Fear of his father was something that lived with Brucie always. He never really outgrew it. As a child he would start up in the night when he heard his father’s heavy footsteps or the sound of his booming voice raised in anger. Like most parents of that time Ben demanded instant obedience, and the punishment meted out for non-compliance was sometimes quite brutal. Because his own childhood had been harsh, it was his nature to believe that any weakness was despicable. The family tells of the very cruel reason one of the sons left home for good. He had borrowed his father’s big horse to ride around the lower paddock for a lark. Unfortunate Ben arrived home the worse for drink, and found the horse missing. When Alex rode up flushed with the pleasure of his ride, Ben dragged him from the saddle, shouting that “they used to hang horse thieves”. Dragging the screaming boy into the feed shed, he proceeded to do just that. The youngster, powerless against the strength of his drunken father, had the halter placed around his neck and the other end over a beam. Bruce and his brothers ran to the house yelling to their mother, “Mumma, come quick! Dadda’s hanging Alex! Quick! Dadda’s hanging Alex!” By the time Frances reached the shed, young Alex, his face purple, was lying unconscious on the ground, and his father was beating his inert body with a buggy whip. His wife’s interference probably stopped Ben from taking the life of her son. When he recovered sufficiently to walk, Alex left home and never returned. Bruce remembered a time when it was his own misfortune to incur his father’s anger. He was beaten with a piece of harness until he too was unconscious, waking up to vomit into the corner of the shed and crawl to his bed on the back verandah in the dark.

As a man Ben was an enigma: he was both admired and feared. His friends would hear nothing against him, but his enemies both feared and hated him. Nothing seemed to be sacred to him. He appeared to have been completely amoral. There are stories of him riding his horse into the Presbyterian Church on one of his drunken sprees, and on another occasion following his young son Bruce to Sunday School at the Church of England. With another drunken friend, Hopley, they demanded that the Rev. Mr Stammer let them into the Church. When the minister refused, and started to close the door on them, Hopley threw his bottle at the half-closed door. Pieces of the glass cut the minister’s face, whereupon Ben turned on his mate and knocked him to the ground, breaking his thigh. Hopley was unable to work for six months. It is notable, however, that during this time Ben made it his business to help support Hopley’s family.

Through all their married life, Ben’s wife Frances adored him. He was always in trouble, and often unfaithful, but she remained steadfast to her wedding vows. It was due to her constancy that Ben in his later years became an accepted member of Uralla’s society.

Bruce remembered his mother as a loving woman: her children admired and respected her, and would often endure discomfort rather than worry her. Through the difficult years Frances kept her family together, dried their tears, mended their hurts, filled their stomachs and kept them clean. She could only be described as a good woman of her time, and to Bruce as a little boy, her kitchen was a haven of warmth and security.

After most of the miners had moved on, some families, like the Smiths, were trying to eke out a living on very small holdings. The town of Uralla was rapidly taking shape, and buildings made of brick with corrugated iron roofs rubbed shoulders with the bark or slab huts. In 1882 the railway came to Uralla, building a fine station house and yards and the town acquired a council. In 1886, the Catholic Church built a new Convent School run by the Nuns of St Joseph on the street now known as Bridge Street. A racecourse was built around a large lagoon on the southern side of the town where the local Race Committee held monthly meetings. The Uralla Races were a highlight of the District’s social calendar. People would come from Tamworth, Walcha, and Armidale, as well as the out-lying settlements of Sandon County.

The largest and most imposing building in the growing township had been built by the pioneer McCrossin family in the early 1860s. It was a three story flour mill, and it was so sturdy that it stands to the present day. At the top of the southern hill was Carroll’s Hotel and the Cobb and Co Depot. The road in winter was sometimes a quagmire because of the horse drawn traffic going up and down the hill. It was at the foot of this hill just above the bridge that Ben’s first smithy was established, and it was here that he was said to have reversed the shoes of Thunderbolt’s horse,
to fool the troopers. Whether this story is true, or not, is a matter of conjecture, but Ben was known to have been a great admirer of the outlaw, and he did buy Thunderbolt’s horse, when it was auctioned at a government sale. Bruce also told a tale of Ben and a man named Frazer finding Thunderbolt’s gun in the creek where he was shot, but Frazer kept the pistol.

There were a few hardy souls who persisted with their digging, and some were able to eke out a meagre living. Two such Uralla men were partners in one mine. Mr Boness and Mr Cooper worked for many weeks on the Kentucky Creek without success and when there didn’t seem to be any point in going on, Boness pulled out, telling Mr Cooper he didn’t want any more to do with it. Cooper’s two young sons decided to help their father dig deeper, and in comparatively short time they struck pay dirt. It was not a big strike, but to the Cooper family living almost from day to day, it was a god-send. When Boness heard of the gold they had found, he wanted his share, and went to the Court House claiming that the shaft was half his. However, the magistrate decided that, because he had walked out of the partnership, the mine belonged wholly to the Cooper family. Boness was very jealous, and although they had all been friendly neighbours up to this point, he looked around for some way to avenge what he considered the wrong he had suffered.

One dark night, he and his son placed their sanitary can on the wheelbarrow, pushed it half a mile to the Coopers’ mine, and tipped the unsavoury contents down the shaft. Next morning, the Coopers discovered the desecration and went looking for the culprit. As the wheelbarrow tracks led directly to the Boness’s backyard, he was not hard to find.

Boness saw them coming and took to the bush. Cooper and his son Alfie followed in hot pursuit, but they lost him. Next day Mrs Cooper, who was a very large woman, made her way to the Boness’ house, wearing one of her husband’s flannel shirts. At the gate she called for Mr Boness and told him just what she thought of him in no uncertain terms. Then she invited him out to fight. When he refused to come out, she offered to go in and get him. The frightened little Boness cowered behind his wife and threatened Mrs Cooper with legal action if she came inside the gate. Frustrated, Mrs Cooper made her way back home.

Mr Boness refused his wife’s urging to prosecute, even though he felt that his very life had been threatened. The Coopers built a large fire at the bottom of the shaft by throwing down sticks and brush, then hot coals and flaming logs from a fire on the surface. Thus they burned out the obnoxious smell so that they could continue to work their claim.

Big companies were moving into the area, with better machinery and fewer jobs for the men. Sandon County, along with most of Australia, was in the grip of depression, and life was hard for the unemployed or the widowed. There was no Social Security, and even the most hardworking people suffered real hardship. The story of a family neighbouring the Smiths was a case in point.

The Faulkner family lived on a small holding on Burying Ground Gully, in a slab and bark hut which Mr Faulkner had built for his bride some years previously. Mrs Faulkner was a remarkable young woman. Part Aboriginal, she had been adopted by a wealthy white family as an infant, and brought up as one of their own children. As a cultured young woman they expected her to hold a position in the community, suitable to their background. However, when she fell in love with a young white stockman on their property and ran off to marry him, they cast her off completely and would have no further contact with her or her children. The mother of the young man was disgusted that her son would marry a coloured woman, and she too turned her back on them. Shunned by the friends of her childhood, the young woman and her family kept to themselves, and though her husband lost his job, he managed to make a living by mining, and they kept their children warm, clean and fed. The Smith family were among their few friends and the children played together along the creek which was their shared backyard, and attended the same school at Rocky River. Tragedy was not far off, however. While the children were still very young, their father was bitten by a snake while working on the banks of Kentucky Creek and, having no other means of transport, he walked the seven miles to his home to get help.

Though Mrs Faulkner sent the children for Frances Smith, there was little she could do, and her patient died, leaving his small family to support itself as best it could. Not long after and while the youngest girl was still an infant, the unfortunate mother, after unsuccessfully nursing one of her sons, herself succumbed to pneunomic influenza, leaving the surviving children alone in the world. Because of the contagious nature of the disease the town fathers decided that the hut must be burnt down to prevent the spread of infection. It was then that Ben Smith decided to take a hand. So that the mother of the children would not be placed in a pauper’s grave, he made a coffin for her herself, and paid for a burial in the old cemetery.

With nowhere for the young family to live, Ben then approached their grandfather and persuaded him to ask their grandmother to allow them to live in a small cottage attached to her much larger home. It was surprising that the old man could do this, for his wife was very much the dominant person in that marriage, and it was well known that he was somewhat afraid of her.

Having conceded to this request, however, the mean old woman then turned her back on the children who were forced to fend for themselves. They slept on pallets stuffed with corn stalks on the floor, and although their grandmother kept a good garden the old man had to steal vegetables for them when she was out. Any attempt to help themselves to the fruit in her orchard was considered stealing and the culprit was...
punished accordingly. The oldest girl, Edith, was not yet 16 years old and the responsibility of raising the younger children rested wholly upon her shoulders. By working as a domestic for one of the hotels for a few hours a day, and doing her grandmother’s housework, washing and ironing, in lieu of rent, she managed to keep the little family together. Washing the brand off flour bags she used the white material to make underwear for the girls and lining for the boys’ trousers. The government of the day allowed two parcels of cloth during the year to deserving families, one for summer, and one for winter. With these she kept the children respectably clothed by sewing well into the night, by the light of candles. There were many times, however, that the two boys went off to school without lunches. When her meagre wages would not stretch so far, bread and dripping was the main meal of the day. As each child became old enough to leave school and get a job, life became a little easier for them, and Edith didn’t have to work so hard. When she married, the whole family moved in with her to a much bigger house, where she continued to care for them all. The surviving members of her family spoke always of their elder sister with great love and devotion.

