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City of Ryde

COMMUNITY LIFE

Library Oral History – An Interview with Arthur Mashford

An Interview with Arthur Mashford

Interviewee: Arthur Mashford

Interviewer: Pauline Curby

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Q: Mr Mashford I was wondering if you would start by telling me perhaps about your earliest childhood memories. Perhaps we could start by talking about your childhood home, where it was and what you remember about it.

I was born at no. 11 Ross St Gladesville, which is on the corner of Tyrell St. I was born on 3 April 1913 and I lived in that house until I was married. My earliest recollections, as I was born before the war was, perhaps in the later years of the war, when my father and mother were actively engaged in comforts for the troops and that sort of thing. and going to various military establishments, and I can only remember that there was a lot of soldiers around. I don't remember going there or coming back. I suppose the earliest clear recollection was my first ride in a motor car with a Mr Ackland, the builder who lived opposite us, I was friendly with his boy, about the same age as myself, and he took us in to see the celebrations of the armistice. Drove into the city in an old De Dion Bouton car and paraded up and down George St with everybody else. You can just imagine that happening today. And so I think that was the first clear recollection.

I have got recollections of going to school and that sort of thing, but that was the most important thing of my life was the first motor car ride.

Q: You were only about five, so you would probably never remember exactly what route you took into the city.

No, I know we drove up and down what would be George St. Because that's where all the parades were and all this kind of thing. I couldn't even remember seeing anything on the way in I was so wrapped up and I was riding in a motor car - look at me sort of fashion - because it was one of these little old things, it was real high up, and you see them in the vintage car parades these days.

Q: With a roof on it?

No, it was open. It didn't have a hood. He was sitting up there and the brake was on the outside. It was all real old fashioned. It was probably a pre-war vintage.

Q: What was the name of the car, the model. You mentioned it a while ago. I didn't quite catch it.

De Dion Bouton or something like that.

Q: French?

French, it was a French car, yes.

Q: So he must have been quite wealthy?

Well, I suppose, being a builder, most builders those days had a horse and sulky, Mr. Ackland was in a fairly big way, and had a nice home opposite us, as I mentioned before, and, as I say that was my first clear memory. But early days of school of course.

Q: Sorry, but before you go onto the school, could I mention about the comfort funds you said you remember your parents being involved in?

Yes. Well what happened there, was that every soldier that left Gladesville, usually left in batches of perhaps half a dozen, because half a dozen friends would join up together and this sort of thing, and there was always what they called a send-off down at the old Gladesville theatre on the junction of Meriton St and Wharf Road, Gus Bowe's old theatre. And what happened, everybody would go and they'd be given a rousing sendoff and there was a dance and all this sort of thing. And they'd all receive 2 pairs of hand knitted socks, a balaclava and a comforts parcel with cigarettes and that sort of thing in it. Every soldier that left Gladesville had that and one particular time I remember my mother told me - you see, in those days women paired up. There was always my mother and Mrs Ellis, Mrs Mashford and Mrs Ellis would do so and so, Mrs Wicks and Mrs Spies would do so and so, and Mrs McDuff and Mrs Coggins would do so and so. McDuff was the plumber. And they worked together. And Mrs Ellis and mum of course were friends way back. Mrs Ellis took me out of the doctor's hands when I was born and washed me. Women helped each other in childbirth. We were all born at home and that sort of thing.

One particular instance that mum recalled when we were talking one time was the fact that someone was going away and it was suddenly and nothing had been organised for him. And so everybody was rushing around and mum and Ellie knitted a pair of socks each one night. They didn't go to bed till they had finished a pair of socks. So he got his 2 pair of socks and somebody else had knitted the balaclava and the sendoff went off and he went off on his own at that particular stage.

Q: What was the name of that theatre?

It wasn't a name, it was Gus Bowes' picture show. There was no name to it, and the electricity, he supplied his own electricity and down the back of the theatre in a big shed was an old gas engine. The boiler was heated by gas rather than shotting lumps of wood on, and this thing used to chug, chug, chug and you could hear that in the back - because they were silent movies in those days and the only noise, apart from the electricity generating machine was Mrs. Stoqueler, who was Gus Bowes' sister playing the piano. And the villain's creeping up and she's playing creeping music and then he jumps out on who ever and there's a great thunderous chords or even the trains bearing down on the heroine, that's tied down on the railway line, and she's playing. And that was what pictures were like in those days.

Q: Could you remember those?

Oh, yes, I remember the pictures quite well, the silents.

But that's the way the people in Gladesville were in those days. It was a very, very close-knit community. Nobody ever went hungry. If anybody lost their husband or anything like that, there was a benefit put on. And all the trades people, the bakers provided the bread, the butchers provided the meat, the grocers provided the butter and the ladies all cut the sandwiches and made cakes and then there would be a dance down at Gus Bowe's picture show and, of course, we only normally went on Saturday night (that's the pictures) and there would be a dance, perhaps a shilling in, or one and sixpence at the most and they might raise 10 or 15 pounds, might be a bit more if somebody donated something. Of course, in those days that was quite a bit of money, I suppose early in the piece, a bricklayer would probably make about 3 pounds a week and if they got, say 10 pounds, that was 3 weeks money, which carefully husbanded would sort of help them along. But that's the way the people in Gladesville were, very, very clanny too. You had to live in Gladesville 10 years before you were accepted as a local. You were accepted, but only as a local.

Q: The picture you are painting of your parents, organising comfort funds, wasn't an unusual thing?

Oh yes. I might of misled you there. My parents, they didn't organise it, they were only working - Dad was the assistant secretary of this, that and the other, you know. Everybody was like that. They all helped each other.

Q: Mr. Mashford, World War 1, of course we know since you would have been far too young to have any idea of this at the time, but I just wondered if you heard of it later - that of the very divisive years with the debates about conscription going on.

Yes.

Q: Did you ever hear your parents later hinting there was any controversy at that time?

Oh yes. And I have been interested in it and read a bit about it and there is a lot of malarkey put about it. Now, Billy Hughes is reviled by anybody with Labor tendencies. But he was the best Labor man of the lot of them. He practically organised, helped organise the Labor party in the first thing. And Billy Hughes was probably one of the most far sighted men that we have ever had in Australia. Now, the first political thing he was embroiled in was this issue of conscription. Now, he could see that if it was purely volunteer, and mind you, Australia raised the largest purely volunteer force in the whole of recorded history. Now he could see that all the men that were volunteering were probably the pick of our youth and our prime breeding stock, and he didn't see why we shouldn't have conscription so that everybody was drawn into it and we were not sacrificing all those young adventurous, at that stage they weren't brave, because they were only doing it for honour and glory, but still that showed a great spirit, whereas the other ones, who didn't want to go for personal reasons, well, they just weren't as prime a breeding stock as you would say, as the more adventurous ones.

Q: You make them sound like animals.

He didn't actually put it in those terms. But this is the way I could see it, or I have seen it in subsequent years. He was the only Prime Minister that ever went right up to the front line of our troops at war to see for himself the actual conditions they were working under, or living and dying under, and the story goes at one stage he went up - because the Australian troops were under British command and they were under British discipline - and here was this man who was strapped to a gun wheel. And that was called number 1 field punishment and that was the worst punishment you could get apart from being shot. They could be there for 1 day, 2 days, 3 days, 4 days, in the rain, whatever. But number 1 field punishment. And he wanted to know who the man was, and was he an Australian soldier. And he ordered him to be released, and the high officer that was accompanying him, probably a major general or lieutenant general or something like that. He said "Oh, well it would be bad for discipline, we couldn't do that, he's been put there as punishment". All he did, he'd broken, his nerve was shattered, shellshock in other words. But that wasn't tolerated. It wouldn't have done for the duke sir, you know. And he said, "If he's not released and if I ever hear of that happening to an Australian soldier I will take every Australian soldier back to Australia, straight away. And they released him.

Q: Where did you hear this story, or did you read it?

No, old Clem Weil told me and he wasn't far away when it happened. He was in the artillery too, old Clem Weil. And it got around pretty quickly. It's not generally known.

Q: So he was over there, Clem Weil?

Yes he was a sergeant in the artillery. Again, to show how far-sighted Billy Hughes was, when at the armistice and the dividing up of all the German territories (Germany had half of New Guinea at that stage) it was going to be put under the control of 3 nations and he wouldn't have a part of it. He said that New Guinea was Australia's first line of defence, and how true it turned out to be in 1939-45. "First line of defence, I will not agree to handing any of it over to anybody else" and he shut off his hearing aid. That was how he finished an argument. That's how far sighted he was. He even could see, now in that very very infant stage of aviation, he could see the future and that's why he offered a prize, I think it was 25,000 pounds, for the first multi-engined multi-crewed plane to fly from England to Australia. Not the single engined and all the adventurous one, but something that would mean something. And that's how Sir Ross and Keith Smith and their 2 crew came out here. Even when Qantas first started and was going broke because they couldn't get sufficient support, he could see that it was necessary and he awarded them a Royal Mail contract, so that whether they took one passenger they still got an income coming in. Any one of those things would be a prime achievements for a Prime Minister but that's some of the main ones.

So that was the story about the conscription business.

Q: So you felt that you felt you could get stories of controversy and conflict in Gladesville from your parents?

Well there was a lot of controversy about it. And because he wanted conscription and everybody reckoned that one volunteer was worth 10 conscripts and all this rubbish, he was reviled in many many areas about it.

Q: I know, I just wondered if your parents said this sort of feeling was intense in Gladesville.

Yes, it was, it was quite intense and dad was a great sticker for Billy Hughes and dad used to get into a lot of arguments about it. There was never any bad blood. You wouldn't have said it was divisive as far as I can remember from what mum and dad used to talk about.

Q: Were your people Labor people?

No, I think dad was like me he was a bit ambivalent about politics. Because women in those days didn't - I don't think I ever heard mum talking politics. She might talk religion but never talked politics. Dad, I wouldn't say he was Labor or Liberal. But I think he became more right wing as the years went on and became more Liberal.

Q: Perhaps Billy Hughes' expulsion from the Labor party -

That could have done it, yes because he used to, I think the first party I heard him talk about, really, was the UAP so, yes, I think possibly that could have been the thing, he was a bit resentful that Billy Hughes - see a lot of people had a down on him because he was the most unphotogenic person, but anybody that came from repairing push bikes to become a King's Counsellor, he was no fool. The fact that he was nearly 90 before he got out of Parliament. You know, he used to have a big Studebaker 8 cylinder, used to come down to watch the Head of the River race every year he used to park in the same spot and kids used to come round "hullo Mr Hughes, hullo Mr Hughes". He was so small, in this great big car, he used to be peering through the steering wheel, that was how he used to drive. And he held the speed record between Sydney and Canberra. He just used to put his foot down and go.

Q: Do you remember seeing him do you?

Oh yes, I remember seeing him. We used to go down to watch the Head of the River race. To see Mr Hughes was part of the whole thing, oh yes, my word. I remember him well, I can see his face right now. Even though he wanted conscription he was beloved by all the troops - I never heard a returned soldier, an ex-digger, say a word against Billy Hughes, and woe betide anybody that did. He always used to stand in the same spot outside the GPO for the parade. His chair and his little digger's hat, even after he was dead, I don't know whether it is still there, every year but it was up until reasonably recently. They all worshiped old Billy, too right.

Q: At that time there was another dramatic event in 1919, the flu epidemic.

Yes, I remember that well.

Q: You would only have been 6, so what are your memories of that?

Well, my memories are fairly clear with that because, for instance, dad made me and mum and himself masks. Dad was very very clever with his hands, he could make anything, he could fix anything. He was a post man, he didn't have anything to do with his hands. A lot of people just wore a piece of cloth, like you see them in operating theatres just tied round the back. That wasn't good enough for dad, he made a little wire frame, and mum sewed linen on it and it was tied round here with elastic to give it tension and mum used to put something on it to breathe through and I remember even as a child going up to the shopping centre with mum and I was fascinated by the funerals. I am not exaggerating, there were funerals going past all day long. And the thing that sticks in my memory, I was thrilled to watch these beautiful black horses, they had plumes on their heads, and these men sitting up with tall hats - I can still see the black bands round and knotted and flowing out the back of them and driving these horses up and the carriages coming behind you know. The hearse with the black horses and their plumes I used to think that was absolutely marvellous. But there were people, really, almost a procession, that's how many people were dying.

Q: The Field of Mars cemetery?

Yes.

Q: And you never saw a motor hearse at that stage.

Oh, no. All horses. For instance, as far as building was concerned, all the building materials were carried in drays, bricks. Now there were 2 types of drays, there was what they used to call a tip dray which was 2 wheeled pulled by a big strong horse, a Clydesdale or one of those big draught horses. That would have had sides, a front and a back, and the back would open down, and that would be about 4' wide, might be a bit more, and about the same length, it held 333 bricks. The used to mainly deliver the commons in those, the ones that happened to be chipped about and they would come up and he would undo a couple of clips in the front and the tray was sort of balanced at the back so that it automatically tipped up and everything came out, or it might be dirt, or sand, and to get it back he used to have a piece of rope that was tied onto the front of the tip tray, and he used to put it round the wheel, and the horse used to move forward, and the wheel used to turn round and that used to pull the tray down and then he would put the pin in and hold it in position.

For bigger quantities of bricks there was the big dray which was pulled by 2 horses and that held 1,000 bricks and they were all loaded and unloaded by hand.

Q: Is this because the builder lived opposite you that you have this knowledge?

No, used to see the drays with the timber on them, mainly bricks and timber for the drays, the dirt, the soil, was mainly shifted in the smaller tip trucks, they used to hold I suppose, perhaps, probably a ton of soil, maybe a bit more, depending on how high it was heaped up and how much the driver wanted to overload his horse. But usually they looked after their horses very well, because after all, they were their bread and butter.

As an aside, there was one old dray man, he even used to sleep with his horse. He had a bed of straw made, his wife used to sleep up in the house. I think, I won't mention his name, his descendants are probably still around, he was reputed to always go to bed with his boots on, and I think his wife probably kicked him out. He used to go up to the pub when he finished every night and get full. Down the side of the hotel there was post and rail fence and they would unhitch his horse and pull the shafts through the post and rail fence then hitch the horse up again. And he would come out and he would try and work out how his horse had got through the post and rail fence, and he used to say "you got and you can get out again". And this used to go on and on. But they didn't too often because otherwise he would have woken up that someone was having a joke with him.

Q: You are not going to say his name?

No. That was one of the little sidelights of that sort of thing.

Q: Now, going back to the flu epidemic with those strong memories you've got of it. Did you lose any relations or friends, do you remember?

During the war? No, the flu epidemic afterwards.

No, because as it went on dad packed mum and me up to her sister's place, they had a dairy farm out of Newcastle, out of Wallsend, going on towards between Wallsend and Minmi, out that way. And I spent probably 6 months up there going to school. And that was the first time that I ever had a sandwich, because my aunt used to pack a lunch for my 2 cousins and we would go off to school and take out lunch with us. Because at Gladesville I always came home for lunch because it was only just up Coulter Street, we were only 3 minutes from home.

Q: And that's because of the flu epidemic you were up there?

Yes. We used to go up there for holidays every year. Yes he packed mum and me up there to get us out of the place, but he couldn't because being a postman, dad was the first employee of the Postmaster General's Department in Gladesville. He was Gladesville's first official postman. He came to Gladesville in 1890.

Q: As a postman?

Yes. He came as a messenger. He was only 16 when he came and he came as a messenger and the postmistress's son, Will Howell, was doing basic postman duties, just the taking mail up to a few shops. But he took over the official letter carrier's duties, and a couple of horses, he used to ride horses, everything from Tennyson, the whole of the Gladesville area, and he was, in those days, probably one of the most important people in the district because he was the only means of communication. There were no telephones, I mean Mr Ackland had a telephone, but I suppose there wouldn't be one telephone in Tennyson, for instance. Now, say Mrs Jones in Tennyson was sick, too ill to get out of bed, Mrs Brown up in Boronia somewhere. She would say "would you tell my sister Millie to send somebody over to look after the kids" or something like this. Or somebody down at Huntley's Point wanted a reel of cotton. Dad used to do all this for people. Take a reel of cotton from Mrs Skinner's little emporium in Gladesville.

