



David Berry Hospital, 2008
Courtesy of the Berry and District Historical Society

Oral history

Gerringong to Bomaderry
Princes Highway upgrade

**ORAL HISTORY CD TRANSCRIPT
DECEMBER 2009**

Gerringong to Bomaderry Princes Highway Upgrade

Prepared for
Roads and Traffic Authority

Prepared by

Navin Officer Heritage Consultatns Pty Ltd
71 Leichhardt Street, kingston ACT 2604

7 December 2009

DEV06/04-HE-NO Rev-2

© AECOM Australia Pty Ltd 2009

The information contained in this document produced by AECOM Australia Pty Ltd is solely for the use of the Client identified on the cover sheet for the purpose for which it has been prepared and AECOM Australia Pty Ltd undertakes no duty to or accepts any responsibility to any third party who may rely upon this document.

All rights reserved. No section or element of this document may be removed from this document, reproduced, electronically stored or transmitted in any form without the written permission of AECOM Australia Pty Ltd.

Quality Information

Document Oral History CD Transcript
Ref DEV06/04-HE-NO Rev-2
Date 7 December 2009
Prepared by Navin Officer Heritage Consultants Pty Ltd
Reviewed by Kerri Hale

Revision History

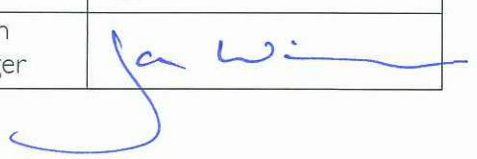
Revision	Revision Date	Details	Authorised	
			Name/Position	Signature
2	07/12/2009	Final for issue	Jon Williamson Project Manager	

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	5
2.0	Dairying	5
3.0	The timber industry	8
4.0	Community life	8
5.0	Local Government	10
6.0	Horseracing	11
7.0	Local Aboriginal community	12
8.0	The Gerringong to Bomaderry Princes highway upgrade	13

1.0 Introduction

Narrator: The Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) is planning a series of projects to upgrade the Princes Highway between Mount Pleasant north of Gerringong and Bomaderry.

This will include a bypass of Berry.

The area has a rich heritage suitable for inclusion in the RTA's Oral History Program.

Oral history is described as 'a picture of the past in people's own words'. It is told by the people who are often overlooked in 'official' documented history: those who were actually there and involved.

Unlike the written word, oral history comes to life in the colour, passion and inflection of the human voice. It tells us about relationships, perceptions and social and political climates of the past. An oral history complements formal written records by offering personal, intimate, human and social accounts of events. Oral history revolves around what a person believes to be the real story. Their version of an event may differ from another's, or even from the documented history, but it is no less valid.

After all, all historical records, including written words, photographs, paintings and maps, may contain some degree of error and bias. Oral history can also overcome the bias of some traditional history sources towards big events and high-profile participants.

Oral history recordings invariably elicit broad local, regional and often geographically wide information. Indeed, such information is the core reason for undertaking oral history recordings – to place the interviewee in context and to obtain their personal memories relevant to a particular area and topic.

For this oral history, a cross section of local residents from the area were interviewed and told their stories. The recurring themes included dairying, the timber industry, community, local government, horseracing, local Aboriginals and the RTA's current plans for upgrading the highway.

2.0 Dairying

Narrator: The area from Gerringong to Bomaderry, largely owned by the Berry family from around the 1820s until the early twentieth century, was peppered with small-scale dairy farms during the early and middle years of that century. Dairying was the *raison d'être* for Berry's original acquisition and, to a large extent, continues as the predominant industry in the region.