Because of its large population, Rocky River had one of the first government schools on the Tablelands. It was established in 1860 and had an imposing title, The Rocky River Provisional School. It was a one teacher school, and the pupils paid six pence a week to attend, which was the only stipend received by the teacher. If a family did not go to school for a week, then the unfortunate man was that much short in his pay. The West End children all went to the Rocky River school, and their way lay over the creek, through the common lands, and up to the road. When Brucie was eight years old, he also joined the procession, following the same route.

About this time, a foreman, an able engineer for a big company, had installed a 50 horse power engine on a dredge on the creek to run some sluice boxes. The dredge lay right on the short cut to school and Brucie would spend a great deal of his time just watching the fascinating engine at work. It stood on a platform made of pine logs, and the sluice boxes were lined with coconut fibre. The method was that the water and mud brought up from the creek bed passed through the matting, leaving the gold entangled in the fibre. Water under pressure was brought up from a deep hole called Reedy Lagoon. It flowed through a series of pipes and, with a great deal of force, washed away the banks of the creek freeing the dirt, gravel and presumably the gold at the same time. The manager of the mining operation would try to keep the youngsters moving, but he was a kindly man and enjoyed telling them about the machinery. There were so many things on the way to school for a boy to see that it was little wonder Brucie was often late. The beauty of the early morning encouraged him to
dawdle. The elms at the back of the house were always filled with magpies, and listening to their morning song was his favourite pastime. The smell of the breakfast fires and the pale blue smoke drifting up the valley vied for his attention with the mist rising from the waterholes in the creek. If he managed to resist the urge to linger near the dredge, there were always a few early miners working along the creek, and the sound of the rocking cradles was a sure invitation to go and watch. One miner lived opposite the school. The children called him ‘Old Man Frank’, and he spent his time digging a tunnel right into the hill. Every day he could be seen wheeling his wheelbarrow full of dirt, and tipping it onto a mountainously growing pile. Nobody knew if he ever found the ‘mother lode’ of gold for which he was searching, but he kept digging his tunnel until he died.

With so many distractions it was not surprising that some of the children were late for school and the school master, Mr McAlpine, meted out the usual caning with gusto. He was a dour Scot, and showed no sympathy for weakness no matter what the cause. Nor would he accept any excuse, but would cruelly thrash both hands. Brucie Smith was often late, and received the same punishment as any other boy, but he was a gentle child with little resistance to pain and would weep bitterly when he was hurt. One of his friends and comforters was a bigger girl named Mabel Young who could always be relied upon to have some home made toffee in the pocket of her ‘pinny’. With the butter from her sandwiches, she would rub his sore hands to ease the pain and dry his eyes with the clean little hanky she had pinned to the frill of her pinnafore. Mabel remained his friend for most of his school days.

A kindly boy, Brucie felt strongly about injustice and cruelty. When a miner, the father of his friends Jack and George was killed, leaving them and their mother destitute, Brucie saw that the two boys often came to school cold and hungry without lunches. He would share his own lunch with them, or run home to bring back some damper and dripping in his pocket. So that his father or older brothers would not suspect this philanthropy, Brucie would run through the gate holding another piece of damper to his mouth, pretending to be eating it, but in fact keeping it for one of his two friends. He managed to feed the two boys for 12 months in this way, until Jack was forced to leave school to help his mother by doing paid odd jobs. Brucie was fond of Jack, who was very tough, and often dirty looking, but a loyal friend. It was he who, after a particularly brutal caning, cut the blisters on Brucie’s hands with his penknife to let the blood out, and advised him to put the hands inside his shirt to ease the pain.

His brother Oliver was a different type of student, and although he was often in hot water, he almost managed to get to school leaving age before being expelled. A strong willed youngster, it was only fear of his father that kept him at school at all, and when the teacher became more
than he could bear, he decided to do something about it. One frosty
morn- ing, he arrived late, and as the rest of the children were still standing
in the school grounds on assembly, the teacher called him to the front,
saying that he was about to "make an example" of him. Oliver walked to
the teacher and stood facing him. Then, whipping his father’s old Tranter
pistol from the front of his coat, he threatened to “make an example” of
his tormentor. The teacher turned pale and shook with fright, backing
away from the angry boy, unsure of what he would do. Oliver waited for a
minute, then turned and ran away. He never went back to school. Instead
he joined his father in the blacksmith shop, and would have remained
there until he was a grown man, if he had not been forced to leave home
because of his father’s cruelty.

The 1890s were a time of great hardship around the old goldfields,
and the children of the poor suffered most. Left to their own devices, they
made their own fun and scavenged where they could. School was a
necessary evil for most of them, and considered a waste of time by some
of their parents, who kept them working at their chores before and after
lessons. It was the custom for the people of West End sometimes to graze
their stock on the ‘common’, and Ben Smith’s little flock of sheep were no
exception. As usual Brucie had to take his turn to fetch them home and
lock them away. So one cold night he set off wearing one of his bigger
brother’s long woolen overcoats. The sheep had wandered further away
than usual and, following the sound of the little bells they wore, he was
led into a property that belonged to an unfriendly neighbour. As he stepped
through the gate he was set upon by three vicious blue cattle dogs.
Kicking and screaming Brucie was dragged to the ground, the dogs biting
his buttocks and thighs. He covered his face and rolled on to his stomach
out of his lighted kitchen, yelling at the dogs to “shut up”. Kicking them
out of the way, and making no attempt to assist the little boy to his feet, he
ordered him to be off.

With tears drying on his face, and his legs bleeding from the savage
biting of the dogs, the little boy in his tattered coat made his way back
home. In spite of the predicament in which he had found himself, Brucie
considered himself lucky to have escaped from Mr Everett. He remembered
that one of his neighbour’s sons had not been so fortunate. It seems
that Walter, a 13 year old, his widowed mother’s only support, was
employed by Everett to drive his milk cart. The boy, having lost several
shillings, was accused of stealing the money. Everett, a blackbearded
strong man, standing about six feet and three inches tall, called on the
boy’s mother and threatened to send Walter to the corrective Nautical
School Ship Vernon, unless she gave him permission to punish him
himself “in the manner of a father”. Afraid of losing her son, and in spite
of the weeping protestations of her boy, the distraught woman gave her
consent. After locking himself with Walter in the feed shed, Everett
threwed him unconscious with a stockwhip, then left him to find his own
way home to his mother, horribly beaten and bleeding from his wounds.
The lad was ill for some time, but the bully escaped scot free, living to
become a wealthy member of local society. The Superintendent of the
Vernon, Capt. Neitenstein, would probably have been more humane.

Brucie followed the creek bed home, hoping to find sympathy and
comfort there. He saw the light at the window, and hurried as fast as his
sore little legs would carry him. His mother met him at the kitchen door
holding a candle and looking very worried, but instead of offering
sympathy, she scolded him for losing the sheep and tearing his brother’s
cost. Then without giving him a chance to tell her about the dogs, she
ordered him off to bed quickly before his father came home. Shocked that
his mother should show so little compassion, Brucie crawled into the bed
of his brother Frank. He found scant sympathy there, but it was warm
beside the bigger boy and he fell asleep, exhausted.

Ben had been away all day, and it was his absence that worried
Frances. Because of his intensified drinking habits, there was no
knowing what he would get up to, and his wife had good reason to worry
on this particular night. It was nearly two o’clock when Ben rode his big
black horse into the village of Uralla. He banged loudly on the door of the
Commercial Hotel, the first encountered in the town, and demanded a
drink. After being told, that the hotel was closed for the night, he again
demanded that they “open up and give a traveller a drink”. When he was
told to “go home to his wife”, he became abusive, but the doors remained
shut against him. Feeling greatly aggrieved, and swearing vengeance
against all hotel keepers who refused to serve a thirsty man a drink, he
went around to the back of the hotel, and stole a ‘clothes prop’ which was
being used to hold up the washing on the clothes line.

With some difficulty Ben climbed back on his horse and, holding the
prop like a lance, he charged yelling and hallowing right up on the
verandah of the hotel pushing the pole through the glass doors of the bar,
and shattering what were then known as ‘French Lights’. Still carrying
the pole he galloped up the street and attacked the Great Northern Hotel
in the same manner. The Uralla Hotel was an easy mark, standing as it
did on the corner of Bridge and Hill Streets, with the bar windows right on
the corner of the building. Still shouting, and hugely enjoying his Don
Quixote act, he was about to attack the Royal Hotel on the next corner,
when he realised that there was a commotion behind him, and the lights
of all the buildings in the street were suddenly being lit. Then he heard the
cry of “call the police”, and became aware that Mr Murray from the
Commercial Hotel was standing in the middle of the road in his night
attire screaming to his roust-about. Ben’s head began to clear as he
realised that the young fellow, though half asleep, was stumbling off in

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the direction of the police station. Hurriedly dropping the clothes prop, he turned the horse's head for home. Galloping through the gate he pulled the saddle from the horse, threw it high on top of the hay shed and gave the animal a whack on the rump sending it off to the bottom of the back paddock. Then, fully clothed in boots, spurs and all, he hurried through the back door, climbed into bed beside his wife and swore her to silence.

