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**INTERVIEWEE:** Lucy Coppin

**INTERVIEWER:** Tom Jones

**Recorded "50 and Over", 3UZ (1958)**

Announcer: Milson's Broadcasting Service, the greater 3UZ in Melbourne, the time 7:30. Commonwealth Railways presents 50 and Over, and for the 876th performance, we cross to the 3UZ Auditorium for the 17th birthday show. [singing] And here to present the programme is your master of ceremonies, Tom Jones. [singing]

Tom Jones: Good evening. On the 17th of August 1941, this show first went on the air. When we at the greater 3UZ were arranging this 17th anniversary broadcast, we did not realise until a few days ago, the happy coincidence associated with this date. And this particular Sunday night. It is also the birthday of our chairman and directors, councillor Oliver J. Nielsen. Or as we know him more affectionately in these parts and I think all over Melbourne, simply as OJ. This night too, we'll introduce a kindly lady in her eighty-fifth year. The sole remaining member of the family of a man to whom Victoria owes a great debt of gratitude. We will meet an 84 year old gentleman celebrating his 21st. That's right. His 21st appearance on 50 and Over. And we will talk with one of Australia's best-known sons tonight celebrating the 50th anniversary of his first exhibition in 1908 of a truly great game. A night of anniversaries and a night of celebrations, not to mention a very beautiful cake on my left on stage here in the auditorium tonight. Come with us then back through the years, 10, 20, 30, 40. [singing]

Announcer: 41 years ago, on another 17th day, the 17th of October 1917, the building of the Trans-Australian Railway was completed. And since the first through passenger train ran between the eastern states and Western Australia on the 22nd of October 1917, Commonwealth Railways have provided a friendly and efficient service, which offers the most comfortable way of travelling across Australia. Just listen while I list some of the modern comforts that are yours when you travel with Commonwealth Railways. Extremes of heat and cold are completely eliminated by the

installation of the latest air conditioning. Temperature, humidity, dust, and even noise are under complete push button control. There's a lounge chair for every first class passenger. Direct and indirect lighting is skillfully arranged for convenience. Yes, there's a complete comfort when you travel with Commonwealth Railways. So for your next vacation, travel to Western Australia by train.

Tom Jones: Arrived in Australia as an actor musician in 1842. Twice elected to the Legislative council, 4 times elected to the Legislative Assembly, twice elected mayor of Richmond, built 6 of Australia's first big theatres, built the first skating rink. Brought thrushes and goldfish into Australia. Staged the first balloon ascent. Developed the bayside site of Sorrento, won, lost, and won again, several fortunes. The man, the honourable George S. Coppin. And for our first guest tonight, here is his daughter, Miss Lucy Coppin of Kew. Good evening, Miss Coppin and a very warm welcome to 50 and Over.

Lucy Coppin: Thank you very much indeed.

TJ: I know that you've not been on 50 and Over before.

LC: No, I haven't.

TJ: Have you been a listener?

LC: Yes, I've been a listener very often, but I've never been able to come out late, you see. good age.

TJ: This a late night for tonight, is it? This is a special.

LC: Yes. I'm very glad to come.

TJ: Well, I can see that, and I've known you've been glad to come too for about 2 or 3 weeks.

LC: Yes

TJ: and we're very glad to have you.

LC: Thank you.

TJ: And our listening audience and our studio audience are going to find out why in about 2 minutes, maybe even before that. Now your father came here in 1842, which means he was born overseas and I presume England.

LC: Yes, in. Mhm

TJ: Which particular part of England was it? You can't remember. No, don't worry, we won't worry about the things you can't remember because I know a lot of things that you can remember.

LC: Yes.

TJ: Now you yourself, I gather, were born right here in Melbourne.

LC: Oh yes, in Richmond,

TJ: which particular street, Miss Coppin?

LC: in Lenox Street. We, we were. Well, many years. I was born there

TJ: in Lenox Street, Richmond.

