

FOOD AND THE DEPRESSION

BITTER BREAD AND SOUR

Paul Van Reyk

*For dole bread is bitter bread
Bitter bread and sour
There's grief in the taste of it
There's weevils in the flour*

So wrote Australian poet and playwright Dorothy Hewitt in her poem *Where I Grew to Be A Man*, based on the experiences of her friend Vera Deacon who lived on Kooragang Island in the Hunter River at Newcastle. Newcastle was home to the steelworks of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company which had been established in 1815 to mine silver and lead at Broken Hill in western New South Wales. When the 1930-1933 Depression hit Australia, workers at the steel mills, like many others throughout all sectors of Australian industry, suffered severe hardship.

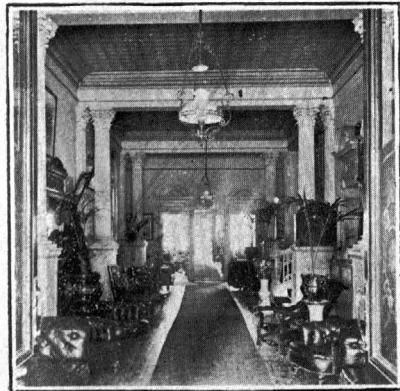
But dole bread is not the whole picture. This paper draws on interviews by Wendy Lowenstein in her 1978 book *Weevils in The Flour*, an oral record of the 1930s depression in Australia, and the *Australian Woman's Mirror* magazine during the Depression, to draw a fuller picture of what Australians ate during those years.

First a quick sketch of the Depression as it affected Australia. 'Early in 1929,' wrote historian Manning Clark, 'sharp falls in the prices of wool and wheat, the withdrawal of English capital, and the fall in export prices by 50 per cent, began a severe financial crisis.'¹ On October 29, 1929, the U.S.

¹ Manning Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, (Ringwood, 1986) p. 198



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