With the subdivision of the Berry Estate, dairy farmers and prospective dairy farmers purchased land across the district, from five acres at Broughton Village to 100 acres at Jaspers Brush, and began producing small quantities of milk, cream and cheese. At that time, milk was taken by sledge to the farm gate and then by horse and cart to any number of small milk factories across the region, including at Gerringong, Toolijooa, Foxground, Broughton Village, Jaspers Brush and Berry. Lilly Toohey recalled,

Toohey: *"...it was all hand milking...the milk had to go into cans... they were 10 gallons... and they were taken on a slide down to the gate, to the road, for a horse and cart to pick them up to bring them in to the Berry factory. It was a butter factory then and the milk was taken there to be treated."*

Narrator: After arriving on horse and cart to the Berry Milk Co-operative some milk was sent to Sydney, as Gus Miller noted,

Miller: *"... the first milk to Sydney went in those factory cans, 10 gallon factory cans. They used to put them on the train. The train would come down from Kiama and picked the cans up the next day".*

Narrator: Bill Jorgenson tells of a prescient moment after starting work for the Bomaderry Dairy Farmers Milk Depot in 1948 when there were between 350 to 400 milk suppliers. According to Bill,

Jorgenson: *"There was an old fellah named Harry Silverside ... after we had finished washing out and cleaning the 10 gallon cans, he said 'Look boy, one day, there's going to be a big truck going around over the other side of the river there - the south side of the Shoalhaven River - picking up milk with a tank on the back of it', and he said, 'that when that happened there'd be about 12 farmers'".*

Narrator: At that time there were about 60 farmers there and now there are only 12, as Harry predicted 60 years ago.

Since then the number of farms has declined dramatically. For instance, there were 76 farms at Milton (now seven), 76 in Kangaroo Valley (now six), and only four remaining from Meroo to Jaspers Brush, and none left in Cambewarra.

Through amalgamation, farms have also become larger. A fact attested to by Bill Jorgenson,

Jorgenson: *"There's more milk coming out of those farms than did out of the 400. I'll just give you an example down here around Bomaderry. There's one fellah down here milks 1200 cows, they couldn't fit his milk on the big tanker for the one day. My son-in-law, when he took the farm over the fellah was producing about 10 or 12 cans a day, that was pretty good, not bad farming in those days. He's now getting 200 cans of milk a day – that's 10 gallon cans, in litres it's about eight or nine thousand litres. There's another one down there getting about 17,000 litres a day and they milk about 700. They're massive, they're big, and there's more milk coming out of those areas than what there was previously – they all had to get bigger. When the deregulation came in they said you've got to have 12 cans of milk to survive. Twelve cans of milk now is like a billy can full – they couldn't survive on it".*

Narrator: The two most prominent factors that appear to have influenced changes to dairy farming in the area and probably throughout NSW, were the introduction of the quota system in the 1950s and industry deregulation in 1991.

As Colin Sharpe explained,

Sharpe: *"The quota system was to make sure that Sydney had an ample supply of milk. At times, Sydney up till then was short of milk. Particularly in the winter time when they just didn't have enough milk and it meant, well, that they just went without. They actually rationed it. If you had children and babies you could get milk everyday but others could only get milk every second day in the winter time. It was more expensive for farmers to produce the milk in the winter time so a lot of them let their production fall down in the winter time".*

Narrator: To overcome that unsatisfactory supply cycle the Government introduced a quota system, which meant farmers had to produce a certain amount of milk all year round which meant there was no longer a fall of production in the winter time. Farmers were given a yearly price. They could organise their finances and knew every month what their income was going to be. As Colin asserted,

Sharpe: *"It made a difference to breeding cattle too; people had to be more accurate with their breeding so that they had cattle calving right through the year to produce that amount of milk. Whereas before it was more a springtime calving and then going through the summer and then it would go down during the winter time".*

Narrator: Colin Sharpe also noted that industry deregulation, which was introduced in 1991, had a similar impact on dairy farmers. He explained,

Sharpe: *"... It meant virtually that there were no state boundaries. Milk could travel anywhere. And with Victoria being the biggest producer of milk they were producing milk a lot cheaper than what we could at that time and it meant that the price of milk dropped dramatically, and it meant that the big producer, those who could produce a large amount of milk, were able to virtually stay in".*

Narrator: The years of known and regular income disappeared and in Colin's words,

Sharpe: *"for quite a few years the farmer, he was absolutely struggling".*

Narrator: Innovation has also been a feature of the dairy industry in the area. Bruce McIntosh divulged that in 1948 his father was involved in a group of fairly progressive farmers who formed the Better Farming League. The group promoted better farming practices and according to Bruce,