LC: Yes.

TJ: Can you recall the exact site, what is there now where the old home used to be?

LC: Yes, there's um that um where they make men's shirts

TJ: Shirt factory. We won't mention their name, although you can wear shirts on the railways on the Commonwealth Railway.

LC: Yes

TJ: Now was that a very big home?

LC: A very big home. It was 4 ... 4 rooms first, and then it was 22 when we were finished with it.

TJ: How many in the family, Miss Coppin?

LC: 9

TJ: 9. Boys, girls, or ...

LC: Ah 2 boys and 7 girls.

TJ: 7 girls. My word, what a lonely fellow your father would have been without all this other activity.

LC: Yes. Well, I couldn't ever see him play, act.

TJ: You couldn't?

LC: No, he'd finished.

TJ: He'd finished his life on the stage,

LC: Yes

TJ: by the time you entered the family. Now were you the youngest in the family?

LC: second. Second youngest.

TJ: but you're the sole surviving.

LC: Yes.

TJ: Now as far as those early days were concerned in Richmond, I also believe you had some famous neighbours.

LC: Yes, the Henty's.

TJ: The explorers

LC: yes

TJ: do you remember them or only by name?

LC: I remember the two ladies very well. They lived just next door to us.

TJ: And as far as your own life was concerned, did you go to school or have a governess or were you just not educated at all?

LC: Had a governess because we have a ... a house down at Sorrento. And we went there 6 months, and we couldn't keep moving from school to school, so we had a governess, the 3 of us.

TJ: What made your father first go to Sorrento because in those days I should think it would be quite a journey from Richmond to Sorrento.

LC: Yes, it was a journey, but he drove.

TJ: Did he have some special keenness for Sorrento?

LC: Oh, I think so, because he really is called the father of Sorrento now. It's uh, he really did do make Sorrento.

TJ: Could you tell us some of the things that your father established in Sorrento, which I know in many cases aren't there even today?

LC: No, well, he got the 3 steamers. And then he got a, a little train that went from the front to the back beach. And um he had um. Oh, he, he had piles put all over the back beach where you could walk. They've all gone to bits now.

TJ: Do you still have the old home down there?

LC: Yes, I have the old home, but we've had it 84 years, but I'm going to sell it, I'm sorry to say, because I can't manage 2.

TJ: Well, we've almost appointed various people on this programme as directors of companies in Melbourne. It looks as though we're in the house and land business tonight, isn't it?

LC: Well, we've got the most beautiful view of all round the peninsula. You can see the boats come in the uh in the heads, and then go right round to Dromana and then back again. See the whole bay.

TJ: Miss Lucy, did you bring in with you tonight the little gold cross that I asked you to bring in?

LC: Yes, I did. I didn't think I ought to.

TJ: Well, I thought you wouldn't, as a matter of fact, because you're a very kindly person, but like lots of other people in this community, I thought you had a certain determination too.

LC: Oh did you?

TJ: I'll tell you why Miss Coppin doesn't want to bring it in. It's a little bit embarrassing. Once upon a time, a long while ago, she dived in the water and saved somebody from drowning. But I didn't ask her to bring it in tonight to embarrass her, I asked her because the beginning of the story of Bland Holt is really associated in an indirect fashion with this little cross. I could read this very well the other day in the daylight, but I'm not sure ...

LC: it's very hard.

TJ: Would you like to read it for me?

LC: I don't think ...

TJ: you probably know it better than I do.

LC: What?

TJ: You have a look. You read it very slowly.

LC: I really don't think I can.

TJ: No, that's a bit unfair. I'll try and read it for you, but very small engraving on it "In grateful remembrance of the morning of the ..."

LC: "... 2nd of February"

TJ: "... 1831, when she jumped into the sea. And saved me from drowning off the end of Sorrento Pier. From Ruby Miller to Miss Lucy Coppin." That's very wonderful, Miss Coppin, and you've kept it all those years. Now the reason why that's important, that was the time when your father said, now what would you like to do? You've been a good girl.