Q: So he was on a horse?

Yes.

Q: Mailbags on either side perhaps?

Well, I just don't know. There wouldn't have been all that much. See, in, say, 1890, there were less than 120 buildings in the whole of Gladesville, that's including shops, but they were widely scattered so that he needed a horse to get from A to B but not to help carry the mail.

Q: So before he came, they may have had no mail deliveries, or perhaps had a mail contractor?

No, well, as I said Mrs Howell's son Will he did that. He was the first to actually physically take mail. Up til then people used to come and get their mail because the first post office was down at the foot of Wharf Road. And you know why that was there because otherwise people used to have to go up to Ryde to get their mail and bring it back again.

So Will Howell was actually the first postman under contract, I suppose really, or his mother probably paid him, she got reimbursed for it. But then, as I say, when dad came he took over the job shortly after he cam to Gladesville. He was the lone postman until it got too big and they had to put another one on.

Q: I was wondering if you remembered him horse delivering the mail.

No I never remember that. My earliest memories of mail delivery was a postman coming to our place. Dad didn't do our particular area. Dad's area was Henley, Huntley's Point and Wharf Road, all the way down the main road and all the way down to the river. He did that on foot. His run was 7 miles and he did it twice a day. He did 14 miles a day. And Pix did a special feature on him. I've got the copy of it upstairs. They reckoned he walked from Australia to England and back about 4 times.

Q: So there were 2 deliveries a day then?

Yes, 2 deliveries a day up til possibly just before the war and the only 2 days apart from Sundays that postmen had off was Christmas day and Good Friday. And they not only delivered all the telephone books - of course there wasn't too many telephone books at that stage - they became later on quite a few. But they also collected the mail from the mail boxes and they had to be at the mail box at a time, they couldn't collect the mail before that time because some people might post their mail and miss out. Inspectors used to come out and wait for them in various places to check up on them. And they always had to wear their serge uniforms. So a postman's lot in those days was a lot harder than the postie's lot is today.

He was in the Gladesville-Ryde Brass Band.

Q: What instrument did he play?

His main instrument was a cornet but he was pretty versatile on most wind instruments, euphonium and that. He used to do solos. The Band would give a concert and dad would do a solo and one of his specialty pieces was "Alice where art thou" with all the triple tonguing and all that. Getting round to that, dad was a marvellous person with animals and kids. He could train an animal to do anything. And he had two horses which were kept in a paddock on the corner that ran from Pearson St down to Ashburn Place near the Asylum - near the Police Station now - and back up Pearson St. He used to keep them in there. And he would go down and he would whistle a tune and the horse of the day would come up. For instance, if he whistled "Alice where art thou" Dolly would come up because that was her tune you see. He had to go over to Hunters Hill to deliver something to Mr Wise the Town Clerk, so he rode Dolly over. He was playing at a concert that night and he had to wait in the town hall for Mr Wise who was engaged and so he was walking there and he was whistling, fiddling around with little bits and pieces he was going to do, and the next thing Dolly comes up the steps and walks into Hunters Hill town hall. That's the only time there has been a horse in Hunters Hill town hall.

He used to go down the south coast for his holidays and every year he used to come back with a whole heap of paspalum seed because to grow it here to help feed his horses. He could never grow it until finally he got some to take and so that everybody that complains about the curse of paspalum around this area, my father was the one that brought it here.

Early recollections as a child.

Q: These things you have just been saying are before you'd remember, these are things he's told you?

Yes, they are the things he told me. Yes, I don't remember dad's horse, because Dolly, when she became too old and when he wasn't going to use her any more, he wasn't going to send her to a knacker and he actually rode her to Newcastle to my aunt and uncle's dairy farm and Dolly spent the rest of her days there. He took his holidays and rode her up the Great North Road all the way to Newcastle rather than she be knackered. I don't remember that, he told me.

Q: That's good too, to hear those stories.

Well, it's interesting that the feeling people had for their animals, see they would send them to a knackery today because they're worth money.

Q: You mentioned where you lived, could you tell me a little about the house, what it was made of and how big it was?

It is still standing there today. It was built by a Mr Hunt, who lived out North Ryde somewhere, for my great aunt and uncle, he was the head gardener down at the mental hospital.

Q: What was his name?

Tomkins, Harry Tomkins. He was, as a matter of interest, apprenticed to the gardeners at the Duke of Norfolk's estate in England where they learnt everything, making wreaths, they learnt the lot. Then he came out to Australia and he got a job down at the mental hospital on his credentials of his training and all that sort of thing and he lived in the house when it was first built, and then mum and dad had been married, after they had moved in there, and they lived in a place in Orr St, Captains Simmons had a servants cottage at the back and mum and dad lived in that. Then when my great aunt and uncle moved down, you know the Banjo Patterson Restaurant?

Yes

You know the house right opposite there?

Yes

Well, that's where they lived only there was a big stone wall and big gates and you had to pull a chain and a bell rang up in the house and Aunt Pink used to come down and open the little wicker gate and let us in. Mum used to go down and visit her every Tuesday afternoon and I used to go down with her, of course. And when mum was obviously pregnant, (she'd go past before then of course) she used to chat with, I think it was a Miss Paterson. She was blind and I think she was Mrs Barton's sister, I don't know, but a Miss Paterson, and Miss Paterson actually knitted me a child's little baby suit which I never wore because mum was so thrilled with it and because of the Banjo Paterson connection, was put carefully between tissue paper mothballs and I never got to wear it.

So she used to go down every Tuesday and visit my great aunt and uncle down there until he retired.

Well that was the start of the house. Mum and dad moved into that after they moved out. It was a 3 bedroom, the main bedroom, then there was a verandah, there was a bedroom behind that then there was another bedroom behind the main bedroom. A hall down the centre and when you went down the end of the hall on the left hand side what was called the dining room, it would be the lounge room today, but it had a big dining room table and chairs and a captain's chair for the husband and wife, one with arms and one without. And then opposite that was the doorway to the kitchen and the kitchen led out onto the back verandah and as you went out the kitchen door

on the right hand side was the bathroom and on the left hand side was the wash house or laundry as they call they call them today. And of course the laundry was hand laundered, well, till long after that, a copper that was stoked up. That was a great job I used to love doing that on a Sunday on a cold winter's day, sitting there, stoking the copper up. There were no Hills Hoists, they had clothes line and clothes props and the man selling the clothes props, he was one of the itinerant vendors that used to come round calling "clothes props" "clothes props" and mum or whoever would want one would go out. Sixpence for a long stick with a fork at the end of it, chopped out of a tree, bit like a small tree.

So that was the house. The house was on a quarter acre block and I remember in my early childhood, my Uncle Harry had made beautiful bush houses all the way up one side and all the way across and they gradually fell into disrepair because dad wasn't interested in horticulture in any way shape or form.

Q: What did they have bush houses for?

Where they would raise plants because they have got highly sophisticated ones now, but this virtually was I suppose about 3 metres wide and 20 metres long and it was made with posts and wire netting. Why they called it a bush house was because it had all tickbush pushed up in the wire netting so that all you looked at was something like one of these brush fences that you see these days, but it was not as thick as that, it let more light in. The tick bush was in the roof too, so it kept it reasonably stable as far as wind, and temperature too I suppose. He used to raise a lot of stuff there. Eventually of course it was pulled down.

Q: They would have been good cubby houses as kids would they?

Well they would be pretty high, I suppose they would have been as that valance rail going round there, it was quite big. Of course he used to have things hanging on the walls, and he had a bench right down the middle. The bench was starting to fall to pieces when I first remember it. I suppose he had all his trays of growing equipment on that. But dad turned the bottom one, across the bottom of the yard, that was turned into a chook yard. We always had chooks in there. Everybody had chooks in those days.

Q: So you didn't have the traditional veggie garden that most people had.

Oh, dad had a veggie garden, he was a good vegetable grower.

Q: He wasn't interested in flowers?

Dad always grew our vegetables and nothing was wasted because he would have vegetable garden, say, 2-3 metres wide going the Tyrrell St side fence. We were on the corner and had a back gate. He'd did a trench perhaps 3/4 metre deep and a metre wide and all the scraps and all the grass cuttings

used to go in there and then he would fill it back in and then he would dig another. Gradually they used to progress up and of course that made wonderful soil to grow his vegetables in. He used to grow wonderful vegetables. He even grew his own horseradish, he liked horseradish with his roast beef, his Sunday dinner.

That house was on the end of Ross St and Tyrrell St. It was brick, double brick. Then across Tyrrell St going down Ross St to Raven St and 3 or 4 houses along, that was a big bakers paddock. The bakers used to keep their horses there. And that wasn't built on for many, many years, possibly around about the end of the depression before that was built on. I could go out our back gate, go straight through that paddock, cross Raven St, through another paddock, across Morrison Road and I would come out, you know where the podiatrist is in Morrison Road? Well a Miss Martin lived there, she had a little corner shop and from there on down it was all bush.

So I could virtually walk out our back gate and go straight down through tracks through the bush to Glades Bay. It was all bush down there, there were no houses. There were a couple of houses up near Ross St in Western Crescent. But there were no houses at all there then. There were native roses, all sorts of wonderful native flowers growing down there.

Q: Did you enjoy swimming down there?

Oh yes. We virtually lived on the water. We learnt to swim in Gladesville baths of course, which was just at the corner of Ross St. And when we got big enough we got sheets of galvanised iron and made canoes and they became more and more and more sophisticated as we became handier and could get bigger sheets of iron. We used to swim all round Glades Bay, of course, low tide there was no water in the baths. No kids ever got taken by a shark. There were a lot of boats and launches used to get moored out there. We used to swim out round the launches, we were like fish.

Q: Did you actually have formal swimming lessons?

No. I don't remember anybody being thrown in, the old style. I never saw that happen. I remember when I first started to swim. I was just laying, pulling myself around by my hands on the bottom and going along like that and then hands come off and I thought "I can float". From then I never looked back.

Q: How old would you have been, have you any idea?

Oh, probably about 6 or 7. Pretty early. All kids swam.

There was a vacant block next to us going up Ross St and then this big cottage, that a Mr and Mrs Smith owned. He was a master a bricklayer and they were the only real grandparents I ever knew, it was always granny and grandpa to the day they died. Because one of their daughters died and there were 2 children, a boy and a girl, Hugh and I just became almost inseparable. We could swim like fishes. And there was a chap had a launch down in

Glades Bay, we used to swim around it, and we would have been about 15 or 16 then - something came up about how far we could swim, and all this rubbish. And he said "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you 2 shillings each" - that was a lot of money in those days - "if you can swim from Pearson's Point to Cabarita". I suppose it would be the best part of 3/4 mile. And he said "I'll come with you in the launch in case you got tired" and we did it, we got our 2 bob each. And that went to buy crackers for cracker day. That would buy a lot of bungers I can tell you that.

Q: Can I just ask about this launch for a minute. It was a power boat you are talking about?

Yes.

Q: And that's what they referred to it as a launch.

Yes. It was a motor launch. A motor launch, the simplest form would be a big rowing boat with a cabin on it, and a bit of a deck on it from there to there, and there would be a bit of cabin, the back would be open and glass round the front and the little engine would sit in there, and the back would be open, and they were motor launches.

Q: So it would be petrol?

Petrol engine, yes. And then they became more elaborate. Occasionally you would see one fully enclosed, and that would become later known as a cruiser. But they were big motor launches in those days. As a matter of fact, the term "motor launch" I don't know whether it still persists in the navy, but it certainly was during my war service. There were big what they used to call launches or workboats, the army had them, what we used to call the knee deep navy, the small ships business was part of the army, and they were big 40 foot ones, big, very wide, just a work horse, and they were known as launches or, sometimes work boats. And I am quite sure that the navy had them, they might still have a boat they call a launch, so it's an old term and it survived. But of course, today, I suppose they call them power boats or whatever, I don't know. But they were a simple thing, they were a rowing boat with an engine in it.

Q: Now, you mentioned cracker night, so you had better describe where you had your bonfire, who was involved, on the baker's paddock?

No, in Mashford's back yard. All the kids from round. As a matter of fact Jimmy Nicholls lives up Princes Street, he lived in Tyrell St near us, he was a fair bit younger than me but he still remembers Mashford's bonfires. We used to have an enormous bonfire. How we were allowed to get away with it I don't know. But we used to save up, do baker's runs, I used to do a paper run and all that sort of thing, and we'd save up our pennies, three pences and sixpences and buy our crackers. We used to keep them in Mintie tins. And every now and again you would pull them out and you would go through them and think "you beaut".

We used to have this bonfire in the back yard and all the kids used to come to Mashford's house. Mum used to get a whole heap of spuds from Mr Ralston and they all got thrown into the coals and the used to roast in the coals and mum would make a great big - she used to make a lot of jam - preserving pan full of cocoa and come up with a lump of butter and some salt and we would rake these spuds out, with thick burnt skins and break them open, dob with butter and salt, mug of cocoa.

Q: Would the spuds have been wrapped up in anything?

No, just thrown in so they baked in their jackets. It was wrapped up but you used buy a pound of butter and the grocer used to buy butter in 50 lb boxes and he used to weigh it up himself. The first job I had in Weils store when his father had it, I used to go up there sometimes and help. No, it might have been just after old Phillip had it, long before it was turned into a hardware store and I used to help round the place. And what they used to do, the used to get this box of butter and put it on a stand, take the lid off, then lift the box away and there was a big cube of butter with paper round it. This stand had a false bottom with a long screw thread underneath it and when you turned the handle, the butter rose up on this thing and there was a wire grid across the top shaped like the side of a pound of butter and you would wind that up til about that much came through and then whoever was weighing the butter up would put the butter pad underneath it, cut it off, put it on the scale, take a little bit off, or put a little bit on, pat it down and then, they would put a piece of paper on first, then the butter would go on it, then they would wrap it up like a pound of butter. So that's how butter was sold in the shops in those days.

Another way, they used to buy their fruit in bulk and there used to be a fruit cleaning machine which would be turned by hand. All it was 2 tubes of close, very small mesh wire and there was a hopper at the top where all the fruit was put into, sultanas, raisins, whatever. You would turn a handle and it would drop down into this, the top one, one would go down at an angle and another would come off at another angle, and on the bottom one there was another container underneath that the fruit went into. And so when you turned the handle these things kept turning like this and that made the fruit work down and of course all the stalks, bits and pieces, insects and whatever that was in it all fell out onto the ground and then the relatively clean fruit, because of course you still had to wash it, still you weren't buying sticks, when you got a pound of fruit, you got a pound of fruit.

They used to sell in those days, it was a general store, all the deliveries were done with a couple of chaps with horses and carts delivered all round Gladesville. Things like bacon, you wanted bacon, it used to come in big sides. Another job we used to have was cutting down alongside the ribs and lifting them out and getting the ribs out of the bacon. Then that would be cut in halves and then put on the bacon slicer and anyone wanted middle cut rashers or whatever type of bacon they wanted, it was cut while you waited.

Q: Now, what shop was this?

This was Clem Weil's father. Not where it is now. It was down, you know where Gay's Butcher shop is in Gladesville? There was the ANZ Bank, which was the biggest blacksmiths. All the horses used to go where the ANZ Bank is. Old Bompetty Small used to have his blacksmith's shop there. Then there was Gay's then there was Weil's. It was a big store. The laneway that's still there behind the shops, between the shops and the Diggers' Hall, that was the laneway that came up into our back yard. We owned it. That was our laneway. So the shop was there right alongside Gay's Butcher shop and that sold practically everything. There was a little area there with dishes and saucepans and that sort of thing, a few nails, but then in 1927, by then I was working up in the shop Wednesday afternoons, Friday afternoons, Friday nights and Saturday mornings, all I ever wanted to do was work up in the shop. So I left school 2 days before I was 14. I had done a year and a bit at high school out at Paddington.

Then Clem Weil decided to get rid of the grocer's shop, grocery part, and he sold that. He made it into a hardware store. I started to work when it was still a grocer's shop but very shortly after it became a hardware store. He bought a little shop next to the school and a part of the school grounds and built the shop where Weil's Hardware is now. It has nothing to do with old Clem, of course, it's just the name that's survived.

Q: So you started working in the shop just as a part time job to get some money?

