



John Mason

Interview Excerpt 5 October 2016

Oral History Project

Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

Oral History Project

Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

Interviewee: John Mason
Interviewer: Simone Taylor
Date: 5 October 2016
Transcription: Sue Piper and Simone Taylor



John Mason
State Politics in Dubbo

John talks about his life as a minister in the Methodist Church and the decision to stand for the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales following the death of Dubbo Mayor and Local Member for Dubbo Lesley Hunter Ford in 1959.

This recording created on 5 October 2106 is part of Macquarie Regional Library's oral history project "Reliving the past: stories from our communities". Each recording contributes to the developing story of life in the Dubbo area.

It is understood that the recording will become part of the Macquarie Regional Libraries collection, and may be used, at the libraries discretion, for editing reproduction (including on the internet) research, publication or broadcast.

(I): So you obviously loved your role as a minister of the Methodist Church here in Dubbo...

(S): Mmm I did, I did.

(I): ...how then did you get into politics?

(S): Well I think the people of the church were very upset that I did (laughs) I think that that was one of the worrying times. I think they were very distressed that I did make the move but there you are. Um well, Les had only just, not long I think two years before this had become the Member for Dubbo after – well this was of course a great railway town Dubbo, well so was most of the areas were so dependent on the railway line - so we were surrounded. All the seats were held by Labour in those days. Mr Renshaw was the member for Castlereagh and Mr Knot was the member for the Mudgee area and so it went on, and Les was the first really one to break through that and he won by only about 180/160 votes I think. But he won the seat and was doing a great job for Dubbo. However, they were in opposition and erm however, it was the annual meeting of the council and he was to be re-elected as Mayor. So he asked - he and Peg asked Meg and myself to have dinner with them and that we had dinner in the Amaroo.

In those days the Amaroo was 'the Hotel'. It was the posh hotel (laughs) and they had a very sort of, very special dining room for that sort of thing. We had a very nice dinner there. We went off to the council meeting. Les was re-elected and then the sad thing is that he said, "I've got to drive back to Sydney." That very night he drove after the election where he was re-elected as Mayor. He drove back to Sydney, got as far as Kurrajong Heights, and had a massive heart attack. I'm guessing he was still in his 50's and erm he just died on the roadside and so there we were. It was December, December 1964 and it was really you know, we were all so shattered. I had to conduct the service, the funeral service. It was a very big, the whole of the community was shattered.

(I): Where was the funeral service held?

(S): Well erm, there was a service held here by the Bishop of Bathurst actually held a community service here, I figured the same time as we were holding his service was to be held in Manly Methodist church. I don't quite know quite why. There was some reason why the family wanted that. I think they might have had a place in Manly, where they went where Les probably stayed when he was in Parliament and anyway, that's where the service was to be. So all of, I think a special plane was, I think Ansett provided a special plane to take us all. We all flew down. The Councillors, the Alderman, all the officials of Dubbo where to go. We all flew down in a special plane to Sydney to go to the funeral. It was a very big occasion, and of course - all of the people in Sydney, senior people in business and public service and so on, Parliament they were all there. Federal and State, it was a massive big occasion. So I had the privilege of conducting that.

Later on of course, when I got into Parliament, the Labour party used to attack me saying, "You only got in here, rode in on Les Fords funeral," that's what they used to say to me (laughs). Anyway, I don't think it was nearly as bad as it is today, I think the tone of Parliament has changed dramatically since those days. Anyway that is how I became the member, I should, should say more on that. One of my neighbours, my closest neighbour. I used to live in Church Street - where Wesley Hall is now, and my neighbour was a leading business man in Dubbo who had the nick name of Snuzzle, Snuzzle Bone, he was called.¹

(I): What was his first name sorry?

(S): Well, I'm trying to remember his first name (laughs). I just know him as Snuzzle, I know him so well as Snuzzle. He used to come and talk to me all the time and he was a character, he owned half of Macquarie Street and a, but he was a - - - he was isolated in many ways, an individual who kept to himself. He was very insular and erm but he was a very interesting man. But he came, he was the first to come and say, "look the town's desperate. There's no one to take Les' place you are the only person that any of us could think of that could take his, could possibly take his place and so you've got to stand." So I thought that was a great joke. But I don't know if he organised it, but then I'd have people ringing me up every three

¹ Snuzzle Bone's full name was Noel Bowen.

or four times a day I'd get phone calls from leading people in the community saying look, you've got to think about standing for Parliament 'cause there's nobody else. So it went on, until eventually I thought I would have to take it seriously. So I did, and that lead to - I don't know how long you want this story to go on.



Member for Dubbo John Mason shaking hands with New South Wales Premier Sir Robert Askin in 1977.

(I): No, no, no the full story. Please.

(S): So, you want the full story, so of course I had to. The church protocol was if you were considering any important or serious action in your life, you had to discuss it with the Chairman of the District as they were called then, and that was the Minister at Orange, Rupert Guy Walker, a wonderful man. So, I went down and saw him, he was a friend of mine. We'd been together, he was next door to me. He talked me into coming to, he was the one that organised me to come to Dubbo and before that, he'd been at Bowral, when I was at Goulburn. He organised me to go to Newcastle when he went to Maitland. So we were pretty close and I was expecting him to say to me, "John, you can't do this, you know, they love you too much at Dubbo, you're having too good a Ministry there everybody says that to me." And I was expecting all that sort of thing, you see. I was really shocked when he said to me, "Perhaps you ought to think seriously about this God maybe calling you to a different Ministry." I was shattered. I was expecting him to say, "No we can't do without you." Oh I was really shattered, I came home very subdued because I was really knocked about thinking they

don't want me. Anyway, we did as he asked me to do, we thought and prayed about it. I decided that okay, I would stand. So, that caused great problems.

Firstly my church were terribly upset, because they didn't want me to go. At least, they made it very clear they didn't want me to go. Anyway, erm, I went but the church law in those days was that... erm, you couldn't do that if one side said I'd stand, and was preselected, I got a letter from - a week later, after I was preselected I got a letter from the president of the church in Australia saying, I had seven days to retire or they would cease to recognise me as a Minister (sighs). Gosh, can you imagine how I felt then, and erm we didn't know whether it was going to be a by-election 'cause it was December and they were three year terms in those days. They were three year terms but you couldn't be guaranteed it would go three years or what. Didn't know if there was going to be a by-election, and here was I with five children, and of course I had to leave the house in seven days.

(I): The house you were living in was part of the Methodist Church?

(S): Yes, it was the parsonage, where the Minister lived. I had to get out of that within seven days. I had no income, so I had to live on my superannuation. They paid me out my superannuation that I paid and you can imagine the state I was in, I didn't know, we had nowhere to live. Anyway, Peg Ford was too distressed by the death, she couldn't stay in Dubbo. She said, "I can't stay here, I've got to go, come and stay in my house." So, that's what she did and 'cause she'd gone, she'd left and she said, "come and stay here." Which we did and later on when I won,² she graciously on very good terms, sold us the house. So we had a very happy time in that house.

² John Mason was elected Member for Dubbo in May 1965, and held office until 1981. He was also Minister for Lands and Forests 1976-1976, Deputy Leader of the Opposition 1976-1978, Leader of the Opposition 1978-1981. (John Mason, Parliament of NSW accessed 14-05-2018 at: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/members/Pages/member-details.aspx?pk=1881>)