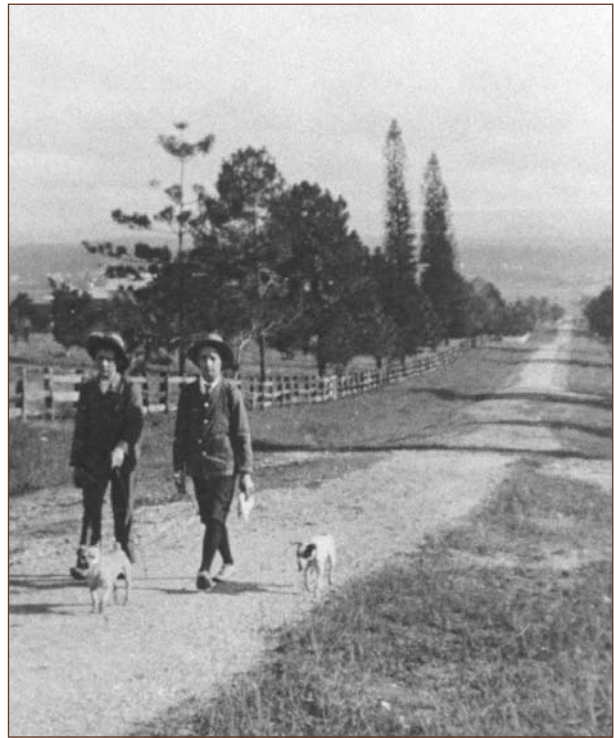


George Roberts

Motor cars and aeroplanes

Date of interview: 1995
Interviewer: Robyn Buchanan
Interview available on CD



Norm and George Roberts in Cherside Road in the 1920s

The Roberts Family:

Mr Albert Edwin born 26.2.1878

Mrs Florence Sarah born 9 Aug 1879

Norman William born July 31 1908

George Alexander born 27.2.09

Florence Ivy born 27.3.12

Don (John Edwin) born 26.2.16

Track 01

I'll start just before the family came out to Australia. My grandfather referred to the last job he did in London which was the gilding of the Royal gold coach. In his office in Gordon Street, he had a series of paper patterns hanging on the wall there and I recall asking him what those patterns were.

He said "They were of the gold coach and to price it, I had to make paper patterns, particularly of all the details of the coach because there were so many odd pieces of it that the costing was quite difficult except by doing that."

It so happened that in 1983, I attended a conference in London which was the FIVA conference (Federation Internationale de Vehicules Anciens - the federation of veteran car clubs) and at that particular meeting, the current president who was Lord Montague was replaced

by Prince Holonoch of Langenberg, Germany. After we had our meeting, which extended about a week, we were invited to Buckingham Palace for dinner that evening attended by the Duke himself and Prince Phillip. After the dinner, we were taken to the mews and we were looking through all the coaches there and the horses and so on and finally we came to the gold coach, and I turned to Prince Phillip and asked "Do you mind if I sit in the coach?"

He said "Why would you want to do that?" and I said "Because I believe my grandfather's last job in London was gilding the gold coach".

"Oh" he said "have you any proof of that?" I said the proof I have is the patterns that were hanging on his office wall.

With that, he called up the curator and in moments, they turned it up and he said "Albert Edward Roberts?" and I said "Yes, that's right."

He said "Well, in that case, you had better sit in the gold coach!"

So that was my knowledge of it.

They came out on the *Dunbar Castle*, arrived in Brisbane and took up residence on the south bank of the Brisbane River, across the Victoria Bridge in Grey St. They owned then the only home in Grey St and my grandfather bought the whole of that property. He bought one mile of waterfront, in other words, the block was one mile square. No doubt that could be found in records, I've not looked at it myself. But this knowledge came to me when I first married and was living on Dornoch Terrace,

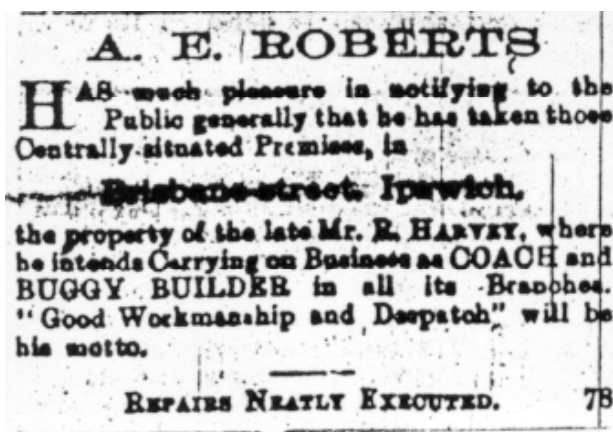


A.E. Roberts premises in Gordon Street

Highgate Hill. My Dad came along to see me and to have dinner with us, we walked out on the back balcony and we looked down towards the river from Dornoch Terrace and said "Well, you're renting property on land that used to be owned by your grandfather" and told me the story of it. That's how I came to know the history of it, otherwise it hadn't been raised up until that point.

They were not there very long I believe before they moved to Ipswich, because Ipswich was the industrial area at that time and there was much more activity in that regard in Ipswich than there was in Brisbane - this is as I understand it.

They set up their business in upper Brisbane Street, living though at the time as far as I can recall in Bennett Street here at East Ipswich. Now I know they lived for a time also in North Ipswich but I cannot find any evidence of them living anywhere near the business premises there in Upper Brisbane Street.



Advertisement for first premises, July 1891

From there they moved down to the corner of Gordon and Brisbane streets and he bought then a coach-building business that was already a going concern and with it, not only the building but the blacksmith's shop which was separate from the coach-building and the house that was on the southern side of that again, there was a space between each of those buildings, that is the coach works, the blacksmith's shop and then the house.

It was to my knowledge somewhere in the 1890s but I can't find evidence of him being there in 1893, perhaps he was, because he talked of the flood but perhaps it was the 1898 flood which was not quite as high as the 1893.

Our father spoke to us quite a lot about having rowed into the shop during the flood and not being able to get the boat out, and he had to get out through the roof and then when the flood went down, their wooden home which was south of the blacksmiths shop had floated and was on top of the coach works. Then the flood went down but it rose again a week later and the house floated off and deposited itself between the blacksmith's shop and the coachworks.

There they built axles and wheels onto the house - it was a two-storeyed wooden home - the base of it was virtually down from the level of the road. That area is where Cole's parking area is today, but that was a quick drop off the road there at that particular time, quite a gully. It was known as Devil's Gully.

So they built wheels and axles onto the house, took it firstly in a westerly direction and then changed it over to a southerly direction and then changed again to an easterly direction. Now my knowledge of that is when I started working in the coachworks, one of my first jobs was striking for the blacksmith and the axles that were used on the house were still lying there at that time. So it was not some fairy tale, I was able to see the actual axles

that were used on the house and I was shown where they fitted on the house.

The only thing that I am not sure was whether that was the 1893 flood or the 1898 flood. Perhaps it was the first one but I'm not certain.

