

An Interview with Jack Pearce

Rosemary Phillis

Jack Pearce passed away on the 2nd June 1998, aged 97. In January 1996 I had the pleasure of spending a morning with Jack sharing his memories of his life in Riverstone. Later his daughter Dorothy Bridle kindly added some information to update the article.

I was born on the 14th March 1901 in the family home in Lytton Road, behind the Riverstone cemetery. My parents were Arthur and Emma Pearce whose ancestors arrived in Australia in 1802 and settled at Yarramundi. I was the youngest of seven children, (five sisters and one brother).

When I was young my family moved into the township, first Piccadilly Street, and later to 24 Mill Street. There were too many floods and bushfires out in Lytton Road and life was hard.

My father was the caretaker of the Meatworks Manager's home, his name was Mr Quinn. I also had to take care of all his animals, poultry, cows and pigs; two of my sisters, Chris and Ivy were employed to do the housework and cooking.

I attended school in the town, it was where the local museum is now. My first job was at Stewarts Shoe Store, situated at the end of the Parramatta Arcade. Wages were low, so I had the opportunity to become an apprentice jockey, the wages were better and board was included. I trained and rode at the Randwick stables and handled all Samuel Hordern's horses, and rode in some races. In those days there were plenty of good experienced jockeys like Alby Woods and Jimmy Pike, and they would be chosen before me. I had two days off weekly and would usually ride in country races.

During World War 1 there were many events at Mulgrave, Penrith and Clarendon to raise money for the war effort and I rode many winners. I was a jockey for about three and half years, then gave up because of my weight. I started at 6 stone 10 pounds and when I terminated I weighed 10 stone.

I was interested in many sports and took up bike riding, we had a bike club in town. I purchased my first bike at 14 years of age, my mother took me to Sydney to buy it. A good bike would cost about 5 or 6 pounds (10 or 12 dollars).

My father was the main wood cutter in town for many years. My brother Percy (known as Joe) and I helped him to cut the wood out at Jericho (near Windsor Downs). We had three or four horses and drays working and a small sawmill at the back of our home in Mill Street. We would saw down the trees, split them into portions using a wedge and a maul, and once the wood was in smaller pieces, load it onto the drays and bring it back to the sawmill. Using the circular saw it was cut into posts and bakers wood, taken to the railway station, loaded onto rail trucks and transported to Sydney.

The circular saw was run by a small motor that never caused us any problems for six years, the only maintenance required was to sharpen the blades. This was done by Clarrie Magennis, an expert sawman who was head of the railway sawmill (where the produce store is now). They would cut two or three rail truck loads a day there.

Jim Ouvrier would also bring in timber from his sawmill at Box Hill. He had a horse team and wagons and would drive down Garfield Road, sometimes having problems if the railway gates were closed and the horse team had to stop; it was a bit tricky making that right hand turn to the sawmill, though often someone would lend a hand.

I can remember riding my horse out in the bush just to watch this man bring his horse team fully loaded through the bush tracks, just missing tree stumps by inches. It was a marvellous sight, he was a very good horseman.

My father also carted water for the people in town, as running water was not connected until 1934. There were two private water wells in town, Petchells and Lobbs, and during the droughts these two wells helped keep the town supplied. We loaded the water by hand, pulling it up in a bucket and pouring it into a tank on the back of a horse drawn dray. The tank had a tap which allowed the water to run into containers. A lot of families would go to the creek to do all the family washing.

My brother and I carted manure from the Meatworks, collecting it from the sheep stage, loading it onto drays and carting it to whoever ordered it. Rumery's orchard needed a lot for their fruit trees. We also worked carting gravel from the side of Rumery's hill, at the top of Garfield Road, and this was used on the Windsor Road, before 1921.

After 1921, I worked at the Meatworks in every section. Money and jobs were in short supply and sometimes I would work all day then go back and do the night loading, it was all hard work.

Like most boys in town I used to box. I can remember taking part in boxing matches in the Picture Show, where there were five or six matches every second night. One of the boys, Billy Teale became a champion boxer in the Army. After the war he returned and taught boxing, in my time you mainly taught yourself. In later years Aub Gillespie had a boxing gym over the railway line.

I also played cricket and football. We had many good players and the Meatworks committee organised various sports. About 1930 I joined the Windsor Bowling Club and played for years.

I was always keen on fishing and fished from Eastern Creek through to Windsor and Pitt Town. South Creek was good as it was tidal, I would catch mullet, eels, perch and sprats. I had to look out and be careful of the snakes, as they would swim across the creek and I had to hit them with a stick before they got me. Some of my fishing mates were Jack Chalker, George Ardle, Garnet Shepherd, Charlie Johnson and Jack Gunton.

Storekeepers from times gone by were John Darling, Bambridges, Charlie Davis and Cohens. Griffin and Beutel were shoe repairers in the town but I would always repair my own as I learnt shoe repairing at my first job. In my time I learnt whatever I could, just to survive.

In 1935 I married Grace Field at St. Paul's Church in Riverstone and we first rented a house in Mill Street, then purchased land in William Street and lived there for over 30 years. There was no water connected in the street until about 1950. We had to depend on tank water and when it ran out, had to draw water with a horse and cart. We had a mixed farm and had some greyhounds, we grew whatever we could just to make ends meet.

My wife and I had four children. As we were both getting older, we decided to sell our property and in 1971 purchased a house in Regent Street. My wife passed away in 1992 and I intend to stay here for the rest of my life, I have excellent neighbours around me, so what more can I wish for.