

ANDREW ALLEN'S INTERVIEW WITH PETER BENSON

AA We have an oral history interview today on 13 December 2013 with Peter Benson at his home in Ingleburn. Peter, we will start at the beginning with the date and place of your birth.

PB I was born right on this property 50 Sackville Street, Ingleburn on 29 December 1924. I was delivered at home by Dr William Mawson, who was the Campbelltown doctor at the time. He was the brother of the great explorer Sir Douglas Mawson.

At that stage my father had a farm here and he was growing table grapes for the table grapes market. My earliest memories are of grape vines all over the property. The family had come from Ingleburn as my grandfather, my father's father, was killed in the Boer War and left my grandmother widowed with four children. My father was the eldest boy. She eventually bought this little farm here, so that is how we came to Ingleburn. So that was in the very early 1900s. My father's brother Ernie Benson joined the RAAF and served with distinction in France and my father also joined the RAAF and was medically discharged before he got to service overseas.

My father went to Ingleburn Primary School for a while and then he went to Fort Street which must have been some travel from here as we are a mile and a half from Ingleburn Station. He left school fairly early and started a poultry farm and then thought that table grapes were better. That is how I came to be born in Ingleburn. It was very sparsely populated.

I went to Ingleburn Primary School. We had three teachers and 100 pupils, all Anglo-Saxons in those days. The big news was when three Italian students came, which was really quite different. Years later I met one of them Jimmy Simone in Liverpool and he turned out to be a great citizen. I used to walk to school every day. I did my six years at Ingleburn Primary School; the Principal was Mr Champion, a wonderful teacher.

AA How long would it take you to walk to school?

PB It used to take about 25 minutes to walk to school. That was nothing, some of the students used to walk in from East Minto, the end of Hansens Road through the bush. Some people came in from Long Point as there was no school in Macquarie Fields. Glenfield had a one teacher school. Minto had a small one teacher school up on Campbelltown Road. I remember going up there for one day with my friend Jack Murray who lived in Dr Redfern's original old home.

AA I have heard stories about Jack Murray.

5 mins

PB His father Claude Murray was the Mayor of Ingleburn for years and years. Jack's mother died in childbirth with his younger sister. Jack was brought up by his grandmother. They were very close. As a matter of fact when I was 8 years old we went up to Murray's farm which was on a hill. In the evening one of the ladies went out to shake the tablecloth and said there was a huge fire. We went out on the veranda to have a look and it was Bonny Brae in flames. We raced back in our 1924 Buick and there was absolutely nothing left. That was the place right next door to this present home. What was worse was that it was in the midst of the depression and we had nowhere to go. The neighbours were very helpful.

We had some sheds at the back which were packing sheds for the grapes etc. My mother was a great homemaker and we set up home in the sheds. I was embarrassed as a boy living in a shed. Eventually we built a small house. They just extended the shed and turned it into a small cottage. That is where I lived until I was married.

My mother was Ivy Hodkin and her family had come from Yorkshire and my grandfather on my mother's side bought the property Hillcrest at the top of Eagleview Road in Minto which is now a heritage property. The old chap had nine children. I think that my mother was the only child born here. But it doesn't take long to knock English people into shape. I can remember my mother saying those Pommies are all the same.

Unfortunately both my grandparents on her side had died in 1913, 10 years before I was born. Henzer Hodkin was a member of Ingleburn Council I believe. He became quite a successful builder. My mother used to talk about how she used to have to go down and meet him off the steam train with a horse and trap, so that's a bit of my heritage.

AA So there wouldn't have been many houses around when you were growing up in the 1930s?

PB No, there were very few homes, as a matter of fact right opposite there was a huge paddock with nothing on it. That was bounded by Cumberland Road, Sackville Street and Collins Promenade; it comes to a point at the roundabout on the Minto side. There was not a building on it. My Aunty when I was about 8 bought half that property and built two houses on the property opposite and the other half was eventually bought by a gentleman called Allan Roberts and he built a small home on that. That remained the same for the next 30 or 40 years. So it was very sparsely populated. To get to school, I used to walk through the bush.

