter activity now taking on a formal structure, Dysons is starting to assume the size and structure of a formidable player in the industry.

Throughout all of this frenetic activity, life did have its lighter side, courtesy of the 'Friday Lunches'. Senior management ritually had their Friday Lunch at one of the local pubs. Meanwhile, back at the office, even the extremely conscientious Jenni Powell (Waldhauser), who joined the company in 1978 and remains there today, would recall with a very broad smile on her face:

We'd work really hard during the week, never get a lunch break, but come Friday, they (senior management) would go off (for lunch) and we could have a bit of a sit down and a talk, and it was nice. That was our time. Gordon Beattie...used to kick a football around the office ... someone lit a fire in a bin once ... we used to have inductions: when you started you had to get thrown in the safe...Graham Storay would always miss his school run ...<sup>65</sup>

On their return to the office, these lunches were usually followed by further 'meetings'. Mrs Cameron would tell them that they had 'more meetings than the United Nations'.<sup>66</sup>

All work and no play ...

The company would remain focused on consolidating their northern Victorian network. In 1982, the company wins the Murchison East-Echuca rail replacement contract. Two years later, in July 1984, Dysons would move to purchase most of Harrison's country services including the Cohuna-Bendigo contract it had lost to Harrison's back in 1979.<sup>67</sup> It went on to win Melbourne-Shepparton in 1985 and then Bendigo-Echuca, in 1987. In that same year, Dysons made their fourth country purchase. They bought the Deniliquin-Melbourne service from Ansett-Pioneer, which enabled them to extend their reach into New South Wales while gaining maximum efficiencies from their established trunk services.

The northern Victoria network was finally coming together.



## East West

While the history of Dysons is riddled with landmarks, the events of 1980 would have to rank amongst the more significant.

As time and circumstance records, the evolution and development of the Cooper family business interests had closely paralleled that of Dysons.

As we now know, there were two occasions over the previous 20 years when their respective courses were more tangential than parallel.

With the Coopers now effectively neighbours with their well established Reservoir Bus Company, it was probably inevitable that sooner or later their courses would again converge.

Certainly, Dysons had looked longingly at the company for some time. It would be a valuable asset. However, the Dyson Company Minutes of October 1978, said it all very simply:

The meeting was advised that the Coopers were not interested in Dysons taking them over.<sup>68</sup>

From the formal records of the company, this is believed to be the only reference made to any proposed takeover.

So if you can't beat them, you may as well join them. The on-going review of the operational efficiency of the public transport network, which had started back in the early 1970s, brought to light the fact that La Trobe University, in particular, which had been in operation since 1967, was being poorly serviced. What was required was an east west service that connected the University and surrounding residential and commercial centres with Reservoir Station on the Epping Line – at one end – with Macleod Station on the Hurstbridge Line – on the other end.

'East West' was born. It was an equal partnership between Dysons and Reservoir Bus Company. The partnership made sense. The proposed route for East West would traverse the 'territory' of both companies. If one or other company won the contract in their own right, it may well have been the basis for deep and enduring divisions. Conversely, a partnership would obviate this potentially very serious problem. In the words of Lou Varella:

The only way of getting it set up was to get both companies involved ... it just seemed logical to do ...<sup>69</sup>

They had to fight hard against other competitors to win the tendered service. The tendered service would traverse the territory of two other operators: no matter who won, someone was going to be 'upset'. History records that the East West consortium won and the operation is still very much in operation today. It provided the basis for an on-going and far more extensive business relationship with the Cooper family in the years to come.

1980 was an auspicious start to the decade.



Jamie Dyson (left) and Greg Deacon, 2002

## Changing Direction

The 'Bus and Coach News' of 7 years earlier, June 1973, included the following short piece on a local bus operator:



Launch of the Sapphire Coast Service ex Bairnsdale 1989. Pictured are Col Dyson with his wife Joan (second from right), Bill and Maisie Deacon with Jim Pennel from Denning.

Gil Toplis has acquired a Pioneer 'Taraflo' GM70 for his Melbourne-Bega service. Looks very smart indeed in a striking new aluminium lime green and white livery. It replaces Gil's GM powered Flxible (sic) which has been advertised for sale as 'the best clipper in Australia'.

Gil was something of an identity in the bus industry and operated his service out of the travel agency, Kaden Travel, which was attached to the former Southern Cross Hotel located on the corner of Russell and Bourke Streets in Melbourne.

In 1981, and hot on the heels of East West, Gil's Melbourne-Bega 'Sapphire Coast' service was to come on to the market. Terry Henderson, through his consultancy practice, had become aware of it, and Dyson's took interest.

Such an acquisition would reduce Dyson's exposure to any future changes in rail operations through Central Victoria, an especially sensitive issue following its experience with the Bendigo/Cohuna rail replacement contract. It also provided a direct link for travellers wishing to access the highly popular southern New South Wales tourist resorts. Bill Curran would be the company's first driver on this run and he was known for putting his 'personal stamp on service'.

The deal represented a significant change in mindset for the company. It was well away, mentally and geographically, from their comfort zone. The Directors were uneasy about the decision. What did they know about that part of the world? What did they know about the tourism business? Well, they were about to find out. They took a chance. They bought the Melbourne-Bega service from Toplis and its purchase signalled the company's expansion into scheduled interstate services.

This single move would also be the precursor to a far more prominent presence in Gippsland, starting, in 1987, with the purchase of a very small local bus operator based in Lakes Entrance.

When they arrived to inspect the buses they were considering buying, one of the two was up on blocks ... and from all appearances, was going to stay that way. Not the kind of start you want. Nevertheless, the company proceeds with the purchase of Lex Tours. The business had much the same ring about it as Laurie's purchase of Ned Gustin's 46A: no depot, just 2 buses, a rented house with tours sold out of the front room, and the buses parked on the street. Quintessential Dysons!

The business ran the local route service from Lakes Entrance to Bairnsdale as well as a Sale to Canberra service. It also had strategic value as it was also the mid-way point for the company's Melbourne-Bega operation.

The responsibility for getting this part of the business was passed to a new comer, Bill Deacon's first son, Greg, and his wife Liz.

Greg, a landscape gardener by trade, started work in his own landscape gardening business before moving to Dysons initially in 1981 to develop the gardens at what was to be the new Bundoora depot. He would also drive the local school buses, and like his brother, attend night school. When the landscaping was finished, and feeling the need to develop his skills, he left to work for the Diamond Valley Council as a landscape gardener where he stayed until 1987. The position of manager of Bairnsdale depot was advertised. Greg applied and won through. He rejoined the company in 1987, and with Liz, headed straight for Lakes Entrance.

With the intention of building up its longer-term presence in Gippsland, the following year, 1988, the company took the opportunity to purchase Brownriggs' Bairnsdale town service. This acquisition enabled Dysons to amalgamate Brownriggs with Lex Tours, and relocate the company's Gippsland base to Bairnsdale.

It would also enable the company to join forces with V/Line in 1989 and expand its network. With an operational base in place at Bairnsdale, Dysons negotiates with V/Line to commence its Bega service from there rather than Melbourne. With that new arrangement in place, its operational reach into NSW can be extended, since Melbourne to Bega represented the legal driving limit for one driver. The company subsequently extends its service to Narooma and then to Bateman's Bay. At the same time, more Canberra services become viable.

Dysons took a punt in moving into Gippsland – and they were lucky. The greatest piece of luck was to come in 1993 when the rail service from Melbourne was made to terminate at Sale. Dysons were in the perfect position for the rail replacement service to Bairnsdale.

Having now established more of a presence in eastern Victoria, it quickly became apparent that considerable economies could be made to existing V/Line contracted services operating along the Sale-Orbost corridor. By this time, there were at least three bus lines servicing this stretch of the Princess Highway: Dysons, Eastern Roadlines (Bairnsdale-Sale) and Snowy River Bus Lines (Bairnsdale-Orbost). In 1994, Dysons moved to acquire Eastern Roadlines and at the same time the Orbost-Bairnsdale contracted service of Snowy River Bus Lines. They were successful on both counts and were able to collapse three services into one.

