

## Jack Squires Story

Jack was born in 1928 at Bulahdelah Hospital to John Henry 'Jack' and Harriet Beatrice 'Attis' Squires, one of four children. Jack's parents had balloted for land, along with many others, back in the '20's. The leases were for 33 or 99 years. Most people took out a 33 year lease after which they owned it.

Jack's story starts at the "old house" along the tramway about half way along where Squires Rd is now. He, along with everyone else, was very fit because of the distances you had to walk or ride. Cars were rare. The people whom they

depended on to get to the district dances in cars were Stan French and Jimmy Muxlow. Other people who owned cars in the 1930's were Sam and Tom

Mudford, Sam Spooner, Tom Metcalf, Arch and Bert Worth, Bob Newman, Shop keeper Earl Maybury and the manager of Allen Taylor and Co tramline, Bill Smedley. He remembers attending Wootton School along with well-known families such as the Stamps, Munroes, Newtons, Fennings, Worth, Squires, French and Cheers with 17 children!! All school children learnt to swim early at the

local 'swimming holes'. The infants learnt at the "The Flat Bottom" and Primary at "Cheer's Hole", both were upstream of what is now called Hoppy's Bridge (also known as Stamps Bridge). As one of the 47 small dairies in Wootton, Jack had to deliver the cream in a 6 gallon can on horseback to Arch Worth's Depot,

4 kms along the tramway. He would balance the can on a corn bag draped over the pommel of the saddle. Sometimes if the can was full to the brim his trousers would be coated with cream. A rough ride could result in it nearly turning to

butter. Blackberries and Wild Passionfruit grew wild along the tramway which was a delight to eat with the fresh cream. He fondly remembers the sounds in the bush - the ring of the axes, the bullock teams, the crack of the whip and the daily loco rattling and puffing along the line.

To reduce walking distances, people would take the shortcut along the tramway line. This shortcut entailed risks. All dairies had bulls and Jersey bulls could not be trusted. Many a time people were bailed up in the only safe haven along the tram line - "the tramline bridges". They had to wait their time until the bull had lost interest and then run to the next bridge.

A tragic tale of a bull's temperament was when a surveyor had set up camp near a water hole in the creekline. Jack and his two sisters were returning from Wootton where they had collected a parcel from the "service car" and noticed the bull "going mad". When they arrived home

they found that the surveyor was missing. Jack's father, Max Roberts and all available local men spent all night searching for him. He was found the next day over the fence, dead, gored by the bull, who had also rampaged through the camp site. The bull was subsequently sent to the abattoirs.

Another story was when his sister Edie and her cousin were held up on the way to a dance by a bull and they had to come home and go the long way around.

Dances were the main social event. Everyone went to dances either to dance or just to have a 'yak'. Entry was 2/- (two shillings) and not everyone wanted to pay. Wings were constructed around the doorway so people couldn't get a free view. One memorable night Gordon Cater refused to pay his 2/- and was turned away only to return with the toilet tin balanced on his shoulder and threatened to throw it in the hall. "Now will you let me in" he said. He was given a wide berth and free entry. He paraded around the dance floor with the can on his shoulder much to everyone's astonishment. Lighting in the hall was supplied by 3 "Gloria Lights" which were fuelled by "Shellite" (petrol/kerosene mix). They had 300 –500 candle power. Air tanks were housed under the hall and each light had to be pumped to 80 pounds pressure to last the night. Jack worked up a sweat doing this. Max Newton, well-known for his larrikanism, couldn't resist the temptation to crawl under the hall and release the pressure causing the lights to gradually extinguish. To beat the troublemakers they moved the gas and air tank to the tea rooms, but they still managed at times to sneak in and have their fun. The Weismantel Band from Krumbach was known to be the best band around with a saxophone, trumpet, piano and drums. There were many other bands as well. Jack's mother, a wonderful dancer, taught him to dance at an early age as she did many others in her home. On a Saturday night, if there were no dances, she would wind up the gramophone, Dad would get out his mouth organ, and everyone would come and dance such dances as the Silver Bell's Quickstep, Barn Dance, Canadian Three Step, The Schottize and The Jolly Miller Mix-Up. Jack was also proud of the fact that his mother corresponded with Council, instigating the surveying and construction of Squires Road. No mean feat by a woman of that time. After practicing for a concert at the hall, Jack, a mate and two girls decided it would be a lark to pinch the tramway trike (which was used by the three fettlers for track maintenance) to get home. They rode it to the top of the hill and then let it freewheel back down the hill to wherever it may rest. He still wonders what the fettlers thought when they came to work the next day and had to go looking for it.