Yes. I did everything to get money. I used to do a paper run for the paper shop, used to 10 pence a day and a shilling on Sunday, 6 bob a week. You got up there at 4 o'clock in the morning, got the papers off the paper tram, took them in, opened them up, counted out the papers for your run. Mr Rea would check them over.

Q: You would have to be there at the right time for the trams?

Oh, yes. And then, my run was all up Monash Road and all up there. On Wednesdays and Saturdays I'd be staggering under a load of papers. They were held over your shoulder with a big strap and all the papers were in there. I used to start at Monash Road and go down there and Buffalo Road and Higginbotham Road, Oates Avenue and Diggers Avenue and all those streets round there, Eltham St, Oxford St, Percy St, the whole lot, all on foot. All for 6 bob a week. I used to supplement my wages there because I'd get round almost the same time at a certain spot all round the run, starting at a certain time and various fellows got to know about this.

A lot of people even didn't have alarm clocks. People were pretty poor in those days. I remember there was one fellow, George Downton, I used to wake him up, I used to knock on the window "wake up Mr Downton". "All right Arthur, all right, ok". And I used to get 3 pence a week off George. If I woke

the people up I used to get a trey (= 3d.) every week you see. Well, if I woke up 4 people it was the equivalent of my Sunday's wages, I got a shilling. I suppose I used to make 2 bob a week like waking people up in the mornings. There was a Mr Silver down in Eltham St, I used to wake him up every morning.

Q: You would go and buy a lot of crackers with that?

Oh, well, of course you always had money put aside to buy mum a good present on Mothers Day and Christmas.

So they had Mothers Day in those days?

Oh, yes. We always used to wear a white flower for Mothers Day and buy mum a present. As a matter of fact, we have got out there, the first decent present I ever bought her after I started work was a Shelley tea-set. Lovely, plain white with a little black band round the top. I still have it out there.

Q: Before, when we were talking about cracker night, I was asking whether the spuds were wrapped up in anything.

The spuds? Oh no. Just tossed in and they used to be real thick black charcoal all round the outside. They would be that hot, you'd be going like this and you'd break them. No, you wouldn't peel them. All you did was dust the ashes off, the actual skin and the bit of burnt potato inside was delicious. You ate it all out and then you crunched onto the skin and that was the best of the lot. That's when you started drinking your cocoa.

Q: It must have been a great night for kids.

Oh, marvelous. There wasn't enough hours in the day for kids in those days. We were talking about on the river and that sort of thing. We used to go down, Hughie and I, and other kids too, but we used to always pair up, in an old canoe and we used to have an old hurricane lamp. We had made a round net out of a piece of wire with a handle on and put a bit of mosquito netting on it and one would paddle in the canoe very quietly and the pawns used to come up to the light and they just scooped the prawns up. We'd get about, I suppose, in a kerosene tin which held 4 gallons in those days, we'd get about a quarter on a good night, or a bit less of prawns. We would fill it up with water, build a fire on the shore. We all had our own, particular fireplaces.

Q: You say you were about 10 when you were allowed to go down and catch the prawns?

Yes, I would be around about 10 or so. Of course, the river was in our blood right up till, well, for many years later. Then dad finished up building me a real good canoe, beautiful canoe, like Indian canoe shape, with the front and back sweeping up like this.

He was great friends with old Mr Towns, the boat builder, and world champion sculler. I think he was the only world champion sculler I ever knew that retired undefeated.

Q: George Towns?

Yes. He was down the foot of Wharf Road. All the off cuts from what they used to call the wager boats, the eights, the fours, singles, was thin cedar only about that thick. And all the off cuts dad used to collect and he made this canoe with the ribs and then he covered it with this fine cedar and then that was all covered with canvas and painted.

I had that canoe for many, many years, probably until I was 21 or more. And many's the time Hughie and I paddled down the Harbour to Mosman and round there. A couple of times we went out through the Heads and on to Manly. It was 12 feet long, very stable, safe.

Q: No life jackets?

No, it would never have occurred to use. We could swim anywhere we wanted to swim. We weren't champion fast swimmers, but we could virtually swim forever. Because we had been swimming ever since we were knee high to a grasshopper. All the kids were like, not only us, we were just the same as everybody else. We would go down when the tide was running out and would come back when the tide was coming in. We only got caught once, paddling against the tide, never again! It's a long paddle against the tide. So that's how we finally finished up with a canoe like that.

Q: And it was a good waterproof canoe by the sound of it.

It was marvelous, completely waterproof. That served much like kids today have got motorbikes - I had a pushbike but I never used it much - the water was everything to us. We just loved the water, We swam and we caught fish and we caught prawns and we went out after crabs. We used to get beautiful blue swimmer crabs - tons of food in the Parramatta River in those days. It was quite clean. See, the only factory practically, was the gasworks.

Q: What about the Homebush abattoirs?

My first recollection of the abattoirs were in, you know White Bay, you know when you come to White Bay and you can turn right to go to Annandale or left to go onto the Glebe Island Bridge. All the low area there was the abattoirs. There was a big stone wall all round them. It used to pong. It used to be great to see the ladies, as soon as the tram turned round from White Bay, all the ladies would bring their perfumed handkerchiefs out and put it over their nose till it got past. Yes, I remember the abattoirs being there.

Q: Did they call it the Glebe Island abattoirs?

It was just the abattoirs.

Q: The Homebush abattoirs of course would have opened when you were a child.

Yes, they would have obviously. Because I remember when there was no abattoirs there. But I do well remember the abattoirs being there, because I remember mum and Ellie going to town and having a handkerchief over their nose.

Q: With your siblings, are you the eldest of the three?

Yes, I have got my sister Joan 6-1/2 years younger than I am. My other sister Del she is 2 years younger than Joan. They are both alive. Joan lives up at Springwood and Del lives up just out of Lauriton. She's retired. Her house is here, there is a little narrow street there and there is the beach just across the road there. But she doesn't have very good health she's got this Parkinsons' disease. She's had it for about 10 years. But she has got a heart about as big as Phar Lap. She won't let it get her down. She's getting slowly worse, but she is all grit and heart.

Q: About that gap in your ages, do you remember your mother being pregnant? Do you actually remember them being born?

No. I don't. I must have been asleep, but I remember mum sending me up to tell dad that I had a little sister. He was just about ready to go out on his run, this would have been about half past seven in the morning, so Joan must have been born in the very early hours. I was born at 6 o'clock. Ten pound I was. I remember Ellie coming out and saying "you have got a little sister" and I went in to see the little wrinkled up red faced thing. But quite curious. And mum said "go up and tell your dad that you've got a little sister". Of course, he already knew, but he was greatly surprised. But I don't remember either of my sisters. I wouldn't know whether mum was pregnant or not. Mum was a fairly solid, fairly hefty person. But I suppose in later years I would have known. But in those days kids were pretty unworldly.

Q: Today, an older child follows through the pregnancy. They take steps to prepare them. You don't remember being told at all?

No, not a word. And I reckon that's the best way. I know I might sound like an old fellow, to my mind kids today are not kids. They don't have a childhood. When I look back to my childhood, it was so supremely happy. I had a good father and mother, loving but not smotheringly loving. Anything I was doing, dad helped me with it. I think that kids today are bored so quickly, I don't know any kids today, I never see kids having fun. You go past a school, they are all sitting down talking and all that sort of thing.

Gladesville School, before we went into school, at playtime and after we came back from having our lunch, it was a riot. We were playing cricket, we were playing saddle me nag, playing all these sort of games, wherever the playgrounds were, they were all dirt playgrounds. Marbles, tops, you know,

there was so much that kids had to do. There were so many things, the day wasn't long enough. When I look back, I think to myself, sometimes I wish I was Peter Pan, I had never grown out of those days. I never knew a sad kid. Even Doc Randall, lived over here. Now, Doc was a cripple and he didn't have any flash crutches, all he had for crutches was two bits of broom handle with a bit of wood at the top with some rag wrapped round it like that. And that was Doc's crutches, he used to stand up, there was no hand grips, I can see him today, his finger used to go just round the 2 things like that. He used to play chasings with us, there was one of the classrooms, you would run along the verandah, it was about a 3' drop, and you would jump off to see who could jump the farthest. Doc would tear along on his crutches, putting one foot on the ground. The worst leg was only a little thin thing with a little foot about that long on it.

Q: So he wasn't a polio victim?

No, he was just a natural cripple.

Q: He was born like that?

Yes. If there was any disagreements, kids would have a bit of a fight, they would pick on Doc.

Q: No special treatment?

No. Anybody came at Doc he got a belt over the head with his crutch. So he didn't get picked on. He used to play marbles. Our hands would be filthy. We would put the big ring on the ground and marbles in the middle and fire out and we'd be scrabbling round for them. We'd go into class with filthy hands, wipe them on your trousers.

And the teachers were great. Today, kids go to school and there is all this rubbish about their tensions and all this that they go through. The only reason that kids are put under pressure is because they are not taught properly. I knew more ... and this has been going back - I've got a daughter 55 - going back to when she was a kid at school, it used to disgust me. The lack of teaching that went on at the schools. And I was talking to her one day and I said "now honestly love, how many good teachers did you have in all the time you were at school?" And she said "two". And I remember one particular instance when she was in high school, and Rae's not stupid by any means. Only twice she had good teachers she was top of the class, otherwise she was down about the middle. But I remember her working out her homework and she was a long time over it. And I said "what's wrong, what's your trouble?" She said "oh, it's these problems, dad, I can't work problems out". And she has always been one to niggle at something until she has got it beaten. And I said "oh, I'll show you" and I showed her how to work it out. That was all right and she worked it out for herself and took it down, and the teacher marked it wrong. When she came back I asked her if she got her marks for the problem, and she said "no, the teacher marked it wrong". I said "why, that was the right answer, don't tell me the answer was wrong". She

said "oh it was the right answer but the teacher said I hadn't worked it out the proper way."

Now, all the time I was at school, and high school, I never had a bad teacher.

Q: That's amazing. Because I have heard some ghastly teacher stories from some people.

Well, I'll tell you what, I got the cane plenty of times and we used to have one teacher, old Bill Richardson who lived around in Pittwater Road here. He was an ex-digger, and the poor old fellow, he had been badly knocked around, and I think he was pretty short tempered.

Q: Was his proper name Archibald Richardson?

William. Bill. Bill Richardson. And this particular classroom was the old fashioned one where the seats went up to the back like you see in medical school.

Q: You had one of those at Gladesville?

Yes, it was right near where the headmaster's cottage where the school bell used to be. He used to have a cane and he used to sit on a chair all the time. Kids used to muck up at the back. He would get them down, bend over the desk, whack! across your backside. "oohh" the kid would yell out. He said "What's wrong with you? Good sugar cane, a good thing never hurt you. Have another one!"

As we grew older we saw the funny side of that. But I have heard a lot of my school friends complain about getting the cane at school. But I never got the cane unjustly. Many the time I should have got it when I didn't.

Q: Do you remember a specific incident that you got it for, that you deserved it for?

No, it was routine. You got 1, 2, 4 and 6. Now, a sixer was something that you didn't want. It was 3 on each hand. Four was 2 on each hand, two was 1 on each hand, and one was just one. No, I don't remember anything specific. But you would muck up. You would take a peashooter and some pigeon peas and you would be up the back and you would hit a kid behind the ear. Sometimes the teacher would turn round and catch you. Well, you would be out and probably get one for that. Or, we used to have desks with inkwells in it, and a pen and ink. You would get a bit of blotting paper and dip it in the ink and have an elastic band on your fingers and let it go and it would hit a kid behind the neck with a lump of ink sodden paper. Well, you would probably get 2 for that. But 4s and 6s you had to do something that was a bit, well, if you played truant, you would get 6, no mucking about.

Q: You never truanted?

No. I never wagged school. I don't think I ever really wanted to, but I wouldn't have been game anyway. Some kids were bits of villains and I remember one, Wockie Wildman, he used to live down here in High Street on the corner of Kennedy Street, he got six for doing something that he shouldn't have. And he went straight back and got the inkwell out of the ink, and the teacher was writing on the blackboard and he shot the inkwell at him. It hit the blackboard, missed the teacher, so he got another six and was sent home. So he had twelve. I never ever got the cane that I considered to be unjust. You got it, you deserved it and you accepted it.

Q: Do you remember coming home and telling them when you had got the cane, or did you keep quiet about it?

Oh, no. You didn't complain about it. If, you kicked your toe or something like that, unless your mother saw it was bleeding, there was no "oh, mummy I kicked my toe". Kids were different then.

Q: Tough, you mean?

Well, they were a bit tougher, but they weren't hard. Now, for instance, all this business, racism, and all that sort of thing. Now, we had black families, we had Indians, we had Italians at our school. Now, there were 2 families of Noels and they were as black as anybody could possibly be, they were that black. I don't know where they came, they were fine featured people, but probably from the Islands, although they weren't Polynesians - I just don't know where they would have come from. They weren't Africans, but they were good looking people. There were 4 boys and a girl in Ross Street and another lived over Tennyson way. Those 4 boys finished up marrying 4 white girls, and the girl finished up marrying a white fellow. But all the time at school, there was never, nobody was even conscious, well you knew they were black, I mean, you weren't blind, they spoke like we did, there was no broken English or anything like that. They were probably 3rd generation. And the same with the Indians and the same with the Italians. There were 2 Italian fruit shops.

Q: What were they, Portuguese?

No, they were Italians. And the other ones were down on the right hand side in the Ryde Municipality. They were next door to Wilson's. And the other ones were down approaching Wharf Road on the other side.

There was never any mention of race or colour. Nobody was ever referred to as a nigger or dago or anything like that. My first feelings, recollections of any racial differences was when we got a lot of English and Scottish migrants came to Gladesville, and it was all right until they started to lord it over us, call us kangaroos and that sort of thing, and that caused a bit of trouble and they were very quickly put in their place. They were very superior see. But they are the ones that today - now I belong to Hunters Hill Historical Society and they

had a talk there one night from a particular chap, who I know and am very friendly with and he was saying about how tough it was for migrants that came out and what the stand was that was taken against them. When he finished and there were questions I said "well, Charlie, all I can say is you have got a pretty short memory". He did a bit of a laugh, he is more Scottish now in his speech than he was when he first came out.

Q: Now, are you talking about when your were a child? You are not talking about migrants coming in the 1920's.

Yes, in the 20's.

Q: And you are talking about a number of them by the sound of it.

Yes, and there were a fair few English and Scottish migrants came out. Of course, they came out long before them. Old Jimmy Park that built the church. Yes, there was a fair influx of them then, after the First World War.

Q: So you find it is numbers which make the racism rather than colour or -

I think its people coming here and bringing their cultures and their attitudes with them rather than people now, I know Italians that have come here perhaps since the War, and I'm very friendly with them. One of them, her husband is dead now, they had the fruit shop next to Weil's shop. They wouldn't let me order my vegetables in English, I had to learn how to order it in Italian. And I still see Ilena when we go shopping at Macquarie. I've got Chinese friends, we had a Chinese bloke in our Unit. Better people you couldn't wish for. He was as Australian as I was. They might have practised their culture at home, perhaps, or in their church, I don't know about that. They might have been Christians. That's how little interest we took. I've got a number of Chinese friends, ex diggers and that, and there's never the slightest bit of racism. It's only people have come here to our country that bring their troubles with them and they expect you to conform with them. I think that's the basis of racism. I think really, we are a pretty tolerant mob. We got on well, when I was in the Islands and when I was up in the Northern Territory and all that. We got on well with the Aborigines up there, with the Islanders. I had one fellow that was attached to our Unit, used to manual work round the place, the New Guinea Administration Unit (it was called ANGAU) brought natives across from New Guinea to the various islands to Bougainville in this particular instance. They used to do work round the camp. And I was in a position where I had to designate them out jobs and things like that. They would come up to you and you would have a Boss Boy. You would always have a Boss Boy. He would make sure the others worked. You used to give him a stick and that was his badge of office and if he didn't get them working properly, the worst thing you could do was take his stick off him and give it to somebody else. And they would come up and say "me go wash wash master" - always master - "off you go" they'd go down to the water, very modest, they'd take their laplaps with them, take their old one off and wash it there and hold it in front of them and come out and put their clean on and come up again. This particular one, who I became very fond of actually, he cried like a

baby, he wanted me to take him back to Sydney. Because Australia was Sydney. "You take back Sydney master?" I said "oh I can't". I was nearly as broken hearted as he was. And I found that with the troops and that. They got on supremely well with the Aborigines and the Islands and that, never any trouble. The only trouble we seem to get is brought here. I really believe that.

