



Reg Bradley

(Reg's wife Connie was also present)

Reg: I suppose I could begin by saying that I was born in the valley 75 years ago. I came through those early Depression years. of course, but as a child going to school, we had a good life, really. It was hard, though. Before leaving school, and after school, we were expected to assist in whatever way we could, because we had quite a large orchard and a small dairy farm, plus a small sawmill, and it was pretty well all operated by the family. Except that my father employed a young fellow who he more or less half reared, and who moved on when he was about nineteen.

Also, apart from that, in the Depression days the farm, the dairy, and the mill still wasn't sufficient, so we were also cutting sleepers in the bush. At that time I was about 16 or 17. We had some timber on our own property, but for some we used to go right across to the other side of that valley down there and up on that main ridge you can see from here, which was a walk of something like two miles each way, and it was uphill and downhill. It was bad enough to walk it without having to do a day's sawing and cutting with the axes as well.

Bill: You didn't ride horses?

Reg: No. Oh... I never had a lot of faith in horses, and I reckon on steep hills, too, they're not very comfortable. I always had too much feeling for the horse - I thought it was too hard on them. I'd get off and lead them!

School was very good. I learnt the violin for about three years and that interrupted the last three years of my primary school work, and whilst I learnt to play the thing reasonably well, I didn't go on to anything beyond that, and more or less dropped it. I wouldn't know which end to get hold of one with now.

Bill: You would have liked to have done that?

Reg: Oh yes, but I'd have preferred a piano, but we didn't have one. We had a violin, so I learned that.

(The curtailed schooling) caught up with me eventually when the War came and I was dead set to get into the Air Force, but my education standard was pretty low. I had about three attempts. I began in 1940, and they told me that my education standard didn't quite reach what they required and they advised me to study on, and it wasn't till early 1942 that eventually I was able to join up. With a lot of study I made it, and got through.

Bill: If we could skip back to your violin-playing for minute, was that just something that you wanted to do, or was there anybody in your family that was musical who encouraged you?

Reg: Well actually, my mother could play reasonably well and wanted me to take it up. My father played the mouth organ. That's about the extent of his music, but he could sing - the whole family could sing. And of course when he was young this played a large part in the family entertainment. My grandfather came to the valley in 1884 - well, my father came then, so my grandfather would have come a few years earlier than that. He built the old home "Ebenezer Cottage" that still stands.

Originally it was a two-storied building, but the old feller, for some reason, when he eventually decided to retire and move to The Entrance, dismantled the top story and erected it out at Picnic Point at The Entrance. You can't understand his logic - he'd have been better off to have got fresh timber and started again. It would have really been worth something. It was quite impressive for those days. He even had it lit by gas light - the Gloria light I think they called them. It was a very high building because the ceilings on both stories were eleven feet, which made it a pretty tall building.

The old man had a sawmill - well, first of all, after coming there and getting the house going he set up a blacksmith's shop. He'd come from Pymont. They lived in Sussex Street and the family had a foundry - well his father before him had a foundry there and my grandfather took over in later years. The great grandfather arrived in Australia we think in 1838 - he was a free settler. He'd come from England - Leicestershire - and I think his people were factory owners, and through some misdemeanour of his he was more or less shoved out a little bit, we think. But he made good, because we've only found in more recent years that he owned some ninety acres across the valley here that we weren't aware of. And he had quite a bit of land in the Kincumber area and at Avoca.

My grandfather was a very accomplished blacksmith and engineer I suppose you'd say in those days. When he came here apparently he looked after the tools and equipment for the people on the land - the farmers who were opening the place up, and he did a lot of repairs to mattocks, ploughs and other tools. I still have his old business book with his orders and where he delivered them. In the last three years before he left Sydney he supplied all the steel for Goulburn Gaol, and it's recorded in this book. Even parts of the gallows.

Bill: So he would have come to the valley not long after the cedar-getters had been through?

Reg: Yes, well, in the early 1880s - I think the cedar-getters were here around the fifties, so they were here some thirty years before him. There was quite a lot of timber here of course. In his business of making cartwheels he used a lot of felloes - the banana-shaped pieces, the segments that made up the wheel. Well, apparently he decided to come up here because there was a lot of timber available and he went into the business of producing those. The sawmill he set up consisted mainly of a drag saw which was able to slice small sections of big logs into flitches. Then he'd use a bandsaw to cut the shape.

They were special drag saws - came from America. They weren't quite large enough for his requirements, though. They only had a two foot stroke, and he required to cut at least 27 inches. And what would happen with a saw like that was that the sawdust wouldn't clear, you see? One tooth wouldn't pass right through each end, and therefore it would clog. According to my father, he cast the wheels and made bigger machines. We've still got one down at our son Graeme's place that's almost complete. And we've got parts of several other ones. We've always valued them, as we've always been pretty proud of the old grandfather. My father didn't have the education that his father had, because the facilities for schooling

weren't all that good. Well, the school was three miles away, a long way to walk, and I think my father said that he only went to school for three years because they were required on the land to look after the farm. It was a big family - twelve or thirteen children. He married again later and he had another three. Dad was about seventh, the youngest of the seven that came from Sydney, with an elder brother before him. The others were all girls. The girls would help with the farm as well - they were very agile apparently, and capable. They grew a lot of corn, and all sorts of citrus and apple trees. We still own the property he took up originally, and there are still odd trees from those times left on the property.

Bill: Did you say there were only two boys in that big family?

Reg: No, later on... it ended up I think there were five boys altogether. Almost half and half. All the tilling in the orchard had to be done by hand with chipping hoes. The trees grew large and there wasn't room for a horse and plough. They realised that those sort of trees root close to the surface and you can only till the first few inches. So that's what we fell into when we grew up, my brother and myself. We still had the orchards, and grew a lot of corn. My father also grew a lot of vegetables, and through the Depression years of course that's what helped us on greatly - and others around us. He was pretty generous. He was always helping his sisters' and brothers' families. One of his brothers came from up near Yorkie. The houses were just on the left side as you go up - from the old road that went off into the scrub from Yorkie on the left. They were about 100 metres up, up in the corner.

Bill: Nothing left of them now I assume?

Reg: No. We were there some years ago and there's some old climbing roses and the odd post. He moved the sawmill he had from the old homesite - a steam mill, of course - and put it up near Kingtree Gully. He erected it in there to the right, just after that gate that goes into where Ed Motz used to live, on a spot beside the creek. I think the idea was that there was so much timber available, and most of it was timber that had been rungbark. In photographs of the mill that we have there's one that shows the old man as he would have been, just before he left up there to go to The Entrance. You can see a lot of the dead timber in the background that the early settlers had rung.

Bill: Was the ringbarking done preparatory to clearing, or as a way of seasoning the wood?

Reg: No. The initial reason would have been for clearing the land, to allow the trees just to die and fall down or whatever. Of course that took fifty years or more, but once the trees died the grass would grow.

Bill: That raises a question for me about when they were cutting the felloes. How did they do that out of green timber? Didn't it warp or check?

Reg: No. The bluegum was a fairly stable timber. There was also the poorer grade of bluegum called roundleaf - it's inclined to distort a bit, but big mature trees are quite stable too. It's mainly the younger ones that distort. But generally speaking it was bluegum that grew mainly in this whole valley. The roundleaf seems to be a timber that grows higher up on the slopes, and I'd imagine there wasn't so much of it in those days - it'd be probably 90% bluegum plus all the scrubwoods. And the bluegums were enormous trees.

So after a number of years that mill was eventually taken from there and erected in one or two other spots in the valley before it came back to the old property. My father and one of his brothers bought it back and we carried on the cutting of felloes up until 1939. It was still a steam mill up till then, and then it was converted to diesel during the war years. We've used diesel motors ever since, really, and that's what Graeme, my son, has down there at present.

Getting back to what the valley was like in those days, in my period of life there was the transformation from the horse-drawn vehicle to the modern motor vehicle. There were still bullock teams - odd ones would go past taking logs probably not right to Wyong, but in the early twenties there were still one or two mills about. There was one down near the Wyong Creek school, for instance, and the teams would

take logs to that. And then there was a mill in Stinson's Lane which the Carson's took over. Mr Carson was a very go-ahead sort of a gentleman and he brought into the valley one of the very early track-driven haulers. It was a relic of the First War where they used them for towing guns and equipment. It was a Holt - they were the forerunner to the Caterpillar. He used that for a couple of years, then he brought the first Caterpillar 60hp into Australia, and that came up here. It came past towing a huge boiler that came from a mill just near the showground in Wyong that had been discontinued. He brought this huge boiler and engine and set it up where Kenneth Smith has his mill now. And he also built the double tramway down from The Knoll, and the flying fox, which you've already heard about.

Bill: And the big chute up Kingtree. He sounds like a real innovator.

Reg: He was. He had some American origin I think. The family came from England originally, but I think he may have been born in America. The chute for instance - you may have heard that he got washed down it after a storm one time. There was a poem written about him by Mr Stinson. Apparently there was a lot of debris built up at the mouth of it after a storm which was damming up water behind it. He was up there cleaning it out and he went down with it too. It was a miracle that he survived it.

The chute came down the side of a cliff-face and curved as it went, and spewed out onto a flat at the bottom. It was made of timber, and Mr Stinson wrote (I can remember one part of it), after talking about pulling splinters out of him, he said: "...and they knew it was Fred by his curls." That's how they identified him in the mud! But he lived on for many years. As a young fellow I was fascinated by machinery and of course I saw that mill working.

Bill: Did you actually know Fred Carson?

Reg: Yes, I worked for him at Gloucester. His son became my brother-in-law. He's retired at Tuncurry now. He's 80, and was equally as much a go-ahead, even moreso, than his father. His ambitions were very high and he built a very large mill at Gloucester. He had it commissioned and worked it for two or three years and eventually sold it out to Alan Taylor Pty Ltd. Boral own it now. It was so big it was very difficult for him to keep up the log supplies.

When Taylor's bought it they had to close down a couple of their other mills and concentrate on bringing their log supplies to this one. That's the sort of thing that's been happening all up and down the coast in recent years. They pulled out of the valley here in 1935 to go up to Gloucester. They claimed that the timber was finished. But as you know, mills have been operating here ever since. It was the best thing that ever happened for Kenneth Smith's grandfather, who had a little mill close beside where Carson's were, only about 500 metres away. It meant that he was assured of many years' of work there,

Bill: There must have been a lot of competition, 'cause there were quite a few mills in the valley, weren't there?

Reg: Yes, there were. I was talking to Billy Waters the other day - he's a character, isn't he? Well, Bill had a small mill operating back in the fifties and sixties - this was before he built that mill that he has not far from where he lives now. But there was a lot of small mills, and we were part of that group, really. But they were fairly productive. I employed four fellows... I think that was the most I ever employed. But timber's been one of the main features of the valley, plus the dairying, of course. The small dairy farms were so numerous here once. Connie used to work for the dairy company at Wyong. She'd know how many there were.

Connie: Well, there were 125 from this valley, Dooralong Valley, and Ourimbah.

Reg: So there could've been 70 or 80 in this valley. Many of them were only half a dozen or ten cows - others might've milked 40 or 50, some of the bigger ones.

Connie: With the mills you and your dad had then, you only cut case timber, didn't you? And the others

would have been onto the bigger timber.