10 mins

When I left Ingleburn Primary I went to Hurlstone. I used to get there by steam train. To supplement the steam trains they had a diesel/electric small train. "Farting Fanny" it was called. It was a very small train that used to service between the steam trains. We had a wonderful morning and afternoon steam train service to the city and later on when I started going to University and working in Sydney at the Dental Hospital I used to catch this train and we used to call it the "Big 6". It used to leave Central at 5.22pm and get to Ingleburn first stop at a minute to 6. But if you missed this train you were in trouble. We weren't electrified here until many years later. As a matter of fact when I was born we didn't have electricity in Ingleburn. I can just remember them putting in the poles. By my recollection that was about 1930.

AA It was a little later than that. I know that Campbelltown got electricity around 1924, the year you were born and Ingleburn was a little bit after.

PB Another thing was from the top of my mother's old home in Eagleview Road we were able to watch the two spans of the harbour bridge come together. I can remember that quite clearly, seeing the two sides come together. That was quite interesting. Jack Laing was a terribly unpopular Premier at the time. I can remember the uproar when De Groot cut the ribbon. That was big news in the papers for weeks. That's a little bit of the early days.

My father was a very wise man. Even though he had never been interstate and never been in an aeroplane, he had a great philosophy on life. He seemed to know about astronomy and all things like that. He made sure that I got religion. Of course in my days and coming out of the depression, the thought of going to University was only for the wealthy and a very occasional very bright child who got some kind of a bursary scholarship.

Well, just after I left Hurlstone war was declared. That transformed Ingleburn in a big way. The paddocks on the other side of the line, McDonald's dairy, was turned into a camp. It seemed to go up in six weeks. I suppose that it was a little bit longer than that, it went up very, very quickly. Thousands of men were trained at Ingleburn. They extended the platform at Ingleburn Station and the troops were loaded onto the trains and sent off to the Middle East. The boys were just a little older than me. I can remember going down and waving them off. Mr Vernon a resident of Ingleburn had his photograph in The Herald saying old-timer wishes the boys farewell.

15 mins

AA Did you have blackouts around Ingleburn then?

PB Oh yes, during the war we had blackouts. They built these sub stations to boost the power. There was the Casula Powerhouse. The blackouts were rare and didn't seem to bother us much, we just put up with them.

AA Going back a little bit, when you were talking about the fire at Bonny Brae, do you remember the major fires in 1929 around Kentlyn and Minto? I don't know if Ingleburn was affected as much.

PB Every summer when we looked towards the coast from here, the bush was on fire and the local men all teamed up to go and fight bush fires. It was a regular thing every summer. As far as I remember in this area no houses were lost through bush fires.

There wasn't a refrigerator in the district, not even in the shops. They had dry ice in canvas bags. The ice man used to come if you were wealthy enough to own an ice chest and you could buy ice. The kids used to hang around his truck and get chips as they broke off. That was a big deal. Of course when the depression came, not many people could afford to own a motor car. We had a 1924 Buick but we couldn't afford to register it. It was in the shed for years on blocks because we just couldn't afford to register it. If you had a good horse and sulky you were pretty big time, particularly if the sulky had rubber tyres. We had a wonderful draught horse called Lassie and a spring cart. Mum sometimes used to harness up the horse and take it down to the station if I didn't want to walk. Many people had horses and horse riding was pretty popular.

AA The roads would have been pretty bad back in the 20s and 30s.

PB There were no sealed roads in the district. The first sealed road in the district went from Claude Murray's home across the railway line and up to Campbelltown Road. Claude Murray was the Mayor of Ingleburn, we had a Council Chambers in Ingleburn in those days and Mr Westbury was the Principal of Minto School up on Campbelltown Road. The first bit of tarred road was from Mayor to Mayor as we used to say in those days. They got quite a ragging over that.

AA Westbury was the Mayor of Campbelltown.

PB Yes. The other roads were absolutely shocking.

