

Work and Play the Holeproof Way

Written from Memory by Ruth Crow

If you lived in Brunswick in the mid 1930s you would be familiar with the poster on huge hoardings which depicted Sister Elliott in her nurse's uniform appealing to parents to *Let Your Daughter Work in Holeproof for her health's sake.*

INTRODUCTION

By the mid 1930s Holeproof was employing over 1000 workers, mostly women, a high proportion of whom were teenagers.

I tried to get a job at Holeproof when I was thirteen and a half. I was too young then, but I got a job there in 1936 when I was fourteen. I joined the Textile Union even though my father said that if I joined the union I would be thrown into the river by the establishment. This was just at the time they were fighting for a reduction in the working week from 44 to 40 hours. The male basic wage was three pounds and eight shillings. I got 14/6 (fourteen shillings sixpence a week) and a rise of 6d (six pence) a week till I reached 21 years.

Most of the girls were young. The charge hands were all adults. We were all scared of the forelady. We thought people were old when they were thirty.

We had a nursing sister at Holeproof who looked after our welfare. One thing that used to make me mad, if you had a day off sick with a bad monthly period, on returning to work you would have to walk (in your own time) to a shop to get an affidavit signed by a Justice of the Peace, so you could be paid, although you may have had sick pay owing to you. (Extract from a contribution from Thelma Prior at the 2nd Women and Labour Conference 1980. Thelma can be contacted through the UAW, 03/ 9654.7409)

WORK-PLACE RELATIONS IN A LARGE TEXTILE MILL IN THE 1930s

I worked at Holeproof for a brief period in 1937. Here are some remembered observations of the textile industry in general and some of my impressions of Holeproof's welfare policies :-.

1. The textile industry was expanding, in Victoria, during the 1920s and 1930s, (1*)
2. The management at Holeproof and other textile mills were very conscious of making a good impression on the local community, firstly to popularise their product and secondly to advertise for employees. (2*)
3. The expansion of the textile industries was based on cheap female labour which was readily available when so many male bread winners were unemployed. (3*)
4. Holeproof was one of the first factories in Australia to copy the USA innovation of employing welfare staff and establishing a factory canteen.
5. Holeproof's first welfare employee was Sister Elliott, the daughter of the famous First World War General "Pompy" Elliott, (See Exhibit 1. Letterhead includes photo of Sister Elliott.)

6. In 1936/37 Holeproof built new offices in Sydney Road but for most of 1937 the building was called "the Recreation Centre". It was mainly used several evenings a week to entertain groups of people who toured the factory.

7. One way Holeproof built up its public profile was to invite community organisations to tour the factory,

8. The foremen acted as tour-guides and the canteen staff stayed back to serve the supper of soft drinks, Lucullus cakes, sausage rolls and sandwiches.(4*)

9. The "girls" in the canteen were casual workers and were paid 11d (eleven pence) an hour. They received no loading for the overtime they worked during the evening when they served supper to the guests on the tours. (5* and 7*)

10. The canteen was in a basement. The cafeteria staff served food at 3 mid-day shifts and one evening shift. I don't know how many were served. When the lunch whistle blew it seemed that hundreds rushed out of the lift in the race to the counter to buy pies, buns, soft drinks.etc (6*)

11. A cook was employed to prepare three course meals (of a slightly higher standard than those served in the Railway Refreshment Rooms in 1930s) for about a dozen executives.

SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL FEEDING

In the mid 1930s I completed my diploma in Institutional Management and Dietetics and had an almost fanatical desire to practise my newly gained knowledge by providing meals at work-places and at schools, coining the term *Scientific Social Feeding*.

I was twenty years old when I enthusiastically accepted the Holeproof's offer of a job. My salary was three pounds a week. I was on the Welfare Committee with Sister Elliott and my photo was taken for an advertisement for local billboards, but I did not stay long enough for this to eventuate. (7*)

ROMANTIC WEDDING FOR ORPHAN PHYLLIS

If you lived in Brunswick in the Spring of 1937 you may have read front page reports in the local paper about "*PHYL'S WEDDING*". I can clearly remember the type of colourful phrases used by the reporter. The article, gushingly, described how Mr Staley from Holeproof had been the *fairy godfather* and had provided a magical wedding for *orphan Phyllis* who had expected to be married quietly but changed her plans when Mr Staley offered to hold the wedding banquet in the new Holeproof Recreation Centre. The generosity of the Holeproof Management enabled the wedding to be celebrated by the whole factory, the paper said.

I have distinct memories of how the report stated *Brunswick dressmakers were up several nights finishing off Phyl's wedding gown*, and of course I remember how I was described. It was reported that I was at the church wearing *A black gorgette floral dress with matching picture hat*.

(3)

I cannot remember much more from the newspaper report, but I do recall that at the wedding breakfast the Presbyterian parson described the wonderful welfare systems which were being developed in the USA. He praised Holeproof's slogan **Work and Play the Holeproof Way**.

REALITY FOR PHYL'S FRIENDS

Firstly, to put the record straight :-

1. Phyl wore Mary's wedding dress which had been worn on several other occasions, so the Brunswick dressmakers had no need to stay up late at night
2. I was not at the church, I was far too busy with the wedding breakfast.
3. I could not have afforded a "black floral gorgette dress and picture hat to match". I did wear a cheap black voile dress with flowers on it.
3. I very much doubt if Phyl did have any PLANS to marry. Her announcement to her friends had been I will **HAVE** to get married, I **THINK I MIGHT** do it next Saturday.
4. Holeproof did pay for the food and drink so they were the "god-fathers", paying for the banquet, but the canteen staff donated their labour free.
5. As stated earlier the canteen staff had not been paid overtime rates for staying back to cater for the tours through the factory, The donation of the 5 pounds for the wedding expenses was accompanied by a statement such as *We have been looking for a special way of thanking the canteen "girls" for catering in the evenings for the tours of inspection, the wedding can be it.*

I don't think I will ever forget that week. It began with tearful Mary telling Bonnie that Phyl will **HAVE** to get married.