Reg: Yes. Before the war years mainly, my father was cutting fruit boxes for the citrus growers. They were boxes with hinged lids, and the idea was that the boxes were returned back to the Wyong railway station and re-used for another two or three trips if they were lucky.

Bill: Were they made of softwood?

Reg: Yes, they were softwood in those days - made out of coachwood, sassafras - valuable woods now. It wasn't terribly plentiful, either. You used to have to go into the gullies mainly to get it. Quite rugged in places and a lot of it was pulled by horses, because the narrow tracks would only allow one animal - not like a pair of bullocks.

Bill: Did they grow big, those trees?

Reg: Yes, well... I suppose about as big round as a 44-gallon drum would be the biggest that we would've used, but of course they do grow bigger than that in places. But the main size would be around 15 to 18 inches through. There's still a little bit of it left, with restrictions on it. We have some on our own property. It won't be taken, of course, because we value it. There's even some white beech, which grew up your way too - it grew in most of the gullies, along with the cedar. Rosewood was another one.

But after the war, my brother and I more or less took over from my father. My brother hadn't gone to the war because he had an injured foot from when he was a young fellow. He was called on by the Manpower and he worked with our father on the farm and in the mill. So when I came back, we upgraded the mill to some extent, and went on mainly cutting cases for passionfruit and tomatoes for the growers up on the mountain. We supplied a lot of customers over many years. We went away from the softwood and into mainly bluegum, which was quite a useable timber. It was fairly soft, and it didn't split too much when you nailed it. We cut them mainly in shook form, and that's the way we sold them to the farmers, who'd stack them in their sheds...

Bill: In what form?

Reg: What we called shooks. Just the loose boards for the case. And in wet weather, or when they were restricted to their sheds, they'd make them up. Even at night time. The delivery of them was the main reason for shooks. It would have been a problem for us. For instance, the Collins brothers up at north Kulnura used to order them in the thousands, and we'd have a truck with four or five tons of them, and if they'd been made up then of course they'd have been an enormous stack.

We went on with those for many years. We were also cutting building timber and palings and fencing material as well, because there wouldn't have been full time work just in the fruit case side alone.

We also got onto what was called ship's dunnage. Fairly low-quality timber that was plentiful. Low price as well. But because of the large volume we were able to do fairly well out of it. It went down to the wharves and was used for what they called stripping the cargo. They'd put in, say, a layer of drums, then a layer of these boards before the next layer came on. The idea was to try to stabilise the load. They'd be chewed to pieces by the time they got there and most of it wasn't used a second time. A lot of it went to the Japanese shipping people and ended up in Japan. Burns Philp was one of our main customers. This was before containers took over, of course. I think we operated on that for about 12 years, and phased out as the containers came in.

Bill: When the containers hit, were you aware that the new technology was going to have those implications for your business?

Reg: Oh yes. You'd start to hear reference to it, and the agents that we supplied kept us advised too. The same thing occurred with the fruit boxes as well, because they went to the cardboard containers. They

were more expensive, but they came in a folded form that could easily be pulled out and set up. And of course now they're styrofoam.

Connie: That's technology, isn't it?

Bill: Well it runs like a big thread through most of the talks I've had. Its impact. Chainsaws...

Reg: Well, that's something I could talk about, too. I could almost claim to have had the first Stihl chainsaw, in ...oh, I think it was in '51 or '52.

Connie: What was the one Ossie got?

Reg: Well he got a Danarm in 1947. He and Merv Smith got them from the Sydney Show where they'd seen them displayed - one each. They were the first in the valley. And of course they revolutionised things. It was a terrible job working a crosscut saw. No matter how good your saw was, and how sharp you could make it, it still took a lot of effort.

And in our case we were using them a lot, too. The logs would come in in long lengths and quite often if you were cutting palings they'd have to be cut in six foot lengths, or double that. Most of the better timber we cut in long lengths. Fenceposts were seven feet. The rails might be nine or eighteen. And if you did get a big log that was too big to handle, then the chainsaw made it much easier to split them in halves. You could saw it first from one side and then the other - which is still done today, of course. We could only manage about a two foot six cut on the breaking-down saw, whereas Kenneth Smith used to have the big old vertical frame saw - you might have seen it operating, though I think he's done away with it now. Those saws were designed to handle big logs.

Bill: Did you sharpen your own?

Reg: Yes. You really had to learn to look after your own saws, even tensioning - in fact all your equipment. We did our own mechanical work. We could do up engines, even though I was never trained and learned by experience. I was never qualified - the boys were, eventually.

But prior to them coming of a useful age... for instance in 1947 after the war we needed quite a big diesel engine - something like sixty horsepower. I obtained one from up at Wallsend, and it was in fairly bad condition. It had been used in a bus between Wyong and The Entrance. Barry Seargent's grandfather told me that he estimated that it had done 200,000 miles between Wyong and The Entrance in the War years. Originally it came out of a crawler tractor in about 1934 or 1935, then went into a log truck, then into the bus, then into the mill. And I had it for 27 years! And now it's back in an old crawler tractor!

But what I was getting at about the engine: I had to pull it apart immediately and put rings and bearings in it, and I was able to run it then for seven years before we had to get it totally done up. We took it down to a factory in Sydney and they rebuilt it. So it was a very good engine, because I could drive from both ends. It had a gearbox on the back end which drove the breaking down saw. On the front end it had a very heavy crankshaft protruding and I was able to connect a drive there to the saw spindle. It was capable of both operations at the one time, providing it wasn't too heavy, of course. If you were breaking a big log down you'd just let the main bench idle till that cut went through.

A lot of the equipment I had I built up myself out of ex-army stuff mainly. Blitz parts... The old hauler we had is still down at Graeme's. It's got a Cadillac V8 car engine in it which was used during the war as a stationary motor. It's very powerful - much better than, say, a blitz engine. They were about 34hp as against 40 for the Cadillac. It travelled all over the mountains around here, on bush tracks, even on a lot of the old wagon tracks. Quite steep hills. I was the driver, mainly, and quite an artist on it, they tell me. (Laughs).

Actually it was a forerunner to the modern skidder. It was a four wheel drive, close-coupled. I think there

was only about five feet between the axles. The engine protruded forward and there was a big winch on the back. The idea was that you backed it up against a big lump of a tree and then you could pull a big log up a very steep hill. And then it was capable of lifting the end of the log off the ground and dragging it for a couple of miles if necessary. We used to pull logs off the Ourimbah State Forest directly behind the mill about two miles. And we might have two bluegums behind it that could be anything up to 80 feet long. We used to cut them right down to small tops because we could use all of them and there was no waste. Being fresh and green they'd slip very freely, particularly after showery weather. By the time you'd got them to the mill there wasn't much damage done to them. Otherwise we'd have to load them on to a four wheel drive with a jinker behind it. The hills are pretty steep, and it required pretty good braking and gearing to hold them back. It was very fortunate I never had any serious accidents in that regard. I never had to jump off or anything like that.

Connie: He put an extra set of wheels on it once, but I don't think they worked, did they?

Reg: This was the hauler. I decided to make it a six wheel drive. It took me three weeks to accomplish it, and it took me twenty minutes to realise how futile it was! So I dismantled it and put it back as it was.

Connie: And they say it was the only thing that Eric Carson couldn't drive!

Reg: Yes, Eric Carson was a very capable man at driving machinery - Caterpillars, graders, anything at all, you know... dozing. He made miles of roads. (Digression)

Bill: You didn't have any serious accidents, but did you have any close shaves?

Reg: My word I did. With limbs, mainly. With felling timber the danger is in one tree bumping another. I can remember being in a very difficult spot, and I didn't have room to move much. A limb came down and I had to just push myself to one side and watch it coming down end-on ...and it drove into the ground beside me. I was always very aware of what could happen and I suppose that made me pretty careful. I've nicked myself with an axe a few times. But actually sawing timber I only ever touched the saw once, and that was when my brother was assisting me. He was feeding timber to me as we were docking it off. He pushed it just before I was ready and the set on the teeth just rubbed a knuckle. It drew blood, but it didn't cut. My father had quite a bad accident with his hand. He didn't lose fingers, but one of my sons lost half a finger a few years ago when he was working up on the Gold Coast. There have been fatalities in this district over the years, of course. I can remember one in the Watagan mountains years back - a man was out on a Sunday I believe, on his own, and when the tree went it came back over the stump and pinned him and he was either found dead there, or... you know. It's the sort of thing that people should never do on their own. They should work in pairs at least. But there's so much in knowing how to fall a tree safely, to know where it would go, and the possibilities of it coming backwards or jamming the saw. There's a great deal of knowledge about all that required. (Digression)

We used to have a T-model Ford - a truck. I think Dad and his brother bought it second hand originally round about 1926 or 1927. It would have been a couple of years old then.

Bill: Would that have been driven on corduroy roads at that time?

Reg: No. There was some, but a new section bypassed it. I think there's still a bit that used to be visible in a paddock just before you get to Kidman's Lane as you're going into Wyong - about 40 or 50 metres there, which was apparently one of the very bad boggy spots on the road.

Bill: But it must have been a pretty rough ride driving over corduroy in a T-Model Ford I'd have thought.

Reg: Well, earlier Fords would have, and buggies, sulkies and wagons. But the roads were reasonably good when I was a kid. When I was, say, around 10 or 11, big road construction work was going on, and there was a quarry on our own property with a big crushing plant and small tip trucks operating, as well as some horse-drawn drays that were delivering from the quarry down to the crusher - a distance of

probably only 150 metres. They stoned the roads for quite some miles either side of the quarry, so the road was in very good condition. They had a big steamroller working on it that put it down beautifully.

Bill: Were dozers around by then?

Reg: No. Well, there was a little crawler soon afterwards. But not long following they had a towed grader with a very small Clea-Trac crawler pulling it. You had a driver on the tractor and a chap working the wheels, operating the grader. Charlie McPherson was the gentleman. But as I say, the road was quite good, and it's been the basis of some of the better sections of our road. When sealed it lasted for many years. The horror sections didn't exist really in my younger days.

There were very few bullock wagons. The road wouldn't have been capable of carrying any high speed vehicles. The T-Model Ford was one of the most suited, and the old Dodge Fours. There was quite a number of those type of vehicles in the valley. Some of the more well-to-do farmers bought new cars. I don't know if he mentioned it but Billy Waters' wife - her father, Herb Fernance had a 1929 Chev, which he bought new. You'd probably only see them once a month - they'd go in on the 20th of every month, which was pay day for the milk and cream. That'd be the big day for the farmers to go to town.

Bill: Was that a bit of a social occasion?

Reg: Yes, they'd do their shopping and... oh they might go and have a drink at the pub, some of them. Generally speaking they'd be there the whole day. You'd see them going back in the late afternoon - they probably had to get back to milk anyway. They'd go in possibly around nine or ten o'clock after the morning milking, and back about three.

Bill: So some people actually did get to do alright with dairying, then?

Reg: Yes. They put in milking machines. The earliest one that I know of was just down here too. An uncle of mine had it - his wife was one of the McKays from Murray's Run. They had the Simplex milking machines over there, and I suppose the old man talked his son-in-law into putting them in down here. He had a family of about six children, I think, and there were four boys. And they were all working the dairy while the father had a bullock team. He was in the business of pulling logs, cutting girders - all that type of thing. The kids in the family used to spend their school holidays sharpening up their axes and mat-tocks, and they'd be cleaning the sides of the hills. There's so much of the hills now that's covered in timber that was bare in those days - up to a certain height. They had to get the extra grassland, you see, for winter feed for the cattle, and those slopes would keep a bit of winter grass going.

