

... TRY BAIRDS

by Rosanne Baird



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This booklet is dedicated
to
Neil H Baird
grandfather of
Stephen, James & Michael Baird
Joanna Hull
Jeremy, Camilla & Sophia Mather

The title . . . TRY BAIRDS is a saying which would be familiar to every person who shopped at BAIRDS. I have often been told of the days when, "If you can't find it anywhere else – try BAIRDS. You can be sure you'll find it there." It seems to have almost been a store motto, of which all the staff were proud.



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A Baird Family Group —1913

*Seated in car (left to right) Mr Adam, Hugh, Miss Ann, Mrs Adam,
Miss Jessie, Estelle, Bill, Mrs W.H., Miss Elizabeth.*

Standing (extreme left) Mr W.H. (William Hutchinson).

Seated on running board (left to right) Leila, Alison, Neil, Laurie.

Standing (extreme right) Mrs Sam.

Preface

In the winter term of 1987, I enrolled in a writing course. Autobiographical writing, the advertisement had said. However, it became clear during our first session together that most people were much more interested in recording the histories of various members of their families and not, as I had envisaged, writing about their own childhood days. In fact, I felt quite inadequate saying I just had an urge to write about my experiences of life!

As the course progressed, now geared more towards biographical writing, it slowly dawned on me that I was acquiring a lot of information which I had the perfect opportunity to use. It had always seemed sad to me that my three sons, Stephen, James and Michael, would never know about an era that had passed. The days of Bairds Family Store. After all, these boys will carry the Baird name on for who knows how many generations, and yet know nothing about a store which carried their name and which was a part of so many people's lives in Perth.

A few weeks after finishing the course, I was still thinking along the lines of, "Yes, one day I must do something", when Richard and I went to a party and met a lovely, vivacious lady called Judy King. Her first question was, "Are you related to the Baird family, the ones who used to own the Store?" Judy then proceeded to tell me of the fun she had in her days working at Bairds and, the more she spoke, the more I realised that I must have been meant to write about Bairds. Here was a former employee telling me, a perfect stranger, her memories at a party. It must have been pre-ordained!

So began my modest efforts to record the memories of Neil and three wonderful members of staff. Most of Neil and Max Smallacombe's stories are from tapes stored in the Battye Library. Neil was very patient in allowing me to tape his early memories of the family during several sessions at home. Judy King very kindly invited me to her home where I met Gwen Crowley, and where I was able to record their stories amid howls of laughter as the memories came flooding back to them.

I do feel a certain responsibility towards the Baird family in writing this, hopefully to their satisfaction. I am only a Baird by marriage, not birth, but the Baird family have embraced me as one of their own from the day I married Richard, and I hope this humble effort will be of some value to all members of the family, including our children and future generations to come.



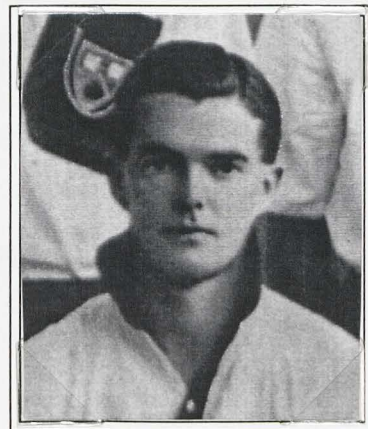
William H. Baird



Adam Baird



Neil H. Baird



Keith Hugh Baird

Introduction

The very first Bairds store was founded in Coolgardie, in 1896, by WILLIAM BAIRD. Soon after, stores were set up in Kalgoorlie and Boulder, all carrying general merchandise, specialising in hardware.

ADAM BAIRD joined the Company in 1899, along with another brother, ROBERT, and their three unmarried sisters, ELIZABETH, JESSIE and ANN. Although established as a family company, the stores were managed by William and Adam.

The Perth Store was founded in 1903 as a small shop in Hay Street, and eventually the family business became so large that there were Stores in both Perth and Fremantle, employing nine hundred people by the 1960's.

Both William, as Managing Director, and Adam as Chairman of Directors, were actively involved in the stores until their deaths. William died in May, 1947, and Adam then became Managing Director until his death in 1954.

William's son, NEIL, had been involved in the Store since he had left school in 1924, as had Adam's son, KEITH HUGH Baird - known as Mr Hugh to the staff. After the death of Adam, his son Hugh became Managing Director, and Neil was appointed Chairman of the Board.

In 1965 there were big changes as the Perth store was rebuilt. It was modernised, air-conditioned and additions were made. A completely new Store was opened on land purchased in Fremantle, where the present Target Store now stands. At this time the Family Company went public.

In 1965, just before the completion of the two new Stores, Hugh died suddenly. Neil then became Chairman of a new Board of Directors, a position he held until the Company was sold to the Myer Group in December, 1969. It was seventy three years since the first store had been founded in Coolgardie.



ELIZABETH
(William's wife)
taken before leaving
Ballarat



WILLIAM as a young man
before arriving in
Kalgoorlie.
Taken around 1890.

Neil's Story

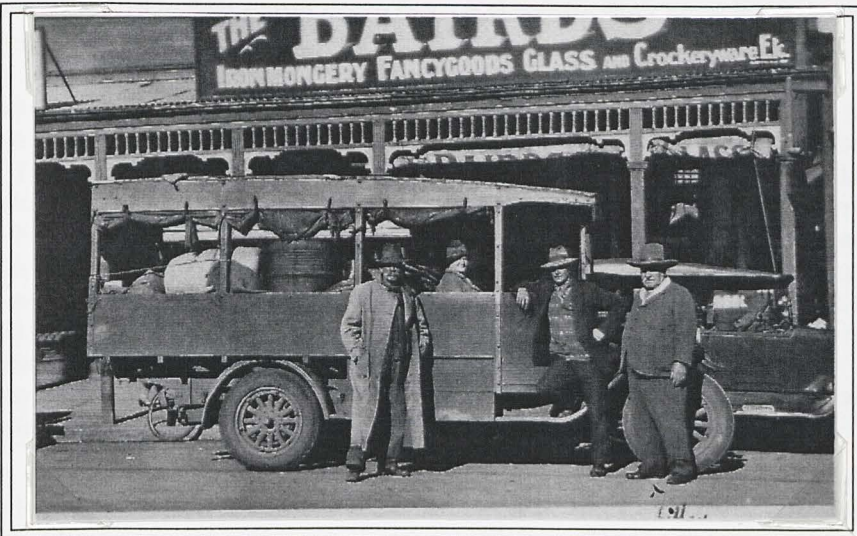
"My father, William was born and raised in Ballarat, Victoria. When he left school he did a training course at the Ballarat Hardware Store where he gained a lot of knowledge in all aspects of hardware. He married my mother whilst still in Ballarat. She came from gold mining people there called Langdon. Her name was Elizabeth. I never remember any discussion about where they met, or how they met. That was their way. They never discussed things like that. Anyway, my father decided to leave Ballarat and travel West, arriving in Coolgardie in 1896. The same year the train started running from Perth to Kalgoorlie.

His first Store was the Coolgardie Hardware Company, in a galvanised shed. He had his supplies sent by rail from Batemans and the Greater Union Stores in Fremantle. Times were hard in those days. There was no electricity or water supply. In fact, you had to buy your water. The following year, 1897, he opened another Store in Kalgoorlie and in 1898 one in Boulder. His brother, Robert, joined him in Coolgardie in 1896 and later the three sisters, Elizabeth, Jessie and Ann arrived. Adam, another brother went to Kalgoorlie as a Mining Consultant and he also decided to join with his brothers and sisters and a partnership was formed in 1899 to run the three Stores. Adam had an Engineering Degree and was very able with figures and theory, whilst my father, William, had more feel for the retail side. Another brother, John, joined the business in 1902. He managed the Boulder Store until he returned to Melbourne but he returned to Western Australia a few years later and settled on a farming property at Nungarin.

In 1903 the family opened a shop in Hay Street, Perth, while still retaining the three shops in the Goldfields. The Hay Street Store was situated where Coles is now and it only sold hardware at first. Adam also came to Perth to help father, as far as I know. Because they didn't talk much about themselves I never learnt all the things I should have, or know much about the early days. The Hay Street Store must have been a success because within a few years they were able to increase their property by leasing a block which ran from Hay to Murray Streets. This was an exciting time as Adam designed an Arcade which became known as Bairds Arcade. One side, the west, was held by the family and sold hardware, gifts and toys and the other side of the arcade was divided into separate shops and leased to carefully selected tenants. There were about twenty different shops there, rather like a shopping centre is today. It was a new idea of shopping for Perth. There was an optician, baby shop, menswear shop, a large variety of shops. It was a pretty good idea and gave the family a



The original Coolgardie Store.