Track 02

Perhaps I should go back to their home here in Bennett St. It was facing the railway line and it was on the corner of what is Bennett St and Cordelia St today. Cordelia St at that time didn't exist as a name, it was known as "The Lane" and the premises of what is the Morris home today, No 2 York St, extended across the lane and to directly opposite No 7 York St where we are having our interview. So directly opposite here were the coach houses and so on.

Then in 1907, my Dad married and he built this home here. Firstly he laid out the garden before building the house itself. Then you can see those tiny plants have become very large palms and trees today. One palm there is 110 feet high and the weeping fig tree is around 100 feet high, so that's it today.

But to return then to Gordon St: this single coachworks building was, in 1908 I believe, extended to Brisbane St by the procurement of one of Cribb and Foote's buildings in Bell St. When Cribb and Foote was rebuilt, they had three buildings sitting side by side there and one of those

was purchased and brought down to Gordon St and that extended the coachworks from there through to Brisbane Street.

The whole of the property there was owned back to what we knew then as Devil's Gully, that's when the drainage system went through there. Opposite that, looking out the back of the building, we looked across to William Harper's furniture business, then to the left of that again was Shillito's engineering business. So that it was at that time quite an industrial area there. Anything virtually could be made in Ipswich at that time. I think at one time there were at least 10 and maybe even 12 foundries in Ipswich, other than the Ipswich Railway Workshops.

So that takes us back to the start of it. The business continued on in coachworks until in 1913, Dad set up business there in motor cars in the same area. So he then produced the chassis and the bodies were built in the coachworks for the vehicles, be it a car or a utility or a bus, whatever it may have been, they were built there.

So I came into the business at the end of 1924, almost '25 and my first job was striking for the blacksmith. From there, I went into the paint shop and from there to the trimming shop and from there into the wheelwrights, building the wheels. Then I transferred from there into the motor car side of it until finally, the whole place was lost as a result of the Depression. So we lost the business then, like so many other people did at that time.

To keep the family going then, we built the Fiveways Service Station. My elder brother Norm and I physically



"In 1907, my Dad married and built this home....those tiny plants have become very large palms..."
From left to right: George, Mrs Florence Roberts, Don, Ivy, Mr Bert Roberts, Norm at 7 York St about 1916.



"The first motor buses were built for a man named Little. He operated a bus service out to Woodend, but it quickly extended to Brassall...." Jack Little is the driver, Bert Roberts is at the front of the bus. Mr Roberts senior is on the extreme left and the onlooker in a white shirt is David Boyce. The bus chassis is a "Traffic" brand imported from America.

built that, we even dug the holes for the tanks to go into and we also graded the road through there by hand, it was all manual work. The white gravel for the road we brought from Pine Mountain. That kept the family going through the Depression years.

Track 03

Going back to building cars, the chassis of course were imported but the bodies were built there and for example the first motor buses built there were for a man named Little, a man we knew as Old Dad Little. His function had been to clear the hyacinth out of the Bremer River but having completed that, then he wanted to get into some other business and he approached my father concerning a bus run from Ipswich to Woodend so the bus was built for him and he operated that bus service out to Woodend but it quickly extended to Brassall where in about three months time, he ordered three more buses, a series of these, and there are photographs of all these buses that were built there at the time.

I know I was part of the building of them, particularly the painting of them, quite a bit of painting of them at the time. I recall that the first occasion I was asked to paint the roof of them - because they were a white canvas roof at that time and they were painted over with white paint. I got up there on the trestles and painted the roof of this bus then when I got down from there, my grandfather said to me "Well, what sort of job did you do?" and I said "Oh near enough Grandfather".

And he said "Near enough is not good enough. Get up and do it again." So I got up and did it again and when I came down he said to me "Well, what's it like now?" and I said "Oh it's very good Grandfather" and he said "That's near enough".

So we had our early days there and the bodies that were built...well prior to the motor side of it, there were all sorts of carts built - either bakers' carts or ice carts and then the sanitary carts - we knew them as the cart that had "100 cylinders and flies" - the flies were always all around it. We built a number of those, there are good photographs of them.

In the passenger vehicles that were built, there were the buggies and sulkies and phaetons and all that type of thing, there were great numbers of them built and they were shown everywhere, not only at the Ipswich Show here but the Brisbane Exhibition and up in Rosewood, Marburg, Lowood and Boonah - all over the place these shows took place and we have evidence of that still today in the numbers of certificates that were produced at that time and they still here with the family and also in the form of medallions. Many of the certificates have since been framed and they have gone to members of the family - a whole series of them.

How many people worked in the business?

I'm uncertain, I think that it varied from time to time. There are photographs of groups such as 20 or 25 people, at other times there might be 12. It seemed to vary very much and whether they were all there at one time or not I

don't really know. There doesn't seem to be any evidence of what took place there.

Track 04

One of the early things that did take place there was: the first motor car that I know to have been in Ipswich, was a Linon, a single-cylinder vehicle, possibly a de Dion Bouton engine, I'm not certain of that, or Astra engine - it would be one of the two, both those engines being French but the car itself was built in Belgium.

That was purchased here by David Featherby who was in the Salvation Army. After receiving the vehicle here early in 1900, he brought it to the coachworks to be repainted in Salvation Army colours. When that was completed, our father photographed it in Gordon Street and our records show that that was April 1900. The car was quite crude in many ways in design, the transmission on it was cross-belt drive, no gear drive, just cross-belt drive on pulleys but it did have a steering wheel, not a tiller which was quite unusual for that time.

The same vehicle in England was sold as the Mayfair. but here, this car was a "Linon". Whatever happened to it eventually, I don't really know but to my knowledge, that's the first car in Ipswich.

The first car to my knowledge in Queensland was 1893, built by Knight Elliott on the corner of Adelaide Street and

Creek Street in Brisbane, the designer of it and builder of it said it was not very successful, but nevertheless it did run in Adelaide St Brisbane.

So that's my knowledge of the first vehicles in Brisbane. After that came Trackson. The cars that Trackson was selling was the Locomobile, that's very easy to prove in the number of photographs that exist today, but he also built the Trackson engines and I recall at Wacol, which was then Wolston, one of his Trackson engine went through the surface of the bridge and lodged in the creek there and it was there for many years.

During World War I, when my Dad was going to Brisbane and bringing up new cars from Brisbane, we couldn't cross this bridge at Wolston, we had to go across the creek near the railway line and come up on the other side of it there and that was then a sandy track leading through Gales which was then Dingo Hill, before getting to Goodna and the whole place was sand the whole way through, it was low-gear drive through there. But as I say the bridge couldn't be used because the Trackson engine had fallen through it and it was lodged there for many years.

Track 05

Among other early cars in Ipswich, there were two Alldays and Onions here, two-cylinder models, and one was owned by Charlie Parslow, the other I believe was



"The first car I know to have been in Ipswich was a Linon...". David Featherby in Gordon St after the car had been painted in Salvation Army colours. The firm's records show this as April 1900



Trackson's Locomobile

owned by Len Lawrence who was then living over at Tivoli Hill and he was involved with John Morris in the Ipswich Woollen Mills here, when the mill was over at Tivoli Hill.

