

Denny Mason

Clarrie Neal

In 2003, Denis Mason, a much loved resident of Riverstone passed away. This article was compiled by Clarrie Neal from information provided by Denis in two interviews April 1999.

Denis (Denny) Mason was born in Riverstone on the 1st August 1912, the second son of Frank and Emily Mason. There were three other children in the family, Monica, Brian and Pat and they were reared in the family house "on the hill" in Garfield Road near the Catholic Church. Denny was also known as Danny or Dinny, depending in which area of Riverstone you lived.

Denny attended the Riverstone School that is now the museum. With his primary schooling completed he then attended Granville Technical College for two years, recalling that his best friend in those days was a lad known as Vic Hey. Vic was a very good Rugby League player who represented Australia, played in England, returning to coach Parramatta for 6 years.

Denny loved to play cricket and has fond memories of one day when, as a slightly built lad of 16 years playing for Riverstone against Freemans Reach, he scored 18 runs. What made the day so special was that Denny scored most of the runs off a bowler named Charlie Nicholson, who played Shield cricket for NSW and later Australia. Denny always considered Charlie to be a gentleman, as he showed a lot of sympathy to the lad at the other end that day and allowed him those 18 runs.

In 1916, when Garfield Road was a gravel track, one of the first people in the district to own a motor car was George Terry of Rouse Hill. Denny recalls, as he heard the car, a 1912 Maxwell, coming up the hill he would run out to the cutting to watch it pass by. He also recalls Edwin (Ted) Rouse being driven into Riverstone in his horse and sulky with Jack Hynds as the driver.

As a youth he became very interested in motor bikes, owning at various times several old English built bikes including a Norton, a Velocette, a B.S.A. and a rare old Calthorpe. This interest in bikes meant he became a good friend of Rod and Noel Terry who each owned a Douglass bike.

He also remembered the time when Geoff Terry returned from the 1st War with a new Sunbeam bike, and it being virtually wrecked when Gerald Terry was riding it along the Windsor Road and smashed into a cow. After the motor bikes came the cars. Denny's first car was a Morris 6 that he purchased in 1950. His next car was a Chrysler Plymouth.

Denny's first job was working as a labourer with the engineers at the Meatworks, earning 16 shillings a week. After two years with the engineers he gained a job with the Egg Board in Mountain Street, Ultimo where he spent four years. Denny remembers that he had to catch the 5.40am steam train to Sydney and that there were four girls from Riverstone working at the Egg Board, including Molly Buchan and Enid Freeman. He had to walk to the station and be careful when walking under the awnings of the two shops located where the Commonwealth bank is now, because there would often be cows sleeping under the awnings.

When the travelling became too much Denny boarded in a house at Paddington. It was while working at the Egg Board that he met Gwen Torr who also worked there. Denny recalled that he was earning 3 pounds per week and that Gwen was earning 27 shillings per week. From this amount she kept 7

shillings for her fares and gave her mother 20 shillings to help support her father and two brothers who, because of the depression, were unable to get work.

Denny married Gwen in 1932 in Sydney and, when they were put off by the Egg Board, they came to Riverstone, where they first lived on the opposite side of Garfield Road – in the house that Brian Mason later occupied. (Frank Mason gave each of his sons a parcel of land. Monica, his daughter was a nurse and she was killed in an ambulance accident in the 1920s. This had a great impact on all three of the boys.) The house next to the Church was built prior to WW2 probably around 1937. The 1950 addition was built by Jim Hanney. It was in this house they reared their five children - Margaret, Terence, Irene, Jean and Kay.

Riverstone was still badly affected by the depression when they arrived and Denny spent a considerable time working for the dole with Blacktown Council. He eventually gained a casual job at the Meatworks, working with Bill Turner and Joe Fitzgerald unloading the stock trains that arrived throughout the night. He gained permanent employment in the freezers in 1938 and worked there for 36 years until he retired in 1974.

To help support a growing family he started repairing bikes in a tin shed he used as a workshop. This practice of repairing bikes kept on growing and became Denny's major hobby. At the time Coulters also had a bike shop, but from about c1960 Denny became the only bike repairer and decided to build a new workshop. The two best known and most popular bikes he sold were the "Alban" which he assembled himself and the "Malvern Star" which came ready assembled.

It was about this time Victa Mowers had a dispute with Rosenthalls, their agent in Riverstone. Victa then approached Denny Mason and asked him to become their distributor for this area, which he readily accepted. It would be fair to say that just about every family in Riverstone during that period had, at one time or another, bought a mower or a bike or had one repaired with Denny Mason. Also sold from the shop were many smaller electrical goods, such as toasters and irons, etc.

Denny had the misfortune to have thieves break into his workshop one night and steal goods valued at 1,000 pounds. Some months later the same thieves returned but this time Denny was ready with a guard dog and a shotgun - the thieves never ever returned after that episode.

In c1988 Denny transferred the business to the town area, where it was run by his daughter Irene for several years before being sold in c1994. Denny suffered a sad loss in 1994 when his wife Gwen, after a marriage spanning 62 years, passed away at the age of 81 years.

Denny, with his pleasant easy going nature was a wonderful man to deal with, many families in Riverstone realising this when, if they were struggling and wanted to buy an item, Denny would allow them to pay it off by instalments, and he never ever charged any interest.

A little incident he recalled when I interviewed him just about says it all for Denny, One day while waiting outside a shop in Marketown a lady came up to Denny put her arm around him and placed a big kiss on his cheek. Denny said "that was very nice of you,..... but what was it for".

She replied "when I was a little girl my parents bought a bike from you and it was the happiest day of my life, I wanted to kiss you there and then to say thank you, but I was too shy. I am now 55 and not so shy and I still regard it as the happiest day of my life, so thank you".