It was not more than ten minutes later that Sergeant Tooley knocked on the kitchen door. Mrs Martha Smith, knowing nothing of her son's escapade, and herself a little hard of hearing, answered the knocking. She was most indignant that the policeman should disturb a decent family in the middle of the night and told him so. When the sergeant asked to speak to Ben, Grandmother Smith told him that she couldn't possibly disturb him as both Ben and his wife had been asleep for some time. After insisting that she check and make sure, the policeman reluctantly apologised for disturbing them and left. Forever after he would tell Ben that he knew he was responsible, but he just couldn't prove it. Ben went next day to each publican and paid for the damage. He was no doubt a scallywag, but he was an honest one, and no one ever told the sergeant the truth.

Because of his size and daring, Ben was often asked to attend some task which others would not be competent to perform. His discretion could be relied upon, and there were times when the children were sent off to bed when strangers came to the house. There were some things that never will be known, for Ben would not always discuss his adventures, but on other occasions his sense of humour got the better of him and his booming laugh accompanied a funny story which he would share with his wife or some friends.

In February 1880, The Uralla and Waitha Times published an article about the new mining town of Melrose. The writer took to task the Mining Registrar's Office for stating that Melrose was "near Armidale", when it was in fact much nearer to Uralla. He bemoaned the injustice to Uralla trade and said "that steps should at once be taken by the Uralla Council, and The Melrose Progress Association, to point out to Sydney Departments that the new diggings form part of Uralla, and that efforts to divert trade into devious channels should cease". Obviously the newspaper had great hopes for the new township and its growing population.

The Melrose mines, however, must have been unable to support a township, for some 15 years later Ben was asked to carry some goods and tools to the then disused Melrose Goldmine for a person called Paddy Doyle, a Welshman, living in Uralla. Mr Doyle was employed by a syndicate to open up the mine. Mr Jarrett was manager of the syndicate, and as the wagon was only lightly loaded Bruce and his friend, Jack Cooper, were allowed to go along for the ride. Wearing his miner's light on his head, and accompanied by the two youngsters, making themselves useful by carrying small pieces of equipment, Paddy made his way into the depths of the first tunnel. All went well until they were deep into the dark and Paddy found they were being watched by hundreds of little red eyes. Thinking it must be bats, the old miner took a closer look and found that he and the boys were surrounded by huge shining black spiders, which clung to the crevices of the walls and hung from the beams of the roof. With one almighty yell, Paddy turned and ran, knocking the boys out of the way, and did not stop until he was well clear of the mine entrance, by which time the boys were close on his heels. Without waiting to find out whether the spiders were dangerous or not, Paddy advised the manager of the syndicate that there was no gold to be had, and resigned his position on the spot.
Life was not all hardship, however, and there were dances and picnics for the young people. Bruce remembers the wedding of one of Lucy's friends, a Miss King, a very attractive young lady, who married a Mr Clifford Condron. Mr Condron was a strong young man, who had settled on a piece of ground towards Kingstown. He had already started his farm, but not yet built his house. This didn't worry young Mrs Condron, who was quite content to live with her new husband in a tent whilst he proceeded to erect their modest dwelling. Lucy liked to visit with her friends, and often took young Brucie for company. The youngster liked to be helpful, and watched carefully as the house took shape. The house was being built of saplings and bark. It was something the young husband could do for himself, and would stand them in good stead until they made enough money from the farm to build a proper house.

Bruce watched as Clifford cut the bark from the trees. He made a circular cut at the bottom of the piece selected, measured the length up the tree, and then cut the top in a herringbone style with his axe. Then cutting a two inch strip all the way down, he would drive a sapling wedge about four feet long, under the bark from the bottom to the top, easing about six inches from the trunk of the tree at a time. Holding the bark away from the tree with wedges, he was able to cut great sheets of bark without breaking them. Lighting a fire approximately the same length as the bark, he would gradually heat the bark until it was flat, then lay it on the ground upside down, with weights on the top, leaving it to 'weather'.

Brucie remembered watching as the young bridegroom struggled under huge pieces of bark which he sometimes carried quite long distances on his back to the site. Having cut his bark and left it to dry, Clifford Condron and his young wife then set about preparing the framework. They cut young trees, stripped them of their bark, and put them into post holes three feet deep at each corner, then along the sides, two to three feet apart. With lighter more pliable saplings, they built the framework of their little house, fixed with lashings made of thin strips of bullock hide. When the frame was ready, the young people began to cover it with the sheets of bark. It was layered from the bottom up, so that rain would run off, and the sheets were nailed on to the framework. Home made galvanised iron washers one inch square stopped the nails from going through the bark.

On the roof they used overlapping pieces of bark and for the ridgecapping, a two foot wide piece of bark, weighted down with saplings from end to end to hold it in position.

The fireplace and chimney was made of bark also, but they made mud bricks and let them dry in the sun. These were then built into the fireplace as a lining. There was a very good type of clay on Mount Jones. It was white pipe clay, and the locals used it for their fireplaces. It made a very good fire brick and could also be used as a white wash. Lucy brought some of it for her friend to white-wash her mud bricks with, and they looked very clean and neat. Windows were about three feet square and were just a frame, with a shutter made of adzed or sawn timber and hinges cut from greenhide. The door was of the same design as the window and set with a bar to hold it closed. This kind of house was known to be cool in summer and warm in winter, and many of our original houses were built in this manner. Young Mr and Mrs Condron had assured their comfort throughout the bitter New England winters, and remained there until they could afford a more salubrious dwelling.

As the get-rich-quick miners left the area, migrants from the 'old country' began to arrive to take up positions on stations as shepherds and general hands. These people brought their families with them, and some were half grown young men and women with no experience, but hopeful that they might work and get a selection for themselves. In spite of the depression holding the country in its grip, these new chums were willing to work for small wages and their 'keep'.
Among the customers for whom Ben built buggies was the local Justice of the Peace and Coroner, Mr Roman. He had been the first mate on a sailing ship and came to New South Wales to try his luck at goldmining on the Rocky River fields. Whether he had any luck there is not known, but he was a very well dressed and extremely pompous person. He ordered a shiny red vehicle, which was easily recognisable in the County. He became the J.P. and Magistrate of the Uralla Court. His constant companion and houseman was a Mr Dewson, a quiet dignified Englishman, who was inclined towards drinking and who would frequent the hotel known as Murray’s pub.

Why Mr Dewson was working for Mr Roman was a mystery, because at one time he had been taken ill and was escorted to a room at the hotel by another client of the hostelry, Mr Boyne, a Government Geologist. After attending to the sick man, Mr Boyne delightedly reported to his fellow drinkers that Mr Dewson’s pockets were full of golden sovereigns, and indeed they had been scattered all over his bed. There were several stories told about the two gentleman friends, one of which concerned a snow storm in Uralla and several naughty boys behind a fence in Bridge Street. It seems that Mr Roman had been presiding over a case in the Uralla Court House, and was making his way back to join Mr Dewson and the new red ‘drag’ waiting at the hotel. Mr Roman was as usual very well turned out, wearing a white pith helmet, a beautiful suit and carrying a walking stick.

When the boys’ snowballs knocked off his helmet, he lost his temper and threw his stick at them. This set them to throwing more of the wet slushy snow, completely ruining his elegant suit. Screaming in anger the magistrate had to be assisted to Murray’s pub to be brushed off and dried in front of the big log fire while he waited for Mr Dewson to bring around the horses and drag.

Another rumour passed down about the two ill-assorted old gentlemen, one so gentle and servile, the other the picture of pomposity, concerned a bogus marriage arrangement. As the story goes, Mr Roman needed a housekeeper and decided that a wife would fill the bill, but he did not wish to legalise the union. He apparently advertised in a Sydney newspaper for a wife and persuaded Mr Dewson to dress as a clergyman, to ‘officiate’ at the wedding. How the woman could have been so gullible as to agree to dispense with witnesses, is hard to imagine. However, it seems that things went well until two months later when the weather turned cold, and Mr Dewson felt it unfair that he should be living in the shepherd’s cold hut, whilst the ‘happy couple’ lived in warm comfort. He therefore marched up to the door and demanded to be let in. The unfortunate ‘wife’, seeing the ‘clergyman’ thus, realised she had been deceived and left Uralla in high dudgeon never to be seen in the district again.

There were several well educated and interesting English gentlemen who had a stake in Sandon County, several of them men of the sea. Mr Roman and a certain Commander Greenland were not the only sailors to make port in the district. There was at least one more, Captain Carter, Master of the warship Calliope, which survived a cyclone in Suva, when all the other ships there were sunk. He came ashore here and settled on Lynton Station.

There was one other who deserves a mention, although he could hardly be described as a sailor. He was, however, famous for his prowess on the water. Born in 1851, Edward Trickett, son of a bootmaker George Trickett and his wife Mary, became the World’s Champion Sculler from 1876 to 1886. He was born at Greenwich on the Lane Cove River in New South Wales, and developed his muscles working as a quarryman. Rowing for sport, he won every race he entered from 1868 while he was under 18, until in 1875 he was considered the best sculler in the colony. On 27th June 1876, he won the World Championship in London on the Thames, and became the first Australian to be a World Champion in any sport. After owning several hotels, during which time he severed some of his fingers in an accident with a beer barrel, his stroke was affected, and gradually he lost his titles. Because of bad management and a worthless mining venture, he also lost most of his money. He went to work for the Department of Trade and Customs until he retired, and whilst visiting one of his sons in Uralla, he was crushed by a fall-in at a mine at Rocky River. He is buried in the Salvation Army portion of the Uralla Cemetery, and a small headstone which marks his grave was placed there by local admirers. One of his sons built a large department
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store opposite where Ben Smith's carriage works stood in Bridge Street. Trickett's name is still on the building, although most of his descendants have now left the district.