McIntosh: *"... even by today's standards they were well advanced back then. They were skilled in pasture management, and they improved thousands of acres of pasture around the Shoalhaven area by the methods they introduced to other farmers. They were responsible for introducing into the government of the day a proposal to establish an artificial breeding centre. It was the first in Australia and that came about because of my father. He was chosen by the New South Wales State Government of the day to be one of six people selected to go to the UK with the Minister of Agriculture on a stud stock buying delegation to improve the standard of stud stock – not just cattle, horses, pigs, sheep and chooks – six of them went over and my dad was one of them. ... That stud stock buying delegation still has the reputation of putting New South Wales on the map in terms of upgrading stud stock and therefore the seed stock of all the broad commercial foods in New South Wales and beyond."*

Narrator: An artificial insemination centre established at Graham Park, Berry, was, according to Bruce McIntosh,

McIntosh: *"a very, very thriving and important aspect of cattle breeding in Australia".*

Narrator: Unfortunately, it appears that it suffered from mismanagement while other more commercially successful centres flourished throughout Australia resulting in the centre's closure about 20 years ago... Bruce lamented that it,

McIntosh: *"should have been commercially successful. One of the bad features of our local history here, it offered so much".*

3.0 The timber industry

Narrator: Timber getting and sawmills were an important part in the development and economy of the area from the arrival of cedar getters around 1811 and Alexander Berry's first timber milling, and later sawmill, site in 1827 until the housing boom of the mid-1900s.

Sawmills once proliferated throughout the area, including at Gerringong, Woodhill Mountain, Kangaroo Mountain, Berry, Bomaderry and Nowra. Bill Jorgenson recalled,

Jorgenson: *"... they had two or three bullock teams, and the real old timers in Berry told me years ago it was nothing to hear the Jorgensen's at two o'clock in the morning coming along Beach Road that runs into Berry and which runs past the David Berry Hospital, cracking the bullock whips bringing logs into the sawmill".*

Narrator: Ray Rutledge noted,

Rutledge: *"... Some of the timber was shipped to Sydney by rail and they cut a lot of mine timbers out between Berry and Seven-Mile Beach, and that was trucked away by rail trucks. Most of the timber, went around to the Wollongong area, particularly after the war years [1950s] when there was a lot of housing going on in those places up there. Several people around the place had trucks that carted the sawn timber".*

Narrator: Around that time, Bill Jorgenson recalled, the Bomaderry sawmill, which didn't produce housing timber,

Jorgenson: *"... cut all their own timber for the boxes and everything. Fish boxes, cherry boxes, that's what they used to make there".*

Narrator: According to Bill, the trees used were,

Jorgenson: *"sassafras, maiden's butt – what they'd call it, there was leatherjacket, there was all different softwoods. Of course, they wouldn't let you cut it out now. They wouldn't let you do it now".*

4.0 Community life

Narrator: Small, self-contained centres were the focus of community life in the region in the early and middle years of last century. Toolijooa, Broughton Village, Far Meadow, Jaspers Brush and Meroo Meadow once had their own small, single-roomed, single-teacher primary schools, and sometimes a community hall and a church. Gus Miller noted,

Miller: *"The school was the community"*

Narrator: Margaret Binks observed that individual teachers,

Binks: *"... had such an influence on the community as a whole that it just branched out into families".*

Narrator: Horseback was the standard method of getting to school and each had its own horse paddock, although occasionally someone had a pushbike and would be, according to Bruce McIntosh,

McIntosh: *"the envy of the whole school"*.

Narrator: All of these schools have long since closed and most have been removed.

At a time when vibrant communities, involved in cricket clubs, debating teams, picnics, ping-pong and roller skating, were active in those small centres, Berry was variously described as being 'very quiet' to 'dead', where, as Helen Chittick recalled one of her neighbours remarking,

Chittick: *"You could fire a double-barrelled shotgun up the street and not hit anyone"*.

Narrator: Margaret Binks reported that there,

Binks: *"were busy days because the farmers would come in with the cattle and of course during the wartime Red Cross would be serving meals to raise money for the soldiers, but generally Berry was dead"*.

Narrator: Similarly, Margaret recalled that Gerringong was,

Binks: *"a sleepy little town, like Berry"* and *"Bomaderry hardly existed. ... Bomaderry was nothing"*.