I believe he was also involved in the car that I knew as the Kangaroo. I heard it referred to in recent times as the Wallaby but I always knew it as the Kangaroo. This was a three-wheeler vehicle, the engine was over the top of the front wheel. I knew of it and have actually seen it on its side, coming off the old Bremer Bridge, turning left off the old Bremer Bridge and then turning right into Nicholas Street which were fairly tight corners, I've seen that car turn on its side be put back again by its owner onto the wheels and drive on - it was not unusual for this

vehicle to turn over. What happened to it eventually, I don't know, I believe it was thrown down a mine shaft at Tivoli. It was a one-off vehicle, built here in Ipswich.

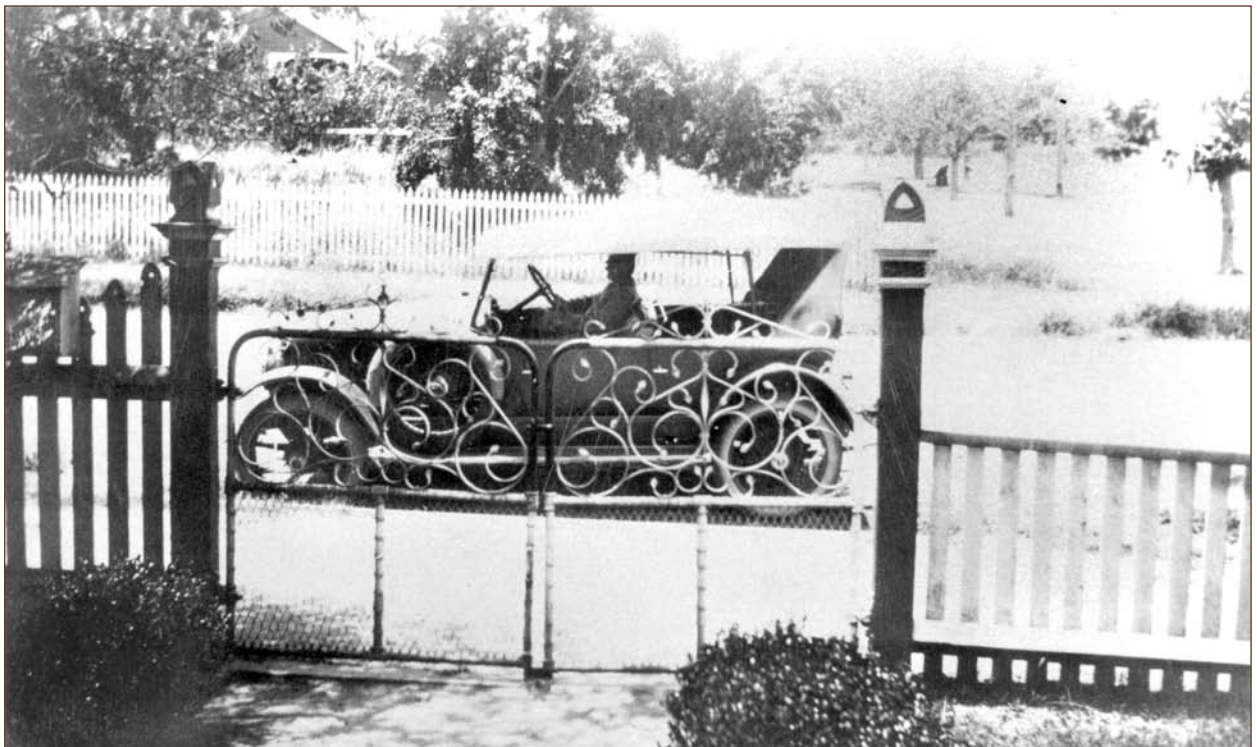
There were numerous other vehicles at the time and the one other I recall very well was Dr Brown's Minerva. This Minerva was a beautiful-looking vehicle but it had a major problem with the roads of the day, it broke its chassis frame more than once. The result was it was brought into our coach works and the blacksmith there, Clarrie O'Brien did the repairs to it. But it became unreliable because of this and the doctor didn't have a car when he wanted it. The doctor's chauffeur was Fred Cheyne. The doctor finally became tired of this problem and he asked my Dad for another vehicle. My Dad offered him a Hudson. Hudson at that time was a fairly mundane-looking vehicle, totally black and the doctor didn't like the look of it at all but my Dad convinced him that the car was very reliable and that he should buy one which he did. This was round about 1918, 1919, thereabouts.

So he bought this vehicle and as he said later, "I wondered why I ever kept the Minerva for so long because this car went everywhere I wanted to go at any time and was an extremely reliable car."

He bought further Hudsons after that, Fred Cheyne being still his chauffeur.

Was it unusual for people to have a chauffeur in those early days?

No, it was quite usual, certainly not unusual in those days. A lot of people drove their own vehicle but by the same token, a chauffeur was not unusual at all. In fact, it was a job that was quite looked to. Not only that, the car was something quite new to them and when the vehicles first came out, the person that did the repairs to them was very often a blacksmith because there were no motor houses



Chauffeur Fred Cheyne waits for Dr Brown outside Oakdale Hospital in Milford St. The car is a Hudson. (Interviewer's Collection)



Bert Roberts outside the Fiveways Garage

initially and then as they were established, it became more a motor business than anything else but initially, very often the blacksmith was the man that did it because he was a practical individual.

There were many other early cars in Ipswich. The other interesting thing was when registrations came out, they were not Queensland registrations, they were city registrations. So from 1910 onward, all the numbers on the cars were prefixed in Brisbane by the letter "A". In Ipswich, it was "E" so I recall among our cars here, we had E7 and we had E87. I remember those two numbers particularly.

We had a motorcycle here which was E19 and that motorcycle was purchased by Dr Macdonald here in 1909 and he sold it several years later to an uncle of mine who lived five doors down the street from us here in York Street. When I was nine years of age, that uncle moved from here to Sydney to become the Chief Electrical Draftsman at Cockatoo Dock, his name was Stanley Pearce, and because of my interest in that motorcycle, it was an FN, Fabrique Nationale, 4-cylinder shaft-drive, he left the vehicle with me. I have it today. So I've had it since I was about nine years of age. It's a 1909 vehicle. But the doctor who brought me into the world came here on that bike to bring me into the world and I still have the bike.

Track 06

It was very interesting to grow up in Ipswich in those years. Looking at the activities that we had here. I often

hear it said today that young people are bored, but we were never ever bored. We had just too much to do and too much to achieve in the time we had available to us.

It was in our early teens, I think to be correct my elder brother Norm was 15 and I was 13 at the time, we started to build our first glider.