Another British sailor built the first flour mill in the district. Austin James Greenland was a Naval Commander, thought to have been the Captain of Queen Victoria's royal yacht, Victoria and Albert. His wife Mary Wellington-Beard was said to have been a member of the Royal household, perhaps a lady in waiting. She came out on a sailing ship to marry Commander Greenland in the late 1870s at Torremburn where he had established the flour mill. They later sold the mill, but they stayed in the County, settling on a station known as Launchby, a property of 12,000 acres, where they built a large cypress pine house on the banks of the Roumalla Creek. Mrs Greenland died young of typhoid fever, and the Commander was left to raise the children alone. When they married and left home, Commander Greenland sent for Mr White, a most distinguished looking gentleman with white hair, who had been an English butler, to take care of the household. White lived with him at Launchby until Mr Greenland died at the age of 79.

Two completely different old men who were mates and lived together, were a couple of very old miners; they lived at Flat Rock in a cottage belonging to a Sam Cooper. One of them named Clendenning was believed to have been a member of an obscure Scottish clan, who came to seek his fortune in the goldrush. The other was another Scot, named McIntyre. The old men used to dig together each day until one day Mr Clendenning fell down an old mining shaft and was killed.

Mr McIntyre was heartbroken, and would go each day accompanied by a blue cattle dog to Murray's Hotel to drown his sorrow. Mrs Murray took pity on the lonely old man, and would give him a bowl of soup before he made his way home again. One night he too fell down a shaft and was not found for months. The shaft had to be filled in on top of the body as it was impossible to bring it to the surface. The blue cattle dog came to the hotel kitchen for years after his master's death, and was always sure of a bone or a bowl of scraps.

The owner of the cottage, Sam Cooper, while making his unsteady way home from the hotel, fell into the creek by the bridge where the Uralla Bowling Club now stands, and was drowned.

The creek by the Bowling Club, although not very deep, has been the scene of several drownings. It was also the reason for another person's discomfiture and a gaol sentence. The creek has a habit of rising very high after a storm, and crossing the causeway is often extremely difficult. During the early days of the settlement of Uralla, and before the advent of sewerage, the night soil was removed and taken away by what the residents called the 'night cart'. In the first year of Federation, the 'night man', whose name was Moses Rixon, popularly known as 'Old Mo', had a dray with a ship's tank on the back in which he would convey his load to a place specified by the town council. One winter's night, when the creek was running a banker, Mo decided that, since he was unable to cross, he might as well take advantage of the flood, and emptied his load into the rushing waters. However, the creek subsided very quickly, and the next morning there was a mess of 'night-soil' all along the banks of the creek. Rixon was arrested for polluting the water course and taken for trial. The Magistrate sentenced him to six weeks' gaol. Poor 'Old Mo' burst into tears and begged to be fined. "Up to 100 pounds", he said, but the Magistrate was firm, and Mo was dragged off weeping and protesting to serve his term. The case was reported by the Uralla Times which came out on 20th October 1901. The journalist noted that the court house was attended, "not only by the Police Court hangers on", and members of "the great unwashed" but also by a generous number of the general public.
During his ninth year, Frances persuaded Ben that Brucie would be better off at the Convent School run by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Bridge Street, where he was to remain until he was 14. The good sisters would not keep boys there after puberty, and advised any boy who wished to continue with his education to attend a boarding school run by the Christian Brothers in Armidale. As most of the youngsters started work at 14, there were not many who continued anyhow. At the Convent School there was a fence dividing the exercise yard, with girls on one side and boys on the other, and they were forbidden to mingle. The fence was usually hung with scruffy young males, their curiosity whetted by the prohibition. With their usual boyish wit, they found plenty of ways to tease and annoy the girls. If anything unusual happened on the girls' side of the playground they could be sure of a full audience. One guffaw or giggle, and the whole complement ran to look. When a little girl called Ella lost her drawers while skipping, her blushes were turned to tears by the yelling and coarse remarks from the other side of the fence. The poor child did not come to school for a week, and after that Sister G. had to threaten the little monsters with expulsion before they would stop teasing.

It must be noted that the girls gave the boys as good as they got. Any sign of weakness on the part of a boy was seized upon with glee, and the girls could be very cruel. Indeed, many a young man learned to fear the female tongue in just such a playground.

The gentle nuns were a welcome change from the brutal Mr McAlpine, and Brucie blossomed under their guidance. He found a new interest in his lessons and discovered a love of reading that was to stay with him all of his life. The Sisters of St Joseph's Convent School were a feature of Uralla for over one hundred years, and the town was very sorry to see them leave in 1985. They were loved by all, and their presence in the town will be sadly missed. It would be interesting to know just how many children passed through their classrooms.

For two weeks in September Brucie and his friends were able to forget the urgency of being on time for school, and they dawdled along the creek watching the dredge at work. A boy in the same class and a special friend was Jack Cooper. With lots of energy to spare, the two often found themselves looking for mischief. During one of their visits to the dredge, Mr Condon, the manager, asked if they would like to do a bit of mining for themselves. It sounded like a good idea to the boys, and they eagerly agreed. Mr Condon lent them a cradle and told them of a spot further up the creek where there was a deserted claim. He suggested that, if the boys were to sift through the hopperings left by the previous owners, as the Chinese were doing elsewhere, they should do well for themselves.

Jack Cooper's family was very poor and the little fellow had suffered from a disease known as 'rickets', which left him with very crooked legs. Nevertheless, he was a tough youngster and a very hard worker, and the two set off with high hopes. Borrowing Ben's big wheelbarrow and some old pieces of blanket for the cradle, they set off for the claim known as 'Paddy's Rush', where there were large heaps of hopperings, or tailings as they are sometimes called.

The two boys wheeled the dirt from the old heaps to the cradle which they had set up by the creek. All day they wheeled the dirt and cradled it, and at the end of the day they gently washed the 'blanket' in a big bucket. The dirt and sand in the bottom of the bucket was then panned, and the tiny grains of gold placed very carefully in an old scent bottle. Brucie and Jack worked very hard each day for a week. Then returning the borrowed equipment, they set off to town to call on the gold buyer, Mr Sam Wah Lee.

A Chinese storekeeper in Hill Street, Mr Lee was considered a most honourable gentleman. Careful about measuring the gold, he first blew off the residue of black sand, then he weighed the precious golden grains that were left. To the boys, the ceremony seemed to take hours, but finally Mr Lee told them that they had just four pennyweights of gold for which he would pay them fourteen shillings. The boys were delighted and with seven shillings clutched in each grubby hand they dashed off to do some shopping. Jack's mother had given him a list of groceries she wanted him to buy with his share of the money, and a sugar bag in which to carry them home. Brucie had no restrictions about his money, and bought a box of bullets for his little 22 calibre rifle. Jack didn't own a gun, but the plan was for him to buy bullets also and take turns with Brucie's gun.
When he had bought all the groceries on the list, he had only one shilling and sixpence left. This Jack hoped to use for shot, but at the bottom of the list his mother had written "a shank for soup". Hoping to save his last few pence, Jack asked Mr Whitton the butcher for "some dogs meat, please", hoping to get it for nothing, but was refused, and he had to part with the remaining one shilling and sixpence for the shank. Jack turned to his friend and suggested that he might share some of his money, but Brucie indignantly refused, whereupon Jack threw the sugar bag over his shoulder and without a backward glance trudged off up the hill, leaving his mate wrestling with his conscience.

Bruce thought of the boiled lollies he had meant to buy. He watched his friend climbing the hill on his bandy legs, with the heavy bag of groceries on his thin shoulders, and he knew that Jack was crying. Realising that without bullets his friend would not be going hunting with him, his conscience got the better of him. Running after the other boy, Brucie pressed two shillings into his hand, and ran off home without a word being spoken.

On a large property between Uralla and Walcha, an Irish family named O'Reilly had taken up residence, the father as a 'useful', and the mother doing light duties, with the girls and boys helping around the place as called upon. Unfortunately one of the young men contracted pneumonia and died and, as was their custom, the family dressed him in his best suit and laid him out on the kitchen table for 'viewing'. All the neighbours were invited to pay their last respects to the dear departed and were offered a beer to wash away the sadness of his passing. When word got around that there was free beer at the O'Reillys', people began to arrive in buggy loads. Another keg was ordered, and the party began to swing.

On the second day Mr Lonsdale the undertaker arrived, driving his black hearse, with six ostrich feather plumes in silver fittings on top. From the collar, back to the swingle bars, it was draped with black crepe about two feet wide and almost touching the ground. The carriage was drawn by two black horses, resplendent in their funeral harness. Lonsdale was properly dressed in his long black coat and a 'bell topper' hat with a black scarf tied around it, hanging down to his knees. When he intimated that he had come to collect the body, he was denied access to the house. "Oh no," said Mr O'Reilly, "We are having a wake. You can't take the dear boy yet. Go away."

About this time somebody decided that it would only be polite to add to the liquor supply. They drove off for some whisky which was O'Reilly's favourite drink, and while they were about it some more beer to replenish the rapidly diminishing keg. At the pub it was discovered that
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was also caught in a fall of earth and buried up to his armpits. His mates
his grown men friends.