I would never ever have thought about going to University and most people didn't get their Leaving Certificate. It was quite rare in those days to get your Leaving Certificate. For most people if they had their Intermediate Certificate which in those days was three years was considered a good education. That was what I intended to do. My father said that he would like me to stay the extra two years and I jumped at the opportunity.

20 mins

PB When I went back to school, the other students said Benno we didn't think that you were coming back. Anyway I stayed there. To matriculate in those days you had to have four passes, one had to be English, and one had to be Mathematics and one a foreign language – that was compulsory - and one other subject. So as much as I didn't want to, my father said to the Headmaster when I enrolled at Hurlstone Peter will do French. I thought I don't want to do French. Thank goodness that I did. When I sat for my leaving certificate it was near the end of the war and I expected to go into the services, which was what you did. The Labour Government was in power and I got a letter from the Minister for Education which said that I had received a reasonable pass in the leaving certificate and we are desperately short of Doctors, Dentists and Vets and if you would like to apply for a scholarship and if your marks are good enough we will pay your University fees and pay you a small living allowance. So that is how I happened to get into University.

AA How long were you at University for?

PB I was there for four years.

AA Where was that?

PB At Sydney. In those days there was only one University in New South Wales. The University of New South Wales didn't exist it was a technical college at Ultimo.

AA Did you travel to the city?

PB I travelled every day on the steam train. I walked to the station and I got the tram from Central up to the University. On a concession I think that it cost tuppence!

AA I guess you would have gone to primary school with Greg Percival.

PB Greg Percival is my best and lifelong mate. Greg and I kind of grew up together. We had a great time in the Scouts etc. We had a wonderful Scout group and that was my hobby, camping out at the river. People today have never been to the river, out the back of Ingleburn, Minto and Kentlyn. That was a marvellous place to be. We used to camp out there 7 or 8 times a year I suppose. We had a wonderful time; we used to catch crayfish, occasional perch and eels when we didn't want to.

AA Around where the weir is?

25 mins

PB I can recall the weir put in, that was during the depression. Harley Daley came to Ingleburn around 1930 as Town Clerk and married Gleam Derriman who used to live just near here. She passed away last month aged 102. Harley was in charge. They built the weir out there with people without work; it was relief work for the dole. That was one of their jobs to build that weir. We called it "Harley's Folly". There is another swimming hole which is a little closer to this place where Myrtle Creek joins the Georges River which was known as the junction. That was an aboriginal swimming hole.

AA Was it pristine water, no pollution?

PB Oh yes, I used to think this is heaven. The water was warm in the summer time and as you swam you could have a drink. There were no mines or anything like that. It was crystal clear and beautiful.

AA We have talked about primary school and you said there were 100 pupils and three teachers. Did you enjoy primary school?

PB Oh yes.

There are a lot of caves at the back of Ingleburn. Have you heard of Donahue's Cave?

AA Is that the bushranger Donahue? I have heard of it, but I don't know where it is. I thought it was in a more westerly direction in the hills. I didn't realise it was a cave on the river.

So that was mostly what you got up to in the summer – swimming at Ingleburn and the Scouts.

PB Yes, I had a wonderful boyhood, mainly with the river which was my major hobby.

AA Did you play any sport?

PB When I went to Hurlstone, it was a great football school. We used to get these big country boy boarders and there were only a limited number of high schools that played in competition. There was North Sydney Boys, Sydney Boys Parramatta Boys, Canterbury Boys, Fort Street Boys and Hurlstone. I always tried out for the football teams. There was the possibles and probables and I was always in the possibles, I never made the school team. I could run a bit and do athletics and high jump because I was lanky. Swimming was my thing. I think I was the first boy at Hurlstone to win the award of merit for life saving, which was the silver medallion. I was the 100 metres freestyle champion senior at the school. That was about my only sporting activities.

30 mins

PB During the war Ingleburn got a rugby union team together and I used to play the odd game with them. I remember one game we played the British Navy. We beat them, not due to my efforts! I was never a footballer. I used to like any form of water sport, swimming, diving and surfing.