Dysons had again built something from almost nothing.

Greg and Liz would return to Melbourne in 1991. With interim managers filling in, Bill Dyson's son, Jamie, and his wife Tracey take over management of Bairnsdale in 1996. By this time, Jamie had been in the family business for 13 years, working as a specialist air-conditioning mechanic as well as part-time school bus driver. Prior to joining Dysons,

Jamie, being a body builder by trade, had spent some 5 years with Newnhams where he had undertaken his apprenticeship. So, in looking for a replacement for Greg, Jamie had become an obvious choice. Tracey would prove to be an equally important part of the team, as she designed and developed the Bega reservations system. Together, Jamie and Tracey would remain in Bairnsdale until 1999 before being recalled to Melbourne.

Over the course of 14 years since Lakes Entrance was established, Dysons proceeded to build, step by step, another 'solid business', this time in Gippsland, with a fleet of 15 buses operating out of Bairnsdale.

Symptomatic of its step-by-step approach to building its business base in Gippsland, was the success the company would experience with Gippsland Grammar. Through its earlier purchases in Gippsland, it had already acquired two of the six service contracts with the school. In 1999, having already paid goodwill for the purchase of the two services that it operated, Gippsland Grammar would place all six service contracts up for selective tender. Commercially, the rationale that underpinned its earlier Gippsland acquisitions was now under threat. However, through the economies that its wider Gippsland network offered, Dysons was able to tender for and win all six contracts.

No doubt typical of many success stories, it is certainly true of Dysons that 'from small acorns do large trees grow'.



# Lot 3 McKimmies Lane

To momentarily return to the 1970s, co-incidence seems to be a recurring theme throughout the history of the company.

Official opening of the McKimmies Road Depot, 1982. At the microphone is Terry Henderson. Also present are Bill Deacon (second from left), John Cain (Premier of Victoria, seated 3rd from left) and Col Dyson.



A central figure in the early history of Bundoora (1840s) was a man whose '... main form of relaxation appeared to be drinking and associating with his mates'.<sup>71</sup> Sounds familiar!

Some drinking mates! They included Bill Mitchell, father of Nellie Melba, and Mr Coles, the father of G.J. Coles. He had a carting business, and started life as a farm hand in the Plenty River District. He had emigrated from Glasgow, Scotland – not all that far from Yorkshire. His name was in fact John McKimmie. It appears uncanny, that in September 1973, just as the company sold Lot 5, Dysons would acquire from the Young family, 5 acres of land on the Lane named after a man who bore such a striking similarity to Laurie.

The Young's had trotting interests. Laurie was a member of the Victoria Trotting Club. It is possibly the case that this would be the connection that would bring the two parties together.

But, as with the purchase of Lot 5 Greenhills Road, nothing is ever entirely simple. At the time of purchase, lawyers advise the company that acquisition of the McKimmies Lane property is not without some risk:

... the land will almost certainly be re-zoned light industrial over the next 12 to 18 months...not completely certain ... some element of risk involved ...<sup>72</sup>

... not completely certain'!! Not a good start. The company has heard words like these before. Nevertheless, the deal is done.

Dysons would pay \$100,000 for the property. As a sign of the changing times, in November 1978, only 5 years later, the property would be paid off in full.

It would be some time before the company would make the move to Bundoora. In fact it would be almost another 10 years before this would happen. In the interim, the property would be rented out to a number of interests, including the Preston Institute of Technology.

The delay in moving to Bundoora was understandable. For one thing, the cost of construction would be significant. For another, the company would be wise to wait until the zoning issue is confirmed. For yet another, the company would want to extract maximum value from Plenty Road. At this stage the company has not acquitted its debt with Dyer, the owner of 757 Plenty Road. His chance of maximising the utilisation and resale value of the property would be come only once he could consolidate all three Plenty Road properties. Accordingly, the company would immediately begin this process following the purchase of McKimmies Lane, firstly by settling its debt with Dyer, and then through the consolidation of titles.

The transition to McKimmies Road would be staged. The first to be relocated were the school buses since they were the major source of congestion at the Reservoir depot. The next to move were the Northcote Bus Service buses, which had earlier been relocated to the Reservoir depot. When that process was completed, the rest of the fleet followed. Overseeing the transition would be Noel Skene who was appointed Site Manager at McKimmies Road.

On 30 June 1982, the Premier of Victoria, John Cain, would officially open Dysons Bundoora Depot. In his speech, Bill Deacon noted:

... As you can see that the Dyson story is a continuing saga, each chapter has a challenging feature, and that today's 30 years of experience will be handed on from generation to generation.<sup>73</sup>

How true, and this would be the third momentous occasion for the 1980s, following on from East West, Gippsland and the Sapphire Coast, and the decade had only just begun.



The Second Generation  
Col Dyson, 2001.  
Bill Deacon, circa 1985.  
Bill Dyson, 2001.

The Third Generation  
Neil Dyson  
Lance Deacon  
Shane Dyson



## The Third Generation

By the end of the 1980s, Bill Deacon, Col and Bill Dyson, had taken a small albeit financially sound business and made it highly visible. The name Dysons was now a recognised 'brand' in the market place. It had taken a great deal of hard work.

This rapid and strategic growth in the company had already been recognised some years earlier in the prestigious appointment of one of the company's Directors. The July 1983 announcement read:

The Transport Act 1983 provided for a seat on the Board of the new Melbourne Transit Authority for 'a person having knowledge of, and experience in, the operation of private buses'. The Minister for Transport, The Hon. Steve Crabbe, announced recently that Mr Deacon had been appointed to that position.<sup>74</sup>

Bill Deacon, who had started life mixing chemicals at J.T. Dunstan's, who moved to his father-in-law's business when it was less than a handful of buses housed on Reg Cock's vacant block, who knew nothing about buses before starting with Laurie, had made it to the premier policy making body for metropolitan transport operations in Victoria. An exceptional achievement by any measure.



The company's entire V/Line fleet including Moama based charter vehicle, Bundoora, 1988.

The appointment to the MTA also had its pressures. By virtue of his role he would have to wear a number of hats. Government policy was increasingly focused on industry rationalisation and deregulation. Bill, as part of the policy making body, would have to justify government policy to his industry colleagues. On the other hand, he was a bus operator himself and represented his company within the Bus Proprietors Association (BPA). The meetings at the BPA were very intense: every Friday night for 18 months. He took the pressure personally and it undoubtedly affected his health.

Bill Deacon's 33 years with Dyson's came to a very sudden and tragic end in 1990. He dies within 10 days of being diagnosed with leukemia.

He, with Col and Bill Dyson, were responsible for most of the growth that the company had enjoyed. With Bill's passing, it was the logical time to start putting into place arrangements for passing over the management of the company to the next generation.

At the time of his father's death, Lance had been with the company 3 years in the position of Manager, Finance and Administration; a new position created following the retirement of Mrs Cameron. Shane and Neil Dyson had both been with the business 12 years, a good deal longer than Lance. It was time to put a succession plan into operation and all three would be

appointed 'Junior' Directors. They would now have the opportunity to sit at the Boardroom table, although not in an official capacity.

After Bill's death, his wife Maisie would increase her direct involvement at Board level. For the next 5 years, Col and Bill Dyson and Maisie, assisted by their sons, would direct the company.

In 1994, both Col and Bill Dyson would officially retire, after 38 and 40 years respectively, with the company. Lance, Neil and Shane would become the next generation of Directors. Lance, Neil and Shane would be assisted on the Board by another family member: Bill Dyson's daughter Jenny Stewart. Jenny, one way and another, had had a long association with the business. She was Terry Henderson's first employee and a tax agent. Through Terry and subsequently Lou Varalla, she would become responsible for the preparation of the company accounts. In 2001, given the expanded requirements of the company, Jenny would assume a permanent part-time role with Dysons.