In 1944 when the war was on they closed the tramline and Jack went working for Forestry up the Crawford River. He was 16. Only the young and the old men were left, most were called up for war. He was given a water bag, crosscut saw and an axe and from Monday to Friday he camped in the forest falling trees. (Anything above a four foot girth was allowed)

Basic accommodation was a “cubicle” which was a hut for four with a fireplace, a small kitchen and four bunks. They existed on corn meat and vegetables, kept in a meat safe, which often ran out by Thursday. It was dangerous work and Jack recalls a number of incidents.

Fred Inchy, a surveyor, was killed when a small oak tree fell on his head. He was dead before he hit the ground. Claude Shultz was squashed between two logs and they weren't small logs! Roy Cheers sliced the side of his ankle with an axe. They wrapped it in a flour bag whilst Jack ran the 2 miles to camp to ring the ambulance at Stroud. Roy survived his ordeal. The boss's beautiful Palomino horse was killed when it walked under a falling tree. On a lighter note, Joe Cheers, a log cutter, climbed 20 odd boards high up a tree, chopped the top off and did a show-off dance on top for all to see. Jack said “He was a much better cutter than most”. Jack's time working in the forest was mostly enjoyable, only for the leeches.

Tennis, Football and Cricket were the main sports played in Wootton and surrounding areas - Bulahdelah, Coolongolook, and Bungwahl. The Under 18's played for a “cup” donated by Bill Newman, one of the shop owners in Wootton. Earl Mayberry owned the other shop. Mrs Leedham ran the Post

Office/Phone Exchange, followed by Mrs McDean (Edie). You could often hear her husband Bill's breathing on the phone line as he listened in to telephone conversations.

Horse racing was another sport and days were held which included “flag races” and “bending races”. People would prepare their horses for these days by feeding them up and training. Jack's anecdote relating to this was when a professional race horse was brought to Wootton to “rest a spell” at Bob Newman's property. Max Newton “borrowed” the horse for the day and entered it in the races at Bungwahl and won easily over the other local horses, a bridle as his prize. The horse was returned to it's paddock before anyone was the wiser. The owner never knew! Another of Max's exploits, along with Keith McDean, was to whitewash George Woodward's bay horse, “Mickey”, leading George to think that it wasn't

his horse when he called it to go milking in the early hours. George was heard to say “Get away you \*\*\*\*\*, you don’t belong here, get the buggery out!!” He always blamed someone else and it wasn’t until years later did he find out who the culprits were.

We asked about bushfires and droughts. He remembered the grass fire during the drought of ‘68/’69 which got away when Bill Hardy ( the best bulldozer driver of the day) was clearing Wilkes’ property. It swept through all the way to the mill on Wattley Hill Road in no time flat and onto Ferney Creek. Derry Willis lost his house and everything in it which is where Buitenhuis live today and Beryl Ede lost a shed. It could have been worse, if not for the help of the mill workers and the Fire Brigade. He said Wootton seems to have always survived droughts better than other surrounding places.

Jack started his own dairy in 1953 handmilking 13 cows. His children helped in the dairy, milking, and the little ones were kept safe in their playpen which was a large tea box. In later years Jack worked for the Department of Main Roads, crushing rocks for the road with a napping hammer, before advancing to driving the bulldozer and then onto the grader. He left the DMR to go sawmilling at Coolongolook. He always worked hard, dairying whilst working for the DMR or the sawmill. He went dairying fulltime when he finished at the sawmill.

Some interesting facts Jack told us were:

- ◆ Worthy’s were the first white settlers in Wootton. Their house was an 18” vertical slab hut where the old pear trees grow straight opposite Worth Street.
- ◆ Wootton was originally known as Hamilton Hill. Nell Squires told him this fact.\
- ◆ The mountain North of O’Sullivan’s Gap was tunnelled out during the war and loaded with dynamite ready to be blown up to cut transport lines in case the “Japs” invaded.
- ◆ Even in Wootton, as in the cities, during the war, all windows were blacked out at night time with cloth. The car headlights were also blacked out, slits were allowed, making night driving slow and treacherous.
- ◆ A Norwegian, Jack Jensen, his wife and three children, lived in a burnt-out tree in Curreeki Creek Road. They added sheets of bark for the walls and corrugated iron on the roof to make it more comfortable. It’s amazing how resourceful people were in those days.
- ◆ Flooded Gum timber was not saleable until the war. Jack’s Dad and his Uncle Fred started the first mill in Wattley Hill Rd, Wootton to mill the Flooded Gum for the war. Since then it has become a sought after timber.

Jack mentioned The “Back to Wootton” days , which were organised by the community in later years. This brought back memories of his wonderful youth, the bullock teams, horse and slide, horse and drays, horse and sulkies, pole cutting, sleeper cutting and tree felling and meeting up with all the good friends, a look into the past and ending with a great ball at night.”