Bill: And that was done the hard way, by hand?

Reg: Oh yes. Grubbing out. For most of it the ringbarking had already been done in those areas - there wasn't much of that that I could recall here. But all the regrowth that starved out grass had to be removed. Of course they did it with a box of matches, too!

Anyway, Jack Greentree's was one of the more reasonable farms - a good family arrangement. The Thompsons were people further down the valley. They were very good farmers and had a very good dairy. It's only in the last five years they've moved out and closed the dairy down and moved up to the Clarencetown area. And Keith Fernance's was one of the better farms - a very good farm. Keith, I think, took over some of the smaller neighbouring farms and he and his boys expanded that into quite a big dairy farm, really, and of course they still maintain quite a lot of farming there.

Bill: And then the dairying took a nosedive sometime in the fifties... with that scheme up at Hexham.

Reg: That's right, that was one of the reasons. Keith would have told you, probably. He sent some of his cattle off and joined the co-operative at Maitland which eventually failed. They couldn't get their cattle back again, and they couldn't start up again because a lot of them had sold their quotas off - that was the

key thing because you couldn't operate without a quota. It would have closed things down quite rapidly for those who decided to join it, and then the smaller ones that were left, they more or less just dwindled.

Bill: But even without the failure of that scheme, was dairying on the decline anyway, would you say?

Connie: What happened with the dairying, I think, was that the kids didn't want to go into it, and didn't want to work the farm because they could get more money away.

Reg: That's right. The children didn't want to be tied down to it.

Connie: With Thompsons, there was the two brothers working the farm and both had boys - Geoffrey had two boys, and Neville one, but they just couldn't do it.

Bill: And it's all gone now, hasn't it?

Reg: Yes. Dan Bailey was the last. There was the big Pioneer Dairy down at Tuggerah too. That was the largest dairy in the whole area. It wasn't really in the valley. They milked hundreds of cows there, and I think the owner of it fought the Electricity Commission for years, as they wanted to put a power station or transmission lines on the site. That was only a matter of several years ago. Then following that there was that talk of a power station at Mardi. They even acquired properties for that. I think it would have been a real disaster in this area. Now of course there's all that expansion planned for that area, with the new shopping complex and the estate.

Bill: Yes. Woodbury Park or something, they're going to call it. I suppose that was named after the Woodbury that had the inn there on the old Maitland road?

Reg: Yes. Matthew James Woodbury I think was the original one there. That little old pub that was on the corner.

Bill: Was that operating in your lifetime?

Reg: As a home, not as a pub. The Collie family lived in that. It was well and truly in the flood area, too, and they often retreated to the attic, I believe. It had a sharp peaked roof on it. That would have been a bit dicey, too - there's been big floods sweep through there. But the main stream went over nearer the bridge. There's still a big pine stump near where the inn was. That would have been just on the east or south east of it, I'd say.

Ken Woodbury, the grandson - I bought quite a lot of timber off him. He owned the land where that proposed power house site was, and he supplied a lot of logs to various mills and I obtained some from him. (Digression)

I suppose others would have talked to you about this, but perhaps I should mention flooding. The road in the early days was very low in many places, and of course subject to flooding and long delays. And over the years they gradually increased the height of the road in the low spots. You might have noticed the last one when they built it up down here. It'll stand a much bigger flood now, and it might only be one or one and a half days' delay. I can recall a delay for a whole week.

One time we had the baker who operated from Chapman and Sons' big store in Wyong stranded with us - they had the old shop at Yarramalong village that they operated as a store as well, and they used to provision it from Wyong with a horsedrawn wagon in the early days for quite a lot of years. And Mr Jurd, who was one of the families that originated over in the MacDonald valley, got caught between two lots of water and was with us for most of a week. During that time he told us all sorts of stories about when he was a young bloke, and how over at St Albans they were reared mainly on corn. We had a lot of corn in the shed then, and nothing would suit us kids better than to make up some sort of gruel out of corn, and eat some.

Not only him, but others over the years were caught by the floodwaters. My uncle's family lived only about five hundred metres away - they were on part of my father's property and had put a house there - and the flood came up to the window level in it twice - in 1927 and 1929, the two record floods. My father had to get them out with a small boat - more or less a punt it was, that he had built. And the water rose so fast that although he had brought the boat well up onto dry land, he happened to look out and it was just drifting away. It must have been a large storm on top of an already flooded valley. It came up and the piano and all sorts of things got caught in it. So in floods they would spend time with us, and with all their kids and ours, we'd have a whale of a time. We'd look forward to flood time.

Bill: And I suppose there'd be no school, or...

Reg: No. We went to a little school directly down

the valley here called Wanda. It was removed during the war years I think. It must have been built during the early twenties. It had a lady teacher, Mrs Baker, and she boarded with some people by the name of Schofield who were directly across the creek. They had a citrus farm there and their bridge was relatively low. We kids were pretty cunning, and we knew when water was rising and when it was falling, and we often convinced her that water that was there and was going down was likely to rise again at any moment. So she'd go back home, and we'd go home! She was there in her Wellington boots. She couldn't afford to get caught out on the wrong side, though she could have done because somebody would have taken her in for a day or two. But the floods played the devil with the farms. I can remember this particular orchard, how it washed a lot of the topsoil off. It was on the floor of the valley, and it had quite good alluvial soil, and one good storm and a flood ruined it. Like so many. There was a lot of citrus grown here in this valley in those early days, and I'd say most of it was taken out because of flood damage. It differed considerably from the Dooralong valley which was much broader and more open, whereas this one was more narrow in places and faster running.

Bill: So the irony was that the floods brought the good alluvial soil, but when you planted things in it the floods wrecked what you planted.

Reg: Yes. And of course also, like it did over in the Murray's Run area - that enormous flood there at the time of the Maitland floods in '55 or '56 - it brought so much sand down and deposited many feet of it onto what may have been fairly good soil previously. It cut the stream out very wide. My mother's sister and her family lived there. She married one of the McKays. We'd occasionally get a chance to go over for a weekend, and one of the neighbours - the Sternbecks who still live there - used to bring their cream over in a little Bean truck - about a one ton truck. He'd deliver that about two or three times a week.

Bill: Took it to Braithwaites to be picked up, didn't he?

Reg: That could have been the case later, but at one stage he brought it direct to the factory. One Friday about 1930 we were due to go back with him in the afternoon. And I can remember Dad going down and seeing him on his way in to find out what time, and him saying he ought to be back at a certain time "if everything went right". He said: "You know, Tom, you know... things might happen". Anyway, he got back, and we went over, and we had our weekend, and he came back again on the Monday morning. And coming back out of the Run - it's quite a steep pull up that hill - we all had to walk up there, and he was flat out getting up it in this little old Bean because they probably only had three gears and no real low gear, and it wouldn't have pulled us all up there. Otherwise we had quite a good weekend and a good trip.

Bill: And would you look forward to that sort of thing? Was it a bit of an adventure?

Reg: Oh it was then, because we only had a horse and buggy in those days and we were limited. We might go into Wyong no more than possibly a couple of times a year - that is, the whole family. Whereas my father would... when his fruits were in season he'd be in probably every week. He'd go with this four-wheeled wagonette with one horse, and that'd be a full day for him. And he'd bring back whatever

provisions we needed.

But we were looked after by the store people in Wyong, Chapman and Sons. I'm not sure how many days a week they came out - it might have been three days, and eventually it was just about every day. And we had two bakers at one time.

That was an incident regarding floods: Vin Earl was the baker for Jones' for years, and he had a '39 Chev panel van. It was a very nice unit and he was very particular about it. He wouldn't drive it into any floodwater - he'd wait till it got down. There were two main spots on the road that held them up, one was near our place and the other was about another half mile further up the road. This time he was waiting for the water to go down, and I had a blitz truck with a tabletop on the back and a four wheel drive, and I said to Vin that we could load him off the bank, and I'd take him through. Well he didn't want to do it for a while, but eventually we got it on and I took it up and there was another bank after passing through the second lot of water, and we got it off. Well! He talked about that for years afterwards. He couldn't get over it! And he was on his way hours before he expected.

He was a real ambassador, too. Any parcels, written messages, verbal messages to pass on, jokes... My father's brother-in-law lived on a small farm down Wyong Creek where there's a goat farm now. I can't remember what started it off, but Dad sent him a dead lizard in a parcel for some reason, and he sent something back, like a heap of cow dung or something like that. Vin wouldn't have known what was in the parcels, though they probably would have let him in on the joke.

One time Dad sent some oranges or some vegetables over to a family in the Jiliby valley, and when Vin delivered it he said - he made it up himself - "Tom said you'll have to tie Art up for a couple of days after he's had all this invigorating food!" It ended up that my sister married their son.

Bill: This Vin Earl must have had a connectedness with a whole lot of people that not many people would have had.

Reg: This is right. For instance he'd take bets for people. Anything at all. And yarn! He'd never get back in daylight. You'd hear him going home about ten or eleven o'clock at night because he'd been talking with people. Then Vin'd have a holiday and they'd put someone else on and the new bloke would be back in daylight hours! He was on it for many years, right up until he was quite aged. Everyone thought the world of him. Wonderful. Big man, too. Happy fellow. He was always very rapt in the Melbourne Cup and the main races, and that sort of thing. I can remember one fellow down the valley was also keen on them, and this fellow was a little bit handicapped, and he was talking to Vin one day about what was going to win the cup. And this fellow says: "Hey, Vin. What about that cattle dog?" But he meant "Catalogue". It won, I think.

But the other one, Mr Jurd, he was a different type of man altogether. He did his job well, and eventually he went to motorised transport. He had a Willys Knight vehicle, and he delivered up to Yarramalong every day with that. I remember we were going home from school and there was a bit of an accident. The silly things that kids do. There was a whole group of us, and some of them started to run as he was coming behind. He'd be probably doing 45 k's or something like that, and this one kid veered out. He had his tucker bag on his back and the front of the mudguard hit him on the tucker bag and threw him, fortunately, back off the road. It knocked skin and hair off him everywhere. This kid got up and cursed him and called him for everything. A little kid about ten years old - talk about swear! But fortunately he was alright, nothing broken or anything. It was getting towards the old gentleman's retiring years, and it upset him a lot, and I don't think he continued a great time longer after that.

Bill: And where did you meet Connie?

Reg: Through the window of the Dairy Co-Op office. I noticed this bit of fluff ...there was some promotion on and she had a cap on....

Connie: It was when they opened the new bottling plant, when they first started to bottle milk...

Reg: And she was done up as a milk bottle, that's right, with a cap. But of course then, she didn't want me. I used to try to get on with her - I'd tread on her feet when we were dancing, - she didn't like that. I persisted, but when I got in the Air Force uniform, that turned the tables! The Blue Orchids as they used to call us.

Connie: But you weren't around for a long while. You were up at Gloucester.