*Outside either the
Boulder store or the Kalgoorlie store.*

good income too. My early memories of the Arcade were of going there on Sundays, when my father would be working, and riding my bicycle up and down! I was very young.

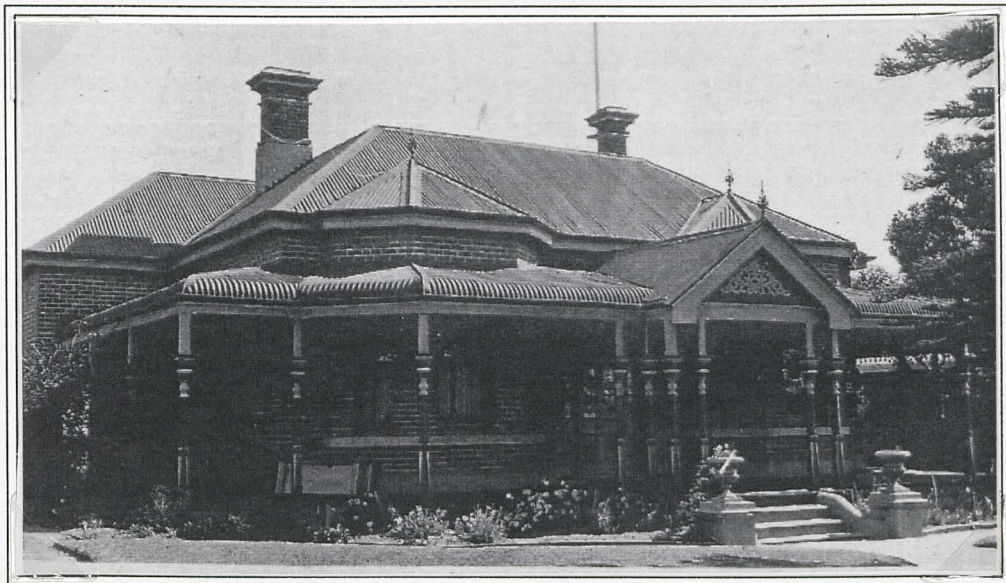
In 1917 the business became known as The Bairds Company Ltd. In 1919 the family bought an adjoining building which extended from Murray to Wellington Streets. This was a hardware premises owned by Mr Levi Green and can still be seen from Wellington Street. Years later two thirds of the Prince of Wales Theatre was purchased and demolished to join with the Levi Green building. The other third of the theatre was bought by a few other retailers and later we had to buy these properties back to build the main Store.

As well as owning the Perth Store we also owned a two storey building in Fremantle, just past the Roma on the South side. It was about 150 feet long. We rented it out and on Sunday nights father would send me down there to collect the rent. I was about sixteen at the time. After the Second World War we offered it to the Salvation Army as a gift, but they wouldn't accept it. About eighteen months later we sold it to a real estate agent for £3,000, just like that! It's incredible the Salvos didn't want it for whatever reason".

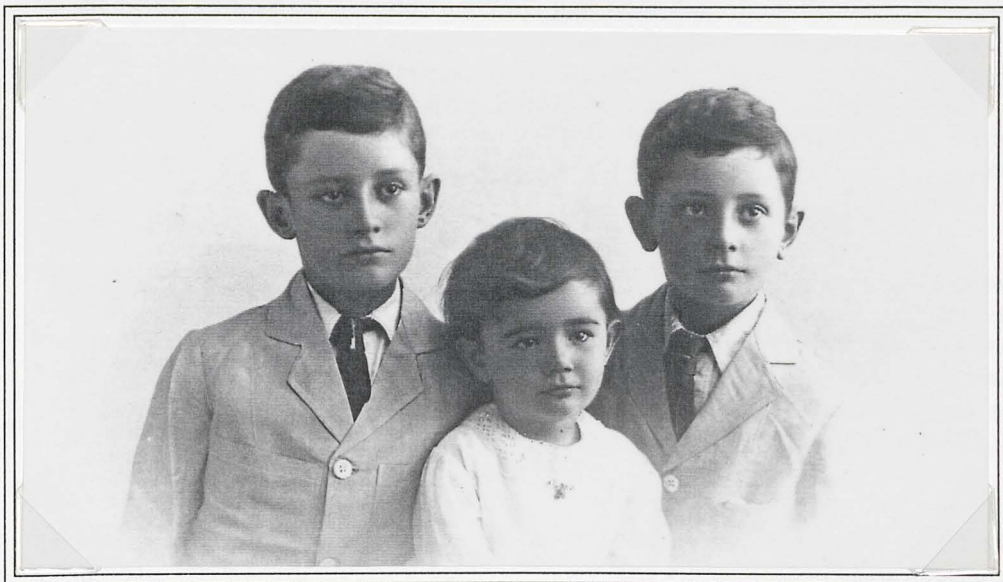
My Early Days

"When the family first came down from Kalgoorlie they lived in Highgate, but that was before I was born. Then they moved to 8 Richardson Street, West Perth, which is the first home I remember. I was born in 1908 and I had a brother, William, who was two years older than me. My sister Peggy was a bit of an afterthought as she was born about seven years after me. My brother and I went to Hale School, which was situated in West Perth in those days. My brother William caught a disease during, or just after the First World War, called the 'Sleeping Sickness'. This led to him developing Parkinson's disease. 'Sleeping Sickness' was very prevalent during the Great War and spread all over the world. He was about eighteen when he caught it but even though he was restricted by his condition, he managed to work in the Store for most of his life. He died in 1962, leaving a wife and two children, Sandra and Angela. Peggy studied music when she left school and also devoted a large amount of time to looking after Mother.

I left school at the age of sixteen and began my working life in Bairds in the Electrical and Radio Department. I also attended classes at Perth Technical School for two years, learning about electricity. We produced our own radio sets in the Store. We had a workshop on the fourth floor and we made fairly simple sets ourselves until we started importing sets. I brought the first record changer out from London, which I had seen and ordered at the Olympia Exhibition. We were pioneers in the nightclub field as we supplied the first record changer to the Lido Nightclub in Cottesloe! When I was in the Electrical De-



28 Leake Street, Peppermint Grove



Bill, Peggy and Neil as children

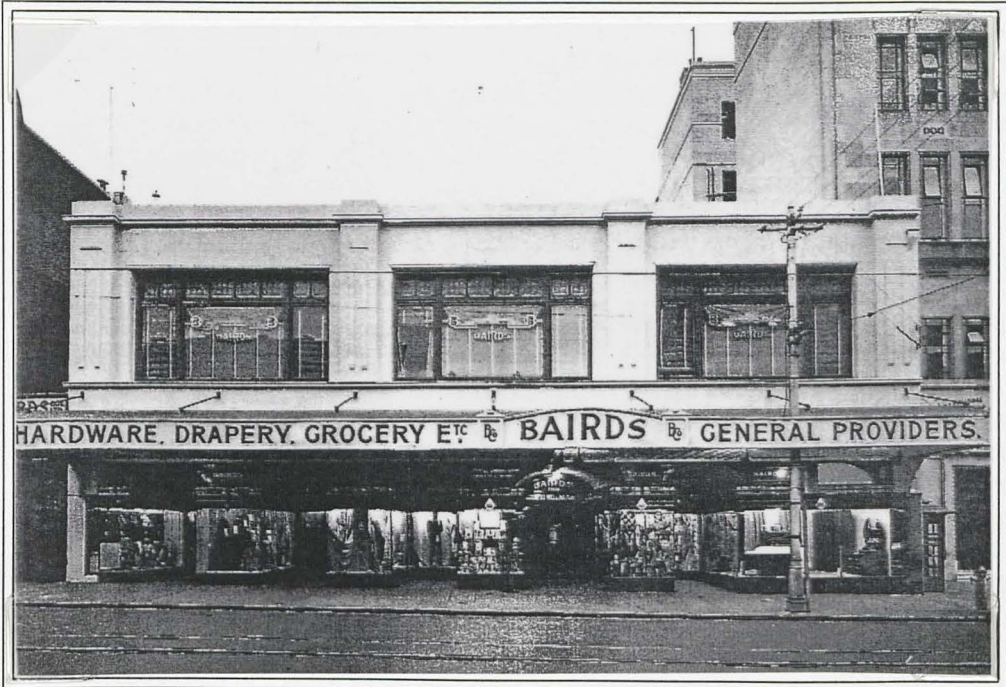
partment, Max Smallacombe was in charge. I still see him and his two sons. He is still active and has a remarkable memory for his age.