Q: Now going back to earlier memories going back to the veterans after World War I around Gladesville there were a lot of them as I believe and that a lot of them needed help. What are the memories of the people who got together to build the veterans homes in the area?

That was a different thing. Like, during the War, there was the Gladesville Branch of the Voluntary Workers Association. And my dad, he was Assistant Secretary. Old Roley Sutton was the Secretary, but he never did any work dad did all the work. But Roley Sutton was a man of great presence and he could get things done. And they used to send away comforts to the troops. All the Gladesville boys got their comforts sent away and mum and dad used to work, with all the rest of them of course.

And then, when the War finished, they had money left over and it was decided - now we had a woman living down in Tyrrell Street, a Mrs Besenvale, her husband had gone and left her with 2 sons and he was killed. And there was another fellow, Jack Simmons. Now Jack had both his legs blown off and actually, fortunately it was in the middle of winter, and it was muddy and everything like that and the mud choked up the wounds and that's why he didn't bleed to death. One of his legs was almost off and the other one was off. And actually, he crawled back into the trench with his leg under his arm, sort of in advanced shock. So it was decided to build them a house. They used the money to buy 2 blocks of ground. One was down in Tyrrell Street and the other one was up here on the corner of Earl Street and Note Street. They got together, and the timber yard - now it wasn't the Gladesville Timber yard in those days. The timber yard in those days was, I think, run by the Swan family. They started off down at the foot of Wharf Road but moved up opposite to where the timber yard is today. It was the Swan family, the people that owned Fairyland. And Ron and his brother I knew fairly well, they were in the militia when I was, in the 51st Battalion. When I was only 17 I joined them up there. I think that possibly the timber came from there. But I know the timber for the houses was donated from one place or the other and knowing the Swans they would probably have donated a lot. And the bricks were donated by the brickworks. Butchers and the other brickworks I forget what it was. And by and large, most of the material was either donated or sold very cheaply, and all the work was done by the local tradesmen, not necessarily members of the Association. Mr McDuff the plumber, W B McDuff, he did all the plumbing on the place. The old chap next door to me, Grandpa Smith, amongst others, did all the bricklaying. The hod carriers and that, they did all the hod carrying and all that. All the skilled labouring work.

Q: Could you explain what that is, please?

A hod is a sort of a box shaped like a V with an end to it but with this end open and with the top open. So you have got a V with an enclosed end and a pole coming down here. What they used to carry the bricks to the bricklayers, the hod carrier would load the bricks into the hod, put it over his shoulder and trot up ladders, along planks and everything and tip the bricks out. Then he would go back and fill it up with mortar, and he would run up ladders. These fellows, they could run up a ladder and they could balance the hod on their shoulder. Underneath the hod there was a round part that fitted on the shoulder, usually with a bit of brass on it. It was polished. So they were the hod carriers and they kept the bricklayers supplied. Or the plasterers, they would keep the plasterers supplied with plaster. And then all the labouring work, the pick and shovel and all that sort of thing was done by the other members, the rest of the men of the Association. And the women used to keep them fed, morning and afternoon tea and lunch and they used to raise money and make sandwiches and all that sort of thing. And so the 2 houses were built.

Q: Do you actually remember them working on the houses yourself, or, your father would also have told you a lot of the details wouldn't he?

Oh, yes. I learnt the details from dad, I wouldn't have known them. I must have been about 6 or 7, perhaps 7. I remember the places being opened as they say, there was a big shivoo, with all the ladies there dressed in white and all the men sitting round and dad sitting there with me in front. I've got photos of them, I gave copies to Megan. I remember that well. I remember going down with dad and playing in the sandpit with a few other kids. Most kids in those days they hung round their father like bees round a honey pot at the weekend when dad was home. Gee whiz, to be with dad was the thing! That's how those houses came into being. As far as they returned soldiers having problems, I don't remember any serious problems. Now, having worked with Clem Weil since I was 14 which was only 9 years after the War finished, I remember quite a few of the returned men that were not well. I remember one had consumption and a few others had injuries that precluded them from working hard, but I don't remember any of them that were in dire need. They did get a pension, it might have been small, but it was enough to keep body and soul together.

(Break in tape)

- three of his brothers into to enlist and he was rejected, for all things, for flat feet. He was walking 14 miles a day carrying a great heavy bag for the rest of his working life. He never rode a bike, he carried that bag of mail to the day he retired. Actually I think he still holds the record of service with the PMG Department, 53 years he was in the Department. I of course was born then and he might have been killed too.

Q: So even though he (father) had a child then there was, it was a long way away in World War 1 at that stage, he went in to try and enlist. I wonder whether your mum was very impressed?

Yes, with his 3 brothers. I talked to him about this in later years. "Why did you do that dad"? He said, "well, son, everybody was worked up about the war and the terrible stories about the Germans and the atrocities and that sort of thing, and, you know, the war was only going to be over in about 6 months." And nobody knew the terrible, the absolutely dreadful conditions. I mean, you listen to the Vietnam veterans, they don't know what war was, even compared with the fellows in the Second World War. I could tell you stories about fellows with their guts shot out, were brought back to a hospital, it was tents, over rough trails in a stretcher on a jeep, they weren't picked up in a helicopter and put into hospital just like that, or when they were in trouble, planes flying over and helping them and that sort of thing. So that they didn't realise the shocking conditions that they were going to be under and they probably didn't even think about getting killed. They were just going over to do their bit as it was said in those days.

And of my three uncles, one didn't come back. One came back horribly gassed and to the end of his life he had this sort of gasp when he was talking. But when he first came back it was shocking. I had to look away, I couldn't look at him when he trying to get words out. And the other one came back without a scratch and a string of medals about that long. He was as mad as a March hare apparently. He got about everything but the Victoria Cross. So that just goes to show the fortunes of war you see, you go from one right down to the other that didn't come back.

Q: Now going back to the Voluntary Workers' Association, even though you were a child, your father would have talked to you about it. Did it have any links with unions? I just wonder about that word workers.

No. Workers because they worked.

Well, they weren't even thinking about building houses in those days. They just worked to get comforts for the boys that were away. And the women were works the same as the men. No, there were no political connotations there at all, it was just simply that they were working, in their spare time, on behalf of the troops that were away, that's all there was to it. And that went on all through the war. And it was only, as I say, at the end of the war. But, can I just go back a little back to the earlier days of Gladesville.

One of the things that were so notable and that I remember so well were the number of perambulating businessmen, you might call them. There was the rabbitoh. He used to go round with his cart with the rabbits in it and it was absolutely amazing. The rabbits had been gutted, but they still had their skin on them. His name was Bunion. You would buy a pair of rabbits, you would buy a pair for 7-1/2d. And he used just to go click, click, click, and the skin was off the rabbit.

Q: Skin it while you were watching?

Yes. And so they were lovely and clean. You would bring out the dish. Mum would say, "go out and get a pair of rabbits off Mr Bunion". I would go out there and give him the 7-1/2d or nine pence, sometimes they were, depending on the size. They were skinned, into the dish, straight out like that, fresh as a daisy. I don't know how long he'd had them, but not too long I wouldn't imagine because the women wouldn't have bought them if they hadn't been fresh.

And then there was the clothes prop man, then there was the fruito used to come around. He'd come round with his basket round the back with a few apples and a few oranges and grapes or whatever he had. Onions would be in the cart. And we'd go out "any specks Jack?" He was Jack the fruito. "Not today". But occasionally when he came around he'd have a speck apple he'd give you if your mother was a good customer.

Q: Then there was the butcher. He had what they called a cutting cart. I don't know whether you would remember the old milk carts or not, remember with the two taps out the back?

Yes. Well, it was like that but the back gate used to some down. It was held by 2 stout chains and that was his cutting board. He would come round the back "anything today, Mrs Mashford?". "Oh, yes, I think I'll have 5 best neck chops, Mr Gay". Bill Gay, he just died recently, the last month or so. He must have been ninety something. I know he was hanging on to be 100 to get his letter from the Queen. Then he'd go back, chop the meat, and he had scales hanging off the back of the cart, it'd go on that, covered with dust, probably. Or half pound of dripping or whatever they wanted.

And then the milkman he used to come round, morning and afternoon, 2 deliveries a day, run round the back. Mum would bring the jug out. "Thanks" whatever would be the milkman's name.

The baker used to come around and he used to have his little basket and he used to have bread and buns and current loaves and coffee rolls and all that sort of thing.

And then there was the road milkman, used to come round, the yodelling milkman. Have any of your interviewees ever told you about the yodelling milkmen?

No.

Oh, yes. They used to come round and yodel "any milk today" yodel, yodel, yodel. "Only 5-1/2d a quart I say", and they would be yodelling. Some of the ladies who didn't have a regular milkman, or who wanted cheap milk, or probably needed to get the cheap milk, they would rush out and get a quart of milk off the yodelling milkman.

Q: Why was the yodelling milkman cheaper?

I don't know why he was cheaper, I'm sure. I don't know whether he bought old milk or what it was.

These days you've got fairly strict controls.

Oh, yes. There wouldn't have been too many controls in those days. There was no such thing as pasteurised milk. I remember when pasteurised milk first came.

Q: They were licensing dairies and inspecting them in the 1920s?

In those days, yes. That could well have been. Because it would have been from the pneumonic plague. Dairy farmers, when they first came to Gladesville, they used to bring the milk, they used to have a little depot down in Meriton Street there, just a couple of doors down from Victoria. I remember, because I used to go round with him, it was one of my jobs, he used to live down Tyrrell Street. I remember on the back of the cart was 'Dairy Farmers Pty Ltd Pasteurised Milk". But I don't remember old Bill Reeves or Jack Peel ever having pasteurised milk.

I just thought I'd mention those itinerant tradesmen. I don't think there were any others that came around.

Another thing, too, that might be interesting. Anthony Horderns used to deliver to all the suburbs in those days and they had a depot in Victoria Road. The depot was, you know Holy Cross College? Well, where there is a shop on the corner of Cressy Road and houses, well they used to have a depot there. And the orders would come out, be delivered on a big, might have had a motor lorry, to deliver them to the depot. They'd come out, probably overnight. Then the local deliverer, he had a big van and a horse and he used to pick up his stuff from there and deliver to all the houses.

And the same with Bushells. Bushells' depot was on the corner of Sunnyside Street and Victoria Road and they used to bring all the tea and that out there and then the local used to deliver it all round the local shops.

Q: So the depot would be like a big shed perhaps?

Like a big garage with a lock-up, yes like a big shed. I forget his name, the Anthony Horderns fellow. He was a local, they were all local, all lived locally. Everybody knew them. The police had their houses, reared their family locally. The teachers mostly lived locally. Old Jim Trim lived locally on the corner of Oates Avenue and Victoria Road as it is now.

Q: Who was Jim Trim?

He was one of our teachers at school. And when he retired he came back, because teaching was his life, he came back and taught as a temporary. And he was actually teaching 3rd generation kids. He taught 3 generations of children. Trim Place is called after him, you know Trim Place in front of Gladesville School? There is a timber arch and all that sort of thing?

Yes.

Well, that's Trim Place, that's called after old Jim Trim. Mr Mahon, he lived up on the corner of Lyndhurst Avenue and Buffalo Road. That's the Bill Mahon, the alderman that helped with Gladesville RSL in Linsley Street.

A lot of the teachers lived locally. Some came from outside of course. Mr Darcy, of course when I started school, he lived on the premises. Molly, his daughter, I think she must have had polio. She had gammy leg. He lived in the cottage that's still there. It used to be used for domestic science. I don't know what it's used for now. But in those days the schoolmasters lived on the premises.

Q: Just talking about school, when you are talking about your pranks in the classroom and getting the cane. You are talking about just boys aren't you? Because at that stage they had it separated didn't they?

Oh, yes. The infants was mixed up to the end of infants school. Then, in what we called the big school, well then the boys and girls were separated. Yes. No, but we were mixed right up till then.

Q: You probably all had male teachers I suppose?

Yes, we had male teachers all the way through except, the infants teacher, the one where you first went into, was a Miss Pink. Everybody loved Miss Pink, she was gorgeous. Then the other female teacher, who lived quite near the school with her brother, she was never married, was what we called old Biddy Preston. She was a tough old cookie. And then the headmistress of the infants school was a Miss Morgan. She was the only one that all the kids hated because she was such a good teacher and she'd stay there until 5 o'clock in the afternoon with kids till they got it right. While I was on the story of Miss Morgan, when they built the infants school, the 2 storey place facing Linsley Street. That was built very early in the piece and while I was in her class there, she fell down the stairs and broke her leg and Eddie Ackland, the builder's son that lived opposite me, because Eddie wasn't all that bright and when she had fallen down and broken her leg, he said "I wish she had broken her neck!"

But Miss Preston, she was a tough old biddy - I shouldn't say that really, biddy - but she was a good teacher and she would give you the cane occasionally, she had the first class in the big school, but she was a hard teacher and you

had to learn it, but she was a good teacher. Teachers were so good in those days, while I was in primary school I never knew what it was to have homework. I never studied for an exam. I passed my high school exam when I was 11, but I couldn't go to high school, because you couldn't go till you were 12 so I had to repeat 6th class. Somewhere along the line I skipped a class. I don't know how it happened, so that I managed to get into 6th class when I was 11.

Q: How was it repeating?

I just had to do 6th class again, till I was 12.

Q: And do you remember finding that a bit of a drag?

Oh, it was boring. I got less marks the 2nd time round. First time round I was real keen to get to high school, and if I had have gone to high school I probably wouldn't have left as early, but I was sick of school by then. That's how school worked in those days.

The teachers made learning interesting.

Q: From talking to other people I always get the impression that it was real rote learning.

A lot of it was and that is how you learnt it properly.

Q: What do you mean, they made it interesting?

Well, they explained things to you, they taught you all sorts of short cuts. For instance if you multiplied a number by 11, if it was eleven seven teens, 1 and 7 is 8 and the answer was 187. If it was a big number that you couldn't put in the middle, you carried it to the front. Instead if it was 11 multiplied by 19, or something like that, well, 1 and 9 is 10, you made it 200. These are a few of the things that stuck in my mind. If you multiplied any number by 9, and these were made so you could check your answers, any number you multiply by 9 and I don't care what it is, when you add up, there might be 6 figures in the answer, add them all up, and they might come to 3 figures, you add those figures up, 9, and you keep on adding, and you finish up with 9. So, this didn't say you were right in your answer, but you were either right or wrong. There were a lot of things like that that we learnt that were interesting. Mental arithmetic, they used to give you mental arithmetic. In short, schooling in those days was directed towards making you think instead of this other business.

They used to read to you. They used to read the classics to us, when I say the classics, like the Peloponnesian wars, the stories of Homer, only made interesting, the war of the Greeks against the Trojans, the Trojan war which, in those days, of course, was fable until Schliemann proved that it wasn't fable at all, that Homer knew what he was talking about, because he went and found Troy and he also found Agamemnon's city and his grave.

And we had singing lessons, we had part songs that were divided up into 4 and we used to sing them. That was fabulous. Once we had learnt them, the harmony coming out of that, we used to think we were pretty good.

I suppose learning by rote was boring, but if you asked me what five 16s were today, I'd say 80. You learned up to 16 times tables and it sticks with you, when you learn it by rote you never forget it. I remember, after the war, I was interviewing a kid just to work on Saturday mornings and he was 2nd year student teacher and everything was in grosses and dozens and things, there was no decimal currency and there was a big price list up, a certain size screw, you looked it up there, was so much a gross. He said to me "how much a dozen would it be?" somebody wanted a dozen of the screws. I said "well, you divide a gross by the dozens, a dozen is 12, 12 into a gross". And he said "what's a gross"? This is a 2nd year teacher student in 1950 say. This is how the decline of teaching went on. The teachers didn't know.