Reg: Yeah, I went working up there for eighteen months, driving tractors in the timber. That's when I re-enlisted and got successfully into the Air Force from there. I was back home for a while on the waiting list, and I was able to catch up with her a bit then. Couldn't make any plans at that stage of the game because the war was on and there was no future as far as thinking of marriage goes. She wasn't ready for me then, anyway, as it turned out. I nearly got married in England, and she nearly got married here, and we both bounced, and that was it.

Bill: So by the time you got together you were both in your twenties?

Reg: I was twenty nine and she was twenty four.

Bill: What were weddings like then? Fairly simple, or slap-up affairs?

Reg: Thinking of my uncles' weddings - I went to a lot of the family weddings. I can remember a couple of them at the Methodist Church at Wyong. I can't recall them having a breakfast afterwards, though. We've got pictures of them coming out of the church. The thing in those days was honeymoons in Katoomba. You'd catch the train from Wyong, then hear the old driver on the whistle when it took off. But wedding breakfasts - I can't recall much of that nature. When my sister Mona and Eric Carson were married they must have had a turnout at the hall or something.

Connie: They used to have dances. And when anyone turned twenty one there'd be a party. Golden weddings, twenty fifth wedding anniversaries...

Reg: They'd be big turnouts. My grandparents on my mother's side had their golden wedding in the Wyong Creek Hall, and there would have been two or three hundred people...

Connie: And the women catered for it. There was no outside catering. Everybody just took that much food.

Bill: And there'd be a band?

Both: Oh yes.

Reg: There were local musicians. Two of the most popular for many years here were two of the local fellows - Roy Waters and Roy Smith. Roy Smith was Kenneth's relative - Merv's brother. They were just simple piano and violin... and foot. Roy used to belt the floor with his foot, and if you were outside the hall half a mile away you mightn't hear the piano, but you could hear the thump of his foot! But they were good. Dancing and activities in the Hall have always been a strong feature in the valley. When our hall was out of action - it was unlicensed for repairs for a matter of a couple of years, Yarramalong allowed us to hold our functions there...

Connie: And it was full. They had people standing outside.

Reg: And that's how it should have been. They should have arranged something in conjunction with one another. On occasion some functions would clash, and that would spoil it for both. There wasn't enough get-togetherness, for some reason.

Bill: But you wouldn't call it rivalry.

Connie: No. A lot of us from Wyong Creek used to go to Yarramalong... I think in the early days there was a greater get-togetherness. They used to often have picnics too. It might have been picnic races, or I can remember way back they'd have pidgeonshoots.

Bill: Was this a clay pidgeon shoot, or...?

Reg: No. The domestic pidgeon. They'd bring them in cages, and they had traps that someone'd pull when the shooter called, and out the bird would go. I can remember Ashley Palmer's grandfather once calling out "Pull!" and the bird never moved! He ended up walking over, reaching in, and picked the bird out. He was the most educated bird of the whole lot! I think they just gave him his freedom then. Of course, with the old shotgun, there was very few ever missed them. They discontinued that after a time because it was inhumane.

Connie: Getting back to the dances: What about when you used to take them from Wyong Creek...?

Reg: Yes, well that's another thing about transport. We had the T-Model Ford, and if there was a dance on you'd end up with a load of people on it because few people had motorised transport. Some would ride horses, and sulkies. Down at the old Wyong Creek Hall, round the back of it, there was a sort of a balcony built with a covered area underneath, and they'd tether their horses there. The young kids, for want of something better to do, would get up on this balcony and pee down on the horses!

I can recall we had a 1927 model Chev Four truck and it would carry a two or three ton load. I drove it to the Yarramalong dance one night and it had a total of fifty people on it, including kids! We had seats all across it, and people hanging on. And just before I went away to the war I had an old sedan Chrysler car - a '29 model, and there were seventeen on that coming home from a dance, hanging on, and on the bonnet. And I was holding a fair sort of a sheila with one arm while I was driving, you know... I was sort of pleased to do it, mind you!

Bill: You'd get into the Guinness Book of Records now.

Reg: With a lot of the dances down here, a bus would run over from the Dooralong Valley perhaps, to bring people, and Reice Palmer would bring down a bus, or King Palmer might be driving sometimes, too.

Bill: And did you interact much with Dooralong, and Jilliby?

Reg: We didn't go to a lot of their dances, I don't think, It's a fair distance, out there and back. I think they had more dances in this valley than they held over there, too, and that brought people to our dances.

Connie: They used to come out from Wyong...they used to have a lot of fights...

Reg: Yes, there'd be a good fight or two on, you know, at times.

Bill: You mean a boxing match or a brawl?

Reg:- No. Someone would just dislike someone else. Handle their girl, or dancing with a girl, or...they'd get into it pretty well. I can remember when I was in Wales with the Air Force I bumped into Jim Taylor, who later became the council's Chief Health Surveyor, and we got talking about times back here in the valley. He said: "Do you remember a dance out at the Wyong Creek Hall, when the bloke pulled a crank handle out of a Dodge and swung it and nearly got me?" I did. Jim had nearly copped it, but the bloke was full, and he was going for the wrong one.

Bill: Did stoushes like this happen often?

Reg: No. They'd usually go for the old bare knuckles. There were some rough types in the earlier days, and even in the later years you got a bit of that element too that tried to upset dances.

Bill: These were people coming in from outside the valley?

Reg: They'd come from other areas... and there were some that even lived in the valley. They'd be good friends probably, through the week, but they'd get a few cheap wines into them ...And there was a little bit of rivalry between some families and it would sort of bring it out when they got turpsed up a bit.

Bill: Was there much actual feuding went on between any of the families?

Reg: No ...not really. There was no real hatred or anything like that. I think that essentially the conditions mellowed people, and I think the feeling was fairly mutual. I know my father got on well with everyone. He reckoned he never had a bad friend in the world, although I know one or two fellers that he wasn't too pleased with! But he'd go out of his way to help people. Poor old Dad, he never made much money for that reason. He made a good living, but he didn't have too much to leave, apart from the property. He died when he was 78, and the day he died he called into the mill in the afternoon. He was still growing some vegetables and he'd been up the farm and had a bag of wood on his shoulder for the fire. He'd only just gone to bed that night, and had been laughing at the jokes in a magazine not long before, and he just went off quite quietly and suddenly.

Bill: Sounds like a good way to go to me.

Reg: Yes ...(digression) But Dad was always a terribly hard worker...

Connie: And a practical joker!

Reg: Yes. And he was a great one for his cards - used to play crib a lot. He'd go over to neighbours who were old friends from their boyhood days - not on a regular basis, but now and again, and they'd play crib, or euchre, or five hundred.

Bill: That's the first time anyone's mentioned cards, but it must have been played a fair bit, was it?

Reg: Yes, well, at quite a few of the dances at the old hall, before we pulled the partition out you used to have a sort of supper room divided off from the main dance floor. It was under a verandah top off the main building. They'd have a ball, and Dad used to take part in a lot of this, as he was a member of the committee, and they'd have their euchre parties while the dance was going on. I never played cards myself - I'd rather read or something. But if any of Dad's friends or his brothers came to stay with us for a few days they'd be bound to have a game of cards. They enjoyed themselves, though it was a bit noisy if you were a non-player. (Digression)

Steam was always a fascinating thing for me. I used to make models, and they'd work, too. I even made a boiler. I'd get a bit of boiler tube about 100mm diameter and 400 or 500mm long, put a plate on each end and a bolt through it and some gaskets to seal it. I didn't have a safety valve on it which I later realised had to be done...

Bill: How did you learn how to do all this sort of thing?

Reg: Well my father had the sawmill operating with a steam engine when I was seven years old. He built the mill up, and he bought this portable, that's what we called a unit on wheels with the engine mounted on top of the boiler. And an engine like that is really fascinating, because everything moves fairly slowly - you know, the big crank going round and the huge wheel. I can remember asking one of my uncles who had a Chev Four car - this was pretty early in the piece when there weren't too many of them around - what was in the engine that made it go. And he said: "Well, you know what a steam engine is like, with the cylinders and the con rods? Well, it's the same thing but you've got four of them, see? Small ones." I'd have been round about 12 or 13 then I suppose. But I realised then the basics of it all.

But the steam was a pretty easy one to understand - you boiled the water and turned it to steam and built up a pressure, which was the same sort of thing as air pressure only hot, and that forced through the pipes

and the valving and drove the pistons. I suppose it's in the family, too. My uncles were all mechanically-minded. I've used books and illustrations whenever I could get onto them, but a lot of it was a bit out of my depth once you got graphs and curves and...I've still got a little steam plant out the back here with an engine on it, and a lawnmower motor that's converted and runs on steam.

Graeme's got a huge diesel engine down there that's pulled down at the moment. The cylinders have a bore of 11 inches, and are about two foot six in length. There's a pair of them mounted side by side with a space between them and a common crankshaft and one flywheel. It came from over near Forbes. Edgells had put it in during the war years to flood irrigate a big area because they were providing vegetables for the war effort - mainly canned peas I think. Anyway, he's going to recondition it and get it going again, and I'll probably help him. It's a massive thing.

I made a tractor out of a T-Model Ford once. (He describes it in detail from a photo). It worked quite successfully in pulling firewood for the boiler. You see, in the case-cutting that the mill did then you didn't get enough waste to fire the boiler all the while, so we had to supplement it with dead timber from the bush, which was fairly plentiful then. I not only shortened it, but I made it narrower. I cut the back axle housing and took 5 inches off each axle so it would fit the bush tracks, because otherwise it was too wide. It was a simple matter to cut the front axle and join it up with plating, but I had to cut the splines on both axles on the rear end.

Bill: What machinery did you use to do that sort of thing with?

Reg: Well, I didn't have much. A hammer and chisel, files, a hacksaw, and ordinary spanners. I've got all the patience in the world doing that - I love filing, and hacksaws. I'm probably the only bloke in the world who made a two-cylinder engine out of a T-Model Ford four cylinder engine by cutting it in half with a hacksaw! You know I gave the darned thing away a few years ago - I should have kept it. I sawed it through the number three cylinder. That gave me a lot less meat I had to cut through. But there were all sorts of alterations I had to do. The flywheel had to be mounted on the front end of the engine, because all your timing gear was on the front end.

The reason for doing all this was, the big diesel engine I was telling you about that I had to rebuild after the war - the electric start on it used to give a lot of trouble. You had to have 24 volts, and expensive batteries on it. And the idea of this two cylinder thing was to mount it on the side of the engine to act as a self-starter for it. You'd get this little one going, and I had a clutch and a chain drive to the pinion off the starter motor. That would turn her over, see? But the hardest part was starting the little engine first. It had a kick like a mule - the T Model Fords were always noted for that. I've got a few marks on my face from encounters with crank handles. One particular time I was knocked unconscious, and on another occasion when I was getting a neighbour's pump started I got hit in the face again. The neighbour was terribly concerned and raced up to the house and came back with a bottle of overproof rum and give me a snort. I'd just got to my feet by that time, and down I went again! I don't know which hit the hardest!

I got known as Mr Fixit. Lots of things I could manage. I never let things beat me in that regard, and I could often substitute something, or make up something. And people on farms around would call me to help start a chaff cutter engine or repair pumps. Once you understand what should be going on its not usually too hard to find out what's wrong. That plantation of pines down there where Graeme is - they were planted in 1960. My father helped plant them. It's lovely wood if you can air-dry it - especially for inside use.

Bill: They must have been big bandsaws that they used to cut the felloes with.