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and accident were prevalent because of the conditions under which the
miners lived. Ignorance and neglect killed many, and there were
odds, they had to pry Charlie loose from his 'mourners' immediately.
With the carriage flying the crepe, and the horses tossing their black
feather head-dresses, both Ben and the undertaker, wearing the high
black hats and suits of the trade, rolled up to the O'Reilly cottage. The
fun and games inside were at their height. Someone had struck up a jig on
an accordion, and the mourners were having a high old time. The
dancers had decided that it was a pity that Charlie should be missing all
the fun, and the corpse was being passed from one to another of the
revellers. It was a few seconds before anyone realised that Ben had
joined in the dance, and with the body flung over his shoulder, was high-
tailing it towards the hearse. He flung Charlie unceremoniously into the
back of the vehicle and scrambled up beside the undertaker as he
whipped up the horses. With the whole company of 'mourners' following
in hot pursuit, they made a hasty retreat through the gate and back to
town.
The loss of life around the goldfields had always been great. Sickness
and accident were prevalent because of the conditions under which the
miners lived. Ignorance and neglect killed many, and there were
instances of 'a little knowledge being a dangerous thing'. Any intelligent
person with some practical medical experience was invaluable. Of the
early doctors in Sandon County many stories have been told. Their
methods were often unorthodox, and the time elapsing between their
arrival and departure from the goldfields was sometimes not very long.
Women such as Frances Smith were often called upon to assist in
operations, and were often the first on the scene to help while the doctor
was making his diagnosis. As a result, they had to be quick in their
reactions, and able to think on their feet. They were often the first to
notice signs of illness, and were able to provide immediate treatment.

Cave-ins were a common occurrence, and it was in fact a fall of earth
that brought about the unnecessary demise of Brucie's friend, Mr
Condon. During the digging out operations, one of the men drove the
head of the pick he was using into the unfortunate man's back, sealing his
fate immediately. The school children were fond of Mr Condon, and
many of them went along to the funeral, mingling their tears with those of
his grown men friends.

It was haste and ignorance that killed another miner. A heavy man, he
was also caught in a fall of earth and buried up to his armpits. His mates

attached a strong chain around his chest with a slip-knot. The weight of
his body as he was hauled up by the winches steadily tightened the chain,
until his ribs caved in and his chest was crushed.

Another man, Robert Hill, was luckier than some. A load of earth fell
on him from 25 feet above but, although he suffered some fractures, his
friends were able to dig him out alive. Frances Smith cared for him in the
weeks following the accident, during which time the doctor dug out six
stones driven into his back by the weight and force of the fall of earth.

Accidents were not the only killers of miners. Disease sometimes
proved fatal. There is a story of an old Chinese miner who was taken very
ill at his home, a very small low built hut, at Wallaby Rocks. His
companions called a doctor who was appalled to discover the old man
was suffering from leprosy and a high fever. Apparently he had been ill
for some time, but the other Chinese had been caring for him. Rather than
inform the authorities, they had kept him hidden in his hut. After his visit,
the doctor called in the police sergeant and gave him a small bottle of
medicine, with instructions about how it should be administered. "Leave
him for an hour," the doctor said. "Then get someone to bury him." The
sergeant called on Ben Smith and asked if he would accompany him to
Wallaby Rocks, as he had a small job for him. When they arrived Ben
found that he was much too tall to enter the bark hut, and so he waited
outside while the medicine was given to the old man. The sergeant and Ben
sat down to enjoy a pipe and a yarn while the medicine took effect. About
half an hour later a Chinese miner went to the hut to visit his old friend.
He came out screaming at the sergeant and Ben, as he rushed off to fetch
his companions from the creek. Meantime, the two white men satisfied
themselves that the old man was indeed dead. Then the sergeant rode off
leaving Ben to dispose of the body and destroy the hut. Ben didn't wait
for the Chinese to return to bury the body. The roof of the old hut was
little more than four feet from the ground and short of crawling in on his
hands and knees, there was no way he could have entered. So with his
usual direct manner of doing things, he set alight to the building, contents
and all. The Chinese were most upset about this, and tried to put out the
flames, but the bark of the hut was well alight and in a matter of minutes
the funeral pyre became too hot to approach. The helpless Celestials
could do no more than gather in a small group mourning the old man and
accusing curses at their tormentor.

The hut burned to the ground. Some of the white miners were
temporarily discomforted by Ben's high-handedness, but because of
their fear of catching 'Chinese diseases', they decided that all had been
done correctly and conveniently forget all about the incident. However,
when some time later a peach tree grew on the site, with beautiful fruit,
such was the superstition of the locals that not even the children would
dare to eat any of it.
Thunderbolt the bushranger was not the only scallawag in Sandon County's past. There were others, both male and female, who were quite accomplished rogues. One such villain was a man called Davies, a bank robber and kidnapper, who under the nom de guerre of Bradshaw, robbed the bank at Quirindi in June 1880. With a companion who bore the splendid title 'Lovely' Riley, he camped outside the small township to watch the regular habits of the bank manager. They discovered that it was his practice to feed his horse about 5 p.m. One night they crept into the stable yard and hid in the stall. Then when the unfortunate man came to do his usual chore, they attacked him. Forcing him back to the house, they locked his wife and children in an inner room and proceeded to the bank where the poor manager was obliged to open the safe for them. The robbers helped themselves to the contents, about 16 thousand pounds, so the story goes (or perhaps 6 thousand) but whatever, a very tidy sum for that time. Having locked the manager in the bank, they made their way back to camp and, so that they would not be traced, burnt their swags and all their camping gear. Then they made off with only the money and the clothes they were wearing.

To confuse the police, and hide the direction in which they were travelling, the two cunning rascals walked a post and rail fence for half a mile, leaving no tracks.

Splitting their fortune between them, the two men went on a 'spree'. Davies, alias Bradshaw, bought a race horse, and Riley began to drink heavily, a dangerous practice for a bank robber. It was in a Tamworth bar that Riley began to boast about their exploit. He was trying to impress a few of the local tipplers. The police caught up with him and his partner, and they were sentenced to twelve years apiece. After their term was finished, Riley disappeared and was never heard of again. Davies, crippled with arthritis, no doubt brought on by his sojourn in the damp prison cells, but which he later claimed was caused by an injury from the careless riveting of leg irons cruelly placed on his ankles, made his way home to Armidale and his wife and daughter. He apparently stayed with his family until the birth of his second daughter, when his wife left him to make her home with her parents near Uralia.

The little family heard no more from the ex-bank robber until the second girl was nine years old. One day he was seen in town driving a buggy with an unknown male companion. He had come with the express purpose of kidnapping his daughter. This he succeeded in doing, while Gertie was on her way to the Convent School, and they were last seen on the road to Inverell. The mother of the child was an accomplished show rider, and she quickly caught and saddled her horse and took off after them.

For two weeks she searched the town without finding a trace of Gertie, until one day when her father sent the little girl to fetch some milk from a neighbour. Mrs Davies lifted her daughter onto the front of her saddle and rode all the way back to Uralia.

There was, however, a sequel to the story. It seems that some time later, while the children were playing in the Convent School playground, a man was seen loitering by the gate and when Gertie saw him she screamed and fainted. All the children gathered around to protect her, but the man hurried away, never to be seen again.

No more was heard of Davies until about 1924 when, as quite an old man, he wrote a book about the bank robbery, entitled Highway Robbery Under Arms. Sticking-Up of the Quirindi Bank Without Shedding of Blood, in which he claimed to be John Bradshaw, the 'last of the bushrangers'. He was last seen in New England selling it around the bars of hotels and at shows.

In the book, he told the story of the Quirindi robbery in detail, followed by the escape of Lovely Riley and himself, by walking the railway line to Werris Creek. Their intention to travel by rail from there to Tamworth was foiled by the presence on the train of several policemen. They then walked each day from town to town, first to Currabubula, then Duri and so on to Tamworth. It was whilst they were having their hair and whiskers trimmed in this town that they became separated, and Lovely Riley started on his drinking spree. Davies (alias Bradshaw) went on alone, still on foot, making his way through Moonbi and Bendemere to Mrs Blanche's wine shanty on the Kentucky Creek just out of Uralia (the same drinking establishment where Thunderbolt had his last drink). 'John Bradshaw', as Davies called himself, claims that whilst he was having an after dinner drink before retiring, the house was
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entered by several policemen, or 'traps' as he called them, who questioned all the occupants about the Quirindi bank robbery, having already arrested several innocent people. Bradshaw told them he was a saddler, on his way to work for Mr Trim in Armidale, and he was allowed to go. After making his way to Grafton where he bought a racing mare, he returned to Armidale and married a young woman from Mihi Creek and travelled back with her to her parents' home. It was here that the police eventually found and arrested him, following Lovely Riley's drunken boasting spree.

Bradshaw claimed that Riley "left a trail like a black snake" from Tamworth to Breeza, then from Gunnedah up to Dalby, boasting that he was the man who had stuck up the Quirindi bank. It was in Dalby that Riley met his Jezebel, a young girl whom he called his "sweet little peach", and to whom he boasted of the bank robbery, telling her all the details. It was she who informed on him. Riley, still drunk, was taken in charge by Constable Teasdale and transferred to the Gunnedah Gaol, where Bradshaw was to join him two months later. The two were convicted and given a sentence of 12 years. In his book, Davies gave his impressions of prison life, and finished by quoting poetry written during his sojourn in the cells. One was titled:

Thoughts on My Darling Child
(Gertrude Davies)

While Confin'd in Prison
In this, my lonely cell I write,
With sad and aching heart,
In remembrance of my darling child,
Although we're far apart
As years roll on, and you grow up,
I hope that you will pray
To see your father once again —
Ah! What a happy day.
If God grants this, my darling child,
The past I will forget,
And show to those who placed me here
That we will be happy yet.
I watched you once with such delight
You were my joy and pride,
A happy day I ne'er shall have
Till I am by your side.
That for your sake I tried each day
My sweetest little pet
To act my part as an honest man

If by those tyrants let.
To my employers you may appeal
As they the truth will tell —
How I suffered for your sake
By villains doomed for hell . . .