Lou Varralla and Terry Henderson, would also be on the Board, and of course Col and Bill Dyson would continue to attend Board meetings. Altogether, it was a very formidable team.

Along with Lance, Shane, Neil, Jamie and Greg, other family members had joined the business during the course of the 1980s, either temporarily or on an on-going basis.

Col Dyson's son-in-law, Terry Newton, joined the company in 1982 as a driver on the Whittlesea service before moving across to tour operations and ultimately on-road supervision of metropolitan services. Terry's brother Rod, would also join the company.

Terry would be followed by Col's daughter, Glenda, who started with the company as a driver, before moving into the tours division. Glenda's husband, Dominic Monardo, while with the company, was one of the company's most senior tour captain's as well as yard supervisor. Col's other daughter, Margie, would also join the business and would be responsible for the company's data base and cash collection, counting and security. Neil's wife, Kathy, worked for a time as a hostess on the company's extended tours and Libb Robins (Dyson), sister of Shane Dyson, who having completed a tourism and hospitality course, worked for a few years for the company establishing 'Dyson's Specialty Tours'.

By the beginning of the 1990s, therefore, the company had become a truly family business. While Laurie had created the concept, it would be his sons, and in turn his grandsons, who would make this concept a reality.



Some more new faces.  
From left to right: Noel Skene, Neil  
Dyson, Gavin London, Mick Reynolds.

## 'If You Don't Buy Reid's, I Will ...'

Before Col would retire, he would preside over what many regard as the most significant achievement of the company – the acquisition of Reid's Metropolitan Services Pty Ltd in 1991.

Reid's had been founded by David Reid. By 1991, with the passing of David Reid, the company was being run by his son Peter and his daughter, Shirley. The Reid family was well known to the Dysons. Bill Deacon and Shirley Reid had in fact worked together at J.T. Dunston's. More particularly, Terry Henderson and Lou Varalla knew them as clients.

So when the business came up for sale, Dysons was a logical buyer, although not without competition from a number of other metropolitan operators. The problem was that, at the time, Reid's business was close in size to its own. Reid's consisted of 25 staff, 22 route vehicles and 1 Denning Coach. They operated in the region to the south of Dysons: Heidelberg to Clifton Hill and Alphington to Moonee Ponds. Their metropolitan routes complemented Dyson's existing route services, extending the company's reach closer to the CBD and further into the western suburbs.

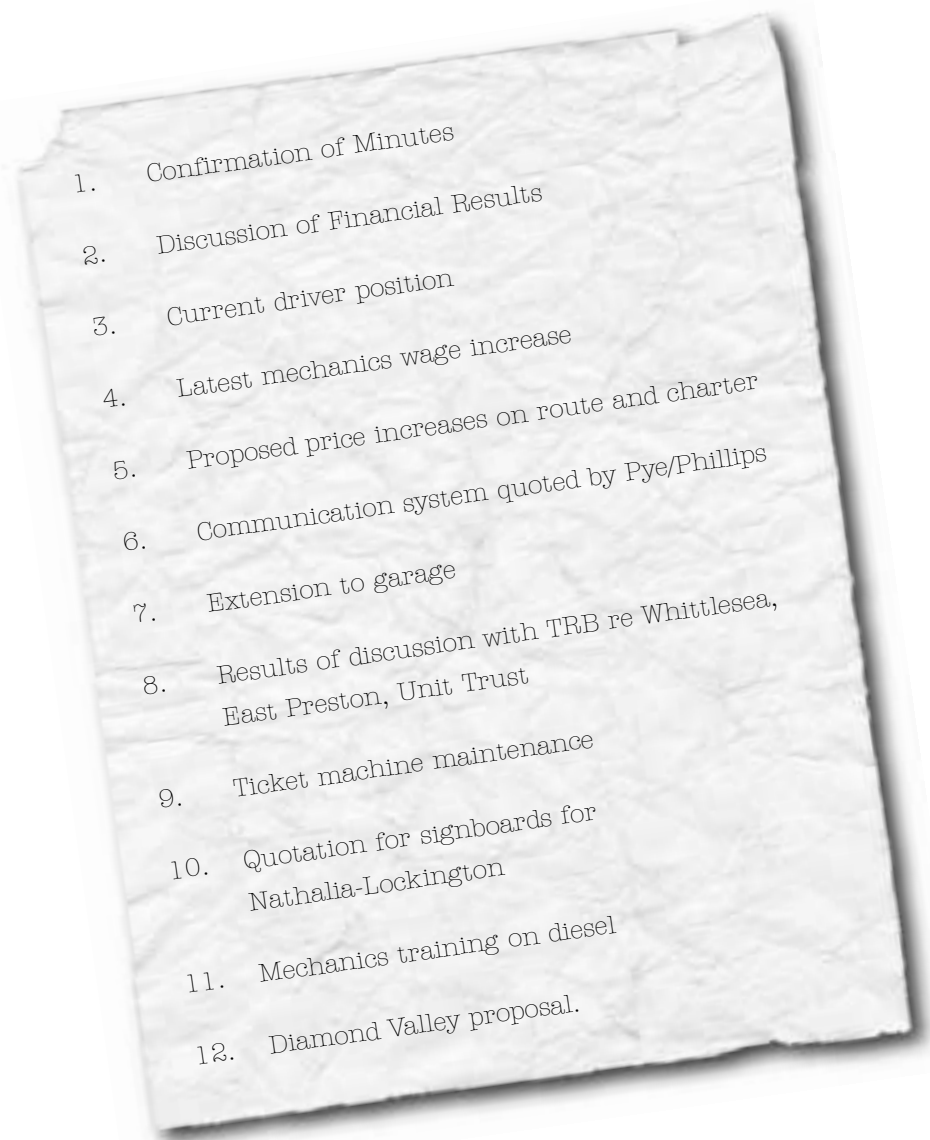
Financially, Reid's was also a profitable business offering positive cash flow from day one of operation.

In short, the business case for the purchase was, at least to some, very clear cut.

Nevertheless, there was very serious doubt within Dysons that they were capable of such a move. It was also, in dollar terms, the largest single deal that the company had undertaken, with a purchase price in excess of \$1 million.



By this stage, Dysons had been in existence for 39 years. While a great deal had happened during that time, it was still a reasonably small operator. Like all small-medium sized businesses, by necessity, it was run in a very hands-on fashion. The Directors, took direct involvement in all day-to-day affairs. The following is typical of the Board's agenda:



Meetings took forever! In retrospect, it is easy to argue that many of the issues should never have made their way to the Board Table, but such was the size and culture of the business at that time.

So when the Reid's proposal hits the table, the apprehension was understandable.

For some, however, the prolonged nature of discussion and consideration that preceded every major move of the company, was just too much. Terry Henderson had brought the Reid's proposal to the Board and it was Terry who eventually told them that '... if you don't buy Reid's, I will'. It was apparently, the same position he took concerning the purchase of Gill Toplis' Bairnsdale-Bega service.

If Terry wasn't doing the pushing, Lou Varalla was:

I pushed them hard on Reid's. I remember one discussion with Bill Deacon and I was on the other side of the Board table and I said 'If you don't purchase [Reid's] you'd be stupid'. He looked at me as if to say 'how dare you say that ... to me it was such an obvious thing to do'.<sup>75</sup>

Throughout all of Dysons history to this point, all their moves, without exception, were small, not always without risk, and strategic. Reid's represented a totally different scenario. It was, by comparison, very large scale. Being metropolitan, the timetabling and resourcing of its route services would be far more complex than anything they had previously encountered.

This issue would inevitably require prolonged discussion and careful consideration.

Fortunately for the company, Dysons acted. Perhaps at the time, it was also fortunate for Terry! It was a moment of great psychological importance for the company. For the first time, after 39 years, Dysons felt that they were 'achievers'.

Following the acquisition, the catch phrase of the time, with respect to Reid's, became 'status quo'. Everything was simply status quo. Reid's would continue to be operated as a stand alone operation for the next three years.