After the Electrical Department I progressed through all the Hardware Departments and was appointed to the Hardware Purchasing Office. Then up until the outbreak of the Second World War, I was in the Houseware section, dealing with all kitchen equipment, refrigerators, heaters, baths and basins.

In 1924 my parents went on a buying trip to the United Kingdom and I lived with my three maiden aunts in West Perth. Two of my aunts worked in the Store and the third one kept house. When my parents returned from their trip we moved to 28 Leake Street, Peppermint Grove. It was a large single storey house set on an acre of ground. It had a lovely garden with lots of fruit trees and we also had room for a cow and fowls. My brother and I had the job of milking the cow morning and night. We also had a tennis court and a shed so large you could park twelve cars in it. There were stables at the back of the house with two rooms for staff upstairs. The previous owner had owned horses and carts as that was his business. My Father and I travelled to work by train each day for some years, catching the 7.50 a.m. train from Cottesloe and returning from Perth on the 5.30 p.m. The shop hours in those days were from 8.20 a.m. to 6 p.m. Two weeks' holiday was allowed per year but staff were only paid for one of those weeks.

My parents lived in Leake Street until Mother died, tragically, when she was hit by an Army vehicle on Stirling Highway, just near Napoleon Street. This was during the Second World War and Peggy was living at the Claremont Teachers College, which was taken over by the Women's Army during the war. Peggy was a driver with the Army. Father was in hospital at the time with a bad asthma attack. He had always suffered from asthma and used to go to a hostel in Lesmurdie where he could recover in the clean, fresh air. Luckily, I was on leave from the Naval service in Darwin when she died, so was able to take charge. She was seventy eight when she died.

The family lived a quiet life, my Father was very strict. He would never allow alcohol in the house, although it wasn't for religious reasons as he seldom went to church, even though Mother did. He never allowed visitors to drink or smoke in the house, but not many visitors ever came really, except occasionally there would be business people from overseas. If anyone ever called, you could see that they would be dying for a drink, but they would never get one! Mother, on the other hand, loved people. Once or twice a year people would call from over East and she would love to see them, but father wouldn't socialise at all. He just worked non-stop. Mother was a very broad-minded person. She was a Langdon. Jack Langdon was my cousin, he was a well known footballer, a very good sportsman. Now his grandsons play League football. They all went to Scotch College.



*The Bairds Store
Murray Street, Perth
during the 1950's.*

I would go up to Kalgoorlie sometimes with Father to help in the Stores there. Father kept an eye on how they were progressing and it was good experience for me to be with him. Later, I would go up there on my own for ten or twelve days at a time to try and help them. I was always welcome and I got on well with everyone. They were nice, easy people. Typical gold town people. I remember once I left Kalgoorlie at 6.30 a.m. and arrived at Bairds in Perth at 12.55 p.m.. It was a fast run for those days! I had a Jaguar then. The only thing that slowed me down were the kangaroos. Kalgoorlie was a good place in those times, a big place. It had thirty hotels. I used to stay in the corner hotel, The Palace. I liked going up there very much. Father and I stayed there together at one stage. He was good to me and respected me for what I was. He never said much, but he thought a lot."

Car Racing Memories

"I bought my first car with my earnings, Father never paid for my cars. I spent many hours working on it, varnishing the wheels and spokes. It was a Peacock Chevrolet. When I was twenty one I bought a second hand Austin 7 for £96. Although I had no thought of motor sport, I was persuaded to enter a Hill Climb at Lesmurdie and to my surprise, I won the Open Handicap event. This started my interest in motor racing. In 1932, whilst on a visit to England, I bought a second-hand MG Midget. I arranged to have the body stripped and the engine and chassis made ready for shipment to Australia. I planned to have a new body built in Perth, similar to the latest model MG, which was of much smarter appearance. When the body was completed, after many months of work, I had a smart little car which I drove in motor events.

The first Round the Houses motor race in Australia was in Albany in 1936. I drove a Hudson Terraplane and I entered under the assumed name of "Jack Hudson". I wasn't sure that my parents would approve of my competing in a major car race and I didn't want to worry them unduly, hence the assumed name! I came third in this event, and for the same race in 1937 I spent a year having another Hudson built to my specifications which I called the Terraplane Special. I managed a third in this race as well. In the same year, 1937, I set an Australian record in the Terraplane Special at Lake Perkolilli, which is a salt lake near Kalgoorlie, driving 88.07 miles in one hour."

The Depression Years

"Many farmers have said to me, referring to the depression years, 'If it wasn't for Bairds we would have had to walk off our farm.' They were very difficult years. The wheat prices fell to less than two shillings a bag. Bairds had a very large number of farmers as customers, using a mail-order catalogue system which



*This photograph was taken in the 1930's.
William is standing on the left side of Wilton Sides.
Most of the group are Wilton Sides' family, but two of William's sisters
are seated on the far left and
Peggy is on the far right.*

was sent to the farmers. It was nicknamed *Bairds' Bible*. They used a thirty day account, but unfortunately many were unable to make payment at the end of the month. As a result the farmers' wives, as an extra income, started selling eggs to us, as payment for goods. This was the start of a bartering system, exchanging eggs, wheat and butter for goods. We ended up with so many eggs we didn't know what to do with them. We had a large food department in the basement where we were selling them but there were so many we had to start exporting them to England. They went by ships in cold storage as it took weeks and weeks for them to arrive. There were only three egg exporters allowed by the Government and Bairds was one of them. All this meant that we had to set up an Egg Department. One whole floor was taken up by the egg business during the Depression. It's interesting to look back on. There were about a dozen women sorting the eggs and Father designed a lighting system to check them. Rollers were built which went around the whole room, and the eggs were checked, graded and boxed. It was like a car factory with a production line. Even though the government controlled it they hardly ever came near the place. It ended up a huge business but I never heard if we made a profit out of it, probably only a small one.

The bartering went on right up to, and even through the war years. It kept Bairds going when a lot of other businesses folded during the depression. We also took wheat in exchange for goods, and butter. Again, we got so much wheat that we had to buy a flour mill. We also used the flour in the Food Department and the farmers' butter. The farmers divided it into one pound lots and sent it down to the Store by train. The train guards kept it cool by wetting sacks and laying them over the butter in hot weather.

The family had also bought into a wool factory in the 1920's called W.A. Knitters. It was very modern and produced mainly men's and boys' clothing. The manager was a good friend of the family, Wilton Sides. He eventually bought the factory in 1964. It was very hard to sell the goods anywhere but in Western Australia. I remember we took them to Melbourne and Sydney but we couldn't compete with people like Bonds and other big companies. That was why we eventually sold it.

During the depression there were so many unemployed all around Australia, but we had a system at Bairds that if somebody wasn't pulling their weight we would give them a fortnight off, as a warning. A fortnight at home, without pay, gave them something to think about. It worked very well. This way, very few employees were actually sacked. We gave our staff sick pay right from the early days, that didn't happen at too many places then!"

Flying Days

"In 1936 I won a scholarship with the Royal Aero Club to learn to fly. I ob-



*Peggy and Mother
in the driveway,
28 Leake Street*

tained my license to fly in the same year and then flying became a favourite hobby of mine. The longest trip I did was in August 1939, in a Gypsy Moth. It took four days to fly to Melbourne. I went with a friend and I remember it was bitterly cold. We could only fly between three hundred and fifty to four hundred miles without refuelling and we went via Kalgoorlie, along the Trans Australia Railway line. In those days the maps were very inaccurate. If we hadn't allowed extra height over the mountains we would have flown right into them. We flew right off our map and landed in a little town near Ballarat and next day flew into Essendon Airport. Our only instruments had been a compass and a height indicator. We didn't even have a radio so had no contact with anyone until we arrived.

I served on the committee of the Royal Aero Club before and after the war and after some years was appointed President. I held that office for three years. I am now proud to be a Life Member of the Club."