LC: Yes.

TJ: And can you remember what you said you'd like to do?

LC: Go round New Zealand with Mr. and Mrs. Bland Holt. So I went round with them and uh I never left them again.

TJ: You were with them for how many years. How many years?

LC: Oh, 50

TJ: 50 years. How many people in our studio audience tonight would remember Bland Holt and his wife? See the hands? You're not alone. Now I haven't told you about this letter. There are a lot of letters in the mail in the last couple of weeks about your appearance on this programme tonight, Miss Lucy, but I want to read this one. "Dear Tom I've been on the programme twice in years gone

by, and I was very pleased to hear Miss Coppin was to be on on Sunday night. I remember her driving her father, Mr. George Coppin, into town in a pony chaise with a sturdy pony because her father was a big man." Is that right? "He usually dressed in grey and Miss Coppin in the frills of those days and was rather a good looker." It's nice, isn't it? "She's still a good looker, as a matter of fact. They stopped outside the Theatre Royal in Bourke Street, nearly opposite the Tivoli. Her father owned the Royal and Bland Holt was the leasee. And did he put on some shows equal to today's film producers? In Riding to Win." Was that a play, Riding to Win? Do you remember it?

LC: Yes:

TJ: In Riding to Win, he rented a livery stable right opposite the Royal in Little Bourke Street, which ran through to Lonsdale Street and got a permit from the city council to build a bridge across Little Bourke Street. You could see the horses coming up the straight, finishing on the stage. Well, that's what I thought too. That was quite true, was it?

LC: Yes quite, they jumped down and then went off through the uh one of the places into a little, little lane that went by the theatre.

TJ: The reason why I mentioned it was you wouldn't get a permit from the council today, would you? And uh this gentleman goes on to say Mr. Arthur Haynes, by the way, of 25 Park Street, Newtown, Geelong. "I can remember his souvenir night, a new farthing being given to every person in the theatre." New Farthing, do you remember that one?

LC: No, Mr. Holt, was it?

TJ: Yes, Mr. Bland Holt.

LC: Oh yes, I remember

TJ: Gave out new farthings at his special show. "Birthday greetings to all the 50 and Overs. PS." This is another reason why I've read it. "I have ridden in your sponsor's train, and it is it in transport." Isn't that nice?

LC: Isn't it?

TJ: Do you remember Mr. Haynes at all of Geelong?

LC: No, I haven't been Geelong.

TJ: He remembers you. Oh, you live, of course, in the Bland Holt home at Kew.

LC: Yes.

TJ: When did you go there, Miss Lucy?

LC: About 40 years ago.

TJ: 40 years ago. It's right on the corner of Davis Street.

LC: Yes.

TJ: And I've been there, been privileged to go twice in recent weeks. And a wonderful place it is. You step in, you could be, well, I imagine, 90, 100 years ago. And there there are some wonderful treasures of the past. Most of them associated with Mr. Coppin and Mr. Bland Holt. There's a memory room too, isn't there?

LC: Yes, yes.

TJ: And I asked for certain things to be brought along tonight.

LC: We did.

TJ: Oh, I know you did. I wasn't accusing you. One of them I chose because it was very light. And also because it is 201 years old. It's a theatre bill from the Theatre Royal Covent Garden Wednesday evening, the 3rd of May 1757. For anybody about my age, I think you could still read the print about 6 or 8 rows back from the stage. "Peg Woffington's benefit under the special patronage of the Prince Frederick of Wales. Master Will Shakespeare's play As You Like It. Rosalind will be played by Peg Woffington. French dancers for this night only. Between the 2nd and 3rd pieces, God Save the King will be sung by the whole of the company. To conclude the 43rd time an original farce in two acts by Mr. Buxton called Irish Lion, this will be the last week but one of Mr. Power's performance in London". And there it is, a theatre bill from the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, 201 years old. Who did that belong to, Miss Lucy?