There were five more verses to this poem, each worse than the last. One other of his poems deserves mention, if only because it commemorates the life and death of Les Darcy of Greta in the Hunter River coalfields, the young blacksmith who became at the outbreak of World War One, many still maintain, the greatest boxer Australia ever produced. Comparison of the style of these verses with that of those dedicated to his daughter makes it very likely that 'Bradshaw' composed both in prison. "Snowy Baker" was an entrepreneur of the time who promoted and exploited young Australians who showed great promise in many kinds of sport. He first recognised Darcy's talent but fell out with him when he left secretly for America in 1916 to fight that country's champions — at a time when armchair patriots thought that all healthy young men should volunteer for the A.I.F. However, the Governor of New York State banned his first major fight because, Les's supporters devoutly believed, he had reasons for safeguarding the reputation of the designated American opponent. Soon after our 'glorious boy' died of pneumonia in Memphis, Tennessee. But hear Jack Bradshaw's moving version:

On Les Darcy
You are gone from us, you glorious boy —
Champion of the World —
Slaughtered by a mongrel push
And from us foully hurled. . .
Cowardly skunks debarred you, lad,
From proving what you could do;
But in our hearts you'll live forever,
Curse on those Yankee crew!
It was all prepared by treacherous hounds
Sports, not worth the name,
Filthy crawlers, Baker's parasites,
Who reaped up for gain.
They killed our Les, our pride and joy,
Of the bonnie native blue,
Hounds sooled on by parasites,
A cowardly, rotten crew.
Why not Baker now go away
To fight the blooming Hun,
Shades of Shame

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And take with him sooder MacIntosh
To shoulder up a gun?

They slaughtered Les in Yankee Land,
By treacherous fakers, letters, wires;

Boycott the stadium, Conscript Billy Hughes,
And send away these parasites and liars.

Have we treated you Yankee blobs
Who fought out here unfair?
We gave you open play, we did
And to you acted square.

Have you passports to come out here
To fake us of our money?
Conscription Pearce and Billy Hughes,
Two silly coons — so funny.

What do Billy Hughes or Pearce now think
Of Snowy Baker's Bum Brigade
Who will not go to fight the Hun
They landed here to raid?

Oh, what a farce, OUR DEAR LES DARCE,
To be murdered far away
By Yankee mugs, who say they're pugs,
And gave you no fair play.

Are you sports to this resort,
To kill our Maitland lad
And break his aged mother's heart
And make their home so sad?

But may his poor mother meet her lot,
And our prayers both far and nigh;
Alas you're gone, but not forgot,
Our Champion Lad, Good-bye!

Somehow this passionate effusion struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of many thousands of common Australians who had, and have, never heard of Jack Bradshaw. So ironically, the self-styled 'last of the bushrangers' will be remembered more for his Ballad of Les Darcy than for robbing the Quirindi bank with his mate 'Lovely' Riley.

Davies spent most of the rest of his life in and out of gaol, but according to his book he was always innocent. It is believed that he ended his days in a rented room in Wooloomooloo.

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Brucie's wanderings often took him past Carroll's Hotel to watch the coaches coming in. Even though the railway arrived in Uralla in 1882,12 Cobb and Co continued to carry passengers to outlying places for some time. When the Company finally gave in to the iron horse, Mr Carroll continued to convey some passengers to Inverell, Bundarra, and Walcha. The fare at that time to Bundarra was one pound return. Bruce was well known at the depot, and his friend, Driver Parnell, would often give him a ride to the changing station. To ride on the box beside the driver was a wonderful treat for the youngster, and he remembered clearly all that was involved.

The driver sometimes handled ten horses, two abreast, holding the reins in his left hand between his fingers, while he held the kangaroo hide whip, often as long as 18 feet, in his right. The great brake lever was worked by the driver's foot. Cobb and Co always blew a blast on a bugle when they entered the town, and the driver would then place the whip in a socket and use both hands to pull the horses up. Bruce was sometimes allowed to throw down the big canvas mailbags, usually carried on the top of the coach, which had a railing almost a foot high, to stop parcels and often people, from falling off. Two men held the lead horses until the driver was set to start, and the 'staging' or 'change' stations were 20 miles apart.

The change station at Torrieburn was kept by a man called Mr Jurd. Bruce remembered his black beard. The driver, Parnell, drove the Inverell coach for 20 years until he retired to run a farm. It was ironical that he should be killed while driving a buggy with only two horses that bolted.

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There was usually somebody arriving or leaving on the coach and the youngster sometimes picked up a penny or two for assisting a traveller. It was not surprising that he should have been at the depot when a large handsome lady, stepping down from the coach, asked to be directed to a decent place to stay. Bruce offered to take her to Miss Alma McCrossin’s Boarding House, and the two set off to walk to the bottom of the hill. The lady introduced herself as the Baroness O’Burnie. She told him that she was in town to collect money for the Old Ladies’ Home in Sydney, and intended to do so at the Armidale Show. Brucie was overawed, and when the Baroness asked if he would like to carry the big leather bag for her and help her to count the money, he was delighted. They collected in Uralla for three days. The locals were charmed by her rich Irish accent, so that she did very well for her ‘charity’. Brucie was sorry when she moved on to Armidale. Things did not turn out so well there for the Irish baroness. The police ordered her off the Showground when she was unable to present any credentials. The young Smith boys, on their way to the Armidale Show, found her sitting on the steps of the Post Office counting the money in her bag. When she saw Brucie, she smiled at him and asked if he could perhaps direct her to a boarding house in Brisbane. He heard later that she had turned up in Brisbane dressed as a Red Cross nurse, and the police arrested her. For some reason she was not charged, and it seems that she married later, but Brucie was very disappointed with his ‘baroness’.

Not all the women in Sandon County were exactly angelic, and there were stories about some that could only be described as — well — interesting. One story concerned a certain midwife, a real ‘angel of mercy’, although it had been said that her tenderest mercies were not so much for the mother and babe, as for the expectant fathers. She was a handsome woman who always rode to her cases on a creamy pony, sidesaddle, with her midwifery bag strapped to the saddle. The midwife was impecably turned out in a beautiful habit, and a ‘hard’ hat. She rode much for the mother and babe, as for the expectant fathers. She was a ‘mercy’, although it had been said that her tenderest mercies were not so merciful. Bruce remembered her being invited to join them for Sunday dinner with the family in Leece Road, and his father sitting at the head of the table in his white sateen coat, with a gold watch and chain across his chest, looking well groomed and handsome. The rumours of her escapades were so strong that, when it was suggested that perhaps Ben may have been calling on the lady, Harry and young Ben marched down to her house and threw a big rock through her window in protest. The midwife reached such a height of notoriety that Uralla’s probably Ben was calling on the lady, Harry and young Ben humanity.”

Lucy’s shame was of a different nature. One of two daughters of a neighbouring family, her stepfather was a big miner who had come from Canada. He was known as ‘Canadian’ Bob, and he had married the widow of another miner with two little girls, of whom Lucy was the elder. Early in their marriage they lived in a house in the Panhandle area of Uralla, but had the misfortune to be burnt out. With her usual kindheartedness Frances Smith had taken the family under her protection, found them a house in John Street not far from her own home, and continued to take an interest in their welfare. At the age of 16, Lucy was a pretty little thing, and she caught the eye of a young drover. As was often the case, she loved him not wisely but too well. When she discovered her condition, she was terrified. Canadian Bob was a stern parent and a staunch member of the local church. Her mother was by nature meek and obedient, and Lucy was afraid she would get no help there. The young man was willing to marry her but afraid to approach the big miner, as he had been forbidden the house. Eloping was out of the question as Lucy believed it to be shameful. So things drifted along until her condition became obvious.

Canadian Bob was outraged. He took a stick to the unfortunate girl. After administering a sound beating, he threw her out of the house in spite of the tears of her mother and sister, who were afraid to interfere in case they would be told to go also. Lucy trudged off up the side of Mount Mutton, and it was there that Alex and Brucie found her just on dusk. They were out looking for a rabbit for supper and stumbled on the sobbing girl, sitting on her little bundle of belongings, half hidden in the bracken. No matter how hard they tried, Lucy would not tell them the reason why she was crying. Nor could they make her stop. Eventually the two boys ran off to tell their mother about it. Frances didn’t waste time talking but, picking up a shawl for Lucy, she marched off up the hill. The young man was willing to marry her but afraid to approach the big miner, so that she did very well for her ‘charity’.