War Years In The Navy

"I was an Army Cadet at Hale School, but after I left school I joined the Citizen Forces and decided to be a Naval Reserve. I was still a Naval Reserve when the Second World War broke out and was based in Fremantle where I was appointed First Lieutenant on a Minesweeper keeping the channel clear in Gage Roads, between Rottnest and Fremantle. I also spent fifteen months in Darwin where I served on small vessels and the Boom Defence. I was there when the 'Mununda' was bombed on February 19th, 1942. Over a hundred Japanese planes bombed Darwin and the R.A.A.F. base, killing hundreds of men, devastating the town as well as sinking eleven ships. I was on one day's leave and ran to an air raid shelter while fifty Japanese fighters and seventy bombers flew overhead. I put my head out of the air raid shelter and there was a plane fifty feet overhead. I disappeared down very quickly! The Japanese flew very, very low, masthead height. They did a very efficient job that day. When I was posted back to Leeuwin I was appointed Provost Marshall, being responsible for maintaining law and order over a large area, including Perth and Fremantle. This was a fairly difficult task as there were many large British warships visiting Fremantle for R and R.

I found time during the war to marry Mollie, on 11th December, 1940. Although the war had been in progress for just over a year, we hadn't yet experienced many shortages and we had a lovely wedding reception at the Esplanade Hotel in Perth, with a hundred guests. I was in Naval uniform and the bride was in the usual finery, and after a brief honeymoon in Bunbury, I returned to duty at Leeuwin."

... TRY BAIRDS

The Retail Traders Association



Manhattan
N.Y.

N.H. BAIRD
President 1961-1962

Neil has not told me much about the days after the War, but I have selected a few paragraphs from "BAIRDS LIMITED - A Short History of the Company" written by Mrs McCracken (a former employee of the firm).

"In 1946, the failing health of Mr W H Baird was causing grave concern to his family and the staff, but he continued to take an active interest in the affairs of the company from his home, until his death in May, 1947. His death was a great loss to the Company and he was sadly missed by everyone.

Mr Adam Baird became Managing Director of the Company, and remained Managing Director until his death in February 1954. The news of his death was received with sadness and deep regret, he was the youngest of the original Baird family who came to Western Australia, and with his death, the last.

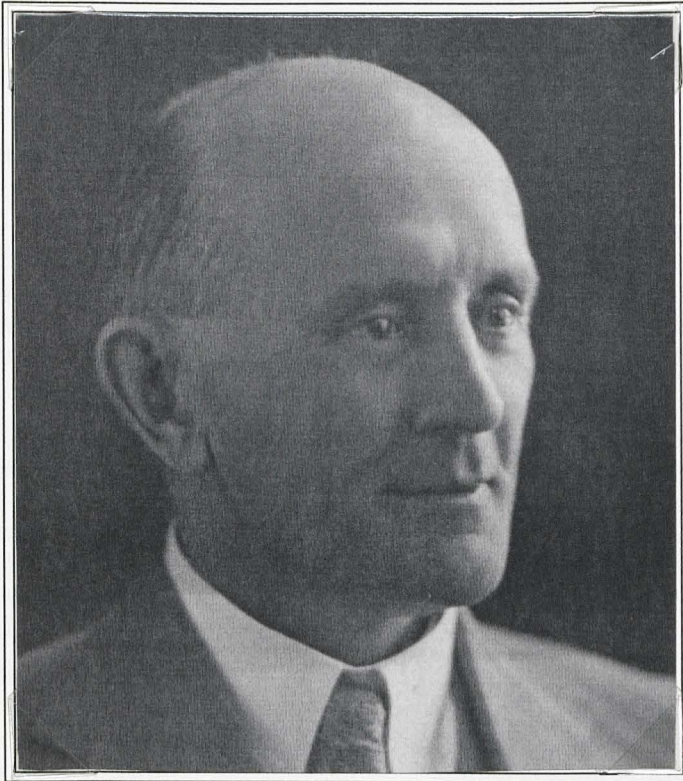
Times had changed, with fast cars and good roads the country people were no longer so isolated. Quick trips to Perth could be made for business and shopping, and Air Services provided the Pastoralists with quick transport, but Bairds was still the "Mecca" of the man on the land whether shopping in person or by Mail Order.

Mr N H Baird held several Executive positions in the Company, particularly in the fields of Advertising and Drapery where his knowledge was extensive. He travelled abroad several times representing the Company and buying. His outside interests were extensive especially in the motoring scene in which he has been interested for years, participating in rallies, racing and trials in his younger days. He is a Past President of the Royal Automobile Club of W.A.

Mr N H Baird was most active in the Public Relations side of the business, he served as President of The Retail Traders' Association, was the Retailers' Representative on The Retail Trade Advisory Committee, and a Councillor on the Perth Chamber of Commerce."



An Obituary to William Baird from
The Editor of The Sunday Times
in May 1947



William H. Baird

An Obituary to William from the Editor of the Sunday Times in May 1947

"William Baird Goes On"

The passing of William Baird, a founder of the Bairds Company, Perth, W.A., removes a big soul from the physical to the spiritual spheres of human progress.

His career was a complete answer to the cynicism that a man can't be in business and be honest at the same time. He was honest, conscientious and able. Service was the principle upon which he and his brothers built up their business, which grew, by that natural law, into an institution which won the trust of city and country people in every part of the State. He was not the type that would leave to others what he could do himself.

He led all the way, not sparing himself, and made a wonderful fight against encroaching age, inspired by the conviction that while there is a job to be done, he should do it. Giant though he was himself, he was generous in his understanding of human weaknesses, and many a worker and citizen owes the "recovery of his feet" to the charitable heart of "old William," who treated his own ideals as worthy of emulation by others if they would and if they could; but if they couldn't, his helping hand went out.

Thousands of Australians have slipped this mortal coil, with a wealth of posthumous publicity, who had not done a fraction of the work for their fellow-men and for Australia that the unassuming William Baird achieved in an industrious life in which he illustrated the spiritual possibilities of competitive commercialism directed by an understanding heart and good character. He surely found that so-called "death" was to him but the passing of one little room of his Father's home into another that was large and lightsome and divinely entertaining, there to renew his health and energy for the unlimited fields of organising and executive work Yonder, that W. T. Stead, communicating with his earth friends after his own transition, declared "transcended in interest anything that any business man could have imagined for himself whilst on earth."

Great will be the veteran's reunion with the bride of his youth, and with his host of friends, who will never grow old again. William Baird is not "dead," but is "all set" for the greater greatness he has the mind and soul to inherit and expand.

Pity there were not more William Bairds in the world and more perception of Truth."



Newspaper Extract - July 13, 1963

"Wreckers are now at work on Central Arcade—but this is how it looked when built in 1905 by Bairds, with its own departments on one side and tenant traders on the other. After expiry of the land lease in the early twenties, Bairds Arcade became Brennans and subsequently Central Arcade. Bairds transferred to new premises on Murray-st., and incorporated the big Wellington-st. ironmongery of Levi Green. Modern stores will be built both by Bairds on the Murray-st. location and by Coles over the site of the 58-year-old arcade."



Newspaper Extract, 1988

“When Ladies Always Wore a Hat to Town

Perth’s most popular milliner Belle Gladstone was having her summer sale, North’s lottery kiosk had just sold the winning 2/6d ticket in the £6,000 Charities, Pix, Look and Life magazines were on sale and Ardath Specials were all the rage with smokers.

It was a warm mid-summer day in 1939 when the photographer snapped this shot in Perth’s Central Arcade, which connected Hay Street with Murray Street on the approximate side of Coles. In fact, Coles was linked to the arcade by a side entrance that featured a set of stairs with a hand-rail that children took great delight in polishing with the seat of their pants.

The arcade, which was demolished to make way for Coles’ new store and the new City Arcade was previously known as Brennan’s Arcade and later as Bairds Arcade.”



Vest Display



Judy King's Story

"I started working in 1942, at Christmas time, in the Toy Department when I was 14 years old. I worked in three departments: toys, haberdashery and clothes. I left Bairds in 1946, just before I got married.

Flossie Cutts was the Floorwalker of the whole Store and I'll never forget her saying to me one day "Miss Robbins, please don't wiggle your bottom at me!" She wouldn't let us talk to anyone, especially boys, but she did let me talk to Howard (my husband to be). She never aged. She was 56 when we started work and she never seemed to get older. She was a bit of a devil to work for sometimes but underneath she was really kind and looked after us like a mother. In fact, Mum wrote to her and thanked her for the way she did look after us.