Later on with Greg Percival and Bert Watson we went in the 1954 Redex Trial. That was a wonderful adventure. For mugs, we did quite well.

AA Did you ever consider following Greg Percival into Local Government?

PB No, I didn't. When we went on that Redex trial, we were also very friendly with Clive Tregear. Actually Clive was Godfather to my children. Clive was very upset with Council. He owned some property down the street from here in Sackville Street which was surrounded by three other roads. He had some kind of a subdivisional row with Council, so he said damn it I will run a ticket for Council. He asked Greg if he would be on it too and Greg said yes. At that time I was totally tied up with service clubs. I was the foundation President of Liverpool Apex club, I was wrapped in Apex, and so I said no, I didn't want to enter into politics; I would stay with the service clubs. Greg had a great career in politics.

Mate Sedgwick was the Mayor in those days and a most affluent speaker and charismatic looking gentleman. As a matter of fact during the depression he used to come down on a pushbike and collect insurance. I had a life insurance and used to pay four shillings a month. Mate Sedgwick used to come and collect the money. We kept it up and eventually I was to get I think \$60 when I was 21 if we paid five shillings a month. Eventually when I went to university I cashed in that policy to buy my instruments. Students had to have a certain amount of instruments. Anyhow Mate had been the Mayor for some time. Greg didn't have any particular political alliances at that stage, they made him Deputy Mayor. Out of the blue Mate said that he was going to resign as Mayor, I have had X number of terms and so Greg was propelled straight into the Mayoral job. Greg often used to say that he was too young when he was Mayor. He then went on to serve around 30 years on Council.

AA I've heard that Clive Tregear was a good speaker.

PB Clive was a wonderful orator. As a matter of fact, one of my other interests is hypnosis, I used to hypnotise Clive. Once I suggested to him that he was Captain Scott down in the Antarctic. He immediately went blue with the cold and shiver and his dog would come past and he say get that husky out of here. He would really take the part. He was most convincing. He could talk on any subject at any time.

35 mins

AA Did you know Harley well?

PB Yes, I knew Harley quite well. He joined up and was a prisoner of war as you know. He came back and with the amalgamations of the Councils, he became Town Clerk of Campbelltown for the rest of his career.

AA He was a bit of a character too didn't he?

PB Oh yes, he was a character. He was a great tennis player and quite a celebrity around that time. He always used to tell me that he came to Ingleburn and met Gleam and they arranged to get married. He fell off his motorbike and got married on crutches with his leg in plaster.

AA If I can go back to your dentistry days Peter, where was your first practice?

PB When I graduated in dentistry I spent the first year as a staff dentist at the Dental Hospital which was good training. I had never been away from home. I did some work in Bellingen and Dorrigo. I did three months in each. I used to travel between the two places, which was a wonderful experience. Then I came home and was determined to have a practice of my own and I went and applied for a job as an assistant at Wentworthville. The dentist there was a chap named Don Wayne.

He said, Peter you live at Ingleburn. I have equipped a surgery at Liverpool. It has been equipped for nine months but I couldn't get anybody to run it. I said that I didn't fancy working at Liverpool. In those days Liverpool didn't have a very good reputation. Not that I really knew anything about it except if you went to Liverpool there was an old men's home there as we used to call it, and these fellows were pretty keen on the metho and lying around. It was a soldier's town from Holsworthy. My only real experience of Liverpool was waiting for a steam train on a cold platform at night. In any case, I was offered a good wage and so I said yes I would take it. What a surprise I got when I went to Liverpool. It had an absolutely wonderful business community; it was a great business town. I bought the practice. It grew like Topsy and was said to be the biggest practice in Australia. I have employed over 100 dentists over the years. I was there for 53 years. We had fourteen surgeries there and I had six assistant dentists and I brought in visiting specialists, straightening teeth, looking after gums and doing major oral surgery etc.

Liverpool Hospital was a kind of a state run hospital which was in the place which is now the Technical College. It was no longer the hospital; they built a new one in temporary kind of aluminium buildings nearby which became the Liverpool Hospital. I went to work and study in London in 1957 for 18 months. When I came back from London I got an appointment there as an honorary visiting dentist.