I said "you don't know how many is in a gross?". He said no. I said "its 144". I said "how many inches are there in a mile?" He didn't know. I said "there's 63,360". We learnt all that. I still remember it. I can quote it to you now. 5,280 feet in a mile. 1,760 yards in a mile. A penny a pound was nine pound six and eight pence a ton. If you were doing sums that involved - if it is so much a pound how much is it a ton, you learnt all these things, all mental. I reckon at my age I could buy and sell most high school kids on general knowledge and that sort of thing. Ask them where a city or a country is, half of them they wouldn't know what country Berlin was in.

My daughter was concerned about one of her children's spelling and she went up to the teacher and said "look Julie's spelling is shocking when she is doing homework". "Oh, don't worry about it, I can't spell either". Rob used to do his maths homework, his father used to go over it with him, show him and that. He asked "your homework was all right?" "Oh, no, the teacher never looks at the homework, you know, dad." Rob's 24 now, so its not just happening now. And that's why I think we had good education. All our teachers were good teachers. Teachers at high school were pretty high up. Sydney Tech High had good teachers.

Q: You went to Sydney Tech High, you didn't achieve Intermediate Certificate?

No, Sydney Tech High was the only school that you could do your Intermediate in 2 years That was the standard of teaching there. No, if I'd have gone when I was 11 I would have completed 2nd year and I'd have got my Intermediate. But as it was, I left half way through 2nd year. Mum and dad badly wanted me to stay at school but, a postman's money wasn't too much then. I wasn't completely unselfish, I wanted to go to work. I'd had school. Because I got a high mark and I went into the A class in which you learnt Latin and French. Now, I would much sooner have gone into one of the other classes, the B, C, or D classes and learnt woodwork and metalwork see,

that's where my interests lay. I wasn't interested in Latin. What good is Latin to kids, anyway, unless you're going to be a doctor or a chemist?

Makes you think.

It didn't make me think too well. So that's the main reason. And strangely enough, hate high school as I did - because I was travelling from Gladesville, right out to Paddington and back every day.

Q: Can you tell me exactly how you used to get there?

The 4 minutes to 8 tram from Gladesville, go into Central, get a Bondi or a Bronte tram and get out just before you got to Victoria Barracks and walk up Green Street and Tech High was there. It's out South Sydney or somewhere now.

Hurstville.

Hurstville, is it? That's where Sydney Tech High was then. I usen't to get home till 5 o'clock in the afternoon. I think that was a bit of a killer too. I shouldn't have gone there perhaps, but that's how it worked out. I wanted to go to the same school that a friend's father went to. He went there and the friend went there and I thought that I'd go there with him. Fort Street would probably have been better, easier to get to. But no, I wanted to leave, and I was fortunate, because later I joined the Old Boys Union and chaps in my class that matriculated and went to university, they came out in the middle of the great depression and were out of a job. I had a job all through the depression. So, in that way I was lucky. And strangely enough, when I was about 15 I decided I wanted to go to night school so I went to night school over in Rozelle and I got my Intermediate at night school, because I wanted to go and it wasn't a problem.

Q: Did they make you do Latin and French?

No, we had woodwork and I remember at the end of the 2nd year, I was sitting there, and I said to Skinny Olsen who came with me "I don't know why we came". They were giving out all the prizes, speech night and all that sort of thing, and then the next thing my name's read out and I got the English prize. I got the English prize every class I was in at school, strangely enough, I don't know why.

Q: So you were a keen reader, were you?

Oh, yes, keen reader, loved poetry, I loved epic poetry. I could learn poetry like that. And I remember for the school concert I had to learn Horatius.

Q: At the bridge?

Yes, one of the Lays of Ancient Rome and I can still recite quite a large amount of it. It was marvelous. The wonderful story. Because Lord McAuley,

he was one of these people like Kipling and Paterson that could put a wonderful story into a poem and you would read it and it brought everything to life. Where the Lord of Luna comes up at last, with all the rest of them, quivering and him and his 2 mates had knocked them all over, and the "great Lord of Luna comes forth with his stately stride, upon his ample shoulders clanged loud the four-fold shield, while in his hand he held the brand that none but he could wield". Anyway he turns round and gets stuck into his own side and he says "if I can get rid of this mob will you come into Rome with me" so he comes up and he lashes out at Horatius and "the blow though turned, yet came too high, it missed his helm, but gashed his thigh, a joyful cry to see the red blood flow" then came the real juicy part. "He reeled and leaned a breathing space and then like a wildcat mad with wounds he sprang at Aster's face. Through teeth and skull and helmet, so fierce a thrust he spread, the good sword stood a hand-breadth out behind the Tuscan's head". That was real juicy stuff.

I think we all had a liking for that sort of thing because we were read all these good stories.

Q: You were brought up on it?

We were brought up on it, yes. And that taught us to articulate. If we went on holidays, a teacher would get us out in the front. I had to go on holidays when dad went on holidays. "Righto, Mashford, come out here and tell us what happened" and you'd have to get out and talk to the class about this, that and the other. Somebody might be an expert on birds' eggs, he'd come out and talk to the class on birds' eggs and give bird whistles and calls. Well, that got you used to talking.

Q: Was that at primary or high school?

Primary. Not at high school, did none of that at high school. Primary school. You were taught to write properly, to hold a pen properly, to slope your writing properly and you would get a rap over the knuckles if you dropped blots on your paper. I've been thankful all my working life, because the sort of job I had particularly in later years, you needed to think a lot. In business, when you got into a big business, you had to do a lot of research, and before you undertook a project, whether to expand or not, or to do this, that or the other, you had to go into all the pros and cons of it and if we hadn't been taught to think you wouldn't have been able to do that, you would have to rely on somebody to come in with a university education who probably wouldn't have known what he was talking about anyway, got you into debt.

Q: Consultant?

Consultant, that's it. That's quite right. So that was particularly in primary school, but to a degree in secondary school. We had a good maths teacher. Our maths teacher was a recognised mathematician in the mathematical fraternity if I could put it like that. He used to give us algebraical problems and things like that and I just wasn't interested enough to be keen on it. I used to

go down and watch the cricket, where the police station is now was a beautiful cricket field, the grass was cut with scythes by the patients, there were good cricket matches down there every Saturday afternoon and I used to go down and watch them. The patients used to come out and used to sit down there. And I got talking to one patient and I learnt later that he had been a brilliant mathematician and that he'd gone over the edge a bit and of course in those days, when you were cured they didn't kick you out, you could stay there and they just took your pension and whatever money you had and they kept you. A very, very humane method. And I got talking to him about this that and the other and something about problems.

END OF PART 1 OF THE INTERVIEW

Now, actually, in talking about the depression and to get some idea of the rather sudden impact, you have got to go back to about the time I started work because that was before the depression and everybody seemed to be in full employment. There was always plenty of money about. That was the era when the status symbols were the pianola and the gramophone and the people that had pianolas were in better employment and had bigger wages than those that had the gramophones. I remember quite well that Friday night shopping was the big thing. It was the only late night shopping and it seemed that everybody that worked locally, or anywhere, got home, had a bath or shower, had their meal, got dressed up and came up to town, whether they wanted to do shopping or not. Some of them were quite well known in the shop because a lot of the people in Gladesville were trades people of some way shape or form, bricklayers, tilers, carpenters, what have you, and they always seemed to have plenty of money and they would come in, mostly the young couples and young married couples, and perhaps starting off the home, and anything they wanted, they bought. That always astounded me because I had been brought up in a fairly frugal home, because there wasn't all that much money about and I often wondered how people could have so much money to spend.

Q: So, are we talking about 1928?

Yes, 1927-28. Now, I couldn't tell you exactly when the depression first started to bite as a date, but I've always felt that the first bad bite of the depression to hit our area anyway, was the timber strike. There was a strike through all the timber yards, probably for more money, but in those days I wasn't very conscious of political things, but I knew there was the timber strike and it was particularly vicious. One man who continued in his job was dumb, and even that didn't stop him betting belted up.

Q: He couldn't speak, you mean?

Yes, dumb. He worked up at Primrose's as it was then and everything seemed to go down hill from the timber yard, because a lot of the economy locally, and our local economy would be the wages of the people that lived there and so many of them were concerned in the building trade. There are even aspects of the building trade you don't realise, for instance, fencing contractors. People think of the building trade as hammering nails and laying bricks, but there are a lot of offshoots of the building trade, and then, of course it spills over into their suppliers and so forth and so on. Yes, my memory, anyway, always connected the timber strike with the first start of the depression.

Q: You can't remember what year?

I can't remember, probably about 1929 I would say. 1929, it might have been 1930, but that might have been a bit late. 1927 and 1928 I always in after years had the impressions they were the years of plenty when nobody was short of money.

Q: This man who was dumb, he didn't go on strike, you mean?

That's right, he continued working.

Q: And who belted him up?

Oh, the rest of the workers. I think possibly a few didn't want to strike, they probably had families and they had financial commitments and possibly thought that they were getting reasonably well paid anyway. It must have been a very militant element in the timber industry at the time, but of course, again, I would be probably 15 and that wouldn't impress me at all really, I wouldn't know anything about it. My father would have told me. That's something that we never discussed at home, the depression.

Q: It wasn't just a localised strike?

Oh, no. It was the timber strike, it wasn't the Primrose strike so I would say it would have been a general strike in the timber industry. The first impression that I got was, one or two of our regulars that used to come in, nicely dressed, always plenty of money, nicely dressed wives, only young couples, and within weeks they were out of a job and didn't have a penny to fly with. They actually lived up to and possibly beyond, because the bubble was never going to burst, everything was going to be good. And if that just happened to one or two that I knew and liked - they would come in chat up some kid behind the counter and everything like that - that impressed in my mind tremendously, to the extent that I have never, ever, owed money except on my house. I've never bought a single thing that I didn't have the money for. If I wanted it, I saved up and bought it. And I think it was mainly because the very, very severe lesson that I learnt, that tomorrow you don't know

Q: Mr Mashford, I don't think we have said on the tape exactly where you were working, or who it was with.

Right, well I was working in Weils Hardware. He was a hardware merchant. We had a fair sized store there.

Q: Exactly where was it?

Well, it was about 3 doors towards the city from Linsley Street in Victoria Road. It was then the Great North Road, and of course all the shops have been moved back now. But in those days they were well forward. Big yards, and actually the laneway that runs alongside the beginning of the RSL, the laneway alongside the entrance of the RSL, not at the back that goes up behind the butcher's shop and the florist, that was our entrance lane. So it went up past the back of the blacksmith, who had just gone, and it was a grocer's shop had been built there and it was Buttles, one of the early chain grocers. So there was them, which is now the ANZ bank, and then there was Gay's the butcher's shop and then us, so the lane went round the back of them into our back yard, where the stables were that when Mr Weil's father started the business, he started his general store in 1892 and all the deliveries were by horse and cart. There were 3 horses and carts delivering all day long, so it was a pretty fair general store. And then in 1927, Mr Weil, who by then had inherited the property and the business, decided to get rid of the grocery side of it and make into a hardware store. And that's when I started working there full time. I had been working there for a couple of years, just after school and Saturday mornings and that sort of thing.

Q: So could you describe your main duties when you first started as a full time worker.

The first thing that was impressed on me very forcibly, that there are so many of our customers come in here that are women that the first thing we have got to have is a nice, clean place. Because women in those days wore gloves when they did their afternoon shopping, or a lot of them did, my mother didn't, but a lot of women came from Hunters Hill and there were some very, very well connected people living in Gladesville then, very wealthy people. He wouldn't countenance anything in our shop to be picked up with a pair of gloves that would leave their gloves soiled. So the first job in the morning, I had to sweep the place right through and that meant putting sawdust and kerosene on the floor so that no dust would rise.

Q: So you would sweep it then mop it with kerosene?

No, you get sawdust and just enough kerosene to damp the sawdust, not to be sloppy, and you threw that on the floor. Some shops used to use newspaper torn up and wet it. But we found that the kerosene and sawdust it was very hygienic and if there was anything likely to crawl around the floor it didn't like the fact that there was kerosene coming. And the front footpath had to be swept clean. There were 2 big windows with a big, wide entrance door, 2

double door entrance door and a tile entrance paving. ‘Phillip Weil’ was on it, ‘Established 1892’. That was Clem’s father. He came up from Cooma. He originally lived in Cooma. And that had to be scrubbed every morning. Some windows had brass, but these windows had copper all round them and where the front window met the side window that slanted in there was a round copper column went up there, that all had to be polished every day. And then the floors of the shop had to be scrubbed once a fortnight. The storeroom didn’t have to be scrubbed, it only had to be swept clean. There was the shop, then a big wall, with a smallish door, then you went out into the great big storeroom. No ceiling, just beams and watering cans, and great big galvanised tubs and all sorts of things like that, they hung off the ceiling and they were lifted down as they were wanted.

Then, before I was allowed to serve a customer I had to learn how to wrap a parcel. I did this while I was working part-time in the grocer’s shop. And the idea was to get a tin of jam, a pound of butter, a bottle of tomato sauce and several other items of equal difference in size and shape and they had to be made into a neat parcel and, of course, tied up with string, because there was no cellotape or anything like that. All parcels were tied up with string and you had to put the string round your finger to break it, even the thick string. It came in 3 different thicknesses, fine, medium and strong. And even the strong one, which was quite a heavy string, you had to be able to put it round your finger and break it, no scissors or anything like that. I think that possibly was a bit of a gimmick for the customers, they always used to ooh, and ahh, that you could possibly do that without cutting your finger off. But it’s quite simple, really. So they were my basic duties.

And then I used to serve customers of course. He was a very astute person and I was very fortunate to work for him because it made it a lot easier for me in later life. He was a hard man to work for, an exacting man to work for, but very fair. We were probably one of the first people round the place that used to have pre-packaged stuff, we used to do our own pre-packaging. Grocers used to have sugar and flour and that sort of thing, they would weight it up and have it ready because it didn’t come packeted in those days. Sugar came in 70 pound bags, butter came in 50 pound lumps and so forth. But we used to wrap up all those different colour powders that were sold to painters, red oxide was sold to concreters to colour paths, and painters used a vast variety of colours. Some of them were ground in linseed oil and came in tins like a thick paste. They were the best quality. A lot of the painters who did cheaper work, they used to buy what we used to call dry colours, that was just powdered colour. And they were all packaged up, and we even used to package up the more widely and popularly sold nails. If somebody came in for a pound of nails on a busy Friday night, and believe you me, the shops used to be jam packed, or our shop used to be anyway, the sooner he could get it the better. Well, you would just put your hand in the bin and bring out a pound packet of nails, rather than lift them up and put the weight on the scale and put them into the scale, just balanced nicely, then wrap them up, so you could serve 4 people with a pound of nails while you were serving one, see?

Q: So the nails would be wrapped in brown paper?

No, they would only be wrapped in newspaper. He was always very cost conscious. Anything that was cheap and unimportant, got wrapped in newspaper. But anything, like anybody bought 2 or 3 cups and saucers, or stuff like that, or a gallon of paint, or a few tins of paint, that would all be wrapped in brown paper. We had it in various thicknesses, you would have to have a heavier paper for heavier articles. And that's the way business was conducted and that's what I did. And then the longer I worked there the more little responsibilities that were thrust on me, such as making sure that there was enough brown paper and string and that sort of thing, they were the early things. I had to ring up and order them.

Q: Do you remember the first time you ever used a phone?

No, I don't. But that would have been in that shop, and there was nothing mechanical about it in those days, you just lifted up the phone and there was a manual exchange, Hunters Hill exchange did it, and our number was Hunter 130. And you just lifted it up and you would hear 'Hunter'. "Would you give me such and such a number please?" "Wait a moment".

Q: Did you have to wind a handle?

Yes. You wound the handle before you lifted the thing. Give a few good turns. And if they didn't answer straight away, it was always a good idea to wait because if you hung up and rang it again it would be ringing in their ears and were probably very, very busy. They only had one pair of hands and somebody might be a lunch or something or other. A lot of the times we would ring up to order something - we even used to order a lot of things from Anthony Horderns, for instance, sheet glass. Until we used to stock our own sheet glass, and even after we had our own stocks, sometimes there would be an odd size or an odd type of glass we would want and you would ring Anthony Horderns because they had a daily delivery. And you ring it up today and you would have it tomorrow morning. So you would ring up and you would ring up and the girl would say "number please?". "City 9440 please". That was Anthony Horderns' number. And that was the exchange in the City. So she would get on to City and ask for 9440 and they would plug in and she would plug in and away we'd go, you see? So working a phone, probably that's why I don't remember the first time I did it, because working a phone was so straighforward, you just picked it up and gave the handle a bit of a twirl and everything was done for you. No, there are no early recollections of that whatsoever.