Reg: Yes they were about three foot six wheels - might have been four feet - the bands themselves were only about inch and a half to two inch blades. That allowed them to follow around a four foot six diameter circle.

Connie: They were boat builders, too, weren't they?

Reg: Yes they were boatbuilders. (Brings out photos of boats and various other historical shots). The boats were usually made out of either white beech or cedar, but white beech was probably the best. A beautiful mellow timber to work, and durable. Must be similar to that Huon Pine from down in Tassie.

Bill: I think I've got most of the hardwoods sussed out, but I haven't had much to do with the rainforest softwoods. I wouldn't recognise a sassafras, for instance.

Reg: You would if you smelt it. The bark, you know, it's like camphor. You can put it in your drawer with your clothes and it keeps the moths away. Like camphor laurel - though it's not related. (Digression with more photos).

There was a funny side to the great grandfather. One of my cousins, an elderly lady who's not alive now, heard that great grandfather disgraced himself because he married one of the factory girls. She was supposed to have been a beautiful girl who smoked a pipe, and over the years we'd always thought that this was a bit unusual. Well Connie's aunt married a pommy, and we were telling him about this pipe-smoking relative and he started to laugh like anything. "She was oop the doof" he laughed, and explained that that's what "smoking a pipe" meant in the English slang. And that was apparently the misdemeanour that caused the family to send him off out to Australia.

Now if you look at this picture here of the valley years ago, you can see how the timber's cleared halfway up the slope, but it's all regrown now. I'm a greenie to some extent, but a lot of people don't seem to understand that it can come back if it's given the chance, and it's not a total loss.

My mother's parents also used to live down here in the valley. They came from Mangrove Mountain. Waratah Road goes off to the right as you go down towards Spencer. Mr Amos Douglas, who is still living in a rest home in at Wyong, he and his brother told me on one occasion when I was out there that grandfather was the first to take up land in the Waratah Road area. My mother was eight years old when they left there and went to live at Tuggerah. She went to school at Mangrove Mountain and at Wyong, so they've been around a fair while. (Digression)

Reg: I don't think we've mentioned guest houses have we?

Bill: No. King Palmer mentioned them though. I gather that people used to come up from Sydney for a country holiday.

Reg: From Newcastle, too. I couldn't give you an exact date, but it would have been from pre-War up to the mid fifties. In all, there was something like four or five. The nearest one to Wyong was called Gracemere - you went across the bridge at Kidman's Lane. That one operated probably longer than most of the others. The most prominent in the Yarramalong area was of course Linga Longa - it was a guest house for quite a number of years. The next one was the old home where Charles Lloyd Jones' road goes off - I can't remember what they called it now. Then where Charles Lloyd Jones' house is now - that was owned by the Lyall Waters family and they operated a guest house there along with their farming, dairy-ing and vegetable growing. I can remember Lyall Waters saying once that at Christmas time all he did was sit in the dairy peeling potatoes to feed all the guests.

Then up Ravensdale there was another one - I think it might be the property owned by John Laws, or else it's where the people up there have a nursery now. A family owned that one. It was well run - very tidy and a nice place, and the people in the family all had nicknames. There was Dad and Doll - that was Mum and Dad, and Dope and Dart.

Dope and Dart were fellows that would have been well into their thirties by that time I'd say, and they were noted for their ability to skite a bit, these two boys. They were describing the two professional tennis players that had been staying there, saying that they'd never seen anyone like them as players.

They watched them for about three days, and in the end Dope said to Dart: "Go and get the racquets and shoes and we'll go over and have a hit with them." So eventually it came to a match, and Dope and Dart beat them 6-0, 6-1. Even though they were the best that they'd ever seen in the world! Mind you, Dope and Dart hadn't been much beyond Wyong anyway. They were characters...

...We touched on floods before. There was one particular one I was involved in - it would have been in the late sixties I think. It was a fairly fast-rising flood in awful conditions. I got a phone call from Wyong from the Controller of Civil Defence - I was a member for quite a number of years. I had a boat with a motor, and it was round three-thirty in the afternoon and raining heavily and he said there were two chaps had driven into rising water in that hollow beyond the Yarramalong Bridge just before the church there. They'd been up to Smith's mill delivering some logs, and they'd picked up a demijohn of cheap wine somewhere and they'd been on it for a while before they hit the water. It was about a 5-ton truck, I suppose, and of course it had stalled in it. I got word that things were getting a bit desperate, so Graeme and myself loaded the boat and drove to the first stretch of water, which wasn't far away. We'd arranged for someone else to pick us up and we were piggybacked through between the two stretches of water and eventually we launched the boat from right beside the end of the old Yarramalong Bridge.

The current was running very strongly by then and we could see that the truck had been washed sideways and was up against a big bluegum tree. The water was running over the bonnet and these tellers were sitting up on top. And they still had the bottle!

It was a hard place to get launched from because I had to point the boat upstream and then edge sideways. I got over to directly above them and fortunately there was a telegraph pole there. I had a long length of rope in the boat and I was able to drive the boat up to the pole and after two or three attempts - I had to leave the motor and dash forward to try to get the rope around the pole - I eventually got it round. Then I was right, because then I could let the boat slip back till it was almost right beside the truck.

But then I couldn't get the blighters to leave! They didn't want to get off! They were scared ...and of course they were still working on the bottle! Anyway I finally got them in, and then I had to have one of them release the rope from around the pole so it wouldn't get around the propeller. Then I went about a hundred metres or so through the bush till I could find a place where I could get safely to the bank - behind the house there where Ivan Grant lives. So it ended happily. I did hear from them later on, but I never got any personal thanks. Not long afterwards another boat came down from Kulnura, but it would have been fairly difficult to use - it was a speedboat type of thing.

There was another occasion down near the mill when we lived there. A neighbour up the road was a chap named John Fountain - he was a journalist and he worked some of the time with *The Land*. He used to commute to Sydney, and on this occasion when he came home the water was up. He managed to get through the water on the Wyong side, but then he got to the deeper water in front of the mill. We'd been staying at the old home where my mother was living on her own, and someone had to be with her every night, and it was my youngest son Peter's turn to be there this night. He heard someone cooeing - this is around nine or ten o'clock at night - and with a light he was able to see that John had got into the low fork of a tree. He'd waded in, and instead of following the road he'd waded off the side of it into deep water. He had a briefcase with him, and good gear on.

Anyway, the boat was near the house - Peter had probably used it to go across and stay with his grandmother you see, and he was able to get him out of there and eventually take him across the water to where he could go on home further up the road. But that wasn't the end of John's problems because he'd lost his good sports coat that had his wallet with papers, money and valuables in it. I think we found his satchel, and then for about a week we searched all up the backwaters and everywhere for the coat and wallet, but didn't find anything. Then one day I had an idea and went right to the base of the tree he'd been in. There was quite a deposit of mud there, and I raked down and sure enough there was his coat. It must have been still water and it had sunk in that spot. He was overjoyed when I took it round to him. He got it

drycleaned and it came up as good as ever, and his wallet and everything was intact, so he was happy.

Bill: I know it's dangerous in floods, but it must be a bit adventurous too - to be paddling round the bush in boats and all that - it must have been good fun.

Reg: Well it was. We used to look forward to it when we were kids. So did our own kids too. Apart from the fact that there was no school, it was a real holiday at the water's edge, you might say. We'd really have fun, and we'd be in trouble because we'd come home all wet and there was no way of drying clothes unless it was in front of the fire that was going. We used to just love splashing around. Sometimes you might have mushrooms coming up - something we seldom see now - that you could go and gather. We'd be throwing sticks in the water, or we might have a bit of a tin boat or an old motor tube.

Bill: The road went under water pretty early in front of your mill, didn't it?

Reg: It was considered to be the lowest spot - the spot that caused the greatest delay. Once the water cleared from the road in front of our place there wasn't a lot of delay between there and Wyong. There were two other spots that were bad - one on either side of the Wyong Creek Hall but they weren't quite as bad as the one at our place and the one further on. The one near the Butler family farm was the longest stretch of water and it curved as well.

I can remember on one occasion going along to have a look at the water to see how it was going - being in the Civil Defence we often had to report on water movements, height and so forth - and on this occasion we'd seen an old EH Holden go through. I thought that he'd have some fun if he went into it and when we got around the corner here was this Holden sitting right in the middle, and it had slewed round because the back end had started to float. It was one of the local residents, Bobby Stackman - a cousin of Michael Stackman, I think, and he'd had a few beers too, and he had a whole heap of empties and full ones in the boot and when he opened it up later the empties were floating all about in there. He had his mother in with him, and we were able to push him out of it. The water would have had to be up on the engine for the back end to float...

My father had one of the earliest phones in the valley - around 1926. Our number was No 2 and I think No 1 was the Post Office, which was on the Wyong side of the Wyong Creek school - a distance of about two and a half miles from where we were. We had to have our own separate wires - they were a pair of wires that ran about a foot apart - and very often the phone would go out and Dad would set off towards the Post Office with a bamboo fishing rod to unsnarl the wires because they'd get crossed or a limb would come off a tree and fall across them.

Bill: Were the phones the box on the wall with the handle that you turned?

Reg: It was a beautiful old phone - quite ornate. It had a bit of scrolling on it and it rose up to something of a peak on the top, and yes, it had a handle that you turned.

We used to get all sorts of calls - well, not so much calls coming in as people wanting to ring out, and emergencies - people sick and wanting to get onto a doctor. Then you'd get the odd one that had had a row with his missus and he'd be wanting to head for town and wanting to ring up to get someone to come out and get him. But by the time he got through, and if the other feller put him off for long enough he'd be sobering up. It was usually the chap from the wine saloon that he was after to come out and get him, and he'd often be sitting there well into the night trying to talk him into it.

There are some characters in the valley - goodly people too. There was one gentleman, a Mr Dixon, who had the nickname of Resurrection. They used to call him the Resurrection of the District - I'm not quite sure how it came about. There was quite a family of the Dixons. I worked with one of his sons up in the Gloucester district. He was a professional tractor driver - he was the one that actually drove the first Caterpillar that came to Yarramalong - to Australia, actually - that I was telling you about. He drove the machine in this area for a number of years before they moved on to Gloucester and he went with it.

Actually he lost his life up there. I worked with him as an offsider on his machine, myself and another chap. We'd leave before daylight to go out on the Berrigo Range with two wagons behind. The timber would have been felled by the cutters and we had to get these two wagons loaded and back, and it would often be eight or nine o'clock at night that we'd be coming down off the mountain with the lights on. And if a storm came up, well you were in trouble then. We used to have to anchor a cable to a tree on the top and lower the lot down by winch. He could manage all that, and it was a storm that got him. There was severe lightning and he went and sheltered under a tree and was struck. Killed instantly. His two mates that were with him were under a different tree. They got knocked down, but they survived. I'd only just left up there six or seven weeks before this happened - I'd gone to Sydney to join the Air Force.

Bill: I think I might have sidetracked you from when you were talking about Resurrection Dixon.

Reg: Oh yes... Mr Dixon had a Falcon Knight car -a big touring car with a sleeve-valved engine and they were inclined to be smoky, though they were a very quiet-running motor. Along with the other gentlemen that I mentioned - the dairyfarmers that went to town about the 20th of the month - he'd be one of those - but he used to leave this thin stream of blue smoke behind him. But the old gentleman used to try and use words that he... for instance, he'd wish people "all the complaints of the season" at Christmastime and things like that.