Greg Deacon, as noted earlier, moved back to Melbourne from Bairnsdale to manage the business from Reid's Darebin Road depot. Greg would be greatly helped by a former long-term employee of Reid's, who coincidentally undertook his motor mechanics apprenticeship with Shaun Tofts, a mechanic at Dysons. The chap's name was Frank Palma, who remains a key employee of Dysons today. Greg would also be assisted by Glenda Dyson who would manage Reid's remaining and limited charter business.

There would be no rush to physically amalgamate their business into the Dysons 'stable'. Room, for a start, was a major reason: as usual, the Reservoir depot was full. Bundoora was too far away. And besides, the Reid's depot was very close to their route runs.

However, room would ultimately be freed up at the Reservoir depot as the company progressively moved to Bundoora, making the transfer of the Reid's operation to Reservoir possible, and on a cost effective basis, necessary. When that happened, Greg Deacon would move across to manage Reservoir, and Mick Reynolds, who had been managing Reservoir, would move to Bundoora to head up the company's quality assurance and occupational health and safety programs.

So the logistics of the purchase, in terms of manpower and vehicles, was not inconsiderable, but the company, by this time, had turned logistics into an art form.



Left to right: Nicholas Martin, Jenny Stewart and Lou Varalla, 2002



Terry Henderson

But what about the marrying of the two cultures? Who were these Dysons characters? Shane was seen as 'easy going' and Neil was certainly on top of things. Col was running Dysons and was typically involved in all the detail. But there was this Lance Deacon fellow:

Lance was the money man – no doubt! When I first met him, I feared him because (he was always) 'cut this, cut that' ... but now we play tennis together.<sup>76</sup>

So Lance had to deal with an image problem. Easy going Shane would also come in for a bit of stick. Within the very first week of the takeover, Shane was not making a good impression:

(Within the first week), Shane being Shane, went out on the road, and I didn't know that he was a Director ... he went out in one of our vehicles and smashed a mirror and I said 'What @##\$\* is this? Send this bloke over to drive our vehicles and he's already wrecking them'.<sup>77</sup>

Shane's excuse? The buses were a bit 'jerky'.

Yes, it was a major purchase, but managing the takeover would take some time and a good deal of finesse.



## Melbourne Bus Link

By the end of the 1990s, and following the acquisition of Reid's and the Albury-Mildura Murray Link service in 1992,

Dysons had progressively grown in size to 96 vehicles, operating throughout Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT. The company employed some 200 staff, spread over four depots: Bundoora, Reservoir, Bairnsdale and Moama.

In its relatively short history, it had come a long way since the four buses parked behind Reg Cocks' house in Drysdale Street, East Preston.

Its metropolitan route network was now very extensive stretching from Moonee Ponds in the western suburbs of Melbourne to Melbourne University in the south and from South Morang and Whittlesea in the north to Greensborough and RMIT Bundoora in the east.

Bill Deacon, Col and Bill Dyson, along with Terry Henderson, had made an enormous contribution to the business. They had brought it from a relatively small but efficient operation, to one of the most formidable in the state.

With the arrival of the Kennett Liberal Government in Victoria, the decision was taken to fully privatise the state's public transport network, starting with the public tender for the remaining part of the public bus network not yet operated privately. Similar opportunities would soon follow in Western Australia and South Australia.

In 1997, the third generation of Directors would be tested for the first time. They had served their 'apprenticeship' and were now confronted with the major opportunities which privatisation presented. Bill and Col Dyson, and Maisie Deacon, would however remain prominent in the background.

The opportunities were immense. If successful, the partnership could offer service linkages with many of Melbourne's major transport, business and recreational infrastructure, including Melbourne Airport, La Trobe and Victoria Universities, Docklands, CBD and Southbank, and the bayside residential and tourist precincts.

Dysons was used to winning public tenders. In fact, they had had a well-established and successful track record in both rail replacement and metropolitan services. This deal was different. They would face international competition from some of the larger privately owned public transport operators in the world, including Stagecoach, Serco and National – they too were used to winning. The bid would also commit Dysons to the acquisition of a considerable number of additional and new buses over a three-year period. If that were not enough, with the stroke of the pen, they were looking at acquiring a fleet that was almost as large as themselves.

Lou Varalla would recall the fact that he tried to talk them out of it at first. To him:

The rules had changed. It was not another Reid's. (Government contracts were no longer done on a cost plus basis). It was a tender and you really had to sharpen the pencil to get it ... and it was a huge (operation).<sup>78</sup>

Having said that, the opportunity was too big to pass up. The acquisition of Reid's had given them the self-confidence that they would need to win. Backing that self-confidence was a strong and natural sense of aggression. Never in their history had the family passed up an opportunity to grow. In the end, therefore, the decision to proceed was easy, but only after intensive discussion and debate amongst the family Directors. That was how it always was, and in many ways, that was their winning formula. It may seem frustrating, but it obviously worked.

With the assistance of Nicholas Martin, the author of this history and a strategic planning consultant engaged by Dysons to prepare the bid, the first decision that the partnership made was to decide upon a bid 'vehicle'. Melbourne Bus Link Pty Ltd was formally born. Jenni Waldhauser, as the company's internal finance manager, would spend many hours preparing and revising financial forecasts. Russell Ward would become Director of Finance and Administration for the new entity, with Stephen and Peter Cooper, Col and Bill Dyson and Maisie Deacon as fellow Directors.

History records that the bid was successful. Dysons, with the individual participation of Peter and Steve Cooper and Russell Ward from Reservoir Bus Company, had beaten international competition. They were now the third largest metropolitan bus operator in Melbourne, and by definition, one of the larger privately owned bus operators in Australia. Lance, Neil and Shane would, within a short time, assume the place of their respective parents on the Board of Melbourne Bus Link.

Lance, Neil and Shane had graduated.

The first decision taken was not to go it alone. Again, as with East West, Dysons would turn to their alliance partners, the Cooper family (Peter and Steve Cooper) along with Russell Ward, the Managing Director of the Cooper family's Reservoir Bus Company, to make a joint bid for the biggest acquisition in the company's history. As partners, and at the urging of Shane Dyson in particular, they would lodge a bid for the Footscray and Sandringham based operations of the Public Transport Corporation (PTC) owned metropolitan bus network 'Met Bus'. In all, the deal involved the purchase and management of a network of 83 buses, 15 of which were located in Sandringham .

Taking on Melbourne Bus Link would dwarf in size anything that the company had taken on to this point. It would therefore require a major effort from many people.

The logistics involved in the transfer of ownership were enormous. In particular, Shaun Tofts in maintenance would spend very many hours supporting Neil in reviewing and upgrading an aged fleet of vehicles. Human resource issues, including the negotiation of a new Enterprise Agreement, were equally time consuming, especially for Shane. Others such as Jenni Waldhauser in finance, John Sherman in operations and Frank Palma in purchasing would also need to give a great deal to make it happen. In short, a good deal would be asked of many of the company's staff.

To Jenny Stewart, as she looked back at this time, it was attitude that made the difference:

I get surprised sometimes at how easily things happen ... there was never any doubt, right from the word go, that they couldn't take on that operation and do the job that was required of them, there was never any thought that that couldn't be done ...<sup>79</sup>

There is absolutely no doubt that Dysons has been very fortunate in the calibre of the people that have worked for them. It is striking that there are today, or have been, so many of them. It's what sets this company apart. It is also symptomatic of the Dysons culture.

The third generation today.  
From left to right, Neil Dyson, Shane Dyson, Lance Deacon.



Melbourne Bus Link Board:  
From left to right: Lance Deacon, Steve Cooper, Shane Dyson, Russell Ward, Neil Dyson, Lou Varalla, Peter Cooper



## The Opportunities Just Keep Getting Bigger

Even after the success of Melbourne Bus Link, or maybe because of it, the question occupying their minds now was – where to from here? It would not be long before the next and even bigger opportunities would emerge.