Q: You mentioned paint based on linseed oil before, I wonder if you had direct -

Yes, as a matter of fact Bill Meggitt and I, now I haven't seen him for 2 or 3 months, Bill and I have been friends for many, many years. There were 3 main suppliers of linseed oil, there was Barnes' - I don't know whether they bought their oil from somebody else and just packed it - there was Meggitt's Limited in Parramatta and Harold Meggitt, used to call their oil Halmeg. That was the oil that was made down at Rock End. And the yard supervisor was a chap called McGillicuddy. He and dad were good mates. I remember Meggitt's very well and with a great deal of fondness too. I have known and liked Bill for many, many years. His wife used to be a lovely piano player.

Bill Meggitt I might add, had the most wonderful train sets. His house was elevated, he lived in an old home down at Hunters Hill and underneath the house, it was quite high, he had these train lines and beautifully made. Bill was no mean engineering genius and a lot of the trains were actually hand made, the engines and everything. Big ones, not tiny little things about this big, but a locomotive of about that size. You can imagine a big house, all underneath, how many hundreds of yards of train lines there were. But that's just an aside on Bill Meggitt himself.

Q: As an adult, you don't mean when he was a child?

Oh, no, I didn't know him as a child, I only knew him through business. But having been to his house at times and admired this train set. I mean to say we are all kids at heart when it comes to a train set, you know.

Q: You mentioned to me last week that during this depression period you were lucky to have employment the whole time. Did they have to put anybody off at Clem Weil's shop?

No, nobody was put off. There was only Clem Weil himself, his wife used to come up on Friday nights and Saturday mornings and one of his brothers-in-law used to come down Saturday mornings and Friday nights, and there was a girl worked there too. She worked amongst the china. Most of the china and crockery that we sold, was utilitarian stuff. We did have a showcase in the front with some nice pieces of crystal and Royal Doulton and Royal Worcester, because, for instance, Dr. Bulteau was a great collecter of Royal Worcester and he would come up and see a nice piece there. That was a big sale! Something worth about ten pounds.

There was nobody put off, but I will say that we worked pretty hard. For instance, we had 2 big windows and your windows were silent salesmen, actually. All your window dressing had to be done at night so you worked nights - not every night - as well as days. It would take a night to dress a window. I paid my own way and learnt ticket writing from one of the local sign writers. I used to go once a week. So that I used to do all the ticket writing for the windows.

Q: When you were window dressing, would you get overtime for that?

Oh no! As a matter of fact, for a couple of years I didn't even get a rise. He was quite straightforward about it. He said "Now the business just can't afford it". And I never queried that because I realised things were not too good. Because having seen all the people out of work I didn't want to be out of work. I would have worked for very little to keep it a job. I did go for perhaps 2 years without a pay rise.

He was a very generous man in many ways. Like at Christmas time, even in the depression he always gave me ten pounds. Now, that was probably about 2 or 3 weeks wages, you see. An immediately I used to go across to Jack Fitzsimmons where the Health Food place is now, he was the shoe fellow, and always used to buy myself a new pair of shoes for about 25 shillings. For about one pound five shillings, or one pound ten, you would get a really slap-up flash pair of shoes. That was my one extravagance, because other than that I only got 3 or 4 shillings pocket money and mum used to have the rest to help along with the board and all that sort of thing.

Q: So you paid the bulk of your pay to your mother?

Oh, yes. That was one thing I do remember. I remember taking my first week's pay home to my mother and giving it to her. I was as proud as punch. Because you didn't get it in a pay envelope, you used to just put it in a ten shilling note and wrap up 2/6d. in that, 12/6d. that was the week's pay - $1.25.

Q: You gave her it all and she gave you some back?

Yes, and there was no thought on my part, or on anybody else's part I suppose in those days as to how much you should get. You gave your pay to mum and you took whatever mum gave you.

Q: Because you were only a kid, because you were only 15 weren't you?

That's right. And mum kept me. She kept me tidily and amply dressed.

Q: So she would still buy your clothes?

Oh, yes. She completely supported me and what pocket money I got I could buy ice creams or go to the pictures or throw it down the gutter or do anything I liked with it. But, then of course, on the other hand, I used to do a few jobs here and there perhaps on a Sunday or Saturday afternoon and pick up a few bob. I was always handy with my hands. For instance, a neighbour wanted a new letterbox, and I made him a new letterbox. I think I got a shilling for that above the cost of the material.

But you could always make an extra few bob if you wanted to, as you could today if you wanted to.

Q: There was no thought of giving your pay to your father, it was your mother - traditional?

Oh no, in our house anyway, mum always was the financial - I don't know how she and dad, they must have had some arrangement and it never even occurred to me to wonder what it was. But mum used to pay all the bills, do all the shopping and used to pay the gas man who used to come round. She used to get stuff on I suppose what you would call hire purchase today, but it used to be cash orders in those days. There was one company called the Australian Cash Order Company and Murdochs and Horderns and all the places used to take them. The cash order man used to come round every week. His name was Mr. Hastie, lived down in Sunnyside Street. Mum might say "could I have a cash order for one pound ten, Mr. Hastie". And, say you got a cash order for a pound, you paid a shilling down and then you paid a shilling a week until it was paid off. So, 5 months I think it used to take to pay a pound off at a shilling a week. So that actually you paid a shilling in the pound so that was 5% in 5 months so it was about 12.5% per year was the interest rate you were paying which wasn't too bad considering that the man came round, wrote out the order. Then you could take that order into Murdoch's and she could buy me a coat or probably could get me a pair of pants and a coat for 30/-.

Q: Now, I just don't quite understand that. You would be paying the money to Mr Hastie and you would have credit at one of these major stores?

Yes, he would get out his book and write out a cash order and that was a slip of paper that said that the Australian Cash Order Company had issued credit of one pound ten to Mrs Mashford. And mum would go to Murdochs and she might spend a pound of it.

Q: And she would be paying Mr Hastie off?

Yes. And she had 10/- she could spend somewhere else. But they didn't give you the money they actually gave you like a cheque or an authority to purchase. And then he would come round every week and she would pay him 1/6d if it was one pound ten, or a shilling if it was a pound.

Most women in her circumstances used to take out an insurance policy on their children payable perhaps when they were 14 or maybe when they were 21, which meant that at 14 they were going to leave school - a lot of people left school at 14, increased to 15 in later years - and they might need to be outfitted for a new job, might have to work in a bank where clothing would be more up market, or 21 for their 21st birthday. Because they just couldn't afford, with the wages that people were getting then, to splash out on a 21st birthday and wouldn't' dream of going into debt for it. So they took out insurance policies. And it might have been, for instance, for 21, you'd pay perhaps 6d. per week and the man from the AMP would come round every week and get his 6d. or 1/6d or 2/- or whatever it was. So there was a lot of

business done door to door like that. And the women didn't have to get out so much and there wasn't the hassle of going and paying off the credit, going to the shop every so often and paying your bill. The man came round and he picked it up.

Q: There was very limited private transport of course?

Yes, in one way. See you lived in Ross Street and there was a tram every 10 minutes into the city. So actually the public transport was a damn sight better those days than it is today. You could go from Gladesville to the Railway, because a lot of shops were centered round there - Bon Marshe was one of the big shops there - and the tram used to take half an hour to get there, or three quarters of an hour to get to the Quay. It was 5d. to the Railway and 6d. to the Quay. Well, it would take you three quarters of an hour to get to the Quay now from Gladesville and perhaps, at the best, a bus every 15 minutes. No transport was very good.

Q: And also, has anybody told you about the parlour coaches? It's been mentioned but if you would like to tell me about them.

Down next to Pye's chemist shop - it's Pye's the optician now - then there is a chemist shop next to it which was also Pye's, well there was a vacant block between them and a butcher's shop that was there. Eddie Batiste's butcher's shop. And that's where the parlour coaches used to pull up. Now, parlour coaches were like the big old charabancs they used to have up at the Mountains to take people out. They were just like a big open car, with seats like a bus, only built like a motor car, with no hood or anything on it. And you'd get in there and sit in there, and it rained, well you got wet. But they used to scoot into town in about, I suppose, round about 20 minutes or less. A lot of people used to travel in those. I think there were about 3 or 4 and most of them were Rios and I really think that what is now the North and Western bus lines, they started off with all Rio buses and I have it behind my mind that in those days, perhaps those parlour coaches were actually started by the Rio company who sold the vehicles. They might have franchised it out to them or they might have bought them and paid it off, but just a bit after that, the first time we had these private buses in any size, they were all Rio buses. But the early buses that we had, if that is of any interest, we had a bus going to Meadowbank from Gladesville and we had another bus going from Gladesville down to Woolwich, a little black and white bus.

Q: You would probably remember when buses first came in?

Yes. Going right back to I suppose even in the early depression these parlour coaches started going. A chap named Bruce started a little bus line down to Woolwich wharf to meet the ferries. And I think possibly, because they were exactly the same bus, he was the one that started the run from Wharf Road and Victoria Road and they used to go down along Morrison Road to Meadowbank Station and back that way.

Q: I wanted to ask you more about the impact of the depression. Firstly, if it had an impact at all on your immediate family and secondly, what you saw in the general community generally, other things that you saw.

Well, it didn't have any impact on our family as such because dad was a postman and he was never out of work, although postmen in those days were probably the lowest paid of all public servants and they still had to provide their own boots and all that sort of thing, but they did get a uniform. No, dad was never out of work and I was never out of work so mum was fortunate in that way because I had 2 sisters coming along after, one was born in 1919 and the other in 1921. So when I was 14 my eldest sister was 8 so they were coming along up. In the depression she would have been 10 or 12. But no, we didn't experience any hardship that you could call hardship in those days. But there was a lot of hardship ins the area.

Q: Now, you were a teenager by that stage, what impressed you at that time, what do you remember seeing and hearing yourself?

A lot of things. Now, firstly, friends of mine that had bought themselves a motor bike on time payment, 2 in particular who I was close friends with when I was about 16 or so, because they would have had to be 16 to have a licence. The banks closed and you couldn't go and draw money out of the bank to pay your bike off, so you couldn't pay for your bike and so they used to foreclose on them and take them. One particular chap that I went to school with, wasn't a particular friend, but I knew him pretty well, he had his bike hidden in another friends place and he reported it stolen! So that was just a write-off for the finance company. He maintained that it was stolen and nobody could prove it wasn't. Eventually of course, it was all forgotten and when all the dust settled down in after years he still had his bike. He is dead and gone now.

And I suppose there were a few people like that that felt that they unjustly dealt with because they did have the money and they did pay while they could, but the money was in the bank. And this particular one that I mentioned, he even went to them when he couldn't pay and he said "look, what I'll do, I will sign a release to you each week or each month" - at a stage he had worked for somebody, might have been a lawyer or an accountant or something, or his father might have been, I don't know, but he seemed to know his way around that sort of thing - he said "I'll sign a release on my bank account, or I'll sign a withdrawal for you every week or every month, and when the bank starts operating the money is there" and they wouldn't play ball. So he thought "All right, I'll fix you". So next week his bike got stolen and they got nothing. Which I thought was poetic justice and he was trying to be honest. So that was one aspect and that was a very difficult time for a lot of very honest, good people who actually had been saving and who had money in the bank and always paid their way and yet they couldn't get their money out of the bank.

And of course, to get the dole in those days you could not have any money. You couldn't own a motor car and get the dole. Rightly it was said too, "Well you will just have to sell your car if you want to eat". And people accepted it. I mean, a lot of people wouldn't even go for the dole, they would sell their car, they would sell everything, half their furniture. People were basically very honest and proud in those days. But you couldn't get any form of financial relief whilst you had a saleable asset. And that should be it today.

Q: Except your home?

Oh, no, it wasn't the rule, your home was something. In short, your home you were a bit dicey about too, because a big percentage of people in their own homes, they were paying them off. When they were paying homes off they might have had to take out some form of insurance against being unemployed. My parents weren't hurt that way because they never owned their home. They always paid rent. That was the thing, most people couldn't afford to buy a home. My father could never afford to buy a house, so they paid rent and they lived in the same house for many, many years.

Q: Do you remember any specific examples of seeing people actually selling their furniture or perhaps being evicted from a house?

I don't remember anybody being evicted but I do remember people selling bits and pieces out of the house. For instance, there was a lady that lived in Tennyson, and I say lady advisedly, it's not a term I use very loosely, a Miss Flockton. She was the dearest old soul, very, very talented. A wonderful painter of bird life. Her father was a member of the Royal Academy or something, and that was THE Association, if you could write RA after your name. That was the highest honour you could have as being an artist. It was based in England of course. And she used to come up to Clem Weil every so often, poor old soul, and sell him a picture and he bought some of the most beautiful. I remember one was a blue wren sitting on its nest and it was absolutely gorgeous. And all her paintings were like that. And she used to sell them and perhaps he might pay. He wouldn't beat her down or anything like that. He would always pay a fair price if he could afford it. And he might pay her five pounds for that sort of thing. Today they would be worth a lot of money. Of course he is dead and gone and so is his wife.

Q: Did he collected them or re-sell them?

No, he only bought them to put them in his own home. We didn't sell anything like that at all. So I do remember that instance and I do remember other instances, not so much the things being sold, but as the depression lifted, I remember people coming and buying a dinner set to replace one that they had sold during the depression. When the husband got a bit of work they started to buy a few things, because up till then they just lived hand to mouth on the least they could get away with.

But there was a lot of self-help in those days. For instance the RSL, and this is the only mistake that I can find in the book.

Q: Are you talking about the History of the Gladesville RSL book?

Yes, the local diggers not the RSL, just a group of local diggers decided to start a fruit and vegetable stall and that was a little stall erected on the footpath, just 20-30 yards along from us towards the school. It wasn't a shop it was just like a glorified fruit barrow that you would see today, and they used to stock it with stuff out of their gardens. Some of them might have chooks, some might grow cabbages and whatever they had over and above what they actually ate they would sell. And sometimes they got a bit of kitty and if they didn't have something the might be able buy something and re-sell it and that sort of thing. And that went for many years and that worked very well except that one particular chap working there - they used to take turns to work, each had a different day

Q: And did the proceeds go towards themselves or to people in need?

No, that was for themselves. And not only that but if any of their diggers were in a bit of need they usually got a bit of free fruit and vegetables as well. But that didn't extend to the general community, because there was only perhaps about 20 of them in this little circle. But I know one of them did get away with a few bob and I think the RSL backed them to an extent to starting them up, perhaps backed them financially. But anyway somebody got away with a bit and never recouped, but it does mention it in the book that all was forgotten after the next war came and that sort of thing. But he sort of disappeared from the district.

In the book it says Hunters Hill Council assisted them in getting, it wasn't Hunters Hill Council, it was in Ryde Municipality. So I don't know whether Hunters Hill Council gave them money, but I'm more inclined to think that Ryde Council gave them permission to have a stall on the footpath. So credit to Ryde Council for that.

Then, of course, there were the business people themselves. They used to do a lot of good in that way too and I remember quite well. One of my duties too, I might go back a bit, was to deliver goods that could be carried by one person. We had a big basket about that round with a handle over the top, very strongly constructed and all the goods used to go in there and I used to put my arms through and I used to lug it out and deliver it to Mrs Jones or whatever. Sometimes I would have to walk a mile there and a mile back. And I remember that basket on many occasions, Clem would go along to the diggers stall with, say, a couple of shillings and get a couple of shillings worth of spuds and onions and a bit of carrot and whatever would go to make a good soup or something like that and I would go up to Jack Wilson's and he would shot in a couple of sheep's heads, with the brains out of course. You would be surprised how much meat there is on a sheep's head, on the cheeks and that sort of thing. That, all put into a big pot, made a big ---- of course a lot

of people that these oval boilers in those days, it was a cast-iron oval boiler, that was an essential part of a woman's cooking apparatus. Used to boil up the Christmas puddings in them. And that would make a boiler of very rich, nourishing broth, thick with vegetables. Of course the sheep's heads wouldn't have any wool or anything on them, but they were all boiled right down the bare bone. It was very rich. As a matter of fact, many a time mum made soup with sheep's heads. In that way the locals were assisted.