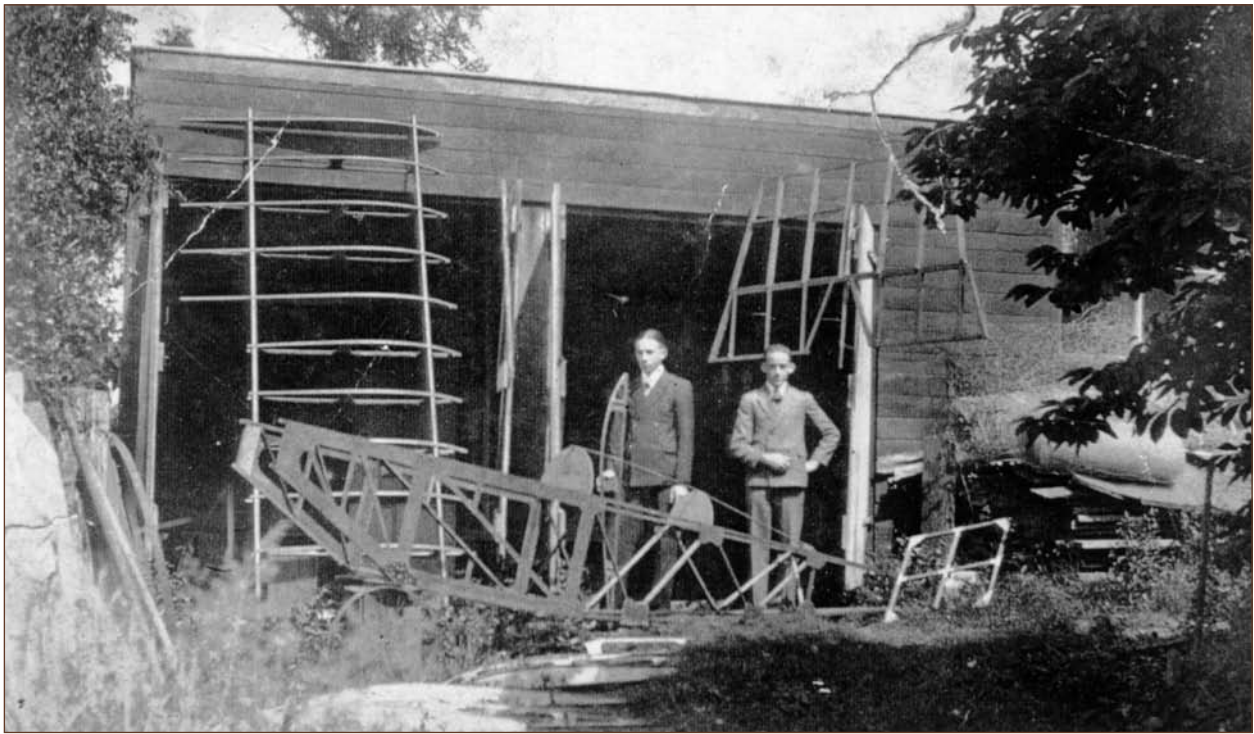
Possibly the reason for this was that our grandfather having been in the coach building business and our father going into the motor business, it was probably a natural progression that we went into aeroplanes.

We first of all built a glider which was far from successful. But it was tested out one Saturday afternoon while the family were out, from the roof of the house here. Norm took off in this glider and I'm on the ground with a mattress, ready to throw underneath him before he hit the ground. There were no injuries but it wasn't very successful.

We then continued to build our first aircraft, the design of which came from Popular Mechanics, an American magazine that I think is still published today. We built that aircraft, it never did fly but it gave us a lot of experience in building one.

Then we got onto another aircraft. I must give my elder brother Norm the credit because he was the instigator of this, not me, I was the one that followed up, probably because I was the younger brother.

One of the aircraft we built was the Flying Flea, the design was Poux de Ciel, a French design and that aircraft still exists today and it hangs up in the Queensland Museum. It was when Norm and I departed Ipswich back in 1938,



Norm and George building a plane at their home in York St

at least I departed before him really, he left in '38, I left in '36, the aircraft was then put under the house and being dark under there, it preserved very very well and it wasn't until 1982 that I took it out from there and it was then given to the Queensland Museum and that's where it is today.

Building it, we were assisted very much by our father. He knew that we needed space to be able to lay out our plans and to build the aircraft and so he built for us a large verandah on the back of the house. Today that verandah is all panelled in and there are rooms on it but initially it was just a big verandah and that was the platform on which we built our aircraft.

So that was a great help to us. It was a timber aircraft, the timber all came from Canada, it was all spruce. The engine on them in most cases was a motor cycle engine converted over with a cross-bearing on the front of it to take the thrust of the propeller.

We built our own propellers and frequently, the initial propeller was not the best, or at least, it didn't give us

the number of revs or the power we wanted in the engine so we frequently had to build another one and that was done.

We had a friend in Brisbane at the time, Dudley Wright, and Dudley also built a little aircraft known as the Wright Mite and the amount of money we had available to us at that time was very little, so when we bought an engine, and converted it over for aircraft use, frequently that would be used in another aircraft as well. So the Flying Flea that is now in Brisbane, the engine in that was also used in the Wright Mite and it was swapped from one aircraft to the other as required.

Unfortunately, the Wright Mite was burned in a hanger at Archerfield one evening when six aircraft and one glider were lost. One aircraft in there was a Stinson Reliant owned by Skip Moodey from Toogoolawah. It had electric flares in it to allow the aircraft to land at night on his property and one of those short-circuited, the aircraft caught alight and burned the rest of them. So we lost a number of them including the Wright Mite, a pretty little aeroplane and a credit to its designer Dudley Wright.



The Flying Flea, now in the Queensland Museum

Track 07

Following the success with that, then we started to build another aircraft here and this design was a bi-plane very similar to the Moth, the de Havilland Moth or the Avro Avion at the time. We only completed the two sides to the fuselage on that and then it hung up under the house here until about eight weeks ago when I got it out and took it to Sydney and it's now on display in the Qantas archives down there. The reason for doing it is it's a good example of the wooden construction - today it's all metal. It's really there for the apprentices of Qantas to see what took place in the past.

But as I say, that's as far as it got. We were both in Qantas by that time, Norm was sent off to Singapore, I was sent to Sydney so that fuselage lay under the house here until eight weeks ago.

Our next-door neighbour at one time was Sir Jos Francis. At that time I believe he was Minister for Air, that was one of his portfolios anyway.

When Norm was 18, he had a visit one weekend here, Sir John Salmon. He had come out from England to assist the then RAAF in a number of ways concerning their operations. During that time, he came up for a visit. Sir Jos brought him over to our home and showed him what we were constructing up in our shed (and of which you have the photograph). He then said to Norm "You should join the RAAF. I'll send you the papers." Which he did and Norm filled in the particular papers and being only 18 - for of course in those days you had to be 21 before you got the key of the door - he gave it to Dad for his signature.

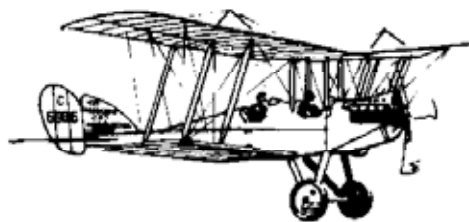
And Dad said "I'm not signing your death warrant."

I was too young for it, I was not then 18, so I didn't have the same offer. So Norm didn't join the RAAF but instead of that, both of us joined Qantas. Today [in 1995], I'm the oldest surviving Qantas engineer. I believe I'm the only member of Qantas from the Queensland days, prior to our move to Sydney.