I think it would be worth mentioning the Braithwaite family. They had a huge holding - a lot of it mountainous, and a lot had been ringbarked for grazing. There were four boys, Ted, and Walter and John and Arch. Arch came back to retire in the valley late in life and I didn't know him well, but Ted and Walter were fine horsemen and they had a bullock team as well. They used to sell logs off their property and on one occasion they asked us about cutting some cedar for them that they had on the property, and I took the truck up to where they had their bullock team. They'd pull them out with the bullocks and load them on.

They were very polite fellows - you'd never hear them speaking roughly to one another, and it was comical to hear them driving bullocks. Walter was the usual driver and he wouldn't swear. When we were working together Ted would be assisting and he'd ask Walter if he'd mind if he spoke to Rambler!

Bill: And bullockies were usually renowned for their terrible language, weren't they?

Reg: Yes. But these two were very polite. Eventually both Walter and Ted became Shire Councillors - Ted was a Councillor for many years. The Braithwaites had a telephone and post office up there as well. It was quite rare to have a letter posted from there, and the postmarked stamps are much sought after now by a local collector. John looked after it there at Bebeah for many years on his own. Later he had his sister Margaret living there with him too. I imagine she got old and ill and moved out, but John lived on to a very late age. My father went up to see John for something or other on one occasion and it was late in the afternoon as Dad was leaving him, and John was saddling a horse to ride right out into the bush to check on cattle or something. He was a man well past his prime then, and Dad was pretty concerned about him. He must have realised that Dad was concerned because about eight o'clock that night he rang Dad to thank him for his concern and to let him know that he'd arrived home safely.

There was quite a funny incident with Reice's bus run. It used to begin near the church where Denny Lee is now, and if there were any passengers from further up the valley he'd send his brother King with his car to pick them up. This particular time he had to go up and pick up John Braithwaite. The Wyong Show was on and it would have been one of the rare occasions when John would go into town. Anyway, when King came back he said: "Holy ghost! His bloody dogs didn't know him, and they took to him!" The dogs hadn't recognised him all dressed up for the Show!

In my childhood days, during The Depression, we had a lot of swagmen come through. They'd be begging, and I know that they were never refused something at home. It was not at all uncommon - there were just so many. Of course there was no dole for them. I can remember one chap asking how far it was to Wollombi, and I thought of just how far he was going to have to walk to get there - up past your place

and over the mountain.

Bill: Maybe there's a bit of an irony here, Reg, where nowadays you have fit young people doing the Great North Walk for pleasure.

Reg: Yes. That's right. Which reminds me, though it's a bit off the track - I drove a Holden ute right along the Great North Road, about 20 years ago. Two of my cousins were with me, and we went out to the junction there at Bucketty and then towards St Albans. When we came to where the Great North Road goes off we ventured down it a bit and came to what had been a fine old bridge that had been burnt out. We were able to bypass it by crossing the gully further down. Fortunately I had a chainsaw with me, because we went beyond the point of no return - some of the parts we'd gone down we couldn't have got back up - and we came across fallen trees that we had to cut our way through. Passing some of those cuttings it was interesting to see initials and dates cut into the rock. Poor old convicts! Anyway, it took us five hours to do twenty five miles, and of course we never got into top gear once. In some places the road was just so bad we'd have to stop the vehicle, and get out and walk ahead to plan our approach. It was hard going, right down to the ferry. There's beautiful work in the cutting going down to the ferry - the last kilometre or so.

Bill: Not a bad ad for Holden utes.

Reg: Mmm. It was an EH, and the clutch went in it when I was near the far end. It was OK coming down but we had to go to Spencer before we could get any brake fluid to put in it. I'd obviously cracked a pipe or something. It was quite an experience.

But back to the swagmen. Hawkers were another thing we had, too. They'd sort of do the circuit. They'd come here down Bumble Hill, and there was a buggy owned by two brothers - the Thornton Brothers, and they'd have little knicknacks, pocket knives, smokers' requirements and household bits and pieces. They'd often pull in and camp on the property. They were self-contained. They wouldn't be begging, they'd be making their way. There were others - we had a Mr Hislop - he was a fine old gentleman. He had an old French Renault wagon covered in like an overgrown panel van and he used to have sleeping quarters on top of it. He'd get up on a ladder and he had like a canvas pop-top arrangement. We'd know it was him coming because it had a terribly noisy gearbox. I don't think he ever got into top gear - you could have trotted and run past him on the road.

He was a vegetarian, too, and he was stopped at the old home one day and he got me to go into a fairly freshly ploughed field where the weeds were just starting to come up to get him some dockadillies - they were something like a carrot or a turnip. He'd sit up there with his pocketknife and peel them and eat them. He was a fine old fellow. I remember one occasion when he went to a church service at my grandparents' home - they used to hold services there about once a month and the Methodist parson would come out. The old fellow was a kind Christian gentleman.

There were about four hawkers used to come round - Mr and Mrs Bishop were another pair - selling clothing, mainly. He'd only ever drive the vehicle and set up the campsite. They had a similar setup where they slept on top of their vehicle too. They'd open the side of it up and it would be like a little travelling shop inside with a display. I think they came from Dural, so they'd probably come across the river on the ferry and do all the mountain area. This is going back a fair way. They came for quite a number of years. And there was another one called Soapie. He had a horse and cart with a bit of a canopy thing over it. He used to sell candles - he'd make his own. He used to say that they were so good that each one was ten candle power!

The family used to make a lot of its own fun - you know, music and that. I said that Dad used to play the mouth organ, but as well they had good phonographs in those days, the ones with the big funnel. Wind-up jobs. Ours took a cylinder of about two and a half inches in diameter, but Uncle Harry had one that took a very big cylinder - about four inches. I daresay that these machines came from their father - my grandfa-

ther - because he had a lot of equipment sent out from England and America. He also had a rare piece which was a music box, which was wound up as well. A cousin of mine still has it, and he sent us a tape of it some years ago. My father had a grandfather clock that stood in the lounge room for years, but it didn't go. As kids we used to open the door and reach up to feel the little wheel, and there used to be a lead weight lying around in the case with a little pulley block in it. We'd chop bits off it when we wanted a bit of lead for a sinker or something, and I realised much later that it was one of the weights off it, and I don't think there was probably much wrong with it that I couldn't have fixed now. There were two beautiful heads on it and another cousin of mine took them away to get something fixed on them, but we never ever got either of them back. We've still got the case - made of cedar by either grandfather or someone in the valley. It stood as high as this ceiling, very nearly, and in it also was that business book of the grandfather's that shows all the work he did for Goulburn Gaol and from then onwards. Ed Stinson used parts out of it for his books.

There were times when they played practical jokes on one another. Uncle Harry - he was the youngest of Dad's brothers - he also lived up at the Braithwaite property up there near Yorkie where I mentioned they had a sawmill. The two brothers and the old man had their houses there till he retired and they carried it on for some years. When the mill finally closed down they came to live on our property. They had six or seven children and we were four, and we all grew up together.

Sometimes one of the other relatives of the family would arrive and we'd all gather. One of Uncle Harry's tricks was to get the cat and demonstrate playing the bagpipes with it. It'd take him a lot of preparation to get the legs and claws controlled properly, tucked under his arm, then he'd bite the end of the cat's tail, and move his arm up and down as it wailed. Needless to say, as soon as he let it go the cat made itself scarce!

There was another brother, Uncle Jack. He was sort of the black sheep of the family. He wasn't a criminal or anything like that but he must have got off the rails a bit in his younger days and he sort of broke away from the family. On rare occasions he'd turn up - back in those days when things were so crook he was doing a bit of what they called then "commercial travelling". He'd have a port full of knickknacks and he'd call in if he was passing by. He always seemed to have a bit of a chip on his shoulder.

On one visit he'd put his port down in the kitchen and that night the usual foolery was going on. Dad got a sticky lolly paper and he stuck it somehow under the cat's tail. You can imagine the cat trying to get rid of it! It ended up skidding along Uncle Jack's port, and he said: "Even the cat wipes its backside on me port!"

During another visit from him, he was sleeping in the spare room, and he'd gone out visiting that night and wasn't due back till nine or ten o'clock, so my sisters Mona and Enid decided to make up a dummy to put in his bed to look like a body in the bed. They had a horrible sort of mask on it for the face, and we didn't have electric lighting then, and they're all waiting for Jack to go into the bedroom when he came home. Apparently he'd got his matches out, and he had the glass chimney in one hand when he saw it. The glass crashed to the floor and he leapt out of the room wild-eyed - because he thought he was in the wrong room! But it backfired a bit because they could have set fire to the place.

Back in those very difficult Depression days Uncle Harry had bought a 1929 Chev truck - well, he took it out on the never-never, I'd say. He had it for quite a lot of years and he ran some of the milk and cream in to the factory. It used to be a penny a gallon he got for whatever he delivered. He'd had the contract for one term and when it came up for renewal he applied again for a penny a gallon but Dick Beavan put in for seven-eighths of a penny a gallon and got the contract.

So Uncle Harry turned to woodcutting - there was quite a bit of wood on our property and on neighbouring properties that he could get. He invented a way to drive the sawbench with the truck. If you jack the truck up and drive the saw off one wheel it's not good for the differential...

Bill: Was that common? Did people do that a lot - use their car as a sort of power-take-off?

Reg: Yes, it was done with trucks, wherever they could get a clear access to the back wheel by pulling the mudguard off or something. Anyway, he built a frame, and he made up wheels by cutting them out with a bandsaw and laminating them together, and put them on a shaft across the cradle frame. Then the truck was backed up to it and pulled up over centre on to it so the back wheels came off the ground and rode on these wooden wheels, with a driving wheel in the middle. He used to run it at about twenty miles an hour in top gear and that drove the saw. Later he hooked up a foot throttle with a wire, and it worked very well.

Later I saw in a very old Modern Mechanics magazine a version of the same idea built in America, but I'm sure he wouldn't have seen it, and his was an original idea. Yet I never regarded Dad and my uncles as particularly good mechanics or engineers.

Dad didn't know the first thing... to see him drive a T-Model Ford was funny. You always had trouble with slipping bands in it. You had to press a pedal in and hold it in tight for low gear, and you'd be crawling up a hill and quite often the darned thing would just refuse to go. You'd have to back down the hill, because the handbrakes didn't hold that well either, and you'd have to pull the top plate off and adjust a bolt in it which took up the slack and put the pressure on the band. But Dad was a horse and cart man and he never got the hang of it all. Relatives of ours lived at Laguna on a big farm there, and Uncle Keith had a Whippet car about '29 vintage too. He married an aunt of mine by marriage whose husband had been killed in a quarry accident, and Keith married her with a ready-built family of two girls and a boy, which was just what he needed on the dairy farm. Occasionally they used to come over to the valley to visit all the relatives living around here, and coming up that hill to The Gap out of Murray's Run he'd always call out to his passengers: "Now, all lean forward!" That was supposed to have made getting up the hill easier somehow!

We used to fish along the creeks. There are some very good spots in the valley. We'd sometimes go right up Brush Creek, up near Keith Fernance's, up to Yorkie Bridge there sometimes.

