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## COMMUNITY LIFE

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Oral History –  
An Interview with  
Ron Freeman



## An Interview with Ron Freeman

**Interviewee:** Ron Freeman

**Interviewer:** Pauline Curby

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I was actually born in Ryde, in Leigh Street which is just off Parkes Street, just the back of Council chambers there. I don't know why, I must've probably the midwife I expect. I was born in 1925 and my parents were married in 1923 at St. Johns Church in Cox's Road which is still there to this day opposite Cox's Road shopping mall, next to North Ryde Public School which of course was the only school in the area in those days. My father came from the country and he worked on the trams for some time. He boarded in a house in Cox's Road which was owned by ...the name escapes me for the moment, sorry. He boarded in a house on Cox's Road and he worked on the trams for a little while. He had previously met my mother who lived in Blenheim Road on an orchard, a big orchard that her father owned in Blenheim Road. He previously met her at Nyngan because one of mum's sisters had married Arthur Jardine who had been sent to Nyngan, Warrigal which is just outside Nyngan as an Engineer for Freezing Works there and dad was working there for a little while, while he lived in Nyngan and mum's sister, Prairie, had married Arthur Jardine. She was having her first child and mum apparently went up there to help and while she was there she met dad and later when he came down to Sydney, he renewed that relationship or friendship with her and subsequently they were married in 1923 as I said at St. John's Church. He bought a house in Pittwater Road opposite North Ryde park. One of five houses which were built by a Mr. Markwell who was a master builder and lived down at the end of what was then Allen's Road, now Wicks Road. The property belonged as far as I know to a Mr. Hancock who had a shop on the corner of Magdala Road and Pittwater Road and the houses were built on the northern side of where the old sub-station now stands. The first house was owned by the Day family, the second house by the Cormack's eventually. I forget who owned it originally. Then dad's and dad had a double block and the next block was vacant and then Tyrrell's house and they had a double block and that block was vacant and then there was just a paddock. Then all the way down to the head of Cressy Road where the next house was and that was owned by Mr. Fred White who had an extensive orchard which ran right back to where Gilder Street is now. Those houses were all built by Mr. Markwell and they are still there. All of them, the five of them are still there to this day, so he must have been a great tradesman. When I sold dad's place after he died fifteen year ago, the chap that bought it, whose wife was a friend of mine, was a carpenter by trade.



**Q: That's the house next door to where we are now?**

Yes. He said that all the... there were no nails in all the building. Everything was all mortised which gives you an idea of how the builders operated in those days. As I said all those houses were all built obviously in the early twenties, so they are all going on eighty years old and they have had numerous extensions done to them of course over the years but basically they are the same house that was originally built.

Now dad then got work down at the Clifford Love's down at the mill on the river and he worked there forty three years. We'll talk a little bit about that later. With the house, it was fairly basic, there was a front bedroom and lounge room but it was nice, it had a verandah on the front which the other houses didn't have with a bull-nosed corrugated iron covering and it sort of made it quite attractive. It had two french-like doors that opened out of the bedroom and lounge room onto the verandah. It made it a little bit different from the other houses that Mr. Markwell built. The back was just a...then you had a second bedroom and a dining room and a back verandah which had the bathroom at one end and the kitchen at the other end and a little in-between which had a few chairs and a couch. We had no electricity of course in the days when I grew up out in North Ryde. Electricity didn't come until the mid-thirties and I still have quite a few of the original kerosene lamps that mum and dad had. Some of my early recollections of course are doing my homework in the bedroom that I occupied by kerosene lamp, the light of the kerosene lamp.

**Q: Was it your job to fill them up and clean them?**

No. I think dad used to...I always remember we used to have probably a four gallon drum with a little pump in the middle of it. It had a...it used to... I don't know what they were called...a little pump with a spout, a small spout. We used to use a, sort of a little bottle or something-or-other to pump this but I always remember it used to spurt everywhere. The kerosene used to spurt all over you.

**Q: Can you remember that distinctive smell?**

And the wicks of course were always a problem. You were always trimming wicks on those kerosene lamps to get a nice light. If you didn't have a nice trim wick you'd get an uneven light or you would get a very big one. Of course, if you had too much wick when you used to wind it up and down like that. If you had too much wick you would get a big flare up and the glass of the lamp would get all black and have to be cleaned. Mum used to clean them with...I can remember a...clean them with newspaper, just get a newspaper rolled up and rub the inside of the glass with this newspaper.

And of course, sewerage was something that we only people out here dreamed of. In fact we built here in 1959, 1960 and North Ryde wasn't sewered until about the mid-sixties. That little shed down there that you can



see was the original outside toilet but we got it extended a little bit but if you walk around North Ryde now, all the War Service homes up there were all built in the fifties, you will see that every one of them has got a little outside toilet. So in that regard, North Ryde was... you grew up with a feeling that North Ryde was country, you know, that all the time...if we only knew...all the time it was sitting here six or seven miles from the GPO. It had to, sooner or later, had to be developed to what it is today but in those days because of the fact that there was no electricity to the area and there was no sewerage, you got the impression that it was "Hicksville" and that lasted for quite a while. I think a lot of the original people that lived in North Ryde like my vintage, the Tyrell's, and the Jeffress's, the Reddings and the Sayers and all those people that were my vintage, all felt the same way because if we didn't feel that way, we could've easily... I remember Noel Tyrell who lives up in Cox's Road now who lived in a house next door, he got married just after the War. He was in the Army and in fact stationed in the big camp up here in Green's Bush just up the other side of Blenheim Road and he wanted to built a house after he married there in Cressy Road and there was a big old house there owned by the Witheridges and he wanted to built alongside that. He found out that the person who owned what we called "Green's Bush", which was a big area bordered by Blenheim Road and Cressy Road and finished up in a point right down in what was then Lucknow Road and became Epping Road, was owned by a woman who lived in Harbord and he went down to see her and she said there was no way she was going to sub-divide it but if he was interested he could buy the whole bush, the whole area. He asked just out of curiosity what and she said I'll take a thousand pounds for it and he apparently tried every way he could to...his father was an old "skinflint", Bill Tyrell, he wouldn't give you the smell of an oily rag and he tried everything he could to raise the money but he couldn't so he gave up. But he could have bought that whole area which is basically...it's probably got fifty or so homes on it now, for a thousand pounds. I think none of us did that, I had...when I came out of the Air Force...I had about £ 250 in deferred payable. For £ 250 I could have probably bought half of North...well quite a few properties in North Ryde which today would be worth...but you didn't think that way because it was...we were all brought up on orchards, not brought up on orchards so much but we all visualised the place as being orchards and poultry farms and that sort of a rural area. A rural area right smack bang in the middle of Eastwood, Epping, Ryde, Chatswood - all these places and this little pocket, you know. It was unreal.

Had the railway line been put through here in the early thirties or mid thirties instead of the one from Sutherland to Cronulla then maybe it would have been a different story because I think the railway line created the emphasis for that area between Sutherland and Cronulla, all your Miranda's and Caringbah and all those places. They all kicked on from the fact that they had a railway line but we didn't....we still...we had this Epping Road, oh I'm digressing a little bit, getting back to childhood...



**Q: Can we go back to that. When you say "instead", did you feel at the time that it was an either or situation that if you got your railway, Cronulla people wouldn't get theirs? Is that how politicians talked?**

That's how I've always understood it. My dad talked about it a lot and a lot of the people that lived...you see my grandfather, mum's father, was a fairly influential man in the district. He served three terms on Ryde Council. He had a big orchard up the Blenheim Road. He was President of the P&C and you know all this sort of thing. In fact my mother never worked, she was his social secretary you know but of course he had no money and he was a bit like sort of an old fashioned Alan Bond that spent money that he didn't have all the time, entertaining and living up to this and of course creating more and more problems for his sons and daughters when he went, when he died, but anyway...

He and a lot of others were instrumental in trying to get this because they realised that it would make a helluva...and they always had a little bit of a problem of getting their produce to the markets and that sort of thing because there was no access from here too...you see they used to have to all buy horse and cart the hard way, into Ryde and along Victoria Road and over Gladesville Bridge and what-have-you.

