

Jan ter Balk

Kevin Balk

My grandfather, John (Jan) Ter Balk, was born in Amsterdam. Jan became a seafaring man and met and married my grandmother Jessie in Greenoch Scotland in 1888. Jan worked his passage to Sydney in that year and settled in Plumpton.

Plumpton was about three and a half miles from Rooty Hill station and transport between these two points when my grandfather first arrived in 1888 would have been by horse-drawn cart or coach. That Jan went direct to Plumpton suggests that his employment had been discussed prior to departing Greenoch, although the Glendennings did not hail from Scotland but from England.

Jan probably boarded with a family in Plumpton until moving into a rental cottage in Cannery Road when joined by Jessie in May, 1889. The 1891 census disclosed this as still their address. The family resided at Plumpton until moving to Riverstone in 1900.

During 1895 Jan obtained employment as a Butcher with the Riverstone Meatworks. Either Jan had acquired some special butchering skills and now sought a better wage with the established company, or, perhaps had been recommended for the new job by Mr Glendenning.

Until the family moved to Riverstone in 1900 Jan walked from Plumpton to the Meatworks and home again, using a rough track meandering through the bush. From Plumpton the route crossed Richmond Road and covered a short distance before crossing Grange Road. The track then led through mainly open space with a few fences until reaching and crossing Garfield Road near the Riverstone cemetery. Shortly before arriving at the Meatworks, Jan's path passed the property which later became his permanent home in Riverstone. However, for almost five years he accepted this monotonous walk, in all weather, as part of the routine in earning his living. It indicates his acceptance of any challenge in providing for his family.

My Grandfather's employment was in the days before refrigeration in the Meatworks or the Railway louvered vans conveying the carcasses. This caused all the slaughtering and processing of meat to be performed in other than the hot daylight hours, mostly in the cool of the evening.

Commencing their duties late in the day the labourers then worked until about 10.30 pm when they took their first break. When slaughtered the animals were first placed in the 'Hanging Yard' and later the dressed carcasses were loaded into the Railway vehicles for despatch to Darling Harbour.

Butcher shops of the period, utilising block ice, contained a 'Coolroom' but the public display of the trays of cut meat in the then un-refrigerated window presented a problem. Aided only by ice and freshly cut ferns this must have been a real challenge to all butchers attempting to retain meat freshness. Still the Illawarra Line Ferncutters benefited through meeting the daily supply demand for ferns which they sent to Central Station daily.

The hours in which the Riverstone Meat Works operated confirms my Aunty Coba's report that her father made his forward journey to the Meatworks in the late afternoon. Probably he then arrived back at his residence at Plumpton about daybreak. The daily travel routine was eased following a move of residence to Essex Farms Estate Riverstone in 1900.