Bill: You'd get fish that far up?

Reg: Yes. There was trout put in the stream up there one time. They used to still catch an odd one up above the bridge.

Bill: Just going back to the old cars for a minute. They would have been pretty hard to drive anyway wouldn't they, what with spark advance levers and...

Reg: Well you had to be careful. Some of them were terrible - Fords in particular would kick your head off. But no, a lot of them were very good. They had self-starters, most of them, but prior to that, with the handle start, you had to get well back. Mr Edward Braithwaite, the father of the four sons I mentioned, he had the same model truck as my uncle - a 1929 Chev. At that time - 1935 - I'd got my licence to drive a T-Model Ford, but I hadn't had a chance to drive anything with a gear change, and Mr Braithwaite was coming by one day and he pulled up because he was having trouble with his vehicle. I went over to see what I could do, and it was the points. I got it going and saw that here was my chance to have a little drive, so with the make-belief that I was testing it I drove it for about a mile down the road, told him she was alright, then happily walked all the way back.

Bill: You mentioned bands before. Were they a precursor to the gearbox?

Reg: Yes. They were the same system as the modern automatic gearbox - planetary gears, but in a modern box it's all done with oil pressure. But in a T-Model Ford you only had two gears - hold it down hard for low, and take your foot off for top. They were the safest thing in the world to drive, really, because in an emergency, if you wanted to stop it didn't matter what you put your foot on it slowed it - with reverse being the most preferable!

The truck we had was a terrible thing to start in the winter time. The engine and gearbox shared the same oil and the oil would get thick and cold and you couldn't crank it, and you'd have to jack up a back wheel, then when you cranked the wheel turned too. But when she'd start sometimes she'd fall off the jack and get away on you. There used to be a saying that the correct way to start a Ford was, once you'd cranked it and it fired, you smartly stepped back, waited for it to come past, then mounted! Dad was always a bit rough driving the things, and in a boggy place once I was driving it, and though I approached it reasonably I ended up spinning, so Dad said to let him have a go. He got back and he let it into top gear and he hit all this at some speed. The next thing the tube blew out in a front tyre. Of course I laughed my head off. It was one of their weakest parts, because you'd often end up cutting the bead off the tyre because they had a very sharp rim.

Bill: I sidetracked you again when you were talking about stocking the creek with trout up at Yorkie...

Reg: Yes... there were some very good spots, some very big holes up the top end of the valley. There's always been good fishing up there, but they don't tell you too much about it. I think they may have used a bit of a wire thing too, some of these fellers, to be assured of their fish.

For years, in the holes along the creek there was little chance of finding any fish. I think there was so much fertiliser used back in the days of intensive farming that the fish disappeared. But they've come back in more recent years. I haven't seen many small fish for many years the way you could see them in the shallows in the earlier days. I haven't tried lately, but a neighbour down below seems to get onto a few good ones each year. Linnie Smith's wife Rene used to catch some good fish. The fish you get are beautiful eating, too. They're relatives of the barramundi, which are giant perch, and these are perch.

Bill: Did you fish much as a kid?

Reg: Oh yes. We often did. We used to cut our fishing rods from the hazel that grows along the creek banks. It grows tall and straight and it would dry out light and quite strong. It had wonderful bark on it too - the bark can be used for tying things - if you strip it it'll run right along and it's quite strong. We'd get a short piece of line and tie it on the end - you didn't have to have it very long because quite often the best places to fish from were little corners, little secluded places, under logs or something like that. Nowadays you throw in and you're more likely to get a thumping great eel. There's so many of them in the creek now.

Bill: Did you eat eels when you got them?

Reg: Dad used to, but there was a bit of preparation in them. You had to skin them, then you'd cut them into sections and boil them first before frying them.

Bill: That's exactly what my grandfather used to do when he lived on Narrabeen Lakes when I was a kid.

Reg: When we were kids we'd fish down at the creek - directly below the house was one of our favourite spots - and my mother used to like to fish too. On this occasion she hooked this eel about two feet long. She let out a scream, gave a big pull, and it broke the line off and the eel went up on the bank into some blackberries and we never saw it again. There's some huge eels in the creek - I've hooked them over three feet long and close to four inches in diameter. My neighbour's down on eels because he reckons they kill the young fish and that it's one of the reasons why we haven't got so many perch in the creek now.

When they put the trout in at Yorkie it must have been somewhere in the twenties I'd say. My uncles were aware of it when they lived up there.

Bill: Who would have done the stocking, the fisheries?

Reg: Apparently so, but I don't know. The Braithwaites might have arranged to have it done. Just down from Yorkie the Christensons lived in the old Stone House. They grew beautiful big grannie smith apples

along with other citrus fruits. Bill Christenson was the last to live there, and he eventually moved down round Wyong. He's passed on now.

There was another character used to take the milk in in a horse-drawn wagon back in my very early days - a real old character he was, and he could swear something awful and he wasn't real particular who he swore in front of. He eventually went to Wyong to live, and we'd see him occasionally when he was an old man. He had a desire to dance, apparently, and he used to attend the old-time dances in Wyong. He wasn't real popular because he'd smoke a stinking old pipe. He was always short of tobacco and bludging a fill off the boys. One of my cousins got a bit sick of this and prior to the dance he built up a beautiful charge of horse manure and had it all ready to take to the dance. He gave old Bill a fill, and he reckoned it was the best bleddy pipe he'd had in his life! Everyone was leaving the hall of course, as he smoked it.

You're aware I suppose of how the dairying went from milk cans to storage vats to tankers? In the earliest days they had a range of cans from ten gallons (the largest) down to a two, which usually would only be used for cream. Some of the farms were so small that it was almost a shame to dirty the cans. Sometimes my father and myself would be called upon to collect some of the cans and take them in because there'd be too much for the other trucks. There was one old chap used to carry his can out for about three quarters of a kilometre, and there'd be not much in it. It'd be cream, but he'd probably only milk four or five cows. Most of the small ones would be cream only, and I think that's what Chris Sternbeck used to bring over from Murray's Run. They'd use the separated milk to feed the poddies and the pigs. You couldn't have transported milk those distances with no refrigeration.

Anyway, from the cans they went to refrigerated storage vats, which was much more convenient for the farmer because he didn't have to be right on time - he used to milk at a regular time but he could store it for two or three days before it was picked up.

Connie: With the cream, when it came into the factory I had to write down how much it weighed. When it came in they'd open up the lid, and there might even be a dead rat or something in it. They had a big bottle of red stain to make sure they didn't try to bring it back in the next time. It was the same when they tested the milk. If it didn't test right they had to send that back, too.

Reg: When Dick Beavan had the contract for the milk at seven-eighths of a penny, he had an uncle who was also my uncle - Adam Bradley - driving a second truck. As you can imagine, the dairies up the top end of the valley had to be up terribly early to milk their cows so it could be picked up, and those that were further down the valley towards Wyong had probably an hour's more grace.

There were one or two that were always late, and one of them in particular had their young grandson there who used to stutter something awful. They'd be running late and Uncle Adam - he was a character too who used to pull all these family jokes - he'd be in this old Chev Four truck. He'd pull up and have the engine idling and they'd send Jackie the grandson down to tell him that they wouldn't be long. Jackie would be trying to stammer out this message and Uncle would be revving the engine up making him worse, and before he could get it out they'd be arriving with the milk!

The dairies that were successful were successful mainly because of the family contribution to the whole thing. If it had been hired help it just wouldn't have worked out - they wouldn't have been able to afford it.

Bill: When did the turf farms hit the valley?

Reg: Before the farms really got started we had people call down at our old home where we had some buffalo grass growing. They'd come from down in the city and ask if they could take some out. They had to cut it and shovel it out and take it away, and they'd sometimes pay you something for it. The last lot you'd never see any money for, it was a case of "pay you next time", you know.

I think Bob Firth of Yarralong turf was one of the earliest, about 1975, and one of the biggest.

Bill: Did the turf farms take advantage of already cleared acreage?

Reg: Oh yes. But there was also a lot of hard work. I did a lot of work with the backhoe digging out stumps for Kenny Watters. It must have been a wonderful timber patch in its day - it had very big stumps - and a lot of them. There was a lot of work put in there to clear it properly because you had to get rid of every bit of wood - they couldn't afford any obstacles in the ground with those machines.

The Grass Factory was not one of the earliest, but one of the nicest ones - well tended, you know. It started up not long after the Yarrawong Turf one right down the bottom end of the valley. I'd say they didn't get under way till the seventies.

Bill: What are your fondest memories about living in the valley?

Reg: Well ...(thinks)... family life, I'd say, generally. It was an ongoing highlight. We were a very happy family. There was lots of work involved in it too, and we only made do because we all contributed. We used to be delighted when visitors would come - though Mum mightn't have been because it meant providing for a lot more. Some of our ancestors would arrive at midnight - in an old unregistered car or something...

There was always plenty of food. On occasion neighbours would kill their own meat and it would get shared around. We had a yard built around four china pear trees. It was a good shady spot and we railed it in and that was the slaughteryard with the gallows and the wind-up gear on it. When we killed a pig us kids would all wait around till the bladder came out and that would be our football. We'd kick that around all day long - talk about fun!

Bill: It was that tough, was it?

Reg: Yeah. I remember after playing with it all day long I was sitting on it, and I got a sharp stone and rubbed it till it went through. It went bang! and I sat down rather heavily, because they were quite big.

Bill: Did you all take turns at slaughtering, or was there somebody that...?

Reg: There was a chap lived nearby named George Caparero - of Italian descent, no doubt - and he was a master of the art. Usually they used to shoot the animal, then bleed it, but I can recall this chap actually killing the animal with the knife. I don't know how he did it. He'd be one of the neighbours sharing, so he'd usually be the one to do it.

Bill: So butchering wasn't something you all learned as a matter of course?

Reg: No. We knew the process, like salting down and cutting up. We had big wooden casks that you would put the meat in with coarse salt and that would keep for a long while - it didn't always taste so good I suppose - it was pretty salty, but it was the only way we had without refrigeration. A bit of a meat safe was the only other alternative, but that was only of short duration. It was mainly cattle and pigs. There were no sheep.

Bill: The valley's not gone in for sheep much has it? Why is that?

Reg: Well, Tom Stinson had 600 sheep over there at one time. They grazed over the hills. The hills were cleared well back, though it's beginnning to grow back now. This was back in the late twenties, early thirties. He had yards built over there where he could handle them, muster them, and attend to them. I remember we were rabbit shooting one day - my father, myself, and perhaps Uncle Harry - and Mr Stinson came over and he had an old wartime .303 with him. Dad said: "Are you shooting a few rabbits there, Tom?" "No," he said, "I was watching your dogs with my sheep." He was going to fix them if they did anything! He'd had a lot of trouble with big eagles taking the lambs, and that was another reason he always carried this gun around the farm. I don't know how successful he was. They must have been there for five years or more to build up that quantity.

Bill: But they didn't take on?