We certainly had some fun, us girls. We had a girl working with us called Peggy O'Neill and during the war all the glass counters were covered with plywood. One day we locked poor Peggy inside the counter. She was banging away to get out as we were trying to serve customers over her! One morning, someone left a sponge cake on the counter. It looked delicious. We left it there a while and then put it under the counter as no-one had come back for it. By mid afternoon we couldn't contain ourselves and we started to cut it up with a nail file. Suddenly a lady appeared for her cake. We pushed it all back together, under the counter, and gave it to her without a word being said! I always wondered what she thought when she arrived home and saw it.

Margaret Grey, another girl in our department, was a bit of a wag. She met a sailor one morning who wanted her to go to the pictures that afternoon so she blackened under her eyes, so she would look sick, and staggered off to see Flossie. Flossie said yes, she could go home, so off she went to the pictures! She eventually married a boy from Bairds, he worked downstairs somewhere. She was always running off to meet him, she was always missing. There were

quite a few girls who married boys from different departments, there were little romances going on all the time.

We did work hard though, as well as have fun. If we didn't have what the customer wanted we had to get it for them, no matter what. We never let anyone leave without getting whatever it was they wanted, or arranging to get it. There was the saying 'If you can't get something, try Bairds'. We particularly looked after the country customers. We did the catalogue orders sometimes and I particularly enjoyed that. Even then there was a man trying to make us join a union. He would follow us around everywhere but I never joined, although the majority of the staff did, I think.

Times are so different in stores around town now. You just can't get the same service as you did in those days.





Gwen Crowley's Story

"I lived at Jarrahdale, which was a long way out of town then, thirty five miles, about one and a half hours on the bus. Mother was a widow and because times were hard it was decided either my sister or I would have to get a job. I was 14 at the time and we tossed a coin to see who it would be. I won!

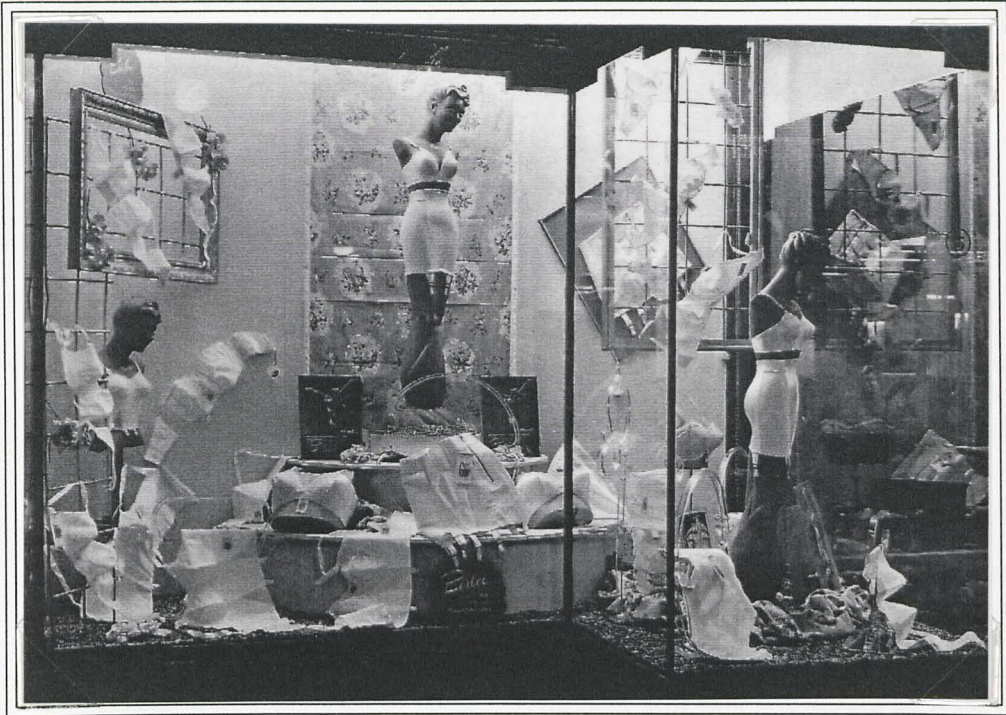
I can't remember my interview for the job, but it was with William Baird. I must have been alright because I got the job. I clearly remember the day I started. I had to be at the Murray Street entrance at 8.30 a.m., dressed in my little black dress, with gloves and black shoes to match. Mr. Baird walked past me at the entrance and said 'Good morning'. He actually remembered me!

I was put in the stocking department to start with. It was during the war and we could only sell the stockings for an hour at a time. Then we would have to cover them up with sheets. The customers had to have coupons to buy them as luxuries like that were rationed and people just rushed in for them. The doors would be closed for an hour whilst we sorted them all out and then there would be a huge rush when the wraps came off and the doors opened. The whole Store closed for lunch during the war, between twelve and one o'clock. We had time to sort things out then. I think we closed because we had such shortages of stock.

I lived in a Hostel in town after I started work, as it was too far to travel home every day. It was the Girls' Friendly Society, a lodge for girls. I was a bit lonely there until I met Judy. She and I were in different departments but she happened to be sick one day and the Floorwalker, Flossie Cutts, MISS Cutts to the staff, sent her home, and sent me with her to look after her on the bus. I took her home and met her Mum and next weekend Judy's Mum asked me to come home for the weekend. After that I became their 'adopted' daughter. I

spent a lot of my time there, and used to try real home every second or third week then.

I can remember what I got for my first job. It was 4/15/74. It started a lot to me that, but we certainly wanted it. The girls who work in shops are lucky these days, they can keep you waiting for hours on end. There was no way that we could do that.



Corset Window

spent a lot of my time there, and went to my real home every second or third weekend.

I can remember what I got for my first pay. It was £15/0/7d. It seemed a lot to me then, but we certainly earned it. The girls who work in shops are lucky these days, they can keep you waiting for half an hour, there was no way that we could do that.

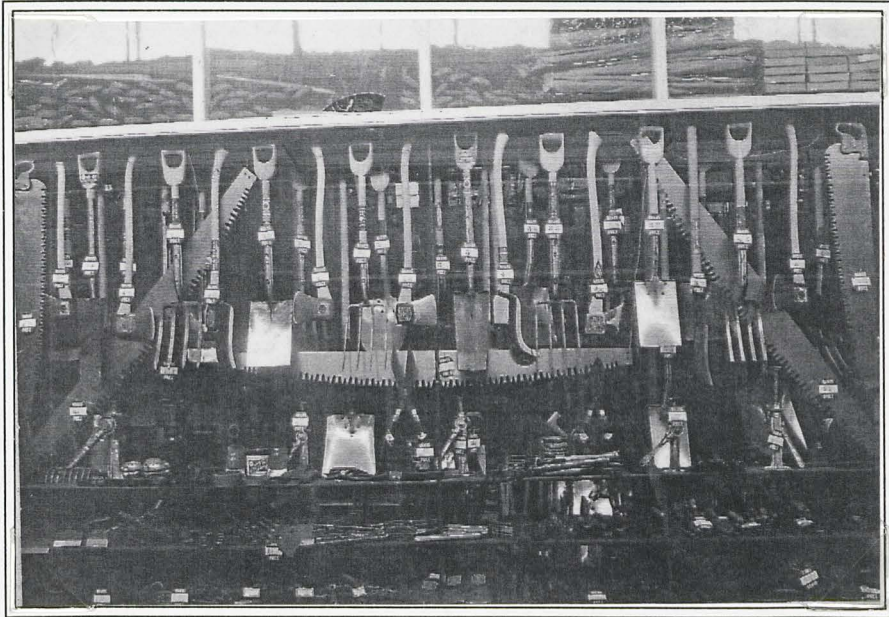
Flossie Cutts was very kind and motherly to all us girls, we were all very young. When I was sick once she left a jar of Malt Extract where I would find it. She made sure I had every bit of it too. It tasted awful! We used to collect our pennies and threepences for cakes for morning tea and eat them while Miss Cutts wasn't around. One day, I got caught. She was miles away, at the Murray St. end of the Store, so I put a big piece of cake in my mouth. Suddenly there she was, right in front of me. I could hear that cake going down all the way and I'm sure she could too! "

I moved to a lot of departments, the best one was with Judy and all the girls. The worst was the Shoe Department. There was an awful man in charge of another girl, Enid, and myself. He was really slimy and used to sidle up to us with his hands going everywhere. Enid slapped his face once. We couldn't stay there on our own with him, he was terrible. There was no-one we could complain to as Flossie had left by then, she had gone to live in Melbourne.