**Q: So this was the sort of thing that your maternal grandfather used to say it was a "common perception" that they got the railway at Cronulla rather than out here. That's how they regarded it?**

Well, that's right and I have always understood that there is just as much lobbying from that area because the transport arrangements to Cronulla were pretty basic. I don't know what they were but they were basic and there was a lot of lobbying went on at that time between the two groups of people. The railway out here was to the stage where it had all been surveyed. I don't think I can show you now but my father used to take me down to Kitty's Creek and show me the "that's where North Ryde Station was to be, down there". He showed me the survey pegs and the rest of it. Eventually a vote was taken, well I assume a vote was taken and Cronulla won it and they got the railway and as a result this area got the road and that's when the road was built, Lane Cove through to Epping. You probably heard them talking the other day it was provisionally called the Spooner Highway because Spooner was the Minister for Works in the then Government and it eventually became the Epping Highway and then just became Epping Road. So that was the end of it and of course here we are nearly into a new Century and still they talk of railway lines between...linking up the Northern line going up through West Ryde, Eastwood, Epping with the Northern line going up through Chatswood but I don't think it will ever happen in my time. It will probably happen somewhere but I think all these major projects now would probably be put on hold until after 2000 anyway. Once they get rid of that...um, so that's basically what happened. And see there was no access, I mean you had a road, there was no bus very little bus service, there was a bus...the people that operated the bus had a depot out in Balaclava Road, they were called Beverley's and they



operated a bus to Ryde and to Gladesville but few and far between and hardly ever at a weekend.

**Q: Could you explain a little bit how people got around when you were a child without public transport?**

Well, I think that obviously the main mode of transport was horse and cart. My dad never ever had a motorcar but he could drive and this is an interesting little... I can tell an interesting little story here.

My grandfather as I said before was a big name for himself...

**Q: Your maternal grandfather?**

Yes. And he was the first one in North Ryde to own a motorcar. He had a T-model Ford.

**Q: Can you tell me his full name please?**

William. William...it's all in the George Redding's book, the article...there is a story on him there.

**Q: What was his last name?**

Whitfield. He bought a T-model Ford. Now that's a...I don't know when they were first produced but you're probably looking at pre the first World War I suppose, probably somewhere in the early nineteen hundreds. He drove it like he used to drive the horse and cart! He was a pretty wild man I kid you not. "Come here you little bugger" he would say "I'll give you heaps if I get you", he was a real wild man. Anyway there was a big...the gate that led into the orchard had two big posts and this huge wide iron gate swung from the big post there and latched onto this, he drove the car into one of these posts one day and he badly knocked the car around and hurt himself a fair bit ever after that. Now this is very early in my childhood, in fact it was probably before my childhood. Anyway he hurt himself and always walked with a limp after that. I can only ever remember him walking with a limp, but dad of course was courting mum and he took over more-or-less the driving of the car and they used to take them, Mum and her sister Amy and possibly others...they used to go for rides and drive down to Bobbin Head and that sort of thing in the T-model Ford.

My earliest memories of the T-model Ford of course was when he had it, after it had served its purpose and was no longer being used and was sitting up in the stables...up there we had these old stables...and they had these hunting dogs "Phyllis and Darkie" and they used to sleep in it and I used to sit there on the seats you know like kids do with the "grrrrrrr....." you know and he would come on the scene and he always had a stick. I've still got two of his old walking sticks...

**Q: Your grandfather?**

And he'd wave this and he'd say "get out of that you little bugger, get out of that". So I'd get out and go for my life down the orchard and hide from him! My grandmother was just the opposite, she was the loveliest delight, oh she was a beautiful woman. I've got a beautiful big picture of her in there, I'll show you after. Anyway that was the transport, you see there was no transport he had...and there was no buses, no cars, they all had...I remember, I don't know whether I said on that but I was a tennis player. Dad bought a court on this - Ronleigh - and the first year...and I was only six, well I still am as far as I know the youngest player ever to win the title here but the first final I played was about in 1939 or something like that you know. I was only about fifteen or sixteen and Margaret was forty...I don't know, anyway I was very young... and because it was the final and was being played on a court called "Al Coo?????" which is in Venor Street in Gladesville, just behind the shops and because there was a final, dad said that I shouldn't ride my bike at this stage as it might take a little bit out of me riding my bike to Gladesville, so he organised a taxi and there was a taxi cab stand at Top Ryde run by the Normans. He never turned up and there was great panic because the thing was at half past one or something and the chap that lived in the house on the other side, Jim Cormack, he run me over on the back of a motorbike. He had an old Harley Davidson motorbike you know, much to-do...anyway, I won the thing. This is an example of what it was like here you know. Nobody had a car or very few people had cars. This is...I'm not talking now the early twenties, I'm talking after the second War, I'm talking 1948, 1947. Even in those days, well mainly after the War of course because of petrol rations...but before the War very few people had cars. Some of the people, the Hicks, and some of them had cars, but very few and everything was still horse and buggy so it was as I said before "Hicksville" and I think we grew up the with idea that that's the way it was, you know and it would never be any different. We weren't able to visualise, I mean we held such sheltered lives, I mean, I never went out with anybody - how could you?

I started work when I was fourteen and I used to get an envelope each week with a ten shilling note in it. That's what I got, ten shillings.

**Q: What did you do with the ten shillings when you got home?**

Gave it to my mother

**Q: The whole lot?**

She used to give me four shillings back for the weekly bus that's all and no spending money and after I had been there for twelve months I got a raise, I got a ten shilling note, two shillings and sixpence. An extra 2 shillings and six a week. I used to give it to her and she'd give me the 2/-6 back and I'm talking about when I was fifteen or more and that was all the money I had 2/- and sixpence you know. So, we were like those people...the Osarks??? In the States. I think the majority of North Rydites were like that. They didn't have



any money, they didn't have...we had little clubs like the Revellers Club at the School of Arts and we used to go on little picnics on Fullers Bridge that sort of thing you know but we were terribly...we were...and because of this we weren't able to visualise what North Ryde became. As I said earlier on if we had of been able, we would have all been bloody millionaires! No risk. I mean look what it is...there's Jack Monks me old...I went to school with him placed about three doors down there on the paddock that I was talking about, it's only a small house and there up for auction and they are looking for about \$350,000 for it you know. It's just a little...

**Q: Do you think there is a feeling of regret amongst North Ryde people that you missed real estate opportunities?**

No. Well I suppose I live here and see what's happened to it. I suppose...I mean it's all water under the bridge...no, but I guess you always...but there's a lot of other things you probably regret that you didn't do and what have you in years gone by but I just make a...emphasis the point that I'm sure that both...all my generation that grew up in North Ryde would have been more or less the same and I don't think any of them...I can't remember... Arthur Tyrrell, Noel's elder brother, he bought a place down in Kent Road and he developed a big market garden growing flowers and all this. He eventually sold all that and probably made a bit of money out of that. He had a big property down there but nobody sort of invested money in...I bought a car. All I was interested in was having a car because I was sick and tired of riding a bike and walking everywhere and I was going with a girl that lived in West Ryde and we used to go to the pictures. There was a picture show down at West Ryde in those days and we would walk back up Marlowe Avenue and we'd say goodnight and I'd set off and walk home and it used to take me about an hour and a quarter to walk from West Ryde home here. So with that in my mind all the time, while I was in the Air Force during the War what-have-you, as soon as I came home on leave I would be down there and this sort of thing would happen and so the first thing I wanted to do was get a car and I spent all my deferred pay on a car. But if I had it all over again, I wouldn't worry about the car! Find an estate agent and start...you know you could have bought properties in Ryde or done anything because there was no money around and everything was so dirt, compared to today, cheap.

**Q: Is there a feeling amongst Ryde old-timers of nostalgia for those days in Ryde or do they just feel that change is inevitable?**

Well, I think it would apply more to North Rydites... I'm talking purely about North Rydites. You see Ryde has always been, and Gladesville, has always been on the trams and trains and you see there used to be a tram run from Top Ryde run down to West Ryde to the train and all that sort of thing so there is never any problem. All this area was all, as I said, mainly all orchards or bush, poultry farms, bush. All that over the other side of the road as I said before was all bush, which is now the biggest War Service area in Australia over there I believe. Housing Commission of course built hundreds and hundreds of homes here, all the places down on the other side of Lane Cove Road there, they are all Housing Commission all the way through there which





they are now demolishing and building units and things. Up there off Badajoz Road all the way through to the Field of Mars Cemetery there all that was Housing Commission but it was all paddocks, all bush and you didn't understand. You were, as I said, because of the fact that you grew up with living very backward as I said as you lived in the Osarcks??? I can remember when I went in the...I didn't have a clue when I went into the...well not in the Army...the Air Force, things were an absolute revelation, things that you could do as an eighteen year old. You could smoke. You could drink and...how could you, what would you pay with. I got more money and by the time I went into the Air Force...I'm probably getting ahead of myself...but by the time I went into the Air Force when I was eighteen, I got more money once I got through a couple of courses, after about twelve months, more money in the Air Force than I was getting in civvy street. Even with...I was working with the leading Chartered Accountants in Sydney, Ellermay??? Hardy as an intermediate audit clerk but I was only getting £ 2.10/- a week in 1943. So, you know, you were very limited in what you could do in those days.