1997 would not finish before it was announced that V/Line Passenger and V/Line Freight were to be sold by public tender. At the same time, the state government of Western Australia announced the privatisation of its metropolitan bus network. It was all happening.

With some lingering doubt, the Directors decide that a major interstate campaign in Western Australia, having just secured a very major win with Melbourne Bus Link, was premature. Dysons are simply not used to passing up opportunities. Nevertheless, activity was hotting up much closer to home.

At the 'micro' level, in 1998, the company became involved in discussions with Mee's Bus Lines Pty Ltd over the purchase of Mee's single 520 route service from Macleod to Yan Yean via Greensborough. The deal bore the unmistakable Dysons signature: it was only one service, but it was strategically important to the company.

To Dysons, the service would fold very neatly into its existing route network. Accompanied by a financial consideration, Dysons offered in return, its Wallan to Whittlesea school service. To Mee's, who had become a major player in school bus services in greater north eastern metropolitan Melbourne, the deal offered the opportunity to expand their school network. As far as the state government was concerned, they were probably relieved to see the absorption, on administrative efficiency grounds, of a single service operator. So this particular deal appeared to offer a win all round.

At the 'macro' level, the Victorian Government announced the franchising of the whole of the public transport system, including metropolitan train and tram services, as well as V/Line Passenger (train and coach services) and V/Line Freight.

The high public profile which Dysons had received through its win with Melbourne Bus Link made the company an obvious local partner for some of the international public transport operators, who had

established campaign headquarters in Melbourne ready for the very intensive bid campaign that was to follow.

With the assistance of Nicholas Martin, the company held discussions with all of them. The mood at the time was quite phrenetic. There were freight operators who were looking for partners with experience in passenger transport. There were international passenger operators who were looking for local partners. There were international passenger operators who were going to go it alone. And there were merchant bankers with lots of money and looking to do a deal!

Dysons was approached by a couple of parties to partner with them in bidding for V/Line Passenger. Early on, therefore, the company, at least momentarily, faced the prospect of mounting a bid, in partnership, for the acquisition of the whole of Victoria's regional rail service. The 'big picture' for the company suddenly took on a whole new dimension.

Clearly, these initial discussions involved issues and financial obligations which would far outweigh any other undertaken by the company to this moment in time. Owning, or even managing, a rail network would be a good deal different to running buses. The 'fit' with the company's operational structure and capability was not there.

The first decision that the company therefore made, and made reasonably easily, was that they would not directly participate in the sale process. The far more difficult decision was how to best protect their existing V/Line business after the sale.

As indicated earlier, Dysons, to this point in time, operated a number of V/Line road coach services. V/Line contracts were a very important profit centre for the business. In fact Dysons had the largest individual portion of the V/Line network. However, these contractual arrangements would terminate with the sale. From that moment, all bets were off. The new franchisee would hold the right to either operate the services themselves or sub-contract them as they saw fit. This is not to say that Dysons were powerless. Their negotiating power was significant: they were the largest single V/Line road coach operator, they had the infrastructure, they had the intimate knowledge of the market place. They also knew how improvements could be made to the V/Line system. And they were respected by the Victorian Government.

Lance, Neil and Shane considered two options.

Option 1 was to actively support one of the bids in return for securing and hopefully enhancing their 'slice' of the V/Line road coach market. This 'picking winners' option had the obvious and considerable risk of failing to pick the actual winner! Failure could see Dysons lose the lot.

Option 2 was to do nothing. Not attempt to pick winners and have the welcome mat out for whomever was successful. Tempting, except for the fact that the company, by being out of the negotiations, could also stand to lose the lot, especially if other coach operators were actively involved in the sale process. It was also a fact that Dysons bargaining position would be strongest up to the closure of the bid process. They were in many ways an

ideal partner in shaping a bid that would have strong government appeal. Once bids closed, however, their negotiating strength would lose its commercial edge.

It was not an easy decision for Dysons to make, but in 1999, it decided to give its support to the UK based National Express Group's (NEG) bid for V/Line Passenger in return for the opportunity to sub-contract some element of the V/Line road coach network.

They chose well. NEG was successful. However, for Dysons the outcome was not yet clear. NEG chose to place all its V/Line road coach contracts up for tender.

In response, Lance, Neil and Shane opt to mount a consortium bid with Sunbury Coaches and Wannon Roadways for the operation of the entire V/Line road coach network.

While the consortium bid was itself not successful, in subsequent negotiation, Dysons successfully tendered for and won an increased share of the V/Line Road Coach market. Its market reach now included Tocumwal, Yarrowonga and Mansfield in Central Victoria.

All in all it was a long process that absorbed a considerable proportion of the company's resources, yet it proved to be worth it in the end.

Within months of settling negotiations with V/Line, the South Australian government tenders for Expressions of Interest for the provision of passenger transport bus services within metropolitan Adelaide.

Unlike, Perth, this time, Dysons can and do act, but not until after some understandable uncertainty had been dealt with.

Some real concern was expressed at the Board Table about the ability of the company to manage another major acquisition: the biggest it would have handled to that point in time and so soon after Melbourne Bus Link and V/Line. Those in favour, however, were confident. They had proved to themselves that they could operate metropolitan services as well as any company in Australia.

V/Line is now a prominent element of the total Dysons fleet.



McKimmies Road Depot 2001



Altogether, the company was looking at the prospect of taking over 153 buses and a staff of 336, which alone involved a total labour bill of \$14.8 million.

Needless to say, such tender bids are very time consuming and costly exercises to mount. John Sherman, as Manager Operations, would spend weeks in Adelaide familiarising himself with the network. Shane would join him. The other Directors, maintenance and finance staff would also spend time in Adelaide attempting to understand exactly what it was that they were buying and how they could improve the service. Together, they become more familiar with the network than the 'locals'.

More resources would be spent on this bid than any other in the company's history.

The bid itself offered state-of-the-art technology and much improved and more efficient service levels. Very long nights were spent in its preparation.

The bid was very strong, but not strong enough. In the end, the South Australian government went with the existing contractors. The company had given it their best shot but there was little it could do. There was considerable disappointment all round. However, much was learnt in the process and the exercise resulted in new and valuable industry relationships being established which continue today.

This almost completes the 50-year history of L.C. Dysons Bus Services Pty Ltd.

But not quite.

In the preceding chapters, each new 'deal' would prove to be bigger than the previous one. In typical fashion then, its most recent deal would be the biggest ever.

For Dysons, the emotional tie to charter has been until now, a unique form of love-hate relationship. These expensive 5 star flagships, in which they take enormous pride, cost a lot of money to keep on the road. More to the point, and generally characteristic of the industry, charter does not make money despite the company's best efforts. During the 1990s, Dysons had successfully negotiated contracted arrangements with Britz Australia Tours, Travelmarvel, Greyhound Pioneer and Dreamtime Tours. By this time, their charter and tour operations extended across Australia.

The problem is that they just cannot let charter go, at least not without a major fight. An enormous amount of pride is at stake and the company is not prepared to compromise on quality. To make charter profitable requires not only excellent marketing and excellent service but also sufficient size to deliver the required operational efficiencies: the work generally tends to be seasonal and the margins low.

Typical of such tenders, the metropolitan system was divided into discrete zones and parties were invited to tender for any or all of them. As would be expected, the amount of financial and operational detail required by the South Australian Government, was enormous. Fleet and parts valuation, depot infrastructure, rostering, timetabling, kilometres to be travelled, total operating costs, occupational health and safety procedures, negotiation process for wages rates and other terms and conditions of employment, required staffing levels, communications systems, administrative structure, acquisition of new fleet, signage, livery, business and marketing strategies and market research all had to be addressed. After that, they wanted to know how Dysons would run the system more cost effectively without sacrificing service standards. And they only had weeks to do it.