Narrator: Two, possibly related, matters appear to have revived the community of Berry in the 1970s. First, as Mary Lidbetter recounted,

Lidbetter: *"Up to then Berry was going backwards. We had four empty shops and about eight empty houses in town, and the Chamber of Commerce had been trying to get light industry and they had two or three start and fizzle. So, after the Captain Cook Bicentenary celebrations in 1970 they decided, 'Right, we'll stop trying for industry; we'll become a tourist town.'"*

Narrator: Second, at that time Sally Lindsay and her family arrived and were part, *"of the first push of people from the city"* and regarded as, *"out of town hippies"*.

Narrator: Sally started up a community centre and organised cultural activities. As Sally noted, the centre is,

Lindsay: *"still in a small way surviving today"*.

Narrator: These factors stimulated the influx of tourists and 'new settlers', and, as indicated by Sally,

Lindsay: *"about the middle of the '80s ... the money started to come down here and buy big properties, and farmers started to subdivide"*.

Narrator: Similarly, both Gerringong and Bomaderry experienced new found growth through tourism and residential development during those years.

Today, community focus now centres on those towns in the region, which continue to experience economic growth. Tourism has largely replaced dairying as the economic and social base, and the small, single school-based community has since become a memory.

5.0 Local Government

Narrator: In 1946, the NSW Government formed the Shoalhaven Shire by the amalgamation of four municipalities and three shires, and, as Bruce McIntosh described,

McIntosh: *"the areas didn't want to be amalgamated, and they fought like you wouldn't believe ... seven of them ... and they darn well didn't want to be together so they fought and fought and fought. Finally the Government recognised that this wasn't going to work and they dismissed them and put an administrator in – a fellow called Keith Hawkshaw. He was here for five years and did a great job he pulled the whole thing together. He was a very good administrator, and that was what he was trained to do".*

Narrator: In those days, the Shoalhaven Council was known as the Shoalhaven Shire Council. Bruce noted,

McIntosh: *"It was exactly the same area – runs from part way between here [Berry] and Gerringong in the north and over to the other side of the Barrengarry on the west out the top of Barrengarry Mountain and then down to a few miles this side of Batemans Bay. It's a big area, and lots of towns in it. It's quite a big and difficult council to run".*

Narrator: Bruce recalled,

McIntosh: *"The Government finally called an election in 1959 and Berry didn't have anybody standing and I ... happened to be president of our local Apex Club, which we just formed, and we were saying well look, 'Berry needs a representative', and nobody put their hand up and I was railroaded into it. They said, well you do it, and so I was the last person elected in that seven man council and the only farmer on it, and I was pretty young. I was 30 years old then and I was there for the next 18 years, so it sort of gets in your blood a bit".*

Narrator: During that time, the term of a councillor was three years but is four years now, and has been for the last decade or so. In those days every councillor was supposed to be representing the whole of the Shire but, as Bruce explained,

McIntosh: *"In truth my main interest was in the farming community because I knew it best. The other councillors knew that I knew it best, so I suppose in that sense I played quite a role on behalf of the farming community, which was still very much the main occupants of the country. I suppose, certainly the main bread winners of the Shire. We should have had more, although as time went on, we did get another one or two farmers on the council, but for the first three years I was the only one".*

Narrator: Although Bruce, and soon after other councillors, promoted improvements to farming and the dairy industry, wider influences were in play. In Bruce's opinion,

McIntosh: *"It really wasn't the effect of their promotions it was evolvement of the industry far outside of local government, its been a commercial activity really and over a period of time it became obvious that small farms couldn't cope with increasing costs from all sorts of things, costs of feed, costs of, you know, just simple living".*

Narrator: Amalgamation of small farms followed and the rest is history.

6.0 Horseracing

Narrator: The late Kevin Robinson was instrumental in establishing and developing a successful horseracing industry in Berry and surrounds; an industry that still flourishes in the area today.