When she finally stopped sobbing, she broke down and told Frances the whole story. Frances was very angry and, taking Lucy by the hand, she set off to tell the Canadian just what she thought of him. When the stepfather began to bluster about “sinful behaviour”, “bringing shame on the house” etc, Frances was quick to remind him that if it had not been for her, there would have been no house. When he raised his voice, so did she, until finally, completely baffled by the militancy of his opponent, the big man asked her advice. “There will be no shame if you marry them off before it shows too much”, she said. The young man was more than willing and so Lucy was saved from goodness knows what fate: at the very least, death from exposure on Mount Mutton in the cold Uralla frost.
There were many young women who would go to any lengths to hide their ‘shameful secret’, and many tragic tales could be told of suicides and illegal abortions, sometimes ending in painful death for the unfortunate girl. Although there were homes where girls could work for their board in the cities and have their children adopted, they were not always able to find their way there. Sometimes terrified of their family’s anger, they would drift to the country to hide for the duration of their pregnancy, with no thought of what would happen after. Some would ask kindly neighbours to mind the child whilst they went off to find work, but would never return. Others simply gave their child away to any person who would take it. The Nuns of St Joseph sometimes found little surprises left on their doorstep, as some desperate young mother, afraid to approach them, left the child and ran. Sadly, even in later years, little bodies of babes have been found floating in a lake near Armidale.

There is a story of a couple living just out of Uralla, who after rearing their own family were alone in the twilight of their lives on a small farm, trying to eke out a living by raising a few lambs, and tending a small vegetable garden by the creek. One very cold winter’s night Mrs Cooper woke her husband complaining that one of his lambs had wandered into the vegetable patch. Although he said that it just couldn’t get through the fence, Mrs Cooper insisted that she could hear it bleating. Grumbling about the cold and foolish women, Mr Cooper tucked his night shirt about him, lit the lantern and opened the door. There to their surprise was a sugar bag with a young baby in it. The bag was tied around his neck, and only the boy’s head was showing. A note, pinned to the dress, giving his age as ten months, explaining that the mother (unnamed) could no longer support him and begged them to care for the child. There was a change of clothes, but nothing to identify him.

Next morning the couple took the child to the police station, hoping to relieve themselves of the burden of caring for him, or at least to find his mother. The sergeant, however, was not prepared to take the child off their hands, saying “What am I supposed to do with it?” He advised them “to take it home and give it a feed” as he couldn’t put up with the noise of its crying. Completely at a loss, the old couple trudged off back home, taking the baby with them and hoping that the mother would turn up. She never came, and the boy grew to manhood, still with the Coopers, who treated him as their own son. He was lucky: he found a good home and kindly foster parents.

There was one other, however, who, it seems, was not so lucky. In a busy shearing period, when business was brisk, Mr Carroll of Carroll’s Hotel, Uralla, took on a young woman to do the extra laundry. She was a hard worker, and after the rush was over she was allowed to stay on and continue the laundry work as well as helping around the hotel with other chores. Her co-workers didn’t get very close to her. She had very little to say and kept to herself, but the other maids did notice that she was putting on weight. Some weeks later a housemaid, sleeping in the room next to the laundress, was awakened by what she thought to be a baby crying, but the noise was stifled almost as soon as it began, and the girl went back to sleep. Early next morning the staff was aware that the laundress had a roaring fire going under the big copper and the sheets were boiling madly. There was a strange smell of burning meat, for which the men blamed the cook, and all expected their breakfast chops to be burned to a crisp. However, it was early, and most had chores to do before breakfast so no questions were asked. Only the maids noticed that the laundress was much slimmer than she had been, but they were silent. They asked no questions, and for most of them the answer was too horrible to contemplate. A few weeks later the hotel was looking for a new laundress. The girl left Uralla as silently as she had come, and was never seen in the district again.

Shame comes in many guises, some tragic, some strange, some seemingly innocent and others downright funny. For a certain Uralla doctor in the 1890s it was earned by his own pomposity. Dr Pring was an Englishman of indeterminate age. He wore a beard and sported pince-nez on a long black ribbon. He wore top boots, tight trousers, and a long coat, topping the outfit off with a derby hat and a riding whip. The doctor always rode a cob, with a short mane and tail, carrying his medical bag on the pommel of his saddle. He lived in Bridge Street and was a bachelor. For some months, the doctor did his job around Sandon County. He would operate in the home of his patients, sometimes calling in Mrs Smith to assist. He made his own splints for broken bones and was not too fussy about sterility. Dr Pring was a law unto himself and not well known for his tact. He was inclined towards grand gestures and was very conscious of the ‘pecking order’ in the district society.

After a short holiday in Sydney, Dr Pring surprised the County by returning with an attractive young bride, a city girl with very definite ideas. The local matrons ruffled their feathers and tried to take her under their ample wings. However, young Mrs Pring would not be patronised, refusing to take her place in the social order and showing complete disdain for country ways. She quickly became bored with Uralla people and the restricted life she was leading. Such a situation was bound to lead to trouble sooner or later, and the lady was ready to rebel just about the time of the big Racing Carnival of 1890. Held on Uralla’s Lagoon Race Course, it was the race meeting of the year. Gentry from miles around were present, and one side of the lagoon was reserved for their horse drawn vehicles. Young boys were paid a shilling for the day to be groom to the horses, which were tied up under the trees still harnessed to the shafts. The attendants were to feed and water the animals and keep them shaded throughout the meeting. Brucie had the care of Mrs Wilson’s horse and phaeton, a proud charge for the boy and one which he took very seriously.
The race meeting was proceeding most successfully. The ladies’ dresses were all the colours of the rainbow, and the hats, adorned with flowers and ostrich feathers only partly hidden under bright parasols, added to the gay carnival atmosphere. There was a circus, some side shows, and a bar. A refreshment room provided lunch and afternoon tea for the families, with children all wearing their very best clothes. The weather was perfect, a bright sunny day, just a little hotter than usual for Uralla, with the sun reflected on the sparkling waters of the Lagoon.

It was about two o’clock when the races resumed after lunch. Out from the jockey’s room clad in her ‘shift’, a white garment with sleeves, marched Mrs Pring, her long black hair hanging over her shoulders to her waist. Looking neither to the left or right, she entered the water and proceeded to swim to the centre of the lake, where she cavorted and dived for about twenty minutes. The boys caring for the horses were the first to see her, and set up yells of appreciation. The racing was forgotten as the rest of the crowd rushed to the lakeside to see what was causing the hullabaloo. The swimmer ignored them all and continued to take her pleasure in a leisurely manner, until she was ready to come out of the water. With the ‘shift’ clinging to her shapely young body and shaking the water from her long black hair, Mrs Pring made her way to the jockeys’ room with complete disregard for the horrified, gaping crowd. A few minutes later she appeared looking cool and elegant, fully dressed and well groomed. Then with parasol and race book she mingled with other racegoers, completely unconcerned by the furore she had caused.

Perhaps the lady was part of the early feminist movement, or she may have been just hot, but as the doctor and his wife left Uralla very soon afterwards, there is no way of knowing why she carried out such a ‘shameful’ exhibition. That was probably the most famous race meeting ever held on the Lagoon Racecourse, and long remembered by the locals.
The Circuit Court

The Racecourse was the scene of tragedy on 26th December 1889 when Mr Jack Doyle, a miner, was killed in a fight with a man named Frazer. It seems that Mr and Mrs Doyle were attending the race meeting where Doyle was winning a considerable amount of money. Frazer approached them and, after an argument, invited Doyle to fight. Mrs Doyle did her best to prevent them, but the two men went off behind a side show tent to settle things. When her husband did not come back, Mrs Doyle asked several of the men standing by for assistance and they found him lying dead behind the tent with a crushed skull. There was no sign of Frazer. There were no witnesses, and the Coroner, Mr Roman, of Uralla found that death was caused by "effusion of blood to the brain caused by a fall, but the jury found no evidence to show how this fall occurred."

On Wednesday 12th February 1890, The Uralla and Walcha Times reported "On Tuesday Feb 11th, Andrew Frazer was charged with the manslaughter of the late John Doyle on the Uralla Racecourse on December 26th last.' At this hearing there were several witnesses who swore that Frazer had said to Doyle in their hearing "I'll do for you before the day's out." The witnesses swore positively that Frazer had used these words. Mrs Doyle, when giving her evidence, "again fainted and had to be carried from the court." The accused was committed to "take his trial" on a charge of murder at the next Circuit Court to be held at Armidale on April 22nd, and bail was refused. However, on April 23rd the same newspaper reported thus:-

Andrew Frazer's Case

Last night we were informed that at the Armidale Circuit Court (which opened yesterday) the jury in the case of Andrew Frazer, charged with the manslaughter of the late John Doyle on the Uralla Racecourse on last Boxing Day, acquitted the accused without calling upon the defence. This verdict we believe to be the only one that could be returned under the circumstances, and it is generally endorsed. We also ascertain that Thomas McDonald, charged with bigamy, pleaded guilty, and was remanded for sentence."

It is very hard to understand why a trial for murder, or even manslaughter (we are told that the Uralla Police wanted to have the accused "take his trial" for murder) could be dismissed in such a cursory manner and without the judge even hearing the defence. By today's standards this kind of behaviour would be extremely suspect and be sure to call forth loud accusations of corruption. One wonders why the reporter of the Uralla Times should assume without explanation: "This verdict we believe to be the only one that could be returned under the circumstances" and the paper does not explain why it was "generally endorsed".

Poor Mr McDonald's misdemeanour seems to have been taken more seriously by the court. He at least was remanded for sentence.