**Q: We are jumping ahead a bit, but we can come back to childhood a bit later. You had a nine or ten year break living from the area living elsewhere, then you came back in 1959. War Service and Housing Commission homes were built, did people get a sense that they had lost something in the area or.....**

## **TAPE 2, SIDE B**

### **(20-120 -245 omitted)**

The nearest shop was up at the school. I used to come home from...even when I was going to Drummoyne School when I was about...because we had no power right? So we had an ice chest, right? You've seen...you know what an ice chest is do you?

Yes, I certainly do!

The ice would only last a certain time so I would come home from school "Ron, we haven't got any ice, you'd better go" or maybe she said before "as soon as you come home from school you go...penny for the bus to Gladesville, penny for bus home, threepence for a block of ice, here's threepence and two pennies. "Sugar bag, over the other side of the park, in the bus". The ice works was alongside the pub there what we called the "Sawdust" the one there in Gladesville opposite McDonalds from Rose Hill. You'd get out the bus there, hop across the road, get the block of ice, get the same bus back home again, carry the ice in the sugar bag, get back and put it in the ice chest.

**Q: Didn't the Iceman come and do deliveries?**

There was, I think, but they didn't... it was only a very small ice chest and it only took a small block...the bigger ones, I suppose they only refrigerated small ones and big ones. The big ones took a big block of ice about that big



and the smaller ones, in the hot weather, only lasted a couple of days. I don't know how often he came but I used to get to go to Gladesville and get this bloody ice - oh Jesus! Oh dear, oh dear...

**Q: Can we talk more about those childhood memories for example going to school. You would walk to school, did you walk along with friends or did you walk by yourself?**

Well, the Jeffress's...first of all lived in that place and then they bought the one on the other side, I don't think they ever bought anything, I don't know who owned it...and they had...there was Alan Jeffress, he lives down Frederick Street, he's the same age as me. No I don't...because Alan used to have to...he's got a story to tell to. He used to have to deliver milk...I don't know, I don't...I'm trying to remember when I got the bike. For a long time I walked to North Ryde School and I think I mainly walked there and back on my own, probably with other kids but nobody special because the Tyrrell's moved away. They went down to Waterloo Road...I don't remember but Drummoyne for sure I travelled on my own because nobody else here...but at that stage I was getting a bus to Gladesville and a tram to Drummoyne and come home the same way. From North Ryde Public School... I can't even remember when...I wonder when he got the bike for me? I suppose, I don't know... but I used to walk, I'd leave here and walk just a little way down Pittwater Road and then there was a bush track from the corner down here, Magdala Road...see that's another place, there were no houses there. There's a bush track from there up and came out the corner of Cox's Road, Cressy Road and then walked right up Cox's Road.

**Q: You mentioned Drummoyne Intermediate Boys High. Why did you go there? A lot of people went to Hornsby to High School. Why Drummoyne?**

Well, as far as I can remember the ones that maybe the ones that were over that side...I don't know how they got to it...maybe the ones at West Ryde went there but we had no way...there was no way we could get to...as far as I know we two choices of Drummoyne which was a commercial school, Intermediate Boys High or Rozelle. A lot of them, the ones that went to...like Fred Hicks that just died here a while ago, he lived up the corner of Badajoz Road, there was Jim Hull's cousin he went to Rozelle which was a Technical school. So to the best of my knowledge they were the only choices we had for that those three years from primary to intermediate stage, if you wanted to carry on after that in those days you had two more years to a leaving certificate and the only school you could go to from here was Fort Street and my parents wouldn't let me. They wouldn't allow for me to go there because they probably couldn't afford it. Bus to Gladesville, tram to Rozelle, tram across from Rozelle to Petersham and then a little bit of a walk down from Fort Street school down Taverners Hill there. And so at the ripe old age of fourteen, I left after I did my intermediate...



**Q: Would you have liked to have gone to Fort Street?**

I think I would have. I think a lot of...some of my friends at Drummoyne went, were going on there and I think I was anxious to be better educated than what I was.

**Q: But no-one around here did I assume. You didn't know anyone who went on...**

No, I don't think I did...

**Q: It wasn't an expectation?**

If you lived in Gladesville or Ryde or Haberfield or Drummoyne or somewhere local probably a lot of those that passed through intermediate went on and got a good enough pass...you had to have a good enough pass to go to...but I would be very surprised if any...you could probably count on the fingers on one hand the number of North Ryde kids that got onto a leaving certificate. Very, very few. A lot wouldn't even have got onto the Intermediate Certificate. A lot would have left school after they did their "QC" as they called it, after sixth class and worked on their properties and things.

**Q: Tell me about North Ryde School. Were there many kids there without shoes? There were no uniforms I assume in those days. For example did you wear shoes to school?**

Well, there were a lot of photos, Heather's got a lot of photos even of Gladesville school. I...you see...it was...things were...we were just coming out of the Depression you know, right in the Depression I suppose for that matter, not coming out of, we were right in the Depression and most families were big families. There was no birth control caper going on in those days. I don't know why mum and dad only had the one child. The next one to Dad for example in his family had seventeen children and she's still alive, she's just turned ninety but that was the way it was you know. You just had kids without even thinking about it and I suppose most of these families in that period...the only thing that stuck to them I guess in this area was they could probably...always had enough to feed them. So they had chooks, eggs, they run pigs, fruit, vegetables all that sort of thing.

**Q: Would they have a house cow?**

Well, yeah I guess so. They never ever had one up at the orchard for some reason or other but I suppose a lot of people...Cormack's had one there. Dad never ever had one. We had chooks, we had fowls down the back there, always had chooks. Yes, I guess a big majority of them would have had their own milk. That was the only thing but the clothing...I got some early photos of me in there and I'm dolled up in a pair of shorts with braces things over the top. The shorts are made out of sort of different coloured squares of material



and you know I can't imagine...I suppose you know, it's just...there was no money. This is what happened in early history.

**Q: Do you remember if you wore shoes to school?**

I think they always tried to. I'm pretty sure I never had to go barefoot. No, I never went barefoot. I think they always tried to clothe me reasonably well, whatever finance they had but no, I would say I never ever had...I always had shoes, yeah. And I always was dressed fairly well. I remember...even when I was...in 1938 I think it was, I was picked in a NSW schoolboys tennis team to go to Brisbane to play Queensland and this caused a great deal...I can still remember this. They didn't want me to go.

**Q: Why not?**

Because they didn't have any...they didn't think they would be able to dress me, you know have good enough clothes what-have-you. I had an old that dad had been using for years, a crummy old racquet you know and all these other kids of course they had...Bob MaCarthy and all these other blokes that come from more influential families, they had a lot more gear than I did. It was terrible and anyway, we were very friendly...and you'll come across him somewhere in your travels...an axe-man called Leo Appo, he used to come and play here on the court with his girlfriend as she was then, eventually his wife, and he was friendly. And he gave dad £ 5.00 and I used to pay tennis with him and he gave dad £ 5.00 because I always remember when I got on the train I had this pound note. I'd never even seen a pound note before and that's what he had left when he bought a new racquet and probably tennis clothes for me to go to...but if hadn't have given him a fiver I don't think I would have gone. So you know, they weren't good times in that regard but I think they always tried as best they could to...and fortunately I was the only child so I didn't have any hand-me-downs like a lot of them had to...like when there was six or eight in the family or seventeen!

**Q: Tell me about the tennis court. It wasn't just for your entertainment I gather, it was for hiring?**

If you ever want to publish anything about me, this is the one thing...this is the one thing that I ...will stick with me...always in my memory...that...and I was always acknowledged my father for the fact that he was able to create...how he did it, I have got no idea. I can't tell you but to me it was like building a pyramid you know. It was an incredible achievement. You see, there was a court open over the other side of the park here. Do you know that? Have you come across that in your travels? It was called Coomassie -The reason it was called Coomassie was because apparently the road from Cox's Road ended at Cressy Road and the portion from Cressy Road down to Pittwater Road was called Coomassie Road, so they must have thought it was a good name. I got photos in there of me...used to play there see and anyway it all went to pot. Council of course operated it all??? So Mr. ...

**TAPE 3, SIDE A (12 May, 1997)**

**Q: We were talking about your father building the tennis court.**

I don't know exactly what year it was but obviously they had played over at the court there on the corner of the park which was called Commassie and it was owned and operated by the Council but it fell into disrepair and presumably they were both keen on the game of tennis. Mum played and so did dad so dad must have somehow or other taken it upon himself to build a court on the vacant block. The block of land here was...there was a house on one side and a vacant block on the side on which he grew strawberries and that sort of thing. So, I don't know exactly what year it was but I was very young, probably about some time about the Depression years I guess, the early thirties. To me now it is a constant source of amazement as to how he possibly did it. I mean he was just a normal person...a fellow who came down from the country. I don't suppose he had a terribly good education. I know he started work very, very young working in the Freezing Works out there and to construct a tennis court is quite a project. Obviously he didn't have any money or very little money. Nearly all the materials were taken from out of the bush. All the fence posts, all the loam soil but he had...the ground sloped away a little bit in one corner so it had to be built up in one corner and I don't know how he got his levels or anything like that. It just amazes me to think that he was able to do it basically on his own. I think Mr. Jeffress gave him some help and possibly help from other people. Mr. Jeffress as I mentioned before lived next door and he didn't have any work at all during the Depression. Dad always had a bit. The mill kept them on during the Depression even though sometimes they didn't work a full week but they were never put off down at Clifford Loves which dad was always grateful for. That's one of the reasons why he kept on with them until he retired. Forty three years he had with them altogether.