Qantas of course was here during the war after that, but I'm referring to the time when head office moved from Brisbane to Sydney and I'm sure I'm the only one left from those days.

Track 08

So we spent a lifetime then in aviation. We were probably encouraged by a cousin, my mother's cousin, Reg Andrews, who was a pilot in World War I flying a SE-

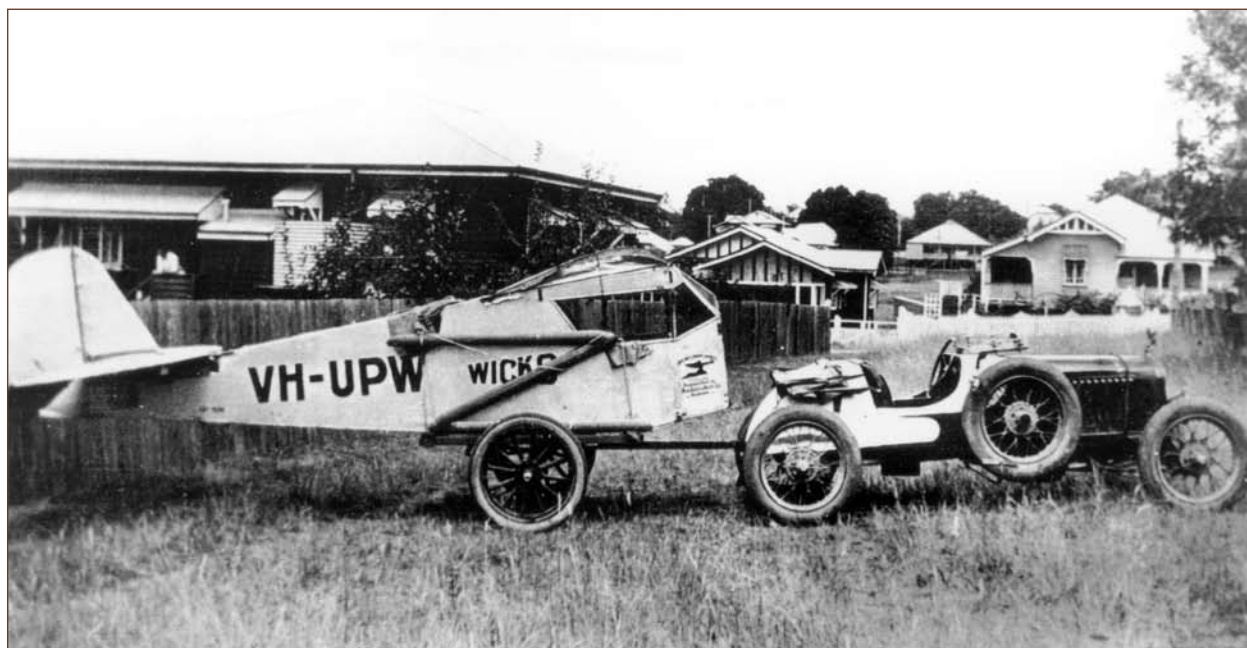


1921 BE2E

5A and he went down between the lines, actually forced down between the lines with engine trouble, jumped out of his aircraft into a shell hole which was full of Mustard Gas and became gassed as a result of it and died shortly after the War, about 1924. But he brought to Norm and I as kids the pieces of the propeller which I have today, and he gave me his flying goggles. He gave Norm and I a book he brought back from those days. Those goggles I used on the three Redex trials around Australia and I still have them today. That possibly was our introduction to aeroplanes.

The next thing that probably assisted our efforts towards aeroplanes was that in December 1918, we were having a holiday at Sandgate, I think it's called Brighton today, at a point near the southern end of the Hornibrook Highway.

We were having a holiday there in a hut when a flying boat came in and landed there. That flying boat was owned by Levius Hood of Sydney. They had flown it up from Sydney, a wooden hulled flying boat known as a Curtis Batboat or Curtis Seagull. It became stuck on a sandbank, the result was with a motor going, they were unable to move until we kids got around the aeroplane, Norm on the nose, Ivy on one wing, I'm on the other wing, we rocked and twisted the aircraft, got it into a deeper trough



The Wicko, designed by Geoff Wickner and built by Geoff, Norm and George. It was flown at Archerfield and reached 17,300 feet. This photo was taken behind their home in York St, facing Kendall St

of water from which it took off and after flying for about half an hour with a rising tide, it returned and then took us for a flight. That became our first flight.

Our next one came with the landing of a BE-2e (British Experimental 2e) World War I aircraft, purchased by the Perdriau Rubber Company in disposals after World War I and used for advertising. The pilot of it was Jack Butler. Jack flew the aircraft up to Brisbane and Ipswich here and landed in Cribb's paddock on the southern side of Blackstone Road. There our father took up the agency or dealership for Perdriau Tyres. The result of that - Norm and I were then taken for a flight in the BE-2e. But we had a function - that was to throw pamphlets out over Ipswich and Brisbane, advertising Perdriau Tyres. Pollution they'd call it today. That was what we did.

The aircraft then flew on from Brisbane up to Longreach and there the agency for Perdriau Tyres was taken up by Herb Avery so Herb was taken for a flight in the aircraft also. But in coming in to land at Longreach, it hit telephone wires and damaged the aircraft, it didn't injure the occupants but the result was the aircraft was put on a train and then sent over to Rockhampton and then down back to Sydney to the Australian Aircraft and Engineering Company for repairs.

Those repairs coincided with Qantas buying their first aircraft, an Avro 504K, from the same organisation. When repairs were completed on the BE-2e, Perdriau Rubber Company by that time wished to dispose of it and they sold it to a man named Charles Knight who was a stock and station agent in Longreach. But he was unable to fly at that time so he asked the then- members of Qantas - which comprised Hudson Fysh, Arthur Baird and Paul McGinness - to fly it up to Longreach as they were taking up their own aircraft.

Paul McGinness being the senior man at the time with a lot of flying experience, he took Charles Knight as a passenger in the Avro 504K to Longreach, leaving the BE-2e to be flown by Hudson Fysh who at that time had only 32 hours flying experience, and Arthur Baird, the engineer.

On reaching Cessnock on the way up there, they ran into a severe storm. The experienced man Paul McGinness flew on to Singleton and landed there safely but the inexperienced Hudson Fysh got into trouble in cloud there. When the storm was over and they had a cup of tea with the good lady at the miner's hut, they took off again downhill and then headed for Singleton and landed there to a very worried Paul McGinness who was waiting for the aircraft to get there.

Following that, both aircraft flew onto Longreach, but Charles Knight, the owner of the BE-2e, by the time they reached Longreach, he didn't want any more to do with aircraft, he had that many frights on the way up so the result was it was sold to Qantas for £450 and became Qantas' second aircraft. Both Norm and I as later members of Qantas had flown in Qantas aircraft before Qantas existed and before they owned the aircraft! So that became quite a story.