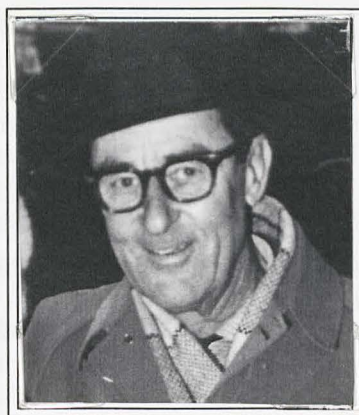
Old Mr. Baird was a dear old thing. He was little, a tiny little old man. He was always around the Store somewhere. I'll never forget, once I was up in his offices checking on stock and he said to me "Get on the phone to Mr. Hilly and ask him if he has a commode". Now, I was not quite 15 then, a kid from the bush and I had never used a telephone in my life! I also had no idea what a commode was. I found out much later it is a toilet seat! Luckily, Miss Griffith, his secretary, saw the look of terror on my face and said she would do it for me.

I worked for Bairds for ten years, from 1942 to 1952. They were good days."





*Tools Window in Bairds Arcade,
early 1900's*



Max Smallacombe's Story

"I worked at Bairds from 1924 until 1966. When I applied for a job with Bairds in 1924 I was interviewed by the Store Manager, Mr Alf Scott. He had come down from the Kalgoorlie Store and he helped run the business for William and Adam Baird. Both William and Alf Scott were hard taskmasters, but they were also very humane people. When William came on the floor everyone behaved!

I was to start work as a packer and, as I had previously been on a vineyard packing grapes to go to Singapore, I told Mr Scott I would just as easily be able to pack rabbit traps and jams to send to Kalgoorlie.

Staff were taken on straight out of school. They started by sweeping the floors and packing, and gradually were allowed on the floor to become salesmen. If they didn't show promise, or were caught stealing, they were instantly dismissed, but never in my time at Bairds did I know of any member of staff who was actually prosecuted. There was plenty of scope to take on responsibility as in those days there weren't yet any department managers.

My pay when I started was three pounds, nine shillings and sixpence. I only stayed in the packing room for about six months. They must have noticed me because I was then brought out onto the counters. In my time at Bairds I worked in twenty one departments, including hardware, crockery and kitchenware, before I eventually took over from Mr Scott. I therefore had a very good knowledge of all areas.

The assistants were trained to such an extent that they knew what was required for building farmers' water tanks, what machinery was needed for horse teams and other farming needs. It was remarkable the knowledge the assistants had.

Bairds Catalogue and the Farmers

I was also in charge off the Ordering System, with my secretary, Miss Dwyer, who had also joined Bairds in the Kalgoorlie Store. I remember in 1964 the Catalogue orders for twelve months came to £779,000! The mailing list for the catalogue sent to the country areas had 28,000 names on it. It only came out every three years, as ninety per cent of the prices stayed the same.

In the early days, my job was filling out the orders for the farmers. Once I was looking in the fish department for a tin of pilchards, when what the customer really wanted was pilchers, babies nappies! Another time we had an order for fourteen pounds of mixed nuts, for a birthday we later learnt, but we assembled an order for fourteen pounds of nuts and bolts and sent them off to the farmer. We got a sharp letter back from him!

Apart from a few mistakes, we made a lot of friends amongst the farmers and knew all about their lives and their troubles. I have had letters from farmers enclosing bank cheques to purchase almost anything. I once bought an eight horse team from a saleyard for one farmer. Another request was for a milking goat, which we eventually found in Osborne Park. One farmer even asked me to get a crank axle cart for root picking but I couldn't get that. We would then arrange for the goods to be sent to the farms by train.

Neil has still got some of the letters written by the farmers. A Mr B Foley once wrote a twenty eight page letter requesting one padlock! It's hard to believe now. Often the letters were very humorous, and sometimes a little eccentric. All these requests from the farmers meant we had to import materials such as iron, cement and wire netting for them. I remember in the 1950's we imported one thousand roles of wire netting for one order. Huge amounts were needed for fencing properties, including rabbit netting to keep the rabbits out of the farms.

During the depression years we wrote off many thousands of pounds in farmers debts. The firm was never paid back. That is why farmers never shopped anywhere else, if they had any moral decency! I also know that during the depression, we never had occasion to retrench. We didn't put off one employee but managed to keep all our staff.

Swan Valley Ventures

In 1935 the Company bought a Chevrolet Coupé and sent out a salesman to travel in a twenty five mile radius from Perth and collect orders. This never achieved much so Mr Scott asked me to accompany him to the Swan vineyard district to try there, since I knew a lot of the vineyard people from the days when I was a packer there. The very first time we went I got my first order from

an old friend for £109. So, from then on, we would go out there every Tuesday and Thursday and collect orders. In the end, we had so much business we would deliver free to the Swan Valley and had to open a separate department for the Swan accounts.

This was also a fruit growing area and led to us buying a packing shed and exchanging our goods for the growers' fruit. We would take the fruit and the growers would get all their requirements through the store. We ended up with too much fruit so it was decided to sell the shed. This is an example of what Bairds did. If they could help the producer in any way, they did. They also helped a paint company that was on the rocks by taking it over.

The Kindness of the Bairds

Bairds were also very good to their staff, paying them during times when they were ill, even for months on end. I know of one person being paid for nine months. We would take his pay to his home in Gosnells. Neil drove me, and we would assure him everything would be alright. He'd had a heart attack. Another instance of this kindness was when a senior assistant on the hardware counter had to have an eye operation. Hugh told him that if he was having trouble with his finances, Bairds would pay. He was off work for eleven weeks and for nine of those weeks he was on full pay.

My son was encouraged to join the firm, and he did so. The following story is only known to myself and Mr Hugh and is about my son, who had just got married. He wanted to build a house and approached Mr Hugh to ask him to be guarantor for an A.M.P. Society loan. However Mr Hugh told him not to apply for a loan at that stage but to buy all his building materials and charge them to Bairds account. The house took eighteen months to build and he owed £1,400 by then but I wasn't allowed to interfere! Mr Hugh had a lot of fun watching the house being built and when it was finished Hugh and his wife, Grace, went to have a look. They both decided that he needed a fridge and some other items of furniture and so he sent another £600 worth of goods. No interest was paid on those loans. My son then got a loan from the A.M.P. for £1,200 on the property, which he paid to Mr Hugh, and then paid off 30/- per week. I remember, he was given a raise of 30/- soon after he started those repayments!

This is the type of thing that went on. There were numerous very humane acts going on all the time. Another instance, an assistant was to marry a woman whom he had met in Austria. The firm paid for the furniture to come over from Austria. They were very marvellous people and the assistants stayed with

them from boyhood to retirement. Management staff had all started working on the counters, we never imported departmental heads and they all felt part of a big family.

My Retirement

I bought the house that I now live in from my son. It is the one that we built with the loan from Bairds.

In March 1966, my secretary showed me a Women's Weekly which had a world tour advertised, travelling on the 'Himalaya'. I decided to go on it and so told Mr Hugh I would like to retire at Christmas time, 1966. On Christmas Eve the staff gave me a very nice send off. There were two hundred people there. They gave me a present, which rather surprised me, as I was a bit of an ogre. I was strict, but fair, and I must say, I didn't know I had so many friends there until that night. The staff gave me a very expensive camera and a cheque too. I still have the card that went with it, which I cherish.

The firm deposited £750 with our English confirming house for me to entertain the manufacturers on my arrival in England, even though I had retired. I had entertained a lot of them in my house in Como. My wife and I spent a month in England, visiting their factories. We had a lovely time and really enjoyed our time in Europe.

Even now, I still keep in touch with Mollie and Neil."



Letter From Corrigin Customer in 1952

C/- G. P.O.

CORRIGIN.

9-5-52

Dear Sir,

In answer to your, lousee, letter of the 7th April
How could you be so dammed stupid, of course I want a,
bloody sink

Ive been without a sink for between 20 and 30 years, and
after having the "cheque" mind you, you write and ask me
if I want a Plastic sink or a Stainless Steel sink. I dont
care a damn wether its, stainless, or not, but you just
send a, bloody sink, a left hand sink, why, because, we
have no water scheme, and the flameing tank is on the left
handed side, you stupid old goat, and you couldnt send two
wardrobes without a lot of plaver, I want two 4ft ward-
robes Lady and Gents as my husband is always bellowing he
cant find his infernal Masonic Lodge, contrapshions, he
says, a single wardrobe, is slipshod, so send the silly
bugger one for himself, and I'll bet you anything he cant
find them then.