**Q: Can you remember the first time the court was used?**

Well I would say so. We had...it must have been about 1935, I was about ten I suppose and the Jeffress's that lived next door...there were two boys, Ronnie the eldest one and Alan the one my age. We weren't really allowed on the court at that stage but either Mr. Jeff or dad would fashion a type of tennis racquet out of a piece of wood and we had devised a way of getting in to the old sub-station which is just up the road. We would loosen some bricks around one of the ventilators...

**Q: Just the boys?**

Just the two of us, Alan and I basically and we would get in there with an old tennis ball and we would hit...it had a very big even concrete floor and you could hit the ball up against the wall and it would bounce back onto the concrete floor where you got a nice good bounce. The only trouble was, was that between the wall and the floor was like a big moat that obviously was there to take machinery of some description and if you didn't hit the ball hard enough the ball would go down in there and you would take about ten minutes or so to get it back because you had to get down in there and then you had to somehow-or-other get back up again.

**Q: How deep was the moat?**

Oh, I suppose it must have been about eight, ten foot deep. It was quite... and it was as wide as this room. Would have been probably about twelve feet or so wide, so you had to.....

**Q: The electricity sub-station was just a shell?**

Yes, yes. There was nothing there. It was full of pigeons, birds actually and yes, there was nothing there. There was a big ladder and we used to climb up there and all that...but anyway getting back...and that's how we basically learnt to play and I must've had a little bit more idea but anyway they eventually allowed us to go in a competition. The court was called Ronleigh and they played in the mixed competition of a weekend and the Sunday morning gents competition that was running then and during the week a ladies competition had teams and we always seemed to have enough players. Some were imported from Ryde or Gladesville but most of them were locals because there was...everybody at that time, That was one of their few pleasures, playing tennis. There was nothing much else and most of them liked to have a hit but there were very few courts. There was only the one dad had built here and the once across the road at Mrs. Cormacks's over the road called Broadhaven and I don't know apart from the courts down at Eden Park, I don't know of any other courts at that time that were in the district. There were courts built in later years. Anyway, they put us in a competition.

**Q: You and Alan?**

Yes. There was Mrs. Jeff and Mr. Jeff, Ronnie, Alan, myself and Florrie Martin that lived over the other side of the park there in Cressy Road. C Reserves, the lowest you could get you know and that was the team we had. That was the first time I basically used a court apart from messing around a bit on it. Dad was very fussy he used to keep it in very good condition.

**Q: This first competition, Ron, how old would you have been?**

Well, I was probably twelve I suppose. As I said he was very very fussy but the courts...we weren't really allowed to run around on it and play until we were playing competition because then we acquired racquets and away we went from then on. I was more or less...got the job of being custodian. He'd made a...it's incredible when I think about it...he'd made a roller, he just got a 44 gallon drum and filled it with slurry and rock and that sort of thing. It must've weighed as much as one of the pyramids over...it was so heavy and it was off centre. You'd start pulling it and you'd get about half way along one end of the court and then it would start wandering off, so you had to stop and straighten it all the time. Sweep the court, water the court. He had bags...line the court, you used to do it with a paintbrush and a pot of lime.

**Q: By hand?**

Uh-huh, it was incredible and put this thing down and do it all...but it was always in good...and it went on for quite a while. It was very popular Ronleigh. Even though we never even had a shed or anything like that. If people wanted to use the toilet they'd use the out toilet you know and it was pretty basic in that regard but anyway that's...

**Q: Was Ronleigh what you called the tennis court?**

Yeah well the house was called Ronleigh, the old place there so the court was known as Ronleigh.

**Q: Ron, was it ever hired out to people?**

No. I don't think so. I heard you say that before. Not that I can remember. Some friends used to come and play. Leo Appo for example and Stella Jupp they used to come nearly every Sunday and play on it. They would just play with one another, then I would have a game with Leo or dad and mum would come out and make up a mixed or something like that but, no I don't think...he never made any money out of it and I'll never know whether he built it to encourage me to play the game or whether he built it because mum said...oh, another thing...one of the humorous sides of the thing was that the block of land of course was only forty five feet. The tennis court with...was thirty six feet, so we only had nine feet, four and a half feet on each sideline between the sideline and fence and four and a half feet isn't very much. The posts that dad had cut in the bush, he cut all these posts which were about...probably went about five or six feet above the court surface (I don't know how far they were underneath) and to those he attached like a piece of four-be-two or something like that to give it the height to take the wire. But the posts were all rough cut and they were all...if you hit one of them and tried to retrieve the ball you could lose a great hunk of skin off your arm because they weren't smooth, so everybody played the fence at Ronleigh. Whenever they played out here they all tried to play the fence because they knew people were frightened to run into these posts.

**Q: When you say he got the posts from the bush, do you know exactly where he got them from?**

No, all I know...I don't suppose he would be able to do it in this day and age Pauline because people would be against such sort of thing but then of course the bush was just a place that people took all sorts of things from. He obviously...he had I can remember down the bottom of Pittwater Road there right opposite Cressy Road where it runs into Pittwater Road, he used to go down there and get soil. The loam that he top dressed the court with and I can only assume that all that was brought up in a wheelbarrow. I can remember seeing the thing but I can't remember how he got it up here in bags carried or in a wheelbarrow. No, the posts and all...I mean the bush was just there for plucking. I think I told you before my grandfather lived beyond his means up



there in the orchard. One of the ways he was able to finance his high living was by borrowing money from his father-in-law. Grandmother's people had a bakery in Redfern, Lovelys their name was which still operated right up until about twenty year ago. It was quite a good business and he used to borrow money from Mr. Lovely and it was paid back by loads of wood that were carted from here into the bakery and he used to get ten shillings a load or something like that which help cut out his loan. So there was no shortage of wood. I mean, it wouldn't happen today right but in those days with wood and the same thing with...

I don't know whether you have noticed or not but around there opposite the club is an old two-storey brick sandstone home and that was...the property ran down the back of ours here...and that was built by a retired sea-captain by the name of Jilks???? and he built it all himself out of stone quarried from down in the bush there somewhere. The story goes according to dad that just as he was completing the thing, he was being...he had a horse and dray, which he used to bring the stone up in. How he ever got the stone up into the drive I'll never know because if you have a look they are great big...he must've had something rigged up, a block and tackle I suppose. Apparently a snake frightened the horse and the horse kicked the cart over and he was killed. He never got to finish it. She lived there for a lot of years but that's...the property at the back of our place which is now Nundah Reserve was taken over by Council somewhere along the line for non-payment of rates and what-have-you. A fellow by the name of Bill Williams as you have probably noticed, there was a lot about him in the local press not so long ago - he died just a few months ago. He was Foundation President of the club around there and all the rest of it. They were going to buy it. Bernice and H.....????? were very keen on it when it was up for sale at one stage but the reason they didn't buy it was because it didn't have an inside staircase! He never ever got to put an inside staircase, it must have been his last project and the people that did come into it somewhere along the line put one on the outside up the outside of the building but it never had an interior. If it had of had an interior staircase, Bill would have bought it. So as I say all these things...the bush was just there.

Mrs. Jeffress, one of her sidelines to try and make a little bit of money, she used to do wreaths and things for funerals and probably other...You probably read in George Redding's book that we used to decorate the School of Arts and this sort of thing for dances. They moved into Higginbottom Road there in Gladesville. I remember, I think I mentioned I got my intermediate results the same day my grandmother died and I found out from somebody who had a newspaper and I ran round trying to tell everybody but all they were interested in was me going riding my bike round to Mrs. Jeff to start making wreaths for the funeral in Higginbottom Road. Alan (I always used to call him Billy) and I used to get the maidenhair ferns for her and she would give us a penny sometimes. We used to go down to Pages Creek down the back here, it's the one that runs along and down into the river there opposite the mill and pick this maidenhair fern from the riverbank.





**Q: Where did she get the flowers from for the wreaths she made?**

Well I don't know where...I'm not quite sure...We used to get a lot of...and even in those days, I think it was probably illegal but we used to get a lot of Christmas bell on the Christmas bush and flannel flower and that sort of thing which she probably used. The other stuff, I don't know whether ...they may have grown a few things I don't know. Mr. Woodbine over the road there that wasn't married to but lived with Mrs. Cormack (her husband was killed in the First World War), he had a .....

