

Brian Recalls Times with the "Times"

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Brian Bayles was the guest speaker at this month's history group and delivered his memories of working at our local newspaper to a capacity crowd.

It was 1958 and 14-year old Brian was more interested in his sporting activities on the weekend than continuing on with school.

Goff Letts and Ted Chessells were the proprietors of the then "Donald Times".

They offered Brian a "Hand Compositing and Printing" apprenticeship and he immediately took it up. The "Donald Times" building was then at 44 Woods St, which is now Donald Motor Cycles. The staff consisted of Goff Letts, Ted Chessells, Robin Letts and Brian. There were also various office girls over the years.

Crash

One of Brian's memories of his first week was of pulling out a drawer, which held about 1000 hand set lettertype, extending it too far and having the whole lot upend and crash on to the floor. The type pieces were metal, square pegs

about 2 em high and had a letter emblazoned as a mirror image on the top. Brian roughly picked them up and placed them on a bench. He said: "They didn't sack me but every time I had a spare moment I had to place the type pieces back, in order, into the type case". This took many, many months.

The Type

Hand set type was used to do the big headings in the paper and the invitations and stationery items, which required different text fonts and text sizes.

The actual articles in the paper were done on a linotype machine. This was a huge machine about 1.5m high, and 1m space. The operator sat in front, tapping the keys on a keyboard. The amount of moving parts and destinations on this machine was amazing. The operator typed the story on the keyboard. Each key was attached to a matrice up above by a long wire. The matrice was a very small brass plate with a letter embedded in one side edge and a combination controlled release mechanism in the top edge.

When a key was tapped it would trigger the release of the matrice containing the required letter, and drop it down

a chute to an assembly point in front of the operator. This continued until a "line of text" was completed. Another mechanism then took the "line" away to a casting point. The line was then elevated and dropped into a place where the head of the mould was. A plunger would come down in a pot of molten lead which would fill the mould up and this created a cast of the line of text

The lead solidified almost instantly into what was called a slug. The slugs would then drop down on to a tray. All this went on automatically whilst the operator was setting the next line. The finished line would be taken back up moved across, and each matrice found its correct place, by combination, it would drop back into where it belonged.

Robin Letts operated this machine when Brian first started his apprenticeship.

Each page of the Donald Times was done separately by placing the finished slugs into a metal frame and making them secure. If they were not secure the whole lot would fall out when the frame was picked up. The frame would then be placed on the Wharfdale Press and the page rolled through and was printed..

The Press

The Wharfdale press did "letterpress printing", which printed from type straight to paper, no plates involved. This was one of Brian's jobs.

The old printers had to be hand fed with single sheets of paper. This was done in the freezing lower back room of the "Times Office" at 44 Woods Street.

In winter, the young apprentice's hands became so cold they ceased to function and some days, in desperation, he held on to the light globe, the only warming device in the room, for several minutes, before he could resume his task.

Brian has another bad memory of forgetting to set the delivery table of the press, and this caused a huge buildup of paper which eventually dropped down on to the machine causing a huge mess and malfunction. Two hours later, after washing all of the rollers and the ink plate, Brian had to start the job again.

Molten Lead

Another story was of dealing with molten lead. Brian wore a beanie, goggles, a beard, jeans and a jumper. The molten lead had to be poured into a mould. One day there was water in the mould and the lead exploded going all over Brian and the wall. Without the protective clothing, he would have possibly lost his sight and have sustained severe burns.

Automation

Brian had been with the paper about ten years when a new Heidelberg printer was purchased to print the commercial stationery, and the paper was then automatically fed into the printer. This freed up the operator to do other things much to the consternation of Mr Chessells. He wondered what the operator would find to do if he didn't have to feed the paper in. Brian was amused that Ted saw no point in the new machine, and often used it to hang his hat on when he came in the building.

The Move

In 1972, the "Donald Times" moved to 6 McCulloch Street, where it has remained ever since.

At this time two second hand linotype machines were purchased as well as a Kliché-and deadlines were paramount with these.

The "Recorders" had to be folded, stapled and trimmed. Grand final day in Boort in the 1960s saw Brian trying to finish the "Recorders" on Saturday morning. He got 100 done and got them round to Frank O'Shea, to send over with the Under-16s. He then got another 100 done and tore round and sent them with someone else who was going over early. Brian then went back and did the last 500, put them in the back seat of the car and headed for Boort. He was amused when the kid on the gate came up to the car window and asked him if he wanted a "Recorder"!

Oops!

Another funny story was when Brian stole the "I" out of a discarded advertisement for O.A. Shilton and Sons to do another job. Os Shilton decided to rerun the ad, and it was printed without being proof read, much to the amusement of the town. Os was in first thing Monday morning. His opening line was "Well, I've been many things over the years, but I've never been Shiton".

Brian had many more stories and he described the equipment so vividly many of the audience wished that they could see these amazing machines.

The two linotype machines are still in the back rooms of the "Times" building and are well worth a look, particularly if you have Brian Bayles to talk you through it.

The articles in the now "Buloke Times" are totally prepared on Apple computers.

The pages are still made into plates and printed on the Heidelberg printer in Donald.

A number of surrounding towns now send their files to Ballarat or further to be printed on a rotary press which does the printing in one operation. A rotary press would be a very costly acquisition so the Heidelberg will continue to be used for a number of years yet. Of course, the "Buloke Times" is now available electronically and can be read on your screen, and as more people take up this option, theoretically, it may not be necessary to print the paper at all.

Brian retired at the end of 2018. He said that after 59 years it is really very nice not to have to go to work.

Brian Brasier thanked Brian Bayles for his interesting talk and gave him a small printed History Group publication in appreciation.