Reg: No. I think it was considered to be too wet. A lot of the flat ground over there is inclined to be a bit marshy. It's alright in the summer months but the wintertime would have been pretty hard on them. We had some sheep for a while. We went up to Maitland Sale Yards - Mr Bert Brown gave us some advice and we bought a pen of Border Leicester ewes. We had a ram called Dennis who was known to butt visiting relatives from behind when they weren't watching. He came from a fellow called Ted who used to live near the Dairy Co-op. Dennis came originally from out round Orange and was a pretty good breeding Merino, which meant we were on the way to having lots of little ones. We built up to just on 50 or so, but then we had the worries of shearing. There was a young Methodist minister based at Morrisset who had come off a farm out at Parkes, and although it was some years since he'd done any shearing, he'd done quite a lot on his father's property. In the meantime, I'd bought a portable Cooper shearing plant from out near Wellington. It was one of those that you could put in the back of a ute. Anyway, this young minister went pretty well till about half way through, when his back started to give up. I think we got ten pounds of wool off one sheep, and at thirty shillings a pound, it was quite good average money then, and was well worthwhile. But for shearing after that, there was a chap at Tuggerah - an old shearer - and he used to go round the area shearing any pets and that sort of thing, and for a reasonable figure he'd clean 'em up for us. We eventually got rid of them.

We had a lot of trouble with dingoes - wild dogs too, but mainly dingoes. They'd come down from the Ourimbah State Forest and we lost quite a few sheep. There was a pack of about ten or a dozen of them. One day I found three half-grown beautiful sheep all mangled and still alive with the skin pulled off them. It was terrible. The dingoes can smell them from a long way off.

Bill: How long ago would it have been that the dingoes were quite that prevalent?

Reg: This was in the early 60's. There's possibly still some out in the bush. We used to see evidence of them, and on one occasion we were cutting timber out on the Ourimbah State Forest, and one of the young fellows that was working with me was pretty scared on his own in the bush. It was late one afternoon and we'd had a cup of tea and then we'd headed for home. We were pulling logs and we had a jinker with a load on it and we realised we'd forgotten something after we'd gone a few hundred metres along the track. He went back to get it, and came back with a look of terror on his face. A dingo was there and had cleaned up the scraps we'd left. I was telling one of the forest foremen about it later and he said that the dingo was well-known around the forest and they used to throw scraps to it.

I shot one in 1947 when we were building the house down below. We were losing chooks - we'd put chooks there before we came to live in the house. Anyway I decided to spend the night in the house, and I set the alarm. I woke before the alarm went off, and when I looked out there was a very dark looking, big lanky thing. I shot it from about twenty yards. And a few years later I was up in the forest and an old dog we had was up on the hillside barking, so I went up. I took the rifle with me. Apparently the female was on heat, and I crept up to where I could look along the track and could see them. I whistled my dog and they both came together and the dingo came relatively close before it sensed me. I got it as it spun round to take off. They were mixtures, but they had the shape of the dingo.

Connie: Buffie was like a dingo...

Reg: Well he was one. We got him from Darwin. We reared this fellow and he must have been at least 90% dingo. He was a great dog, but I had a lot of trouble with him for a long while. He cleaned up our chooks a couple of times, and people used to tell me I should shoot him. He had a white tip on his tail - that's one way you can distinguish a dingo - most of them have got a white tip. But this fellow could bark. He could whine too, but he could bark. We had him for quite a few years. He was a very faithful dog, and he'd ride in the trucks and everything - he had to be where you were...

Back in the sixties a small piggery was operating on a property only 150 metres from our house. But it

was only on a small scale and it really wasn't much of a problem. It changed hands and a doctor from Sydney took it over with intentions to greatly expand it. They put in a large extra shed, which had the capacity to hold over a couple of thousand animals. They had ponds outside for the effluent and the idea was to then transport it away. But in the wet weather it would overflow and the smell was something shocking. It was bad enough for us, but we had neighbours who were in between us and the piggery and the nearest shed was only a matter of 30 metres from their house.

We began to protest to the council, but they claimed that they could do little about it. One Friday evening a great discharge of effluent overflowed and went 150 metres down the road and formed a lake in a flat place. What they used to do was wait till Friday night and then they'd jiggle the plug in the effluent tank and let some go and it would end up in the creek. This time the plug had stuck, and I believe they had fellows in the tank up to their shoulders trying to get it back in.

Anyway, it went to court and the council made a blue of it. They charged the doctor, but it was a family company and it was lost on that technicality. The whole thing did end happily some time later when the economics of the operation closed it because he had to bring the feed from inland NSW and it was too expensive. The sheds were pulled down, and ironically we bought one of them later on. The other one went to Kulnura where I helped erect it using my backhoe as a crane.

Connie: And we heard that the doctor had remarked to some of his own people during the court action that we were only peasants!

Bill: Really!

Reg: ... We were out at Cobar about fifteen years ago, and they have a nice little museum there with a mock-up of a blacksmith's shop at the back. My brother-in-law and myself were there and we spotted six or seven felloes there, just like the ones my father used to cut at our mill. When we examined them we found that they had been cut in my grandfather's day, and had his BT brand on the end! The brother-in-law went back a year or two later and offered the curator a little donation and we ended up with one each. This is it here. (Brings out a very grey but still very sound felloe). Graeme's got one down there that we've kept that has been in the family since those days ... Uncle Adam was a perfectionist at bandsawing these felloes, and he was in one of Stinson's poems where he refers to Adam's ability to saw them ... (Digression as we look at photos in a well-tended family album).

Reg: ... The big old White truck in that photograph used to haul logs from up your way with a logging jinker behind it. They used to have terrible trouble getting around that last hairpin bend. I think they tried several ways of adjusting that corner so they could make it. When you think of it, Brush Creek Road is very historic. It was engineered by a Mr Braithwaite who was an uncle of the Braithwaites. It was a mighty undertaking.

(Later, after a cup of tea and some general chat):

Reg: ... I don't feel that I adequately answered your question about what was my fondest memory of my life in the valley. I don't think of one distinct happening - more a number of events. To make my mother happy by doing things for her like gardening, building some small piece of furniture - perhaps a stool or a carved item from school like a picture frame or a letter-holder. Showing gratitude to her for the lovely food she gave us - the clothes she made. Being happy when she was happy, knowing she was greatly appreciated. These things were highlights for me which continued through my family home life. I think my mother was certainly a highlight.

To illustrate further... during the war, when I was on an operational flight in 1944 in a Sunderland off the western coast of France, we had a terrifying experience in a storm which almost ditched us in the ocean. I was looking through a window at what I believed was about to be the end only a few seconds away. I put my head down on the desk and immediately my mind was on my mother, and God. At about 300 feet the

same great wind current that had put us into the dive wrenched us out of it. The shock of being spared was almost unbelievable. Other highlights would have been perhaps when I passed exams for the violin, and playing in several concerts in Wyong. And when I finished making the machines I built - the tractor and the log hauler. But perhaps the most outstanding memory would be of my first ever flight in an aeroplane for ten minutes at The Entrance in about 1937. I was nineteen then, and had always been fascinated with planes.

(Connie was reluctant to talk with the tape recorder, but she later provided me with some written notes about her activities in the valley with the CWA. They are reproduced below.)

There were two branches in the valley - the Yarramalong Branch and the Wyong Creek Branch. We were formed in November 1947 with a few ladies joining and gradually the Wyong Creek Branch had a membership of over 30. With the decline of the dairy farms and orchard farms lots of hobby farms were created but we found that newcomers were not very interested in joining either Branch. They had other interests, or they worked. Yarramalong Branch closed many years ago and Wyong Creek Branch is officially closed now, but such is the friendship there are still seven of us that meet on the first Wednesday of each month in our own homes.

The CWA brought all Branches on the central coast together in great friendship. Members travelled to other Branches' birthdays, attended Group Council Meetings, Group Conferences, and if possible, the State Conference in Sydney Town Hall. There are cooking competitions between Branches, then between Groups, and winners could end up with entries in the State Cooking Competition. I had the chance to cook sponges in public at the State Competition, but luckily Peter was a baby at the time and I was able to back out.

Making handicrafts was another enjoyable part of our activities and beautiful work of all descriptions was done. As with the cooking competitions, handicrafts were exhibited, judged, and winners ended up at the State Conference.

Our International Day was a very special day. Each year a different country was chosen to be studied and scrap books made. Wyong Creek schoolchildren entered posters which were judged and a small prize given. They all attended the afternoon talk by our guest speaker and were given a party afterwards, and the Branch gave a book to the school library. So good were our International Days that members from other branches booked for the next one a year in advance. We put on beautiful lunches in the Hall that we had decorated in an Australian theme. Being in September, we had waratahs, ferns, travel posters and Aussie teatowels hung all round the Hall. Decorations for the countries studied included flags, special flowers, posters, and souvenirs collected by members on their travels. Where possible the food also featured recipes from the country studied.

The International Day that I will always remember and remain proud of was the one for Norway. To start with, our Hall was closed for repairs at the time and everything had to be taken to Yarramalong Hall. We were lucky to have a lovely lady Member who travelled from Sydney for our meetings - they had a property for weekends near us. This member knew the wife of the Norwegian Consul in Sydney who proved to be a great guest speaker. She and her friends were in national Norwegian costume and had lots of things to show us and for us to learn about. We came up with the idea of showing them something of our valley, and we organised a display of bees and honey produce, dairying and lots of goodies from Wyong Dairy Factory, fruit and vegetables to take home, and our handicrafts. The end of the year was another great occasion, with even Santa putting in an appearance.

But it was not all social. We wrote to, and bothered Wyong Council to upgrade roads, and to lop tree branches over the roads. We also wrote letters suggesting that the area over our new bridge be made a park and given the name of Braithwaite Park to honour Mr E. Braithwaite who was our Shire Councillor

for years. It's a great picnic place now. We've raised money for the many CWA State Projects to help country women and children, and sent Christmas presents to Upper Tuggerah Lakes Meals-on-Wheels recipients. But when these got to number over 80 we had to give up and their local Lions or Apex Club took over. We switched to sending presents at Christmas to patients in Wyong Hospital. Years ago the same members visited Morrisset Hospital with gifts for patients there. I couldn't take that, and in the end we sent a donation for smokes etc, but when they all got pensions there was no further need.

We're very proud of the things we've done over the years and of course they couldn't have been done without the help and backing of our husbands. (They always said that the lunch they got on our main days were always leftovers, or duds, or burnt offerings).

Another interest for us was the Wyong Creek Hall and the monthly family dances there where the committee supplied the lovely supper, the prizes, and a good cheap ticket raffle. These went on for years with people travelling for miles to attend. One daughter-in-law and her family and friends came from Woy Woy - she was about 13 then and with her dancing partner was lovely to watch. She married our youngest son nearly nine years ago and now they have a young son.

Lots and lots of public meetings were held there - protests, Junior Farmers (now Rural Youth), the Progress Association, school concerts, the CWA meetings and all the CWA functions. It was a sad decision to stop the dances because of poor attendances and the high rise in band prices, and to see it no longer used as much. It was the focus and meeting place since being built in 1913 by Reg's relatives and others.

With the P&C Association, the teachers who love our small school, the parents and children - everyone worked together and had fun together. There were picnic days, and a packed Hall of proud parents and grandparents and friends at the end-of year concerts. Santa always arrived and there was a great supper afterwards. Such was our fellowship with all that nearly everyone was Aunt or Uncle to most kids and still are, and proud of their successes, and they attended the 21st Birthdays and weddings. So amongst all of this we got our work done, helped our husbands when needed, played tennis, learnt golf, went on fund-raising bus tours, and raised our families. It was really great.