Kevin's son, Terry, recalled,

Robinson: *"... my father started out as a harness racing trainer / driver and that's where I started with him when I left school. We also ran the riding school here and through that riding school we all grew up, all of us children all grew up at some stage through it, and sometimes managing it, most of us have managed it at some stage throughout our lives until the insurance put us out of business. I continued working with my father in the harness racing game then we gradually got into gallopers, a thoroughbred business – we were training those and riding them since I was 18 and we gradually turned over into thoroughbreds. Dad was very successful in the harness racing game he ended up winning the Sydney premiership".*

Narrator: According to Terry, Kevin is now, "one of five they call legends of the game". Kevin's passion was the horse; he wanted to be a jockey. Terry noted that his father,

Robinson: *"used to have a race track in Berry, which was on the railway side of Berry. ... The old race track, which is still sort of there. You can still see it. ... they used to bring horses down from Sydney on the train in the old days and race there ... they'd only have a couple of meetings a year".*

Narrator: The Robinsons used to train horses on the Berry Showground. Terry explained that Kevin,

Robinson: *"was right opposite the showground gates and it was just convenient for him, he'd been there all his life, trained horses there all his life".*

Narrator: However, in 2007, Equine Influenza forced them "out of training at Berry". Terry has since developed a self-contained training complex at Bolong Road, Shoalhaven Heads, on land that his family had owned for some time, and as he noted,

Robinson: *"... the weather is a lot better out here, being right on the coast. Berry can get so hot in summer where you've always have a nor'easter here and I think my horses appreciated it."*

7.0 Local Aboriginal community

Narrator: Recall of the Aboriginal community in the local area is largely restricted to their historical contact with Alexander Berry in the early 1800s and limited knowledge of their seasonal work on farms in the mid to late 1900s. However, Sonny Simms' recollections of the Bomaderry Children's Home – *"the birthplace of the stolen generation in NSW"* – reveals the very personal tragedies of those affected.

Historically, as Mary Lidbetter recounted,

Lidbetter: *"In 1822, Alexander Berry came to the Shoalhaven and his friend, Charles Throsby, from up on the tablelands had sent his Aboriginal guide down to act as guide to Alexander Berry. His name was Broughton. His Aboriginal name was Thotit or Toodwick but he wouldn't have spelt it."*

Narrator: Mary noted that Berry had originally thought of building his administrative centre at Backforest but when he saw it he realised that it wasn't suitable for farming because of all the swamplands around it. According to Mary,

Lidbetter: *"... Broughton said, 'I'll take you to the place where I was born.' And he brought him up the Shoalhaven River into the entrance to Broughton Creek, walked him up Broughton Creek till they came to where Broughton Creek branches into two branches – Broughton Creek, which goes towards Gerringong ... , and the other branch comes through the town [Berry], that's Broughton Mill Creek. Now in that land in between was the Aboriginal's camping area".*

Narrator: In more recent times, in the mid-twentieth century, Mary continued,

Lidbetter: *"the Aboriginals would come over here [to Berry] pea picking, and they would be brought in from Bomaderry Mission and left in town for the pea-pickers trucks to come [in from various farms in the area] and pick them up ...".*

Narrator: At the end of each day they would be brought back to Berry. The ladies would wander into Mary Lidbetter's shop as described by Mary,

Lidbetter: *"for their reel of cotton or stickybeak or what have you"*

Narrator: and the men would congregate in Tom Lidbetter's saddlery shop. Apparently, the men were told by their elders,

Lidbetter: *"While you're waiting for the truck, you do not hang around the street, you do not go to the pub, you go to Lidbetter's shop".*

Narrator: The Bomaderry Children's Home was opened in 1908. Sonny Simms recounted that,

Simms: *"When they Aboriginal children were removed from their parents either on missions or reserves by the Aborigines Protection Board, then the Aborigines Welfare board, they were brought to the Home, as being so called neglected, and were under the auspices of the United Aborigines Mission Organisation- the UAMO".*

Narrator: Sonny's father was among the first five children taken to the home – he spent 14 years of his childhood there. Sonny noted,

Simms: *"They were still bringing kids here; the Nowra Local Aboriginal Land Council purchased this property on 16 October 1993. I brought the front fence with fellahs on Nowra council back in 1974 and it still went for about another eight years after that, they were still bringing kids here. So the kids were still coming here in the '80s".*

Narrator: The property is now heritage listed and contains the Nowra Local Aboriginal Land Council office.