Q: Did they have a soup kitchen, do you mean?

No, Mrs Jones might have 10 kids and he'd be out of work or he might have taken off looking for work in the country and never got any. But anybody that was in real need. Everybody knew. I'd be the one to deliver that. So I actually knew -

Q: Deliver the soup, oh, you mean the ingredients?

All the ingredients went into the basket and I delivered it to Mrs Jones and that sort of thing. And I've seen women actually cry to see such a wonderful profusion of food in one thing. Perhaps there would be a loaf of bread in it. I would go down to old Jimmy Walsh's and he would probably have some bread that was left over from yesterday, or the day before. Because that didn't matter. I still prefer stale bread to fresh bread as far as that is concerned. There would probably be half a loaf of bread there, or a loaf of bread. There was very little in the way of groceries sent out like that because the grocers were pretty strapped themselves. They had more people owing them money than you could poke a stick at. And they didn't cut anybody's credit until they just couldn't afford to give them any more credit because they had to live and they had to pay for their stock when it came in.

Then there was the Reverend H.G.J. Howe, he was the Anglican Minister in those days and a wonderful man. He was a Christian in every sense of the word. A little bit on the narrow-minded side. He had a daughter Cecily. I think she married a Dr. Carmen, many years later up at Ryde. She was a lovely girl, but he would never let Cecily go to the pictures. There was one picture that came on, I forget what it was, it was a semi-educational one, it might have been For The Term of His Natural Life, or something, and she was allowed to go with one of the parishioners. It was a big day in her life. Cecily used to go to the Sydney Church of England Girl's Grammar School, SCEGGS, and she used to get the same tram as I got and the rest of us that used to go in, a few from SCEGGS and a few from Tech High, always used to get the 4 minutes to 8 tram in the morning.

Old Mr Howe, he used to give a little ticket worth 2/- out of his own stipend. He had an arrangement with Mr Ellis, Ted Ellis. I have mentioned my mother's bosom friend Mrs Ellis, and Ted was dad's old best mate. And Ted managed Derrins, the grocers shop. It was just across the road practically, from the Church of England. The Reverend Howe used to give them a little voucher about twice as big as a tram ticket, 2/- and they had to go and give it to Mr Ellis. And Mr Ellis would give them 2/- worth, perhaps a little bit more, of

whatever they wanted. It might be a shilling's worth of butter and a shilling's worth of flour, or something like that. And that was the general spirit. Most people that could afford it, and perhaps those who couldn't - I don't suppose the Reverend Howe could really afford all that. It probably made his budget a little bit tight too. But there were a number of people, his own parishioners, who used to hand out these tickets. And I have no doubt that perhaps the Catholic Church did the same thing. I don't know, and I don't know about the Presbyterian Church, my church. I don't think our minister would have been giving any because he had a tribe of kids himself and he wasn't overpaid anyway, that was the Reverend Pendleton Stewart. So he couldn't have possibly afforded it.

Then there was work for the dole. They used to call it unemployed relief work. Jack Lang started that and everybody working paid unemployed relief tax. That was 2/- in the pound. If you got two pounds a week, you paid 4/- tax. And that went to pay people. I think they got 2 days work a week. I don't know whether you know that the big brick Tarban Creek drain down here. That was built by unemployed relief.

Q: Do you actually remember seeing men doing this sort of work.

Oh, yes, sure. I remember it quite well. And that big drain, wasn't concreted, it was built with bricks and so that added a great deal to the local brickyards, because they would have provided the bricks. I am sure they wouldn't have come from an outside brickyard. I am sure we would have heard if it didn't (come from the local brickyard). And there were many thousands of bricks there.

That, just for interest sake, was actually part of Tarban Creek. Tarban Creek originally was tidal right up to, I don't know whether you know Bateman's Road? No you probably don't. Gladesville Road. There's a Pilkington's Bridge there, well if you went straight across Ryde Road from here and down Augustine Street, at the foot of Augustine Street, that's where Tarban Creek was tidal, right up to there. But then they built a dam in it to catch water for the mental hospital and that stopped the tidal water. The creek started up behind the drill hall and so the fresh water that came down from there, it was dammed up and used at the hospital.

Q: But that's not telling you about the depression, is it?

Generally you are saying that there was an overall sympathetic attitude to people. For example, when the tax was brought in to pay for the unemployed relief work, did you ever hear any negative comments from people who were in work?

No, we were all so glad to have a job. As far as I was concerned, I was quite happy about it, although it probably would have impinged on mum rather than me, because I used to take my money home and give it to mum. I just got pocket money up till I was 17, I think before I handled my own finances. No, I was quite happy because I had so many friends that were out of work. The big

negative part, the biggest minus part of the depression in our area was the people that took advantage of it.

Q: How do you mean took advantage?

Well, I will give you an instance. There were 3 builders that I know of, who were never greatly thought of, one of them was not an Australian he was of another nationality, but had accumulated a lot of money by trading. He built a number of houses around Gladesville, as did 2 others, and they would say to ----- now 2 of my friends in particular were carpenters. And the arrangement was that if you want the job you have got to, what they used to call 'fit a house out'. Now, in fitting out a house, you put in all the architraves around the windows, hung the doors and put all the architraves and timberwork round the doors, all the skirting boards. All the rooms in those days had a picture rail and in the lounge room there was what they called a plate rack. It was little shelf with fancy bits of moulding that you put ornamental plates and things on in the house. Now that was quite a bit of work for one man. And in those days, the timber didn't come from the timber yard and get nailed up like it does today. In those days the timber came from the timber yard, the carpenter had a long plank on a couple of trestles and he would cut the architrave, then he would plane it to get the milling marks out of it and then sandpaper it. Because when the painter came, he didn't want to be sandpapering something smooth, because if the finish wasn't nice he didn't get paid. One tradesman worked in with the other. And they were screwed down to the extent that this friend of mine, Len, he used to get one pound ten shillings and have to provide his own nails to do all that work on a house. And if he didn't like it, well then somebody else would take it. That created quite a lot of resentment. There was this man and 2 others who did take advantage of it to my certain knowledge.

For instance, another friend of mine who was a painter. He had to paint all of the ceilings and down to the picture rail, kalsomine it, all through the house and he got one pound ten for that and had to provide all his own kalsomine. Kalsomine was 2/6 a packet and it would take, possibly, skimping you might get away with 2 packets, but it would probably take 3 packets. So he painted all that, say 5 ceilings and the walls down to the picture rails for, say one pound five, one pound two and six. And if he didn't do it well, too bad, give it to somebody else. And they got away with shoddy work.

And of course things were very cheap. Electricity had been available for a while, but, I was about 15 I'd say, before we got electricity into the house. We always had gas lamps. And you could never find a jolly match to light the darned thing. There were always matches alongside the gas stove, but that was a no-no. When mum wanted to use the stove, her matches had to be there.

Then she had saved up enough money to get the electricity put onto the house and Harvey Thomas the local electrician put the electricity on. One light hung down on a cord with a globe in and no shade and pull switches, not let in or anything like that, it was a fairly cheap job, two pound ten, that's $5 to connect the electricity to the house.

So in that way the depression kept prices down. And I remember quite well, that for years in the depression, nothing ever went up. A gallon of Bergers paint was a pound. And I can quote you prices now, paintbrushes and things that I still remember, mainly because they never went up.

Q: Do you ever remember prices dropping at all?

No. I don't remember the prices dropping. I do remember cases in some of the trades people, like the baker and that. Old Jimmy Walsh, if you were out of work he'd sell you a loaf of bread for 3d. and I think the normal price was 4d. I think some of the milkmen even forgot to charge, or made it pretty cheap. If a woman wanted half a pint and she had about 3 kids, she would usually get a pint and charge for half a price. But no, I don't remember actually prices coming down. I must say that.

Q: So, during these depression years, you were a teenager, you had your job, did you get a chance to get out and about and enjoy yourself much.

Oh, yes, we played tennis.

Q: There were cheap things you could do?

Oh, yes. There was a woman down the bottom of our street had a tennis court in her back yard. Mrs. Harl. We all got together and I think she used to let us have the tennis court for the weekend for perhaps 7/6 or some amount of money like that. We started up a little tennis club, we had 8 boys and 4 girls. We might have paid 9d a week or something like that. We had to buy tennis balls of course, but we usually used to get those second hand. One of the chaps knew somebody out at White City. They used to buy the balls second hand out there. You could buy a good tennis ball for 6d. or something like that.

We played tennis, you could go to the pictures. You could get into the pictures for a shilling. So if you had 3 shillings a week pocket money you could play tennis, you could go to the pictures once a week. There were dances held in various places. Where that hardware store is on the corner of Cambridge Street now, that had a big hall at the top of it. Peter Duffy had a produce store and at Duffy's hall on the top, there used to be a dance there every Saturday night. That was a shilling.

Q: Did you like dancing?

No. It was something that I never cottoned onto for some reason or other. There was no reason that I didn't like it, but I had so many other things to do. Most of my friends were male friends. I was very keen from a young kid on shooting. It has been my great love, all my life, shooting and firearms and that sort of thing. My father took me in hand, when he cut down an old daisy air gun, had to cut down the stock of it so I could use. So that was a fairly male dominated sport.

Q: Where did you go shooting?

We used to go out into any fairly big area of bushland, we'd shoot. We used to shoot mainly at tins and things.

Q: So, not rabbits?

There weren't many rabbits around here so much. But, later on, when we could get about, yes. But when I was 17, for instance, I joined the 51st Battalion Militia. That was 1930. I naturally joined their Militia Rifle Club and every Saturday afternoon, that's where one shilling of my pay went, we used to all throw in a bob each, and I forget his name now, used to live on the corner of Cambridge Street, he used to take us out in his lorry to Long Bay Rifle Range. They call it Anzac Rifle Range, but its not Anzac Rifle Range at all. It was Long Bay. And we used to shoot out there every Saturday afternoon. There was some pretty hot competition out there.

Q: You are not talking about clay pigeon shooting now are you?

Oh, no, military rifle shooting, 303s. We shot at targets and it was a very well organised sport. It was run under the Militia Forces Rifle Clubs Union and there was inter-unit shooting and there were 3 battalions in a brigade for instance and there were 6 blokes in the brigade team and I was fortunate enough to be a member of the champion brigade team, all the brigades, 6 of us from various battalions were the champions.

Q: So you were a pretty good shot obviously?

In all modesty, I must say yes, I was. That cup over there, that silver cup, (I've got rid of all the rest) but that's my proudest possession. Because there were different types of competition, see. There was application where you sat down and took your time and you shot away, then there was another one, rapid fire, and then there was snap shooting. Well, rapid fire, you got down, you loaded 10 rounds in and you got them off as quick as you could and with that I got a possible. I got 50 out of 50 and that got me that cup. It's the only shooting trophy that I ever kept. But I reckon I earned that.

Q: So you didn't do clay pigeon shooting?

With shot guns. No, I never did clay pigeon shooting because as far as we were concerned, anybody that used a shotgun to shoot something they were beyond the pale. I know you get a lot of arguments there. But we reckoned that a good shot, you shot what you aimed at with a piece of solid shot, and if you couldn't hit it, well, this scatter shot business well that was for the mugs. Well, not only that, but if you shot rabbits like that, you brought a rabbit home that was full of pellets.

When we got to the age of about 18, one of my friends had a motor bike and I had by then bought an old motor bike, falling to pieces and I worked on it for about a year and I got it going pretty well. I bought it for 2 pound 10. We used to go away shooting rabbits then. We might go up to almost as far as Oberon. It was very cold up there, this is in the winter we used to do this. We used to go up there and we used to shoot the rabbits. We would bring perhaps 3 or 4 home to eat. But we used to go up for the skins. We used to sell them by the pound, that's how they used to buy the rabbit skins. There was a furrier lived not far from use. Occasionally you would get 3 skins to the pound. If you told anybody that today, they'd say, well they were beautiful skins. Big, heavy, thickly furred skins, because it was so cold up there. Even some of the sheep used to die of the cold. So we used to do quite well. I'd knock off Saturday at lunch time. We'd hare off up there. It would take us about 3-3.5 hours to get up there. Put a tarp over the 2 bikes and a few bags on the ground, we'd sleep on that. We didn't have a tent or anything. We would get the odd fox. That added considerably to our ---- my wife still got a fox fur that I shot when I was courting her.

So we actually turned sporting shooting. And by the way, I have never ever shot a native animal. Rabbits, foxes, pigs and goats. I reckon if anybody couldn't get enough sport out of those they were hard to please. And targets. I joined the Concord Rifle Club years later and went up shooting at Anzac Range. We used to ride our bikes up there Saturday afternoons. So I was shooting right up till the war started.

Q: When you were young was it quite acceptable to shoot native animals?

Yes, nobody cared. You could shoot kangaroos and wallabies. But, I went away with a couple of chaps once and they shot a couple of kangaroos. They wanted the skins, they skinned them. And when I saw that poor jolly thing laying there with those big eyes looking up, dead of course, I thought "gee I couldn't shoot you", and I never, ever shot a native animal. I can honestly say that.

I did a lot of shooting as I got older, and there were farmers, who once they knew you didn't shoot at everything that moved, they liked you to come, they would give you permission, particularly with pigs. Pigs were a big problem with them, and some of the pigs in those days had great big tusks and they were dangerous. They would tear you to pieces and so you were very careful who you went shooting with because one always covered the other one's back. You never both shot at the one pig.

Two of us used to go down to a place between Bowral and the coast, a dairying place. They were infested with goats.

Q: Nowra?

No, this was between Bowral and Nowra. Robertson. There used to be a cheese factory there. The hills were alive with goats. Of course we only used to shoot them. We didn't shoot them for their skins, because they used to stink. Goats are terrible, particularly a billy. The same as a dog fox. You'd shoot a dog fox but you'd never skin him. They always ponged.

That's how we went on through the depression. We used to make a nice little nest egg and so we'd save enough up and we'd sell the bike that we'd done up and buy a bit better bike and do it up. We used to always buy wrecks and do them up. We went up the scale.

Q: Did you ever go out to North Ryde where they had the bike racing.

No, I didn't know there was bike racing at North Ryde. I have just forgotten exactly when it was.

It could have been. The only time I used to go out, and this wasn't an organised thing, but out at French's Forest there was a little dirt track out there and we used to go out there, we didn't have ---- we'd just our own bangers, that's all and we used to tootle round there. A lot of us had a spare front wheel with a little narrow tyre on it so that you could corner better on that and because you were raised up a bit, that was a bit of an advantage. I was never actually mad on bike racing although I actually every opportunity, because Frank Arthur who ran the Empire Speedways, that was the speedway out at the Showground, I knew Frank well and I knew all the greats of the speedway. I used to go out there and into the pits and I knew Dick Case and all those fellows, but I never had any desire to do that. I liked to get into what we used to have what we used to call "scrambles". It's cross country stuff now but we used to have scrambles, but only normal bikes, there were no special cross country bikes or anything like that. I used to go in a few of those.

Q: What brands, types of bikes did you get?

Oh, there was a wonderful variety of bikes, marvelous! Particularly amongst the English bikes. There were more bikes and brands than you could poke a stick at. I suppose the cheapest of course were the 2-strokes. Now, people by the name of Velocette used to make a 2-stroke. P&R Williams in Wentworth Avenue were the agent for them and then Velocette made the 4-stroke bikes up to some of the racing bikes. There were Nortons, Velocettes, Aerials, Excelsiors, and a variety of bikes like OK-Supreme, I just can't think of them all at the moment. BSAs, Royal Enfields and then there was a Scot Squirrell which was a 3-cylinder 2-stroke and it was like a swarm of bees. It used to have a big square radiator out the front of it to cool it and it used to go! There were only a few of those about. The Harley Davidsons, of course and Indians, they were American bikes. Last bike I owned was a Harley Davidson actually.

Q: Was that a status symbol then?