40 mins

I stayed there for the next 40 years and eventually became a consultant. It was a very big trauma hospital and at one stage we didn't even have a plastic surgeon. We used to get all these broken jaws and they used to be sent into town to get fixed up. The Matron said to me, Peter why don't you try to have a go to fix these major facial traumas. So I did and little by little I became relatively proficient. To back it up I got myself a higher degree in oral surgery. Sometimes we would manage 5 or 6 fractured jaws a week. So that was a good experience.

In the meantime I started a little branch practice at Ingleburn. I used to rent premises in Ingleburn Council Chambers. That was next to the Ingleburn Hotel where Woolworths is now. It was only a small building. It was done up once in the early days and it had quite a nice modern front on it. There was a baby health centre on one side of the hall and I had my dental surgery on the other side. I had 2 or 3 rooms there.

I had a patient come to me one day and said he had just come over from East Hills. East Hills at that stage wasn't connected by train as it is now. I had never been to East Hills. So this chap said that he was in a Housing Commission place there and they needed a dentist. I went over and I started a branch practice there. I was the first practicing dentist in East Hills. So I had a practice in Liverpool and branch practices in Ingleburn and East Hills. Eventually it became too much and another dentist came to East Hills. I bought premises in Liverpool and expanded the setup there and got out of East Hills. Eventually I left the Council Chambers in Ingleburn and built a custom built surgery in Oxford Road, which I eventually gave to my son-in-law Warren Duff who is now an Orthodontist in Campbelltown. I worked in Liverpool for 53 years and retired too young at 75.

AA Do you have any funny experiences from your time as a dentist? I know that is putting you on the spot a bit, but any memorable experiences.

PB I used to try and make it a fun thing. Nobody likes going to the dentist. That was when I became interested in hypnosis. I had seen stage people wave their hand and make people do silly things. They always said they could take away pain etc. I read some books on hypnosis and actually tried it out on a patient and found that it worked quite well.

We had a big dental society the Western Suburbs Dental Society which used to meet in Strathfield. It took dentists from Picton to Hornsby. In 1950 I said to some of my dental colleagues I don't need to use any anaesthetic these days I just wave my hand. They said I was having them on. I said that I would give a demonstration.

45 mins

I took a patient down from Liverpool who was a very good hypnotic patient who needed an abscessed tooth out. I took my nurse, a lass named Shirley who was also a very good hypnotic subject. This was an all-male thing in those days and if they would go to tell a ribald joke, they would say we can't tell that Shirley is present. I would say "go to sleep Shirley" and Shirley would go to sleep and they could tell their joke.

Anyway, I said here is a man who needs a tooth out, it is an abscessed lower molar. I will hypnotise him, so can I have a volunteer who will extract this tooth. They hummed and hawed and in the end, a fellow said that he would do it. We had facilities there to wash up. He came and swung on this tooth which was quite difficult to take out. The patient Keith Coppin was his name looked up and said 200 dentists here and no bugger can take my tooth out. By that time the tooth was out and over with. That was my introduction to hypnosis. A side of that, one of the dentists became very keen on Shirley and married her.

AA Did you use the hypnosis much after?

PB Yes, I used it quite a lot. The idea was to try to hypnotise people deep enough. If you hypnotised everyone it would be very time consuming. The principle of hypnosis is that you don't have to be in a deep trance to not feel pain so much. I just used to tell them to relax completely and close their eyes and relax and then you won't feel any pain and I would give them the injection. It would make the whole business a lot more comfortable.

I have had quite a lot of experiences with hypnosis. One local obstetrician asked me to hypnotise his wife while she had a baby which I did and was quite successful.

Now much later we have an Australian Society of Hypnosis which doctors and dentists and clinical psychologists are more interested in than anyone else. It is a neglected medical field. I eventually wrote a thesis on it. Years later a dental surgeon who was interested was researching my thesis which is in the rare book section of Fisher Library. I did some late post graduate work and I went to Fisher Library and sure enough it was there and it is now on the internet.