Now I've got that off my chest, I feel better you see my
Dad and Mumwere Welsh and B.B.C. Transcription says. The
Welsh dont work up a temper, like the English, they ex-
plode, well I've exploded so mush lately, that I am sure
that its nearly bread outter me I cant think how that Pro-
fesser, could say, Man has more brains than women. They
the brains weigh more all I can say some men have "No
Brains" in a house Try em and see.

Yours etc.



Goldfields'
Cash Prices from

The BAIRDS Coy.,

— PERTH, KALGOORLIE, COOLGARDIE, BOULDER —

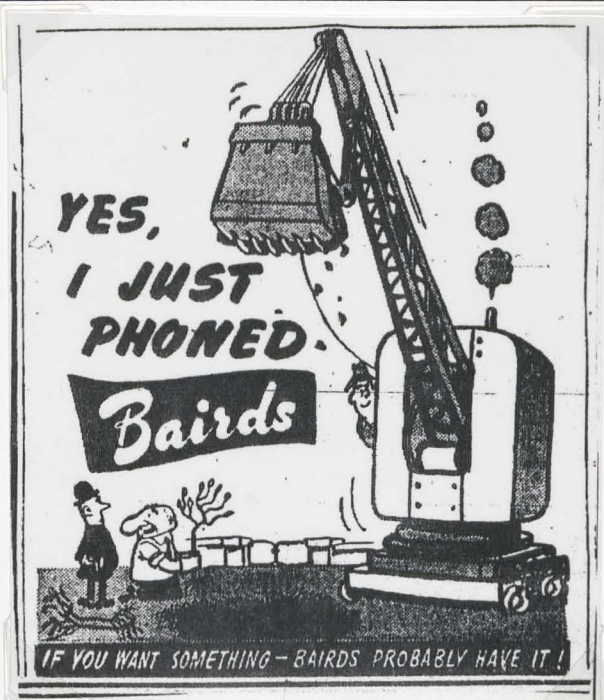
Quality of Goods and
Promptness of
Despatch Guaranteed.

Tools, Builders' Hardware.	General Hardware.	Furniture, Stores.	Crockery, Electroplate.	Raney Goods, Sports.
Galv. Iron, 4ft. 2s. 3d. Sputting, Rdg., etc. Screwed Downpipe, 2½in. 2d. per foot. Wire Netting, 3ft. 3d. Fencing Wire, Barbed, Flywire, Shaker Wire, Doors, Windows, 5s. Tie-rod, Fly Screens, Mantelpieces, 2s. Canvas, Hessian. Kilnblocks from 1s. 0d. But Hinges, 1d. Claw Hammers, from 9d. Planes, English and American. Chisels, best quality. Lifting Jacks. Garden Tools. Large Shovels, 1s. 6d. Hose and Fittings. Wheelbarrows. Sawyer's Chippers, 3s. Box, Centre Squares. Paint Brushes. Horse Clippers, Rugs. Barber's Knives, Saws. Co-les' Knives, Forks. Mowing Machines.	Good Knife and Fork, 1s. Xylonite Tables, 12s. Deserts, 10s. 6d. doz. Spoons, from 1s. 6d. Forks from 3s. doz. Iron Saucepan, Bolders. Enamelled Ware. Enam. Jugs, Basins. Enam. Tubs, Buckets. Enam. Pie-dishes, 1s. Enam. Saucepans, Kettles. Enam. Frypans, 1s. 3d. Enam. Cafetieres. Patty Pans, 6d. doz. Dippers, Billies, 6d. Flour Sifters, 1s. 6d. Canary Cages, 4s. Parrot Cages, 6s. 6d. Lamps from 1s. 3d. Draw Room, 6d. Lanterns, Reflector. Chain Wire Rope. Coal, Coke, Linn. Crucibles, Fluxes. Explosives. Best Sole Leather. Calzin Cooling Paint. Oils, Paints, Colors.	Tables from 10s. 6d. Chairs, from 5s. Chair Seats to 18in. Washstands from 15s. Folding, 5s. 6d. to 12s. 6d. Marble from 50s. Chest Drawers, 42s. Duchess Chest, 35s. Wardrobes, from 25 10s. Sideboards from 95s. Kitchen Sates, 10s. 6d. Dressers, 50s. Fenders from 5s. 6d. Pecorads, French, 45s. Bedsteads, Italian, 74. Lindolams, Door Matt. Best Knapok and Flock Bedding. Sweether, Bed, and Pillow complete, 10s. 6d. Go-Carts from 50s. Meters, Shaves— No. 1, 65s., No. 2, 87s. 6d. Camp, Bedroom, Hotel, Heating Stove. Washing Coppers, or With Frame, 55s. 6d.	China Tea Sets, 21 pieces, from 10s. 6d. Dinner Sets. Toilet Sets, 15s. Milk Jugs, 9d. Tea Pots, from 1s. Pies from 4d. Cups and Saucers, 1d. Best Chin. 9d. Great Variety of Porcel. Cans, Plates. Ornamentals. Bird mirrors. Comen. Flower Pots. Glass Tumblers. Rich Times at Wholesale Prices. Glass Sugars, Runners. Campanis, Salads, etc. Cheques, Biscuits. Teapots, Cruets, Jugs, Present in Silver. Electroplate. Tins and Coffee Sets. Teast Racks, Biscuits. Silver Salvers. Nickel Salvers.	Match Footballs, 12s. Punching Balls. Boxing Gloves. Quoits, Steel, Rope. Tennis Racquets, 10s. 6d. Golf Clubs, Balls. Brach-Loading Guns, 25s. Hammerless Guns. Winchester Rifles. Revolvers. Reloading Quills. Cartridges, Rods, etc. Lunch Basket, 9d. Bunches, Basket. Purses from 1s. Cash, School, Brief, Gladston, Trav. Dresser Case. Boxes Stationery, 6d. Writing Pads, 9d. Note Paper, etc. Acrorn, Broke. Ink, Pens, Pencils. Gloves, Gum, Glee. Fancy Soap, Scent. Mechanical Toys. Cheap Dolls, Games. Toilet Brushes, etc.

Complete Stock of Groceries, Produce, Farmer's Bacon at Cash Prices. Write for List to The Bairds Coy.



Advertisements from The Daily News newspaper,
June, 1954



Advertisements from The Daily News newspaper,
June, 1954



SOUTH PACIFIC HERALD

MIDNIGHT
EDITION

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF BAIRDS STAFF SOCIAL CLUB

Vol. 1, No. 1

4th September, 1961

6 cents Honolulu

EDITORIAL

Let us welcome you to the night of nights with "ALOHA" — we are glad you could make it.

Like every "MALIHINI" (first timer) you'll say this Ball has more than I dared to expect. The trade winds (Fremantle Doctor) might have ruffled your hair getting here, but you'll soon realize that when you drape the lei around your neck and get in the groove of the exotic and beautiful atmosphere in this Ballroom you'll become a real "KAMAAINA" (one of us).

Welcome to V.I.P.'s.

With us tonight we have visitors from country and interstate. A cordial welcome is extended to Mr. and Mrs. Millsted of Wangan Hills, Miss Weston of Benella, Victoria, and Mr. K. Langlands who made a special effort to come all the way from Geraldton. Also Mr. P. Bentley who has just stepped off the plane from Cocos Islands. A word of warning, "Gently Bentley".

Many a man thinks he is a great leader, even though his own dog won't follow him.

★ ★ ★

Many a girl is just like a serial story. She always stops when things are getting exciting.

★ ★ ★

There is nothing more exasperating than a wife who can cook but won't—unless it's a wife who can't cook but does.

★ ★ ★

It isn't the girl who is cold that gets the fur coat.

★ ★ ★

A fellow from Zurich wed a Hawaiian and their daughter was the only hula dancer with a Swiss movement. Watch her.

★ ★ ★

Someone said that a hula dancer is one who acts as though there were a snake in the grass.

Director Returns Home

The management and staff extend a very warm "Welcome Home" to Mr. and Mrs. Neil Baird.

They spent six days at Honolulu and broke into their world tour to be with us for our Annual Ball.

We hope that the trip has been one hundred per cent. successful from both angles — business and pleasure.

We look forward to many new and interesting ideas as a result, and we feel sure there'll be plenty.