**Q: You mean a de-facto relationship?**

Yes, yes, yes. Well as far as I know they were never married, they always called him Wally Woodbine. He had a flower stall up at the cemetery and he... possibly may have got some flowers from him because we used to...dad used to grow a lot of...I always call them "stinkun rogers" geraniums and then they'd pack them in a clothes basket and I'd carry them over the park to Mr. Woodbine and he'd give me a sixpence or something to take back to give to dad.

**Q: Let's get back to the tennis for a moment. Could you tell me about your rise to stardom as a tennis player. When you were playing that first competition, were you the best player?**

Well, I must've had a...

**Q: Compared to the others?**

Yeah. I must've had you know, a knack for it obviously because a little while later on, and I don't think I ever forgive him for this, he...they had their annual championship and he put me in...

**Q: Your father?**

Yeah. He put me...I must've been a bit older than twelve because...oh I don't know...No, I suppose that would be about it. Anyway he put me in...it must have been the first year I played in the Association Championships and he put me in every singles event he could and that was right from C-grade right through to handicap, special and open and I won the lot you see. I was only sixteen then.

**Q: Where were they played?**

Well, it was played in a variety of courts. They used to have the draw in the Weekly Times of a Thursday or so and all the local courts were all used for the various events. We never ever had a, in those days... The North Western suburbs Tennis Association was a breakaway from the Balmain Association and it was very poor. We never had Association courts or anything like that. We played inter-association tennis what they called Tremlett Cup, Angus &



Coote Cup, Blackwell Cup all that sort of thing were all played on just a court. ????????, Ryde, Henley down there and Gladesville, Harmans Court down there, Morrisons Road. Anywhere and everywhere whereas you go to the other Associations, they had big Association courts. Ten or twelve courts in a block. They've got it now. They've got Olympic Park and they've got the big setup down at Meadowbank but there was nothing like that in those days.

**Q: How did you feel at sixteen being a tennis Champ?**

Oh, well. I don't remember. I think it was all a bit amazing. I think I said last week that I suppose I was a very naïve young boy. I didn't know very much about anything really. I was living here in North Ryde, we were sort of a long way behind the times. I suppose going to Drummoyne School brought me out a little bit because I played tennis there and I played cricket with them. Like I said I got that trip to Queensland in the tennis and the next year they came down here and played here. So I guess I was gaining a little bit of confidence in my ability as a tennis...on what I was doing on the tennis court but I don't really...I think I was pretty shy and pretty naïve as far as anything else was concerned. We never had girlfriends or anything like that in those days. I suppose because we never had any money to take anybody out. We didn't play up in any way because there was nothing much there to encourage that sort of thing. I don't know...that's a good question, huh "How did I feel"?

**Q: Were your parents really proud of you or were they just "low-key" when you became a really good tennis player. Did they make their pride obvious?**

Yes, yes. I'm always very glad, very happy about...that's one of my better memories. Dad didn't push me but he obviously...and mum sort of stayed in the background pretty well but yeah, I've no doubt in my mind that they were really proud of the things that I did on the tennis court here and in the area. I don't know whether there was any way they really showed it except to know that you could tell even at that age, you could tell how pleased they were about the success I was having and how very...

**(320-350 omitted)**

**Q: "Ronleigh" was a tennis club you said.**

Yes, Ronleigh Tennis Club. Well, like I said it was pretty basic. The court I suppose was basic because it had been built by one person. There was no shelter shed. Most courts had...dad used to put just a tarpaulin up between the side of the house and tie it onto the wire and had a few old ??????????? and seats and things, we used to sit on that.

**Q: The people who played there were just people from around there?**

Yeah. Most of them. I say there were a few imports. There was...I don't know how they were acquired or why they came out here to play but most of



them...I remember Jock and Jim Cormack played, the Hicks' played with us, Paddy Hicks and what-have-you, they were all locals.

**Q: Were there any other good players beside yourself?**

No. I don't think so. I can't recall anybody, apart from the one I just mentioned, Paddy Hicks - he was a very good player and moved up into the Eastwood area and did very well up there but...no, I don't...tennis was, even though there was always someone here playing there was nothing like cricket or football. There just wasn't the courts. People...and probably it might have been a little more expensive than other sports too. I mean you had to have a racket for starters and if you played competition you had to have whites, sandshoes, properly turned out.

**Q: You talked about going up to Queensland and it being an effort to get the gear to go up there. In the first competition you played around here, did you have whites for that or did you just wear whatever you had?**

I think so. I should have mentioned him earlier we were a bit lucky, we had a little bit of a benefactor. A gentleman by the name of Bradley, who had a clothing store in Gladesville. Just a couple of doors down from Massey Street, on the left hand side there. He took a big interest in my career and he provided my parents with quite a lot of stuff. He didn't give it to them but I think he gave it to them at a very reasonable price. When I said that before I was always...I think I was always dressed...but I was always dressed in very ordinary gear. I never...and it became a little bit of a fetish with me in latter years. I used to...when I was playing and when I was up there with them, I used to spend a lot of money on tennis clothes. Sharkskin shorts and all that sort of thing you know as I always went from being just a "yokle" on the court to try to look like the part. I was very conscious of my dress on the tennis court. There's a shot in there in one of the albums of Molly coming off the court at Pratten Park there and ...I'd just played Bill Sidwell, it was in the paper and I looked the part you know. I looked as if I was a tennis player. I always used to say when I was coaching...you see I was a coach for a lot of years..."always look the part, always....."

**END OF TAPE 3, SIDE A**

**TAPE 4, SIDE B**

Mum was quite keen on that. She was a great organiser, I wonder where Heather is at the moment but I'll show you something in a minute I'm sure she can turn it up. They were always involved...they had a few plays and reviews and that sort of thing. We had...I'm sure mum...she had the rudiments of being to play the piano but she was a very good looking woman, my mother and she never ever worked. As I said before she was grandfather's social secretary basically, so she was a fairly confident sort of a person and they had...the only place they did have anything like that was the School of Arts. That was the focal point for the whole area. There were only two in my time



and their time I suppose. There was only the School of Arts and in latter years Les Meurer? built the old Khartoum theatre out there in Khartoum Road which you've read about. But that didn't come until later on, probably mid thirties. Mum was...yes, she was and Mrs. Jeffress like I said, she used to do the decorations for the...and the cricket. Dad played. They had a strong cricket set up and they used to have their...I can remember going up to the School of Arts. They used to think it was great seeing them all there, all the dancing and carry on. They had a library and meeting room in front of the School of Arts and somewhere along the line...I didn't get overly involved in it but...somewhere along the line May Humphries and St???? Humphries up there that made jump...they set up a thing up a thing...and they called themselves "The Revellers" and it was just a bunch of people you know, eighteen, nineteen that sort of thing. We used to have our little dances and meeting up there and occasionally they would go perhaps up to Burragorang Valley for a weekend but I don't think I was ever involved in anything like that but there were picnics down Fullers Bridge and that sort of thing.

**Q: Did the Revellers have anything to do with a church organisation?**

No, I don't think so.

**Q: So, was it people from all religions?**

I'm not a real expert on it, how it started, except that I know that as I said up there in Cox's Road - on the corner of Cox's Road and Blenheim Road - there was a big paddock and after the War, it belonged to the Jumps and May who was a smart girl, she's still alive but she's got Alzheimer's pretty badly, she's in a place down Narrabeen somewhere. She built a couple shops there down in Blenheim Road and Stowe Humphery. Her brother had one and her sister had another. It was the whole family sort of thing. But they were...to the best of my knowledge, they were the ones that started it I think and I don't think had any affiliation with any church or anything like that. It was just the local teenagers just got involved in it because it gave them something to do. There was nothing to do. Like I said it was, what could you do out here? You couldn't go anywhere very much. Apart from a bit of sport, there was nothing to do. I used to study a lot...I got...but...and of a night time, you never went anywhere because there was no transport to go anywhere and you didn't...so I guess a thing like that just automatically happened, provided you had somebody to organise it and May was just the one that organised...but there again I'm not...Is there anything, what's George Redding got in the book about the Revellers Club? You must have something but I was looking at a ...when I was going through those albums there...There's a photo of...The local bus service, for what it is worth, was very limited and operated by a fellow by the name of Beverley's, Syd Beverley, they were out in Balaclava Road and there's a photo there of one of these buses and a group of people which were mainly the Reveller's type of people you know, Jock Cormack, Billy F...????, ????? and all those sort of...and one of them I could see when I was looking through yesterday was...one of the Olivers, Stan Oliver who still lives up in Bess Street is it? off Pooley Street there just off Pidding Road and I thought next time I see him I'll ask him who all the others are you know. But they were



all the Olivers, the Hicks's, the Jumps, the Rennies. The Rennies and all that ?????????? channel, ten and all that ?????????? area out there was all owned by...beautiful orchards over there opposite the cemetery. The Rennies, the Andrews out there, Doris Mackenny, they were all graduated more or less and I suppose that was the reason why...this is all pre-War. I don't know what happened after the War. We were all very sophisticated and grown up after we'd served in the Services, most of the men but anyway a lot of the womenfolk...Olive for example she was in the Women's Air Force.