I've had some interesting patients. Gough Whitlam was a patient of mine and a very good friend. Also I was called in to treat some victims of the Milperra Massacre.

AA How did you feel about that?

50 mins

PB That was OK. One particular fellow had some of his front tooth shot off and the roots were still there, so I had to extract them. I had to go to Court later on to give evidence about the extent of the damage. Nearly every week there would be some interesting thing crop out. Why I was particularly interested in hypnosis, in the early days we would use cocaine as an anaesthetic. Very good anaesthetic, but quite a few people were allergic to it and would be horribly sick. You might have one patient in six, you would give the injection and they may vomit which was very messy and smelly and horrible and everybody felt bad about it. I thought there's got to be some better way. But then when lidocaine became the anaesthetic of choice it didn't have the side effects and so other methods weren't so necessary. I used to use nitrous oxide (laughing gas) too which was a help.

AA I wonder why hypnosis hasn't taken off as much as you might think.

PB I've explained that in my thesis quite well. We go back a couple of hundred years in the days of Mesmer and Mesmer was fairly primitive in those days. Anaesthetic hadn't been used so if you had to have your arm or leg cut off, a swig of rum was about the best they could give you. People had lots of psychological problems and Mesmer hit upon this trance like state which is easy to induce in people and had wonderful medical benefits. He started off in Vienna and moved to Paris and he was quite a showman. He was winning all the elite people of Paris and orthodox medicine didn't like it. So they set up an investigation and said he was a fraud and they virtually banned teaching hypnosis or mesmerism which is virtually the same thing in medicine schools and so it has been neglected.

So it was only really in the last 50 years or so that psychologists in particular which is a relatively new profession understood what can be done with mind over body, so it has become a new field. There are international societies of hypnosis and very good scientific papers written on it. Like much of the human body and particularly the brain our most complex computer with billions of interconnections, there is a lot we don't understand. What we do know is that all people are susceptible to suggestions, some more than others and it is quite possible to close down the conscious portion of your mind to a degree and let the subconscious which controls most of our bodily functions anyhow take over. One of the things it can do is stop the pain connections by releasing endorphins and enkephalins in certain areas, bodily fluids that cut out pain. So it is possible. Some people are very susceptible to hypnosis and other people are very very difficult to hypnotise. It just doesn't suit everybody, but in my opinion everybody in the healing profession should have some knowledge of it because not everybody that goes to the medico needs his appendix out, but those that need it, it is a lifesaving operation.

55 mins

AA I might change the subject a bit. You told me you were in the Scouts. Did you keep that going?

PB Yes, I did. I had a wonderful time with the Scouts. A big adventure in 1938 we had a big world jamboree in Bradfield Park which later became an Air Force training centre. That was a big thing in my life. I was a patrol leader and we had to prepare a camp site and camp away from home as fairly small boys. I went on to collect many proficiency badges and became a Kings Scout in those days. I became the troop leader and during the war when we didn't have a scout leader, I virtually ran the Ingleburn Scout Troop for some time. Then eventually we formed a rover crew and we had a couple of prominent Campbelltown people in it, Jimmy Lapin and Bob Walker.

We had a couple of years of rovers and then I drifted out of the scout movement and my son Richard became a keen scout. They said now that you have a son in it you had better do something about it so I became the first District Commissioner for Bunbury. They said that I wouldn't have to do much but I could have been out every night. There were various Hume area meeting and group meetings etc. I supervised the construction of a new scout headquarters at Minto and one at Macquarie Fields. I was quite interested in that. I held that position for quite a few years and then eventually I resigned. I was in Rotary and Apex and the District Commissioner.

I married Jeanette Shaw a Campbelltown girl in 1951 and had two children, a boy and a girl. I now have five granddaughters and five great grandchildren.

AA Did you know Jack Hepher?

PB I knew Jack Hepher quite well. He was a very keen scout of course and rode a penny farthing bicycle in all the parades.

AA I interviewed his wife some years ago.