No, look these bikies today - it was a different attitude. Now, we used to even run competitions amongst ourselves, not in a organised club, to see who could take their back wheel off and change the tyre and put a new tube on, or who could pull the engine down and de-carbonise and grind the valves and get it together again and all this sort of thing. There used to be quite a few of them about that lairised with a new bike, they probably only paid about five pound deposit on it, would never own it, but they were the ones that had the flashest bikes. They used to come up the main road, ride up down, stand at Wilson's corner there and everybody would gather round and admire the new bike. We used to call them block sprinters. They would take off and go round the block and back again and that was as far as they ever rode their bikes, never went up the bush or did anything with them.

So there was a great variety of wonderful bikes and I was lucky enough, when I first joined up I was in a militia Signal Unit, we went en masse over and formed this Unit, and I was in the Dispatch Riders' Section, but then I was grabbed by a school that taught driving and maintenance, everything to do with motor cycles, vehicles, bren gun carriers and that and they could take anybody they wanted from any unit. So I went to them and there were no army bikes then and all the bikes were being what they called "impressed" and they only took bikes that had been sold in, say the last 2 years and some of the poor blokes, I think the biggest price anybody ever got was forty pounds. Now you can just imagine if you had bought a nice new Aerial or a nice Norton or something like that and got forty pounds for it, it would break your heart!. Sunbeam was another beautiful bike. But we got a wonderful selection of bikes.

Q: Do you mean they had to give them up to the army?

The army just took them. What they called "impressed". Actually the people that were the victims weren't impressed with the whole thing. They were an impressed vehicle, or "pressed' like the press gangs in the old days. So we got a whole variety of lovely, almost new bikes and of course all the instructors got first pick. Mine was a Velocette. I rode that all the time I was in that particular Unit. That was what we called the elementary school and the next higher up from that was the army schools and I got grabbed up for the 1st Aust. Army School. And then from there I progressed to the Land Headquarters School of Mechanisation as instructor, that was the university! Then they used to send teams all round, not have people coming down to learn about it. They would go to where they were being operated, to the Islands and all round like that, and teach fellows on the spot, especially with all these new amphibious vehicles and amphibious tanks and things like, because nobody had every heard of driving a vehicle through the water. That's as far as the bikes were concerned.

But after all that rather elementary stage, all the army type vehicles started to come in. It wasn't only bikes that were impressed, a lot of people lost their utilities, some lost their cars.

Q: Was this right at the beginning of the war or beginning of the Pacific war?

Pacific War. You see, when the war first started, it was a phony war and I didn't want any part of it because they were only dropping leaflets in Germany and that sort of thing, and then things started to hot up in 1940 and that's when I became involved.

Q: You thought that' when you should?

Oh, well, I had to, yes. With my uncles and that that went before me, you just did it. I was married, it was not too good on a young bride, I don't suppose. I'd only been married a year.

Of course the whole story about the mens' war services, are completely ---- story that's beyond the scope of that we are doing, but if I could just ask you on that point how your wife felt about it at the time.

She was pretty good, she managed well, and we were paying a house off of course. Payments were fairly low in those days and you could get some sort of moratorium. But she managed on the pay I got and I was lucky enough to get promotion reasonably quickly. I finished up as a Warrant Officer which was reasonable pay. It was a bit of a struggle for her. But she worked for Clem Weil for a while.

Q: Inherited your job?

Well, not my job actually, but she worked in the shop. There were a few men still about. The chap that took my job, he stayed in my job there until about, it was very obvious that the war was going to finish, so he hurriedly joined the air force so he wouldn't lose out onto his entitlements, which was a bit poor. Anyway that's another story.

Q: Now, just going back to the 30's, you are about the age I think of the infamous 40 Thieves I hear mentioned all the time in Ryde.

Yes I remember the 40 Thieves.

Q: Do you? I was just wondering were you a member of the 40 Thieves.

No, they were a lot of larrikins. There were various gangs around in those days. There was another gang call the Arabs. I think they came from Drummoyne or that way, and the Arabs and the 40 Thieves they used to do battle together. The Arabs might go up to Ryde. And they would pull palings off the fences with the nails in them and they would get into each other like that. As far as we were concerned down here, the normal people weren't worried too much about them because they used to fight amongst themselves, more for the sake of it than anything else. I don't remember them actually doing any physical damage to property. They may have in Ryde, mind you, I wouldn't know. But there were a few members of them from Gladesville and one particular instance I remember well my mother telling me, because mum and Mrs Ellis, they used to go to the pictures, that was their treat. They went to the pictures every Saturday night.

Q: Your dad didn't go with Mr Ellis?

No, they stayed home and minded the kids. That was the girls' night out. She'd walk home with mum and then dad would walk her home, he lived a couple of streets away. He would walk with her till she got home, so she wouldn't be walking on her own.

There were half a dozen of these gang members, they used to stand on the footpath a little way away from the picture show and make rude remarks, derogatory remarks to the ladies as they were walking past.

Q: Even to women their mothers' age?

Oh, yes, my mother "oh, fat old tart" all sorts of things like that. Anyway, this went on for a couple of weeks and Gus Bowe made a complaint to the local constabulary.

Q: This is at the Rialto?

No, this is down at Gladesville. Gladesville Picture Show.

Jack Bentley, there was him and one other policeman. Jack Bentley had been heavyweight champion of the Police Force. So they waited on this mob, they lurked in a shop front. And the policemen just stood in the shop front till they started. And then they just walked out and got stuck into them. They flattened the five of them and they stacked them two, then two across, then one across like that. They laid them like logs of wood, dusted their hands and walked away. And they never saw the 40 Thieves again. They never troubled Gladesville.

Q: Were they out of uniform?

No! Oh no, they were on duty. They just walked up and they belted them and that was it.

Q: And your mother saw that?

Oh no, they used to scurry away. No, but it was well known. They were seen. The stack of bodies was seen. It was well known. That used to come up years later. Became a folklore.

Q: One man about your age at Ryde has suggested to me that there was no 40 Thieves. He said he was in a group called the Sunshine Club and that they were a lot of unemployed youths who didn't do any harm to anyone.

Now, he's talking about the depression years. This would probably be before the depression years. But there was definitely the 40 Thieves and there was the other mob, the Arabs. There is no doubt whatsoever.

Q: So have you heard of the Sunshine Club?

Never heard of them, no. That was probably up in Ryde. You see, we were fairly insulated from each other and Ryde was never much of a shopping centre. Until that Ryde Centre was built, Ryde was a big nothing. People used to come from Ryde to Gladesville to shop. Gladesville was a fantastic shopping centre in those days. Nothing now.

Q: Eastwood was good too?

Eastwood was marvellous. Yes. I finished up working at Eastwood. Eastwood was the best shopping centre, this is according to a Bank of New South Wales survey in those days, in a line from Burwood and Strathfield to Gosford. Better than Hornsby.

Q: And what time were they talking about?

This would be in the fifties-sixties era. It was a wonderful amalgam of people it drew its custom from. There were to artisan types from those that worked in Eastwood and the Ryde area, Meadowbank and everything like that and the people were quite well to do people increasingly from Epping and Beecroft, Cheltenham and around those areas. They used to come down to Eastwood. So the shops in Eastwood were able to carry a very, very wide range of goods. You could buy a cup from us, one cup for 4.1/2d. and you could also buy a cup from us say in the early sixties, for a pound. We could sell you a 24 piece Royal Doulton Dinner Set or an 18 piece Japanese dinner set. Eastwood was a marvelous shopping centre. And Gladesville was excellent too. Drummoyne was nothing. People used to come from Drummoyne and Ryde to shop in Gladesville.

Q: So basically you saw a major change in the sixties.

Yes, a big change in the sixties.

Q: Ryde Shopping Centre -

Ryde Shopping Centre and also the development of other shopping centres with the big multi-stores in them that sold meat, people could walk in there and buy almost everything.

See, in Gladesville, in the main road, there were six butchers. Today there is only one. There were 2 produce stores, now there are no produce stores. I don't know what you'd do if you had chooks and you wanted to buy some wheat, pollard and bran and stuff like that. I don't know where you'd go.

We saw very large changes. See after the war, there was a lot of shortages, during the war of course too, and there was a lot of young men coming out of the army wanting to get married or perhaps that had got married during the war and didn't have a house, and the powers that be were very thoughtful in those days, that if you ----

(End of side 7)

A lot of items were terribly hard to get, what they call P.C. items. They were prime cost items and that is when you build a house, your bath, your basin, sink, tubs, all that sort of thing, you were quoted a price for the house and you were allowed so much for P.C. items then you could go and pick whatever you wanted and you could get it as expensive as you liked, but you only got paid to a certain level. They might say "P.C. items one hundred pounds" or whatever it was. If you went the whole hog and got two hundred pounds worth, well you had to pay the extra. So the P.C. items were very difficult to get. Now, for instance, the store in Gladesville.

Q: Now after the war, if I could just clarify this, did you go back to Clem Weils?

Yes I went back there to work. I think our quota for baths, a bath and a hand basin was six a month. There was a lot of racketeering went on. For instance, a bath, a hand basin, a sink and a set of tubs and a copper. Now you could buy the lot of those for about 30 pounds. Now, you could sell as many as you wanted on the black market for a hundred pounds. And a lot of people were doing this. And it made it bad for use because we were very strict. We took our orders. I had an order book. I used to do this myself and used to quote names on my orders and then the invoice would come through from, say, Metters, one pink 5'6" first quality bath order no. so and so, Mr. Jones and that went to Mr. Jones. And so if there was any queries, as there used to be, as a matter of fact there was some bad blood over that unfortunately.

We got a quota of so many bags of cement. So many bundles of water pipe. There was 100 feet in a bundle of water pipe. And everything in the building was strictly quoted and a couple of men who had been friends of my father, one in particular who I had a great deal of affection for, too, he ordered a bath and a basin, he was doing alterations on his house, and after about six months, he started to come in about every week. "How's the bath?" "Hasn't arrived yet, Mr. Thearle". And one day he fronted me and said "Look, I don't believe this". He got real cranky. And I said "Well, I'm sorry but everything that comes in here goes out in its strict order". He said "I'm sure you must be selling them". And I said, "Oh, look, I was going to show you my book and all the invoices covering everything that came into here, but if that's your attitude I don't want to talk to you" and I just turned round and walked away from him. But he would have got his bath and basin in perhaps another 2 or 3 months, but I only had six a month. And you can imagine the young chaps coming out. If I was going to do anything apart from in strict rotation, I would have been giving them to young diggers. I wouldn't have been selling them. There was a bit of bad blood like that, but not a great deal.

Q: Now when you are talking about the black market, how were the black marketeers managing to get the extra supplies?

Through people in shops like ours.

Q: So people in hardware stores would be -

Yes, well that was the big bone of contention, were the people that were selling, particularly some of the very big places -

Q: But if you could only get six a month how could they get more?

Well, you see, now let's say X company, they might have a very, very big business with branches all over the place, and it was very hard for the management to keep an eye on everything and there was all this under the counter business going on and they were faking records and everything like this and of course there was no shortage of people wanting to buy them. They used to come round often. A hundred pounds for a set of P.C. items, quite blatantly. That's how they operated and they made a lot of money.

Q: Mr. Weil and yourself wouldn't have a bar of it?

No, actually I handled all that part of it. By that time he left most of the running of the every day business to me. Oh, no, he wouldn't have been in anything like that at all, he was a very straight laced, honest man. It's a matter of principle. But a lot of it went on.

That's when Jack Peel came to the fore. He was moving his dairy out I think, to Blacktown or somewhere like that, because ground round here was starting to become valuable and he could see the time coming when people wouldn't be allowed to have a dairy in a community like this. So he very generously

offered the whole of his property to be cut up and given to servicemen free of charge.

Q: Was he a wealthy man?

Yes, the Peel family were a wealthy family. They had properties in Queensland and all that sort of thing. He was a very unpretentious man. I don't think he had any family as such, but there were 2 boys, Tommy who was in my class at school, and Alec who was a bit older, they might have been relatives, but he brought those boys up and I think there might have been a girl too.

Q: So he was a bachelor?

No, he was married. Well, the girl might have been his daughter, but he apparently he felt he had an obligation to these 2 lads anyway and he brought them up. Even after they grew up he set them up with a house and that sort of thing. So he was a very, very good and generous man. Most unpretentious, when he walked into the shop he could have been Joe Blow from down the street. He gave this, but by the time Council subdivided them up and the services were provided, they were costing as much, if not more than what some of the fellows could buy elsewhere. They were all balloted and they got to the stage where some of the chaps were saying, "No, I don't want it, I can buy a block of ground cheaper".

I know Ryde Council of that era, deservedly or not, got a bad name for the price that they were putting on the subdivision and provision of services. But I suppose the Gas Company and all that, would provide their own services, they don't charge for that.

Q: It seems strange being able to get land cheaper, perhaps in North Ryde you mean?

Oh, round Gladesville.

Q: It seems strange that the land given to them is still ---- Mr Peel must have been annoyed.

Oh, yes, he was. He was deeply hurt at that I think. Jack Peel had the idea of giving these blokes a free block of ground. Put your house on, there's your ground for nothing. But it didn't work out like that.

Q: And there was no question of any underhand business there anywhere was there?

There were all sorts of rumours floating around about contractors being very well paid to do certain work and all this sort of thing. There were times in Ryde Council when things were very slack. Now, I had a friend in Ryde Council, who was in the works part of it, and every so often they used to take stock, how many mattocks, hoes, crowbars, which they had to do to keep a check on what they had. And they lost a big ten ton roller, a road roller went missing. Now, I don't think it was a mechanised one, it was probably one of these ones you tow behind, but it weighed 10 tons, it was a great big thing, and Ron, who is dead now, anyway, he was my best man, he was laughing his head off one day in the shop. He said "You'd never know, we've lost a 10 ton roller". So somebody must have got it underhand. But I suppose in any big organisation things go on like that. But there were a lot of stories around at the time. But I don't think anybody had sufficient proof to do anything and whether there was any cover up in Council or not, I don't know, and there probably wasn't. Things haven't always been as they should be. For instance, in Champion Road, Tennyson, at one stage the street was paved right up to the corner on which one of the aldermen lived. From Morrison Road up to his place was paved. Little things like that used to go on.

No, as far as the ground was concerned, there were a lot of stories but to my knowledge no single person ever had the finger pointed to them. So that was the story on Jack Peel's ground.

In later years, something came up. As a matter of fact Tommy lived next door for a while, he was a bit of roamer, and his wife of course.

Q: Who was Tommy?

Jack Peel's nephew, one of the boys he raised. I said something about the free ground. I said "I thought you would have got one of those blocks of ground, Tom." and that's when it all came out and the price and everything like that. And I said "By gee, Mr Peel must have been hurt at that" because he was such a generous man otherwise. In the depression, I was telling you about the milk, a family usually got what they needed, not what they could afford to buy. He agreed with me that he was deeply hurt about that business, or rather, deeply disillusioned about it. So that's the story there.

Just comparing it with today, and I know with old fellows nothing is ever as good today as it was in their day, I'm well aware of that. But I just happened to mention, this was brought up last Thursday night when I was giving a talk, and it had never occurred to me till that very moment that in all my life, I never knew what it was to have a bad teacher. Every teacher I had, even at high school, were good teachers. Some of them were hard, but they were all meticulous in their teaching, and not only did they cover all the subjects that they were supposed but they taught kids to think and that is probably the most important duty that a teacher can undertake, is to teach the kids to think. And

even though, even today, when curriculums are different and there are all these sort of strange ways of teaching kids to do things, there is nothing to stop a teacher teaching kids to think.

Q: And yet, you didn't like Sydney Tech High, you got out of there fairly well as soon as you could?

Yes, simply because (a) I had too far to go, (b) I wanted to go to work in the hardware shop and I didn't like Latin. I must say there all teachers were good teachers. Now, you would be lucky today to find, from people I've spoken to, not that I know, to get 2 good teachers in any one school. Now, my eldest daughter, I asked her this, and she's a pretty intelligent woman, she's holds down a very good job and I said to her "How many good teachers did you have at school that you can remember that you really learnt from?" And she said "Two". And she's 55. My grandchildren, my other daughter, went up and was worried about her daughter's spelling. And she spoke to the teacher and she said "Look, Julie's spelling is terrible and what can we do to correct it?" "Oh, don't worry about it, I can't spell either". So what chance have kids got?

END OF PART 2 OF THE INTERVIEW