**Q: You showed me photos of your father and uncles football team, rugby union team and cricket team. How important were they in the thirties, not just for sport but also social interaction in this area?**

I think, that's the only thing that kept them going really, those...it must've been...dad talked a lot about the early days with the cricket and the football and to this day I often bump into...Alan Jeffress, he was, he became President, he played cricket better than he played tennis and he became quite a good cricketer and he became President of the Gladesville District Cricket Association and held the position for twenty years or more I suppose. He still lives down Frederick Street. I think anything like that in those days and we are going back, all the time we're talking about the twenties and thirties, but in those days out here that's all they had, right? There was nothing else. It was terribly important I think to them. You've seen the photo that I showed you last week and the one that's in George's book...I think it's the biggest thing that ever happened to my father. It was only B-Grade, it wasn't A-grade. B-Grade. He was just a fairly ordinary cricketer I suppose but he was a very keen cricketer. He used to get the fielding awards and he had a lot of little cups in there and every one of them...and he had little shields they used to hang from their...where they had a watch for their fob pockets and they used to...always fielding and if he ever got forty or fifty with the bats you know it was better than winning the lottery. I think the football side of things...well obviously that gave them something to run a little bit of energy off and to participate they...he used to talk about the good old days where they'd probably play at Ryde oval and they'd go down to Keogh's there and have a few jugs and this Oliver that I talked about before this...Arthur Oliver's wife Hazel, her father was the Inspector of police and he used to round all the North Ryde hooligans up on his horse and get 'em going, get them back in their horse and carts or whatever they had and get as far as Quarry Road and say "right oh, all you North Ryde yahoos" (or whatever word he used) "get yourselves home. I don't want any more trouble out of you". So obviously that's the sort of thing...and they used to go in a...they had a horse-drawn wagon thing, you'd see it with most of the team and go over to Waitara Oval and play in this thing. Of course they played over here too in this park and he always used to tell the story about this fellow by the name of George Bishop who played with Hunters Hill. He went on to represent Australia and then he became a leading referee in latter years you know after his playing career. And how he used to...he was a centre forward or hooker (I don't know how much you know about League but in those days centre forwards used to...He used to have some decent old stoush's in the scrum fighting for possession of the ball). George Bishop was an expert and one of the North Ryde blokes took him on one time and they



fought...They both got sent off and they fought up and down the touchline for about twenty minutes. Then he went on to represent...He told all these tales you know.

**Q: I noticed in the photo it said "Rugby Union", were both codes played or don't you know?**

I don't know Pauline, I only noticed that this morning. Dad played to the best of my knowledge, I always thought he played League but now...he's not in those photos...

**Q: They were your uncles?**

You see he would have played probably in the early twenties, they were before then but he always told me he was lock forward and I just assumed he was a...they played League because when you talk to George Bishop, he played League and...maybe in the early days they did play Union. Well they obviously did didn't they because that's...but Horrie the one in the photo there...you see that's something I don't understand...he was quite good...Mum's brother, the youngest one...and he played with the Eastern Suburbs. We went out there a couple of times to try and find some old programs and things and talk to people out of the Eastern Suburbs League Club but we weren't successful but dad always said that he played at either...I thought he said he played a lot at first grade but we couldn't find anything. He did play a lot of reserve grade with a scrum half with Eastern Suburbs whenever years it was but I don't know, as far as football was concerned it all happened before...when I was old enough to see what was going on, it was soccer. I can't ever remember seeing a game of Union League or anything like that over the park but soccer they played...they were very strong in those...my formative years. I wasn't the least bit interested in that. Naturally I was...I used to race home from school so we could have a hit either in the sub-station or on the court. And cricket, that was...because we played at school where North Ryde golf course is now. That used to be a motorcycle track in years gone by. I believe the gentleman up there in Cox's Road, a retired policeman (I don't know what rank he had), has got some posters of the programs of the North Ryde motorway or whatever they called it. I did see at one stage too up at Eastwood...they have a shop there in the arcade...motor vehicles, spares and all sorts of gear and stuff...they had a big poster up at one stage - the Castrol poster. Because I mentioned to Bobby B???? one time and he said that fellow there has them. And right in the...the track used to come up from Bridge Road and come down round like so and back up the hill like that and right in the middle was a football ground. It had a cricket pitch in the middle of it and that's where we played our cricket down there you see. And they used to come from other schools and we'd play them. We'd go to other schools, down to Birchgrove Oval and play there. We weren't very successful, North Ryde but at least we played. And we also had a little pitch behind the church up there, the church that mum and dad were married in, we played there. So we got involved in cricket. Alan was probably better at cricket. I played a couple of seasons when I was younger, when I was sixteen or so with Balmain, that's why I'm still involved with them, Balmain Cricket



Club. Only the lower grade, second and third grade but I did play in the Association here after the War and we got involved and I'll say this, just to give him a rap. In this particular match we were playing at Westminster and our Captain was...I played with a team called Pioneers and our Captain was Charlie Bradley who was a local store...lived in Western Crescent there in Gladesville, terribly well known and a good cricketer who played a lot of first grade cricket with Balmain. I used to open with Doug McQuirter who was a local identity. He lived down in Morrison Road and his sister does physical culture with Heather.

**Q: Was he related to Nurse McQuirter?**

Ross?

**Q: No, there was a Nurse McQuirter many years ago in a street just off Park Street in Ryde?**

**Tape interrupted**

They were very involved in tennis but I would just like to give Doug a rap. He was another terrific bloke. He lived in the Strand, just off the Strand there in Gladesville and played a lot of tennis with him too. Anyway, he was late getting there so Charlie opened with me and Charlie only...got out very early and by the time Doug had arrived...and this was 1946, 1947? thereabouts. So that's a few years ago. We finished up...he closed and it was one for two and sixty eight, we had a partnership of two hundreds and sixty four which still stands to this day. And Doug, I'm not saying because of me, that's something that a lot of people don't realise that they talk about me but Doug has of course unfortunately died. But he was a very good cricketer and a terrific bloke and as I said his sister Bonnie, who married Jackie Taylor, they lived down in Champion Road, he was a very good cricketer, Jackie Taylor. And Bonnie is a lovely girl and she still does...she lost Jack not so very long ago but she still does physical culture with Heather. Where is Heather? I want to show that...

**Q: I wondered if you could tell me a bit about your grand-parents orchard. You've mentioned it a few times. How do you remember it operating in full production when you were a child?**

Well it was a most productive orchard. They had a large number...it was all peaches, practically the whole orchard was peach trees. They were beautiful peaches too. And they had a big packing shed up there and mum was one of the ones that did a lot of packing. It was mainly uncle Bob and Bill that run the orchard and when the...they maintained it all, kept the weeds down, watered all that sort of thing during the...and then Bob who was recognised as the best person in the district as far as pruning peach trees were concerned...A lot of fruit growers in the area wouldn't touch their trees, they'd wait until Bob was available. He picked up a bit of money on the side doing those you know.

**Q: It was a skill you would really have to acquire?**

Yes, yes. I don't know what was so terribly special about it but obviously it was something that had to be like you said had to be acquired and he must have just somehow or other acquired that skill. I grew up being very frightened about pruning anything because my father would not prune. We had quite a few trees at the back of the place here. I suppose he would get thirty or forty boxes each year off the trees and for 1/- and sixpence or 2/- a box...but he wouldn't touch them, Bob used to come down and do our trees and do the majority of trees in the district. Bob and Bill as I said maintained it and when the peaches were to be picked, they would get help from different ones from the family and I used to go up and do a fair bit.

**Q: Did they pay you when you did that?**

No. No there was never anything like that. They used to...I don't know whether they always did it...they used to send their peaches over, take their peaches by horse and cart over to Allards who were on Lucknow Road there at the top of the hill just above Peter Board school there on the other side and there's a street over there now called Larkard Street which is the Larkins family is the "Lark" and the "Ard" is the Allards. They used to send all this stuff in into the markets from there together with theirs. I don't know Charlie just...talking about that sort of thing just for a moment while I'm thinking of it...Charlie for a while, one of the sons, was a commission agent at the markets so he obviously would have handled the fruit then, all the peaches then.