PB They were quite a prominent Campbelltown family. One of his sisters was a keen scout leader. Joyce was a champion athlete. Jack ended up in Bundanoon.

AA You were also a member of the Lodge. You were in a lot of things.

PB Yes, I just received a 60 year medal from the Lodge. I was in that with Greg Percival too. When I left Apex I joined Liverpool Rotary and I have been in that for over 50 years. I'm not a good Rotarian these days; I was very keen years ago. I have been very fortunate to have been given two Paul Harris Fellowships.

60 mins

I have been given some very nice accolades from Liverpool. I was Pioneer Citizen of the Year in 1998 I think. I was made a Companion of the Order of Liverpool, that's a heritage award. I was Foundation President of the Ingleburn Probus and I have been made a life member of the Ingleburn Probus Club. So that's a few of my activities.

AA You're involved in the Horticultural Society too aren't you?

PB Yes, that's what I do now. I just grow pot plants. I am also the rain recorder for the Weather Bureau. I was a Ranger for the Campbelltown City Council for some time. They did away with the Rangers and I became a Special Officer and then they did away with them too.

AA Your parents or your grandparents were involved with cut flowers weren't they?

PB My father became a very keen orchid grower in his later years. He used to grow orchids and export them to America. When the cymbidium season is on here, it is the off season in the States. He was just getting that going when he had a heart attack and died aged 64. My mother was a great floral decorator. She used to make baskets of flowers, buttonholes and bridal bouquets and wreaths for funerals and things of that nature. That was her hobby. Both my parents were very artistic.

AA Getting on to Ingleburn again, some of the shops that you remember from the past that aren't there anymore. Do you remember McIlvains?

PB Yes, I remember it well. As a boy and for many years, there were two major stores in Ingleburn on opposite sides of Oxford Road down near the station. One was McIlvains and the other one was Collins. McIlvains used to sell almost everything including produce. They both used to sell produce and we used to get our pollen bran for the chooks which they kept out the back. I think McIlvains also had the newsagency. So they were the two rival firms and up near the school there was a small shop and in the early days it was run by people by the name of Chivers. Chivers and McIlvains were related. That little tuck type of shop across from the school used to sell penny ice creams and books and pencils. When I was about ten, the shop was taken over by people by the name of Carrig. Russell Carrig was also a great friend of mine in the scouts. They lived here then for many, many years. Russell joined the Air Force and went to war etc.

AA McIlvains was more towards the station was it?

65 mins

PB McIlvains was on Minto side of Oxford Road and Collins was on the other side. Up the street there was a great character called George Craft. He had a series of weatherboard shops that adjoined Percival's butchers shop. There is a modern butcher shop there now, but they had an old one with a gauze window in it. George Craft used to make saddles and leatherwork. He was a boot maker and he was also a barber. Out the back he had a duck farm. He was a character of a fellow. He had this multi-purpose shop with saddles, stirrups and boots and things like that and next door he had a barber shop. I used to go down there as a child to have my hair cut. He would come in with a grey flannel singlet and waist coat all covered with pollen from where he had been feeding the ducks. He used to use a cut throat razor and cold water to shave my neck which I used to hate.

He was a wonderful character of a fellow. He told my dad the story of at one stage the family lived at Appin. His mother got word that George's father had been injured in a mine accident at Bulli. So she hopped on a horse and rode to Bulli to see her husband. The next day his brother was born. George was usually seen in his old dirty clothes with chook food all over them. He bred ducks and he even had a duck named after him called the Inglecraft Duck. I remember once I was going to either school or the university and here turns up this fellow with a cane, bowler hat and spats. Blow me down, it was George Craft. He was going to the Royal Show in Sydney to judge the ducks. He was well respected in that field. He came up and got my father to edit his life story. Unfortunately I didn't see that story.

There were two blacksmiths shops in Ingleburn and on the other side of Cumberland Road there was also a very small shop that used to sell haberdashery and stuff like that and that was about it. The School of Arts was where it is today. The original façade is still there. We used to have our school concerts and things in there. We used to have wonderful flower shows there run by the Ingleburn Horticultural Society which is one of the oldest clubs which is 85 years old now.