Today Qantas has the engine and propeller of that aircraft and I'm trying to convince management at the present time to build a replica of the BE-2e because we have

all the plans for it. The other thing was Jack Butler, the pilot of the BE-2e became Hudson Fysh's best man at his wedding.

Track 09

Other aircraft arrived here in Ipswich and they all used Cribb's Paddock off Blackstone Road. Amberley of course didn't exist at that time. Amberley was just a big flat field and was not known as Amberley, it was known as the Three-Mile. The bridge I believe this side of Amberley is still known as the Three-Mile although I'm not sure of that.

That was Warrill Creek coming through there so you had the Bremer River and the Warrill Creek and the flooding of those two is what made the flat field which is Amberley today.

Getting back to other aircraft that came here, one that frequently flew up here and landed in Cribb's Paddock was an identical aircraft to the BE-2e and also Avro 504Ks, they were the two aircraft that were generally around at that time, ex-World War I. Jack Tracy came up here quite a lot from then Eagle farm.

Archerfield didn't exist until 1931. The reason for the airfield being changed from Eagle Farm to Archerfield was Eagle Farm at that particular time was flooded at least twice a year, with the king tides coming across and it became a bog. Both Norm and I were gliding there in 1928 and Qantas were there in 1927 at Eagle Farm with one hanger there and a fore-runner of the aeroclub. So it was a training field for people to learn to fly. [*The main airport for Brisbane was Eagle Farm, acquired by the Commonwealth in 1922. It was shifted to Archerfield in 1931 but returned to Eagle Farm in 1948*]

Most of the aircraft that came up here to Cribb's Paddock were either BE-2e or Avro 504K. There was also a Henry Farman here at one time, a Henry Farman Box Kite, but I think only on one occasion I saw it here.

They came mainly for joy-rides, people were having a joy-ride, in fact Jack Tracy came here for joy-rides at 10/- a ride - that was the usual figure at that particular time. But naturally we kids would race over there to see any aircraft that came in there, there would be a general scatter in that direction.

I can remember another aircraft activity here - I had forgotten - Harry Ferret lived on the southern side of Brisbane Road about half way between the Fiveways and the Gully [*near the end of Kendall St*] and he built a glider. Living at the back of him was a man named Eb Foote and he was one of the early motorcyclists here, he had a motorcycle and sidecar.

Harry having built this glider got it out onto Brisbane Road with the help of Norm and I and he was to then try and fly it down Brisbane Road, using the motorcycle to tow it into the air. So the tow rope was put on to the motor cycle and sidecar, Harry got into the glider which was a Primary glider and the aircraft lifted off quickly with no problem from the roadway.



Group of Ipswich people at Eagle Farm in 1928 includes - back row - not known, Tom Brown, George Roberts, tobacconist Fred Kipping. Front row - first two not known, footballer Harry "Lulla" Chiggee, not known, Bill Chiggee. The plane is an Avro-10 owned by Kingsford Smith's original Australian National Airways.

But then the tow rope did not become detached and as a result, as the motorcycle sped on, it pulled the glider down to the ground and the final thing was, there was a glider and a motorcycle and sidecar and one airman and one motorcyclists rolling down the road. Not many injuries received but nevertheless, there were a few bruises. That was the end of the glider.

Interviewer: there can't have been much traffic then?

No traffic then, no! I don't think the glider was rebuilt, I think it was just put up in the shed and left there. His brother Chris Ferret was in the Council here. I guess Harry died many years ago, he was older than us.

Track 10

Another interesting thing. From where we sit here on this verandah today, I particularly recall the Southern Cross coming back after a flight to England and they had engine trouble flying over here and it was flying almost level with us here, probably 100 feet above the railway line here, no more than 200 feet at the most, in real trouble. It was down to the centre engine, the two outer engines had stopped and the pilot of it at the time was Scotty Allan and he decided to make a landing at Bundamba Racecourse. But just on his approach to Bundamba, he was able to restart one outboard engine and so instead of landing, he lifted off and went on to Archerfield. In doing

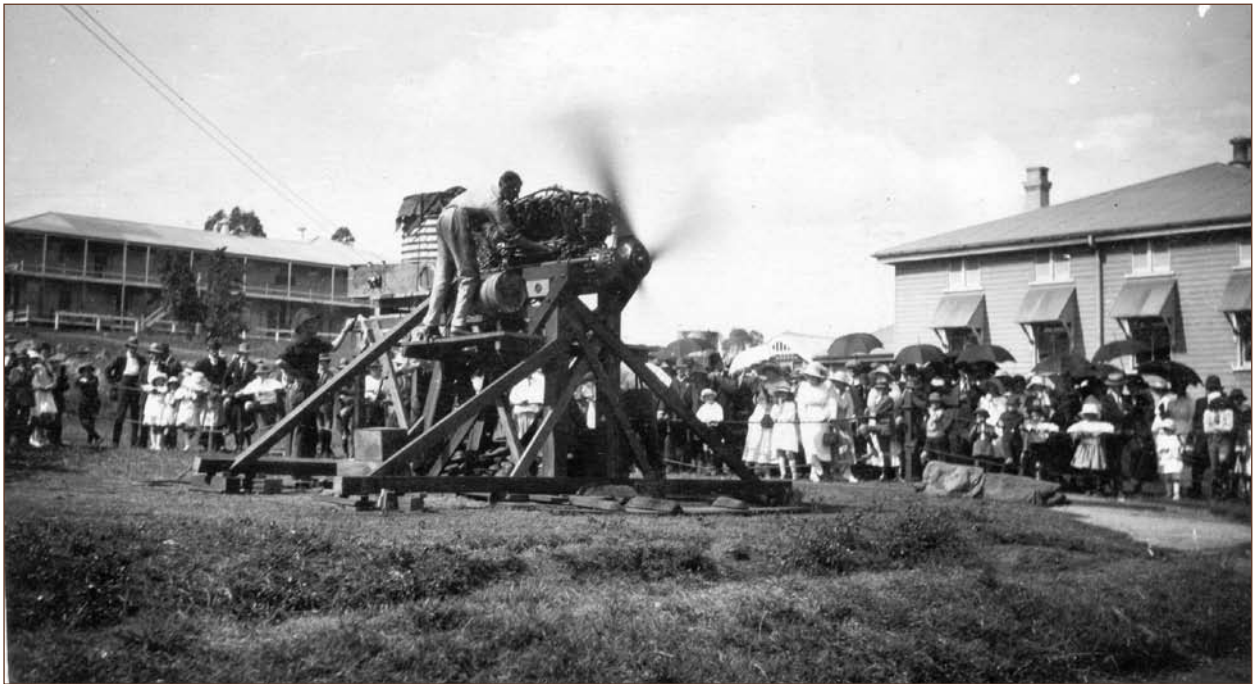
so, he just got in because that engine failed again. Today, it's at Eagle Farm. We chased it in our cars, to make sure it got in to land.

Various aircraft at that time were breaking records and coming out to Australia. One of course was Bert Hinkler but he decided not to land on Eagle Farm, possibly it was a bog at that time, I'm not sure. Instead of that, he landed on Eagle Farm Race Course, actually on the course itself with his Avro Avion. I was there to watch that come in.