Despite the inherent difficulties of charter, the company's greatest single commercial venture would present itself in the year 2000, and as with earlier decisive moments in the company's history, Terry Henderson would be the catalyst. Terry would be instrumental in bringing together Australian Pacific Tours (APT) and Dysons, in a four party arrangement, in which Dysons would operate that part of the APT Australian based coach services which originate from Melbourne. This would include all APT packaged tours involving Melbourne Day Tours, Tasmania, Western Australia and all APTs camping safaris. The work would be year-round and would require the purchase of twenty-one 5-star coaches, equivalent to almost half of the entire APT coach fleet, and the absorption of APT drivers into the Dysons ranks.

The nature of the contractual arrangement is such therefore, that for the first time, charter has a sustainable financial future. The deal was not without risk, but then again, very few business decisions are totally risk averse. The company substantially increased its exposure to the vagaries of the national and international tourism market. Calculated risks to one side, to Dysons, the deal is also symbolic. The well established APT 'brand' is representative of first class road coach service. The fact that APT chose Dysons to be their front end service provider was, to Dysons, recognition of their standing within the industry.

Hand-in-hand with this recognition are the tourism awards which the company has received over recent years. In each of the last two years of its first 50 years of operation, Dysons has won the Victorian Tourism Award for the best Tour and Transport Operator: a far cry from the buses that held over 100 people at rush hour!

And what was the secret to this success? In the words of Lance Deacon:

... it proved that if you just work through the issues without getting blown away with exactly what you are doing, if you continue to work through the little issues, you eventually get over the line, and you look back and say ... it's a pretty big deal that we've just done! ...<sup>80</sup>

Not bad advice. By its 50th year, Dysons had achieved all and more of its ambitions.

From left to right: Neil Dyson, Jamie Dyson, Janet Angelkoska, Craig Bolton, Jenny Stewart, Graham Reid, Mark Pearson, Greg Deacon, Brendan McGrath, Rob Kaznovski, Terry Newton, Dane Nye, Raquel Paladino, Michelle Turner, Jenni Waldhauser, John Sherman, Margaret Dyson, Trevor McKernan, Suzanne Holland, Lance Deacon, Shane Dyson, Natasha Owen, Michelle McKenzie and Dean Bagley





## The Future

On the back of Dyson's Ultra Low Floor, \$330,000 metropolitan bus, are the letters [www.dysonsbus.com.au](http://www.dysonsbus.com.au).

I wonder what Laurie, a man who loved the written word, would make of that? Perhaps very little. After all, there's not all that much difference, at least in terms of the Queen's English, between a 'dot.com' and a 'Commer Knocker'.

Looking at the 'big picture', Laurie was adamant that the tram would not proceed along Plenty Road beyond the East Preston tram terminus – it would happen 'over his dead body'. As irony would have it, his son Laurie Jnr would recall that:

... the day they buried him, the tram line was being built past the cemetery, so he was right!<sup>81</sup>

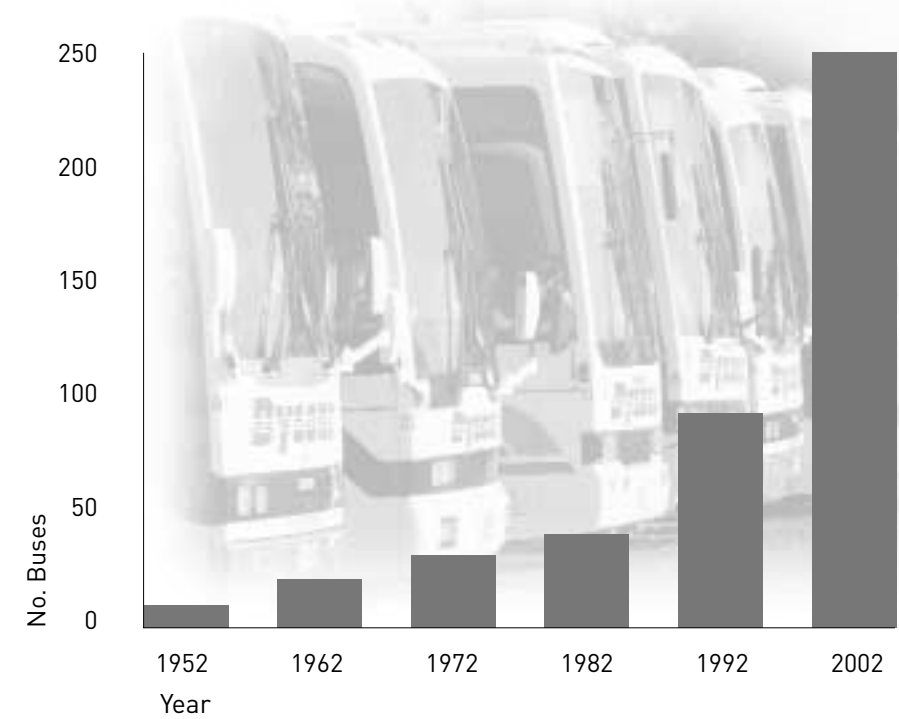
Opinionated to the end – and beyond.

The threat of the encroachment of the tram along Plenty Road played very seriously on the minds of everyone. It was a very real threat. Laurie had staked his business on it not taking place. In the early days, Dysons was particularly exposed as it had a lot of buses running down Plenty Road. Had the extension of the tram happened when it was supposed to have, it would have been a major threat, particularly as no compensation was payable to any bus service replaced by the tram. But by the time it did happen, the company had been able to develop services away from Plenty Road.

Times certainly do change. Nothing stays the same for very long.

Despite the encroachment of the tram, the company he started would grow enormously. Each generation would take the business to a distinctly higher level.

Figure 3.  
**Fleet Size: L.C. Dyson Bus Services Pty Ltd**



Easier? Each generation will no doubt call it their own way. Each generation has certainly left its mark. From small beginnings, which had their own unique challenges and demands. Dysons has become a company of very sizable proportions. As shown in Figure 3, the last 20 years has seen very marked growth, with the last decade being spectacular.

Don't they want to 'come up for air'? Not really. Challenges have become part of the Dysons culture:

at the moment the challenges don't stop. You don't get a breath of fresh air. It just keeps rolling on and sometimes I feel, Gee!, I would just like two weeks where nothing out of the ordinary happens ... but when you get into it, you just can't stop yourself.<sup>83</sup>

In its 50th year, the company is yet again finalising plans to relocate to an even larger and state-of-the-art depot. Its fleet of buses, including those owned in partnership with RBC, number in excess of 240. It now has a staff of 400 people.

While the company started with just one Melbourne metropolitan route, 46A, it now operates a Melbourne metropolitan network of 12 routes in its own right and a further 11 routes in partnership with Reservoir Bus Company: 4 under the 'East West' brand and a further 7 with 'Melbourne Bus Link'. In its totality, the network stretches from the western metropolitan extremity of Dear Park to the north eastern extremity of Yan Yean and the infamous Whittlesea. Outside the metropolitan region, the company has progressively extended its reach beyond its original and single non-contracted Nathalia service to cover government contracted services to Barham, Deniliquin, Moama, Echuca and Mildura. It also operates

Which was the best time? Col's view says it all, except for the sting in the tail:

My perception of it is that it's better now. It's pretty hard to compare the two eras. The difference now is that when we were running the business we were hands on as well as doing the other, which is not easy. Today, people who are hands on aren't running the business ... we were doing all the bus washing, cleaning, answering the phone, taking charter bookings, we were doing everything, but now you have specialist people doing that.

Is that a good idea?

Much better, *that's why it's easier* (author's emphasis).<sup>82</sup>

contracted services connecting Albury-Mildura, Sale-Bairnsdale, and Lakes Entrance-Bairnsdale as well as services connecting Sale with Bateman's Bay and Canberra.

In association with National Express, the company offers additional and separate contracted services connecting Melbourne with Shepparton, Mansfield and Tocumwal as well as separate services connecting Moama with Bendigo and Murchison East, Benalla with Mulwala and Bairnsdale with Sale.