News seemed to have spread and by the end of the day Mr Staley came into the canteen and presented Phyl with a pair of **Black Magic** stockings. He gave me (as Manageress) a five pound note, offered the recreation centre for the wedding breakfast and said that invitations to the celebration would be placed on the factory notice boards. (8*)

I forget most of the reasons for the stresses that piled one on top of the other, but take my word for it, it was a stressful week. The dance after the banquet, with Laurie Donovan at the piano, playing *All by Yourself in the Moonlight* and *The Music Goes Around and Around* made up for most of this.

And what happened to Phyl, Mary Bonnie and the others ? I don't know. I kept in touch with Mary until the mid 1960s and I heard from her that Phyl's marriage lasted a very short time.

FOOTNOTES

(4)

1*. From my own experience I know that both Myers and Morleys were established in Ballarat in the late 1920s. I remember the excitement when two new factories were built.

2*. When I was in the 8th grade, in 1929, the manager from Morley's Mill visited the school to tell us about the new factory and to invite us to visit it on a school excursion. This was followed by an essay competition which I won (I may have been the only person enthusiastic enough to write an essay out of school hours!).

3* It is often stated that women were first to be dismissed in recessions, this was not universally true, in the 1890s depression the clothing factories like Pelaco were established and in the 1930s depression the textile industry was rapidly expanding.

4* I think the foremen were salaried staff and probably not eligible for overtime. I know that they were rewarded for hosting the factory-tours by a dinner of chicken and lobster, wine and beer, and then a visit to a theatre. I know this because I prepared the meal. It was quite a banquet for about 40 men

5* The wedding breakfast was the reward for the centeen "girls"...see later.

6* It was a very short meal period. One very young under nourished girl was given half a bottle of milk (a quarter of a pint) a day, free, as part of Holeproof Welfare Committee's policy on better nutrition.

7* There are two main reasons why I left the job, I was frustrated in implementing a policy for better nutrition through the need to show a weekly profit. Secondly I asked the Management to pay overtime rates for the canteen staff when they worked in the evening, thus my behaviour was out of keeping with the others on the Welfare Committee. The stresses and strains of the wedding brought these contradictions to a head.

8* Five pounds would be the equivalent to about \$500 today. As stated in the quote from Thelma Prior (on page 1) her weekly wage was 14/6, thus 5 pounds was almost 7 times her weekly wage. Wedding feasts in the 1930s were much less extravagant than those provided today, The 5 pounds was enough for the wedding cake, the food and soft drinks and the decorations.

9* I was also told that the wedding would be the reward to the canteen "girls" for their willing help with the tours of inspection. We thanked the tour-guides by the special dinner and theatre night. We have been looking out for a way to thank the girls. So this can be it.

EXHIBITS

1. Reference for Ruth Miller (Crow) from Holeproof. See slogan, photo of Sister Elliott and sketches of workers at recreation.
2. Photo of Ruth Miller (Crow) in her manageress uniform, This was to be used on a bill-board..*Let Your Daughter Work at Holeproof for her Health's Sake.*
3. For good measure, a 1944 letter to Ruth Crow from 4 Holeproof employees

Prepared for Brunswick Community History Group, 1998.
by Ruth Crow 03/9329.8685 .

WORK AND PLAY THE HOLEPROOF WAY
Exhibits.

Exhibit 1.

Reference for Ruth Miller (Crow) on Holeproof letterhead.
Note :- slogan, photo of Sister Elliott and sketchings of
workers at play.

Exhibit 2..

Photo of Ruth Miller (Crow), 1937. This photo was taken to
be used on bill-board poster.

Exhibit 3.

On same page as Exhibit 2. Letter from 4 women employed at
Holeproof in 1944, on war production. Ruth Crow was the
Secretary-organiser of the Brunswick Children's Centre in
1944. Documents about the Brunswick Children's Centre are in
the Crow Collection at the Victoria University of
Technology, Footscray Campus.

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Reference for Ruth Miller (Crow) on Holeproof letterhead.
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TELEPHONES
FW 4101
FW 4102
FW 4103
FW 4104
FW 4105
FW 4106



23rd May, 1938.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Miss Ruth Miller was employed in our Cafeteria as Manageress during a period from 1st August, 1937 to 12th December, 1937.

Miss Miller proved herself a capable Manageress and handled her staff of six girls admirably.

Her relationships with us were quite happy, and we have no hesitation in recommending her for any similar employment.

She carries with her, our good wishes for the future.

WELFARE CAFETERIA CLUB,

L. N. Ley
Trustee.

L.N.Ley/d.

Exhibit 2..

Photo of Ruth Miller (Crow), 1937. This photo was taken to be used on bill-board poster.



Exhibit 3.

Letter from 4 women employed at Holeproof in 1944, on war production. Ruth Crow was the Secretary-organiser of the Brunswick Children's Centre in 1944. Documents about the Brunswick Children's Centre are in the Crow Collection at the Victoria University of Technology, Footscray Campus.

of Holeproof
Lydney Road
Brunswick

Dear Mr. Crow.

On behalf of my workmates and myself I would like to express our appreciation of the splendid work done by you and your helpers during the school holidays.

If it had not been for the break there would have been four out of six machines idle in our section, which, taken over the ten days would have meant a considerable loss in production.

Thanking you one and all
Yours sincerely,

H. Suggs
J. Johnson
B. Gardilini
L. Koskelainen

per 944