Then I was also at Eagle Farm when Smithy came in with the Southern Cross across the Pacific. I recall that we got there at 3am and it was 11am before the aircraft arrived. They reached the coast of Australia at Ballina then flew up from Ballina and finally landed at Eagle Farm.

Another one was Amy Johnson. She was escorted after reaching Darwin, they were concerned with her being lost in Australia because unlike flying the rest of the way where you had a lot of identification to navigate, once you reached Australia, the heart of Australia had virtually nothing there you could tell. So she was escorted across Australia by CW Scott, Charlie Scott as we knew him, then a Qantas pilot, and later Scott and Black flew the Comet to Australia.

CDW Scott was to escort her across Australia but he was not so keen on the job, particularly when Amy each time she saw an emu or a kangaroo down below, she wanted to get down and fly and have a look. So he got a bit fed up



'A test stand was built and there the engine and the new propeller were tested out at the Ipswich Railway Workshops....'

with her by the time he reached Eagle Farm, he brought his aircraft which was then a DH50 in to Eagle Farm, touched it down and immediately took off again. Amy came in and landed virtually at the same spot but then realised there was a fence not very far in front of her so she pulled the stick back and the aircraft lifted off again but she didn't gun the motor, and the result was the wheels hit the top rail of the fence there and the aircraft went over on its back in a cornfield.

The nearest people to it at the time were Ivor Morris [owner of Morris Woollen Mills at Redbank] and myself. And we raced over to her and we extracted her from the cockpit. She wasn't hurt, we undid the harness and got her out of the cockpit much to the consternation of the farmer who owned the cornfield whose corn we were treading down, running through it. And of course the other people who joined us.

Finally the aircraft was lifted out from there and then taken to the sole Qantas hanger that was at Eagle Farm. "Jason" was the name of her aircraft, a Gypsy Moth.

Track 11

The Railway Workshops is another area that needs recognition from the aircraft point of view. The first aircraft to reach Australia from England was Ross and Keith Smith with Bennett and Shiers, the two engineers. On their flight across from Darwin down, they developed propeller trouble. They repaired it temporarily at one point then finally had to do something about renewal of it when they reached Charleville. The result was that the port engine and propeller were taken out of the aircraft by Bennett and Shiers, put on a train and sent to the Ipswich railway Workshops. There in the Pattern Shop, a new propeller was made for it from Queensland maple.

But the engine also was damaged, the result of a threshing propeller, an unbalanced propeller, it bent and cracked connecting rods so that in this Rolls Royce Eagle 8 engine, 12 new connecting rods were made, forged and machined and everything, for that engine and those rods and propeller are still on the engine today at the airport at Adelaide.

Finally after the engine and propeller were made for it, a test stand was built and there the engine and the new propeller were tested out at the Ipswich Railway Workshops before returning to the aircraft where it was re-installed and the aircraft flew on. The next station was Bourke, and then they went on to Narromine and finally into Sydney and then later on it went down to Melbourne and finally at Adelaide where the aircraft is today.

There are photographs that I have of not only the engine on the test stand but the propeller being made and balanced separately and I have another one of the old propeller and the new propeller side by side and a further one of Ross Smith himself actually at the Ipswich Railway Workshops, not a particularly good one but it can be reproduced. The other ones are very good. They were taken by my father.

Also when the whistle blew over there at 5 o'clock, and the workmen came out of the workshops, they all stood around the engine waiting for it to run up and amongst those people, and I can see in the photograph today, a man named Dolf Weise, he was one of the workmen there and so I can recognise his face. But the man I'd like to find out what his name was if it's possible was a man of Russian extraction, possibly then known as one of the White Russians, this exceptionally tall man, very well-built man indeed, stood head, shoulders and chest above us all over there. He was asked by Jim Bennett, when the engine didn't start initially, to turn the engine over using



"Norm and I built a lot of what we called at the time 'Underslung Fords'...."

the propeller and I recall him turning this engine over almost as though it was a fan, he stood well over 7 feet. I recall him walking down Brisbane Street and bobbing his head under the awning as he walked down.

It was quite an early episode, because it was December 1919 the aircraft reached Darwin and it was February 3rd 1920 before it left Charleville to go further south.

I've written a full story on that and I've also written a story on a man that observed it in operation at Bourke and he wrote the story of it there back to his family, I've got that as well and that is a very interesting story. he wrote it in such a manner that it really told the story of this aircraft lumbering around the field before take-off and the dust and everything at Bourke, it's a very good story. I'll let you have that if you wish it some time.

Track 12

Interviewer: *Coming back close to home, York St must have been an interesting place to grow up? There seem to have been a lot of interesting people here?*

Yes, there were. My knowledge of the street is that first of all, the name comes from New York Estate. The area all here was known as New York Estate and the man who built the first home here was a man named Hargreaves and that is the home which is now No 2 in York St [Merton] owned by Humphrey Morris. He then built another home here on the eastern side which is No 9. He then built the next one I believe either 13 or 15, 15 possibly. That was Hargreaves. When he vacated No 2, at that particular time, he sold it to a man named Cardew and Cardew

occupied it for many years. Directly opposite to where we are talking today, were the stables of that house.

Cordelia St was then known as The Lane. Bennett St was named but Cordelia St was the lane that led down to the railway.

At that time, the two stations of the railway were not opposite. One was on the eastern side of the Chermiside Rd bridge and the other one was on the western side, so to get from one side of the station to the other, you had to cross under the bridge although here were stairs led down to each of the stations from various points.

I think possibly this home was probably one of the next homes to be built which was 1907 but I'm not absolutely sure of that. Certainly these other three homes were there, and there was one other, that was No 1 York St which was built by the Greenways, a stone home, of course he was a stone mason and that's why he built a stone home. So that would have followed the three built by Hargreave, or it may have been built in between them.

The other homes around here didn't exist when we were children. That was all paddocks down there and I would say the one following this was owned by Walkers on the corner of York and Gibbon Streets.

My grandmother lived in a home in the Gully as we referred to it, which was down the hill, where Kendall St now reaches Brisbane Road. That was the Gully and was all owned by my grandmother at that particular time, she later sold it.

Sir Jos lived next door, a very good neighbour, a delightful chap he was. We saw quite a lot of Jos at that time.

Norm and I built a number of what we called at that time "Underslung Fords". Today there are generally known as Fronti Fords or Rajah?? Fords. They made the old T-Model go very much quicker than it went initially and we built a number of them here. One of them was built for Ivor Morris, another was built for Mort Stephens, Mort's father was a parliamentarian, lived at Lanefield.

The fastest one of them, we took it to Southport Main beach as it was then, Surfers' Paradise didn't exist and to get to Main Beach at the time, we crossed over a little ferry over the Nerang River near the Boys Grammar School there [*?The Southport School*] then there was a sandy track that took us to the beach. So this car we tried it out on the beach, brakes were virtually non-existent on it but it certainly had lots of speed. We were timed at 104 miles per hour on Southport Beach. That was quite a success in those days for us, that would have been in the 20s, probably around 1928.