And finally, in association with Australian Pacific Tours, the company wet leases to APT, under the APT brand, a further 21 coaches covering tour services to Tasmania, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

In all, a magnificent achievement. The company has come a long way from its 92 pounds a week service from Regent Station to Janefield Hospital ... and chaps with gladstone bags. Would Laurie be surprised? Curiously enough, the family is divided on this issue. Many say definitely yes, probably reflecting more on the early days in the company's history. Others are less certain, thinking more about the man's stubbornness and dogged persistence with Plenty Road.

Of course, we will never know the answer to that question. What is true, however, is that the company today, at the end of its first 50 years, is the product of many people's efforts: Bill Deacon for his capacity to manage; Col Dyson for his unrelenting demand for standards; Bill Dyson for his very astute 'on the road' sense of how the business was performing. Their sons, Lance, Neil and Shane, given the solid base created by their grandfather and respective fathers, would together preside over the company's greatest ever period of growth, and this fact should not be forgotten.

In looking forward, the company has a five-year strategic plan. It is called *Buses With Attitude*. The title is entirely appropriate, for that is the way the business has grown. They have not waited for things to happen.

To those looking in from the outside, the company has always shown a very rare and distinctive combination of adventure, achievement and great enjoyment. Aggressive? – absolutely, but always, they would hope, with integrity. Those who have developed a relationship with the company are unanimous in their belief that Dysons, in the words of one person, has achieved a standard of behaviour that you do not see very often.

The sense of pride and attachment which the family has for its business and its staff is reflected in the words of Maisie Deacon:

... it wouldn't matter how simple the bus is, whether it's a route bus or whatever, you can't help watching it and wondering 'where's that bus going, I wonder who's on that ...'<sup>84</sup>

Looking back at the first 50 years, most agree that central to the success of the company has been not only its attitude to others, but its attitude to *themselves*:

One of the most important things that the company has always done has been that it has left the money in the business and let the profits develop the business. They haven't taken anything out.<sup>85</sup>

Today, this attitude remains a cornerstone of Dysons philosophy.

As for the future, Dysons will certainly continue to grow. But future growth will require increasingly large sums of capital and an increasingly more skilled workforce. There is absolutely no doubt that subsequent generations will continue what Laurie commenced. But change is a certainty. Issues such as corporate entity, structure and the development of the next generations will emerge and will need to be dealt with. Gone forever, are the days of 46A. The question now is can the company achieve all its ambitions and remain a family business? For this generation, the answer is an emphatic 'yes' and on this point, the last word might go to Margie Dyson:

It's very important that (the company) remains a family business because that's really what we are about ... we're not some (multinational), we're a family business and hopefully that is the way it will stay.<sup>86</sup>

So what's on the agenda for the next 50 years? That's family business..



1952

46A

Regent Station to  
Janefield Hospital

# To Those Who Made It Possible

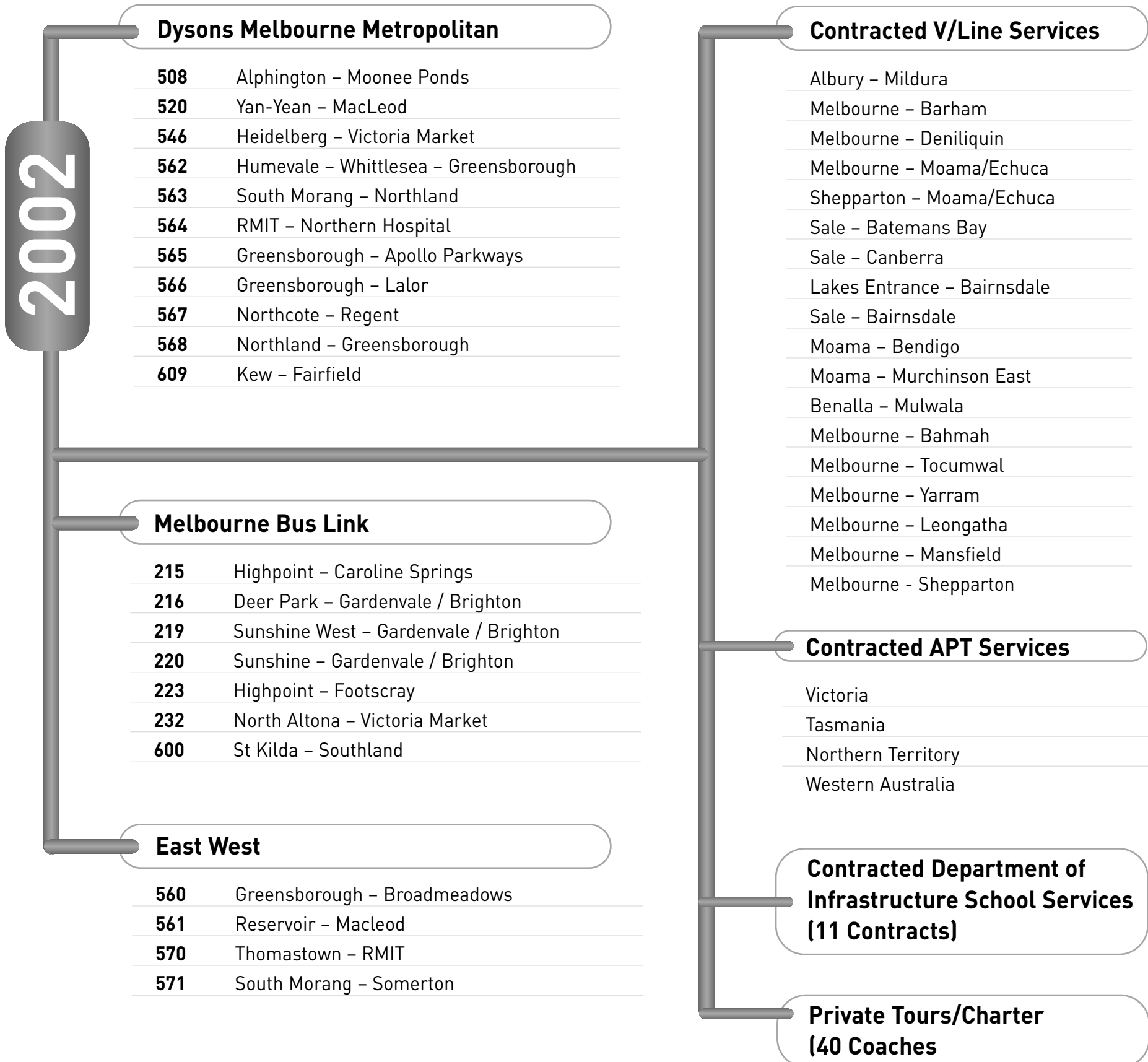
The Dyson story of its first 50 years, is one of great pride to all members of the family. The preceding pages celebrate the achievements of its family members:

- Laurie Dyson
- Collins Dyson
- Bill Deacon
- Bill Dyson
- Maisie Deacon
- Jenny Stewart (Dyson)
- Lance Deacon
- Neil Dyson
- Kathy Dyson
- Shane Dyson
- Libb Robins (Dyson)
- Greg Deacon
- Liz Deacon
- Jamie Dyson
- Tracey Dyson
- Richie Dyson
- Margie Dyson
- Glenda Monardo (Dyson)
- Rodney Newton
- Terry Newton

However, the story would in no way be near complete without formally acknowledging the loyalty and dedication of our long serving advisors, those very special employees who have repeatedly gone the extra distance for the company, and to those with whom we have done business. Together they helped us make it happen, and in the process, made the first 50 years so much fun.