AA Do you remember Ingleburn House?

PB Yes, I remember Ingleburn House, the Collins family used to live there. It's all gone now. The creek used to run through the middle of Ingleburn. There was a big wide bridge; I suppose it must have been 50 metres wide going right over the creek about where Percival's butcher shop is. It's still there but it's all covered over now. In times of flood where Ingleburn Fair is would be under about half a metre of water. They put in a big canal to drain the water away and it doesn't flood now. It's still quite possible that it could flood depending on the tide. Evidently the tide backs up.

70 mins

From school, we would go to Casula for our recreational swimming. We would swim in the river. There was a big resort that used to lease out canoes where the Powerhouse Museum is. On Wednesday afternoons we used to catch a train to Casula to go swimming for the boys that were interested in swimming.

AA Do you remember Milton Park?

PB Oh yes Milton Park. That was the home of the Hilders. I think that old Mr Hilder was the manager of a silver mine out the back here somewhere. He had quite a series of children; one of them was killed in the first war. Frank the younger son was a bricklayer. I think he was a POW in the last war. A girl married Archie Graham and used to live in Sackville Street. That was the Hilders. Eventually they turned Milton Park into a research lab for the Garvan Institute.

AA Any other characters besides George Craft that you can think of.

PB There was a chap named Joe Cunningham who used to live over here. He was a big burly fellow and used to live in a one bedroom house. He had a kind of a dairy farm. They used to have local dances here and apparently he was a very good dancer. He would have a few drinks and then stand in the middle of the floor and say "If any bugger wants a bit of me let him step outside". I remember him as this big burly kind of fellow and years later when I was a dentist in Liverpool I went into the pub next door once and Joe was there. He was married then and was a shrivelled up little old man, I couldn't believe it. The perceptions you get as a young guy.

When I was a District Commissioner in the Boy Scouts we got a fellow called Morris Jackaman to be President of the Hume Area Boy Scouts. He lived in Sturt's old cottage in Varroville. He invited me up to dinner and talk about Walter Mitty. He said "When Amy Johnson asked me for a job, I said sorry Amy I haven't got a job for you at the moment." You couldn't mention anyone that Morris didn't know. I said "We've just been to Switzerland and stayed in Lausanne." He said "Oh have you, I used to fly the Prime Minister over there. He was there one day with this gorgeous looking lady and I said who's that?" They said "Oh Morris that's his mistress didn't you realise that. During the war I was in trouble, I was the duty officer at one of the big air force establishments and I wouldn't let this plane land and it was Anthony Eden. He said Jackaman, you bastard I'll get you for this. By the way, I designed Gatfield Airfield, actually I still own the railway station there Peter and you can have it if you like." I didn't take any notice, we used to come away laughing. Next time we went he showed us the paper saying "Jackaman Designs Gatfield Airfield." It was fair dinkum, he did design it.

75 mins

He and his wife Cherry did a lot of work up there. He said Vivien said I don't think you should have put the fishpond there and Robert said no, you should have put it over there. That was Vivien Leigh and Robert Morley. They were up there in Minto. Morris got hurt in a motor accident when he was driving to a scout meeting at Strathfield. He sickened and he died. Cherry lived on and she became the President of the National Trust of Australia. She was very prominent. She was in charge of the women's service or something in London during the blitz. They were locals living in Minto. Every time we went up there, they would be entertaining all these famous English people. I saw the letter from Amy Johnson asking for a job. He said "I was lucky Peter, I had a small plane and Amy won one in a raffle." So he had two planes. I asked him what he did during the war. He said he was flying Hurricanes. I asked him what was his rank and he said he was only a Squadron Leader! He had a mate and they hired a small plane from Bankstown. They took off and got up there and neither knew how to work the controls. Here they had been flying for umpteen years and didn't know how to fly a small plane. They did make it down and thought it was a great joke. He was a character.

We didn't have TV, we had a crystal radio. That was my hobby, making crystal radios. Have you ever made a crystal radio? They were very easy to make and we used to make them.