During the same sitting of the Circuit Court, a young woman named Maria Stewart, of Taralba, brought an action for Breach of Promise to Marry against Jack Duggan. It appears that earlier Jack and a mate had won an unusually large amount of money in a Melbourne Cup Sweep, when they drew the winning horse 'Bravo'. Their winnings were said to be 23,000 pounds. The plaintiff stated that Duggan had promised to marry her, and one night he "had taken advantage of her". At that time she was between 17 and 18 years of age. Maria said that she was worried, and went to Duggan and said "Only fancy if father should find out", but the defendant again declared his intention of marriage. Intimacy continued between them until a child was born, and Duggan's love began to cool. He stated that he had seen Miss Stewart "sitting on another young man's knee". The Circuit Judge, Mr Justice Foster, did not think this sufficient reason to abandon the young woman and her child and, in spite of her 'sin', the court awarded Maria the full amount claimed, a substantial sum, for damages. Duggan was also ordered to pay 7/6 per week towards the maintenance of the child. His plea to the court that his money had by then dwindled to a mere 6,000 pounds was disregarded.

The hearings of the Circuit Court were many and varied. There was a case tried in the Armidale Court House during the Christmas period of 1897, which probably outclassed all of them for notoriety, because of the people involved. The town of Uralla figured largely in the case, and its citizens followed the proceedings with great interest, a large contingent.
of them attending the court house daily. During the sessions, members of parliament were pilloried, the Governor of N.S.W. questioned, judges were discredited, and reputations were shredded by a most notorious journalist.

On 24th October 1897, the Sydney newspaper *Truth* published a letter from a Uralla alderman, George Lonsdale, written to the editor and proprietor of that paper, John Norton. In the letter Mr Lonsdale made allegations against the manager of Salisbury Court, a property between Walcha and Uralla, and the then Minister of Lands, Mr Joseph Hector Carruthers, whom he accused of perpetrating a swindle, proving himself dishonest, and lying to Parliament. Lonsdale also accused the District Surveyor of incompetence, and for good measure attacked the local press for failing to print the true facts.

The journalist and editor of *Truth*, John Norton, was a person often accused of 'mischief and villianity', and well known for his hobby of pillorying political opponents of his newspaper. In writing to Norton, George Lonsdale sparked off the greatest criminal libel case in the New South Wales legal history to that time. So insulting was the article that was set published, that the Crown Law Officers had Lonsdale and Norton charged with criminal libel for their attacks on the minister. The two miscreants were haled before the Sydney Water Police Court and ordered to appear at the special sitting of the Circuit Court in Armidale on December 20th. This was not the first or only libel case that Norton had to face. In fact there were several pending during the same period, and he had to fight one in the very week before the Armidale case.

The trial was set for 20th December, and such was the interest aroused in Sandon County that there was not a hotel bed to be had in Armidale over that whole festive season. The courthouse was full to overflowing each day of the hearing, and the jurymen, mostly farmers, were taken from all points of the compass, Guyra, Sausmarez, Rocky River, and Wollombi. The foreman, Robert Scott, came from Hillgrove.

The judge was Mr Justice Backhouse, of the Circuit Court, who had to specially commissioned to hear the case. The *Salisbury Court* people admitted that Mr Carruthers and his friend Lord Hampden, the then Governor of New South Wales, had paid several visits to the property and had been guests at shooting parties lasting several days in each case. Lord Hampden, who was a member of several famous clubs, such as Brook's and the Travellers, was a keen sportsman. He did not think much of the hunting or fishing in New South Wales, but noted that Australians were "passionately fond of horse racing", and actually stated that they were "superior to England on the cricket field."

Lonsdale, of the Uralla Council, insisted that Carruthers had lied to Parliament about a certain piece of land on *Salisbury Court* that was set aside for a model farm, and which Lonsdale stated *Salisbury Court* manager, Mr Edwin Cordeaux Blomfield, wanted to exchange for a parcel of relatively worthless land known as The Black Knoob, on the boundary of Sandon County and County Vernon. An exchange such as this was permissible by the act of 1895, providing that the surveyor, the local Land Board and the Minister for Lands agreed that the Government would not be disadvantaged by the exchange. Mr Blomfield freely admitted that, if the model farm area had been thrown open to selectors, it would have had a devastating effect on *Salisbury Court*. He believed that he was within the law in requesting the exchange and originally proposed that an equal amount of land belonging to *Salisbury Court* should be exchanged for the model farm area. The then member for Armidale, Mr Edmund Lonsdale, brother of the Uralla alderman, interfered with this plan, and the amount of land to be exchanged was greatly reduced.

Norton, conducting his own defence, first challenged the judge's ability to give him a fair trial. He argued that since he had accused His Honour in a *Truth* article a year earlier of being class biased, the judge could be prejudiced against him. However, Mr Justice Backhouse assured him that he had not bothered to read the offending article and so had no animosity towards Norton and the case got under way.

The first few days were taken up with argument about the attempted land exchange and the relative value of each parcel. Then it became apparent that Norton was set on scarifying the reputation of Mr Carruthers. He insisted that his open letter to the Minister be read in full, insults and all, although the crown attempted to restrict the reading when the larrikinism of Norton's defence became apparent. In the letter he had accused Carruthers of being "the dirtiest little trickster amongst a very dirty lot", and "a man given to a skunk-like system of political warfare". Further, he expressed surprise that someone like Premier George Reid would tolerate "your malodorous presence in the cabinet" finishing with the suggestion that the proper place for Mr Carruthers was "in a privy". Pretty strong stuff, even for *Truth*.

A very overweight prostitute, who was brought into court, pretended to have had a somewhat lurid affair with Carruthers, but witnesses were able to prove that the 'lady' was a most unsavoury character. Allegations of affairs with other young ladies were also made, but the young ladies in question could not be found. Then Norton wanted to know why it was that the Minister's recent divorce case had not been thrown open to public scrutiny, and the reason for it being heard on a Saturday, suggesting some kind of parliamentary privilege. He then called upon Sir George Dibbs to state that the Minister for Lands had made scandalous charges against him, causing him to lose the seat of Tamworth, which Sir George did. However, he also added that he had a distinct dislike for the writings of Norton, and then asked to be excused as he had urgent business elsewhere. During the trial there appeared in the witness box...
They Came to Thunderbolt Country

the Premier of New South Wales, Mr (later Sir) George Reid, Mr J.G. Leary, the Chief Clerk in Divorce, Mr Francis George Finlay, Chairman of the Armidale Land Board, and several high ranking policemen. At the end of the hearing, Norton's summing up lasted from 10 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the evening. He emphasised the respectable standing of Mr Marsh and Mr Blomfield, and mentioned their honesty of motive, compared with Carruthers whom he described as an untrustworthy witness.

When any witness did not suit his case, he put them down, as in the case of Mr Leece, Town Clerk of Uralla, whom he called the "Poo Bah of Uralla and the echo of Salisbury Court", and he also said "this little preacher makes me feel quite unwell" and asked the judge for time to recover. Among his other accomplishments, Councillor Leece was a minister of the church and very short in stature.

In the course of the trial, Norton managed to place the Minister of Lands in the position of defendant, as Mr Carruthers battled for his reputation. The journalist peppered his summing up with words such as these...

If you do not acquit us, and if the people are not alive to the keen sense of this land maladministration, the grip of the monopolistic institutions will become forever firmer...

Since the jury was made up of selector farmers, they would know the power of the banks only too well, and Norton played on their fear of repossession, ever present during those years.

His Honour, Mr Backhouse, summed up in much less time, intimating that it was for the jury to decide whether the statements in Truth were for the public benefit, or if they were indeed libellous. After twenty three hours the jury failed to agree; so the issue was left for ever unresolved. There was no further trial. Both sides claimed a victory.

Speculation on the hypothetical verdict of a second jury is still going on in Sandon County.

It may seem that the contestants in the libel case would have buried the hatchet, but that was not so. There was a continuation of local feuding through the years to follow.

In the winter of 1899, there was an election for the district of Uralla and Walcha. A meeting in the Oddfellows' Hall in Bridge Street attracted a large crowd. Among those present were several of the Smith family, Bruce, his brothers and their father Ben with some of his fighting friends. The candidates and their supporters were Mr Michael John McMahon, a saddler of Bridge Street, a Catholic, and his campaign director, Mr George Lonsdale, Land Agent of Uralla, an Irishman, a well spoken but very aggressive man (later to become a councillor).

On the other side were Mr McLeod Marsh, owner of Terrible Vale Station, Protestant, and his campaign manager, Mr Tom Bardsley, storekeeper of Uralla.

Circuit Court

There was also a third contender, Mr W.J. Watts, a storekeeper from Walcha, but he did not appear to have a campaign director.

During the evening, Mr George Lonsdale was called to speak in favour of Mr McMahon and made his way to the stage area. It seems that Lonsdale was in debt to a Mrs Gobas and had somehow cheated her out of almost 20 years' rent on some property, and she couldn't force him to pay because of a faulty clause in the contract. When he stood ready to speak, Mr Bardsley called from the body of the hall "Why do you not pay Mrs Gobas the rent you owe her?" There was uproar, and as he turned towards the speaker Lonsdale shouted in a very deliberate and very loud voice "You can kiss my arse", and sat down. In the shocked silence that followed, Mr and Mrs Bardsley, the minister, his wife, and the curate of St Johns walked out of the hall, followed by half of the audience. However, Mr McMahon's supporters insisted on carrying on, and a vote of confidence in him being taken, he was later elected as Member for the District. Amid the excitement that followed the meeting, his horse was removed from the shafts of his sulky, and dozens of his followers dragged him seated in the driving seat through the streets of Uralla and up the hill to his home. Here he made a speech of thanks still standing in the sulky while his friends held up the shafts. Ben Smith was one of the hefty followers who helped to draw the sulky, and his shouting sons joined the jubilant crowd who followed after.