## Our Advisors

- Terry Henderson
- Lou Varalla
- Tony Locke
- Nicholas Martin



## To Those Key Staff Still With Us With More Than 15 Years Service

Blago (Bill) Bozinov  
Tony Cardamone  
Rodney Clarke  
John Dean  
Brian Duffy  
Maxwell Franklin  
Mendo (Mick) Jovcevski  
Peter Katsakis  
Les Lubcke  
Valentine Mack  
Peter McCulloch  
Brendan McGrath  
Jose (Joe) Metelovski  
Alan Mills  
Gary O'Loughlin  
Frank Palma  
Brian Sizeland  
John Skedden  
Shaun Tofts  
Gaetano (Tom) Tumeo  
Jenni Waldhauser  
Graham Welton

## To Those Very Many Past Employees Who Stayed With Us For Many Years

(Over 15 Years of Service)

Eric Boyd  
Jim Buckland  
(Mrs) Mary Burns  
(Mrs) May Cameron  
Graeme Cartlidge  
Peter Connelly  
Syd Dunn  
Bill Gledhill  
Mick Heaphy  
George Herbert  
Jim Hewat  
Alec Hutchison  
Alf King  
John (Jack) Lawrence  
Robert Lynch  
Ron McKenzie  
Les McLaine  
Bob Moore  
Tom O'Halloran  
Alf Oldham  
Bill Parker  
Les Patterson  
Kelvin Pitts  
Michael (Mick) Reynolds  
Frank Rocca  
Donato (Don) Rossi  
Mick Simpson  
Graham Storay  
Coralie Smith  
Bill Watts

## To Those Very Many Past Employees Who Stayed With Us For Many Years

(Under 15 Years of Service)

Alan Anderson  
Ian Bennett  
Lou Blake  
Victor (Bert) Carey  
Joseph (Tom) Collard  
Don Flack  
Les Gibbs  
Noel Hawking  
Bruce Henry  
Norm Iredale  
Aslam Kazi  
Max Knight  
Daryl Lay  
Keith Lay  
Ralph Logiurato  
Steve McIntosh  
Julie London  
George Sacco  
Pat Sacco  
Mick Sweet  
William Van Gemert  
Don Warren  
Alec Waters

## To The Very Special

Terry Henderson  
Lou Varalla  
Noel Skene  
Brian Cocks



To you all, our very sincere thanks for your loyalty,  
for your dedication, for your friendship.

From the Directors of Dysons  
and their families

## Footnotes:

1. Len Kenna, *In The Beginning There Was Only The Land*, Lions Club of Bundoora, 1988 pp. 22-40
2. It is doubtful that the Cooper's and the McLean's of the 1840s have any direct association with the Cooper and McLean families of the 1930s noted in this book.
3. The original name of the business.
4. Interview with Bill Dyson, September, 2000.
5. Interview with Laurie Jnr, November, 2000.
6. Ibid.
7. Interview with Laurie Jnr, November, 2000.
8. Anonymous letter dated 27 September, 1959.
9. Interview with Col Dyson, February, 2001
10. Interview with Bill Watts, Driver, 7 March, 2001.
11. Ibid.
12. Letter received from Mr A.J. Broomfield, Kingsbury, Hon Secretary, Kingsbury Progress Association, dated 27 February, 1960.
13. Letter dated 27 February, 1960.
14. Letter to the Secretary of the WASPA, Collins Street, Melbourne dated 7 June, 1960.
15. Balance Sheet dated 30 June 1956, prepared by A.D. Burgoyne AICA, LCA.
16. Interview with Col and Bill Dyson, February, 2001.
17. Interview with Laurie Jnr, November, 2000.
18. Ibid.
19. Contract of Sale dated 7 August, 1957 between H.E. Taylor and L.C. Dyson.
20. Letter from J.L. Hawkins, Victorian Railways to H.V. Field Secretary of the TRB, dated 27 August, 1956.
21. Interview with Col and Bill Dyson, October, 2000.
22. Letter from Harold Lawrence to L.C. Dyson, dated 29 August, 1958.
23. Letter from Laurie Dyson to Secretary of WASPA, loc. C.
24. Company minutes, dated 22 June, 1959.
25. Provision was subsequently made for employee shares but was never actioned.
26. Interview with Col and Bill Dyson, September, 2000.
27. Presentation of Accounts for year ending June 1961, A.H. Clarke and Company, Chartered Accountants.
28. Letter from Laurie Dyson to WASPA loc. C.
29. Nick name given to Bill Dyson as recalled by May Cameron.
30. Interview with Bill Dyson, September, 2000.
31. Letter to WASPA loc. cit.
32. Letter from Town Clark, City of Preston, to L.C. Dyson dated 24 May, 1960.
33. Almost certainly an 'overstatement of the situation. In the company accounts for the year 1961/62, the company's schedule of buses numbered 12, excluding cars.
34. Draft undated letter to A Tinning, Town Hall Preston from L.C. Dyson.
35. Letter dated 5 July, 1960 from H W Tinning, Building Surveyor and Planning Officer, City of Preston
36. Company Accounts for the Year Ending June 1960
37. Copy of Letter from S W Cooper to Secretary, TRB, dated 12 May, 1961
38. Letter to Dysons from the Secretary of the TRB, Mr B.P. Kay, dated 16 November, 1961
39. Manuscript comment, Joan Robinson, September, 2001
40. Company Minutes, 8 May, 1963
41. While Laurie would more than once refer to his initial purchase as three buses, he did in fact purchase four.
42. Company Accounts for year ending 30 June, 1963.
43. Interview with Bill (and Col) Dyson, September, 2001.
44. Interview with Col and Bill Dyson, September, 2000.
45. Ibid.
46. City of Preston Permit, Application Serial No. PT 99, dated 8 June, 1970.
47. President's Report, 1975/76, Bundoora Cricket Club.
48. Jamie Dyson, interview 12 December, 2000.
49. Ibid.
50. Internal Memo dated 29 November, 1978.
51. Interview with May Cameron, August, 2001.
52. Ibid.
53. Interview with Laurie Jnr, November, 2000.
54. Company Minutes dated 22 April, 1971, 9.30 am.
55. Company Minutes, dated 30 April, 1971, 3.30 pm.
56. Garth Buckner, Owen Dickson Chambers, 30 August, 1971.
57. Whittlesea Post, page 1, 22 October, 1964.
58. Letter to Dysons dated 16 January, 1978 from G. J. Meech, Director of Transport.
59. Bus and Coach News, April, 1974.
60. Board Minutes, 24 March 1975.
61. Report to TRB, April, 1977.
62. Undated meeting notes. Meeting attended by Bill Deacon and Terry Henderson.
63. Letter from Bill Deacon to Hon. R. R. MacLelland, Minister for Transport, dated 22 May, 1979.
64. Unsigned and undated Objectors' Schedule, TRB.
65. Interview with Jenny Waldhauser, August 2001.
66. Interview with May Cameron, August 2001.
67. Unsigned and undated copy of letter sent to V/Line on Harrison's letterhead.
68. Company Minutes of 30 October, 1978.
69. Interview with Lou Varella, August 2001.
70. Presumably this was an editorial error and should have read Denning Denair GM.
71. Len Kenna, *In the Beginning There Was Only Land*, Lions Club of Bundoora, pp96-98.
72. Advice from solicitors, Home Wilkinson & Lowry, dated 30 August 1973.
73. Speaking notes, Opening Ceremony, dated 30 June 1982.
74. Bus Proprietors' Association (Vic.) Bulletin No. 83/14, dated 8 July 1983.
75. Interview with Lou Varalla, August 2001.
76. Interview with Frank Palma, Dysons, August 2001.
77. Ibid.
78. Interview with Lou Varalla, August 2001.
79. Interview with Jenny Stewart, August 2001.
80. Interview with Lance, Shane and Neil Dyson, April, 2001.
81. Interview with Laurie Dyson Jnr, November 2000.
82. Interview with Col and Bill Dyson, September 2000.
83. Interview with Jenny Waldhauser, August 2001.
84. Interview with Maisie Deacon, November 2000.
85. Interview with Lou Varalla, August 2001.
86. Interview with Margie Dyson, August 2001.



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83  
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# Family Business

The 50 Year History of L.C. Dyson's Bus Services Pty Ltd

Nicholas Martin