LC: My father

TJ: Belonged to your father, Mr. George Coppin. Also, one other thing I asked to be brought along, but this wasn't quite as light in weight, was it?

LC: No.

TJ: It's a bird in a cage. Yeah A bird in a gilded cage.

LC: Yes.

TJ: Now what's the story behind it, Miss Coppin?

LC: Well, he bought it for a play, and there was a blind girl. Harry Ireland, some people would know and uh he, he... she went and looked at. Looked at it and it used to sing to her. We've had it for 50 years I think.

TJ: Isn't that lovely, the bird in the gilded cage. How long will it whistle for, Miss Coppin?

LC: Oh, I think that uh. About half an hour

TJ: about half an hour.

LC: It'll stop and then go on.

TJ: You've just talked yourself out of the rest of your interview. Well, whilst you have a little rest, because I know this is quite an ordeal for you, our audience is going to sing for you while the bird chortles that same song. You know the one I mean? A Bird in a Gilded Cage. [singing] Well, they

were very good, weren't they, Miss Lucy. Can we shut the bird off without being cruel? That's wonderful, just a little lever. Tell me, has the birdie had any mechanical attention over those 50 years? I feel like a gorilla behind those bars. It has had attention?

LC: What?

TJ: It has had attention?

LC: No

TJ: Not at all. That is the original mechanism of the cage.

LC: Cleaned it up

TJ: Cleaned it up, especially for tonight. Well, that was one of my favourites, and then in the room too there are treasures belonging to Burke and Wills.

LC: Yes.

TJ: Would you tell our listening audience what those treasures are?

LC: They're... What they had when they had to eat it from trees, and then we've got the nettings that they caught fish with, and they were found just where the wagon wheels were found dead. We've had them for a long time and the museum haven't got any. So I'm going to leave it to them.

TJ: I might add that nice thoughts like that one have been going on now for some weeks because when I was in your home about 10 days ago, you were very excited because I think it was the public library had just taken the grandfather clock.

LC: Yes.

TJ: Had you had that for long?

LC: Yes, as long as I lived, 85.

TJ: Now Mr. Bland Holt, I believe was known, you'll notice I say believe because I never ever knew of him. I believe he was known as the king of melodrama. Now that to us these days sounds a little overdramatic, but was he a type of Laurence Olivier of the day?

LC: They did call him that, yes. Oh yes, he was wonderful. He wouldn't have anything that wasn't real. He'd have real horses and real... In one scene, there was uh they were having lunch on the moors. And he had ponies and pheasants and all sorts of things. We had one lady playing him and she was, she'd only acted in comedy, and she was so worried, she didn't know where she was because the ponies were everywhere and the dogs were. It was funny to see her come out.

TJ: And as far as you were concerned, what did you spend most of your time doing in those days?

LC: Oh, I do all sorts of things.

TJ: Having such a busy father, I should think you probably were given a lot of jobs by him.

LC: Yes

TJ: I must add here that one of the reasons why we have Miss Coppin with us tonight is that little argument we started about six weeks ago about what stood on the site of the comedy theatre. And eventually when we worked it out, it was the hippodrome and before that the Iron Pot. Everything led back to Miss Coppin, and I found out since that there's, shall I say, a landmark of her father to this day inside the comedy theatre.

LC: Yes, yes, I unveiled that.

TJ: Will you tell everybody what it's all about. You came here to talk, they hear me all the week.

LC: Well, it was the historical society that put that there, got me to unveil it and um... he went to England and he couldn't have a, a theatre here at once. So he had it all made up in iron. And brought it out and in 6 weeks he put up the iron pot. It wasn't called the iron pot you know but it's uh the Olympic Theatre. And then afterwards when he'd finished with it as a theatre, he changed it into a, uh not a vapour bath, you know...

TJ: Turkish baths

LC: Turkish baths, yes.