**Q: Your mother's brother, Charlie Whitfield?**

Yes, mum's brother. I don't know how long he was doing it but I know he was for a period.

**Q: With a large family, they probably didn't need to hire any labour did they?**

No, I don't think so. They used to somehow or other get it all done. They worked very long hours and very hard. As I said my mother packed, used to pack the peaches and presumably that's what the...the others probably, when they were around in the earlier days before I can remember, they probably did...Prairie and Amy...they probably helped too but Amy she never married. She was my Godmother, she never married and she used to look after Bill and Bob and Crick. He didn't spend as much time on the orchard, he seemed to want to do other things. He was a jockey in the early days and he got various jobs with Council what-have-you. So it was mainly Bill and Bob and my mother did a lot of packing, Bob did a lot of packing but I can still remember them. They had homemade ladders and they were very rickety things, they were like an inverted...like a triangular thing with a post going behind it sticking in the ground and about three rungs on the front. They used to get up this with a bucket, an old bucket, tied with a rope around your neck,





the rope around your neck was tied to the handle of the bucket and you would pick the peaches and you always had a way of picking a peach. It breaks my heart now. I go shopping...Heather and I go shopping every Tuesday and I can't bear to watch what goes on at the Golden Banana for example. You see...I even saw one day...this woman come up and press some potatoes. Mind you these womenfolk, I say women because it's mainly women, but if there's lovely peaches or nectarines or something there you know and they press them you know to see if they are...ooohhhh...my poor old B..... if he caught you doing anything like like ooohhh.

**Q: Tell me how you pick a peach Ron?**

Well you would sort of get it in your hand and twist, a slight twist you see and it comes away from the...

**Q: So it wouldn't bruise?**

And it sort of sits in the palm of your hand and you put it in the bucket like that.

**Q: Very gently?**

Ummm...very gently. Oh I wouldn't mark them. If a peach came off and it was that big and it had a slight mark on it, it was chucked to one side.

**Q: After your mother was married, do you know if she would go back and help them at peak times at all?**

I used to...see I was... I suppose I was very lucky. I probably spent a lot of time up there. You see they had a couple of dogs, couple of hunting dogs and they in those days of course there was a lot of stuff out in this area that was...it was like...I guess I was a bit like Huckleberry Finn you know. Bob and Bill, Bob mainly...you know I've got photos of him in there. There was Wally Hicks...but they used to for example go down the river through the cemetery and down the other side to the river and catch prawns and get a good quantity of prawns. Get back home and Amy would have a big cauldron thing going with boiling water and the prawns would go in...and the kerosene tin that they had...and they'd sit there under the stars and eat these prawns or whatever. They were there with their legs crossed and the dogs alongside, it was great. You see I spent a lot of time and my grandmother was the greatest you know. You should see the photos in there. She was the loveliest person and I couldn't... and Amy, oh the stuff she cooked. And I was always hanging around her because she used to cook things for me. She used to make...I'd hate to think what they'd do with them in this day and age. They were called fat cakes. They were just a hank of dough you know stuck in this big basin full of fat, ooohhh and they would be golden brown and you'd open them out and stick butter in them and honey or treacle or something like this and ooohhh.

I think I was very lucky, I had a great childhood because I had a bike at this stage, I would hop on the bike. I would come home from school from Drummoyne or something like that, hop on the bike and race up through the



bush over the other side there, the orchard and because they had horses too which is a great attraction. They had a horse called Bill Squires that they used to have a little sit on from time to time. Because they used the horse to do the ploughing, and that sort of thing. Before that grandfather had this saddlery contract for Hunters Hill Council and they used to use horse and carts for that caper you know.

**Q: And that fertilised the orchard?**

Well, I don't know whether that was the case or not! I don't know very much about that except that he had...all I know was that there was a lot of old pans lying around up there in the horse yard down here see? There was a shed at the other end and there seemed to be a little bit of grass and mostly old pans lying around the place.

**Q: Were you like the child Amy never had, were you like a son to her?**

Yeah, I think so. She was a...I suppose...when you start talking like this, you realise how lucky I guess you were to know such wonderful people. Amy...I think I probably tried to be because I was the only one in latter years when...you see they got out when Bill died in 1950 and Bob couldn't handle it on his own so...and Bob in years gone by had a girlfriend called Lavinia and he had built this...God knows why...but he bought this little block of land on the plateau at Collaroy and built this funny little old house, small little thing, weatherboard thing. Carted all the timber down there from here. Anyway Lavinia did him wrong and she went and married another local instead of Bob and Bob never...but he kept the little house. You see, when they sold the orchard, that's where they went, down to Collaroy. Amy...

**TAPE 5, SIDE A**

Everywhere you went there were orchards. I don't know whether it was a real financial success because I think grandfather bled whatever monies they made, he spent. They had such a basic life, you feel so sorry to think...you see I've got something marked "humpy". They call it the humpy. Now in that humpy, three boys, three men lived in that.

**Q: Your uncles? Didn't they live in the house?**

If you look over our fence there down the back of next door you'll see it's still there. It's still there now. They brought it down from up there and put it in the back of dad's place after, when the place was sold because Crick (Norm) who was still going and who worked at the depot at Hunters Hill Council, he lived in that down there just as he lived in it down at the orchard but he was only there of a weekend. He had a little hut down at the depot. He used to leave here of a Monday and spend a week down the depot and come back on Friday afternoon but it's still there. And it was so basic, they had a bed...



**Q: You mean your uncles lived there?**

Yes, yes.

**Q: What was there, a bed and ...?**

I'll show you in a moment. Can you see it from the window? Just a bed. There were three beds when you went in. That was Bob, that was Crick and that was Bill. Bill he had sort of half of it, there was a little partition across the little...just a basic bureau with four drawers or something like that you know. A little thing with a couple of their clothes, a few clothes they had hung up. They had no power, the only hot water they had they had to boil up themselves. When you went into the house here there was a bathroom thing there with...very, very basic. Very basic. A little toilet down here, one little toilet right down there. Fancy going there if you wanted to go to the toilet. You had to go all the way down there.

**Q: Ron, why didn't they live in the house?**

Well, there obviously wasn't enough room.

**Q: They would have been middle-aged men when you remembered them in that "humpy".**

Ummm. When I was.. I mean they were all born before the turn of the Century you know. They were all over...and I was born in 1925, so I'm talking about the thirties and even up to the forties. That's where they...because I suppose I started spending a lot of time up there from the time I was, maybe twelve or thereabouts you know but not much before that. In the house itself there was only...that there was...I gave Reg a plan to show the rooms but he didn't do it but...this was a kitchen where they ate all their meals mainly in there. This was a big dining room which opened out on the courtyard but they very rarely used it. There were a couple of steps that went up there and there was a lounge room there, a bedroom there which grandfather used, a bedroom there which grandmother used and a bedroom there which Amy had. So there was three bedrooms. When the grandfather died, Bob moved from the humpy over into that.

**Q: So the grandparents didn't have the same bedroom?**

No. Well, not in my time. What the set up was originally, I don't know. As I said, Bob lived there until grandfather died in whenever...I'd have to look up and see when he died...and he moved over and lived in that room there. Bob there and Amy.

**Q: Why did Bob get the bedroom, was he the oldest?**

I don't know, you see Bill...Bob sort of managed the...well Bill was the eldest but Bob was the businessman. He did all the...he was...Bill was a very, very



easy going sort of a fellow. He used to, every afternoon virtually without fail I'd say, he'd take off down Blenheim Road as it was, up to Cox's Road and get the bus in to Gladesville into the Sawdust. He'd have his three or four drinks or what-have-you and come home in the bus. I remember he mostly took a sugar bag when he had to get the meat. The meat would be in this sugar bag when he come home. So he was...he just went along...he was a very, very good-looking fellow in his early days a terrific bloke really. Bob wasn't. Bob was a very hard taskmaster.

**Q: That was Bill that went in on the bus?**

Bill. Bob wouldn't do that. He was responsible for all the money and keeping them going. I don't know what Crick did. Obviously he got paid by the Council. I don't know whether he gave them some money or what. He spent quite a bit of his money on...he liked a drop of rum and spent quite a bit of money on that I would say and he smoked quite heavily too. Bill smoked too. He smoked a pipe all the time. Never ever saw him smoke a cigarette. Bob never I don't think.

**Q: When your grandfather was alive, did he hold the purse strings or were you too young to know?**

I couldn't answer that Pauline, I mean I presume he did. He was a domineering, terrible man. I had no time for him he used to belt me.

**Q: He used to belt you?**

Well, if he caught me he would. He didn't catch me very often. No, he'd threaten to. I don't know whether he ever did or not but he was a bit like that Quinn character I imagine down in Melbourne. He was a man that lived beyond his means and considered himself a very important gentleman around the place.

**Q: Do you remember him doing any work?**

No.