No doubt we shall have the pleasure of enjoying a picture night with the usual highly interesting commentary.

WEATHER FORECAST

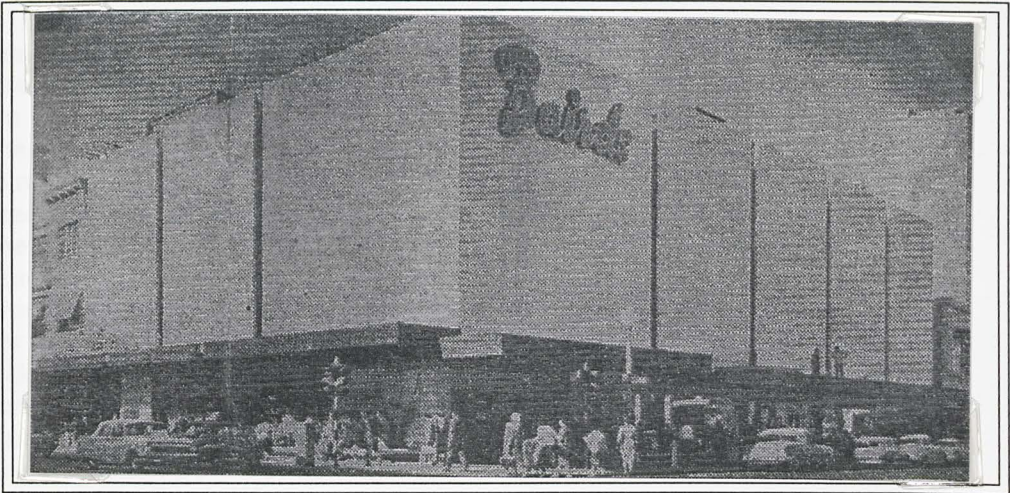
City Forecast:
Honolulu 98, Hawaii 94, Molokai 97.
Perth Tonight—Temps, rising, drought, expected to break.

IT'S A WATER TEMPERATURE TESTER SHE HAD SENT FROM

Bairds



IF YOU WANT SOMETHING—
BAIRDS PROBABLY HAVE IT!



Article from "The West Australian", Friday October 13th, 1969

“ Myers makes a bid for Bairds

Myer Emporium Ltd., Australia's biggest department shop group, gave notice yesterday of a cash takeover offer for Bairds Ltd.

The offer, which came as a surprise, is worth about \$4.3 million. Myers has offered to acquire all of the issued shares in Bairds on the following terms:

- \$3 for each fully-paid Bairds \$1 ordinary share.
- \$3 less the amount of unpaid capital on each partly-paid ordinary share.
- \$1.50 for each fully-paid \$1 preference share.

Bairds directors said yesterday that they were considering the offer. They would make their recommendation to shareholders as soon as possible.

Bairds has an issued capital of \$1,460,264, made up of 85,000 7 per cent cumulative preference shares of \$1 each; 1,364,764 ordinary shares of \$1 each, fully paid; and 60,000 \$1 ordinary shares paid to 17.5c a share.

Share sales

Sales of 1,100 fully-paid ordinary shares were made in Perth yesterday at

\$2.15. There have been no recent sales of preference shares.

Last month, Bairds announced a record after-tax profit of \$290,000. This was a rise of \$203,000 on the year before, despite a lift in tax provision to \$240,000 from \$175,000 in 1978.

The company recently signed a building contract for more than \$1 million for two more floors of 70,000 sq. feet at its Perth shop. The building will be completed within two months.

The company also operates a department shop at Fremantle but has not opened branches at new shopping centres, a practice followed by many city shops in recent years.

For most of this century, Bairds was run as a family company. It admitted the public in 1965 with an issue of ordinary shares and started a rebuilding programme which gave Perth one of its most modern shopping premises.

The 1969 balance sheet has not yet been issued but at the 1968 balance date current assets were worth \$3.5 million.

Though the Myers offer had been a well-kept secret from Perth retailers, Myers has been expected many times in the past 20 years to make a take-over offer for a W.A. retailer.

If Myers succeeds with its Bairds offer it will then be operating in all States.

Site refused

Some years ago Myers was offered a chance to acquire a site fronting Murray, Hay and William streets but turned it down. The company was then busy readjusting itself to post-war conditions.

Myers had one of the best results of any industrial company for 1968-69.

On September 18 it announced a 17.8 per cent jump in earnings to a new peak of \$15.1 million and an increase in the annual dividend to 22 per cent.

It has been established as the nation's leading retailer for many years and in its latest year of operation had group sales of \$335.4 million.

Myers operates big shopping centres around Melbourne as well as in the city.

It has also recently joined in a big shopping centre enterprise in Sydney.



Extract from "Bairds Ltd – A Short History of the Company"

" Seventy three years have passed since the first Bairds Store was opened in Coolgardie. Many people will, with a warmth of affection remember BAIRDS, remember their services to the people in the outback in the early days when those services were so valuable.

Members of the staff, some retired, some still working in the Store, will remember the happy days of their lives spent in the employment of the Company. They will remember the kindness and consideration, the help which was given in times of need or stress, the feeling of belonging which was theirs.

In December 1968 and again in 1969, a Christmas Party was organised by the Directors for all the retired staff, these were a great success, old times discussed, old friendships renewed, and again, that feeling of belonging to the "Old Firm". There were gifts for everyone and good wishes from Directors and friends.

Many West Australians feel that it is sad to see a local Company taken over, a Company that in two generations grew from a small hardware shop in a mining town, into a large Company employing a staff of 900. However, today is the day of National Retail Companies having many advantages over the smaller operator. The fact that the Myer Group selected Bairds as their West Australian outlet is a great compliment to the Founders and the many fine people who helped develop the Company. "

Extract from Bill Bailey's Column sometime in 1980:

"Hundreds of Perth women gathered in a city hotel recently for a night of nostalgia and now plan to do it every year. Their former male colleagues will be doing the same and hope to organise a similar annual reunion.

The only thing they have in common was that they have all worked for Bairds, the family department store that was taken over by Myers in 1969.

"We had 300 at our reunion, including members of the Baird family," said Mrs Olga Brown, a former buyer. "It was just wonderful; you won't find anywhere the love and affection we used to enjoy as members of the staff at Bairds.

"There was even a woman of 95, and now we've had our first reunion I don't know how we'll cope with the numbers who will turn up next time."

Stan Lee, the store's former display manager, told me: "We expect to get at least the same number when we hold our reunion at the end of August. I hope former male staff members will call me on 361 7988.

"We were such a happy bunch, and after the success of the women's party I'm sure we'll have a great night.

"The Bairds spirit was summed up for me one day in the hardware department when a woman went by with a squeaky pusher.

"An assistant nipped out from behind the counter, oiled the wheels and the woman went on her way. Try getting that sort of service anywhere today."



Customer's Letter — July 7th, 1980

"

26 Geographe Bay Road
Busselton
7th July, '80

Dear Mr Lee,

I read with great interest, the description in Bailey's column of Baird's employees. I would like to let you have the customers' view to add to your next reunion.

I was a farmer's wife, and we were spoilt a lot! We wrote to Bairds to order anything, and if they didn't have it, they went out and got it for us.

It was always our first port of call when shopping, and the hardware section was something that would cause shoppers to gasp in disbelief! Waiting for my turn to be served with some tool or other, hinge, or fancy kind of screw, I'd watch the consumer ahead, gesticulating as he strove to make clear that he wanted "that thing that goes like that, and fastens it" and blow me down, the man, wizard more like, behind the counter, knew what he meant, and moreover, he had it! I'm still using china and kitchenware with which I set up house when I married, bought at Bairds.

One day, my husband waited to buy a new hat, and listened to a rude and irate customer berating the man behind the counter for something he could not help. We wondered at the man's iron self-control, and when the customer finally flounced off in his flat-topped North West type hat, my husband made some remark calculated to lessen the tension and show our sympathy. He burst out with suppressed venom "The wider the brim, the bigger the overdraft" and we all laughed and changed the subject.

It was a Home from Home. We all felt we belonged, and I'm so glad it was just as happy behind the scenes.

I went twice to the shop after it changed hands, and never again. They didn't have the variety of things we wanted, only gadgets fastened to sheets of card and plastic, and no-one knew anything — in fact, it was hard to find someone to accept our money if we did buy something.

Old Perth died when Bairds did.

Good luck, and best wishes to your reunion.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Margaret Webb "