TJ: One of the first in Melbourne, I believe.

LC: Yes, but then such a lot spread out that he didn't do very well with it.

TJ: Put him out of business with his own idea.

LC: Yes

TJ: How did your father come to make so much money so often and lose it so often?

LC: Oh, well, you know, he made a lot of fortunes and lost a lot. In Adelaide, he made a big fortune, but he put it into oil shares, I think, and then the gold started here up in, not Geelong, up in Ballarat, and he walked up there

TJ: Walked to Ballarat...

LC: Walked, but he got all sore hands and that was no good to him, so he came back with sixpence and he, he went to Geelong and made another fortune. So then he went home and went to Adelaide and put the money for his creditors all under their plates. So they sent to, they sent to England and got him the most beautiful window. Huge window of Shakespeare, and it was sent out, there were 2 in Shakespeare's birthplace, and this one was sent to my father. And he put it in through the Theatre Royal, and the Theatre Royal was burnt down and that was the only wall that was left standing. So we have the window in our home now.

TJ: And it's still there to this day on the corner of Davis and Cotham Road Kew.

LC: Yes

TJ: A beautiful window over the stairs, one of the most magnificent glass stained windows I've seen of William Shakespeare.

LC: Yes, it's beautiful, isn't it?

TJ: And in the beginning it was sent out as a token of esteem for a man who paid his debts.

LC: Yes

TJ: A wonderful thing. Now as far as those days were concerned, Miss Coppin, in the streets of Melbourne, do you remember very much about the buildings and the means of transport and all the other little things that go to make up a city?

LC: Yes, I remember the um cabs, and then the uh trams, you know, the, with the, much nicer than now.

TJ: Before the cable trams?

LC: Yes

TJ: Before? What were they like then?

LC: Oh, horse trams somewhere ...

TJ: Comfortable?

LC: ... and some of them, yes, yes, they were comfortable.

TJ: You wouldn't prefer them to today's trams? We had a lady on this programme last weekend who told us all about Ned Kelly, and just before we came on the air tonight, you told me that your father bought Ned Kelly's horses.

LC: Yes, that's right. He bought Ned Kelly's mare and she called Mirth and Brains[?]. A horse, he was a chestnut, and we had that as a pair for oh for years in the wagon.

TJ: Do you know Mr. Vergona? Mr. Vergona, he was that handsome gentleman I introduced you to a while ago. He's looking at us.

LC: Is he?

TJ: Cos you're tapping the microphone that's going ping. Oh no, not time, oh no, no, you're tapping the microphone, it's going ping ping like this.

LC: Oh sorry

TJ: Oh no, don't, don't apologise, it'll only encourage him. Now, as far as your life was concerned out there with Mr. Bland Holt, I think our listeners should know that he lived to a very great age.

LC: 90 years

TJ: And he died only 12 years ago.

LC: Yes

TJ: 90 years of age. Mrs. Holt alive?

LC: No, she died. She died 4 years after.

TJ: Now, as far as you yourself are concerned, in recent years, have you, uh, shall I say, got about a lot? Have you walked or driven cars or rode horses

LC: Oh driven cars

TJ: Driven cars?

LC: Yes, till 2 years ago they made me stop. Yes

TJ: They made you stop. I don't know what the law is on those things as a matter of fact. Can you drive a car when you're 82 years of age?

LC: Yes

TJ: Oh, you could, I know, but if they let you, really? They do. And you can't drive one now.

LC: Oh, beautiful car, a big 8 cylinder.

TJ: Miss Coppin, do you find too many changes today compared with those days that we've been talking about for the last 20 minutes or so?

LC: Well, I, I really think the traffic is no joy to to drive in now. They tear past you, don't they? They do.

TJ: Talking of tearing past two, I do know that during your lifetime you've made two trips around the world. Well, these days there's not much in that. Lots of people do if they're lucky, but in your case they were made early in the 1900s, weren't they?

LC: Yes, 1908.