**Q: That might have been because he was too old perhaps, or too important?**

I don't know whether he did anything in the orchard in the early days as I said...you see he died, I was only very young when he died so I wouldn't know. Well this is...mostly a lot of stuff was what we found out in later years about his modus operandi but we know that...the stuff that mum used to tell us about...I don't doubt that he was...like I said, he was three terms in Council so obviously he had to be elected to Council. He made himself a fairly popular man by the fact that he threw a little bit of money around I'd say. He was a patron of this, a patron of the Cricket Club, a President of the School of Arts, all this sort of thing you know. He probably bought his way into most of those sort of things with money that he didn't have. The money he borrowed he



used to, according to mum, have parties and things at their house you know. Because this was a big courtyard area out here and all the garden and the rest of it. The house was very nice, it was lovely. He built it himself but it was wooden.

**Q: Weatherboard?**

Ummm, but very badly affected with white ants over the years so he didn't use it.

**Q: What sort of a roof, corrugated iron?**

A lovely big front verandah on it

**Q: Corrugated iron roof?**

Yeah, I think so. I'm not sure.

**Q: Did you sit on the verandah when you had the prawns?**

No, no, you'd sit here. This was another grassed area here you see, just there and that's where the cool-room was and that photo that's in there was taken about there you see. This was a little grassed area and this was a grassed area. No, they mostly used to sit out near the humpy here you see out the front of the humpy sort of thing and sit down there depending on the weather I suppose. Even my grandmother, I mean apart from the fact that she was always...and she always smelt nice. Obviously she used eau de cologne or whatever they used in those days. I used to love the way...and she was always so nicely dressed and all the rest of it and I can never imagine in the latter years now how they ever got together. I mean they were like chalk and cheese honestly. He was such a strict old...and she was such a lovely person. But I support that sort of thing happened. I don't know how they ever got together because...all I know is that they were married on Christmas day at St. Andrews Cathedral.

**Q: Was she a down-trodden woman?**

No. I don't think so. No, she seemed to be able to hold her own...he, I don't know whether she might have been. Most of my memories of her were in this room that she had with a lovely big canopied bed and all the nice...and I think it even had a fireplace in it. She spent a lot of time in there. I'd read to her and all that sort of thing.

**Q: Was it normally a good living with an orchard? Assuming your grandfather hadn't overspent, could they have made a good comfortable living out of that do you think or was it a poverty stricken existence?**

Yes, I would say so. Yes, it was recognised as one of the better orchards in the area. The fruit that they grew there was first class. It was really good stuff. They had a good name. The Whitfields had a very good name. As I say Bob



was sought after as far as his pruning was concerned, Bill was popular enough. Amy was well known, mum...well they were all a well respected family. I think had he been a different person that, yes they would have. You see even like I told you, he bought a car for Christ sake. OK a car. He was the first person in North Ryde to own a car. He had to do these...he was that way inclined, which he smashed up after a short period of time but all these sort of things took money out of the...and as I said the boys killed themselves trying to keep the thing viable and doing all these extra things like the wagon loads of wood and all that sort of thing which obviously had to be out of the bush, cut and chopped up into lengths that would feed into the boilers and all that sort of thing and then transported into Redfern. Well they would have taken time away from looking after...so all that probably contributed but even so, the orchard was always immaculate. All in between was always weeded even with a chip hoe that sort of thing. They used to do it with a chip hoe. It was all watered. They had a watering system all the way through there. They used to dig a little trench around the trees and the water used to run in from pipes. The trees all had in those days, to protect against the fruit fly, they used bottles with stuff in them right and the fly used to...and they were all on the trees. They all had to be...I was very...I thought it was very good and all this...they grew all these vegetables. All sorts of vegetables along there. All these were apricots and nectarines and plums and all that but they only marketed a few plums, they were nice. All that was all peaches and this here where I've got grapefruit, poor Bob, he perceived somewhere along the line that there was money to be made out of grapefruit. This is before people even knew what grapefruit was I think and he bought dozens and dozens, probably hundreds of trees and planted them all and I don't know how he ever...he might have read it somewhere or somebody told him or talked to him but it didn't work out. They were...they had peaches there too which they grubbed out and planted with grub???...so there were peaches all down there. The grapefruit obviously didn't work out. The fowl-house at the back there was where Amy used to keep ducks and she used to use duck eggs in the cooking.

The stuff she cooked, I kid you not. And that was one of my jobs you know, was to go down and get the...there was a little dirt track went down through here and I'd go down and get the...chop the wood for her for her stove. I used to do that for her.

**Q: Did she make nice sponges?**

Oh, did she ever. Mum was a good cook too but Amy was unreal. Heather's mother was...a lot of the womenfolk of that era were all...well I mean there are probably a lot of womenfolk of this era that are very good too but I don't think... the majority of people now go and buy stuff ready-made. They don't make a career out of cooking or anything like that do they in years gone by, I don't think.

**Q: In the veggie garden, were the vegetables just for home consumption or did they sell those as well?**

No, well they probably had a barter system going in those days. I mean we had the same thing here, we had all this after we came here and what-have-you and dad was still going. I put vegetables and all down the back there and we had that many that we used to give them away to next door and the people on the other side and all that sort of thing. I don't know Pauline, they possibly sold a bit of it. It was quite extensive, everybody growing peas, beans, turnips, carrots those sorts of things but whether or not...I don't think...It wasn't as well maintained in my time as this side of it you know. I think it was more or less something for their own use or for the families use. I don't know whether they sold too much of. It got run down a lot in later years. This old dirt track was pretty rough, got rougher as it went along and this one of course was only ever used for the...to go up the packing shed mainly, it was only a rough track. There was a gate there...this was a main entrance here and that's where...that line there...on the other side of that is where the Army Camp and the other side of that was all the...but not on this side. That's Edmondson Street now up there.

**Q: We are looking at a plan that you got an architect to draw up of your grandparent's orchard. Was this all from your memory?**

Yes. I don't think we have got anything have we Heather? Have we got anything in writing or on paper about the orchard?

(Heather) "No".

Their orchard was typical of the orchards and the way people lived in those early years of North Ryde. They all had a nice home, all the ones I can remember had nice places. They all had fairly big families. They all probably helped to maintain and work on the properties as they were growing up. Some of them, the Rennies for example, they were on top of the hill there right opposite...One of the boys (I can't think of his name at the moment), he built a house right on the corner of Pittwater Road and Delhi Road and Donnie Rennie, my age - we went to Drummoyne school together, obviously acquired (what was his name...Jack?) property because he knew the orchard game. He went into it himself right and that happened a bit. The Olivers and Hicks's and all those you know, the Heards and what-have-you. You probably read about them trying to...a lot of people reckon they should call it Heard Park and all this sort of thing because the Heards had a big property up on the corner there.

It was mainly from about Quarry Road outward...I don't think there was much on...in my time. You see, there was a big, big, big Chinaman's Gardens out at where Macquarie Road is and Lane Cove Road is now, all in that...where that horrible business is with Quarry Road and Gouldings Road and Lane Cove Road, it was all big...and out further I suppose, out where the High School is (it's not a High School now, it's the spastic centre people) out there, there



quite a lot of orchards there I think. But it was mainly from there right out to the river when you got out to Waterloo Road out there. There was a lot of the early people had extensive orchards all out where the Macquarie Shopping Centre is and all that, all out through the back of Marsfield.

**Q: Would you say that the orchardists lived in what you would call frugal comfort?**

Well I suppose they... I don't know what I'd call it. To them, I suppose it was all they could expect. I certainly don't think there were any Taras or anything like that, any Scarlet O'Hara business. There was no...like the cotton in America, there was nothing like that. I'd say the majority of them were fairly basic because they didn't get...I don't know whether Heather's got them somewhere but she's got...but I don't think anybody made a lot of money.

**Q: You got one shilling and sixpence for a box of peaches?**

Well, it depended on the quality. I mean they'd get up to 3/- maybe 3/- and sixpence a box or something like that but I don't think...it wasn't like a sheep station or something like that.

**Q: They were reasonably comfortable, not poverty stricken?**

Yes, yes. I think that all...if you talk to any of the descendants of the people that had orchards. If you talk to Donny Rennie or the Olivers or the Sayers or any of those sort of people...

**Q: Was it considered that when your mother married your father, was he considered a social equal working at the mill or was that considered a bit lower down on the social scale?**

A lot of men folk didn't have many fancy jobs. Dad wasn't working I don't think...I'm not sure, I would have to check. I don't know whether he was working at the mill then, he probably was. 1923 - forty three years, 1965. Yes he started about 1922 I think. I don't know whether there was any sort of status about people in those days. Most of the men if they had a job, they were doing well, right. It didn't have to be a very glamorous job.

**(350-397 omitted)**

**...END.....**