Sonny stated,

Simms: *"On 24 May 2008 we ... celebrated 100 years of the former Bomaderry Children's Home. Kids come back to this place and a lot of those kids never saw each other for 40 years, even one lady from America come back to meet with her sisters for the first time in 40 years. ... We had over 1,500 that come back. ... None of the UAMO Home people came to it – they were fearful of the word compensation. Like I said no one's going to point the finger, we're here to celebrate, which we did. But I was pleased".*

8.0 The Gerringong to Bomaderry Princes highway upgrade

Narrator: Most of the long-time resident interviewees recalled the parlous state of the roads in the area around the middle of last century. 'They were all dirt roads', 'just ordinary dirt roads with a bit of gravel on them or whatever', or just 'grit'. Although subsequently sealed with bitumen, some interviewees also recalled their danger, as Bill Jorgenson noted,

Jorgenson: *"You know before you hit the Foxground there's a bridge and you go over the bridge and you come around that bend, I know that people have been killed there. A fellah named Luke McGuire with a big timber semi-truck he used to rev it up a bit of a night, big bloke he was, one of the wood chopping mob from Tomerong, he forgot to go around the corner there one morning and that was the end of him... It's not hard to clip someone there if you don't watch yourself. That's a bad part of it".*

Narrator: Most, if not all, interviewees have also been involved with proposals to upgrade the Princes Highway in the area since the 1990s, and many were aware of similar proposals from the 1960s.

Helen Chittick recalled,

Chittick: *"We went on bus trips around and then they had working parties. But see most of the people that were here 21 years ago, most of them have left or died. I notice that there are hardly any of the same people there at the meeting for the recent upgrade proposal. ... It's really a waste of money, isn't it? ... Do all this work and then swipe the lot".*

Narrator: With regard to the current proposals for Berry, Sally Lindsay noted,

Lindsay: *"The people of Berry were really, I think, hoping for a true bypass of the town rather than a road that goes along the edge of the town. A bypass is greatly needed. Since the early 1970s we have had at least two, three, processes where the road has been looked at and various routes have been discussed and there have been arguments to and fro in the community ... so people have become rather tired of the process and a lot of people are unwilling to be involved particularly people who have been here a long period of time because they are cynical. They don't believe it's going to happen".*

Narrator: Sally continued,

Lindsay: *"I think a lot of people who might have spoken out against what has been the ultimate choice for a new highway, didn't get involved because this has happened before and it's very, very stressful, extremely stressful for people, and even this time and I know the RTA has done as much as they could to make the process as comfortable, I suppose, as possible for people, it still sets people from one side of the town against people on the other side of the town and people in the middle of the town. It's a very difficult process. ... Really, I suppose what I'm saying is that nothing has ever changed in all this time and the route seems very much the same since the first time anything was first suggested and it doesn't seem to me to be really taking into account the changed circumstances of the town and the needs of the town and the needs for sporting facilities and green spaces and things like that. ... And I think a great modern highway like that at the edge of an historic town where there's plenty of nineteenth-century buildings that are still intact and well maintained is going to destroy the character of Berry. ... I think it is unfortunate that this route was chosen. Although I do give credit to the RTA for considering the historic precinct as a valuable asset in its entirety".*

Narrator: Nevertheless, as Mary Lidbetter emphasised,

Lidbetter: *"Certainly we're desperate to get the trucks off the shopping centre area".*

Narrator: For those whose land and homes may be directly impacted by the current proposed upgrade, such as Margaret Binks, Helen Chittick, and John and Gus Miller, they are saddened and have either resigned themselves to it or remain uncertain about the future.

For some, it is inevitable. Colin Sharpe expressed the view that,

Sharpe: *"... whether we like it or not it has to be upgraded. I am prepared to accept that it must be upgraded. With the amount of traffic now and the state of the roads, particularly between Gerringong and Berry, where there is virtually no passing lanes and with the amount of traffic it just has to be upgraded".*

Narrator: For others, such as Terry Robinson, the proposed upgrade represents opportunity. Terry stated,

Robinson: *"I think a bypass is a necessity for any place. To have the highway all the way around Australia it would be the greatest thing in the world – a two-lane highway and you could bypass any town. It's a lot quicker – it just seems so obvious – to me, that you keep the traffic rolling and it's a lot safer. I'd be an advocate for it anywhere".*