TJ: Tell us a little about them because I should think shipping in those days would be a little frightening.

LC: Well we went, uh, the first I went with Mrs. Holt alone, we went all through American over to England and and stayed Colombo, then Mr. Holt went with us and he didn't mind what we did in the daytime, so long as we booked for the theatre at night, except on a Sunday.

TJ: Every night you went to the theatre?

LC: Every night we went to the theatre in all over the world.

TJ: It must have been an impressive trip because I've seen a small glass table with every ticket from every show pasted underneath the glass.

LC: Yes, hm.

TJ: Kept them all from 1907. And what type of ships were they? Were they British ships?

LC: Oh yes, beautiful ships.

TJ: Do you remember their names or is that asking too much?

LC: A lot of German boats ...

TJ: German boats ...?

LC: They were travelling out here then and they were very big.

TJ: Bremen ...

LC: The Bremen, the [Gneisenau?] and a lot of, lot of them.

TJ: Have you any special ambitions, Miss Lucy, that you'd like to achieve in the next few years?

LC: In the next few years?

TJ: Yes, 5, 10 years.

LC: No, I think I've had enough.

TJ: Well, what do you get the most fun out of life with today?

LC: Oh, I have plenty of fun, plenty of fun.

TJ: I should think you would. I wasn't doubting it for a moment.

LC: Have a lot of young people come.

TJ: And it's very nice to have visitors because you've got so much to show them. Well ...

LC: I was reading the um book on football today for the Melbourne football and uh, they were telling me that the Mister Hatching...

TJ: Mr. Hutchins? Mr. Hutchinson.

LC: Mr. Hutchinson uh founded it, didn't he?

TJ: Football?

LC: Yeah.

TC: You, you sound as though you're reading the history of Essendon rather than Melbourne.

LC: No, no Melbourne

TJ: Melbourne?

LC: Yes

TJ: And you've written it down, have you?

LC: Yes, where they had um, their 1st, 1st games they had from where uh where the um oh cleaveton is, right up to Punt Road and the posts were quarter of a mile separate so

TJ: they must have been very good kicks in those days.

LC: I thought it was really funny.

TJ: From Punt Road down to Jollymont Station.

LC: Yes

TJ: that's a fair size kick which reminds me I can't let you go without referring to something else that's most unusual. These balloon ascents that were referred to in a letter from Mr. Brown on the programme last week. It was your father who sponsored the first balloons in Australia.

LC: Yes. Yes, down at um. What's the name of the?

TJ: Do I get a prize if I tell you? I don't remember it well, but I read Mr. Brown's letter. Cremorne Gardens.

LC: Yes, Cremorne Gardens.

TJ: Where were they, Miss Coppin?

LC: Down by the river

TJ: Down by the river

LC: in Burnley and uh very big

TJ: Of course this question's a little unfair. You yourself weren't actually alive when those balloon ascents were made

LC: No, but they were the theatre. And uh goldfish, and once the river flowed over and washed a lot of the goldfish into the Yarra, and all the, the whole of uh Victoria was, got goldfish through that. And he brought the English thrashes. And uh camels, and Burke and Wills bought 3 of his camels. And then they um they left them and went back to Adelaide, where they'd been, the camels.


TJ: Ms. Lucy, is it right to say that Coppin Street is your family name and Coppin Hall?

LC: Yes it is.

TJ: Any other names around Melbourne apart from those?

LC: He was the first, uh, Grand Master. And so the Coppin Hall was ...

TJ: That's why it's called Coppin Hall.



LC: Yes

TJ: Well, you know, we could spend a long while together, longer than we should really, because, uh, there's so much to talk about. You've turned over some of the most yellowing pages of Melbourne's early history tonight. It is indeed a shame that we can't talk to you for a longer period of time. But thank you for coming into 50 and Over. May you be spared for many a day to come with your great tradition of a proud family. Good night and God bless Miss Lucy Coppin.

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