Instead of the old wooden wheels, we were using wire wheels on the car which were on the last of the Model T Fords built which was 1927.

These wire wheels were for sale in sets by the Ford Motor Company here at the time for £4 a set of five wheels with hubs and brake drums and so on and we using those wheels, much more substantial than the wooden wheel that preceded them.

I recall a Miss Wilson coming around and selling property that became Surfers Paradise. I was then 15 and I was going to buy two blocks there; those blocks at that time were 30/- and they were 50ft wide, 150 ft deep and they

were right in the centre of what Surfers Paradise is today. But Cahill had not then built his hotel and zoo which he had behind the hotel.

Interviewer: It is interesting that a block of land at Surfers was cheaper than a set of wheels.

That's right, it was. One of the people who bought one of the blocks of land was people named Freer and that family bought a block and put a shop on it in Surfers Paradise. Their home at the time was then at the top end of Chermside Road, just opposite the then gate of the park. I recall very much the hotel there and the zoo at the back, the zoo was quite something in those days.

There was no bridge across the Nerang for quite some years, that was eventually built. Prior to that, we got on this ferry which was just hand operated across the Nerang River quite near the Church of England Grammar School.

Track 13

The flood of 1924 came across Brisbane St and Gordon Street and it was up the walls of our building about four or five feet. We had built a canoe, a fairly sizeable one, and our father's youngest brother Leo and Norm and I, we went out in the canoe from across Brisbane St, through Devil's Gully. We hugged the bank of the flood all the way up to the One Mile then got out into the stream where the water was running fast and came back again quite fast down the stream, had difficulty turning in out of the stream into Devil's Gully, back to the shop.



East Ipswich Railway Station.

"At that time, the two stations were not opposite. One was on the eastern side of the Chermside Rd bridge and the other one was on the western side..."

I recall after that time, we had to get the fire hoses down to hose all the mud out of it. We had removed the cars beforehand.

What I should have mentioned earlier, the number of horse-drawn vehicles that were made in that coach works. It was quite something really. Perhaps I can find you a photograph of just one Show, showing the number of vehicles all just displayed out in the open.

Another of the motor vehicles: we have a photograph here of father selling a 1915 T Ford at the Ipswich Show. That photograph is a particularly good one. He has a number of people around him and he is there selling this particular vehicle. Many years later, about 1956 or '57, I was here at the time on a holiday, my brother Don became interested in veteran cars and he made a comment while we were having lunch this day, "It's alright for you people in Sydney getting these old cars, there are none here."

Dad was sitting at the table also and he immediately said, "What about so- and-so at Booval?" and Don said "Oh, I think he sold that car years ago."

Dad said "When I drove past this morning, it was still under the house."

Don went that day and bought the car. We still have it today, so it had one only owner apart from ourselves, a 1915 Ford

Don trailed that car to rallies all around Australia and twice he took it to Perth, once via Darwin and down the coast and then across the Nullarbor and back again. It's

still quite original, has the original upholstery in it, yet we have a photograph of it being sold.

I set off in 1934 from here in a '27 Model T Ford and went up to Rockhampton and out to a place called Plumtree on the coast opposite Quail Island which was then owned by Harry Walker, one of the mining Walker family here. There was virtually nothing doing at the time so Harry and I decided we should drive further north. We then drive up through Townsville, Cairns and Cooktown and on to Cowan. We couldn't get any further in the car, we were going to try to drive up to Cape York Peninsula but we only got as far as Cowan and couldn't get further for sand dunes so we decided then to go cross country, we went over one property then on to another one on tracks and where tracks didn't exist, we went a compass course.

We finally got down through to Normanton, from there we went out to Burketown and then from there we followed a line as near as possible to the Queensland/Northern Territory border down to Birdsville and then followed from Birdsville back to Ipswich here on as near as possible to the Queensland/New South Wales border.

So other than the sector from Cowan to Cape York Peninsula, we virtually did the periphery of Queensland in this T Ford. We were about nine weeks away doing this, 1934 or '35, about that time. Norm had joined Qantas and I hadn't at that time, I joined in '36.

We put petrol tanks onto each running board, two 12-gallon tanks, and then used the normal main tank in the car. Crossing the country from Cowan down to



Inside the coachworks: Bert Roberts is in the dark hat on the left, his younger brother Leo is on the extreme right with Mr Roberts senior to his left. The paint shop was through the rear doorway.

Normanton, in some of the creeks we had to cross, we used thin stringy bark poles which we roped together to get through the sand base of the creeks and also to cross through the water, we'd put them down and run the car over them. We carried them right across our mudguard, they stuck out either end of the car.

Well, Harry then owned Quail Island and I took several cars up to him and actually put one car on the island for him, a T Ford. I have photographs of that too. We only had a 23 foot launch, Quail island was about four miles off the coast and so we took it over to the island, the chassis one day and the body the next on this 23 foot launch. It's probably still there today, probably rusted away by now!

In taking one car up to Harry, he wanted a utility so I got a Chev utility here for him, his dad bought it here actually, and I drove it up on that occasion up through Banana and on through up to Biloela, Mt Morgan, and finally up to there.

On the way up, I stopped at Banana overnight and the hotel was then a slab hotel so you could see from one room to another through the cracks in the slabs and we had a kerosene lamp, that's what the lighting was, no doors on it, there was hessian hanging down and the floor was also slab. When I put my hurricane lamp out that particular night to get into bed, one big toe went through a crack in the floor and I'm in pitch blackness trying to get my toe out of the floor! Finally I did, with some splinters in it. That was taking this Chev up to Quail island.

Harry finally left the island and came back here to the mining, he was a mine manager here. But he decided to give it away. Quail Island was a sheep station, it was six miles long and four miles wide.

Track 14

I don't know how many stairs there are there at our home in York St, but we used to run through the hall here and jump the length of the stairs and roll - preparing ourselves for falls here and there. As you will see in that eulogy we wrote of Ivy, we also set up tightropes here between the trees and we walked these tightrope and Ivy did too. We also had penny farthing pushbikes at the time and Ivy rode those as well as us. I recall one particular time I heard my motorcycle start up and was astounded to see Ivy going out the gate on it, she'd never ridden one before.

So that's some of our activities. I guess what we did made us very adaptable to anything we wished to try and achieve. All sorts of experiments we carried out here. I know Norm particularly was trying to look for perpetual motion in our teens - never achieved it of course but he tried hard.

We did our engineering training at the Technical College where our mother was the secretary and there is evidence of that still here.

The College principal was then Wearn and he later became the principal of the Brisbane Technical College.

We had a hut at Spicer's Gap - Cunningham's Gap Road

did not exist then - but he had this hut at Spicer's Gap and we went up there frequently and climbed the Blue Pinch there, it was one in three so we always took our cars up there backwards in case it stalled, we could run down frontwards and steer properly. Up on top was Governor's Chair and there is a hollow area there, we looked for the entrance to it, obviously there is a cave underneath there because you can stamp on Governor's Rock there and the whole thing sounds hollow underneath but we never did find the entrance to that cave, if there is an entrance to it. That was another place for our activities with the cars, up and down this Spicer's Gap.